



Hygiene and sanitation system in murang society

Zahirul Islam, Mir Zakir Hossain and Sk Morshed Anwar, Bangladesh

THE AIM OF this paper is to document behavioural, social, ecological and spiritual patterns of hygiene and sanitation practices as a system of Murang society of Chittagong hill tracts (CHT) in Bangladesh. Murangs are one of the renowned ethnic groups, which live in Bandarban district and one of the sub groups (lineage) of the Tripura clan [Hossain, 1993]. Hygiene and sanitation system of this society is different from the majority Bengali population like other components of the culture. This deference seems in views, place of defecation, cleansing faeces, anal washing, hand washing, source of water, means of collecting and preserving water, usage of water and rituals related to sanitation, etc.

Methodology

Theoretically our aim is to express the ethnographic focus on actual practices and indigenous discourse regarding hygiene and sanitation in Murang society. Base data concerning water, sanitation, hygiene related practices, activities and rituals were collected through using ethnographic tools and techniques like participant observation, intensive interviews, key informant technique, emic approach and holistic approach. Data were collected from Porapara under Sualok union of Bandarban district during the period of 3 months October – December, 1999.

Worldview about water, sanitation and hygiene

The worldview of Murang people is developed on the beliefs of *turāi* (super natural power) who creates and controls every things of the Universe. From this view there are four types of totems in their culture, which are - *dengoā*, *prāmsāng*, *konglāi*, *gnaro-gnonor* [Sattar, 1966]. These totems represent the *turai* From this view they perceive all things of their world including water, sanitation and hygiene (WSH). They believe that *tui* (water) is sacred gift from *turai*, it should be used carefully and with holiness. *Turai* creates woods for them that can be used as the place for defecation and other activities. To protect the attack of germs they depend up on help of *turāi* and they follow totems.

Water, sanitation and hygiene in murang rituals

Murang people view that purification is closely related with spiritual aspects. So purification is one of the important parts of their all ritual functions. Murang people

observe various types of rituals. By any means most of these rituals are related with water, sanitation and hygiene. Some of these rituals can be briefed in this context. *Oreng puja* is one of the major rituals. It is held in the rainy season at the bank of *ā-u* (river) due to the need of water. In this ritual they drink wine and prey for protecting and curing diseases. Wine is their main drink, which is widely used in every ritual. *Chengrāng* is a ritual related with cremation, which is held at the bank of *ā-u* (river). They cremate corpse (due to cholera) in the deep woods for purifying germs. In the *kuāngplāi* (New Year festival) they clean their *kim* (house) and cloths [Hanafi, 1993]. In the marriage functions they use water along with rice as symbol of holiness and good luck. We identified some other rituals in which water, purification practices are also included.

Practices related to defecation

Murang people domesticate *pok* (pig) for their subsistence. *Pok* is one of the main sources of their nutrition. It plays vital role in hygiene and sanitation system of Murang society. There is no concept of 'latrine' in the discourse and practices of their culture. They defecate in the woods. Faeces are licked by *pok* because these are the main food of *pok*. Basically *pok* simultaneously acts as an agent of cleansing. Due to the individual habit two or more persons do not defecate in the same place. One person uses one place for one time. So there is no major risk for transmitting faeces borne germs from one person to another. There is no practice of water with defecation. Because water is scarce and sacred thing. For anal cleansing after defecation they use small pieces of bamboo twigs, so they do not have to wash hand after defecation.

Sources, collection, preservation and usage of water

The habitation of Murang people is situated in the *pung* (hill tops). Installing tube well in this place is not possible. *Wāng* (rain) and *chong* (fountain) are the only sources of *tui* (water). Women collected *tui* from *chong* and preserve it in *tui ā-u* (pot for water made by hollow gourd) for a certain period (two days). Every day they go to *chong* for collecting water, washing plates and other materials and bathing. Water is scare and valuable resource to them. They use water for food making, drinking, rituals, homestead gardening, bathing, etc.

Social and ecological settings regarding hygiene and sanitation

Murang culture is mainly patrilineal. But there is no fixed labour division by sex in their society. Men and women both are responsible for maintaining hygiene and sanitation. They own individual language. All hygiene, sanitation and water related communications are maintained through this language. Some times rites and rituals act as language. Language relates the individual with hygiene and sanitation system. The settlement pattern of Murang habitation is characterized by agglomerated [Baquee, 1991]. Their *kim* (house) does not include the source of water and place of defecation.

Conclusion

From this paper some learning are gotten-

- Murangs use water carefully and they never misuse it;
- They use locally available materials for sanitation;
- They view water with sacred feelings and it is a part of their rites and rituals;
- Hygiene is a synonym of purifying soul;
- One goal of purification and rituals of Murang society is protecting germs.

Whole system of their hygiene and sanitation is no threatened to environment. In fact the hygiene and sanitation system is their coping strategy with environment. As a diversity of culture the hygiene and sanitation system of

Murang society should be studied which could be inputs in the plans for the millenium.

References

- BAQUEE, A. MD, and et al, 1991, *Bangladesher Grameen Bshetir Dharon: Ekti Ruprekha*, in *Dhaka Vishabidyaloy Potrika*, Vol. 41, Dhaka.
- HANAFLI, JA, 1993, *Upajatio Nandan Sansjkrity*, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka.
- HOSSAIN, FERDOUS, 1993, *Parbatya Chattagramer Prashasan Byebostha: Oitihashik Potabhumii O Bartaman Parjay*, in *Bangladesher Upajati O Adivashi Angshiduritwer Notun Digonta, Bandarban*.
- SATTAR, ABDUS, 1966, *AARANYA JANAPADE (In the land of the Aborigines)*, Joly Books, Dhaka.

-
- ZAHIRUL ISLAM, Project Officer, Community Based Water Supply and Sanitation Project, SEMP, DPHE-UNDP, Bangladesh.
- MIR ZAKIR HOSSAIN, Programme Officer, Organization for Social Development and Anthropological Approach, Bangladesh (OSDAA - Bangladesh).
- SK. MORSHED ANWAR, Research Officer, Organization for Social Development and Anthropological Approach, Bangladesh (OSDAA - Bangladesh).
-