

SWACHH BHARAT ABHIYAN: THE KARJAT EXPERIMENT

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is a flagship programme of Government of India. It was launched on 2nd October 2014 with an aim to clean up the cities, smaller towns and villages of India and eradicate open defecation. Perhaps more importantly it was aimed at changing the mindset of we, as a people, towards the concept of cleanliness in public life. To assess the impact of SBA, Swachhta Sarvekshan 2018, a survey of urban areas was scheduled to be carried out from 4th January 2018 in all towns and cities of India. Each town/city was supposed to be ranked on a total of 4000 marks, comprising various fields, namely, a). ODF progress (30%), b). Collection and transportation of solid waste (30%), c). Processing and disposal of solid waste (25%), d). IEC activities (5%), e). Capacity building (5%) and f). Innovation (5%). Further the assessment weightages were, a). Documentation of SBA related activities (35%), b). Citizen feedback (35%) and c). Independent field observation by the survey team (30%). Also for the first time all 4041 towns and cities were to be ranked.

It was in this background that I, Kumar Ashirwad, an IAS Probationer of the 2016 batch, was posted in Karjat town in Raigad district in Maharashtra as Chief Officer of Karjat Municipal Council for six weeks as part of my district training on the 13th of November 2017. This was to be my first independent charge.

As my tenure was only of six weeks I decided to focus on a few target areas, namely Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, improving the living conditions of the numerous Dalit Bastis (colonies) and increasing the property tax and water tax collections. Amongst these three I decided to make Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, my priority. Why? First, because it would be real challenge to actually clean up the city with cleanliness being visible on the ground. Secondly because the target was gettable in a period of six weeks.

In this article, I will be discussing my experience of implementing Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, the challenges we faced, our failures, our successes and most importantly certain observations that might help us in achieving our target of a clean India in a better way.

Let's begin...



To get a real picture of the cleanliness of the town, I started going around the town on a motorcycle, along with a peon, from 8 to 11 every night and some days at around 5 in the morning. It became clear to me that Karjat was a very dirty city even by the standards of small towns. The main bazaar was especially dirty with the day's garbage simply being thrown on the road by around a thousand shopkeepers in the bazaar area when they shut shop and stray dogs further spreading it out throughout the night. By morning the place looked like a post-apocalyptic world with garbage being all that the eye could see and dogs fighting over the eatables in the garbage. Similarly almost none of the nearly thirty public toilets had taps, water, lights and were extremely dirty. Some were even locked! The residential areas were no

better, with entire housing societies and colonies simply dumping all their garbage at certain unanimously agreed upon spots. This sea of garbage contrasted starkly with the beautiful surroundings of the town, Karjat being a popular tourist destination during monsoons. For nearly ten days, I and my peon rode through the entire town, at late night and early morning, taking pictures of garbage strewn across the bazaar and residential colonies, dirty toilets, missing taps and broken lights. By the end of the first week we had nearly 2500 pictures each on our mobile phones. Another thing that was made abundantly clear during my interactions with citizens, Councilors and my officers was that cleanliness was not a priority for anyone.

I decided to begin by getting my own house in order. The post of Chief Officer in the Municipal Council had been given to the Naib Tehsildar as an additional charge since five months and hence due to the lack of a full-time officer, the work culture had seriously deteriorated with staff attendance and office timings taking a hit. On the very first day I called a meeting of all the staff and informed them that any absence without leave or during office timings would invite penal action. A few days and many cause notices later, this problem was solved. I now decided to focus on the primary task at hand. I started meeting with NGOs, school principals, shopkeepers' associations, various clubs, senior citizens, ex-army men, professionals'

