

Waste is not a Waste

We all do generate waste in our households, when we travel, when we go out for dining or for a marriage party – in short everywhere, wherever we are. And, certainly in most cases we do not care about the waste we do generate. We simply think that its not my responsibility to think or act towards that waste that I generate. It is someone else's responsibility and I am happy as long as I can see my surroundings cleared of waste. In fact, we could have continued this thought process unless the earth stated getting littered by waste materials all over.

You think of water bodies – oceans, lakes, rivers, ponds – all are found with loads of plastics and other wastes that are contaminating water and impacting creatures living in these water bodies adversely. I do not want to talk about cities, since all of us see how the waste materials polluting city environment. Go to the sea beaches, you will see how the beaches are littered with plastic bags, bottles and other wastes. Hills, which at one point of time were the places to breath fresh air and see clean ambiance, are also not spared. One can see wastes are all around, some littered by the visitors to the place as tourists; and the rest is by locals since their consumption behaviour has changed with availability of modern products and there is no awareness generation system so that people get to know what to do with their wastes generated. So, the simplest way to keep their place clean is to throw wastes down the hill. Thus, wherever modern consumption pattern makes a dent into living styles, we can see that wastes are dumped anywhere and everywhere, as long as the neighbour is not objecting only because he is being affected.

Is it really so difficult to handle waste? Or, what all we throw as waste, are they indeed a waste that cannot be utilised? Perhaps not. The solutions are much simpler than we think. Only what is required is passion for saving our environment and leaving a earth where our next generations can live without being crippled under the burden of pollution we leave for them. I am sure no one wants that the moment we think of our own future generation. What requires to handle waste generated by us is a mix of awareness, discipline and commitment to future.

Now, lets look at the way we think of waste. Anything that does not have any utility to us, we call it a waste. For instance, left over food, pet bottles, plastic bags, discarded clothes, shoes etc. The moment we decide that something is lost its value for our usage, we categorise it as waste and want that to be out from in front of our eyes. So, what we consider as wastes are either given to municipal (or private) waste collectors. We can classify wastes in four broad categories: 1) Wet waste, 2) Dry waste, 3) Hazardous and

Medicinal wastes and 4) Waste related to construction materials. Out of these 4 broad categories, except the hazardous wastes, everything else can be used.

Wet wastes are primarily kitchen wastes or vegetable wastes generated from any source be it households, markets, hotels etc. the entire waste can be used for composting purpose. Composts are not only sold in market to the farmers, but are equally useful for all of us to use in our gardens, whether be it kitchen or balcony gardens or lawns. And, the composting process is extremely simple for anyone. Moreover, the bad odour while producing compost is a myth. There is a liquid that removes entire odour of the wet waste that is used for composting.

The entire dry waste is recyclable. The prices vary according to the material and their conditions. Recyclers purchase each of these dry wastes. They use these dry waste either for their own recycling unit or sell it further to some other manufacturer. All of us have seen that the informal rag pickers collect wastes from road or from households, who we call as "Kabadiwalas". If you notice closely, you will see that they only take those wastes, which they can sell to recycles at a much higher value. And, many of us do sell them anything they are willing to pay is for, ranging from old newspapers to discarded televisions, mobile phones etc. This always poses a big danger for all of us. The reason being that these rag pickers sell whatever the recyclers buy and dispose of the rest either by burning or dumping it in open space. Many a times these includes hazardous wastes also and in this process significant pollution and health hazards are created.

Hazardous wastes are those which are toxic in nature and can create pollution to air, surface and water bodies. This is the waste which needs to handles with extreme care since it directly affects human health. Therefore, this is treated separately and more cautiously compared to others. This is generally not used for any purpose and disposed off with care so that neither human beings nor ground water levels are in any contact of these materials. The construction wastes are generally used for filling up low lying areas to build further constructions.

Therefore, as I told at the beginning that waste is not a waste is actually a fact. All other wastes barring the hazardous waste has their utility and has economic value. Currently, the new phrase that represents the value of the "waste" is known as circular economy. Precisely, the waste generated in a economy is re-used and again given back to economy with an economic value attached to it. If it is so, why do I even write this article and share with you?

The catch is we, the user of the products sold to us, do not know when we discard them as waste after using it. Except a few cities, till now in India residents of different municipalities do not know what is wet, dry or hazardous waste etc. Therefore, we put anything and everything that we call as waste in a single bin dedicated for waste. At that step itself, waste becomes a waste in true sense. One we mix wastes of different types, we cannot reuse them in most of the cases. The only way we can dispose of the mixed wastes is either dump those in landfills or send to some energy plant where those can be burnt and energy can be produced in a less efficient manner.

A little bit of awareness coupled with discipline to segregate wastes into wet, dry and hazardous will benefit the entire society, in turn all of us. This will not only save our environment, but will also help those who are engaged in waste collection related activities as well as recycling activities. A little bit of effort on part of each of us can finally everyone in a much larger scale. So, do not waste your waste, utilise it.