

REVIEW ARTICLE

CIVIC SENSE IN INDIA: FROM INDIFFERENCE TO INVOLVEMENT – A MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF BEHAVIOR, GOVERNANCE, AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Civic sense, broadly defined as an individual's commitment to social ethics, public cleanliness, respect for public spaces, and observance of civic laws, plays a pivotal role in determining the quality of life in any society. In India, the notion of civic responsibility is often undermined by a combination of historical neglect, administrative inefficiencies, social disparities, and a lack of sustained civic education. This research paper provides a multidisciplinary examination of civic sense in the Indian context, focusing on urban behaviour, educational interventions, youth involvement, and the roles of local governance and policy frameworks. Integrating case studies from metropolitan, semi-urban, and rural settings across states like Telangana and Maharashtra, the study exposes significant regional and sociocultural disparities in civic awareness and practice. It further explores how educational institutions particularly school curricula, the NSS, NCC, and student clubs can be restructured to foster a culture of civic engagement from an early age. The research also critically analyzes the performance of governmental initiatives such as the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Smart Cities Mission, and e-governance tools like MyGov and Swachhata App, examining both their successes and limitations. Particularly insightful is the analysis of civic behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic, which revealed contrasting trends of collective responsibility and civic indifference across different strata of society. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives from geography, sociology, public administration, and education, the paper ultimately offers a roadmap for embedding civic sense into India's developmental discourse. It proposes practical reforms in education, governance, and community engagement to promote a national civic consciousness. This transformation from passive compliance to proactive participation is crucial for building a democratic, inclusive, and sustainable India.

KEYWORDS

Civic Sense, Governance, Urban Behavior, Youth Engagement, Education, Public Participation, India

1. INTRODUCTION

Civic sense commonly understood as the observance of norms that uphold communal harmony, hygiene, and respect for public spaces is a foundational pillar of any well-functioning society. It includes behaviours such as following traffic regulations, maintaining cleanliness in public areas, participating in community development, and respecting shared infrastructure. While seemingly simple, these practices form the basis of collective living and social responsibility. In India, however, the erosion of civic sense has emerged as a pressing issue, particularly in urban landscapes undergoing rapid expansion and modernization (Kumar et al., 2021).

The challenge of cultivating civic consciousness in India is multidimensional. Historically, Indian traditions emphasized cleanliness and collective responsibility. Ancient urban centers such as Mohenjo-Daro exhibited sophisticated civic planning and sanitation systems. However, colonial rule disrupted indigenous governance systems, replacing them with top-down administrative models that gradually weakened local participation (Bhatnagar, 2019). Post-independence, although democratic institutions were established, the focus on infrastructure and industrialization overshadowed the nurturing of civic behaviour. The result has been a growing disconnect between citizens and their

responsibilities toward shared spaces and systems.

This disconnect is evident in a range of daily scenarios: indiscriminate littering, spitting in public, encroaching on footpaths, violating traffic rules, and apathy towards environmental degradation. These acts are not just reflections of individual indifference but are symptomatic of deeper institutional and educational shortcomings. Studies have shown that civic awareness in India varies significantly across regions, economic classes, and generations, further complicating efforts at national civic reform (NCERT, 2023).

Over the past decade, several government initiatives have sought to address the issue of civic behaviour. Programs like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission) launched in 2014, and the Smart Cities Mission initiated in 2015, have focused on improving urban infrastructure and public sanitation (Ministry of Urban Development, 2020). Additionally, platforms such as MyGov and the Swachhata App have encouraged citizens to participate in civic problem-solving. However, while these efforts have improved cleanliness rankings and digital engagement, they have not led to a significant transformation in public behavior. Most campaigns are top-down and infrastructural, with limited emphasis on long-term behavioral change or grassroots empowerment.

Education remains a critical lever in shaping civic attitudes, yet Indian

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educational institutions often fail to translate civic knowledge into civic practice. Civic topics are present in school curricula, but they are taught more as theoretical content than as tools for ethical living and community engagement (NCERT, 2023). National-level programs like the National Service Scheme (NSS) and National Cadet Corps (NCC) are potent vehicles for civic training, yet they remain optional and underutilized in mainstream schooling.

In this context, this paper aims to fill the gap between policy initiatives and behavioural realities by adopting a multidisciplinary lens to examine civic sense in India. It investigates the influence of governance, education, youth involvement, and regional culture on civic behaviour. Through field observations, case studies from both urban and rural contexts, and a critical review of civic engagement platforms, the study presents a comprehensive assessment of the state of civic sense in India.

Objectives of the Study:

- i. To explore the status of civic sense in urban and rural India, identifying regional disparities, behavioral trends, and the influence of cultural and institutional factors.
- ii. To assess the role of education, youth leadership, and governance frameworks in shaping civic attitudes, and to propose strategies for enhancing civic participation across communities.

2. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The need for this study stems from the growing discrepancy between infrastructural development and civic behavior in India. While the country has made significant strides in areas such as urbanization, digital governance, and public sanitation, these advancements have not been mirrored by a corresponding growth in public awareness or civic responsibility. From traffic violations and public spitting to littering and vandalism, the absence of basic civic sense is evident across cities, towns, and even rural areas. This persistent civic deficit not only undermines the success of government initiatives but also affects the quality of life, environmental sustainability, and community cohesion. Therefore, there is an urgent need to investigate why civic awareness is not evolving alongside physical and policy-driven development.

Behavioral issues continue to pose major challenges to the effective implementation of flagship programs such as the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Smart Cities Mission, and Clean Ganga Campaign. These initiatives rely not only on top-down execution but also on bottom-up participation from citizens. Without fostering a sense of collective ownership and responsibility, such programs are at risk of becoming symbolic rather than transformative. This makes it essential to understand how civic attitudes are shaped, what structural or educational gaps exist, and what strategies can encourage behavioral change at scale.

Another compelling reason for this study is the untapped potential of India's youth population. With over 65% of the population below the age of 35, the country has a unique opportunity to mold future citizens who are socially conscious and community-oriented. However, youth engagement in civic matters remains minimal outside formal structures like the NSS, NCC, or sporadic volunteerism. There is a pressing need to investigate how civic values can be systematically introduced into the educational framework and how youth can be empowered to act as change agents in their communities.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic brought civic behavior into sharp focus, revealing both the strengths and weaknesses of public conduct during emergencies. While some citizens rose to the occasion by helping neighbors, following health guidelines, and supporting relief efforts, others displayed civic indifference and negligence. These contrasting behaviors highlight the critical role that civic sense plays in resilience and

crisis management. Understanding these patterns is essential for building future-ready, responsible communities.

This study is significant because it bridges multiple disciplines urban studies, public administration, education, and behavioral science to develop a comprehensive understanding of civic behavior in India. Its findings have the potential to inform policy reforms, guide curriculum design, and shape public awareness campaigns. Moreover, it aims to empower local communities by emphasizing the importance of participatory governance and shared accountability. By focusing on civic sense as both a cultural and structural challenge, the study contributes to building a more responsible, inclusive, and sustainable society.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques to explore the patterns, perceptions, and practices related to civic sense across diverse regions of India. The approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of both measurable civic behaviours and the contextual factors influencing them, such as education, governance, and socio-cultural norms.

