

The background of the image is a dark blue and purple night sky filled with numerous white stars of varying sizes. In the foreground, there is a silhouette of a forest of evergreen trees. The text is centered in the middle of the image.

TOPIC OF THE WEEK

DEC'18 (20 to 26)

Plastic is ubiquitous

Environmental pollution is the biggest problem in the modern times and no species on earth is untouched by this issue. The contamination of the natural environment gives birth to lots of diseases in human beings and affects the normal survival of animals and other organisms. We waste the bounties of our nature without a thought that our actions cause serious problems. We must deepen our knowledge of nature`s laws and broaden our understanding of the laws of the human behavior in order to deal with pollution problems.

Till 1980's only a few shops were offering plastic bags in America. So for the generations born after 1980's, irrespective of the economic strata they belonged to, usage of plastic products is a part of their lives. Today, they are all perplexed as to how they would survive without using water bottles, carry bags and other products. Every year monsoon throw up horrific images and the main reason for the flooding is the plastic products choking all the city's water outlets. If we simply take a walk on any roads in big, medium, or small city in

India we get to see Street after street is littered with plastic–bags, bottles, and cutlery. Take a train ride, and the arrival of a station is heralded not by the site of landmarks of the city but plastic waste littered along the rail tracks. More than three decades ago, Barry Commoner, an American cellular biologist had said, “Environment pollution is an incurable disease. It can only be prevented.” Before the advent of plastic bags, we did survive, and we lived in a cleaner environ. We carried cloth or embroidered bags to buy our groceries, which were packed in those large conical shaped handmade–paper bags. The smaller versions are given by the street–side chanawala today. For oil and ghee, we carried dabbas from home or were given tin dabbas. Milk was distributed in glass bottles which were exchanged the next day for fresh ones. Fruits like grapes, berries and others were packed in Peepal leaves. While travelling, drinking water was carried in clay pots or surais. Festival or wedding lunches were served in banana leaves or stitched plates made from Peepal tree leaves. Plastic remains to be the worst offender because it is so versatile that it is used almost everywhere. One such harmful product is the plastic container in which you eat your food. The implications of eating from a plastic box

are serious and there is much evidence to support it. More than 92 percent of patients who underwent treatment for hair loss at a clinic in Bengaluru were found to have BPA – a chemical used to make plastic – in their blood. And the worst part is that the harmful effects of plastic are not restricted to only to the hair. Not only is it linked to heart problems, but BPA is also found to be responsible for causing damage to brain and hormone production and triggering severe health conditions such as ADHD and diabetes.

Mountains of plastic trash have been found everywhere in the world's oceans. More than floating around in the water column, plastic trash is found in the guts of more than 90% of the world's sea birds, in the stomachs of more than half of the world's sea turtles , and it's even choking the life out of whales . At the rate at which plastic is accumulating in the oceans of the planet, it's predicted that, by 2050, the mass of plastic in the world's oceans will exceed the mass of all the fish that live there. Even sea salt winds up being polluted by plastic. More established is the fact that degraded plastics found in the ocean are ingested by marine wildlife, making their

way up the food chain and perhaps winding up at the dinner table.

Plastic straws are also the essential part of our life and it is harmful for both the environment and human bodies as well. Most single-use plastic straws are made from polypropylene, a type of plastic commonly made from petroleum. Sipping from a straw introduces air into the digestive tract. This can cause uncomfortable digestive symptoms, such as gas and bloating. Drinking sugary or acidic beverages through a straw can increase the likelihood of cavities. Most single-use plastic straws are made from polypropylene, a type of plastic commonly made from petroleum and chemicals from polypropylene can leach into liquids and may release compounds that could affect estrogen levels, especially when exposed to heat, acidic beverages or UV light.

The world is now struggling to recover from its plastic pollution hangover. Corporations, municipalities, and even national governments are proposing and implementing bans on plastic straws. Seattle became the largest U.S. city to ban plastic straws. They're not

alone. Starbucks plans to phase out plastic straws by 2020. McDonald's recently announced it will ban plastic straws at its U.K. and Ireland restaurants. Bon Appétit Management, a food service company with 1,000 U.S. locations, announced last May it will phase out plastic straws. Alaska Airlines will be one of the first airlines to phase out plastic straws and stirrers, in part thanks to an environmentally conscious girl scout. Steps like these play a substantial role in better future

The main reasons for uncontrolled rise in plastic pollution are permissive legal framework and careless attitude among the people. If we want a healthy future – a future of clean cities, rivers and beaches. We need combination of both responsibility and awareness.

Suggested Reading:

- <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2018/07/news-plastic-drinking-straw-history-ban/>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/sep/08/sea-salt-around-world-contaminated-by-plastic-studies>