

# A Resurgent India Needs to Beat Plastic

Dr. Sanjib Kumar Goswami

**Abstract—** Covid -19 pandemic has paralyzed the priorities of a resurgent India. In zeroing its effort for a resurgent India, the manifold priorities need to be chalked out keeping a scope for additions and subtractions. One such addition of the priority list of a resurgent India needs to include long term policies in beating plastic pollution especially through avoiding single use plastic bag. Plastic pollution is used to compromise the safety of our food supplies, soils, water and wildlife. Single-use plastics (SUPs), or disposable plastics, are used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. Central Pollution Control Board of India projected that an estimated 25,940 tons of plastic waste is generated across India every day. This is equivalent to 1,030 truckloads at 25 tons per truck. Much to relive of the Indian soil, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) under Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change , Government of India has notified that that there will be a blanket ban on single-use plastic items from 1 July, 2022. However, unless people are used to “Say No to Plastics” becomes a habit of the people, it will only remain as a slogan only.

**Index Terms—** Environment, India, Plastic, Pollution, SUPs.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The priorities of a resurgent India have long been paralyzed by Covid -19 pandemic. While the fiscal health of the country has not suffered much, the pandemic has definitely affected the priorities of the BJP led government in India. It has been observed that the present Indian government has over emphasized in creating beneficiaries. The government has given more focus on schemes and programmes like Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (both Grameen & Urban), Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, POSHAN Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, Swachh Bharat Mission (both Grameen & Urban), Jal Jeevan Mission & AMRUT, Pradhan Mantri SVANidhi Scheme, One Nation One Ration Card, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, Ayushman Bharat , PM Jan Arogya Yojana, Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centre, and Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana. These schemes span over nine Ministries and Departments of the Government of India and the number of beneficiaries of several of these schemes runs in crores and in some cases in tens of crores. No doubt, the schemes for the poorest sections of population, including housing, availability of potable water, food, health and nutrition, livelihood and financial inclusion are some positive steps towards a resurgent India. The immediacy shown by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in cleaning the rivers and clearing the forests from encroachers

are also his praiseworthy priorities, yet they are likely to have set backs without a proper long –term comprehensive action plan. In zeroing its effort for a resurgent India, the manifold priorities need to be chalked out keeping a scope for additions and subtractions. One such addition of the priority list of a resurgent India needs to include long term policies in beating plastic pollution especially through avoiding single use plastic bag.

The first proactive environmental action was taken by the Sikkim government and conceded the country’s first plastic-bag ban in 1998. In 2016, Sikkim banned plastic bottles in all government departments and programmes. The state also banned the use and sale of disposable items such as cups, plates, spoons, containers and similar items made from polystyrene foam. Taking cue from Sikkim, some state governments from time to time have been exercising the powers conferred under section 5 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 to impose ban on plastic bags. In 2018, Maharashtra declared a blanket ban on single-use plastic. However, it didn’t work due to low awareness, strong lobbying by the manufacturing industry and a lack of pragmatic substitutes. Clearly, lack of concerted and determined efforts on implementation yielded vague results. Finally, some relieve to nation came in 2019, when from red Fort Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is leading efforts to scrap single-use plastics by 2022, stated “Can we free India from single-use plastic? The time for implementing such an idea has come” and requested shopkeepers to put up boards in shops saying ‘don’t request plastic bags, get a cloth bag.’ In 2019, the Himachal Pradesh administration imposed a Rs 25,000 as fine for trashing or selling single-use plastic cutlery in Himachal Pradesh. This state government banned the use and sale of plastic cutlery, made of non-biodegradable plastic, having one-time use. Like Himachal Pradesh, most of the state and union territories of India responded positively either by imposing complete or partial ban on single use plastic bags, yet the execution was very temporary without strict regulatory mechanisms. Thus, the clarion call of the PM Modi for freedom for India from single-use plastic in his 2019 Independence Day speech and his further reiteration of the commitment to phase out single-use plastics by 2022 has been put in a coma stage by different implementing authorities.

