

PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENT FOR HUMAN LIFE

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Part - I

As another anniversary of World Earth Day is upon us, the issues raised at the first observation of this event still plague the globe and especially a developing country such as India. Issues such as environment deterioration, industrial pollution, loss of wilderness and toxic waste are more relevant now than ever before. Perhaps more so in Lydia's leading industrial state, Maharashtra.

Pollution:

Air:

Air pollution has been a major concern for the state due to increased commercialization and industrial development. In 2009, a Central pollution Control Board (CPCB) report ranked five industrial towns of Maharashtra, namely Chandrapur, Dombivali, Aurangabad, Navi Mumbai and Tarapur among the 43 critically polluted industrial clusters out of 88 in the country with Chandrapur among the top 10. Their expansion was put on hold. The levels of Respirable Suspended particulate matter (RSPM), one of the four main toxic pollutants, in the state capital and commercial hub, Mumbai, are always above 200 micrograms per cubic meter even though the permissible limit is 100 micrograms per cubic meter. Pune has an exceedance factor of 1.5 from its permissible limit which puts it in the 'high pollution' category as per standards. Civic bodies such as the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) organize annual tree plantation drives but tree survival rate is not adequate. However, citizen drives and NGOs undertake regular planting of saplings in cities such as Mumbai and Pune, citizen groups and resident associations actively take up green causes with civic officials.

Noise:

Although noise pollution, especially during festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi and Diwali, was a major grouse earlier with residents in cities such as Mumbai, levels have dropped significantly

in recent years due to increased awareness by environmental groups and strict enforcement by the police which ensures low volume and sound not travelling beyond limits, and not loudspeakers. However, vehicular traffic and noise due to construction are still a bone of contention.

Water:

Due to the efforts by various NGO,s and the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board MPCB, eco-friendly celebration of festivals has caught on.

For example, eco-friendly Ganpatis have become hugely popular in cities such as Mumbai and Pune. This is important as idols made of POP do not dissolve easily and pollute the water. At the government level, MPCB ties up with various clay idol makers every year and puts up a list of such makers on their website to promote the practice besides conducting various awareness campaigns in conjunction with local NGOs.

Waste:

Due to increase in population and changing lifestyles in urban areas, the amount of waste generated in the state is high. Mumbai generates around 6,500 tonnes of solid waste per day according to BMC records, one of the highest in the country. According to the CPCB, Maharashtra ranks first among the states.

Efforts for effective waste management in cities such as Mumbai have not achieved desired results due to lack of space for dumping waste.

Use of Plastics:

The menace of plastic in the state truly came to the fore when thin plastic bags choked the drains and caused water logging during the 2005 floods in Mumbai. In the aftermath of the incident, the government proposed a complete ban on plastics but later decided to ban only bags of thickness less than 50 microns. Plastic degrades slowly which means it remains in the environment for a long time and is known to release toxic substances. However, it may be a long time before plastic is completely banned in the state due to its widespread utility. But the anti-plastic movement is gaining stream in cities such as Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur where 'Say no to plastic' campaigns have led to various citizens carrying cloth or paper bags for grocery and general shopping, while at the policy level, Mahabaleshwar recently issued a blanket ban on plastic usage in the hill station.

Mangrove conservation:

Environmental concerns in a coastal state such as Maharashtra are many since, apart from the other ecosystems, coastal ecosystems such as mangroves and wetlands also need to be conserved. Mangroves are important as they act as a bio shield and protect coastal areas from erosion and natural disasters such as hurricanes and tsunamis. However, protection of these ecosystems requires effort as urbanization and development issues compound the problem.

Thankfully, environmental groups and citizens have been fighting the battle. In the state and earned important victories such as in 2005 when the Bombay High Court declared government-owned mangroves as 'protected forests' and ordered a total freeze on destruction of mangroves and banned any construction or garbage dumping in those areas. On its part, the state government has notified about 5,469 hectares of mangroves and handed them over to the forest department. However, encouraging signs have emerged recently with the state forming a special mangrove cell to protect this eco-system.

Although Maharashtra has made concerted efforts to deal with environmental problems, more needs to be done at the policy level. Not just awareness drives and campaigns, action directly dealing with the problems is required. As it looks to achieve more industrial progress and as urbanization increases, the government agencies, local organizations and the citizens of Maharashtra must all become stakeholders in this process of conservation so that development and environment can go hand in hand.

References:

Std. 10th English Text SSC Board.