associations, journalists and other reputed and influential citizens. With all these people, I began by asking about how they felt about the unsanitary conditions prevailing in the town. To my surprise many people did not consider Karjat to be very dirty. This was perhaps my first lesson. We, humans quickly adapt to any reality and begin accepting it as normal. It was only when I showed them the photos that they realized how bad the situation was. Perhaps seeing all the dirt all at once in the photos made them aware of the grim reality. I informed them of the upcoming Swachhta Sarvekshan and how Karjat was amongst the bottom currently and how little time we had to rectify this situation. I gave this message to everyone who came to my office. During my interactions, I sensed that the people were looking for someone to take the first step and I realized that it was important that I, as the head of the Nagar Parishad needed to be seen leading the mission. Only when the citizens would be convinced that I was dead serious about cleaning up the town, would they participate actively. During the first week, I had managed to start night time sweeping of the bazaar with one garbage vehicle passing through the entire bazaar and collecting the day's litter from the shopkeepers. Almost every night I along with my loyal peon, Mr. Rupesh Patil, would walk behind the garbage vehicle telling each shopkeeper to throw their litter in the vehicle. We both would pick up any litter lying on the road and throw it in the garbage truck. This had a tremendous effect. People would start following our example and very soon, without a single word on my part, a sizeable crowd would gather behind me and start throwing the litter in the garbage truck. One day a journalist saw this and reported it the next day's newspaper. Other newspapers followed suit. Very soon through a series of newspaper articles Karjat had come to know of a peculiar Chief officer who roamed around at night clicking pictures of and cleaning up garbage. This gave us a huge advantage. I now had the moral authority to ask people to help me in this campaign. By the end of the third week, having convinced the good people of Karjat of my earnestness, we started conducting Swachh Bharat Abhiyan awareness campaigns. We received a tremendous response from the various clubs, SHGs, NGOs and especially schools. Within a short



period of time we could conduct numerous campaigns. We left the design and content of the events entirely up to the organization (clubs/NGOs/schools). It was their prerogative whether they wanted to stage plays or songs or dances or conduct rallies or clean up Garbage Vulnerable Points (GVPs) etc. We simply asked them to hand over a comprehensive list of whatever resources they needed and arranged those resources promptly. I ensured that all such events got good press coverage and made it a point to get the main organizers interviewed on TV or the newspapers. This went a long way and many more groups came forward. We also held numerous competitions for cleanest schools, societies, hotels and essay competitions. Here my work in the Dalit Bastis paid off stupendously and the people from these colonies, which were usually the dirtiest parts of the town, supported me whole heartedly.



Cleaning up a city has two aspects. One, reducing the amount of garbage that is thrown in public places. This needed changing the mindset of people which we were attempting to accomplish through the above measures. The second involves collection of the garbage that will inevitably be thrown, ensuring daily cleaning of public toilets, fixing their taps, lights, getting societies and shopkeepers to keep dustbins, processing and disposal of collected waste, cleaning up the gutters, bringing to book those who still littered etc. This is the prerogative of the government machinery, not the citizens. I had assumed that this would be the easy part and I was badly mistaken. In Karjat, most of the above work had been contracted out. Collection of waste in about three-fourths of the Municipal Council area, transportation, processing and disposal of the collected waste, cleaning up of most of the gutters, public toilet cleaning and maintenance had all been given to various contractors. It also became quite obvious to me that most of these contractors were, as we say in common parlance, “well-connected individuals”. Moreover, they had not been doing their job at all. An initial meeting with them in

the very first week had convinced me that to deal with them and get them to uphold their side of the contract faithfully, I would have to take a tough stance. It would necessarily be an unpleasant task. I started reading the terms and conditions of their Contract Agreements in minute detail. Needless to say, they were guilty of violating most of those terms and conditions. I started calling them one by one. Each contractor was given two sheets of paper. On the first sheet, he was asked to write down, point by point, the terms of the agreement that he was faithfully executing. On the other sheet he was asked to write down those terms that he was violating. There was no room for oral arguments. He was then asked to sign both papers affirming that the information given by him was true to the best of his knowledge. Inadvertently most of the contractors affirmed that they were following almost all the terms and conditions of the contract. They were then shown pictures of the dirty gutters, or unclean public toilets with broken taps, lights or unclean streets. I informed them that they had lied, as was evident from the photos, and thus had given false information to a public servant making them liable to be punished under Section 177 of the Indian Penal Code, which entails up to six months of simple imprisonment. As for the points on the second sheet of paper they were liable to have their contracts cancelled as they had violated the terms of the contract by their own admission. This, unfailingly, had the desired effect. They were given a deadline to rectify their mistakes and warned of the above consequences if they failed to

