

## **Rural Hygiene And Sanitation Programme: A Case Study Of Assam**

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### **Introduction:**

The concept of sanitation today entails much broader meaning that includes liquid and solid waste disposal, hygienic food, environmental hygiene along with personal and domestic hygiene and thus it goes beyond the narrow meaning of the sanitation that only means disposal of the human excreta. Proper sanitation is an important component of the individual health and hygiene. In the developing countries like India, there are various unhygienic practices related to disposal of human excreta, food and environment. High incidence of viral and bacterial diseases and the high incidence of the infant mortality rate in India can be attributed to the poor sanitation in the rural areas.

The importance of proper sanitation lies in their role in our individual and social life along with the general health. Proper sanitation can play an important role in the prevention of diseases by preventing the contamination of the water and soil. Sanitation is also an important component of the human development index and quality life.

The government of India has realised the importance of the rural hygiene and sanitation and hence started a Programme called 'Total sanitation Campaign' which focus on Information, Education and Communication (IEC), Human Resource Development, Capacity Development activities to create awareness among the people. This will also increase people's capacity to select proper options through alternate delivery mechanisms according to their economic situation. There is emphasis on community centric implementation of the programme. Children have a significant role in dissemination of new ideas. The main focus of the programme is to popularise good sanitation practices in school and households. It also aimed at providing separate urinals in schools and Anganwadis in rural areas.

With the recognition of the importance of the rural hygiene and the sanitation programme for the overall development of the rural areas, a project was undertaken to evaluate the condition of hygiene and the sanitation in Parbatia village (Gaon) under community work and social service. As the project was part of the community work and the social service, therefore an important component of the project was the sensitisation of the rural people of the concern village about the importance of the hygiene and the sanitation.

### **Aim and purpose of the community work:**

Community work is one of the important innovations in the teaching learning method that can make learning 'a participatory exercise'. Hence the basic aim of the community work is to make students a part of social change along with the learning process. The 'action research', 'participatory rural appraisal' is some of the example of the community work in the teaching-learning process. Some of the aims of the community work are

- To help the student to know how to prepare and practice manual works at the individual and the collective basis.

- To develop awareness among the student and the teachers about the need and procedures of the good hygiene and sanitation.
- To help the student to create awareness among the rural people about the need of good hygiene and sanitation for good health.
- The ultimate aim of such community work is of course to create good and responsible citizen of the country.

Thus, it is seen that the basic aim of the community work in the sanitation is the make the student an active agent in the social change to bring positive changes in the society.

**Universe or area of study:****a. Location:**

The study was conducted in Parbatia village which is situated at the southern part of the Sivasagar district. It falls within the jurisdiction of the Sivasagar sub-division, Mauza-Salaguri, Police station- Amguri and is situated near a small business centre named Namti Chariali. According to the folk belief that prevails among the common people, the people of this village were sent by the Ahom's king authority to collect food for fuel from the local 'Naga Parbat'. These people settled in this very locality and hence the place came to be known as Parbatia gaon.

**b. Population:****c. Socio economic status:**

The study of the socio economic status of the people is important to assess the hygiene and the sanitation condition among the villagers as it is well known fact that the condition of the sanitation members of the society can achieve is very much dependent on the economic condition of the villagers along with their social conditions. It is because, the standard of living, housing conditions, and other amenities can be acquired only when the person posses a good economic condition.

Most of the people of the Parbatia gaon are associated with primary occupation. Around 30% of villagers are employees of government as well as private sector. They work in different departments such as ONGC, Education Department, P.W.D. etc. Rest of the villagers are mainly cultivators. They also do animal husbandry and poultry farming as allied means of livelihood. Recently, some people have started small tea garden. A gar plant, which is a valuable plant used to make perfume, is grown by almost every household.

A unique feature of the village is the presence of many social organisations which try to solve various problems in the village with their voluntary initiative. 'Parbatia Gaon Development Committee' is one such body. Unity among the villagers irrespective of the caste and class distinction is another important feature of the village and this can be more seen during the time of various misfortune faced by the villagers where the co-villagers are always ready to offer helping hands.

