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Psychological Foundations of the Cleanliness Initiative in Ahmedabad City of India

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Abstract- Spitting on the roads of and littering around a city in India have been of concern to national leaders and civil servants since the pre-independence years. It was unsurprising, therefore, that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) as a nation-wide cleanliness campaign on October 2, 2014 at Rajghat, New Delhi. The cleanliness initiative by the Ahmedabad Municipal Commissioner (i) dissuades spitting on the roads and littering around the city, (ii) collects fines from those whose photos are captured by CCTV cameras, and (iii) invites active participation of all residents of Ahmedabad in the cleanliness drive. The authors present psychological foundations of this initiative, arguing that all residents ought to hold the offender and anyone else associated with such an offense as accountable. Further, they raise four new issues with the current cleanliness drive and offer suggestions for how to resolve them.

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Psychological Foundations of the Cleanliness Initiative in Ahmedabad City of India

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I. The Cleanliness Initiative in Ahmedabad

The UNESCO declared Ahmedabad in Gujarat as the first heritage city of India.[1] On January 28, 2016, the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India also included Ahmedabad among the top 20 cities to be developed as a smart city.[2] As a result, Police Commissioner Anup Kumar Singh and Municipal Commissioner Vijay Nehra took the challenges of substantially improving the quality of life in Ahmedabad.

During his tenure as Police Commissioner of Ahmedabad City, Singh (2016-2019) initiated actions against illegal parking and violations of traffic rules,[3] and provided Nehra (2018-2020) with police support to implement the cleanliness initiative (known in the Gujarati language as the "Roko ane [and] Toko" drive) that dissuades people from spitting on the roads of and littering around the city,[4] a concern expressed by the father of the nation[5] as well as the present prime minister.[6] Thousands of CCTV cameras already installed across the city capture photos of the people who make Ahmedabad look RED and DIRTY. One captured on the camera doing so is fined ₹100. If the fine is not paid within a week of the e-memo issued, the Municipal Team visits the home of the offender to collect even a hefty penalty of ₹500 from the offender.[7]

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Encouraging response to his initiative led Nehra to invite the active participation of all residents of Ahmedabad in the new cleanliness drive. Specifically, he expected citizens to intervene (i.e., "Toko") and inform the offenders that *spitting, littering, and urinating in public* places are unlawful as well as prevent people from committing such offenses (i.e., "Roko"). One can also take photos of the offender and send them to amletters@gmail.com or 8320530590 (WhatsApp) for punitive action against him or her by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC).[8]

II. Psychological Foundations of the Initiative

A person is usually punished by the law only when the law-violation is *intentional* (Hart & Horne, 1985). However, social psychology portrays people as *intuitive prosecutors* when they (1) get distressed by violations of norm or law by others, and (2) try to restore social order by holding the offender and anyone else *associated* with the offence as accountable (see, e.g., Singh, Ramasamy, Self, Simons, & Lin, 2013; Singh et al., 2011; Tetlock 2002; Tetlock, Self, & Singh, 2010; Tetlock et al., 2007). Importantly, people in the prosecutorial mindset tend to blame and punish others even for an error of *omission* (i.e., when one ignores the offense or fails to report it to the appropriate authority for punitive actions, Singh et al., 2012a, 2012b). To support these tendencies, we describe the findings of two psychological studies by the first author and his international collaborators below.

In one study, Singh (2006) described an offense by a person to people from the United States, Singapore, and Japan, and asked them to assign blame and allocate demerit points to the *offender* and his *family, friends, school*, and *organization*. Notably, the offender was the doer, but others were his associates. As in the law, the prosecutorial responses of blame and demerit points were higher to the offender than to his groups across all countries. However, Asians were harsher than Americans with the offender's groups, and the participants were harsher with family members and friends than the school where the offender had studied and the organization wherein he or she worked. Such prosecutorial responses to associates of the offender were more precise among adults than children of Asia

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(Singh et al., 2011), pointing out that adults punish others more because of intention than an association.