come good on their promises. By the end of the fourth week, most gutters were cleaned up. All public toilets were up and running with taps and lights being fixed, cleaning and spraying of insecticides being done twice daily, roads being cleaned daily and the city being visibly much cleaner. Further the compost unit and biogas plant (both given to contractors) which had become defunct began their operations. (The compost unit whose sheds had not been constructed for the past one year is still not fully functional, but construction of sheds was started). I also held regular meetings with Safai karamcharis and established a very good rapport with them. They were free to approach me in my office at any hour of the



day. I got their genuine complaints resolved and they in turn gave their two hundred percent in my endeavor. I remain indebted to them.

There were numerous other activities we undertook, such as identifying and training rag pickers in collection and segregation of waste, ensuring door to door collection of waste, increasing percentage of source segregation, installing GPS on garbage trucks, levying fines for littering, conducting farmer outreach programmes for sale of compost, ensuring that the ODF status of Karjat was maintained, accelerating the construction of household latrines, preparing a plan to set up decentralized compost units, forming numerous Swachhta committees in schools, holding e-learning courses for the staff, putting up SBA hoardings all over the town, conducting announcements by loudspeakers to throw litter in the dustbin and undertake segregation of waste, ensuring all shops near the railway station and bus stand had dustbins, and many such other activities. Moreover all these activities were documented in detail for the purpose of Swachhta Sarvekshan 2018. One activity in particular that I feel deserves special mention is our work related to Swachhata App. When I had joined Karjat on the 13th of November, Karjat was **ranked at 750**. This ranking was based on number of Swachhta Apps downloaded, number of complaints posted and resolved within the given deadlines and user happiness. We held numerous campaigns making people aware about this app and training them how to use it. By the time my tenure was over on the 26th of December, Karjat stood at **80th rank**. As on the date of writing this article (9th January), Karjat is placed at **rank 17**! Though, in all fairness, it needs to be pointed out that we jumped around 200 places because of a change in the ranking scheme which also considered the population of the town/city while ranking it.

This is not to say that I did not have my share of failures. Though I held numerous awareness campaigns, I later felt that they could have been made more large scale by involving multiple organizations in the same campaign rather than each campaign being held by a single organization. This would have made a larger impact. Second, I cannot boast of many innovations that I came up with during my tenure, though it needs to be said that I had a lot to accomplish and only six weeks to accomplish it. However this is no excuse. Third, our progress in source segregation of garbage was not to my satisfaction though it did go up.