In this regard, if we take the activities of a north eastern state of India, namely Assam, the picture of etherized state of action in combating the menace of plastic will appear in a vivid manner. The first BJP led government in Assam led Sarbananda Sonowal reiterated that the prime objective of his government is to transform the Assam into a pollution-free state. With the aim of making Assam pollution-free, the State Government even organised a conservation initiative where 33 districts of the State will be competing against each other

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for the “Best Pollution-Free Green District of Assam.” Speaking on the occasion of World Environment Day in 2018 at Digboi, the then CM Sonowal asked the people of Assam to work towards becoming a plastic free state. Accordingly, a notification was also issued on 10th July 2019 by which the Government of Assam has imposed a complete ban on the use, manufacture, import, supply, store, transport, sale or distribution of plastic bags less than 50 microns, plastic cups with diameter less than 60 mm and thickness less than 50 microns, as well as short life PVC. Nine different categories of officers were directed to enforce this ban. However, with the exception of a few Deputy Commissioners and a handful of officers of municipal bodies the other categories of officers remained absolutely silent in executing the direction. Committed Deputy Commissioner like Om Prakash IAS was successful in implementing this ban by his persistent strict action in district like Nalbari. However, with his exit from the district, such bans also made a quick exit. The use and sale of plastic bags went unabated in Guwahati despite the Kamrup (Metro) District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) directing the Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) to initiate stringent act against anyone found using them. These are just some examples to reflect how Sonowal government failed measurably in achieving the goal of Plastic bag free Assam. The new Chief Minister of Assam Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, who always believes in getting things done by hook or crook, is also yet to take any action plan in banning plastics, especially single use plastic bags (SUPs). His appeal independence day speech appealing the citizens to stop using single use plastic bags will also yield no result, unless they are backed in a visionary way by enforcing strict rules and regulations or acts banning such SUPs.

Central Pollution Control Board of India projected that an estimated 25,940 tons of plastic waste is generated across India every day. This is equivalent to 1,030 truckloads at 25 tons per truck. From this projection we can say that India generates approximately 9.46 million tons of plastic waste per year. What is most threatening is that in India 10,000 tons of plastic remain uncollected. The rest amassed in landfills or in the natural environment; much of the plastic waste eventually reaches the paddy fields, rivers and oceans. It is really alarming news that by 2050 there could be more plastic in the oceans than fish.

Single-use plastics (SUPs), or disposable plastics, are used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. In India, Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021 defined SUP as “a plastic commodity intended to be used once for the same purpose before being disposed of or recycled”. These items are things like plastic bags, straws, coffee stirrers, soda and water bottles and most food packaging. are like plucked poltergeist. They have threatened the planet by cores of willful uses in every minute. India’s plastic consumption is one of the highest in the world. Plastic bag debris has become a devastating environmental trouble in India. They cluster in drains, spill out of garbage container, tangle in trees, harms the fertility of soil and cause death to animals and marine creatures consuming plastic as food. People of India using single use plastic bags are worst affected as it does not biodegrade but breaks down into ever smaller pieces, which are breeding grounds for bacteria and carry toxic chemicals into food and water. Plastic pollution is a grave public peril as it is non-biodegradable. The chemicals released by waste

plastic bags go into the soil and make it unproductive. Micro plastic is by now found in the food chain. Are these what a resurgent India wants?

Much to relive of the Indian soil, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) under Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India has notified that there will be a blanket ban on single-use plastic items from 1 July, 2022. According to the CPCB, things such as ear buds, flags, candy and ice-cream sticks, decorative thermocol, PVC banners less than 100 micron thick, stirrers, wrapping films, cups, glasses, and cutlery, among others won't be allowed.

While the bans imposed by state governments cannot give desired result for there is always a chance of transportation by hoarders from other states, this nationwide ban that would be a real success provided its receives whole hearted support from the citizens of India. In fact, the success of any environmental campaign depends on the degree of participation of all stakeholders and the consistency of the awareness drive. The same is also true in this campaign against SUPs. As opposed to bans and taxes, the value of promotion and adoption of reusable bags as alternatives to plastic bags is an example of a strategy where the choice rests with the consumer. This strategy will change consumer behaviour and reduce the use of conventional plastic carrier bags.

