Swachhata in Ancient India

Mains: *PIB*

- **Historical Roots –** India's sanitation traditions predate the modern movement, with archaeological evidence showing planned layouts and extensive drainage networks in Indus Valley cities like Lothal.
- **Infrastructure and Practice –** Ancient homes featured private toilets connected to drains, inspection points, and solid waste management systems.
- **Spiritual and Conduct Connection –**
- Vedic traditions linked clean water, fresh air, and healthy surroundings with spiritual practice.
- Buddhist traditions instructed monks to avoid polluting water sources and to clean toilet areas for subsequent users.
- Archaeological evidence, such as a Gupta-period monastery in Bihar with a dedicated toilet chamber, confirms organized ancient sanitation.
- **Core Philosophy –** Cleanliness has historically been intrinsically linked with personal conduct, discipline, and community life.
- **From Infrastructure to Social Behaviour Change**
- **Modern Challenges –** Addressing modern sanitation requires both building physical systems and instilling habits for their sustained maintenance.
- **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Launch –** Launched on 2 October 2014, SBM represents one of India's largest government-led sanitation movements –
- **SBM-Grameen (SBM-G) –** Focuses on rural sanitation, toilet access/usage, and solid/liquid waste management.
- **SBM-Urban (SBM-U) –** Focuses on urban sanitation, public spaces, cleanliness infrastructure, and waste management.
- **The Dual Mandate –** Combines the decade-long construction of extensive infrastructure with the ongoing challenge of driving long-term behavioral change.
- **The High-Density Test –** Institutionalized waste management faces its toughest test during massive religious gatherings where millions assemble

in short timeframes.

Image 1: Drainage channels brining in waste-water from households in Lothal

Key Pilgrimage and Community Initiatives

Maha Kumbh 2025 – Scale and Infrastructure

- **Scale of Facilities –** Over 28,000 toilets, 20,000 community urinals, and 20,000 source-segregation trash bins were established across the Prayagraj fairgrounds.
- **Awareness and Engagement –**
- Fairgrounds designated as plastic-free zones.
- Deployed a **Swachhata Rath Yatra** procession alongside street plays, musical performances, and public address systems to encourage waste segregation and bin usage.
- **Community-Led Sustainable Alternatives –** Women from 28 UP districts and regional artisans produced around 60 crore eco-friendly products (leaf plates, *kulhads*, jute/cloth bags) sold across 300 locations.
- **Rapid Maintenance –** Specialized sanitation teams performed immediate post-bathing cleanups, toilet maintenance, disinfection, and fogging.

Image 2: Dedicated Sanitation Team at Maha Kumbh 2025

Kanwar Yatra – Managing Linear Transit Routes

- **Targeted Logistics –** Delhi implemented round-the-clock sweeping, waste collection, and temporary toilets along heavy pilgrimage transit corridors.
- **Plastic Reduction and Dignity –**
  - Distributed over 5 lakh steel Ganga-water containers and jute bags to replace single-use plastics.
  - Introduced two **Pink Kanwar Camps** managed by female volunteers, offering clean, dedicated toilet and bathing facilities for women pilgrims.

Amarnath Yatra – Eco-Friendly Himalayan Stewardship

- **Zero-Landfill Alignment –** Aligned with SBM-U 2.0 to protect fragile mountain ecosystems.
- **Waste Processing –** 100% of the daily generated waste (~11.67 metric tonnes) was processed on-site.
- **On-Ground Deployment –**
  - 1,300 **SafaiMitras** maintained round-the-clock cleanliness.
  - 1,016 twin-bin stations installed for wet and dry waste, alongside dedicated sanitary waste bins near women's restrooms.
- **Interactive Campaigning –**

- Utilized public engagement drives such as ‘Plastic Lao, Thela Lejao’ and ‘Bin It, Win It’.
- Engaged over 70,000 devotees through a Green Pledge campaign and social media sharing.

Image 3: Sanitation workers in J&K ensuring segregation of waste using color-coded bags

Project Udvasana (Hyderabad) – Scientific Handling of Sacred Waste

- **Targeted Waste Stream –** Focuses on sacred and religious waste (flowers, garlands, religious texts, and damaged idols) through municipal collection and scientific processing.
- **Phased Rollout in Greater Hyderabad –**
- **Phase 1 (Pilot at ISKCON Jubilee Hills) –** Collected 66 kg of religious material.
- **Phase 2 –** Expanded collection to 443 kg.
- **Phase 3 –** Scaled to 6 major temples, engaging 124 devotees and recovering 753.59 kg of material for recycling and processing through authorized agencies.

Reference

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