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She has designs on your garbage

Karunya Keshav



Waste is her business: Poonam Bir Kasturi, the brain behind the eco-conscious Daily Dump. — Photo: Karunya Keshav

One part business, two parts design, a handful of ideas and a lot of garbage — that's what Daily Dump is made of. A venture started by National Institute of Design graduate and founding faculty of Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology Poonam Bir Kasturi, Daily Dump helps individuals and communities manage household waste through composting.

"Waste takes the least priority in municipal budgets," says Poonam, explaining the rationale behind her start-up. "Seventy per cent of funds are spent on collection and 20 per cent on transport, leaving only 10 per cent towards disposal."

With little hope that governments would wade through the political minefield that is waste management legislation, 'compostwali' Poonam believes her "no excuses" approach could help neighbourhoods keep as much as 60 per cent of household waste in Bangalore out of landfills. "Communities must understand that community composting is easy to do," she says.

Not one afraid to get her hands dirty — metaphorically of course, for Daily Dump is all about hygienic methods that keep smells and maggots away — Poonam put up leaf composters outside her home and workplace in Indiranagar. However, the initial support fizzled out. Rigid attitudes towards waste, indifference to waste segregation and logistics of setting up composting units are only some of the challenges to community composting, she says. The "any street is my dustbin" attitude is almost impossible to change, she adds.

However, she says, flats in the newer localities of Bangalore, not included in the Bruhat Banagalore Mahanagara Palike's garbage collection programme, have successfully adopted community composting. And, in the four years since Daily Dump started, it has around 4,500 customers. Over 3,500 kg of organic waste has been composted.

Compost in 90 days

What sets Daily Dump apart from other economic models of waste management is a strong emphasis on "finding solutions through design". The smelliest of rubbish goes into the prettiest of painted terracotta products. Thanks to the team's trial-and-error ridden research to deal with waste without the mess, the corner of your garden with the earthworms and vegetable peels gets a makeover. In its place stand artistically shaped pots that take what you throw and return rich compost in 60 to 90 days.

The idea of stripping away unfavourable attitudes by scrubbing a seemingly dirty thing clean is something Poonam and her team have taken to the informal sector of street waste-collectors in and around Indiranagar. Poonam explains, with a fair degree of indignation, how neighbourhoods would welcome a brightly-lit coffee-chain outlet, but drive away a waste-collector.

She is interested in the possibilities for waste management if this "autonomous" and "resourceful" community can share its knowledge. With a belief in microenterprises and collective ownership concepts, Daily Dump is happy to share its know-how. All information, including how to start home composting or a similar business venture is freely available, for free, under a creative common licence.

As a result, Daily Dump has 15 "clones" around India and abroad — autonomous businesses that are following and sharing the Daily Dump model for waste management. "I'm not a green," Poonam says, tossing out an oft-used label. "I'm just an experimenter, an explorer. That too, without a rigorous methodology!"

"All our journeys are stories," she adds, "I chose to tell this story. And for that, my life is richer."

Visit www.dailydump.org or call 9916426661.

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Poonam Bir Kasturi believes neighbourhoods can save landfills from 60 per cent of household waste