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PLASTIC TURMOIL - IS BAN A WAY AHEAD?

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Abstract

Plastic waste has become a nightmare for the urban environment which has also turned into intense and highlighted debates in various section of the media today. There is a huge concern that is growing day by day in the municipality as well as public because environmental damage due to plastic has led to an alarming situation. The markets leading to plastic waste shows that there is a continuous increase in the waste compounded at an annual growth rate of 10%. To further understand the issues, the article shall investigate how plastic waste has become an alarming situation and what major impacts it holds. The article will also throw light on whether plastic ban is one of the steps taken forward to protect the environment or just a misconception. After establishing the above concept, the paper shall investigate the pathway of a case study in India and the inter-relatedness of environment and plastic waste along with recommendations via legal lens.

Landscape

Plastic waste is one of the most debatable topics in media today and has become a nightmare for the urban environment. The major contributors to plastic waste have been the construction, health care, textiles and automotive industries. Research shows that there is an increase of 10% of plastic waste that is compounded at an annual growth rate and in volume 8.33 million metric tons per annum. The study further shows that by 2020 this shall reach to 22 million metric tons per annum. This growth shall further be compelled with initiatives taken by the government such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Skill India, and Digital India. However, a recent call for plastic ban has been taking away the sway of waste management. A lot of states in India have

banned plastic bags due to illegitimate and unsurfaced way of disposing waste. India is facing an inflow of plastic waste at a hawk of more than 15,000 tons per day. Studies by Central Institute of Plastic Engineering & Technology and Central Pollution Control Board in 60 major cities have suggested that 66% of plastic waste is generated and most of it is from the urban household areas above from that the city's existing with the plan of plastic ban are also amongst it.

Plastic waste management-The success?

In India, plastic waste is a major environmental and public health issue, especially in urban areas. In India, due to problems of overuse and litter-ing, plastic bags of all sizes and thickness are o-ften found occupying the city landscape. In advance to being a mere eye sore, plastics have become an issue as they clog drains and gutters. Not to mention, open plastic waste dumping is harmful for the stray animals as these animals consume them and end up getting sick. Foreseeing the issue Plastic Waste Management Rules (PWR), 2011, came into recognition to ensure the management of plastic by setting up a committee at a state level to monitor the plastic waste. The rules in furtherance tended to issue plastic bags by setting a benchmark for the thickness of plastic and to charge the retailer for each bag made accessible. This rule was however taken over by the Plastic Waste Management Rules 2016. The major change to be seen, was an increase in the thickness of the plastic bag from 40 microns to 50 microns, and this part of the regulations contributed to the importers of the plastic. The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, allowed spot fines but strict fines along with legal aspects can itself become a challenging aspect. Once again, the rules were revised to be known as the 2018 Rules on Plastic Waste Management (Amendment). The major role played by the 2018 amendments was to categorize a multi- layered packaging into a recyclable category or with some alternative use . These are generally seen in the packaging of fruit juices, and the recycling of these products are termed to be expensive due to its multi-layered properties. Looking through the rules and amendm in order to manage waste, it does not resolve the common issues one faces and contributes to the environment which is dumping of solid waste. If the solid waste is dumped at the current rate it would require 1,240 hectares of landfill site each year. In India per capita solid waste is generated at 0.17 kg per person per day in rural areas and 0.62 kg per person in the urban areas. Unmanaged landfills are a significant cause of pollution of groundwater. The soil quality of neighbouring ranges is affected by a combination of toxic material and decaying organic material from a landfill site and affecting the biodiversity. The landfills transmit few CHG gases such as carbon dioxide and methane

that constitute 90 to 98 percent in themselves. Due to this CHG gases trap extreme UV rays leading to climate change and methane being combustible in nature causes landfill fires.

The Turning Point

In the writ petition filed by Karuna Society for Animals and Nature v Union of India , The Supreme Court had asked the State and the Union to consider Plastic Ban, but as the debate arises is plastic ban a way ahead or is it the best way to decrease the rate of plastic.

