

# Around Town

## Trash medal

**Akhila Seetharaman** speaks to people who are intent on spreading the recycling fever.

In the end, everything has to be trashed," said designer Devika Krishnan. But doomsday can be delayed, according to her, by stretching out the life of things we've junked. "You could drink a Frooti and throw it out, or extend the life of that material, generating employment and creating something new," Krishnan said. Choosing the latter option isn't easier, but it is certainly more interesting than adding to a landfill. It's a path that Krishnan, who has long worked with rural women to create livelihood projects around traditional crafts, has consciously chosen.

In Bangalore, Krishnan has helped young mothers to set up a unit called ANU, which transforms discarded Tetra Pak containers into trendy woven baskets, and wool-embroidered cement bags into elegant folders and laptop bags. "There's a lot more satisfaction when you have to work with pre-fabricated, pre-cut raw material and come up with something new," she said. Krishnan was one among a mix of designers who participated in a workshop on making lamps from trash, organised by artist and designer Jenny Pinto recently. An exhibition of these unusual lamps is being held this fortnight, as one of several events of the Bengaluru Recycling Habba 2011.

The idea for the Habba began to take shape when Pinto found herself wondering about what happens to waste that is produced in the city. "Once we have finished with something we just mindlessly chuck it away, sometimes not even in the right place," said Pinto. "As a result, Indian cities are among the dirtiest in the world. Can we, urban, educated Indians, begin to make a change? Can we begin to think before we throw?" This line of questioning got Pinto talking to other environmentally-conscious people in the city and soon the idea of a festival around the theme was born. Aware that nobody likes to be lectured about bad habits,



**Waste word** What you consider junk can be turned into objects that are utilitarian

Pinto and her friends decided to drive the message home in a celebratory way, timing it to run through International Recycling Week, observed in many countries. Apart from the exhibition of lamps, the festival includes a Recyclathon – an event to recognise people around the city who are both segregating and

“  
**Can we begin to think before we throw?**”

recycling waste – , a mela about recycling, an exhibition of fashion from recycled materials, a panel discussion, a tour of the city's trash trail and a kids' workshop on bugs.

For Pinky Chandran, who heads Jain College's community radio station, Radio Active, the objective is to change people's concept of waste as

something dirty that needs to be disposed of. "The simple act of rinsing your cola bottle and recycling it, instead of sending it to a landfill, can make a difference," said Chandran, who is organising the Recyclathon, encouraging individuals, companies, schools, college and residents' groups to come forward and showcase their achievements in recycling.

However, if extended producer responsibility, or EPR, ever becomes part of policy, you might just be able to send your cola bottle right back to where it came from – to the manufacturer, for re-use or recycling. EPR is the theme for a panel discussion that will take place as part of the Habba. "There are two aspects to producers' responsibility," said Myriam Shankar, who spearheads the Solid Waste Management Round Table – a group of organisations committed to reducing and recycling solid waste in the city – and is one of the festival's organisers. "It calls on producers to come out with products that are environmentally friendly. It also requires them to reduce packaging materials and find ways to recycle or collect them," Shankar explained.

For Pinto, an important realisation during the lamps-from-trash workshop was just how hard it is to convert waste into new products. For one, since we don't separate our wet and dry waste, all garbage is dirty and smelly. If you want to upcycle, identifying, procuring, sorting and cleaning of trash is an expensive process, so you can't help but wonder if it is really worth it, Pinto said. And when a material is used with a certain intention, changing its intent is not simple, she added. "When you think of the humongous amounts of waste urban centres generate on a daily basis, it is a very sobering feeling," she said.

See **Fri Nov 4** in Events.