

GROOMING with a BROOM

BY VIRGINIA JACOB

The idea of a blemish-free Swachh India should begin with our little ones picking up a broom.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off his pet project, *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*, a spark of revolution was kindled all across India. Our sub-continent, which was once bursting at its seams with trash cans filled to its brim, is now being decked up to join the league of international bigwigs.

Inspired by the popular ALS Ice Bucket Challenge, Modi invited nine of country's prominent celebrities to join his 'Clean India' crusade. Starting with cricket's demi-god Sachin Tendulkar, Modi challenged popular actors Aamir Khan, Priyanka Chopra and Kamal Hassan to join the crusade. This movement to clean India is not only the first but also the biggest of its kind. The idea is to sensitise citizens about the concept of complete cleanliness.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan relies on two simple aspects – first is to build humongous number of toilets across the length and breadth of the country. The next is to cleverly use the social media to post before-and-after pictures of citizens manually cleaning dirty streets. This twin-focus on toilet-construction and broom-

wielding is laudable. It is aimed at eradicating open defecation and wire cleanliness into our sub-conscious system.

As parents dealing with citizens of tomorrow, there is no better time than now, to get a head-start on your very own cleanliness drive. Kids as young as 5 years old can be sensitised about the importance of hygiene. Being tidy and clean should be wired into their psyche at a very tender age. The merits of keeping your surrounding clean should be the prime focus. Personal hygiene, tidy rooms, organised closets, clean habits and the likes should be encouraged, appreciated and rewarded.

Mahatma Gandhi wrote in *Navajivan* back in 1925 – 'Both excretory functions should be performed only at fixed places. To pass urine anywhere in a street, at any place not meant for the purpose should be regarded an offence. After passing urine at any selected place, one should cover up the spot well with dry earth. Lavatories should be kept very clean. Even the part through which the water flows should be kept clean. Our lavatories bring our civilization into discredit, they violate the rules of hygiene'.

7 CARDINAL RULES TO CLEAN-UP

- ♥ **Practice what you preach:** Set an example before doling out lessons on cleanliness to your little ones.
- ♥ **Give them space:** Start by allotting a room or space exclusively to them. Sense of ownership helps.
- ♥ **List out the rules:** Make a checklist that the kids can refer to. Use pictures for little ones and simple words for the younger bunch.
- ♥ **Reason it out:** Teach your little ones the importance of personal hygiene. Have a one-on-one with your teens on topics such as grooming, bathing, cleans habits and appropriate dressing options.
- ♥ **Make chores fun:** Club cleaning with fun activities and allot rewards.
- ♥ **Simple sanitation rules:** Start by teaching your tots to keep the restroom clean. Cultivate habits like washing hands, flushing after using the loo and using the waste bins to trash.
- ♥ **Catch a breather:** Take short breaks between lengthy and taxing chores.

No wonder then that the Mahatma felt that cleanliness was next only to Godliness. After all, the moral is simple and sleek – let's create a cleaner tomorrow, not just for us, but for generations to come.

THE YUMMY ICE-CREAM FOR DIRTY TRASH BARTER

BY VIRGINIE VLAMINCK

Why the 'holy cow' on the road, was my first reaction when I landed in Chennai several years ago. In a country where cows are worshipped, I wasn't hoping to find them loitering on the crowded alleys. It wasn't a pretty sight. The urgency to clean the grand Indian mess has caused a magnanimous nuance of change over the last decade. Numerous NGOs, activists, advocates of the environments like me, have taken up the broom to counter this clutter.

We have been trying to do our bit long before *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan* happened. With me being an expatriate, I have great cooperation from my neighbours and together, we have gone on a journey to change the perception of a clean environment.

My first initiative is called *Namma Chennai, Namma Beach*. Having served in the down-trodden and famine-stricken parts of Africa, I started the beach-cleaning initiative almost 3 years ago. When we started, the Municipal Corporation of Chennai and people from the local community came forward and volunteered to work with us.

Currently, we are working on a project in which we plan to distribute

free ice-cream to children at the beach in return for piles of garbage. As for *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan*, I am thoroughly impressed by the PM's cleanliness initiative and I am so glad that India has a responsible leader. Issues of public interest such as safer roads, cleaner streets and proper sanitation have to be addressed with immediate urgency.

Modi's initiative is along the lines of UNICEF's *Bring the poo to the loo* drive. There is still a long way to go, and although people say I am only changing a drop in the ocean, is the ocean not a multitude of drops? So I keep going. ☺

VIRGINIE VLAMINCK, A PHOTOGRAPHER FROM BELGIUM, IS A PROACTIVE ENVIRONMENTALIST

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