

## Make a choice...now

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When you are faced with garbage or pollution, don't just complain. Step in and see if you can make a difference.

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I lived in a metropolitan city during my school and college days. The problems of urban living — pollution, garbage and so on — bothered me. I discussed the issue with my friends, cribbed about it, penned down some thoughts in the form of poetry. But I never really got down to doing anything. I told myself `what choice do I have'? Looking back I realise that I did not make an effort to find out why. Today, I work for an environmental action group, and every day I come across people who have sought, found and spread the message of doing things a little differently. Recently I heard of a group of students who got together to go bird watching. I also hear of protests they stage when birds are killed, and of others who campaign to conserve the Delhi Ridge Forest, which is considered the "green lung" of Delhi.

You might say that these are big things. Not everyone can campaign or would have an interest in watching and counting birds. But you can think of the many small things you can do that would make a difference to our earth and in turn for our being. For instance, when you buy a cold drink or a packet of branded potato chips, try and find out a little more about the company that is manufacturing it. This is especially important as so many multinational corporations flood our market with "choices" for us. Understand the level of damage the manufacturing of some of these products might be causing to the environment and to the people living close to the factory. And, if you feel strongly about it, then boycott the products. Two years ago I was driving on the Jaipur-Udaipur highway in Rajasthan, and the countryside was scarred and ugly. All along were marble quarries, with newly formed hills of marble dust. The Aravalli ranges looked as if they had been eaten into. And then I thought of my home, and the marble I have used. I thought to myself, `was it really needed'? I guess, that's the question all of us need to ask. Are there less destructive alternatives? Exercising this option can make a difference. There is the most talked about practice of reducing, refusing and reusing plastic. While I was in college, a friend of mine suggested that I try and first reduce the use of plastic in my life by carrying a cloth bag when shopping or carry a glass during a train journey to have tea.

This can be applicable to everyone. So the next time a shopkeeper gives you the goods in a plastic bag or container, refuse. I have not been able to change all the things in my lifestyle, as I am surrounded by stuff that is environmentally unfriendly. But, I do feel we should be looking for alternatives. We can form a network among our friends. Even this beginning is a matter of making choices, and we need to do it to make a difference.

*In collaboration with Kalpavriksh/National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan*