

MR. ISHWARBHAI PATEL

Recipient of the Award for Application of Science and Technology for Rural Development - 1988

Called "Mr. Toilet" with affectionate humour, Ishwarbhai Patel has taken life-long pains to improve sanitation in rural areas. He brought all his zeal for social work and the long experience he had had under the watchful eye of Krishnadas Shah and Appasaheb Patwardhan, both well-known Gandhian workers, to bear on the herculean task of arousing the consciousness of people for cleaner and healthier domestic and community environment. Through constant experimentation and application, he devised low cost sanitation equipment and methods of removing dirt and filth from the surroundings. He also successfully tackled the problem of utilisation of waste.

In this work he was motivated not merely by the need for more cleanliness as such, but his sensitive mind was deeply grieved by the miseries of the community of scavengers, which was the victim of inhuman and unhygienic practice of carrying excreta as a head load. His efforts for removing the drudgery in their work and to improve their working and living conditions, including their social status by making alternative jobs available to them, have few parallels in the social reform movement in the country.

As Principal of the Safai Vidyalaya, Ahmedabad, he has worked tirelessly for popularising the cleaner and more hygienic sanitation devices and also for propagating smokeless chulhas and the renewable source of energy-the biogas. He has a penchant for communicating with people, as a result of which he organised thousands of camps for training persons from all walks of life. He exhorted them to spread the message of Gandhiji about cleanliness and better sanitation. Building human relationships is a rare skill; Ishwarbhai possesses it in abundance. It is no wonder, therefore, that he has been able to establish sustained contacts with teachers, students, social workers, Government officials, field workers of International voluntary organisations, officials of World organisations and the ordinary folk like sweepers and artisans.

Strictly speaking, Ishwarbhai is not a scientist or a technician. But the models developed by him for rural sanitation are truly scientific and have been approved as such by International Council of Societies for Industrial Design.

