

Indian Sanitation Innovator & Social Reformer Awarded 2009 Stockholm Water Prize

Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak, founder of Sulabh Sanitation Movement in India, has been named the 2009 Stockholm Water Prize Laureate. As the Founder of the Sulabh International Social Service Organisation, Dr. Pathak is known around the world for his wide ranging work in the sanitation field to improve public health, advance social progress, and improve human rights in India and other countries.

His accomplishments span the fields of sanitation technology, social enterprise, and healthcare education for millions of people in his native country, serving as a model for NGO agencies and public health initiatives around the world. Since he established the Sulabh Sanitation Movement in 1970, Dr. Pathak has worked to change social attitudes toward traditional unsanitary latrine practices in slums, rural villages, and dense urban districts, and developed cost effective toilet systems that have improved daily life and health for millions of people. He has also waged an ongoing campaign to abolish the traditional practice of manual “scavenging” of human waste from bucket latrines in India while championing the rights of former scavengers and their families to economic opportunity, decent standards of living, and social dignity. “The results of Dr. Pathak’s endeavors constitute one of the most amazing examples of how one person can impact the well being of millions,” noted the Stockholm Water Prize nominating committee in its citation. “Dr. Pathak’s leadership in attaining these remarkable socio-environmental results has been universally recognized, and not least by those who have secured the freedom of human dignity as a consequence of his efforts.” Dr. Pathak will formally receive the 2009 Stockholm Water Prize at an Award Ceremony at an Award Ceremony in the Stockholm City Hall during the World Water Week in Stockholm this coming August..

Sanitation Innovator

Frequently citing the common toilet as one of civilization’s most significant advances, Dr. Pathak has led the development of cost-effective and culturally appropriate toilets and related treatment systems to replace the traditional unsanitary bucket latrines in poor communities throughout India. His most prominent innovations include:

- The Sulabh Shauchalaya twin pit, pour-flush toilet system now in use in more than 1.2 million residences and buildings built by Sulabh. This technology has been declared a Global Best Practice by United Nations HABITAT and Centre for Human Settlements, and is now recommended by the UNDP for use by more than 2.6 billion people around the world.
- Sulabh public toilet and bath facilities based on that system at 7500 locations, together serving more than 10 million people daily. These pay-per-use public facilities provide an economically sustainable, ecological, and culturally acceptable solution to hygiene problems in crowded slum communities and public places.
- Optimised water conservation in the Sulabh Shauchalaya systems, requiring only 1.5 litres of water per use to flush, in contrast to conventional toilets that require a minimum of 10 litres. This has significant additional benefits for health and quality of life in water-poor regions.
- Environmentally balanced wastewater treatment based on a duckweed and fish raising (pisciculture) ecosystem that provides economic opportunities for rural poor communities.
- Several technologies that convert waste from Sulabh Shauchalaya toilets into biogas for heating, cooking, and generating electricity.

Action Sociologist

A self-described “action-sociologist,” Dr. Pathak has worked on the leading edge of social enterprise for decades, combining business best practices and principled activism to advance the causes of better sanitation, societal change, and improved quality of life. In 1970, he founded the Sulabh International Social Service Organisation, an NGO that has been a catalyst for improved sanitation and social change across India. Now with more than 50,000 associate members who are rendering their voluntary services, the organisation has recently started operations in Bhutan

and Afghanistan. In collaboration with UN- HABITAT, Sulabh has trained engineers, architects, planners and administrators from 14 countries in Africa. Sulabh is now planning to start work in Ethiopia, Cambodia, Laos, Angola, Madagascar, Dominican Republic, Tajikistan and other countries.

Through Sulabh, Dr. Pathak has waged a decades-long campaign to abolish the traditional practice of manual “scavenging” of human waste from the simple pit latrines that have predominated across much of India. His early concern for the plight of the “untouchable” scavenger caste led to the development of the Sulabh Shauchalaya toilets to eliminate the need for scavenging in poor communities. Over the years he has led multiple initiatives to champion social dignity, economic justice, and liberation from the caste-oriented system for former “untouchable” scavengers and their families.

Hygiene and Health Educator

With the establishment of the Sulabh International Institute of Health and Hygiene (SIHH), Dr. Pathak has led efforts across the NGO and government sectors to develop effective and culturally oriented hygiene and health models for urban slums and rural villages. In collaboration with other organizations, SIHH has created hygiene curricula for young schoolchildren and their teachers, provided sanitation and health training for volunteer instructors in slums, and opened centres providing basic healthcare for urban poor at Sulabh community toilet complexes. Working with the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests, Dr. Pathak also established the Sulabh Environmental Information System Centre to gather and disseminate environmental information related to hygiene, sanitation, and sewage treatment for researchers, academics, policy makers, and students.

About Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak

Born to a Brahmin family in 1943 and raised in the Indian state of Bihar, Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak attended Patna University where he earned an M.A. in Sociology, an M.A. in English, a Ph.D. in “Liberation of scavengers through low cost sanitation” and a Doctorate of Literature in “Eradication of scavenging and environmental sanitation in India: a sociological study.” Dr. Pathak first came to understand the plight of scavengers in 1968 when he joined the Bhangi-Mukti (scavengers’ liberation) Cell of the Bihar Gandhi Centenary Celebrations Committee. During that time, he traveled throughout India, living with scavenger families as part of his Ph.D. research. Drawing on that experience, he resolved to take action, not only out of sympathy for the scavengers but also in the belief that scavenging is a dehumanizing practice that would ultimately have a destructive impact on modern Indian society. With the establishment of the Sulabh International Social Service Organisation in 1970, he thus launched a unique movement that combines technical innovation with humanitarian principles. A prolific writer and speaker, Dr. Pathak has authored several books, the most well-known of which is *The Road to Freedom*, and is a frequent participant in conferences on sanitation, health, and social progress around the world. He lives near the Sulabh campus in New Delhi.

About the Stockholm Water Prize

First presented in 1991, The Stockholm Water Prize is the world’s most prestigious prize for outstanding achievement in water-related activities. The annual prize, which includes a USD 150,000 award and a crystal sculpture, honours individuals, institutions or organisations whose work contributes broadly to the conservation and protection of water resources and to improved health of the planet’s inhabitants and ecosystems. An international nominating committee appointed by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences is responsible to review the nominations and propose a candidate. The Founders of the prize are Swedish and international companies in co-operation with the City of Stockholm. The prize program is administered by the Stockholm International Water Institute. The patron of the Stockholm Water Prize is H.M. King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden.

Source: Mail from Ravinder Singh <progressindia008@yahoo.com>