To ensure regional diversity and representation, the primary data was collected from four states: Telangana, Kerala, Delhi, Maharashtra, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. These states were chosen to reflect a blend of metropolitan, semi-urban, and rural settings, along with cultural and developmental variability. A total of 600 respondents participated in the study, with 100 samples drawn from each state. The sampling strategy was purposive and stratified to include a balanced representation of age groups, genders, educational levels, and occupational categories. Respondents included students, working professionals, homemakers, senior citizens, and local shopkeepers.

Table 1: Sample Distribution Table

State	Urban Samples	Semi-Urban Samples	Rural Samples	Total Samples
Kerala	40	35	25	100
Delhi	45	30	25	100
Maharashtra	40	35	25	100
Telangana	40	35	25	100
Uttar Pradesh	30	35	35	100
Bihar	35	30	35	100
Total	230	200	170	600

Source: Research Survey 2023

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire that included a mix of close-ended and open-ended questions designed to evaluate individuals' awareness, attitudes, and practices related to civic responsibilities. Key focus areas included public hygiene, participation in civic initiatives, traffic behaviour, waste disposal practices, digital civic engagement (e.g., use of the Swachhata App and MyGov), and perceptions of governance effectiveness.

To complement the survey, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with a subset of 10 stakeholders, including educators, municipal officials, youth volunteers, urban planners, and civil society leaders across the selected states. These interviews were semi-structured and aimed at capturing narratives around the challenges and opportunities of promoting civic sense at the institutional and community levels.

Table 2: Stakeholder Profile Table

Stakeholder Category	Role/Expertise	State Represented	Purpose of Inclusion
School Teachers	Civic education, student engagement	Telangana, Maharashtra	To assess how civic sense is taught and perceived in schools
Municipal Officials	Urban planning, sanitation, and civic regulation	Kerala, Uttar Pradesh	To understand challenges in implementing civic policies
NSS/NCC Coordinators	Youth mobilization, civic training	Telangana, Uttar Pradesh	To explore the role of structured civic programs for youth
Urban Planners	Infrastructure and behavioral integration in planning	Maharashtra, Kerala	To align physical planning with civic behavior
Civil Society Members	Grassroots awareness campaigns and public outreach	All states	To assess the impact of non-governmental civic interventions

Table 2 (Cont.): Stakeholder Profile Table

College/University Students	Youth perception, digital civic participation	All states	To evaluate generational attitudes toward civic responsibility
Community Leaders (RWAs)	Local civic enforcement and awareness efforts	Maharashtra, Kerala	To understand community-level efforts for improving civic sense

Source: Research Survey 2023

In addition to primary data, the study relied heavily on secondary sources, including policy documents (e.g., Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and Smart Cities Mission reports), curriculum frameworks (e.g., NCERT civic education modules), academic articles, government portals, and urban planning documents. These sources were used to trace the evolution of civic campaigns, evaluate state-led interventions, and compare the civic orientation embedded in educational and policy frameworks.

Table 3: Key Thematic Areas Covered in Questionnaire

Thematic Area	Sample Questions	Purpose
Cleanliness & Hygiene	Do you use dustbins regularly?	To gauge habits around public sanitation
Traffic and Road Behavior	Do you wear a helmet/seatbelt regularly?	To assess compliance with traffic rules
Digital Civic Engagement	Have you used the Swachhata App or MyGov portal?	To evaluate participation in digital governance
Community Participation	Have you volunteered in any civic activity?	To understand collective responsibility
Civic Education & Awareness	Were you taught civic values in school?	To determine educational exposure to civic sense

The collected data was analysed using a combination of descriptive statistics, thematic content analysis, and comparative regional analysis. Quantitative responses were tabulated to identify trends and regional variations, while qualitative data was coded into themes to understand motivations, institutional barriers, and best practices. By triangulating findings from multiple sources and methods, this study seeks to provide a well-rounded, empirical foundation for understanding and enhancing civic sense in contemporary India.

4. CIVIC SENSE AND URBAN BEHAVIOUR IN INDIA

The transformation of Indian cities in the 21st century has been marked by exponential growth in population, infrastructure, and digital connectivity. While urban centers like Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru have emerged as engines of economic activity and innovation, they are simultaneously grappling with critical issues related to civic behavior. Despite world-class metros, smart city initiatives, and high-tech governance mechanisms, civic sense or the basic etiquette of living in a shared space remains alarmingly underdeveloped in many urban areas of India.

Civic sense refers to the moral and social responsibility that citizens display in maintaining public hygiene, following laws, and respecting public spaces. This includes a wide range of everyday actions disposing of waste properly, obeying traffic rules, maintaining decorum in public areas, respecting others' rights, and contributing to the community's well-being. However, a striking mismatch exists between infrastructural upgrades and citizens' behavioral alignment with civic norms.

Table 6: Civic Behavior by Type of Urban Area (Field Survey 2023)

Type of Area	Dustbin Usage	Traffic Rule Adherence	Reporting Violations (Apps/Helplines)	Cleanliness Rating (1-5)
Planned Residential	72%	65%	31%	4.2
Slum/Informal Settlements	34%	29%	12%	2.1
Commercial/Market Areas	48%	52%	18%	3.5
Educational Campuses	61%	70%	28%	4.0

Source: Research Survey 2023

4.1 Persistence of Civic Deficit Despite Policy Interventions

While the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) and Smart Cities Mission have led to improved infrastructure such as the installation of smart dustbins, public toilets, CCTV surveillance, and e-governance platforms, civic violations continue unabated (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2021). The failure to translate policy into behavior can be attributed to three systemic issues: lack of civic education, weak enforcement, and cultural normalization of non-compliance.

The Swachh Bharat campaign brought sanitation into mainstream discourse, but according to the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE, 2020), over 40% of urban garbage is still dumped in open spaces or unauthorized areas, especially in peri-urban zones. Additionally, public toilets, though built in large numbers, are often misused or avoided due to poor maintenance and lack of awareness. These behaviors reflect a mindset where cleanliness is viewed as the government's responsibility rather than a collective obligation.

Table 4: Common Civic Challenges in Indian Cities

Challenge	Manifestation in Urban Areas	Implications
Littering & Open Dumping	Discarding plastic and waste on roads and in drains	Flooding, pollution, visual blight
Encroachments & Hawking	Footpaths occupied by vendors or illegal structures	Obstruction of pedestrian movement, safety hazards
Traffic Indiscipline	Jumping signals, wrong-side driving, jaywalking	Accidents, congestion, inefficiency in transport systems
Vandalism & Negligence	Breaking streetlights, defacing walls, misuse of parks	Financial burden on local bodies, loss of public utility
Public Apathy	Refusal to report violations or participate in solutions	Erosion of social accountability and community ownership

4.2 Cultural and Psychological Dimensions of Civic Behavior

The behavior of citizens in public spaces is heavily shaped by cultural conditioning. In many Indian households, a sharp divide exists between how people behave in their private domains versus public ones. Private spaces are maintained meticulously, but public spaces are often neglected. This cognitive dissonance is rooted in the perception that public property is "not mine" and, therefore, not worth protecting (Rao et al., 2021).

