

Awareness up but more green action needed

It's the very young, those still in school, who are likely to drive change, says Nanditha Krishna

Today, knowledge about environmental issues is much greater than 10 years ago. But, action is what is lacking. People are aware about issues of global warming and the importance of preserving the environment. Dignitaries and ministers plant trees but that doesn't mean real efforts are being taken to green the country. These actions are mere tokens and do not have any effective and positive result.

I have been in the field of environmentalism and environmental education for 30 years. There have been individual victories, like a new law coming into force. But, in total, land and forest cover has gone down, freshwater resources are polluted, groundwater levels are going down, air pollution has increased leading to a rise in diseases like cancer and asthma.

The government and the people know what they are doing and the results of their actions, but nobody cares. Greed and apathy are our worst sins and they are apparent in the state of the environment. Since 1986, the National Environmental Awareness Campaign conducted by the Ministry of Environment and Forests has funded rural NGOs across the country to enhance people's awareness about environmental issues. Every year, they have a theme such as conserving water resources, biodiversity or climate change. So there is



more knowledge, even in rural areas, but it does not translate into action.

That's because there is apathy among people. Everyone knows about the consequences of global warming but there is no hesitation to cut down trees. We are encroaching into forest areas, leading to increasing man-animal conflict. For instance, man-elephant conflict is on the rise in Tamil Nadu as

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elephant corridors, which are traditional migratory paths, have been encroached upon.

The situation will get worse before it gets better. The present generation, in their 20s and 30s, are more environmentally aware yet they are not really putting their mind to changing society. That can be brought about only by changing the way you behave. Old Mahabali-puram Road is home to numerous IT companies, where some of the most brilliant minds work. But it is neither clean nor

green. This attitude is true not just of Chennai alone. Bangalore, which used to be a garden city is now one of the most polluted. Ooty, which was the paradise of my childhood, is now choked with plastic despite having a law banning plastics.

India does have sound environmental laws but they are not implemented. People flout laws with impunity because corruption has become a way of life. There is the feeling that even if you break the law, you can pay a bribe and get away. That's why Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement is important. It's movements like this that offer the only ray of hope. I also have more faith in the very young, in children who are still in school. Their parents have seen the economic boom, earning good salaries, and these children will hopefully realise there is more to life than just making money. I see a lot of idealism in them.

(The writer is director of The C P Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation)