

## THE POLITICS AND PRIORITIES – SBM AND JJJ

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### ABSTRACT

*Politics is gradually veering away from its traditional core contentious issues like power struggle between social and religious groups, regions at the national level as well as sovereignty, national interest, war, disarmament at the international level and focussing upon emerging issues impacting the common survival of the people like the right to life including right to food, shelter, health, clean environment. The legitimacy and authority of the political systems at the national as well as international level would more and more depend upon their ability to address these new challenges. This article discusses a contrast between the performance of the democratic political system in India and International Organisations to ensure access to two basic needs for survival – safe drinking water and sanitation.*

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**Keywords:** *Indian Democracy, International Organisation, Basic Needs.*

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### Introduction

The Preamble of the Constitution of sovereign socialist democratic republic of India guarantees to all its people Justice, Social, Economic and Political. The economic justice aims to create opportunities for every citizen to have a dignified, productive and creative life that extends beyond simple economics. It is about equity of how institutions distribute specific benefits and burdens. Scholars like Amartya Sen, Kenneth Arrow, Serge-Christophe Kolm and others have studied how distribution of primary goods, liberty, entitlements, opportunity are of paramount importance in politics and governance. David Easton has defined politics as the authoritative allocation of values. Demands are inputs in the political system that is expected to respond by outputs in terms of decisions and actions. The rights of marginal people to improve their quality of life, such as the right to have good health has recently become a central issue in politics. As a consequence, ability and performance of a political system to address the long-standing problems of deprivation of people from basic necessities of life has emerged as an important area in politics. It has been argued by political economist like Amartya Sen that the democratic State is better suited to be responsive in this context compared to non-democratic regimes.

The subject of this article is to examine the recent performance of India in contrast with the performance of international organisations and other nations where the citizens are still deprived of the basic necessity of drinking water and sanitation.

In this perspective, drinking water politics may be defined in a general way as the politics affecting the access of the common citizens to water, especially clean drinking water. In the last few decades, more than ever, allocation of resources that support right to life has occupied the centre stage of politics both at national and global level. In the cold war era after the second world war international politics was focussed upon issues like the balance of power between NATO and Warsaw Pact members, disarmament, war, diplomacy etc. However, the global community recently got alarmed by the fact that there are much bigger threats to human survival than war, armament race etc. The new emerging threats are damage to environment causing global warming, pandemics, diseases that could occur owing to lack of basic necessities etc. The world has realised that human civilization could be extinct even without war. Power realism is being replaced by planetary globalism. Hence, the subjects that now share centre stage

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in international politics and diplomacy include right to food, right to safe and clean environment that constitutes a necessity for all life forms and human development. Sustainability of development has become a priority for all Governments. In this article, the focus would be on drinking water. Similar is the case with the nation states, especially in the developing nations where the citizens are more and more assertive regarding the rights to basic necessities of life.

In India the right to drinking water has been recognised as a justiciable fundamental right, as a part of the all-encompassing Right to Life guarantee under Article 21 of Indian Constitution. All citizens have equal right to have access to drinking water. The Supreme Court of India has pronounced landmark judgements in which Right to Clean water has been focussed upon as part of the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. The concept of Right to Clean water was first articulated in the case of *Bandhua Mukti Morcha V. Union Of India* in the year 1984. The Apex Court protected this right again and again in various cases. *A.P. Pollution control Board II v. Professor M.V. Nayudu* (2001), *Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v. Union of India* (1996), *Delhi Sainik Cooperative housing Building Society Ltd. and Others v. Union of India and Ors.* (2018) are few examples.<sup>(1)</sup> Unequal access to drinking water has been a source of political discontentment in various parts of the country. At the global level, it has been fervently advocated time and again in many forums and platforms that everyone in this planet has the right to safe drinking water and access to safe sanitation services. Everyone knows that the absence of access to clean water negatively impacts the population in every respect of their lives including health and nutrition.

Yet one thing is very evident. Underlying all the alarming reports and fervent resolutions at the global level on the urgent need for immediate attention and accelerated action, there is a harsh reality. That is the yawning gap between promises and performance and the widening hiatus between goals and achievements. In this background the political commitment, strategy and implementation through mass mobilisation in the context of democratic politics, decentralized power structure recently in India has been a historic phenomenon in the background of the progress to achieve universal access to clean and safe drinking water.