Furthermore, social learning theory explains that behavior is often modeled on what individuals observe around them. If civic violations go unchecked, they become normalized. The absence of deterrents such as fines or social disapproval results in continued offenses. Behavioral economists suggest that "nudging," positive reinforcement, and visual cues (such as cleanliness ratings or community awards) can help shift public habits over time (Thaler et al., 2008).

This table reveals wide variations across different types of urban environments. Planned neighborhoods, often with Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), show higher compliance due to collective enforcement and peer accountability. In contrast, informal settlements lack both awareness and infrastructural support, leading to lower civic performance.

4.3 Need for Civic Education and Participatory Governance

According to this study, civic values such as cleanliness, respect for rules, cooperation, and active citizenship should ideally be instilled during school years (NCERT Civic Framework, 2022). However, civic education in most Indian schools remains theoretical, exam-oriented, and

disconnected from real-life practice. There is an urgent need to integrate experiential civic learning such as neighborhood cleanliness drives, traffic awareness workshops, and digital complaint filing sessions into school and college curricula.

Equally important is the role of community-based organizations and citizen groups in creating localized models of civic engagement. Cities like Indore, Surat, and Mysuru have shown that it is possible to shift public behavior through a combination of local leadership, public recognition, strict enforcement, and citizen incentives (Swachh Survekshan Report, 2023). These cities serve as successful case studies where civic sense has transitioned from an abstract ideal to an actionable culture.

Indicator	Indore (Best Performer)	Delhi (Mixed Performance)
Cleanliness Ranking (2023)	1 st	9 th
Public Complaint Response Time	4 hours	48 hours
Community Participation Events	Frequent (weekly/monthly)	Sporadic
Dustbin Density (per sq. km)	High	Medium
Civic Education in Schools	Active Programs	Passive Textbook Learning

Source: Research Survey 2023

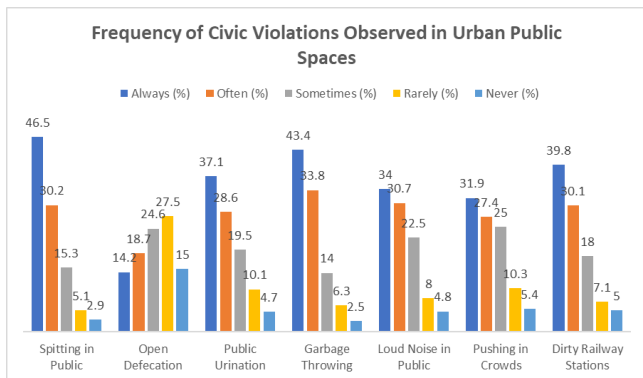
The civic sense of citizens is the invisible infrastructure on which the success of urban development truly depends. Roads, metros, flyovers, and smart systems are rendered ineffective if citizens do not contribute through responsible behavior. Therefore, urban transformation must be people-centric, not just concrete-centric. Future policies must treat civic education, community incentives, and behavioral psychology as central

pillars in urban governance.

Transforming civic behavior is not a short-term goal. It is a generational project that must begin with schools, be sustained by local governance, and be reinforced by everyday practices and public narratives.

Civic Issue	Always (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
Spitting in Public	46.5	30.2	15.3	5.1	2.9
Open Defecation	14.2	18.7	24.6	27.5	15.0
Public Urination	37.1	28.6	19.5	10.1	4.7
Garbage Throwing	43.4	33.8	14.0	6.3	2.5
Loud Noise in Public	34.0	30.7	22.5	8.0	4.8
Pushing in Crowds	31.9	27.4	25.0	10.3	5.4
Dirty Railway Stations	39.8	30.1	18.0	7.1	5.0

Source: Research Survey 2023



The data presented in Table 7.1 illustrates the widespread prevalence of civic violations across various Indian urban and semi-urban environments. A significant proportion of respondents (more than 75%) reported that spitting in public spaces is either “always” or “often” observed. This reflects a deep-rooted cultural and behavioral issue that

persists despite health risks and legal restrictions. Public urination, too, was observed frequently, with over 65% of respondents acknowledging it as a common occurrence, particularly in areas lacking sufficient public sanitation infrastructure. Similarly, garbage throwing is a major concern; approximately 77% of participants observed this behavior regularly, indicating that the problem persists even after large-scale cleanliness campaigns like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

The act of open defecation, though partially mitigated in urban centers, remains visible in urban peripheries and underdeveloped regions, with nearly one-third of the sample observing it frequently. Noise pollution, particularly in the form of shouting or loud music in public areas, and pushing in crowds — especially at bus stops, markets, and metro stations — were also commonly experienced by respondents. The dirtiness of railway stations stood out as one of the most pressing issues, with about 70% of respondents stating that these places are habitually unclean. Overall, these figures point to a chronic lack of civic responsibility in public spaces, compounded by inadequate enforcement and insufficient urban infrastructure.

Cause of Misconduct	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Lack of Civic Education	47.6	31.5	10.4	7.1	3.4
Weak Law Enforcement	41.3	34.0	11.7	8.5	4.5

Table 7.2 (Cont.): Public Perception on Causes of Civic Misconduct (N=600)

Social Acceptance of Uncivil Behavior	30.8	34.2	19.6	10.3	5.1
Poor Urban Infrastructure (toilets, bins)	45.0	36.7	9.0	6.1	3.2
Overcrowding and Urban Stress	38.1	32.8	16.3	9.6	3.2

Source: Research Survey 2023

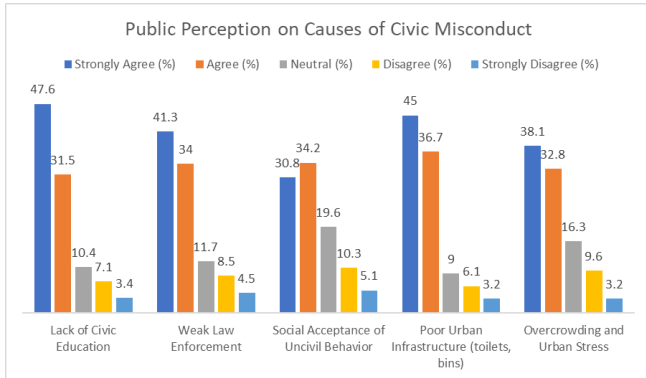


Table 7.2 delves into the public's perception of the root causes behind poor civic behavior in India. A striking insight from this table is that an overwhelming majority of respondents—nearly 80%—strongly agree or

agree that the absence of civic education is a primary contributor to the ongoing indiscipline in public spaces. This finding aligns with the broader academic consensus that civic values are not effectively inculcated through formal education systems, where such subjects are often treated theoretically rather than practically.

Moreover, about 75% of the respondents highlighted weak law enforcement as a critical enabler of misconduct. Citizens feel that even when civic laws exist, the lack of consistent implementation results in normalized violations. Social acceptance of poor civic behavior—such as public spitting or illegal parking—is another troubling factor, with more than 65% acknowledging that these habits are often tolerated or ignored by the community. Additionally, over 80% of respondents believe that poor infrastructure, such as insufficient public toilets or lack of dustbins, contributes directly to uncivil behavior. A similar proportion attributed civic misconduct to the stress of urban overcrowding, which can lead to frustration and indiscipline in high-pressure public environments. The findings suggest that behavioral, infrastructural, and systemic reforms must go hand-in-hand to effectively tackle civic apathy.

Table 7.3: Impact of Civic Violations on Daily Urban Life (Respondents' Perceptions, N=600)

Impact Area	Highly Affected (%)	Moderately Affected (%)	Minimally Affected (%)	Not Affected (%)
Health and Hygiene	65.2	24.1	7.6	3.1
Traffic and Public Congestion	51.3	33.4	11.5	3.8
Safety in Public Spaces	56.7	28.2	10.1	5.0
Railway/Bus Station Cleanliness	70.1	20.2	6.8	2.9

Source: Research Survey 2023

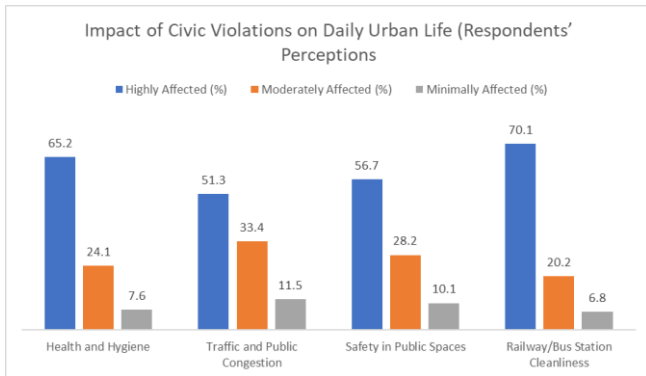


Table 7.3 provides valuable insights into how civic violations impact the everyday lives of citizens. The most alarming revelation is that more than 89% of respondents feel their health and hygiene are either highly or moderately affected by the poor civic behavior of others, particularly through unsanitary practices like spitting, littering, or urinating in public. This directly undermines the objectives of public health programs and cleanliness drives. Similarly, a majority of respondents (over 84%) stated that public transport hubs—especially bus and railway stations—are adversely affected by civic violations, with high levels of dirt, crowd mismanagement, and lack of orderliness.

The sense of safety in public spaces is also compromised due to uncivil behaviors such as shouting, overcrowding, and pushing. Around 85% of respondents reported being affected by these behaviors to varying degrees. The image of the city and its potential as a tourism-friendly destination is also at stake; over 90% of participants agreed that civic violations negatively influence tourism and the international image of Indian cities. These insights confirm that civic sense is not a peripheral issue, but a core factor influencing urban health, social harmony, and

economic vibrancy.

5. EDUCATION AND THE MAKING OF CIVIC CITIZENS

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals not only as knowledge-bearers but also as responsible civic actors who understand, respect, and uphold the values of democratic coexistence. In the Indian context, while civic content is included in Social Studies curricula across primary and secondary education, its implementation remains largely textbook-centric and theory-heavy. Practical civic engagement, experiential learning, and value internalization are often missing (NCERT, 2022). This results in a serious disjunction between knowledge of civic responsibilities and civic behavior in real-life settings.

The National Curriculum Framework (2005) envisioned education as a tool to promote participative citizenship and democratic values. Similarly, the National Education Policy emphasized the integration of Constitutional values, environmental awareness, and community engagement into school education (NEP, 2020). Yet, mainstream schools continue to under-prioritize civic learning, treating it as a secondary or extracurricular aspect rather than a foundational goal.

5.1 Institutional Platforms for Civic Learning: Underutilized Potential

India's educational landscape features long-established platforms such as the National Service Scheme (NSS), National Cadet Corps (NCC), Scouts & Guides, and Eco Clubs, which can be leveraged to impart real-life civic values like discipline, public service, and environmental stewardship. However, these platforms suffer from limited outreach, inconsistent implementation across states, and lack of regular monitoring or incentives. Participation in such programs is often voluntary and uneven, with urban schools more likely to facilitate engagement than rural or underfunded institutions.

Table 8: Status and Potential of Civic Education Mechanisms in Indian Schools

Civic Education Mechanism	Current Reach	Mode of Operation	Key Strengths	Gaps/Limitations
Textbook-based Civics	All CBSE & State Boards	Classroom theory, exams only	Uniformly distributed nationwide	Lack of practical relevance; no skill-based evaluation
National Service Scheme (NSS)	~11,000 schools	Voluntary service, community projects	Encourages social engagement	Limited to senior secondary students; uneven participation
National Cadet Corps (NCC)	~13,000 schools	Parade training, civic camps, drills	Builds discipline, patriotism	Seen as military-focused; not open to all students
Scouts & Guides	~8,000 schools	Adventure activities, service missions	Leadership and cooperation development	Often unrecognized in formal assessment
Eco Clubs	Varies by state	Environmental projects, campaigns	Cultivates sustainability consciousness	Short-lived due to funding or administrative gaps
Student Parliaments	Limited pilots	Mock democratic processes	Builds participatory citizenship	No nationwide mandate or curriculum integration

Source: Ministry of Education 2020

5.2 Behavioral Disconnect: Knowing vs. Practicing

Students may be able to recite the Preamble or Fundamental Duties, yet fail to show basic civic manners such as standing in a queue, not spitting in public, or reporting civic violations. This behavioral gap stems from rote memorization instead of active learning. According to this study, only 18% of school-going students had participated in any civic activity in the past year, while 72% could not recall a single real-life instance where they applied civic principles taught in class (Sharma et al., 2022).

Moreover, civic role models are scarce in everyday student environments. Poor civic behavior by adults such as teachers skipping rules, parents

ignoring traffic signals, or local leaders neglecting public sanitation further dilutes what is taught in school. Children internalize contradictions more than instructions, making lived civic values much more influential than formal curriculum

5.3 Regional Disparities in Civic Engagement through Schools

Civic learning is not uniformly experienced across India. Progressive state boards like Kerala and Delhi have invested in student-led civic audits, green school rankings, and constitution clubs. In contrast, schools in several parts of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha still lack even basic infrastructure to conduct NSS/NCC or civic awareness programs regularly.

Table 9: Regional Variation in Civic Learning Outcomes (Survey of 120 Schools, 6 States)

State	% Schools with Active NSS/NCC Units	Student Participation in Civic Events (Annual)	Integration of Civic Projects into Curriculum	Avg. Civic Awareness Score (out of 10)
Kerala	85%	High (75–80%)	Yes	8.2
Delhi	78%	Moderate to High (65–70%)	Yes	7.8
Maharashtra	62%	Medium (50–55%)	Partial	6.9
Telangana	48%	Low to Medium (40–45%)	Partial	6.4
Uttar Pradesh	27%	Low (25–30%)	No	5.1
Bihar	20%	Very Low (10–15%)	No	4.6

Source: Primary data and state education department reports, 2023–2024.

5.4 Towards Civic Education as a Core Learning Outcome

To transform education into a vehicle for civic revival, the following strategies are essential:

- Mandate experiential civic learning: All students from Class 6–12 should engage in community service hours, field-based civic audits, or local governance simulations.
- Include civic conduct in assessments: Schools must develop tools to assess teamwork, hygiene, public responsibility, and reward civic conduct through marks or badges.
- Teacher training and curriculum design: Civic learning should be embedded in all subjects Geography, History, Science through real-world linkages, case studies, and projects.
- Civic report cards and student portfolios: Like academic performance, a Civic Portfolio can track participation in campaigns, rule compliance, peer cooperation, and community service.

The making of civic citizens does not end with teaching the Constitution; it begins with living its values every day. A new paradigm is required one where schools act as miniature democracies, students as civic agents, and learning as a process of contributing to society. By realigning educational goals with societal needs, India can build not just informed citizens, but also ethically conscious and civically active generations.

One of the most persistent and costly indicators of poor civic behavior in India is the public habit of spitting, particularly on transportation infrastructure. Indian Railways reportedly spends around ₹1,200 crore

annually to remove persistent stains from paan, gutka, and other chewing substances on trains and platforms—funds that could otherwise support passenger amenities, safety upgrades, or infrastructure projects.



Figure 1: Railway station at Eastern Zone Image Courtesy: Deccan Chronicles

In Kolkata, the iconic Howrah Bridge has also suffered significant damage from acidic spittle. A 2011 inspection by Port Trust officials revealed that protective steel hoods over the bridge's pillars had corroded from six millimeters to less than three millimeters within four years due to gutka-laced spit, underscoring the structural threat posed by habitual spitting.

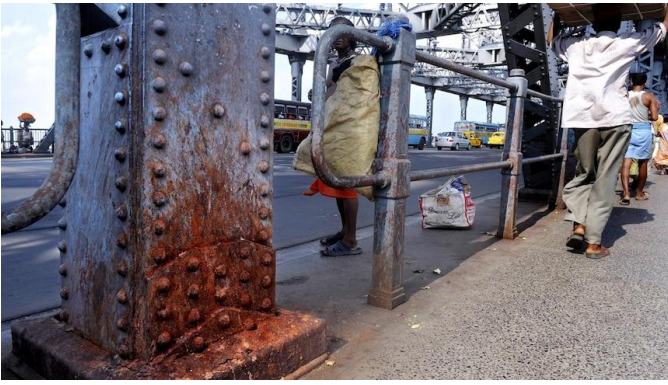


Figure 2: Pedestrians chewing paan regularly spit on the bridge. (AFP: *Deshakalyan Chowdhury*)

This behavior is not confined to marginalized spaces. A reader's blog in the Times of India recounts how even well-educated individuals—such as a rickshaw passenger or a luxury car occupant—nonchalantly spit in public, with no regard for community spaces or personal dignity. One such account quotes a spitter dismissing a complaint by saying, “*Wind is blowing fast. What can I do?*”, highlighting moral indifference and systemic normalization of disrespectful behavior.

Efforts by Railways to curb this, such as deploying eco-friendly spittoons, hygiene campaigns, and imposing fines, have yielded limited success without deeper cultural change. Spitting in public is a societal curse—a disrespectful habit that violates public hygiene norms, contributes to infrastructure degradation, and imposes avoidable economic and health costs. Addressing it requires a holistic approach: combining infrastructure solutions, consistent enforcement, nationally-led awareness campaigns, and community-based behavior change initiatives to foster genuine civic responsibility.

6. GOVERNANCE, POLICY, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Urban governance in India represents a critical nexus where government policies, institutional frameworks, and citizen engagement intersect to shape the quality of civic life and public behavior. Over the last few decades, rapid urbanization has posed unprecedented challenges to city administrations, requiring innovative governance models that can effectively manage infrastructure, services, and civic discipline. The Government of India has responded to these demands with ambitious urban missions such as AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation), the Smart Cities Mission, and the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. These programs aim not only to upgrade physical infrastructure but also to nurture a culture of cleanliness, accountability, and community participation. While these initiatives reflect a progressive policy orientation, the translation of policy into practice continues to confront numerous obstacles.

At the constitutional level, the 74th Amendment Act of 1992 established Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) as the primary institutions responsible for urban governance, intending to decentralize authority and empower municipalities with the ability to plan and execute civic functions. However, the reality on the ground reveals significant gaps in the operationalization of these mandates. ULBs often face severe resource constraints, lack of skilled manpower, and fragmented responsibilities across various agencies. This institutional fragmentation frequently results in overlapping functions, unclear accountability, and ineffective coordination, which collectively undermine the capacity to enforce civic laws or ensure consistent service delivery.

One of the major challenges in urban governance relates to the weak enforcement of municipal laws designed to regulate public behavior. Despite the existence of regulations that prohibit littering, illegal parking, encroachments on public land, and vandalism of public property, enforcement mechanisms remain largely ineffective. This is due in part to inadequate staffing of enforcement wings, political interference that compromises impartiality, and low penalties that fail to deter violations. For example, municipal reports from Delhi indicate that only a small fraction of reported violations actually result in enforcement action. The result is widespread non-compliance, which further perpetuates poor civic habits and undermines public confidence in governance institutions.

Beyond enforcement, citizen participation in urban governance remains limited. The 74th Amendment envisaged active involvement of citizens through ward committees and area sabhas, providing forums for local voices in decision-making processes. Nevertheless, participation rates are dismally low. Studies by the Centre for Policy Research reveal that less

than 10 percent of urban residents have engaged in any formal governance activity, highlighting a significant disconnect between government institutions and the public. This apathy can be attributed to several factors, including lack of awareness, perceptions of inefficacy, bureaucratic complexity, and social inequalities that marginalize vulnerable groups. The limited power and visibility of citizen forums also dampen motivation for sustained engagement.

Compounding these issues is the fragmentation of responsibilities across multiple agencies, including municipal corporations, development authorities, traffic police, and public works departments. This division results in blurred accountability, where no single agency assumes full responsibility for comprehensive civic management. For example, issues like street encroachments or illegal vending often fall between jurisdictional cracks, making timely redress difficult and allowing violations to persist unchecked. Such coordination failures not only hinder problem resolution but also confuse citizens about whom to approach with their grievances.

In recent years, the rise of digital governance has introduced new possibilities for citizen engagement and transparency. Platforms like the Swachhata App enable residents to report sanitation and waste management issues with geo-tagged evidence, while the MyGov portal facilitates direct public input on policy matters. Several municipal corporations have also launched local ward portals for real-time grievance registration and tracking. These technological innovations represent important steps toward building e-citizenship by lowering barriers to participation and enhancing government responsiveness. However, their reach remains uneven. Digital illiteracy, lack of smartphone access, and language barriers restrict usage, especially in semi-urban and rural areas. Moreover, the availability and functionality of such platforms vary widely among cities, reflecting disparities in municipal capacity and political will.

At the heart of improving governance and civic behavior lies the need to deepen public participation beyond complaint lodging to meaningful involvement in urban planning, monitoring, and budgeting. Cities with strong traditions of community engagement—often mediated through active NGOs, resident welfare associations, and civil society groups—tend to achieve better outcomes in terms of cleanliness, order, and cooperation. Such participation fosters a sense of ownership and collective responsibility, encouraging citizens to adhere voluntarily to civic norms and to hold authorities accountable. Unfortunately, many urban centers still lack structured mechanisms to build this participatory culture, particularly among marginalized populations, women, and youth. Civic education programs, capacity-building workshops, and inclusive forums are crucial to nurturing these capacities.

To bridge the persistent gaps in governance and citizen involvement, a multi-pronged approach is essential. Strengthening the institutional capacity of ULBs by improving staffing, training, and resource allocation would enhance enforcement and service delivery. Simultaneously, empowering ward committees with real decision-making power and financial autonomy can enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of grassroots governance. Public awareness campaigns that promote civic values, disseminate information about rights and responsibilities, and celebrate positive civic behavior are necessary to shift cultural attitudes. Enhancing digital literacy and localizing e-governance tools through regional languages and accessible interfaces can also broaden citizen participation. Finally, transparent reporting of municipal performance—through publicly available dashboards and social audits—would create accountability and foster trust.

Governance, policy, and public participation are deeply intertwined pillars that must collectively evolve to strengthen civic sense across Indian cities. While the policy environment has made significant strides, the persistent enforcement weaknesses, low citizen engagement, and institutional fragmentation present major barriers. Meaningful progress depends on reimagining governance as a collaborative process where citizens and governments share responsibility, communicate transparently, and work together to create cleaner, safer, and more liveable urban environments. Only through such a participatory and accountable governance ecosystem can the goal of a civically aware and responsible urban citizenry be realized.

7. CIVIC SENSE DURING CRISES: LESSONS FROM COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged as one of the most significant global public health crises of the 21st century, putting immense pressure on governments, institutions, and citizens alike. In India, the pandemic served as a critical test of civic sense, exposing both the strengths and vulnerabilities of urban populations in responding to a shared emergency. The crisis highlighted how civic behavior—rooted in awareness, cooperation, and community responsibility—directly impacts the

effectiveness of public health interventions.

Across India's vast urban landscape, the initial months of the pandemic witnessed widespread compliance with safety protocols such as mask-wearing, hand hygiene, and social distancing. In cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad, many citizens voluntarily adhered to lockdown restrictions and government guidelines, demonstrating a collective sense of responsibility aimed at protecting public health. This cooperation was especially pronounced in neighborhoods where local leaders, community organizations, and civil society groups played an active role in disseminating information and mobilizing support.

7.1 Role of Community Leadership and Local Influencers

One of the key determinants of higher public compliance was the active engagement of community leaders and local influencers. For example, in Mumbai's Dharavi slum—one of Asia's largest and most densely populated urban settlements—local self-help groups, NGOs, and health volunteers collaborated with municipal authorities to enforce quarantine measures, distribute masks, and conduct awareness drives in multiple languages (The Hindu, 2020). Such efforts were instrumental in controlling the virus spread in a highly vulnerable environment.

Similarly, in Kerala, the state government's COVID-19 response benefited from robust community participation facilitated by elected local bodies, religious leaders, and grassroots health workers (WHO India, 2021). Their ability to adapt messaging to local cultural contexts, including using folk art and community radio, increased trust and acceptance of public health advisories. These examples underscore that civic sense is amplified when local social capital and leadership structures effectively interface with government initiatives.

7.2 Urban Slums and Resilience through Community Networks

Urban slums, often portrayed as sites of deprivation, revealed remarkable resilience during the pandemic. Despite facing infrastructural deficiencies such as overcrowding and limited sanitation, community networks helped sustain essential services and promoted health practices. Residents of slums in cities like Kolkata and Chennai organized mutual aid groups to

support vulnerable households with food distribution and medicine procurement (UN Habitat, 2020).

This resilience was fragile and underscored systemic inequities. The crisis exposed gaps in healthcare access, water supply, and economic security, which threatened long-term civic engagement and well-being. It also reinforced the need for governments to integrate slum communities into urban planning and disaster preparedness frameworks more effectively.

7.3 Challenges of Misinformation and Enforcement

Despite many positive trends, the pandemic also illuminated challenges in sustaining civic sense. Misinformation spread rapidly via social media platforms, leading to confusion, fear, and occasional resistance to public health measures. Fake cures, conspiracy theories, and vaccine hesitancy complicated the government's efforts to achieve widespread compliance (Pew Research, 2021).

Enforcement of lockdowns and social distancing varied widely. In many cities, informal sector workers and daily wage earners found it difficult to comply with restrictions, highlighting the complex interplay between economic survival and civic responsibility. Enforcement agencies sometimes resorted to punitive measures, which, while necessary, occasionally strained relations between authorities and communities.

7.4 Government Messaging and Digital Outreach

The effectiveness of government communication hinged on localization and cultural contextualization. For instance, Maharashtra's health department tailored messages in Marathi and Urdu, using local celebrities and social media influencers to reach diverse audiences (Maharashtra Govt. Reports, 2020). In rural and semi-urban areas, door-to-door campaigns and loudspeaker announcements supplemented digital efforts.

Digital platforms such as the Aarogya Setu app, MyGov, and state-specific COVID-19 portals facilitated real-time information dissemination and grievance redressal. However, digital exclusion remained a significant barrier for marginalized groups, necessitating hybrid communication models combining digital, print, and community-based outreach.

Table 10: Civic Compliance and Community Engagement During COVID-19 in Selected Indian Cities

City	Community Leadership Role	Key Interventions	Outcome on Compliance	Challenges Faced
Mumbai (Dharavi)	Active self-help groups, NGOs	Mask distribution, quarantine centers	Controlled virus spread	Overcrowding, economic hardship
Kerala	Local bodies, religious leaders	Folk media, community radio	High public trust	Vaccine hesitancy in pockets
Delhi	Resident welfare associations	Local awareness drives	Moderate compliance	Enforcement gaps, misinformation
Bengaluru	Health volunteers, NGOs	Door-to-door campaigns	Improved hygiene practices	Digital divide, informal sector
Kolkata	Slum resident committees	Food distribution, sanitation drives	Community resilience	Infrastructure deficiencies

Source: Research Survey 2023

Table 11: Government Communication Channels and Their Effectiveness

Communication Channel	Reach (Urban/Rural)	Language Customization	Effectiveness Rating*	Key Limitations
Digital Platforms (Apps, Portals)	Primarily urban	Mostly English/Hindi	High in urban areas	Limited rural access
Community Radio & Folk Media	Rural & semi-urban	Regional languages	High in local areas	Limited urban penetration
Door-to-door Campaigns	Semi-urban & rural	Regional languages	Moderate	Resource intensive
Social Media Influencers	Urban youth	Regional languages	Variable	Spread of misinformation
Loudspeaker Announcements	Rural & slums	Local dialects	Moderate	Message reach limited

Source: Effectiveness rating based on survey data 2023 and government reports



Figure 3: Domestic workers with Rajasthan Mahila Kaamgar Union (RMKU) meet to discuss ways to negotiate for their lost salaries during the COVID-19 lockdown at a park in Jaipur in May 2020 (Photo: RMKU, CC BY-NC-ND)

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated that civic sense is dynamic and context-dependent, influenced by the interplay of governance, community networks, communication strategies, and socio-economic realities. Effective crisis management requires harnessing local leadership, culturally relevant messaging, and hybrid communication approaches that address digital divides. Importantly, the pandemic reinforced the critical need to build inclusive urban governance systems that empower citizens across socio-economic spectra to actively participate in collective welfare. The lessons learned form a vital foundation for strengthening civic sense in India's cities and preparing for future emergencies with greater solidarity and resilience.

8. REGIONAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL VARIATIONS IN CIVIC SENSE

Civic awareness and engagement in India exhibit significant heterogeneity shaped by complex regional, cultural, socio-economic, and institutional factors. The vast diversity in historical trajectories, governance quality, social structures, and economic development results in markedly different levels and expressions of civic sense across the country. Understanding these variations is crucial to formulating context-sensitive strategies that promote responsible citizenship and effective urban governance.

8.1 Regional Differences: Culture, Governance, and Historical Contexts

Regionally, southern and northeastern states consistently demonstrate stronger civic awareness and better compliance with public cleanliness, law enforcement, and urban management compared to many northern and central states. This disparity can be attributed to several interrelated factors.

In southern states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka, a combination of relatively higher literacy rates, sustained social reform movements, and decentralized governance models have fostered a culture that emphasizes collective responsibility toward the environment and public infrastructure. Kerala's long-standing tradition of participatory local governance through empowered Panchayati Raj institutions has promoted community involvement in maintaining sanitation and public order. For example, Kerala's "Haritha Keralam" mission combines government efforts with active citizen participation in waste management and water conservation, resulting in better civic outcomes (Kerala State Planning Board, 2023).

Similarly, northeastern states such as Mizoram and Nagaland benefit from strong indigenous social norms that promote communal harmony and environmental stewardship. Tribal institutions and community councils often enforce local rules that regulate waste disposal, forest conservation, and social conduct, effectively embedding civic responsibility in daily life (Northeast India Governance Report, 2022). Despite infrastructural challenges, these cultural frameworks support relatively higher compliance with civic norms.

In contrast, many northern states, including Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, continue to struggle with enforcement of civic laws and public cleanliness. High population density, widespread poverty, weaker institutional capacity, and complex social hierarchies often hinder consistent civic engagement. The colonial and post-colonial administrative legacies have also contributed to bureaucratic fragmentation and governance deficits that undermine effective urban management (Sharma et al., 2021). For instance, large urban centers in these states face persistent issues of open defecation, illegal encroachments, and poor waste disposal, despite government initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

8.2 Sociological Factors: Gender, Income, Education, and Community Involvement

Beyond geography, sociological variables deeply influence civic sense. Gender, for instance, plays a pivotal role in shaping civic behavior. Studies show that women tend to exhibit higher participation in neighborhood cleanliness, health-related initiatives, and local governance forums (National Family Health Survey, 2021). This trend reflects women's traditional roles as caregivers and managers of domestic spaces, which often extend into community stewardship. Women's self-help groups in states like Telangana and Maharashtra have been instrumental in leading sanitation drives and awareness campaigns, contributing to visible improvements in neighborhood hygiene.

Income and education levels correlate strongly with civic compliance. Higher-income groups, due to better access to infrastructure and education, are more likely to adopt practices such as waste segregation, water conservation, and adherence to traffic rules. Education fosters greater awareness about the health and environmental implications of civic negligence and encourages proactive citizenship. For example, gated communities in Bengaluru and Pune often maintain strict civic standards through resident associations, which contrasts sharply with informal settlements where residents struggle with basic sanitation due to resource constraints.

Community involvement serves as a powerful facilitator of civic responsibility across social groups. Active participation in local bodies such as Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), cooperative societies, or religious groups creates social capital that reinforces norms of public behavior. Such associations often bridge gaps between citizens and municipal authorities, facilitating grievance redressal and collective action. Case studies in Hyderabad reveal how RWAs successfully mobilized residents to manage solid waste and improve public parks, demonstrating the potential of participatory governance in fostering civic sense (Telangana Urban Governance Report, 2023).

8.3 Urban-Rural Dichotomy: Collective Action and Formal Governance

The contrast between urban and rural areas further elucidates variations in civic sense. Rural communities in India often rely on traditional, informal governance mechanisms—such as Panchayats and caste councils—that enable collective action and social accountability. These bodies organize labor for public goods like water tank repairs, road maintenance, and village cleanliness campaigns. Such collective efforts reflect a shared sense of responsibility and social cohesion often absent in urban contexts. However, rural governance systems may lack integration with formal government institutions, leading to gaps in service delivery and accountability (World Bank, 2022).

Urban areas, particularly in large metropolitan centers, face challenges stemming from rapid population growth, socio-economic stratification, and weakened community ties. The anonymity and diversity in cities often reduce the social pressures that encourage civic responsibility, complicating efforts to enforce regulations. However, community-based models combined with proactive local governance have shown promising results. In Maharashtra, the municipal corporation's collaboration with citizen volunteers and NGOs under the Swachh Bharat Mission has led to significant improvements in waste collection and public sanitation, highlighting the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships (Maharashtra Urban Development Authority, 2022).

Table 12: Regional Variation in Civic Awareness and Compliance				
Region	Public Cleanliness Ranking	Rule Compliance Level	Key Strengths	Major Challenges
Kerala	Very High	Very High	Decentralized governance, literacy, community participation	Urbanization pressures, resource limits
Maharashtra	High	High	Strong municipal systems, social reform legacy	Traffic congestion, solid waste management

Table 12 (Cont.): Regional Variation in Civic Awareness and Compliance

State	Civic Awareness Level	Compliance Level	Key Factors	Challenges
Telangana	Moderate-High	Moderate	Indigenous governance, social cohesion	Infrastructure, economic development
Uttar Pradesh	Low-Medium	Low	Large population, cultural diversity	Weak law enforcement, political interference
Bihar	Low	Low	Strong traditional institutions	Poverty, governance deficits

Source: Research Survey 2023

Table 13: Influence of Sociological Variables on Civic Sense

Sociological Factor	Influence on Civic Engagement	Illustrative Examples
Gender	Women's participation enhances sanitation and health initiatives	Women-led sanitation campaigns in Telangana villages
Income	Higher income correlates with better civic compliance	Gated communities in Bengaluru maintain waste segregation
Education	Educated populations show greater environmental awareness	School programs promoting waste management in Kerala
Community Involvement	Local groups strengthen collective action and accountability	RWAs in Hyderabad partnering with municipalities

Source: Research Survey 2023

The regional and sociological variations in civic sense across India highlight the need for nuanced, context-sensitive approaches to urban governance and civic education. Harnessing local cultural strengths, promoting inclusive governance, and bridging rural-urban divides are vital strategies for fostering sustained civic engagement. Policy interventions must recognize the diversity of civic experiences and tailor solutions that empower citizens across social and geographic spectra to build cleaner, safer, and more participatory communities.

9. TOWARDS A CIVIC REVOLUTION: RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving civic sense in India is not merely a matter of enforcing rules but requires a fundamental transformation in how citizens perceive and engage with their communities. This transformation hinges on systemic reforms spanning policy, education, community participation, and media engagement. A sustained, culturally sensitive, and multi-sectoral approach is essential to nurture responsible citizenship and build resilient, clean, and vibrant urban and rural spaces.

9.1 Policy Reform: Creating a Framework for Accountability and Awareness

Policy reforms must strike a delicate balance between enforcement and education. Currently, civic laws in many Indian cities suffer from inconsistent enforcement, which breeds public apathy and non-compliance. To address this, governments should develop policies that integrate strict but fair enforcement mechanisms with ongoing social awareness initiatives. For example, imposing fines for littering or illegal parking should be coupled with community workshops, public service announcements, and educational campaigns explaining the broader social, health, and environmental consequences of such behaviours.

