

## Why Indian cities are dirty

We are all familiar with the call for cleanliness that is regularly conveyed to the public through different forms of media. Photo ops of "netas" wielding brooms on streets, with the dust and the garbage of the city being swept off roads, are shown often on [Facebook](#), Twitter and other online platforms. After several months of this great countrywide "abhiyan" however, our nation remains the dirtiest country in the world.

There is no such campaign in any other country in the world, yet they are far cleaner than villages and cities in India. In my travels, I have yet to come across any place that is as dirty and as full of litter as an Indian town. Every time I return to India this is a fact that strikes me the most - that I am back in the dirtiest country in the world. Yet, I have never come across the sight of streets being swept as energetically in any other city abroad, never seen dignitaries handling brooms as assiduously as I have done here.

So what is the secret behind the mystery of the cleaner cities? As an author of several mystery adventure novels for children this is one mystery I know I can solve. Yes, it is simple, my dear Watson. No, it is not because litter is removed quietly and secretly on dark nights when the whole world sleeps, nor is it because the rubbish is made to vanish magically by helpful wizards, nor do aliens carry the garbage to research on what constitutes the filth found on the streets of planet earth.

It is the discipline instilled in the minds of citizens from an early age that helps maintain cleanliness in a country. "Do not litter" signs may be there in many public places in India and children in our schools may be told to throw waste into dustbins, yet this has not become the clarion call of our leaders. They may conduct all kinds of campaigns - against cow slaughter, against people of other religions, and so on - but so far the most important campaign against "dirtying" has not been taken up by anyone. Our public spaces are allowed to get as dirty as possible. And no wonder, for some sweeper or cleaner is bound to come and clear the rubbish. That is his job. After all, he must be getting paid to do the work. So we have every right to throw plastic bottles, bits of paper and whatever we do not need, anywhere and everywhere. Drains along roads are public dustbins and that is where we deposit our waste, no matter if the drain gets blocked or choked and the dirty water overflows on to our doorsteps. We have every right to sweep our shops and throw the dirty stuff into the drain running alongside the road leading to our home. After all, homes where puja is performed must be kept pure and clean, no matter if the brooms direct the dust and other impure matter straight onto the street in front of our pure homes.

"Gandagi nahi failayenge!" "No dumping of litter!" This slogan should ring from east to west and from north to south. "Kachra idhar udhar nahi daalenge!" should be the slogan, and not the one being made popular today. This is the secret behind the clean public places seen in other cities in other countries. It is not the "cleaning", but the "not dirtying" habit that needs to be encouraged in our citizens.

During our stay in Germany almost 50 years ago, it was a crime to throw anything outside our home in Bonn. Two dustbins were placed before our front door; all waste was placed there and they were cleaned regularly every week by the municipality. During winter, one had to remove the snow from the pavement outside our home so that passersby would not be inconvenienced. It was our responsibility to keep the area in front of our home spotless all the time. A friend of ours in the US, also many years ago, was pursued by an irate motorist, because he had thrown the remains of an [apple](#) he had been eating on the road. He was forced to pick up the apple and deposit it in a dustbin rather than on the road. We know China ended its citizens' habit of spitting on streets a long time ago.

The focus in the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan, in short, should not be on the cleaning up of an already dirty space but on the prevention of any public spot from becoming dirty. There should be strict rules on using dustbins, which must be installed everywhere and regularly emptied by municipal authorities, with a proper system in place for doing so. The rule that everyone should keep public spaces around their homes, shops or other establishments clean and free of litter will automatically lead to cleaner cities and healthier and happier citizens.

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