In the global context, the world community took up access to drinking water as a major common task as a part of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and later Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Target 7C of the Millennium Development Goals declared in September 2000, was to halve, by 2015, the proportion of population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Sustainable development goals also included availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030 as Goal-6.<sup>(2)</sup>

A perusal of the data stated in various reports of the previous years by WHO and UNICEF highlighting the failure to achieve the desired goal unmistakably makes few things evident.

One, Politics Among Nations is no more about Struggle for Power, National Interest, Ideology, Balance of Power, Sovereignty, War etc. as Hans J. Morgenthau wrote in his book. Now, priority is human survival and welfare at a global level. Despite this the progress by international community towards the common target has been painfully slow. Each report calls attention to new possibilities riddled with old issues. Why has the international community failed to achieve the objective so far. Politics is about optimal allocation of resources to achieve public good. In a democracy, the leadership is responsible for the people and the pressure from the electorate guides the governments to respond to the needs of the people. The international organisations have no accountability to the large number of people that suffer from absence of access to safe drinking water.

In contrast, India's political commitment, action and achievement have certainly been extra ordinary as well as exemplary. In India policy makers are fully aware that absence of access to safe water supply leads to heavy cost and economic burden. It has been estimated that water borne diseases have an economic burden of approximately USD 600 million a year in India alone.<sup>(3)</sup>

Intervention in the rural sanitation sector in India was started initially in the First Five Year Plan in the year 1954. The Government of India subsequently introduced a structured scheme in the form of the Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP) in 1986 primarily with objective of improving the quality of life of the rural people and also to provide privacy and dignity for women. From 1999, a demand driven approach under the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) was introduced to significantly upgrade the program. Subsequently, a more comprehensive programme taking village as a unit and with the objective to develop open defecation free villages named Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan came in the year 2012.

Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen), called SBM(G) and Jal Jeevan mission (JJM) have been and continue to be the two most ambitious flagship programmes of Government of India of unprecedented scale. They demonstrate three things.

- First is the response of the political system to the grave situation as described above.
- Second is the allocation of resources at a massive scale by political leadership.

And the third is the bottom-up approach in implementation of the schemes made possible by democratic decentralization, i.e., the role of Gram Panchayat at the grass root level.

SBM aimed at achieving open defecation free (ODF) status in rural areas of the country by 2 October 2019 and to put focus safe sanitation. The mission was launched in 2014. Under this programme, more than 10 crore toilets were constructed in rural areas across the country by 2019–20. As a result, all the 36 states and union territories declared themselves ODF by 2 October 2019. The mission had to deal with 4 Ss – stigma, speed, scale and sustainability. Massive campaigns for mobilisation and behaviour change involving all sections of people including film stars and sports icons made SBM a ‘Jan Andolan’ – a people’s movement. Currently, the second phase aims at sustainability and solid and liquid waste management.<sup>(4)</sup>

Achieving an ODF India in record time of only 5 years means that India attained SDG 6.2- sanitation for all- a whopping 11 years before UN SDG target of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2030. From having dubious distinction of being home for 60 crore people practising open defecation in 2024 -60% of world’s total population of open defecation to achieve ODF status through behaviour change at such scale is nothing short of a miracle. India’s sanitation revolution is one of the biggest behaviour changer mass movements in history. The project cost of this mission is Rs 1.3 lakh crore (USD 20 Billion).<sup>(5)</sup>

JJY was announced in August 2019 to provide drinking water supply to every rural household in adequate quantity of prescribed quality on regular and long-term basis at affordable service delivery charges leading to improvement in living standards of rural communities. The scheme aims at providing functional household tap connection (FHTC) to every rural household by the year 2024. The main features of the programme include, among other things, empowerment of Gram Panchayat and local community, partnership with other stakeholders, convergence with other programs and ensuring the quality of services. In 2019, out of about 19 crore households in rural areas, about 3.23 crore, that is, 17% had tap water connections. The remaining 15.7 crore households were to be provided with tap water by 2024. This mission forms part of one of Government of India’s biggest community infrastructure outlays with an amount of Rs.3.60 lakh crore.<sup>(6)</sup>

JJM intends to make water ‘everyone’s business’ by involving all stakeholders and turning it into a ‘Jan Andolan’ -a people’s movement. It is expected to be a decentralised, demand -driven and community managed programme that aims to instil sense of ownership among the local community.<sup>(7)</sup> Therefore, the role of Gram Panchayat would be critical. JJM has 8 main components. They are -

- tap water supply to 119.3 million rural households by 2024
- bottom-up planning for community engagement
- women’s involvement
- focus on schools and preschool centres (anganwadi centres)
- skill development
- grey water management by reuse and recycling of waste water
- source sustainability by recharge and water conservation
- water quality

The project cost of JJM would be Rs 3.60 lakh crore (USD 48 billion) over a period between 2019 to 2024.