In another study, Singh et al. (2012b) described an offense by a person to Asians and Americans. In that offense, the offender's group of friends had either *provoked* for the crime (i.e., they had committed *an error of commission* by challenging the person to commit the crime?) or cautioned him against it (i.e., they had committed *an error of omission* by merely warning the person against the violation of the law). Participants assigned blame to and recommended length of imprisonment for friends of the offender. As would be expected from the law, friends of the offender were held more accountable for the error of commission than that of omission. Consistent with the model of people as intuitive prosecutors (Singh et al., 2011, 2013; Tetlock 2002; Tetlock et al., 2007, 2010) in social psychology, Asians, compared to Americans, were harsher with the group of friends for both the errors of omission and commission. Participants in the condition of error of omission were of the view that the group of friends should have not only cautioned the offender against the crime but also reported the crime and/or handed him over to the police in accord with their duty of responsible citizens.

III. Implications of Collective Prosecution

The preceding findings from research in social psychology indicate that Asians, compared to their American counterparts, are more favorably inclined toward enforcing norms and laws by blaming and punishing the groups of the individual offender. Prosecuting the offender and his groups or associates are norm- and meta norm-enforcements, respectively (Singh et al., 2011). By implication, people in developed Asian nations would regard "what anyone from their social circle does" as their responsibilities more than would those in America (Singh et al., 2011, 2012b; Tetlock et al., 2010). That is, Asians have the proclivity to uphold social order through both the norm- than meta norm-enforcements. Thus, Nehra was justified in requiring residents of Ahmedabad to be *vigilant defenders of norms* and *active participants* in transforming Ahmedabad into a sensitive SMART city through the "Roko ane Toko" drive.

Another implication lies in suggesting a renaming of the current initiative to "Toko, Roko, ane Photo Moklo (i.e., Upload Photo)" [Reproach, Prevent, and Report]. Whereas Toko informs the offenders about the laws,[9] Roko not only eliminates omission by the spectators or the offender's groups but also encourages others to be active in upholding the norms. If the offender nevertheless replies in the negative (e.g., "This is India." "What I do is none of your business.") to any accountability demands to him, the correct responses of the observers or the offender's groups should be (a) "What you do is very much my/our responsibility because of *mere association* with you" and (b) "I/we will send your photo to the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) as the 'Toko, Roko, ane Photo Moklo' drive requires."

IV. Have Residents Become Vigilant Defenders of Normative Orders?

The expected vigilant defense of normative orders seems to be working at the levels of behavior and thought of citizens and authorities in Ahmedabad. For example, Atul Dave, a social worker, filmed the Driver and the Head Constable of the Joint Enforcement Team (JET), spitting in the open outside the AMC ward office and posted the film on his social media account.[10] Further, he approached the competent officer, requesting that the two culprits be fined. Given that JET imposes fines on people flouting civic rules in Ahmedabad, the officer did issue a memo and collected a fine of ₹100 from the Driver and the Head Constable each. Dave again caught a police constable deployed with JET spitting on the road in another area of Ahmedabad and got a fine of ₹100 slapped on him on the spot.[11]

Most residents of Ahmedabad have been appreciative of the cleanliness drive and conforming themselves to the norms. Arjun Suthar, for instance, wished that the culprits should be "named and shamed" (p. 6).[12] Thus, what the present Prime Minister envisaged and the previous AMC Commissioner initiated seem to have brought in a shift in the attitude of people toward cleanliness! It is also likely that this very cleanliness drive might have had better prepared the State of Gujarat in dealing with the current pandemic of COVID-19 (16,779 + cases) than the adjoining State of Maharashtra (67,655 + cases)![13]

V. Four Issues and Their Solutions

For the success of the "Toko, Roko, ane Photo Moklo" initiative, four issues and their possible solutions deserve consideration. One issue concerns those people who seemingly commit the error of omission; that is, they witness the offense but ignore it. It is possible that such observers are ignorant of what is expected of them. If so, educating them about the initiative in both the informal and formal ways should be the first step by peers and the AMC. Once the error of omission is confirmed, however, the AMC should send a *Letter of Reprimand* with an unhappy emoticon (😟) signaling disapproval of that error (e.g., *"You have fallen short of being a responsible resident by not reporting the offense to the AMC. How can the city be SMART if residents like you do not support the "Toko, Roko, ane Photo Moklo" drive?"*).

