

## Editorial Note

Our urban centres are severely impacted by rapid urbanisation, which has created severe problems related to waste management, environmental pollution, and public health. Along with this, pressures from the market and poor support from the state have put our food systems under the control of profit-seeking powers whose interest lies in separating the 'consumer' from the 'food producer'. What this has resulted in are obviously unsustainable and harmful agricultural practices. The practices pushed by the Green Revolution still remain common in the agriculture sector. It increased dependence on chemical fertilisers and intensive irrigation methods, resulting in the importance of agricultural 'waste' shrinking considerably.

However, contrary to popular belief, urban agriculture is a well-integrated part of many cities of India. Home gardens are the most prominent form of private green space managed by women, where waste generated at the household level has been traditionally used as an organic input in many places. It is economically sensible too and can be a source of manure and nutrient-rich compost to improve the fertility of the soil. Farming in the city also remains a life source for the urban poor, providing livelihoods, access to nutritious food, less exposure to pollution and better health. Less explored has been the possibility of tackling another major issue that our overgrown cities face- waste.

Under capitalist urbanisation, waste is overproduction and a 'non-value' that can neither be consumed nor be invested back into the process of production. The production process itself is a linear rather than a circular system, focused solely upon increasing the rate of profit by externalising the cost of producing waste. Landfills have become a common sight in cities and an easy way to dispose of things that are no longer "useful". In this, the share of organic waste is also huge. In Delhi, thousands of tons of garbage are generated daily, consisting of agricultural waste, waste from households and commercial establishments, and human waste. When we reconsider our common understanding of "waste", it opens up possibilities of approaching the issue of waste management more holistically.

Suppose we start thinking about the problem of waste differently. In that case, the substances categorised as 'waste' can actually form a symbiotic relationship with urban agriculture, where compostable waste and surplus heat can be turned into consumable outputs. Due to its close proximity to cities, urban agriculture can easily absorb a significant amount of waste generated in urban centres and integrate it into the food system. It can help us move towards a more sustainable food system and healthier urban environment.

Rethinking how we perceive waste can help tackle many urban issues. It is directly tied up with the reduction in ecological footprint. The production phase of food contributes to almost half of the overall GHG emissions in the food system. The efficient management of food waste by turning it into fertiliser and energy can reduce GHG across the entire food system. Moreover, combining other forms of "waste" to create energy has even more potential to impact our food systems' overall ecological footprint. Wastewater can be used for irrigation in acutely water-stressed city regions. Agricultural waste like stubble which remains a serious concern due to its contribution to air pollution can be integrated into the soil to increase fertility. Even biomass could be incorporated into the nutrient cycle through organic waste and can also prevent soil contamination. This edition of Beejpatra is a small contribution to building a clear understanding of the role urban farming can play in addressing the problem of waste.

In this edition, Arpita shares a personal anecdote about how a chance encounter with Kuvempu and his poetry helped her understand the connection between the disintegrating state of her city, the need for better waste management and how all citizens can contribute to reversing this process through simple acts like decentralised segregation and composting.

Kapil and Namrata, both associated with the innovative initiative Edible Routes, share stories of residents of a neighbourhood in Delhi who have been composting and taking charge of their kitchen and yard waste.

In their respective articles, Archana and Aakiz, members of People's Resource Centre, map how our urban centres manage their waste,

especially the effectiveness of Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) and the need to question our understanding of 'waste' to move towards a sustainable future, respectively.

Along similar lines of enquiry, one of us talks to Manoj Misra, the senior environmental activist credited with life-long efforts to rejuvenate the river Yamuna. This interview touches upon the relationship of river Yamuna, waste, and STPs and presents an environmentalist perspective on the claims of farming communities on the Yamuna floodplains.

Apart from these original contributions, this edition also features excerpts from the case studies of urban agriculture in Mumbai and Pune by Geetanjali Gurlhosur and Rosamma Thomas, respectively, from the series "State of Urban Agriculture in Indian cities" published by the People's Resource Centre. These excerpts share some examples of initiatives by citizens and communities towards collective self-management of waste.

These studies and essays motivate us to look at the relationship of waste and urban agriculture in conjunction with other issues related to land, law and livelihood. There is a direct link between secured access to land and supporting policies and how invested farmers are in their lands. Only when a community feels secure to invest materially and emotionally in the alternative practices can there be a transition to a better, more ecological city that would find a productive use of what it earlier considered waste.

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