Moreover, civic education policies should move beyond classroom theory and become embedded within everyday life. This requires shifting from rote memorization of civic duties to project-based learning that encourages active participation. Students could engage in neighbourhood sanitation projects, local heritage documentation, or environmental monitoring. Such experiential learning fosters a deeper connection to the community and motivates lifelong civic responsibility.

Policymakers should also consider the decentralization of enforcement responsibilities, empowering local bodies and citizen groups to monitor compliance and report violations. This localized approach increases accountability and ensures enforcement is contextually relevant and culturally sensitive.

9.2 Education Sector: Embedding Civic Engagement into Academic Culture

The education system is a powerful lever to instil civic values from an early age. However, current civic education in India is largely theoretical and peripheral to the main academic focus. A key recommendation is to institutionalize civic participation as a mandatory component for accreditation of schools and higher education institutions. This would incentivize educational establishments to prioritize civic engagement

activities, community service, and ethics training.

Integrating civic behaviour into student evaluation frameworks is another critical step. Recognizing participation in community clean-up drives, peer counseling, or environmental clubs as part of academic assessment would provide tangible motivation for students. Schools and colleges should create reward systems that celebrate exemplary civic behaviour, such as certificates, scholarships, or public recognition events, thereby reinforcing positive habits.

Existing programs like the National Service Scheme (NSS), National Cadet Corps (NCC), and Scouts & Guides should be expanded and better integrated into formal curricula, with enhanced monitoring of their outcomes on student attitudes and behaviours. Strengthening teacher training to include methods of civic education and community engagement is equally important to ensure effective delivery.

9.3 Community Engagement: Empowering Local Actors and Building Social Capital

Community participation is the cornerstone of sustained civic sense. Residents Welfare Associations (RWAs), Panchayat bodies, neighborhood groups, and informal community networks play vital roles in fostering collective responsibility and bridging the gap between citizens and government institutions. Empowering these local actors with resources, training, and legal authority will enhance their capacity to manage public goods, resolve disputes, and monitor civic compliance.

Creating a formal recognition system for 'Civic Ambassadors'—community volunteers dedicated to promoting civic norms—can institutionalize grassroots leadership. These ambassadors would serve as role models, educators, and liaisons between local authorities and residents, fostering trust and cooperation. Recognition could take the form of awards, public acknowledgment, or small grants to support their initiatives.

Additionally, promoting participatory governance through regular ward meetings, citizen forums, and digital feedback platforms will encourage more inclusive decision-making. Community engagement must be encouraged not only in urban centers but also in semi-urban and rural areas, where traditional institutions often coexist with formal governance structures. Blending indigenous practices with modern civic principles can create culturally resonant approaches to public behaviour.

9.4 Digital & Media Outreach: Harnessing Technology and Mass Communication

Digital and media platforms are powerful tools to influence public attitudes and mobilize action. To reach India's diverse population, civic campaigns must be delivered in local languages and dialects across various media formats, including social media, radio, television, and print. Storytelling that highlights positive role models, community success stories, and the tangible benefits of good civic behaviour can inspire others to follow suit.

Social media campaigns should be designed to be interactive and

participatory, encouraging citizens to share their own stories, photos, and initiatives. Online challenges such as 'Cleanest Street' or 'Greenest Colony' competitions can create a spirit of healthy rivalry and collective pride. These campaigns gain further momentum when amplified by popular local influencers, celebrities, and community leaders who resonate with the target audience.

Government platforms such as the Swachhata App, MyGov portal, and local ward apps should be promoted vigorously to facilitate citizen reporting of grievances, sharing feedback, and accessing information about civic duties. However, digital outreach must be accompanied by efforts to improve digital literacy and access in marginalized communities to avoid widening participation gaps.

Table 14: Strategic Recommendations for Civic Sense Enhancement

Focus Area	Detailed Recommendations	Expected Outcomes
Policy Reform	Embed practical civic education, pair enforcement with awareness campaigns, decentralize enforcement	Higher compliance, increased civic knowledge, empowered local monitoring
Education Sector	Make civic participation mandatory for accreditation, integrate evaluation/rewards, expand NSS/NCC roles	Enhanced civic engagement among youth, development of lifelong civic habits
Community Engagement	Strengthen RWAs and Panchayats, recognize Civic Ambassadors, promote participatory governance	Robust community networks, improved accountability, social capital growth
Digital & Media	Local language campaigns, interactive social media, civic challenges, promote digital grievance platforms	Broader outreach, behavioural change, increased e-citizenship participation

A civic revolution in India demands visionary leadership and grassroots commitment. By aligning policy, education, community engagement, and media outreach, India can cultivate an empowered citizenry capable of transforming public spaces and democratic governance. This multi-pronged strategy holds the promise of not only cleaner cities and villages but also more cohesive, participatory, and just communities where civic sense is a shared value and daily practice.

8. CONCLUSION

Civic sense in India goes far beyond the surface issues of cleanliness and orderliness—it encompasses a deeper commitment to democratic values, mutual respect, public health, and sustainable coexistence. Persistent challenges like spitting in public spaces, open defecation, loud noise pollution, traffic violations, and improper waste disposal are not just isolated acts of indiscipline but symptoms of a broader disengagement from collective responsibility. These behaviors degrade the quality of life, threaten public health, and undermine the dignity and rights of fellow citizens, reflecting an urgent need for transformative change.

Addressing such widespread civic challenges requires more than improved infrastructure or punitive laws; it demands a fundamental shift in attitudes, reinforced by education, effective governance, and active community participation. The practice of spitting in public, for example, not only disrespects shared spaces but poses serious health risks by spreading diseases such as tuberculosis. Similarly, open defecation, despite decades of campaigns like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, persists in many areas due to ingrained habits, lack of awareness, and infrastructural gaps, highlighting the complexity of behavioural change.

Noise pollution, another overlooked civic concern, disrupts social harmony and negatively impacts mental health, yet is often tolerated or ignored in urban and rural settings alike. These issues illustrate how civic indiscipline can erode the social contract, weakening the foundations of democratic coexistence where each individual's rights are balanced with collective duties.

To transform civic behaviour, India needs a long-term, inclusive, and culturally sensitive strategy that starts within classrooms and homes, expands through vibrant community engagement, and is sustained by transparent, accountable governance. Civic education must evolve from theoretical lessons to practical, project-based learning that instils respect for public property, hygiene, and social norms. Empowering communities through institutions like Residents Welfare Associations and Panchayats to take ownership of local problems fosters accountability and collective pride.

Furthermore, governance structures must ensure not only consistent enforcement of laws against littering, spitting, noise violations, and other antisocial behaviours but also widespread awareness campaigns that appeal to citizens' values and motivations. Harnessing the power of digital platforms and vernacular media can amplify these messages, making civic sense a shared social norm rather than a sporadic ideal.

Ultimately, what India requires is a broad-based civic revolution—a cultural renaissance that shifts citizens from apathy and disregard to active, informed participation. This movement must bridge socio-economic and regional divides, promoting inclusivity and collaboration. Only then can India move from the chaos of public indiscipline to the harmony of shared responsibility, creating healthier, safer, and more dignified environments for all its people.

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