

## Plastics- a kind request to you “Do not throw me out. Please.”

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### I. INTRODUCTION

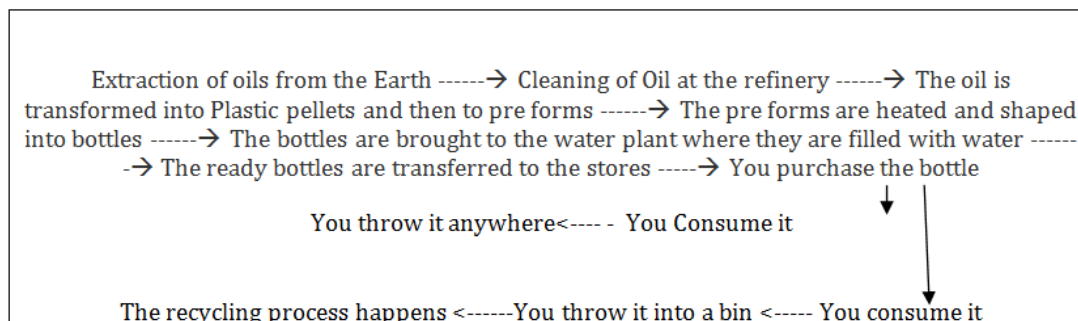
Before I begin, let me tell you instances from my real life experience. I have a friend of mine who once said to me “There’s a corner in my kitchen dedicated to plastic bottles. For as long as I can remember, we have been storing water at my house in this army of bottles and it was only very recently that my mother decided to get glass bottles instead.”

This proves a very basic assertion- plastic bottle is necessary, and speaking on a broad scale, Plastics are necessary in day to day life. Have you ever imagined life without a plastic bottle? Pepsi, Bisleri, and all the beverages that you buy would perhaps have been extinguished.

But as we all know, these bottles aren’t the environment’s greatest friend. Just to put things in perspective, a plastic bottle takes 700 years to break down. And it’s estimated that the world uses more than 100 million plastic bottles daily, most of them only once including you who is a part of this activity.

Have you ever wondered how these bottles are manufactured or what happens to them once you throw them away? From the time of its manufacture to the end of its journey, that these plastic bottle spells doom for the environment.

Let’s see its journey in a very simple form



Now what happens to this plastic which we throw here and there? We ate a packet of chips; we throw the packet out of the window. We have a carry bag which is useless now; we throw them from the top of our apartments. Who suffers from this? Yes it’s true that we are selfish and we incur no loss- but what about the animals? Oh yes! We don’t need to bother about them.

Animals, especially cows, ingest the plastic and develop complications, which finally result in their death. And how many of us are aware of this?

I had done a survey asking people regarding this particular problem and I was completely taken aback with their so called “witty” answers.

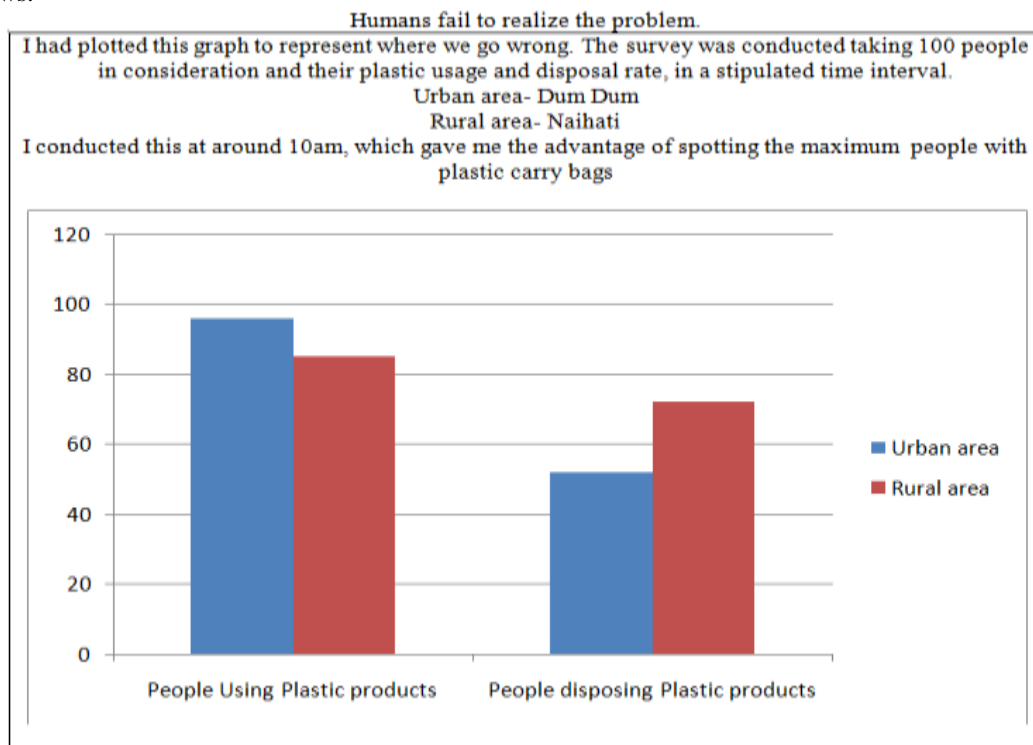
L o c a t i o n - N a n d a n , K o l k a t a  
“Do you realise that plastics ruin us?”  
Ans- “ I am least interested”  
  
Location- Dum Dum, Kolkata  
“Do you throw plastics on the road?”  
Ans- “ yes, The municipality workers are there to clean it up”

