



MATTER OF GOKARNA ECOCIDE

FACTS OF THE CASE – GOKARNA FEATURES

1. OUTLINE – Facts in brief

Potentially Gokarna might be the wealthiest Gram Panchayat of the whole Uttara Kannada district, would its multiple resources be properly managed.

The Petitioner, extremely concerned with the adverse effects of uncontrolled and unplanned tourism growth at Gokarna (with its extensive use & throw practices of wastes including banned plastic materials), the rampant illegal commodification of environment, the large-scale burning of garbage including plastic wastes, the death of water bodies by dumping all kinds of wastes, etc., got prepared to make a move in Gokarna waste management and sanitation.

Due to sheer number lakhs of floating population, the waste management is a bigger issue than in smaller towns and, with the water channels, creeks and *tirthas* filled with solid waste and sewage, the place has not only become an endemic abode for mosquitoes spreading but the blocking of these of creeks and disposal of raw sewage into them has contaminated the water bodies and ground water.

Then, despite the comprehensive system of rules available, the information and caveats given by State and Central authorities, garbage is openly dumped and burned everywhere by public and Grama Panchayat, drains are clogged with trash, banned plastics are given at all shops day after day.

The difficulties are many but not impossible to overcome. It only requires a broad, intense, inclusive, joint actions/ concerted and robust effort.

To trigger a change, Khushi Parisara has designed at 2016 an **Action Plan** to establish a fundamental 'Trash Change' in the way people view their relationship with trash, building a healthy community by a clean environment, through simple everyday actions. It was all about to develop new practices, implementing positive activities focused on education, community and governance actors, assuming that without a paired action (public/governors) no change is bound to be sustained.

So, if local strong stakeholders, together with empowered state governors, bet on Gokarna as a green pilgrimage place, preparing it to be part of the Green Pilgrimage Network, that might bring an effective and durable change with a broad range of benefits – environmental at the top.

Khushi Parisara sought to drive an intense, vast and deep collaborative endeavor with all the stakeholders, but it ended up having to fight a daily fight with the ignorance, indifference, lethargy of local bodies and administration.

Outreach programs can be done, local bodies can be reminded of their duties, listing and calling their attention for them, clean-ups can be conducted, surveys can be made, corporations can be motivated for eco-friendly behaviour, for re-sourcing resources; It is possible to explain, propose, remind, teach, call press meets, create and install eco-collecting points, etc., as Khushi Parisara did it.

BUT it was not possible to implement the laws, approve policies, allot funds for environment protection, for waste remediation, force civic bodies to lead the way on complying with Environment and Waste Management rules, showing the general public the way to follow. Indeed Khushi Parisara COULD NOT and its actions were blocked by their inaction.

There are enough guidelines provided by the government, enough notifications, orders, enough complaints to get the work done. However, given the amount of inertia, of lethargy, of damage, of violation, of political pressure, no regular officer will be able to tackle Gokarna situation.

Gokarna is a challenge. A huge challenge, as it got the self- and hetero-empowered right of being out of rules and regulations, out of commons, out of any concern with nature, grounded on their **nefarious governance system of "not governing themselves, nor allowing to be governed"**.

2. DETAILED FACTS OF THE CASE AND SUBSTANTIAL ISSUES

A – Broad-spectrum

1. Massive CRZ violations all along the Gram Panachayat coast with huge buildings disposing wastes at the seashore and burning them openly.
2. Chronic discharge of fecal sludge & raw sewage to dunes, seashore, water drains & water bodies
3. Appalling usage of all types of banned plastics sanctioned by local authorities
4. Unlicensed tourism operators (hotels, restaurants, resorts, homestays, etc.) indulge in plastic pollution, encroachment of drains, roads, dunes, seashore, etc.
5. Gram Panchayat long standing illegal open dumping in Forest area
6. Devastating common waste dumping and burning all around the place
7. Unanswered Reports & Complaints notified by PHC Officer on S&L W Mismanagement
8. Escalating of unlicensed hoteliers buildings
9. Dunes replaced by homestays
10. Clog of water drains with solid waste
11. Roads and roadsides full of waste
12. Glass bottles thrown (and broken) EVERYWHERE
13. Recurrent burning of waste by GP workers and public
14. Persistent outlet of toilets into water bodies and seashore
15. Huge amount of waste dumped into the sangam by shopkeepers
16. Ingrained filthiness of bus stand, fishmarket, sangam banks, tirthas, santhe
17. Non compliance with S&LWM rules by Hoteliers, Tourist and Pilgrims operators
18. Water drains used as incinerators, urinals, waste bins, sewage & fecal sludge collectors

B – Specific Gram Panchayat Solid Waste MisManagement:

1. Lack of adequate planning, scheduling, segregation, workers, supervisor, vehicles
2. No accurate collection of SWM charges/penalties are being taken by Gram Panchayat
3. Scarce and incorrect waste collection by GP of mixed waste
4. No segregation of waste at source, at collection, at transportation, at disposal.
5. Huge gap between generation and collection of waste
6. Huge gap between sweeping and collecting
7. Absence of disposal instructions for tube lights, Sanitary items, E-waste, Demolition, Hazardous, etc.
8. Absence of bins at shops and for secondary collection at visitors areas
9. Last but not the least, a complete lack of transparency on the absence of Sanitary Landfill and dearth of request for it – crucial for a place like Gokarna very far from the ZERO WASTE requirements.

REQUEST FOR SOLUTIONS

Most of the snags do not require a big project or financial investment in order to be solved, rather a simple but **robust mechanism of daily, weekly and monthly enforcement of laws and bylaws and frequent reviews of the situation**. However, because the situation in Gokarna is beyond a routine administrative governance, by all reasons and facts brought to the knowledge of authorities, the commitment of paramount stakeholders is unavoidable, with immediate ENFORCEMENT OF RULES.

A. IMMEDIATE ROBUST ENFORCEMENT of rules, regulations and orders, namely:

1. GENERAL

- a) Undertake wastes management in compliance with WM Rules & Panchayat Raj Act
- b) zero plastics stance in compliance with PWM rules
- c) bulk waste generators lawfully processing of wet waste
- d) CRZ rules – remove all illicit buildings
- e) STOP chronic discharge fecal sludge to water bodies, dunes, drains, etc.

2. GRAM PANCHAYAT PRODDINGS/ENJOINMENTS

- a) Fix bylaw for penalties for giving plastics to public, littering, burning trash, dumping trash anywhere, failure to segregate garbage at source
- b) Provide suitable training for sanitary workers (public toilets, sweepers, drivers)
- c) Stop burning trash by GP workers, ensuring no burning of trash anywhere
- d) Notify strict waste management at Santhe, poultry stores, Bhojana, High School & temples
- e) Notify shopkeepers to keep bins outside and not litter on road or drain
- f) Notify temples to ban plastic bags inside premises
- g) Notify *karma mantapas* to properly dispose garbage stopping their customers chronic dumping
- h) Notify shacks/hotels to collect waste dumped by their customers at shore
- i) Notify Bus Stand to keep premises clean
- j) Provide loud announcement on waste rules
- k) Distribute a handbill on waste good practices mindfulness at all households
- l) Provide waste management liability memo to all **shops, temples, hotels**, etc
- m) Clean the nala banks dumping spots & put warnings to prevent dumping

- n) Clean the GP dumped place at Belle Hittala
- o) Fix boards and distribute SWM handbill to visitors

B. CONTRIVANCE OF INFRASTRUCTURAL CHANGES

1. **CREATE** a liable committee coordinated with CEO and DEC to reverse Gokarna disaster [composed of Government Stakeholders, proposed list attached] **[ANNEXURE E]**
2. **APPOINT** for 1 year a knowledgeable Environmental Engineer for (vide Prayer5)
 - a) drawing a comprehensive Strategic Rescue Plan to be accomplished by the Committee
 - b) triggering the stern implementation of the Strategic Rescue Plan
3. **PLACE** an IAS officer as Gokarna PDO for the same period
4. **ASSIGN** immediately a legal landfill and specific areas for decentralized waste processing
5. **ENGINEER** a sound and sustainable Gokarna Sangam Remediation Project
6. **ENGAGE** Tourism Department to submit a Waste Management Plan for Gokarna

PRAYERS

1. A ward-wise survey within a specific time frame piloted by a team assigned to assess the waste conditions, exhaustively identifying chronic waste hotspots, mandatorily attended by the respective GP member/s, and providing appropriate record of the pollution extent, ranking wards as most, moderate and less polluted.
2. To charge the answerable stakeholders for the violations, mismanagement and non enforcement of rules that created the issues.
3. To direct the outline of a comprehensive, systemic, time-framed remedial Action Plan, with the liable stakeholders, reflecting the assessment of the survey
4. To ensure accurate monitoring of the remediation process [within a pre-given form], with monthly report.
5. To deploy for a given period of time, an environmental official, extremely experienced, knowledgeable, skilled, deeply connoisseur of the local issues, to tackle the situation in full time, to trigger the needful emergency and structural changes.
6. To call Legal Service Committee of District for
 - a) Monitoring and acting on identified Wastes Management and Environmental violations
 - b) Refer liable officers who fail their responsibilities
7. To fully enforce laws, bylaws, orders and guidelines in a given timeframe.