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# GARBOLOGY LESSONS CREATE A NEW GENERATION OF LITTLE WASTE WARRIORS

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: null

Students of PACR Trust school, Rajapalayam

“In this ‘Follow The Bottle’ month, our students track the journey of the bottle from source to end,” says Shyamala Raja, coordinator of Garbology, a programme on waste management underway in 10 schools (managed by the RAMCO group, of which five are government aided), in Rajapalayam, Tamil Nadu. Last month, in the ‘Map My Soft Drink’ programme, children learnt to make an informed choice about the container when they decide to have a soft drink. “When disposed, a PET bottle will remain in a landfill for hundreds of years, a metal container can be recycled, and a glass bottle can be reused at least 30 times, the responsibility of making a choice rests in our hands,” says Shyamala.

Conceptualised and created by Auroville-based social entrepreneurs Ribhu Vohra and Chandrah Nusselein, the Garbology journey started with the founding of WasteLess, a non-profit social enterprise in 2011. “We believe that, through education, we can initiate significant changes in the way we make, dispose, and think about waste. Our dream was that children also become changemakers at home. Many take this new knowledge home and inspire changes there.”

Impressed by the research behind the programme, Nirmala Raju, who heads the CSR initiatives of the Rajapalayam-based RAMCO group, introduced the concept at Arsha Vidya Mandir in Chennai in 2014. “We have the Swachh Bharat Mission but what is the process behind managing our waste?” she asks. Simultaneously she facilitated the subject in 10 schools, five government-aided and five under the RAMCO group at Rajapalayam. She also met the State Education Minister and the subject was integrated into textbooks in 2019 and is taught in 234 government schools in Tamil Nadu. The activity-based programmes were stalled during the pandemic but are now back in full swing.

“We signed an MOU to train government school teachers in the subject and integrate the concept in to textbooks” says Nirmala pointing out that the behaviour change in children was evident and a key reason why the programme should be part of the syllabus. In a follow up, representatives of schools from across the 37 districts were trained at Tiruchirappalli and Rajapalayam, over four sessions. “We were sitting with government teachers and writing Garbology concepts. Millions of textbooks were printed in Tamil, English and Arabic,” says Nirmala explaining that information on plastics was integrated into the chapter on carbon and its compounds.

One of the first programmes, Garbology 101, is an interactive educational tool for the six–12 age group. A free online version, Garbolite contains 13 extensively tested classroom activities designed to instil knowledge of waste management and inspire behavioural change.

Ribhu who left his corporate job in the Netherlands in 2008 and spent a year travelling around the world discovered that waste management was a challenge in every country. He spent more than three years working on grassroots waste management projects with residents and local government, researching innovative and sustainable methods to increase resource recovery from Indian waste. Joined by Chandrah, with her background in child-centred pedagogy, the two developed Garbology 101.

Apart from looking at the best practices in all countries, the duo co-design the programmes along with teachers and students. “We sit at the back in classrooms and watch the teacher unspool our content and observe student reactions,” says Ribhu. “We see a keen interest to share information and 97% Ninety seven percent of the children go back home and share the information with their parents.” The team’s latest offering is the kNOw Plastic programme that includes a Memory Game.

“We introduced the activity-oriented programme in 2014 from Std I to Std VIII and are seeing a clear change in behaviour of students towards waste management,” says Arpitha Reddy, Deputy Correspondent of Arsha Vidya Mandir, Chennai. Some of their activities include segregating waste at source, weighing and knowing the quantity of waste generated daily, and composting waste in school. “Children learn to live sustainably in a very systematic way and are now familiar with themes related to Solid Waste Management and composting, like conscious consumerism and resource conservation. The senior students analyse the impact of the waste; they know what goes to the corporation and what will end in landfill,” says Arpitha. The school uses ECF (Elemental Chlorine Free) paper made from wheat straw, has a system of loaning textbooks to students of the next batch, students use steel lunch boxes and steel bottles.

The first batch of eight-10-year-olds who started learning Garbology at at Deviah Memorial Preparatory (DMP) school in Bittangala in Coorg are called little waste warriors. In a Waste Relay Race, they run to segregate a mixed bag of trash into four baskets: wet, dry, hazardous and rejects. Faced with doubts over a bottle of nail polish or a perfume bottle, they make an informed choice and bin it in the appropriate basket. Amid noise, laughter and confusion, the game teaches them to segregate solid waste.

Garbology was introduced in the school in 2017, says Savita Chengappa of the family-run boarding school that was founded in 1980. The school follows low waste and sustainable policies. Six months into their course, they put up The Garbology Skit in Kannada and took the act to government and tribal schools. “We reached out to almost 800 children and their teachers. Children are best conduits to teach other kids and their parents too,” says Savita.

Pavan Aiyappa, a volunteer teacher at DMP says that the subject is part of the curriculum. “We have added two more R’s — Rethink and Repair — to the four R’s of waste management — Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Refuse,” says Pavan. The lessons make the young ones think about ‘Want and Need’ and about actions like ‘Use and Throw’ to ‘Repair and Increase’ the life cycle. A mechanical engineer and planter, Pavan shuttles between Coorg and Bengaluru. By the end of 2018, he says that the DMP children had spread the concept, “taught them” to more than 800 children and their teachers in different schools. “We are reviving the subject after COVID-19 halted it,” he says.

Shyamala speaks proudly of the innovative ways the children are translating the learning to day-to-day living. At Swaach Vaibhavam, a festival on the garbology themes, held at PSK auditorium in PACR Educational Trust Campus in Rajapalayam, the children made a mobile urinal using bubble top water containers, a lampshade from single-use plastic, sofas from old tyres and scientific teaching aids from old stuff lying at home. “These are all manifestations of the change in thinking,” she says.

During the pandemic, the programme was kept alive through WhatsApp. “Most of our students are from underprivileged backgrounds and did not have access to online facilities. So we used social media, sent videos and shared their stories on waste management. We have kept the theme alive and are again reviving it with the Follow the Bottle programme,” she says.

Many school teachers report new behaviours like students bringing birthday treats without

packaging and homemade items instead of chocolates packed in plastic.

Shyamala recalls a former student telling her: “Madam your face crops up every time I look for a resin code on a plastic object.” She says happily, “It feels good to be recalled thus; the resin codes tell us how safe or harmful the plastic is. It is mandatory for manufacturers to have the code on the plastic.”

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## MINT

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: null

On the occasion of the World Earth Day on April 22, Zomato on Friday announced that it will go 100% 'plastic neutral' for its deliveries starting from April 2022. Additionally, online food delivery platform set the target to deliver more than 10 crore orders in sustainable packaging over the next three years. Deepinder Goyal, Zomato Founder and CEO, in a blogspot shared on Twitter said that the company recognises that it is important to start promoting biodegradable and other non-plastic alternatives to make them become as affordable and available as plastic is today.

Deepinder Goyal tweeted, "starting today, we will recycle 100% plastic used for food delivery packaging on [Zomato](#) orders. Also, over the next 3 years, we'll help cut down the plastic footprint of the restaurant sector."

Starting today, we will recycle 100% plastic used for food delivery packaging on Zomato orders. Also, over the next 3 years, we'll help cut down the plastic footprint of the restaurant sector.

Read more here – <https://t.co/rjigIBpIn8> [pic.twitter.com/OaZe18u4jJ](https://pic.twitter.com/OaZe18u4jJ)

In the blogspot, he wrote, "from now on, every meal you order through Zomato will be 100% plastic neutral, which means we will voluntarily recycle more than 100% of all plastic utilised in your order's packaging."

"We have started working with cutting edge ISO-certified plastic waste management organisations, who will partner with municipalities across India, to collect and responsibly process plastic waste," Goyal shared.

Asserting that more work lies ahead in order to completely reduce or eliminate the use of [plastic in food delivery](#), he said Zomato is also "amping up our efforts to develop and promote sustainable packaging for all types of cuisines."

"We are aiming to deliver over 100 million additional eco-friendly food delivery orders (orders in sustainable packaging) over the course of the next three years, by supporting our restaurant partners in switching to affordable and sustainable packaging alternatives," Goyal said.

"We're going to partner with various stakeholders working on innovative solutions and models for the restaurant industry including government-led initiatives, social enterprises and startups."

Acknowledging that this initiative is going to cost Zomato a significant amount of money and affect its profit and loss statement negatively, Goyal said, "However, I strongly believe that what's good for the planet is good for business. I also believe that profits happen when you do everything else right. And this is surely a step in the right direction."

Sharing steps taken by Zomato towards long-term sustainability, he said that last year the company had launched 'Climate Conscious Delivery' and also started funding local environmental projects to offset the carbon footprint of all its deliveries and packaging in India.

Zomato had also made 'no cutlery required' as the default option on its app. This helped ensure 74 per cent of orders go without cutlery "preventing tonnes of single-use plastic from reaching landfills," he said.

"We signed up for the EV100 initiative, and have committed to move to a 100 per cent EV (electric vehicle) fleet by 2030," he said adding, doing all this, last year, the company offset around 5,00,000 MTs of carbon emissions.

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