The all resident of Parbatia gaon are Assamese speaking caste of Hindu religion. They actively take part in the various socio-cultural festivals like Bihu, Dipawali etc. 'Namghar' is

one of the most important socio-religious institution that play a dominant part in the life of the villagers.

**d. Education:**

Although more than 90% of the villagers are literate, nearly 60% of them are highly educated. As education plays an important role in creating awareness among the people about need of hygiene and sanitation, therefore there is a need to make all people educated. Of course, proper awareness of the various method of sanitation is essential along with education to have a healthy society.

**e. Accommodation:**

The nature of accommodation is important dimension to look at to assess the hygiene and sanitation condition of the villagers. A well built house with proper means of waste disposal and ventilation is a sign of hygienic condition. But it is dependent on the economic condition of the people along with the proper knowledge about such scientific housing.

The villagers of the Parbatia gaon live in both 'Pakka' and 'Kacchha' type houses. The former type is more suitable for the maintenance of good ventilation and hence good hygienic condition. It is observed moist and dump condition of the 'Kacchha' house is suitable condition for the development of the various disease causing agents if proper sanitation is not maintained. Regular washing with lime can be an economic but important step to maintain hygiene in such condition.

**Methodology of the study:**

The study was done on the basis of both primary and the secondary data.

For the collection of primary data, household survey method was adopted. A well structured interview schedule was prepared to assess the hygiene and the sanitation condition of the village. Observation was another important method in the collection of the data.

Primary data are supplemented with the secondary data that are collected mainly from the books, journal articles, newspapers etc. Data are analysed in the context of the village to get a picture of the condition of sanitation and hygiene in the village.

**Observations and findings:**

As the concept of sanitation implies a broader meaning that goes beyond the idea of personal hygiene to include the hygiene maintained in the house, neighbourhood and the environment as a whole, it is necessary to assess all these conditions to have a proper picture of the sanitation condition of the village. As such, a well structured interview schedule was prepared that tried to gather data which can be broadly grouped in five categories i.e. personal hygiene or personal cleanliness, environmental or domestic hygiene, disposal of excreta, water and nature of health care. The findings of the study are discussed below:

**1. Personal Hygiene and cleanliness;**

Maintenance of the personal hygiene is essential for the good health of the villagers.

The village studied has somewhat satisfactory condition of personal hygiene and cleanliness. While all the people practice bathing daily, some of them do not use clean clothes. The inability of the villagers to by soaps and detergents can be attributed to their inability to use clean clothes.

It is observed that the villagers has a good practice of maintaining cleanliness by washing hands after going to toilet, before feeding infant, before taking food and before serving food to others. While all families except one wash hands after going to toilets, all villagers seen washing hands before feeding infant, before taking food and before serving food to others.

While some families take regular care of feet, teeth, nail and hair; others take occasional care of those things thereby susceptible to various diseases. Of course, most of the people do coughing, sneezing and spitting practices only occasionally thereby greatly reducing their vulnerability.

## **2. Environmental or domestic hygiene:**

The general scenario of the maintenance of domestic hygiene is not satisfactory and scientific.

Although, all villagers except one use of soap and water, but they are not regular in such practices. Even the condition of water is not always clean.

Conditions are not good in case of availability of fresh air, good ventilation. Unscientific method of building house is main cause of lack of availability of good ventilation. It causes various respiratory diseases among the villagers especially among the poor women who have to cook food in ill-ventilated kitchen.

It is observed that some villagers do not take necessary steps for keeping the surrounding clean. The presence of cattle house and poultry farming near the human dwelling adds to these unhygienic conditions. It is also the main reason for the moist and damp condition of the houses and the presence of mosquito, insects etc. Only few villagers maintain the scientific method of the waste disposal. Open disposal of various wastes near the human habitation is the demonstration of unscientific and unhygienic method of waste disposal.

Generally people avoid bathing and washing near the wells and it is good symptom from the perspective of maintenance of hygiene and sanitation. All the villagers use mosquito net which is essential because region has high incidence of mosquito borne diseases like malaria, Japanese encephalitis etc.

