

APPRECIATING AND ENJOYING THE CLEAN INDIA CAMPAIGN

Description

I do love traveling: who else wouldn't? But the mode of travel I prefer, a luxury bus or a train. For many fidgety reasons, fear dominates when I think of cruising in a car on Indian highways. And my cautious commonsense has no belief in the abilities of not only my driver but also all the drivers plying on the highways. Unavoidably, whenever I find myself taking a trip on a highway I'm compelled to stay vigilantly awake from the word go: one eye on the driver and another on the maniacal onrush of vehicles big and small zipping past.

Responding to a family exigency I was asked to visit Chennai, though, I can afford the luxury of a flight, I chose a train journey. You can't sit through such long periods on a train? my son cautioned me. Aware of my heart condition, I usually avoid overnight travel, by any means. After a two year pause, I gave myself a long trip of leisure and became a customer for the amazing Indian Railways. The train to Chennai was scheduled to leave early evening at 3.30 and the drive to the station would take not less than forty-five minutes, an extra twenty minutes I allowed myself to collect a few savouries for my untrusting stomach which was aware of notoriety of bland food that would be doled out by the vendors in the train.

The day is a Good Friday, and a public holiday most of the shops were closed and roads were silent and wore an empty black glow, and the drive to the Railway station was fast and brief; I arrived with a full half-hour in hand. The moment I stepped out my car the ominous summer, our city was known for, in its early onset, hit me like a huge hot blower turned towards me.

Unable to stand the intensity of heat I scrambled into the elaborate entrance lounge, flush with people: immersed in their preparations to begin their travel on one side, and on the other, tired passengers with downcast faces dragging themselves out after completion of their journey for some, it means more than a day.

More or less, it was two years that I have stepped into the station. As I went past by its wide entrance, I hovered a little longer than necessary, something struck me unusually odd: not matched up to some of my earlier images of the very station I have been in and out, at best, hundreds of times for decades. At first instance, indeed, I couldn't make out: but yes, my eyes immediately, with a dramatic smile I could gather: unbelievable, I whistled to myself, and said, It's like an apparition: the station, my goodness from top to bottom is markedly clean.

No crumpled balls of paper, no remains of orange peels, no mini piles of peanut husks, banana skins, emptied pouches, crushed paper tea cups carrying tiny blobs of liquid rolling on the floor, overflowing garbage containers muddy, slimy trash encircling it. Where did our trademark carelessness and unhealthful environs disappeared into? I couldn't help thinking, Did I enter into a wrong place?

Looked like, as if a gigantic vacuum cleaner or a mighty gale had swept away the tons of garbage in one flash, and got it transported to some unknown locality. I scanned the massive double-roofed entrance hall that was delightfully neat and in good order. As it was commonly obvious, in any Indian railway station the entrance hall would be rumbling with men, women, and children. But what I witnessed was altogether unfamiliar details: as if a hidden hand was guiding them everyone deposited the leftovers into a properly placed garbage bags, situated at reachable corners of the hall. I even saw they are being emptied at regular intervals by uniformed maids as dignifiedly as the people who are using them.

Way back, a few years ago, when the concept of "clean India" was not considered as a policy matter, I used to shrink to enter and walk on our city railway platforms. It would be altogether an embarrassing retort if I begin to go into details about the stinking way they were maintained.

Let me give you my version of what it looked like, only a few years ago; when I ventured out on one the platforms. The sharpness of cacophonous sounds would burst out at your ears, the length and breadth of the platform looked like a refugee camp filled with people at various stages of waiting for their journey to commence: eating, chatting, sleeping, packing, and washing: the whole space was treated by most of them as a "transit home".

The offensive part was yet to come: The railway tracks that shoulder the hundreds of tons of weight of carriages, the speed, and the friction: once they enter the station, helplessly, would become the spaces of unbearable stink and odor. The whole rundown looked like a giddy blend of throngs of people, their sultry body odors, and a long pit of disgusting, putrefying miasma. During nights the reeking offensive would be redoubled.

Coming back again and resuming my approval of pleasant transformation what I saw at the railway station entrance lounge, it took me a while to record the fledgling social responsibility in action playing out before me. Not able to hide my "taken by surprise eureka moment", I thought, "if this civic responsibility when spread to, far and near nooks of our country" looking at the positive compliance in such an unmanageable public places like our railway stations I felt upbeat thinking about future "the well-maintained surroundings and garbage free areas.

Once I stepped on to the long-winded platforms, I was restfully convinced of the seriousness of the watchful authorities at keeping up the entire precincts litter free, odor-free, no offensive stench between the tracks. I presumed a well-oiled mechanism working round the clock to present a comfortable, welcoming place for traveling public. Kudos to the massive government initiative "Swacha Bharat" that was now well accepted as a competitive mass movement all over India.

Although it's a long way to go, at least, after seventy years of Independence the wheels of public awareness, civic responsibly, accountability of Government officials started moving in the right direction. Refocusing earnestly, thoughtfully, on one aspect "to keep the public places clean and convenient.

The tour of my gratifying surprises didn't stop at the moored platforms; the sanitation crusade was evident in all railway coaches also. As I made myself relaxed in the chair car, I noticed, uniformed helpers, trotting along the length announcing to help keep the coaches clean and carried huge plastic bags collecting the leftovers from the passengers. I have seen them repeating this clearing-up act as long as the span of my journey. To discourage the commuters not to fling the chunks of refuse out through windows or drop them down through whichever space they detect in a moving train, sizable wide-mouthed bags were placed at common areas. Like obedient school kids, everyone uncomplainingly took pains to be less lazy, less careless to conserve the sanity of the coach for seven long hours of the journey. According to me, a remarkable feat by any common Indian who normally presumes, scornfully, "sanity, an inch beyond my body is not my damn concern"!

Complacently, it was quite a revelation to me what I saw: the slow but substantial reforms taking roots in our neighborhoods too. I observed clean colours of change "the streets, the by lanes, the roads, and in many public places a sincere campaign is reaching out with a rationale, "better you keep your surroundings clean and bright, it's you and your children who have to live within them" sending a sensitive message: that clean community "means healthy children, healthy citizens: fresh air and liveable cover for all of us.

Personal hygiene, public sanitation, social responsibility: are the catchwords that must keep ringing and must reach everyone every day. The sad irony we come across was scores of Indians spend lakhs of rupees and relish time with their families touring in western countries that are clean and place a high

premium on social responsibility and pollution free environment, and a citizenry committed to it. Back in India, the same revelers, they go about treating our very own place as a huge waste paper basket. This is our country, this is our life, this is our sanctuary where our children's future is associated with; if we want to keep it safe and clean for them; each one us has to spend a few moments to meditate about it and throw ourselves into action, briefly, achieving it.

Category

1. Uncategorized

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Author

eswarnadipalli

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