



Krisha Sanghvi

## What Swachh Bharat signifies for me and way forward...

“A clean India would be the best tribute India could pay to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary in 2019...” were the words by a visionary leader, Mr. Modi – The Honourable Prime Minister of the Republic of India, on the 2nd October 2014 – the day when he launched the iconic – “The Swachh Bharat Mission!” As much as this mission was an enlightening endeavour, it was a hard-bitten challenge. On the 2nd October, 2014 – our Prime Minister urged the people of this nation to do something that perhaps they had paid least heed to, he sought help of a hundred and twenty crore Indians who till date were nothing but cynical about this entire issue circling the country’s cleanliness. The people of India realized, they had a tenacious grip on their century-old habits and the man standing out there on the podium was expecting more than what was practically deliverable but every Indian out there took this irrefutably and answered his urge with applause and cheers! Be it the ‘Clean Ganga Mission’ or ‘Swachh Sadak Abhiyaan’, people walked hand-in-hand, shoulder-to-shoulder and marched to every move the newly elected Government was taking.

While, soon in months I saw the nation progressing, people becoming aware about their civic duties more than their rights and although seeing roads neat as a pin, imagining a country as immaculate as ever was yet a far-off dream but

if even Rome wasn’t built in a day, we’d all also be patient enough to see things, set in motion. And while I see this mission doing well at places, securing its place on possibly every Government-provided utility printed invoice, seeing it getting introduced as a tax-linked cess, if personally asked about my opinion, I see ‘Swachh Bharat’ from a little different perspective. If the term as it signifies is about cleaning the country and perk her up than never before, I’d say it is also about cleaning the mess that lies within.

With efficacious campaigns and a leviathan mass of countrymen – we might succeed to achieve dirtless roads, a clean Ganga, civilised streets, and a sparkling infrastructure but what about the impractical traditions, unexplained customs, narrow minds and a not really justified devout? Would it be justifiable to call my country swachh without she being free from this menace? Every morning we get up to news filled with scams, people cutting each other’s throats in the name of religion, rapes, women-security issues, gender equality issues, and the list doesn’t end. While in other countries, news means something new that has or is happening within their boundaries which might include both – good as well as bad. But in our country, news has taken a close enough synonym to being nothing but bad. It has become such an evident synonym, that when a person as

simple as one walking on the road if asks the other about the news, there'll only be bad ones reaching out to him. The good ones somehow either don't end up reaching the masses or perhaps the bad ones occupy most of the space in the newspapers, that they don't find enough space to fit in the good ones. The day this nation wakes up to news flowing with nothing but positivity, progress, growth and development – that would be the day I would consider my *Bharat swachh*.

Women in our country constantly live under the social pressure and the fear of security is the first thing hovering over their heads. While a young girl is pressurized to choose what she wear wisely, limits are set over the time of the hour when she returns back home, a married woman is expected to curb her personal desire for growth, and look after the family first. She is given a defined set of protocols to be followed in the society and a stated way to mingle. It is considered deemed and assumed that a girl, right from the time when she is born, she'll do what she is asked to do and give all the sacrifices that she is expected to give. So in our well cultured society, when boys can go around and have the kind of independence they want, girls seldom can do the same. With something as simple as going for a late night movie show, when a boy has to think nothing about but which flavoured popcorn he'll be relishing or which theatre he'll be going to, a girl will have to think about alot many more things. To state a few – What should I wear so that no boy looks at me with eyes that might hamper my security? If I go with a guy friend and if my neighbour sees it, what will they think? What if someone sees me coming back home at two in the night, what will they assume? Will it really be safe to travel in a taxi at that time of the hour? If going for a movie happens to be so complicated, we can very well imagine how difficult it would be to deal with other major issues for them! When women will share an equal space with men, when women will have an equal say in the crowd, when they won't be seen as objects but considered the strength of our society, when girls won't have to think twice about their attire or their way of doing

things, when women will be given a fair chance to prove their worth, to give importance to their personal growth, when marriage won't be a barrier for them to sit back within the four walls, when woman will be given an equal chance to work, when the century-old restrictions imposed upon them will no longer be imposed, when they'll be applauded and valued for all that they do, when they'll be appreciated and bowed down for the sacrifices they give, when their security won't be a fear anymore, that will be a '*Swachh Bharat*' for me!