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Another issue pertains to those who vigilantly defend the normative orders and send photos of the norm-violator to the AMC. We contend that those who sent photos to the AMC should receive a *Letter of Appreciation* with a happy emoticon ( ) signaling approval of it (e.g., *"Congratulations on your exemplary civic behavior! You are one of those residents who have been encouraging others to be vigilant defenders of the normative order and actively cooperating with AMC in making the "Toko, Roko, ane Photo Moklo" drive successful."*)? [14]

Notably, a letter of reprimand signaling disapproval of the error of omission draws the attention of RELUCTANT residents to their lapses. In contrast, a letter of appreciation signaling approval of upholding of the normative orders encourages VIGILANT REPORTERS for their further participation in the cleanliness initiative. No less important, both emoticons may motivate RELUCTANT others to imitate and follow those who have been fulfilling their civic duties (Bandura 1977; Skinner, 1938).

The third issue of sustaining the "Toko, Roko, ane Photo Moklo" drive attains importance because the financial and human resources are often limited with the Offices of Police Commissioner and AMC. There have been disturbing news reports that the number of e-challans issued to norm violators has been declining since July 2019; that JET has failed to recover penalty against the e-challans issued; and that the AMC staff are busy with other initiatives. We contend that our suggested solutions for the first two issues mentioned above may enable residents to internalize the commitment to keep the city neat and clean. If it does happen, people themselves, instead of police and AMC staff, might act as societal watchdogs!

The "Toko, Roko, ane Photo Moklo" drive targets cleanliness at public places like roads, gardens, bus and train stations, and parking places. The final issue pertains to a similar initiative in the housing societies of Ahmedabad or any other city in India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi lamented that social hygiene schemes fail when people view them as jobs of the government or civic authorities.[6] We agree with him, and further argue that all members--from children to senior citizens--of every housing society need of to be watchdogs of the cleanliness as they have been during the recent Lockdowns for COVID-19.[15] If people take care of their respective housing societies, the cleanliness initiative will start operating at the grass root level itself. More important, it will promote what social psychologists term collective psychological ownership (Pierce & Jussila, 2011). To foster such collective ownership of OURS, let there be competition between housing societies vis-à-vis how neat and clean they are over and above how good they are in participating in the community dance of Garba during the Gujarati Festival of Navratri (i.e., worship of Goddess Ambaji for nine nights).

VI. Concluding Comments

In sum, what the two Commissioners of Ahmedabad did illustrates an initiative toward *collective psychological ownership* of the city. They have been promoting mutual accountability among people and forging a communitarian consciousness among them in which one will never be justified in replying "none of your business" to a demand for obeying the norms and laws from any resident in the city (Singh et al. 2012b). Pressurizing others to behave normatively in a housing society, a garden, a mall, a city, a state, or a nation is an effective meta norm-enforcement, not meddling in others' freedom or privacy (Singh et al., 2011). When people spontaneously build such pressure on spectators, associates, or groups of the offender, meta norm-enforcement goes hand-in-hand with norm-enforcement. It is high time to rely on both the norm- and meta norm-enforcements in turning Ahmedabad or any other city into a SMART one.

Social psychologists have consistently demonstrated that (i) making sense of a situation as peers do and (ii) avoiding their disapproval of any deviance underlie much of social influence such as conformity, compliance, and obedience at the real or virtual level (Asch 1951; Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius 2007; Sherif 1936; Singh, 2020). Therefore, residents of Ahmedabad must join City Commissioners in their commendable initiatives of building peer pressure through reproach, prevent, and report in turning Ahmedabad into a great city to live in and feel proud of it. Residents should also place constant accountability demands on people of their social circle to behave normatively. The same should be done by residents of other cities across the country, especially when civil authorities take initiatives based on psychological facts and principles, as illustrated in this article.

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