Role of Youth in Sanitation and Cleanliness Services in the Tribal Area of Dangs District

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ABSTRACT

Due to the hilly terrain and scattered settlements of Dangs district, delivering sanitation and cleanliness services at the local level is challenging. In this scenario, tribal youth can become primary agents of awareness and social change. Being thoroughly familiar with the local Dangi dialect, culture, and geography, youth can easily bring about practical behavioural changes among people regarding toilet usage and waste management. Through Nehru Yuva Kendra, NSS, and rural youth mandals, they make significant contributions by organizing shramdaan (voluntary labour), water conservation, and cleanliness drives. They also engage the community through digital sanitation apps and folk art. However, challenges such as seasonal migration, lack of resources, and social hesitation persist. By engaging youth power through eco-tourism, sanitary entrepreneurship (composting/recycling), and incentive schemes, Dangs can be transformed into a clean and model tribal region.

Keywords: Tribal, Youth Power, Sanitation and Cleanliness.

INTRODUCTION

Sanitation and hygiene are not merely matters of personal health or convenience; rather, they are foundational requirements linked to the development, health, and dignity of social human life. Nestled in the lap of the Sahyadri mountain range in South Gujarat, Dangs district has the highest tribal population in Gujarat. Delivering cleanliness and public health services in this geographically hilly region characterized by dense forests and scattered settlements (majra/pada) has been a unique challenge. In such a geographical and socio-cultural environment, local youth power is the greatest and most influential medium for bringing about permanent change. Youth are agents of change in any society. When tribal youth deeply understand the local dialect, cultural values, and geographical conditions of their region, their contribution to the field of sanitation proves revolutionary.

Selection of the Research Problems:

Selecting a research topic is considered extremely important in research. The effectiveness of any research can be evaluated based on its topic. The choice of a research topic depends on practical considerations or scientific and intellectual interest. When a research topic is chosen driven by practical considerations, its purpose is connected to public welfare. Meanwhile, research chosen for scientific or intellectual reasons can also be applied in practical fields. In addition to these, personal factors such as a person's values and attitudes are involved in the selection of a research topic.

According to Young, a researcher's ability to understand the subject area, resource limitations, availability of techniques, the likelihood of obtaining authentic and reliable information, and the boundaries of the research field are considered important factors when selecting a research topic.

The presented research topic, **"Role of Youth in Sanitation and Cleanliness Services in the Tribal Area of Dangs District,"** was selected by keeping the following points in consideration:

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Geographical and Socio-Cultural Background of Dangs District

Main tribal communities such as Bhil, Kunbi/Kunkana, Warli, and Gamit reside in Dangs district. These communities are deeply connected with nature. However, due to geographical disparities, the following challenges are observed:

1. **Scattered Settlements:** Since houses are located far apart, difficulties arise in solid and liquid waste management.

2. **Physical Scarcity of Water:** From the end of winter through summer, water shortages occur in hilly regions, which directly impacts the sanitation process.

3. **Lack of Basic Awareness:** Due to traditional lifestyles, problems of open defecation and improper disposal of organic waste around houses persist.

Labeling Theory

In the sociology of health, particularly through 'Labeling Theory' used to explain illnesses and their various associated aspects in individuals, Howard S. Becker studied the behavioural aspects of an individual who falls ill due to filth, lack of cleanliness, or other reasons, along with the associated social structural system. Based on this, Becker formulated Labeling Theory.

Structural-Functionalist Perspective

M.N. Srinivas and S.C. Dubey have made notable contributions to the structural-functionalist perspective for studying society. This perspective focuses on understanding the system and structure of society, placing primary emphasis on social order. Anthropologist A.R. Radcliffe-Brown states that the entire framework (structure) of society possesses functional unity, wherein all parts of the structure function with harmony and coordination.

This perspective compares the social system to the human body. Just as various organs of the body contribute to its existence and maintenance, similarly, the various structural parts of the social system work to sustain the existence and continuity of the entire social system. In the structural-functionalist perspective of studying society, society is viewed from a holistic standpoint—meaning the various parts of social society are seen in relation to one another and in relation to society as a whole.

The structure and functions of a social system are interrelated. Therefore, when any social system is viewed and understood by focusing on both its structure and its functions and dysfunctions, it is called the structural-functionalist perspective.

In the modern era, health and stability are viewed through the perspective of stress and cooperation. Whatever work takes place in society provides continuity to society, and the human beings who play a role in it are interconnected and integrated. Of course, norms and values are important in this process.

