

SAVING OUR DYING OCEANS FROM PLASTIC

Relevant for: Environment & Disaster Management | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development & EIA

With everyone from Pope Francis to the Prime Minister at home eagerly ringing the plastics-ban gong, a number of brands stride in as champions to the cause. Sneakers, sunglasses and bikinis... the list is endless. When Leila Veerasamy named her recently-launched swimwear brand PA.NI (meaning 'not naked' in Mauritian creole and 'water' in Hindi), connecting the name to her Mauritian roots was not the only thing on her agenda.

"PA.NI shows its allegiance towards environmental conservation by using fabric made from recycled ocean plastic — part of the material is made from nylon sourced from recycled fishing nets," says Veerasamy, who launched her brand this September. With its breezy Instagram feed flooded with sunny locales and chic outfits for every body type, PA.NI aims at creating conversations around body positivity. The fabric used consists of two different yarns. "Our fabric has 78% econyl, which is made from recycled fishing nets, and the rest — close to 22% — is elastane," she says (2,500 at pa-ni.in).

Among collaborations taking the cause forward is Parley For The Oceans' (partnered with Adidas in 2016 to create sneakers from ocean debris) latest initiative, Clean Waves. First in a series of products made from marine debris is its range of sunglasses. Another pioneer in crafting stylish shades made from trashed ocean plastic and plant-based materials is US-based Norton Point (nortonpoint.com). "We partner with recycling facilities across the world to ensure a reliable flow of material. This is then re-purposed at our production facilities into usable goods," says Patrick Todd, brand manager of the three-year-old company.

But while intentions might be good, do the manufacturing costs make for good business? For Nils Wiiburg of Norway-based 'recycled' sneaker brand New Movements, the cost is justified given the benefit of doing away with synthetic materials. "With natural/recycled materials, the production cost is higher, but the cheaper synthetic options are not durable as natural leather or rubber, and end up in landfills sooner," says the PR manager, explaining why their products were launched on kickstarter.com in August 2018 — to reach customers directly. They have recently partnered with Empower, an Oslo-headquartered organisation that targets plastic waste in oceans through collection and recycling drives and awareness campaigns. "This ensures a dedicated source of raw material. We are building a Plastic Waste Fund to pay for cleaning up plastic waste by anyone, anywhere in the world," explains Wiiburg, adding: "The laces can be recycled to new plastic, the leather to new leather, the soles to new rubber products, the organic cotton to new cotton products, and the cardboard packaging to new cardboard."

But where does the plastic in our oceans actually come from? The answer to this lies in first identifying the varied types of plastic and how they ought to be recycled. Tracing its journey back to our cities, Sarita Fernandes, a Mumbai-based researcher, says of all the waste we generate in a day, only half of it is recycled. "The rest goes into the ocean," says the student of Public Policy, who is currently writing a paper on plastic debris in Goa and Mumbai. Toothbrushes, for example, she says, take close to a 1,000 years to decompose. Only high-end plastic, such as ones under grades four and five, are picked up for recycling. "So shouldn't we invest in recycling enterprises that deal with other kinds of plastic?" asks Fernandes.

Despite 25 Indian States and Union Territories imposing some sort of ban on plastic, their effectiveness varies. Sikkim, the nation's first fully organic State is perhaps the only shining example of tackling the plastic menace successfully in India: with campaigns highlighting the

drawbacks of open public defecation, afforestation and plastic use. We get you up to speed on the plastic ban in our coastal States.

After raids targeting bulk producers, the State municipality plans to introduce hand-held devices akin to ticket vending machines — to click pictures of citizens and shops using plastic — that will generate spot fine receipts. But this still does not hold manufacturers accountable. The Plastic Waste Management Rules (2016) has brought in Extended Producer's Responsibility (EPR), whereby manufacturers are required to deploy infrastructure to collect and aggregate multi-layered plastic packaging after EOL (end of life). But this is not being implemented, except with PET bottles.

It has been at least five months, but the law still says next to nothing on plastic polythene bags already in circulation. With no takers, they accumulate in warehouses and dumping grounds.

Experts highlight how the the lack of viable alternatives makes implementation tougher. Maharashtra and Karnataka, among other States, have already seen protests from retailers. "Right now, a vendor gets 100 plastic carry bags for 50 or less, whereas a cloth bag costs 15 or 20 each. This will fuel a parallel market for banned products," says Viji Ganesh of Chennai-based citizen-led NGO, Namma Ooru Foundation.

While the municipal body is in the process of setting up an online database of cloth and paper bag manufacturers, the ban still has many loopholes. For instance, plastic bags with less than 50 microns are prohibited but paper bags of 52 microns are being manufactured. "This isn't an improvement," says Vidya Amarnath, director at Chennai-based start-up Patterson Energy (PE).

For Sapna Karim of Bengaluru-based non-profit Janaagraha, the complex recycling process must be simplified. "We only get to read about sporadic instances of plastics being used while laying roads," she says. Dumping waste into the oceans is often just a matter of convenience. In Goa, collecting waste from beach shacks is difficult due to the distance from the roads. "Instead of taking the trash all the way to collection points (from where it goes to cement plants to generate thermal power), most of it is dumped in the water," says Sarita Fernandes.

For the state to have a success story, recyclers and manufactures alike need to be prioritised, and 'greener' alternatives such as jute and cotton have to be made cheaper. "Prohibitive costs of plastic waste aggregation, transportation, storage and segregation must be taken into account," says Viji Ganesh from Chennai, warning that, though a product may have the recycling symbol, you can never be sure if it actually is. She recommends that the huge network of post offices in our country be put to use as collection points/aggregation centres.

Even for recyclers, not all types and forms of plastic are viable. Some exchange only plastic bags, while straws hardly find any takers as they are difficult to recycle. We do not have specialised personnel for many categories, which is why most of the recyclables hit landfills. Our policies must also mention penalties and incentives. "There needs to be strong incentivisation for not using plastic and even for dropping plastic off at collection centres," says Karim of the Bengaluru-based non-profit, Janaagraha.

While cement companies have tied up with the Corporation to collect non-reusable and non-recyclable plastic waste to use as fuel in their kilns, it is not enough. With just two months to the ban, Amarnath of Patterson Energy has seen little change. At PE, a tonne of heterogeneous plastic mix, after recycling, results in close to 400 to 600 litres of a high-variant of diesel.

It is only when waste segregation becomes cheaper, allowing companies to stop buying plastic, that we can target the root of the plastic maze.

A mission to explore the bottom of each of the world's oceans.

Our existing notification subscribers need to choose this option to keep getting the alerts.

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

CrackIAS.com