Location- Madhyamgram, west Bengal  
"Do you consider plastic a medium of pollution?"  
Ans- "no, and it's a very bad policy the government has implemented to charge on carry bags"

Location- Naihati, west Bengal  
"Should we stop using low cost plastic bags and use thick plastic bags to prevent pollution?"  
Ans- "No, then how can we bring vegetables and fish? Check air and water pollution first"

Here lies the problem. We people always blame everyone without noticing our fault. Many people give their opinion that we are recycling plastic, so what's the burst that we create about plastic pollution. Recycling is better--I won't write "good"--for the environment. But without economics--without supply and demand of raw materials--recycling is nothing more than a meaningless exercise in glorifying garbage. No doubt it's better than throwing something into an incinerator, and worse than fixing something that can be refurbished. It's what you do if you can't bear to see something land filled. Placing a box or a can or a bottle in a recycling bin doesn't mean you've recycled anything, and it doesn't make you a better, greener person: it just means you've outsourced your problem. Sometimes that outsourcing is near home; and sometimes it's overseas. But wherever it goes, the global market and demand for raw materials is the ultimate arbiter. Fortunately, if that realization leaves you feeling bad, there's always the alternative: stop buying so much crap in the first place.

Plastic being non-biodegradable can remain intact in the environment for 1,000 years. Cows and other cattle are not selective eaters. The often swallow food with plastic. Once plastic enters their entrails, it can neither be digested nor vomited. "It must be really painful for the cattle and animals, as once the plastic is ingested there is no technique to remove it. Animal rescuers are often distressed to see animals feeding on garbage sustain agonizing injuries--a dog with its head trapped in a jar of biscuits, obviously while trying to retrieve the contents; a cow with a hoof stuck in a tin of food. The dog had no access to food and water till the obstruction was removed by IAR vets. The cow had maggots due to the infection on its limb. Cattle also tend to ingest sharp objects like needles while consuming food. This can pass through their rumen into the diaphragm and can infect the pericardium, the layer around the heart. Often animal rescuers treat animals with pins stuck in their jaws.



From the survey it was clear that a very few number of people do not dispose the waste and the rest disposes off anywhere. In February 2011, a rule was notified by the Urban Ministry of Environment and Forests that plastic bags should not be issued free of cost to customers, in an effort to curb the indiscriminate use of plastics. The rule states that consumers will be charged a fee which is prescribed by the Kolkata Corporation, for every plastic bag any store gives them. In addition, these bags must conform to certain environmentally

accepted standards of thickness and constituent pigments. So, now whether I shop for a few thousand rupees at a book shop, buy 10 big sized books, or pick up my mother’s weekly supplies of vegetables at a supermarket, I pay a separate and not insignificant price for carry bags. This new rule of charging for bags leads to important behavioural changes in customers. I remember to take cloth or reusable bags from home, and even if I don’t have any on me, I am not indiscriminate in my use of carry bags. I use only what I need, I reuse what I can.

We know that Stray animals are also being forced to consume unnatural food. The shrinking of grazing grounds has left the cattle stranded around garbage heaps. Many of them can be seen ambling towards dumps at night. And still we argue how plastic causes the death? Each and every day we find cases where domestic animals die of this particular waste and still we blabber about recycling. We really never, never threw anything away. You think you know about recycling? We invented it. We had to. We were desperate. Sometimes maybe the only thing we had to work with was a couple of leftover baked potatoes from the weekend, and that was all there was to eat. Didn't matter to us that much. Ma just baked them again. Twice-Baked Potatoes really were kind of a treat for us, and we'd never complain when she served them.

Animals do have a life. We have engulfed their habitat, their food, their shelter. And whatever is left, we are happily polluting them. We want milk, but we don’t want cows to live. How ironic!

That one bottle you picked up for a subtle drink and threw away most casually is now most likely making its way slowly down the rivers and oceans of the earth, slowly clogging the life out of them. More than 5 trillion pieces of plastic are floating around in the world’s oceans currently, according to recent research! In case you think this is vague and without any context, take a look at the ‘Great Pacific garbage patch’: an “indeterminate” region of water which has extremely high plastic concentration and often leads to the poisoning of marine life-forms, many of which are often consumed by humans.

It is high time that this problem is addressed. As one of the signatories to the of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, India needs to do more. But how do we do this? How do we stop polluting our water bodies? If you consider that 40 percent of the world’s oceans are heavily affected by human activities, including pollution, depleted fisheries, and loss of coastal habitats, seems like there is a lot we can do. The easiest thing that one can do is to become a responsible consumer. *Which* means that we can’t just stop at buying a plastic bottle and throwing it away and then forgetting about it? We must substantially reduce waste we generate through **the three big R’s**: reduction, recycling and reuse. When it comes to drinking water, this means using glass bottles instead of plastic ones and generally reducing dependence on plastics in everyday life. We do everything except Reduction. We always think this statement to be USE, Recycle and USE. We never thought of reduction because we love luxury. Once we know we can recycle we tend to use more rather than reduce.

We also need to push our government to adopt sustainable practices that ensure environmentally sound management of chemicals and wastes, with the end result of less waste and less pollution all around. These practices will not only help significantly reduce Plastic pollution from land-based activities but also help curtail activities that threaten our everyday life too.

Since plastic was invented more than a century ago, we have become dependent on it for its convenience, affordability and function. This dependence is now choking our environment. But small steps can make a huge difference. And it’s time we started taking those steps.

It is our responsibility not only as a nation but as a citizen of this planet (of our only home as we know it) to protect it and to ensure that planet continues to be liveable. Because we have only one home and one chance to protect it. Waiting is no longer a luxury that we have.

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