

Acceptance Speech of Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak at Royal Banquet

*Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies,
distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,*



I feel proud, privileged and happy today to receive the 2009 Stockholm Water Prize. I am grateful to Stockholm International Water Institute, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, Hon'ble Members of the International Committee of SIWI, Swedish and international companies and the city of Stockholm, who chose me for this prestigious and precious award. I would also like to thank Mr. Anders Berntell, the Executive Director of SIWI; Ms. Cecilia Martinsen, Director, World Water Week and Water Prizes, SIWI; Ms. Gunnel Sundbom, Director, Stockholm Water Prize; Prof. Jan Lundqvist, Senior Scientific Adviser, SIWI; Prof. Per-Arne Malmqvist, Scientific Director and other members for the same.

I am thankful to Your Excellency Mr. Balkrishna Shetty, the Ambassador of India, for being present on this occasion. Finally, I owe my gratitude to Your Royal Highness for conferring this coveted award on me.

As an Indian presently in Sweden, I remember my country when I hear the following words of your country's National Anthem:

*"Thou ancient, Thou Free,
Thou mountain crowned North..."*

These words echo so much of my country's sentiment which is ancient, which is free and which has the Himalayas crowning its North. The life of people of Sweden follows the "middle way". And people in India blessed by Lord Buddha have been taught to follow the "middle path". India, like Sweden, also believes in non-alignment and neutrality.

These commonalities though are coupled with a stark contrast too.

Whereas 85% of the population of Sweden is urban based, in India it is rural-cum-semirural population which is nearly 85%.

The Stockholm Water Prize is a worldwide recognition of the endeavours of an individual, institution or organisation whose work contributes broadly to the conservation and protection of water resources and to improved health of the planet's inhabitants and ecosystems.

In keeping with this, our concerns are focused upon some of the same major problems. Climate change is one, which has engaged attention of both the countries. We have to arrest the melting of the glaciers, so that our rivers continue to nourish our lands. Water is another area which deserves to be looked at.

I, however, would like to add that if water is honoured by the Prize being named after it, the importance of sanitation, its sibling, cannot be left far behind. The two complement rather than compete with each other. Provision of sanitation provides dignity and safety, especially to women, and reduction of child mortality. As a matter of fact, safe water and sanitation go hand in hand for improvement of community health.

For more than four decades, I have been striving to fulfill the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi for a clean India, free from dirt and filth and restoration of human rights and dignity of a section called 'untouchables' in India before Independence who were cleaning toilets and carrying human faeces to earn their livelihood, a profession which was a blot upon our civilization. While doing so I invented, innovated and developed two technologies for on-site sanitation, which are appropriate and affordable. Because of these, millions of human scavengers who were subjected to insult, humiliation and drudgery, have been relieved from the sub-human occupation and brought into the mainstream of Indian society. Secondly, women can now go to a toilet in safety and with dignity, which was not the case earlier and girls to school because

facilities of toilets are available there. Child mortality rate also stands reduced. These technologies have been instrumental in eliminating defecation in the open and reducing water and environmental pollution to an extent.

My journey of more than four decades was arduous, often encountering mighty storms and extreme difficulties. To achieve the goal, I not only burnt the midnight oil but also worked painstakingly in the hottest of summers and the chilliest of winters, slept on railway platforms and in the absence of money, sold my land in the village and ornaments of my wife. But, undaunted, I continued with my efforts to achieve my mission and goal.

The technologies I have developed are not only suitable for India but also for the 2.5 billion people in the world who do not have access to hygienic toilets. They are also suitable for developed nations, if you take into consideration their beneficial effects by way of reduction in global warming, saving of water and production of bio-fertiliser, which is the demand of the day.

Once again, I am thankful and express my deep sense of gratitude to Stockholm International Water Institute for honouring me in this beautiful city of Stockholm and to Your Royal Highness for conferring the award on me.