When the lust of a few men spoil the life of a woman, when rapes happen at a faster rate than the birth rate of women, when just to avenge a girl's rejected she is attacked with acid, when obsessed love takes away a girl's life, the society merely sits back and enjoys the show! In spite of the entire country being aware of what and who is wrong, the rape victim in turn is held responsible. It takes tremendous valour to stand up and speak against what's wrong! And when a girl shows such valour, she is made to sit at the police station for hours just to record her statement. The rape victim is excommunicated from the society. Why does that happen? What was her mistake? No one ever has an answer. When rape will be considered a crime attracting the heaviest capital punishment, when the rape victims won't be excommunicated but supported by millions, when men will start valuing the life of women, when the rate of rapes happening in India will fall down to an absolute figure of zero, that will be a '*Swachh Bharat*' for me.

Corruption is spreading like wild fire in this country. Every one, right from a government officer to a minister, are in some or the other way corrupt. It has become a tradition, a well-set culture to get things done with bribe. Imagining things getting done without a penny is a far sought out dream. The entire concept of corruption grounds down to greed. Because there is greed, there is a need for money! Because there is a need for money, there is a hunger for power! Because there is a power for hunger, there is an attraction to become a minister! The government is trying in many ways to deal with corruption on a large

scale but it is us, the people of India who have to join the efforts hand in hand. It is because we offer; they enjoy taking more of it. The council of ministers are for the service of the people. They are the leaders of our country; they should work towards progress of the nation and not filling their own pockets. When this country will awaken to this wrong-doing, when they'll decide to unite and roar in refusal to spend not even a single penny in bribes, when the government officers, ministers undertake their office as a responsibility and not as a money minting machine, when this nation will be labelled as a 'Corrupt-free country', that will be a '*Swachh Bharat*' for me.

Talking about corruption, politics at the same time has a very different meaning in our country. While when the constitution of our country allows a multi-political party system, it has created a menace in the recent past. While politics is a way of contributing to the nation's progress by being an active part in its functioning, in our country it appears to be a power-rich authority. People take up politics for their own personal interests, and in achieving so, it doesn't take them much time to sacrifice the nation's interests in front of their own. India happens to be the largest democratic country in the world and the Lok Sabha elections are a treat to watch, every five years. People all around the world give a hefty slot in their news channels to cover the election campaigns. Western countries in their well-clad style define the Indian elections as – 'The largest show on earth where a hundred and twenty crore Indians vote for five hundred and twelve seats!' But only we know what happens inside. As soon as we are a year away from the general elections, all the major political parties come out with their own set of manifestos, their own set of promises which end up being nothing but a piece of paper post their victory. When this nation will see politics as a constructive way of functioning the government in an honest and righteous manner, when each and every countrymen will attempt to step their feet inside the puddle and not merely sitting at a distance and criticizing the system, when the basic criteria of standing for election will be amended

with a clause which would state, 'The Member-Representative needs to be educationally qualified', when the youth will take over the mettle and surge forward to carve out a young Indian enthusiastic government, when the voting rate will be cent percent and every countryman's finger will be inked with pride and honour of contributing their part to the betterment of the nation, it will be then what will be a '*Swachh Bharat*' for me.

Having talked about politics, the parliament being the place where the law makers find haven, happens to be one of the most disturbed places in the country. Where the ruling sits to pass bills under their banner and create history, the opposition sits to yell and shout to oppose that happening. The commotion reaches at its peak almost every time there is a major bill presented and the speaker is left with no option but to adjourn the sitting. And then we sit back and wonder how GST took two long years to become an Act. While it is estimated that every sitting of parliament costs a lot many lakhs, adjourning the sittings leads to nothing but a criminal waste of public money. As per the law, every member needs to apply to the speaker in writing about his desire to present his speech in a particular sitting and on approval, he is granted a defined set of few minutes to put his view forward. While when the members are gifted those few minutes to speak, it would be a wise thing to put in front of the house, the difficulties that their respective constituency is facing or for that matter if they wish to do something specific in their respective constituency or bring about a change in the functioning of the government. However, all they end up doing it nit-picking on their opposition's doings, commenting on how things are functioning under them and this in the end, yields out nothing productive. In Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam's witty words: 'This nation needs to understand the power of democracy and constructive discussions. If the parliament resorts to more of constructive discussions rather than opposing each other, India will reach new heights of success!'