The schemes and sub- missions under the erstwhile National Rural Drinking Water Program (NRDWP) would be subsumed into JJM. However national water quality sub-mission, SWAJAL, water quality monitoring and surveillance would continue as part of JJM.

Country has nearly 50,000 habitations that are quality affected. Chloride and arsenic account for nearly 3000 habitations each, whereas nearly 30,000 habitations are affected by iron and 10,000 by salinity. Nitrate and heavy metal account for about 1100 habitations. Community water purification plants are being provided as short-term solution. The long-term solutions include large piped water supply projects where local sources are not available.<sup>(8)</sup>

SBM and JJM have been exemplary successful programmes. The important lessons learnt are the following:

- **Strong Leadership and Political Will**

In the first Independence Day address to the nation in 2014, Prime Minister of India announced a massive nationwide programme for Sanitation. He talked about a lack of toilets and the indignity of women and girls having to defecate in the open. This was unheard of before and PM announced the Clean India Mission (Swachh Bharat Mission). As a tribute to the Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi, he gave a target of making the country free from open defecation by 2 October, 2019, the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the Mahatma. An adequate resource was part of this announcement.

- **Massive Mass Mobilisation**

SBM is said to be world's largest behaviour change programme in which people from all spheres of life contributed to ensure that more than 10 crore toilets were constructed by 2019-2020.

- **Convergence Of SBM As Well as JJM With Other Sectors**

The conversions of SBM and JJM with other sectors included close multi sectoral coordination with other related department like Health, Education, Women and child development, Rural Development, etc. as a part of their strategy. However, the most important part of the strategy was that role of all these departments should converge at the Gram Panchayat. Gram Panchayat was to own the programme and other departments were expected to assist the panchayat. This bottom-up strategy, decentralize structure and the system of management is the heart of the mission.

- **Focus on the Outcomes**

The mission not only achieved the physically targets but it was ensured that the people actually use them. As per the studies conducted by UNICEF, WHO, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the impact of the missions on the parameters of the health, nutrition, women empowerment has been considerably achieved.

- **Women Participation**

Both the missions gave over-riding importance to the participation of women as they are directly linked with water as well as sanitation. Training and capacity building of women was a major component of the mission.

- **Concurrent Monitoring**

The success of both the missions was monitored with the focus on desired outcomes. Number of construction of Latrines and Drinking Water Capacities was important. Simultaneously the outcomes out of these outputs were of paramount significance.

### **Strategy, System and Structure**

Conceptually, in the management of water supply services in a democratic political regime it is important to see the three aspects.

- strategy,
- structure and
- system.

There are mainly four stakeholders in the water supply sector. They are the government, private sector, local elected bodies and the consumer.

### **From SSS to PPP – People, Policy and Process**

The paradigm shifts in JJY and SBA in India has shown the way. Political leadership, bottom-up approach, mass mobilisation and paradigm shift from a government driven project to a participatory project where people actively participate was created at Gram Panchayat level. People's movement alone can miraculous achievement possible. India has demonstrated that it is possible. Other countries could learn from this experience.<sup>(9)</sup>

A clear paradigm shift is visible in the new approach to water supply sector that is instead of Government and Central Authority deciding what to do, how to do and through which agency, it has been found more effective to shift responsibility to the people by appropriate policy changes and allow processes to develop for ownership, management and sustainability. This policy of creating demand driven people's movement would result in powerful processes.<sup>(10)</sup>

Hence it would be useful to shift from the approach of strategy, structure and system (SSS) to the approach of policy, people and process (PPP) with necessary flexibility and autonomy at the grass-route levels. SBM and JJY could be important pointers for the future of Indian politics. Politics could veer away from preoccupation with traditional issues like religious identities, power struggle, freebies and tend towards the priorities that could bring about progress of living standard and well-being on which ultimately economic growth depend.

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