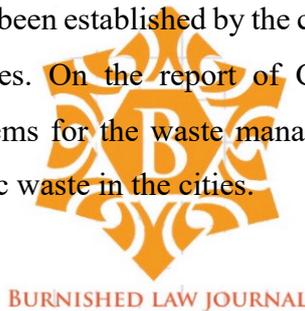
How the Government Reacted

The Government has been participating actively in incorporating statutory provisions along with the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 where it had prohibited the use of plastic bags below thickness of 50 microns. Further, the rules also required a pre-registration fee to be paid by the importers, vendors and the manufactures. Different state legislation has been carrying out different rules as of partial ban to complete bans on plastic bags. Advisories on the usage of plastic waste in road making has been established by the central government. However, these rules haven't got a name in states. On the report of CPCB it has been claiming that implementation of organized systems for the waste management hasn't been done properly which has led to a turmoil of plastic waste in the cities.

The Plastic Ban

The ban on Plastic led to a huge hue and cry in the cities, but the ban hasn't been enforced effectively, therefore it still exists in the market, as of by the fruit or vegetable seller or by the clogged sewage drains. Ensuring necessary monitoring assessment is still a big challenge for the local government as a large area is under impact. Would this turmoil be solved by imposing a ban? Though this idea can be innovative, but the question here also arises regarding the economic factors and the applicability of such ban, which remain silent within themselves. Single use bags can become one adherence which includes of paper bags, and which can make plastic ban less effective. Switching to paper bags also leads to environment concerns as a good amount of water would be used for its manufacturing and its transportation escalating the green house emission, which is all a concern within itself. Hence, for an alternative to be considered the costing and feasibility of such an alternative, need to be evaluated as well.

Carry Out Bag Fee



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The turning point was the Plastic Waste Rules Amendment 2018, which removed Section 15 related to pricing of plastic bags that was earlier introduced in 2016. This had been a degrading moment as the pricing scheme was bringing in a change gradually. A study that was carried by Delhi School of Economics in 2011 showed that incentives to customers had reduced plastic bags usage but in a country with little enforcement capacity, such a ban probably would not be the best strategy to be considered in. The study further showed that instead 82% of consumers would switch to their own bags if they were charged for the bag. Various cities in the U.S.A like Washington, California, Chicago has seen success by imposing a fee on the plastic bag, and which has showed a behavioral change in customers. The alarming situation is that vendors still have access to cheap plastic bags below 40 microns which is a cause for concern and must be addressed.

The Way Ahead

Plastic waste is a significant challenge, and an assessed approach is required. A huge void needs to be filled even if initiatives such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan exist in the country. Adherence of alternatives must be introduced along with awareness campaigns and highlight the best practices, by discouraging the use of plastic bags. The alternatives introduced should be cost effective, more durable and should be the best fitted option. A priced should be predefined for whether a plastic bag or an alternative. This shall, lead to behavioral change which will nullify the use of plastic bags. The government should give serious consideration to reintroduce this in the legislation and follow a mechanism where they can also levy strict fine on the defaulters. Apart from this, an assessed way of mapping of waste and effective way of implementation of plastic waste management mechanism is required in the cities. Incentives and funding for bio-based products should also be promoted to encourage businesses and customers. As there is no one way to address the problem, a structured approach is required to address the turmoil.

Conclusion

Plastic usage and consumption will never come to a full stop in the age of urbanization and amid growing demand. This calls for a constructive designed structure to inculcate the waste management and use of sustainable options. For plastic wastes, the municipalities should maintain a proper plan and improve towards scientific management of plastic. Introduction of a scheme of pricing should be involved as this will not only lead to a switch, but an extreme behavioral change can be seen. Although plastic ban might seem to be a good call, but the

availability and the economic factors need to be assessed while carrying out the search for the best suited alternatives. Further the use of bio based, and biodegradable plastics can be used in for the minimization of waste. Biodegradable items should be promoted especially in the large scale. Hence, we can conclude that this could be a long process to get through but by implementing an effective strategy, a lot can be saved by revolving around the green economy cycle.