My short tenure and the fact that I am yet, only a Probationer, would render it improper for me to give any sort of advice. And yet I would be failing in my duty if I did not make a few suggestions, which could turn out to be useful at best and foolish at worst, but which nevertheless I sincerely feel I must share. First, before starting any awareness campaigns around Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, the government agency conducting those campaigns, and especially the leader of that agency must convince the citizens of their earnestness by their actions. People first need to see that agency in action before they participate willingly in the campaigns and mission. Else the entire thing remains just discrete events without actually changing the mindset of the people. Second, in awareness campaigns, maximum press coverage should be given to the organization conducting the event. The government agency should take a backseat here. Third, I personally felt awareness campaigns involving children had the maximum impact. Fourth, if any aspect regarding cleanliness is contracted out to private contractors, the penalties for violating those terms should be made extremely stringent and regular monitoring is a must to see that the contractor upholds his/her side of the bargain. Fifth, actually achieving cleanliness which is visible on the ground level requires sustained focus rather than intermittent periods of frenetic activity. Sixth, another area which could be improved upon is the Swachhta App and the swachh.city website. Both are rather slow, though in all fairness, they do handle a large volume of traffic. For example, uploading a picture of a garbage heap on the Swachhta App takes around 3 to 4 minutes. People usually lose patience by then and do not upload the complaint. Seventh, some of the indicators in the Swachhta Sarvekshan 2018 are not suited for small towns. For example, Indicator 1.12 asks for percentage of gardens and parks practicing on site composting. Most of parks and gardens in smaller towns are rather small and do not generate enough waste to warrant an onsite compost unit. Similarly, Indicator 1.2 asks for percentage of RWAs or Bulk garbage generators (establishments generating more than 100 kgs wet waste per day) that practice on site processing of wet waste. Most small towns do not have RWAs or Bulk garbage generators. Thus, having one template for bigger cities and a different template for smaller towns would be better. Eighth, having a point based Swachhta Sarvekshan with marks being assigned for different activities was a huge help in streamlining our efforts in Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. I feel that all flagship programmes should have a similar marking and ranking scheme. It will help in streamlining the entire process, marking out areas of weaknesses, highlighting important activities (a lot of the

activities we conducted were mentioned in Swachhta Sarvekshan 2018 as indicators) and increasing accountability. It also makes monitoring much more meaningful. And finally, it would be really useful to have a central repository of all the best practices and innovations from various parts of the country. This would ensure that good ideas are disseminated and recognized.

Working in Karjat on Swachh Bharat Abhiyan was my first experience in the world of bureaucracy and I could honestly not have asked for more. It would be an understatement to say I went through a period of tremendous personal growth during these six weeks. Everyday brought new challenges and thus new opportunities. However, I would be rightly accused of arrogance if I failed to mention all those people, especially my staff, without whom I would have been able to achieve nothing. I will forever be indebted to the citizens of Karjat for their cooperation and for enabling me to be a part of such a tremendous experience.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is perhaps the most important and transformational programme of this decade. My experience of working for this programme is just one amongst 4041 stories. And hopefully an interesting and useful one at that!

KUMAR ASHIRWAD

IAS PROBATIONER 2016 BATCH

MAHARASHTRA CADRE

Below is the Karjat story in pictures....

SWACHH BHARAT ABHIYAN RALLIES



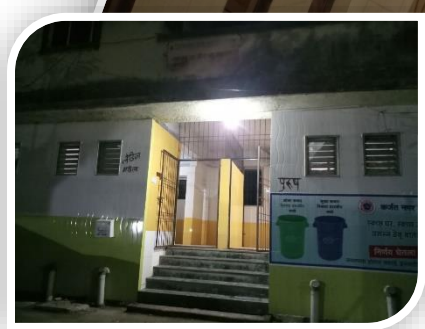
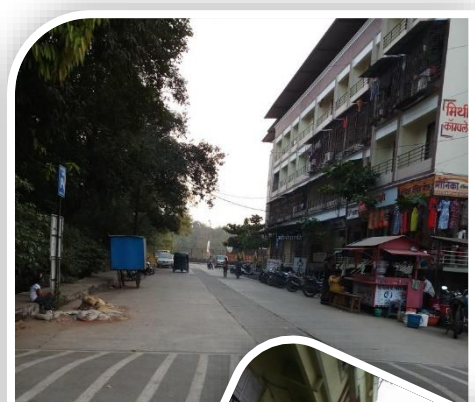
SWACHH BHARAT ABHIYAN IN SCHOOLS



BEFORE PICS

SWACHH BHARAT
ABHIYAN

AFTER PICS



PICTURES OF DALIT BASTI



NIGHT TIME CLEANING IN BAZAAR



THANK YOU