## **3. Disposal of Excreta:**

The disposal of the waste in the village is found to be more or less satisfactory. Although, some people do not have scientific method of disposal of excreta but all people except one have latrine. All types of latrine i.e. sanitary, semi-sanitary and pit types latrines are found in the village.

One of the major issues in case of disposal of the excreta is that we could find some houses where pit type latrine is situated at a distance of less than 50 ft from the source of the drinking water which is not a healthy sign. Even there are some villagers who do not use toilets thereby deteriorating the healthy environment of the village.

#### **4. Condition of Water:**

Source of water and method of their use is one of main indicator to judge the hygiene of the villagers. It is well known fact that most the vector borne diseases have their origin in the dirty drinking water. Besides, lack of knowledge about the proper method of treating the drinking water adds to the problem.

The villagers are found to be using water from all type of sources like tap, hand pump, pond, well etc. Although the availability of the water is found to be adequate because it is more than 150-200 litre daily per head, but sometimes they are not clean. In some cases the sources of water was found contaminated with pathogens and various others waste and unsafe for drinking. In some cases water was found to have bad odour and hence unsafe for drinking. Boiling and filtering of water is seen but some villagers do not practice it and thus making them susceptible to the water borne diseases.

A good condition is the availability of the source of water in short distance from the house.

#### **5. Health Care:**

The health care facility in the village is not satisfactory. Nearest medical centre is at Namti Chariali. People have access to a sub centre without doctor, LHV or GNM. Treatments for small diseases are offered by ANM which is not sufficient. Besides, the people in the village need to go to the distant hospitals to avail the facilities of the laboratory and the delivery room that add to the problem of the villagers. Besides, the supply of the medicine by the government is not regular and insufficient. Thus, there is a need of taking urgent action by the government to improve the health care facility. Improvement in the communication is essential ingredient as people need to go to distant places to take prescription of the public doctors.

#### **Some general observations:**

The overall scenario of the village regarding the hygiene and sanitation is not good. Although people maintain normal cleanliness of their personal body and their surrounding, but unscientific nature of their living lead to deterioration of their health condition. The poor economic conditions of the people work as obstacle in the people's access to good sanitation and hygienic conditions. The nature of personal hygiene that the people of the village maintain is not sufficient enough for their good health. Various viral and bacterial born diseases like skin infections, diarrhoea are common among the villagers especially among the poor people.

#### **Suggestions:**

On the basis of the field work and knowledge gathered from various books, following suggestion are forwarded which can greatly help in the policy making with regards to the improving sanitation and hygiene of the rural people.

- It is observed that one of the main problems of the rural areas is the lack of awareness about the need of maintaining good hygiene and sanitation. Besides, people are not aware of the scientific method of maintaining hygienic environment. There is need of

creating awareness among the people about the need of maintaining hygienic environment and scientific method of doing it.

- It is found that most of the people who do not have sanitary toilets are economically weak and the poor financial conditions dissuade them from having a sanitary toilet. There is need of government support for building sanitary toilets in rural areas.
- Medical facilities can help to tackle the various problems that arise due to unhygienic living. Good medical facilities which are easily available should be within the short distance of the village. Government should take initiative for improving the infrastructure of the medical facilities provided by the state. Besides there is a need of proper supervision and review for the just distribution of such facilities.
- Improvement of the transport and communication can go a long way for giving people timely access to the medical facilities. Government can augment the such services by increasing the number of free ambulance available to take the patients to the hospitals.

**Conclusion:**

It is observed from the study that the condition of hygiene sanitation of the people of the Parbatia village needs improvement. Lack of awareness of the people about the scientific methods of maintaining good hygiene environment and sanitation is one of the main problems in this regard. Poor socio economic conditions of some of the villagers work as bottleneck in improving sanitation of the village. There is need of pro-active role of the various nongovernmental and civil society organisations along with the government agencies for maintenance of good hygiene and sanitation in the village.

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