

Dirty Doings: How We Pollute the Environment

Our Toxic World:
A Guide to Hazardous Substances in Our Everyday Lives,

Toxics Link, Sage Publications, 2010,
161 pages, Rs 395/-

This book, in the manner of a graphic novel, introduces us to the deadly world of toxins that we surround ourselves with in our daily lives. It presents us with varied situations and highlights everyday actions that on the surface appear very regular and obvious, but enclosed within is the wrath of numerous hazardous substances.

The book contains twelve chapters; each represents different events during the course of which man introduces different contaminants in the environment. Various facts are strewn along the plot, wherein each member of the Sachdeva family, residing in Delhi, discovers various aspects of 'our toxic world'. The boiler inspector father, the house maker mother, the architectural apprentice son and the high school going daughter, all of them are well connected in the web of venoms strewn by mankind over the years. Presence of an environmental activist in the plot facilitates the logical flow of information throughout the book.

All those things we take for granted bring us a step closer to an exceptionally poisonous and deadly future. It outlines how the damage done so far is so extensive, that we are already experiencing the effects of our ill-planned actions in terms of raising an entire generation of unhealthy and weak individuals who are being bestowed upon with the heritage of an extremely polluted environment.

From enlisting the benefits of green buildings to waste segregation, this book covers whole lot. The last two chapters on recycling and callous celebration of Indian festivals are specifically very interesting as they seem very achievable and can inspire many youngsters to take up this cause seriously. In almost every chapter, the readers will be provided with suggestions on how they can contribute to the cause of a cleaner environment.

Being a graphic novel, the sermon on a cleaner environment seems more interesting; towards which people usually exhibit disconnection or disinterest, which can also develop interest in children and youngsters of all ages to take a good look at the contents of the book. Bioaccumulation of toxins is an important phenomenon to understand as it has led to various serious illnesses in the past, for example- Minamata disease in Japan due to bioaccumulation of mercury. Highlighting the plight of the unfortunate people who work as scavengers and risk their lives everyday also can force people to think about adopting better waste disposal methods.

The book is a revelation and some alternatives to various substances that we use daily are very interesting except that the keyword for today's world remains 'convenience'. When handy and better appearing and smelling products are available in the market, can we expect a working woman to spend time preparing different concoctions in the kitchen for her skin and hair? Also condemning every product used at the household level is the easiest way out of this web of hazardous substances, but suggesting effortless alternatives to all of those products, say from toothbrush to food that we eat is a very complex job.

On the other hand, dumping of electronic wastes in developing countries by industrialized countries is definitely not pardonable; this will surely make readers think about where we stand as a country in the World politics. The so called 'affairs of state' influencing the pollution control assessment in industries is also well depicted, although Mohanlal Sachdeva coming victorious after the spat with his boss seems like a distant dream to come true. One of the main concerns raised in this book, which makes us question our judiciary system is the pending case against the beverage giant Coca Cola, which enjoys patronage from a large number of people in the carbonated drinks market in India, regarding the presence of pesticides in its beverages.

Overall the book is a good read. Extremely informative and well presented. It talks about developing a progressive attitude and being knowledgeable which helps in taking informed decisions. However, readers could feel an overload of information and feel disheartened about criticism in all shapes and sizes directed towards all their actions and objects that they make use of to make their lives well-placed and pointing them towards a world full of death and diseases. Many of the situations seem unavoidable and it is certainly too tedious to change one's lifestyle even if it is for the larger good. While readers will learn a lot from the book where as putting knowledge into practice is going to be a different ball game altogether.

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