Squatting with Dignity
Reviewed by Sudhirendar Sharma
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Making squatters count

Despite so much an effort made in the past few years, rural sanitation coverage has just touched the 50 per cent mark in 2008. The fact that only 18,000 of the 250,000 villages have so far achieved Nirmal Gram Puraskar (Clean Village Award) implies that the destination is still quite far. Added to this is the fact that many of the awarded villages are returning back to the age-old scourge of open defecation. Written with commitment and passion, Squatting with Dignity provides an in-depth analytical account of what has worked and what remains to be achieved in the sanitation arena.

Having worked in the sanitation sector for almost a decade, author Kumar Alok provides insights on how issues related to the total sanitation campaign have been encountered by policy makers. Though personal anecdotes from his long stint in the administrative services and liberal sprinkling of invaluable quotes from great men of wisdom do pace the text, the author remains largely confined to discussing the highly predictable approach of the state in coming out of the stinking mess. No wonder, sanitation remains as compelling an issue as it was six decades ago.

The author attempts to wriggle out of the current crises by proposing a shopping list of ideas. From eco-sanitation to menstrual hygiene and from grey water use to earning carbon credits, over a dozen of such institutional, technological and operational ideas are brought to the table. However, each of these signifies that the variables in achieving the target of total sanitation have yet to be systematically overcome. Squatting with Dignity offers just one way of looking at the issue. That there could be another ways to reaching the goal need to be explored.

Squatting with Dignity by Kumar Alok, Sage Books, New Delhi, 380 pages, Rs 850