And that is exactly what the law makers need to understand – the power of democracy and the

magic of constructive discussions. If there are issues in a particular bill, wouldn't it be more fruitful to hold a joint meeting or cross-placing some alternate views rather than breaking chairs and shouting the throats out? In a country so varied and vast, constructive discussion is the only way to bring out a win-win situation, the end-goal being growth of the nation. When the law makers will resort to healthy debates, when every law maker will respect the view of the other, when there will be thuds on the benches with the hands of all signifying the view each one of them puts before the house, when the rate of adjournments will fall down to zero, when India will become the fastest country in passing bills and making laws, when India will have a house full of educated young minds, it will be then when India will be a '*Swachh Bharat*' for me.

Having said about that, evading tax is a major revenue leak for the government and in spite of varied efforts, it is never possible to be cent percent fully equipped with a mechanism to bridge this leak. The only way to seal this leak is to change the mind-set of people, to change the way they see and perceive the concept of tax. Tax was introduced with the guiding principle which said: 'Give us ten and we'll give you back a benefit of twenty!' Tax was introduced with a view to take a cut from the people's earnings for their own betterment and the development of the country. But the way we see it in India, people see tax as the biggest burden over their heads with no future or enduring benefits. People in India see Tax as a sunk cost when in reality it is a deferred expenditure with promising returns and benefits. In countries like Denmark, the Tax rate is high as forty-five to fifty percent. The young crowd have to bear a tax burden of as high as almost half the income they earn. In return, the government promises them a secured life post their retirement. So, once they retire their entire expenses are borne by the government. It is that government's way of giving back what they have taken from the people, and the benefits people get are way more than what they've spent as their tax expense. The people of Denmark are so well convinced with this concept that evading tax is

never an option for them. Even if given an option, they choose to disown the option of evading tax, for they are convinced of getting enduring benefits from the government when they'll have no running income. In India, because people evade tax – the government falls short of revenue and in turn that develops a limitation in what they do for the public at large, which could have been way more if the people would choose not to evade tax. It is because of this reason, government needs to resort to a deficit budget almost every fiscal and as the interest cost increases, inflation increases. When the people of this nation will understand the concept of taxation, when the people will be convinced of promising benefits on them paying taxes, when people will partner in creation of a cash-less economy, when the countrymen will furnish honest returns and show their income transparently, when the penalty sections will remain just in the books and would never need to apply them in real, when the concept of black money will be uprooted from the Indian soil, when India's budget will turn into a surplus one, when India will become the highest tax collecting country in the world, that would be a '*Swachh Bharat*' for me.

When Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru's words when he'd said, 'The appointed day has come—the day appointed by destiny—and India stands forth again, after long slumber and struggle, awake, vital, free and independent. The past clings on to us still in some measure and we have to do much before we redeem the pledges we have so often taken. A new star rises, the star of freedom in the East, a new hope comes into being, a vision long cherished materializes. May the star never set and that hope never be betrayed! We have hard work ahead. There is no resting for any one of us till we redeem our pledge in full, till we make all the people of India what destiny intended them to be. We are citizens of a great country on the verge of bold advance, and we have to live up to that high standard. All of us, to whatever religion we may belong, are equally the children of India with equal rights, privileges and obligations. We cannot encourage communalism or narrow-mindedness,

for no nation can be great whose people are narrow in thought or in action!' turns out to be true and personified, when gender equality won't just be a term anymore, when my countrymen will be educated, when freedom of speech won't be taken advantage of, when religion won't create difference between people, when every religion, creed and sect will be respected and seen upon equally, when castes won't define the dignity of people, when people's mind will be open and free, when India will be counted amongst the first world country, when India will be ranked on the top list on the 'happiness' index and considered as a 'happy' nation, it would truly be then when I would consider her as '*Swachh Bharat.*'

Having said and opined my personal views on what would really be a '*Swachh Bharat*' for me, it should be considered wise to consider the cost associated. Every dream has a cost and every cost needs to be backed with a plan. Every major revolution requires investment and every investment requires funding in a viable manner. If this is the dream which I personally see of shaping my country as, it would also involve a heavy cost to make it a reality. The Swachh Bharat campaign has already been launched on a massive scale and it involves a hefty amount of public expenditure, a remarkable part in the government budget, a notable tax cess which though now stands redundant but was successfully implemented from 1st June 2016 to 1st July 2017 with the connotation – the Swachh Bharat cess charged along with service tax. But the dream of Swachh Bharat which I have seen would require a lot more in terms of resources and finance. It would require the government and the countrymen to come out with various innovative ways to help the *Swachh Bharat* movement surge forward.

The government, every year allots a part of its budget to the Swachh Bharat mission. It sets aside almost a thousand crores for the successful implementation and functioning of the flagship campaign. The focus majorly lies on keeping the country clean but cleaning the minds of the countrymen would require a much heavier

investment. So if asked for my personal view, I would suggest the government to save even the thousand crores which it sets aside for this campaign. Rather, it can very well earn a minimum interest of 5.5% on the slated amount which right now would be taken as an opportunity cost. It would also be a suggestion to the government, to avoid introducing the required cost as a tax, which would ultimately burden the countrymen with more tax flowing out of their pockets.

Allowing myself some liberty to put my views forward, I would suggest the government to resort to various innovative ways and means to make this campaign altogether more lucrative and attractive. The people can be made more aware and responsible about their responsibilities towards the society by introducing a concept which could be connoted as – The Swachh Bharat reward program. As per this program, the people should be first encouraged to do their duty in keeping the country clean. On successful achievement of their part, they should be rewarded some points. The entire program should be IT-enabled and every person would require to make an account on the slated application to claim their rewards. Once they achieve their part, some points should be credited to their wallet which they can redeem against purchasing whatever they like. If the private companies are reluctant to join hands in this program, the government themselves can take the initiative. If a person successfully accumulates a particular amount of points in his wallet, the government can reward him by giving him a discount on the liability of taxes which he is expected to bear. Let's take for an example – a person undertakes the responsibility of keeping the street joining his house clean by regularly sweeping it and keeping it free from garbage, the government would credit 100 points per week to his wallet on successfully verifying his claim. His claim could be certified by a Chartered Accountant or for that matter any competent professional after physically verifying the said area. Once his claim is verified, he would earn 5200 points in a year (52 weeks times 100 points). The government could then allow him to redeem these points and

set-off against his tax liability. If not entirely, a certain defined portion of it. This would turn out to be a cost for the government in terms of the tax that it would have to forego but at the end, it would be a win-win situation for both of them. The government wouldn't have to set aside a defined sum of money to carry on the functioning of this campaign and the person would at the same time, feel more motivated to take care of his responsibilities because he would be fairly rewarded for the efforts which he would be taking. While the government would achieve its purpose, the person too would feel involved in doing his part for his country.

Another innovative way, what the government could resort to is – giving extra tax exemptions and benefits under the Direct tax regime to encourage people to take this movement forward. Apart from the regular tax exemptions, the government could give the people some lucrative schemes under the tax system. Some of them could be – if a particular company keeps the area around it, clean; if it undertakes the responsibility of beautification of the area, educating the unfortunate living in the vicinity, helping the people get rid of hunger by providing them food, providing aid during the time of natural or man-made calamities, the government would give such companies a tax holiday for a certain defined period of time.

Over and above, the government could also provide those companies with some benefits like supplying the basic amenities to their factories at subsidized rates. This would encourage the companies to do their part towards the society and the government would be free from the worry about developing those areas. Over that, the cost that it would incur in developing areas would be much higher than the tax which it would have to forego.

Another way to attract big business houses to undertake an equal footing in this iconic program could be – 'A star rated program!' As per this program, if a business house undertakes to adopt the area around which it is situated entirely and help it develop and grow, the government would

give them a rating on the basis of stars based on the work that they have done. The rating would be on a scale of one-to-five, five being the highest. Based on the rating and the number of stars they get, the business houses would get some special privileges from the government in the form of a reduced tax rate, government subsidies, greater export incentives, government tenders, etc. So, for example if a business house is situated in the backward area of Manipur and it adopts a particular area, constructs a school there, brings clean water to the people, undertakes to keep the entire area clean, conducts various awareness programs, educates the people on the concept of having an open mind towards religion, provides employment on a mass scale, and on the basis of this work done, the business house gets a four-star, then probably the government could provide them tax concessions by charging them 25% instead of 30%. The government could also give them an annual subsidy, sign a tie-in agreement for recurring purchases, provide them export incentives over and above the regular ones. In this way, the business houses would be attracted to set up their plants in the backward areas, with a view to availing such benefits, they would develop the entire area and what would normally cost the government hundreds of crores to do the same, it would achieve its objective by getting it done by a business house.

There could be a lot many more innovative ways out to develop a Public-Private Partnership for this program. India is a potentially strong country rich in its heritage, culture and traditions. It is our responsibility to preserve and protect the same. In a nation with a hundred and twenty crore countrymen, each one of us should consider taking a vow to preserve the rich culture of this diverse nation. It took us years but now that we've been aware about the importance of keeping our nation clean, let's do it entirely from outside as well as from inside. If we are now giving importance to keep our streets clean, let's give importance to keep our minds clean too. And this responsibility will have to be shared amongst all of us. It wouldn't be anywhere right to expect the government to

everything for us. After all, government is nothing but just a public body by the people and for the people. If government has taken an initiative to make India newer heights, we as the responsible citizens of this great nation too, need to take an initiative to change our attitude towards certain things, to adapt to the change which is for the good, to stop spitting on the roads or littering our streets! It is time to move towards a path which is promising us development and growth. It is time to stop fighting in the name of religion and caste. It is time to stop pushing each other down and being concerned with just our own self-growth. It is time to stop evading tax and not giving the government what it rightfully deserves. A rupee spent in taxes, will come back to you as ten rupee earned for your own betterment. It is time to stop criticising the government, its mechanism, its council of ministers or for that matter its officials. They'll change, the day we change. Indians are looked upon as people who can do wonders throughout the world. Be it Sundar Pichai, or Satya Nadella, be it Ajaypal Singh Banga or Indra Noyi – Indians have gone abroad and proved their mettle. But the hardened fact is these great people had to travel places to prove their worth. Is it because their own country didn't give them enough space and opportunity to grow to the level, they wanted to? Well, sadly yes! So now is the time to develop our own very nation in such a way that any Indian who wishes to prove his self, nothing but sky would be the limit for his ambition. Just keeping ganga clean won't signify a successful Swachh Bharat abhiyaan, but having an open mind, tolerance towards each other, respect for each other's religion, getting rid of the century old meaningless customs, surging towards a safe, content, ever growing, ever expanding, path breaking, innovation inviting India would truly personify and sum up the Swachh Bharat mission. So to conclude in my words – when India, the almighty India – a nation with a population of 1.2 billion, the seventh largest by area in the world, the sixth largest economy in the world, with tens of religions, and hundreds of languages – will rise to a poverty-free, a corrupt-free, a pollution-free

country, when she will out beat Denmark in its happiness index, when the entire population will be considered educated and just literate, when men and women will match shoulders in every sphere of life, when infant mortality will be an unknown phenomenon, when the nation's GDP will define new heights and set new benchmarks, when people won't slit each other's throats in anguish, when my countrymen will be under no kind of agony, when smiling faces will be a most watched phenomenon, when politics will see a new dawn, when politics will find its new meaning, when law makers of our country won't need the back support of the bureaucrats, when every kind of job will be considered of dignity, when India will be called the 'Golden Sparrow' all over again, it will be then when I'll say – Yes! Yes, this is exactly what *Swachh Bharat* means to me! And to further conclude in Mr. Rabindranath Tagore's wise words:

*'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high,*

*Where knowledge is free*

*Where the world has not been broken up into fragments  
by narrow domestic walls  
Where words come out from  
the depth of truth*

*Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards  
perfection*

*Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way  
into the dreary sand of dead habit*

*Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-  
widening thought and action*

*Into that heaven of freedom, my father*

*Let my country awake!'*

### **Bibliography**

www.google.com

(For the extract of the poem)

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