

# Struggling with Plastic: A Hidden Story of Hill



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Lepchajagat is a small forest village with around 120 population in Darjeeling district nearly 15 km away from Darjeeling main township, West Bengal, India. Literally, Lepchajagat means the world of Lepcha locally called Lepcha Bustee. Picturesque view of the mysterious evergreen pine forest enhances the beauty of this place. Hill with pine forest makes this place more attractive for tourism.

People living here in a small circle with a small neighbourhood. They believe in simple living since a long-time back. Surrounded by forests, tea gardens being more closed to nature, they are very simple in nature, kind-hearted, helpful, and down to earth. A dweller explains “We were born seeing the forests clean and healthy, the place where we built our first camps, start our hide, and seek journey. The most famous one “wario” the game where we took hides in different trees as we had less option of playground here and these forests carried our entire childhood”.

Time changes many things. According to dwellers of Lepchajagat as time is passing, people here notice the ecosystem of these forests are no longer the same. Problems are immense, in fact its rising day by day. The ground is turning into mess, littered and the sad part is that plastics are seen in many places in different forms, layers after layers. The streams are turning into dump yards,

the forest have become a perfect vegetation for plastic wastes, The ground becoming dry, and plants die, many species of butterflies have already been vanished, many of the birds are not seen these days. People used to enjoy the forest walk as it was healthy and the forest was green and rich in diversity. Now, people hesitate because many of the trails are submerged by waste, the smell of forest is covered by the smell of the waste produced by “the most intelligent creatures of God”.

One of them regrets “travellers who came from the cities less aware of it because cities have municipalities to handle this part. They may think if they litter it will be cleaned up anyhow, but the actual scenario is not like that.”

With all these struggles, people in Lepchajagat takes an initiative by themselves. Since before the covid era they have started the waste management programme by their own. They collect Rs.100 to buy gloves and essential items for cleaning from each household or homestay. Even from this year they have made it a routine task, where every Saturday at least one member from each household or homestay take part of this either to clean or burn the solid waste part.

The worst part is that we love nature, we love to spend times in hills, but sometimes we forget to

take care of her, to admire her actual beauty and we become responsible for this huge damage to nature. If we take small steps, practice few

responsible habits, we surely can end this struggle.

There is a role for everyone.



*Involvement of local people in managing waste in Lepchajagat, Darjeeling*