

Danger at the Dump

Mystery of the missing pencil

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From the Desk of Dr R K Pachauri

Through the history of civilisation human beings have always been fascinated by great adventures and the unraveling of mysteries pertaining to the earth and the universe. Human society has made substantial progress in advancing the stage of knowledge in a number of fields. To a large extent, progress achieved in knowledge and its applications have generally benefitted mankind. However, some of the by-products of our production and consumption processes have led to negative consequences, which human society has either been ignorant of or indifferent to. Yet, we as human beings have to use knowledge of the future to define pathways of development which would enhance overall human welfare. Mahatma Gandhi was absolutely right when he said "A technological society has two choices. First it can wait until catastrophic failures expose systemic deficiencies, distortion and self-deceptions.... Secondly, a culture can provide social checks and balances to correct for systemic distortion prior to catastrophic failures".

When I was a child, the word 'pollution' was unknown in the English language, and I think industrialisation created a level of excitement which made us oblivious to the impacts which production and consumption decisions were having on the environment and the earth's natural resources. It was a courageous and determined young lady in the US by the name of Rachel Carson who brought out some of the harmful impacts of continuous and excessive use of chemicals of various kinds and pollutants, which were affecting the air, the soil and the water all around us. Environmental pollution is having a negative impact on the oceans of the world, the mountains, which have been known for their beauty and purity, as well as our forests and rivers.

Continuous damage and degradation of all these natural resources will lead to deterioration of the services that we derive from them. These would affect the welfare of coming generations to an undesirable extent. Hence, it is for the children of the world, who hold the future of this planet in their hands, to play an increasingly important role in cleaning up the earth's ecosystems and restoring them to their pre-industrial pristine quality. But to do so we need to understand the harmful impacts of current patterns of economic growth, the hazards that these may create and how we might be able to cross some of the pitfalls ahead.

And that's precisely what *Danger at the Dump* tells you. It is the story of a dangerous situation that we have created – dumping all sorts of hazardous, poisonous, and radioactive waste material in air, water, and land.

Danger at the Dump is the story of Golu, a 14-year-old ragpicker, and his talking cat Batooni, who discover a mysterious packet in a garbage dump. And they set out on a mission to place it in the right hands. I hope that the readers will follow Golu and Batooni's example, and will be inspired to take the responsibility of saving their environment, ensuring a safe future for their planet.



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