Regarding the 'Sick Role' and the behaviour of a sick person in the sociology of health, Talcott Parsons has discussed that a person's ability to effectively perform their role with maximum capacity is defined as proper health. In structural theory, it is essential for members of society to live a healthy life for the systematic and smooth operation of society; if a problem arises in this regard, a problem arises in society as well.

Selection of Sample

Sampling is the cornerstone of social research. Sample refers to a part of units from the total population (universe). The entire process of selecting a sample is called 'sampling'. The purpose of sampling is to understand the characteristics of the entire population by studying a few units chosen as a sample, meaning that obtaining information about the whole through the study of a part is the primary objective of sampling.

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Sampling is essential for collecting necessary data and analyzing information for research. Thus, social research remains feasible even with a limited budget. It is also advantageous in terms of time, and compared to a complete census, it not only ensures greater accuracy but also allows for collecting detailed information regarding each unit; hence, the use of sampling is highly necessary. In the present study, 10 villages were selected from Ahwa taluka in the Dang district of Gujarat state, and a total of 300 respondents (30 from each village) were chosen using the purposive random sampling method.

Role of Youth in Sanitation and Cleanliness Services in the Tribal Area of Dangs District

Safe drinking water, health security, and sanitation hold immense importance in the health policies of any country; because the progress of a country or its states depends on the well-being (happiness and convenience) of the citizens living there. Every nation and state continuously strives to improve the health and welfare of the people living within its borders. Various policies and schemes related to sanitation are formulated from time to time, and efforts are made to examine whether they have been implemented and how they can be implemented more effectively.

Local self-governance institutions (local bodies) also work for the public welfare of village or city residents and for local utility services. Such institutions typically perform tasks such as providing clean drinking water, cleanliness, maintenance of roads, street light facilities, and construction of public toilets for the people of their area. Youth play a significant role in such services and various activities carried out at the rural level.

Information regarding the role of Gram Panchayats in sanitation and cleanliness services in tribal regions has been provided. The attitudes and behaviors of respondents toward cleanliness and hygiene in their daily lives—such as regular bathing, cleanliness facilities at home (toilets, bathrooms, and their cleanliness), drinking water and its usage methods, methods of consuming fruits, vegetables, and milk, and respondents' awareness of sanitation-related schemes—were assessed.

Main Findings of the Research

1. Gender-Based Distribution: Among the total respondents selected as a sample, 72% are male, while 28% are female. Thus, the present study shows a higher proportion of male respondents and a lower proportion of female respondents.

2. Religious Background: Out of the total respondents included in the study, 100% belong to the Hindu religion. Respondents from other religions are not observed here. This data indicates that the Hindu population is the highest (100%) in this tribal region.

3. Family Size: 24.67% of respondents have a small family, 19.33% have a medium family, and 56% have a large family. The majority of respondents have large families, reflecting the cohesiveness of tribal society.

4. Family Type: Out of the total respondents in the study, 75.33% live in joint families, while 24.67% live in nuclear families. Such a large proportion of joint families indicates that the joint family system remains strongly intact in India.

5. Occupational Status: Among the respondents, 76.67% are engaged in agriculture (farming), 5.33% are engaged in private jobs, 12.33% are laborers, and 4.33% are engaged in government or other occupations. The majority are associated with agriculture, showing that farming is the primary livelihood in tribal regions.

6. Means of Entertainment: Among the respondents, 19% have a television, 3.67% have a radio, 70.33% have a mobile phone, and 1% have a computer, while 6% do not possess any means of entertainment.

7. Personal Hygiene (Bathing): 100% of the respondents included in the study bathe regularly.

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8. Nail and Hair Trimming: 57% of the total respondents regularly trim their nails and hair, while 43% do not trim them regularly.

9. Covering Food: 59.67% of respondents keep their food covered, while 40.33% do not keep their food covered.

10. Consumption of Milk: 67.33% of respondents consume milk after boiling (heating) it, while 26.33% consume milk unboiled. The majority of respondents drink boiled milk.

11. Cleaning of Fruits and Vegetables: 67.67% of respondents use vegetables and fruits after washing them, and 32.33% use them without washing.

12. Washing Hands Before Eating: 74.33% of respondents report washing their hands before eating, while 25.67% do not wash their hands before meals.

13. Means of Washing Hands: During meals, 34.33% of respondents wash their hands with water only, 55% wash with soap, and 10.67% wash with handwash.

14. Sources of Drinking Water: 29% of respondents fetch drinking water from wells, 44.33% obtain water through handpumps, 18% from borewells, and 8.67% from other sources.

15. Frequency of Complete House Cleaning: 24.67% of respondents clean their entire house once a month, 41% clean it every six months, and 34.33% clean their entire house once a year.

16. Awareness of Sanitation Schemes: 69% of respondents are aware of various sanitation-related schemes, while 31% lack awareness on this subject.

17. Sources of Information on Schemes: 28.67% of respondents learned about sanitation schemes through the Sarpanch, 41.33% through the Gram Sevak, 22% through the Talati (Gram Sachiv), and 8% through other sources.

18. Filtering Drinking Water: 70.33% of respondents filter their drinking water, while 29.67% do not. A large majority (70.33%) use filtered water.

19. Water Purification Measures: 35.67% of respondents use chlorine tablets to disinfect drinking water, a very small minority (8.66%) use R.O. systems, and 55.67% do not use any method for water purification.

20. Drainage of Wastewater: Only 3.33% of respondents reported that wastewater drainage facilities are provided by the panchayat, while 96.67% (the vast majority) stated that no proper arrangement exists for wastewater disposal.

21. Panchayat Measures for Disease Prevention: 33% of respondents reported that the Gram Panchayat sprays powder to prevent disease spread in the village, 9% reported mosquito net distribution, 49.33% stated that the panchayat sprays medicines (insecticides), and 8.67% reported that all the above-mentioned arrangements are made.

Importance of the Research

The significance of social research is determined by two main criteria: first, the validity of the research, and second, its practical utility. The importance of social research must be considered keeping these two criteria in mind. Researches are conducted to solve various problems. Through appropriate suggestions and solutions derived from research, problems can be mitigated or resolved. Thus, every research holds its own importance. The significance of this research can be evaluated as follows:

This research study primarily discusses sanitation and cleanliness in tribal regions. Since the study area is rural, a lower level of education is observed among the people. The level of education directly affects cleanliness-related aspects of their lives.

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The presented study provides information regarding the role of cleanliness in spreading awareness about hygiene in rural areas. It highlights how Gram Panchayats provide sanitation facilities under rural development services. It holds specific importance in demonstrating how villagers utilize the sanitation facilities established by the Gram Panchayat, as well as the methods employed by youth in spreading cleanliness awareness in tribal regions. Furthermore, cleanliness is linked to an individual's standard of living. The hygiene standards of people in tribal areas reflect the importance of cleanliness in their social life.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

When we accept the importance of research, we must also acknowledge its limitations. Limitations are particularly visible in the field of social research because society serves as a laboratory for social research, where life, social life, culture, interactions, interrelations, and behavior are studied. Therefore, the conclusions of such studies are likely to be less stable compared to studies in natural sciences, as natural and physical sciences study inanimate matter. To maintain a scientific character, this study attempted to adopt a scientific approach using scientific methodologies. Despite this, the possibility of errors remains, and its main limitations are as follows:

1. The present study was conducted with reference to Ahawa taluka in Dang district of Gujarat state, raising the question of whether its conclusions can be applied to tribal regions across the entire state and other districts/talukas, given vAreations across different villages and regions.

2. The present study focuses solely on the role of youth in sanitation and cleanliness services within tribal areas.

3. The study includes only the aspects of youth sanitation services and cleanliness, without shedding light on any other dimensions.

4. The conclusions of this study pertain to Dangs district; whether they apply to other talukas, districts, or states is a matter for consideration.

5. The likelihood of applying the findings of this study to all districts of the state is negligible.

Factors Hindering Rural Sanitation

In cities like Vadodara or villages in Gondal, designated locations were established for manure heaps/garbage pits (ukarda). Such spaces have either been merged into the gamtal (village boundary), utilized for other purposes, or people's habits and attitudes have changed. Due to such reasons, a jungle of haphazard garbage heaps near village houses is visible. Moreover, garbage heaps are visible at crossroads even where paved roads have been constructed. Despite having their own cattle fodder enclosures, farmers could place garbage heaps elsewhere, yet arbitrary garbage dumping occurs, sometimes involving relatives of panchayat officials or unaddressed due to vote-bank politics. This is a stark reality. If there is government wasteland (kharaba) near the village, the Gram Panchayat can pass a proposal requesting the District Collector to designate such land solely for garbage dumping. Individuals owning cattle yards should be instructed to place their manure/garbage heaps there. If Gram Panchayats systematically have pits constructed and dung-urine-garbage deposited in them, genuine manure can be obtained.

Most villages in Gujarat have been provided with tap water connections to every household. The Gram Panchayat is responsible for maintaining the pipelines laid for this purpose. This work can be handled by the Water Committee of the panchayat. Furthermore, as per the state government order dated 24/10/2004, every Gram Panchayat is required to propose the formation of a Water Committee, with defined duties and functions. If water leaks from anywhere and timely action is not taken, action can be taken against the Sarpanch of the panchayat under Section 51(1) of the Gujarat Panchayats Act 1993 for dereliction of duty.

