

# DOWN TO EARTH



Our collective consciousness about the devastating effects of global warming is bringing about a significant change in the way we see nature, its processes and our actions – both positive and negative. **Anoop Jaipurkar** speaks to five Puneites working for the cause on **World Earth Day**

Pics: Mandar Deshpande & Shyam Sonar

## WASTE IS WEALTH

CHAMP 1 | UDAY BHAWALKAR

● **CLAIM TO FAME:** An IITian, he first propagated the idea of decentralised waste management and was a part of the committee that framed norms for solid waste management in 2001. The recommendations were later accepted by the Apex Court.

● **SUCCESS:** Pune became the first city in the world to go for decentralised waste management. Terrace gardens, which feed on household waste, are becoming popular. Bhawalkar has four patents; BioSanitizer Ecochip earned him one of them. It helps clean water, soil and air in a natural way. He has also worked in US, complying with their tough environmental norms.

### WHY APE THE WEST?

Europe gets snow for six months a year, so it was not possible for the English people to leave organic waste on the soil. As a way out, they developed the centralised dumping and processing method. We were told to follow their system. Why? We should give cooked food, vegetables to soil and give inorganic waste back to industries. Feeding leftover food to animals is a tradition in India, which is most scientific and feasible. Everything comes from nature

and should be given back to it.

### RAGPICKER YOUR FRIEND

In India, recycling dates back to centuries. We are different from Europe and US in a sense that we reuse paper to make paper. This saves us a lot of processing cost. Pune did not have a garbage problem some years ago because we did not 'use and throw'. We should re-teach ourselves the skill of utilizing things to the fullest, then upcycle or recycle them.

### WASTE IN OUR MIND

The concept of segregation of dry and wet waste is wrong. It should be natural and industrial. Farmers have been doing organic recycling for ages. Urban people should do industrial recycling. Segregation does not mean mixing waste and then separating it. Stop wasting and start utilizing. Our organic waste is good for plants and soil. Feed the soil like a mother feeds her daughter. Most importantly, use technology to develop feasible solutions.

### GOLDEN WORDS

“Man is a selfish animal. But it is better to be selfish than foolish. Convince him that waste is wealth. And urban waste problem will end

## RESPECT NATURE

CHAMP 2 & 3 | KETAKI GHATE AND MANASI KARANDIKAR

● **CLAIM TO FAME:** Studied over 10,000 acres of land for ecological restoration (improving the quality of water, air, soil and forest cover)

● **SUCCESS:** They are convincing private land owners in forests/hills to live in sync with nature and not to harm it for personal gains. The success rate, as Ketaki puts it, is almost 100%. “We see a change in people’s perspective. They sound convinced and also pass on the message to others,” she says.

### URBAN LESSONS

Restoration is not just for forests but can be done in cities as well. We made it possible on a five acre plot on Sus Road. The semi-arid land was converted into a paradise for butterflies and fish in just six months. About 15 years ago, there was a land boom around Pune. People were buying tracts of forest land for building resorts/farm houses. Instead of opposing



Manasi & Ketaki

the trend, we decided to work with them, convince them about the importance of not cutting local, native plants, tell them why hills should not be levelled and how

## TREAT RIVER AS A SYSTEM

CHAMP 4 | VIJAY PARANJAPE

● **CLAIM TO FAME:** Helping rehabilitate people affected by Pavana dam in the 70s brought Paranjape, an economics teacher earlier, closer to rivers. He understood the riverine system, what role the rivers play in the eco system and why should they be saved. As the head of Gomukh Trust, he is now working in the area of



technical support in building Anna Hazare’s model Ralegan Siddhi village.

riverine system. The objective should be to treat sewage and give treated water to farms. We are cheating

to minimize construction. Not everyone was convinced. But many were. We did it for them in the most scientific method. They were happy on seeing the results.

### RESPECT DIVERSITY

We tell people to accept diversity. The species that are getting lost or extinct also have a right to live and thrive. We help them do so. We want to save the giant squirrel. We tell developers to remove such areas from their plan of development which supports the squirrel. We don’t bend rules of the nature to accommodate human needs.

### FOR HILLS AROUND CITY

Pune’s hills need dry deciduous dense forests, but what we see is mostly shrubs. Plantation drives are not enough, because the soil is not ready. We first need to restore soil moisture.

### GOLDEN WORDS

“Cities are parasites to their catchment areas. They draw everything from the surroundings, but in return give nothing but pollution. Nature has its limits,” said Ketaki

## AIR WATCH

CHAMP 5 | GUFRAN BEIG

### CLAIM TO FAME:

He developed SAFAR-India to provide accurate air quality forecast during Commonwealth Games in Delhi in 2010. It was the first of its kind service in India and the second in Asia.

● **SUCCESS:** Dr Beig used his expertise of over two decades to fine tune this m... Network 2