The people of India must remember that a resurgent India needs to beat plastic by carrying out strict enforcement and constant and continuous raids till the when “Say No to Plastics” becomes a habit of the people, instead of a slogan. The people of India must take an oath to take their own cloth or paper or jute bag when they go shopping and may undertake to reduce, reuse and recycle the plastics -already in their possessions.

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### Brief Profile

**1. Name & Designation:** Dr. Sanjib Kumar Goswami  
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**2. Educational Qualification:** M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

**3. Brief Profile:** -

**Presently serving as**

**(i) Member, UGCBCS Coordination Committee, Gauhati University (VC's Nominee)**

- (ii) Member, Integrated Committee of Courses and Studies (CCS) for Vocational and Skill Courses, Gauhati University (VC's Nominee)
- (iii) Member, Guidelines & Regulation Drafting Committee, State Standard School Authority (SSSA), Government of Assam (as per NEP 2020)
- (iv) Subject Expert, Different Sub Committees of Guidelines Drafting Committees, State Education Act (proposed)-2022 (Nominee of Hon'ble Advisor, Education, Government of Assam.
- (v) Regional Coordinator, National Children's Science Congress, Assam (DST, Government of Assam)
- (vi) Executive Secretary, State Organising Council, Assam, Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha (Catalyzed by DST, Government of India)
- (vii) Public Member, VMC, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Nalbari
- (viii) Member Secretary, Prajna Yojana-a flagship programme of Hon'ble MLA 59- Nalbari LAC for assisting aspirants in preparing for the job oriented competitive examinations & entrepreneurial endeavours

Serves as a

- (i) Resource person in Navodaya Leadership Institute (under MHRD Ministry, Govt of India)
- (ii) Resource person of English Language Teaching Programme, RMSA, Government of Assam
- (iii) Resource person of English Language Teaching Programme, SSA, Government of Assam
- (iv) Resource person (Pedagogy) of D.El.Ed courses of different universities.
- (v) Subject Expert, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, AUUP Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh
- (vi) Subject Expert (syllabus) at Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit and Ancient Studies University
- (vii) Subject Expert Krishnaguru Adhyatmik Vishvavidyalaya (KAV) Nasatra, Assam
- (viii) Serving the Assam Science Technology & Environment Council and DST, GOI as a recognized Resource Person and PSM activist for the last 20 years
- (ix) Motivational Speaker and Soft skills Trainer in different academic platforms
- (x) Recognized promoter of Sports Activities
- (xi) Advisor/ Resource Person of many newly provincialised colleges of Nalbari and Kamrup (Rural) District, NACC related activities

Served as a

- (i) Member, Academic Council, Gauhati University
- (ii) IQAC Coordinator, Kamrup College, Chamata (Accredited by NAAC with A Grade- CGPA- 3.04) for 10 Years
- (iii) Casual News Reader in the Doordarshan Kendra, Guwahati.
- (iv) General Secretary, Students' Science Society, Assam
- (v) Assistant secretary (Office & Publicity), Assam College Teachers' Association

Attended: Many National and International Seminars/Workshops both in the different states of India and abroad- as Resource person/ Research Paper presenter

Published: Many articles in leading English Dailies viz. The Assam Tribune, Amar Axom, Niyamiya Barta, The North East Times and in various Magazines Research Journal (including ISSN & UGC Care list), Books (ISBN), magazines.

Edited: Many Books (ISBN) / Journals (ISSN) / Magazine including Resource Book for Peer Educators (Rashtrya Kishor Swastha Karyakram Published by Health & Family Welfare, Government of India)

Authored: Inquest of A Successful Career; Published by Rastrya Madhyamik Siksha Abhijan, Government of Assam.

Adjudged as the Best Debtor in many State and National Level Debate/ Elocution Competitions (representing Cotton College and Gauhati University) during College & University days.

Acts as a Quiz Master and Speaker/Judges of various state/ national level debate competitions, and deliver public speech in various awareness programmes, meetings & symposiums. Also, acts as a Career Counselor for undergraduate and post graduate students for different colleges and universities of Assam other states of India.