**Why is Single Use Plastics (SUP) an important issue?**

“Single-use plastics may represent the epitome of today’s throwaway culture.” (Wales, 2018). The plastic products that are used just once and then thrown away are known as single-use plastics. SUPs typically consist of cigarette butts, plastic drinking bottles, food wrappers, plastic grocery bags, straws and stirrers, foam take-away containers, etc. (Wales, 2018). This has major environmental, social, and economic effects. Here, we analyse those effects and understand why it is an important to address this elephant in the room.

Single use plastics have major environmental impacts. The plastic that we throw away, does not always make it to the recycling facility or the landfill. Because most single use plastics are light-weight, they get carried from one place to another, eventually ending up in the oceans. It is estimated that currently, about 150 million metric tons of plastic is floating around in our oceans and we add 8 million metric tons of it to the ocean every year (Ritschel, 2018). Marine animals often mistake plastic for food and consume it, which leads to them choking up on it and eventually dying. “According to the Ocean Conservancy, plastic has been found in more than 60 per cent of all seabirds and 100 per cent of sea turtle species.”(Ritschel, 2018) 700 species in the ocean are affected by the plastic contamination in the ocean (Ritschel, 2018). The land animals also eat this plastic and get choked up or become fatally ill.

Plastics can also exacerbate or even induce natural calamities, thus endangering human lives. In 1988, Bangladesh, which had a very poor drainage system, was flooded due to the thrown away plastics. This resulted due to the plastic litter clogging up the drains. The floods were so severe that almost 2/3rd of the country was submerged in water. There were many deaths too. (Giacovelli, 2018, p. 13). Thus, single use plastics single-handedly take lives of both humans and animals all over the world.

The health and social impacts are far worse for human beings. When fish or meat of animals who have plastic in their systems, is consumed by humans, it enters the human food chain. Styrofoam, which is used to make take-away packages, contains toxic chemicals like styrene and benzene. These chemicals are considered carcinogenic (Giacovelli, 2018, p. 14). Plastics or microplastics, if ingested in the human body, can create various health complications. Some of these complications include adverse effects on the nervous, respiratory, and reproductive systems, problems in the functioning of kidneys and liver (Giacovelli, 2018, p. 14), birth defects, endocrine disruption (Tagney, 2018), etc.

Sometimes, in order to get rid of the plastic, it is burnt instead of being recycled methodically (Giacovelli, 2018, p. 14). Plastic is manufactured using fossil fuels like crude oil (Tagney, 2018). Thus, when burned, it releases toxic chemicals in the atmosphere, eventually entering the human body. The plastic litter laying around on land also contaminates the soil which is used to grow plants. So, even if a person does not eat meat or fish, plastic can enter his system through other means.

Lastly, the economic impacts of plastic have affected both, the developing as well as the developed nations. Plastic litter is an unpleasant site, be it in the ocean or on the land. If tourist spots are littered with plastic, they are less likely to be frequented by tourists which results in the loss of money for the tourism department. This can affect the GDP of all the countries, especially the ones reliant on tourism as their major source of income. (Giacovelli, 2018, p. 15)

Another reason for economic loss due to the use of plastic is the cost of recycling it (Giacovelli, 2018, p. 15). The cost of recycling is sometimes so high that it almost makes it impossible for some countries to carry out the process. If not, then it is either dumped in landfills or oceans or exported to other countries for recycling, thus making it financially unviable.

Thus, using plastic, especially single use plastic, has far reaching consequences. As discussed above, it not only has economic impacts, but also has the potential to kill humans and animals. There might come a day when certain species of animals might become extinct solely due to the human obsession with using plastic. Men might also die if the use of plastic is not controlled. The use of plastic should be controlled as soon as possible to stop these deaths.

CITATIONS:

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