Soak pits (shoshkhada) should be constructed wherever standposts exist. In a village of Bhachau taluka in Kutch, it was observed that the Gram Panchayat charges a predetermined fee when providing household connections. Individuals who do not construct a 15-foot deep soak pit at their residence are not given a water

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connection. Due to such well-planned practices, water does not overflow from taps to create muddy pools anywhere in the village. The Gram Panchayat maintains the water pipeline. If water leaks from provided tap connections and flows into streets, the Gram Panchayat should be notified and the tap connection disconnected.

Rural households throw domestic garbage into streets. Leftover food is often thrown anywhere with the intent of feeding dogs. Flies continuously buzz over it, spreading diseases. A retired professor from Patan College who served as Sarpanch of Mithiwavdi Gram Panchayat in Patan district under the 'Samras' (unanimous election) method addressed this issue. Having noted prior severe outbreaks of diarrhea during intense summers, he convened a Gram Sabha to find a solution for leftover food disposal, ensuring special participation of women. A large drum (container) was placed in every street, and a rule was established that leftover food should not be thrown anywhere else. After the Gram Panchayat implemented the practice of transporting such leftover food away via tractor, not a single case of diarrhea occurred in that village.

Section 99 of the Gujarat Panchayats Act 1993 provides detailed information on the duties and responsibilities of Gram Panchayats in Schedule-1 of the Gujarat Panchayat Laws. Sanitation workers collect garbage from public streets, places, etc., apart from the village outskirts (seem/boundary). Such garbage can be disposed of alongside the village outskirts' garbage, or if that is not feasible, cow dung cakes collected at the outskirts can be auctioned separately and linked with the manure found along pathways.

Under the Government of India's Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan / Nirmal Gram Yojana, financial assistance of ₹12,000 has been implemented for BPL beneficiaries. Some middle-class people cite financial constraints in this regard. An enthusiastic Sarpanch in Ahmedabad district shared in conversation that they are committed to arranging toilets for all residents of their Gram Panchayat. To achieve this, they contacted a bank that finances loans to the Gram Panchayat for toilet construction, and the panchayat provides funds to individuals or takes responsibility for loan repayment. If such a scheme is implemented, the toilet problem can be resolved to a large extent.

Safe drinking water, wastewater drainage, and toilet construction are government-announced programs, but they cannot be successfully implemented unless they become the people's own programs. Therefore, community cooperation is an indispensable and undisputed solution. Fresh air, water, and a clean environment are everyone's primary necessities. To fulfill this need, shifting the mindset that "work happens only when the government does it" requires the general community to take responsibility themselves. Along with generating mass awareness and consciousness on a large scale, building primary facilities in rural and urban areas through public participation is an urgent need of the present time. The Environmental Sanitation Organization has taken primary yet concrete steps in this direction. In addition to initiating mass awareness work in Gujarat with the cooperation of voluntary organizations, encouraging and training Sarpanchs through voluntary organizations has been undertaken. As a result, approximately two hundred thousand odorless water-sealed toilets have been constructed in Gujarat over the past five years. Since this field of work is very extensive, such work must be undertaken directly by rural areas and rural leaders under the leadership and guidance of organizations, only then can we realize the philosophy of "Health for All and All for Health."

World energy consumption is increasing daily while traditional energy sources are depleting, making the utility of non-traditional energy sources vastly important. Biogas is a significant non-traditional energy source in this regard. Biogas can be easily obtained from animal and human excreta in rural areas. It also yields superior quality manure. Its usage saves firewood used for fuel, thereby halting deforestation and averting adverse environmental impacts. For this, mass awareness and scientific information must reach rural populations.

CONCLUSION

Thus, cleanliness and health are foundational conditions for the all-round development of Dangs district. Through the coordination of knowledge, enthusiasm, and love for nature in tribal regions, youth can become torchbearers of a sanitation revolution. Through the confluence of government machinery, NGOs, and rural youth mandals, Dangs district can transform into a model "clean and green tribal region" in the state. The

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presented research deeply presents the subject of youth actions in sanitation and cleanliness. It provides a detailed description of information obtained from rural people regarding sanitation, including the sanitation status of tribal rural residents, their awareness regarding hygiene, and precautions taken concerning cleanliness. Furthermore, the role played by youth in sanitation in rural areas has been described. This includes activities performed by youth such as toilet facilities, safe drinking water arrangements, solid waste disposal management, wastewater drainage systems, cleaning village alleys, organizing sanitation camps, programs held within them, sanitation meetings, and representations (demands) made by villagers to the Gram Panchayat regarding sanitation facilities.

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