
SOLO WOMAN WALK-BATAPADY BEACH TO KANYAKUMARI-850+ KM-OCTOBER 5TH 2019 TO DECEMBER 6TH 2019-K2K THE COASTAL WALK

Solid Waste Across the Coastline of Kerala

JANET ORLENE | MALAPPURAM



On October 5th, 2019, Janet Orlene set out on a solo coastline walk from Batapady beach near the border of Kerala to Kanyakumari. Backed by a team of 2, Pradeep Rajendran and Meghana Basavaraju, Janet covered the entire strip of coast meeting the unique terrains, people and solid waste patterns of Kerala.

**This report has not been formally edited.* | 4th July 2020 | Authored by Janet Orlene
Report on Solid Waste along the coastline of Kerala - Malappuram*

Introduction

What I expected to see was completely different from what I saw. I expected to find a lot more sanitary napkins, thin plastic bags, more obvious chemical pollution and other textbook things that I've learnt all my life. Instead, the largest quantities of solid waste turned out to be in the form of slippers and shoes, plastic water bottles, diapers, medical waste and household waste. The chemicals I saw polluting the ocean were in the form of thin oily surfaces (often near ferries and the shipbreaking yards), mining wastes, sewage, etc.

This journey through all of the most beautiful coastal landscapes Kerala had to offer was an eyeopener in terms of human activity caused destruction. The coastline is one of the most powerful indicators of the human-caused environmental crisis.

What this report aims to show are the observations I made during the walk down the coastline of Kerala.

Note:

**Although not mentioned otherwise, one of the largest polluters across Kerala shore are diapers.*

**Slippers, Shoes, Medical Waste are the other surprising but largely occurring pollutants.*

**Household wastes, Plastic bottles and other forms of plastic pollutants are mainly found in areas with a higher density of population.*

**Several areas showed biosphere damage with symptoms such as washing up of several species, jellyfish bloom, invasive flora and oft-spoken about, unseasonal weather changes and damage to the fish population.*

Intent and purposes

This report intends to look at the visual observation of solid waste made while walking continuously down the coastline of Kerala over 2 months as a district basis as well as one area that stood out in terms of the intensity of solid waste on the coastline or effort to curb the same in each.

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Malappuram

The district was a beautiful one. The coastline covered with coconut trees right next to the almost continuous sea wall, the district has far greater worries than the solid waste found here. Yes, the coconut groves are covered with little pieces of torn thin plastic covers extensively but the greater worry is the **sea erosion** that has taken large portions of roads, homes and shore away. The streams leading to the ocean were black and smelled filthy. Plastic, choking almost every one of them. But the freshwater reservoirs were treated with a certain reverence at the same time.

Some fisherfolk collected vast numbers of bottles for recycling. When asked about the uses, a few spoke about recycling them, the other spoke about selling them to people who make floatation devices out of empty bottles for the nets. These, I was informed, were more lucrative for them.

Fisherfolks are worried about the future of fishing. They were worried about the impact of plastic on the numbers of fish and their future tied to the same.

Commercial beaches and establishments as beach parks that also attracted vendors had packaged food covers, paper and plastic cups and plates. There is a growing consciousness in pockets of people but there is a lot more to be done.

Ponnani

Ponnani was almost like any other place as I started walking the stretch. This was the first area seriously affected by erosion. Many coconut trees had been washed away and what was left was entangled with plastic and hundreds and hundreds of rubber slippers. Remains of homes stood empty and staring out at the open.

Sea walls were constantly being eroded and washed into the ocean. Many blocks of rock had already been washed away and newer layers had been built behind them.

Both sides of the sea wall, facing the land and facing the ocean, were covered in plastic covers - being blown about by the wind or the ocean currents.

DATA OF VISUALLY NOTED SOLID WASTE THROUGH THE COASTLINE OF MALAPPURAM



Visual Data based Key:

- 1 - almost nil/nil
- 2 - Scattered
- 3 - Scattered with points of rubbish heaps
- 4 - Heavily distributed / stepping in it often
- 5 - unable to avoid waste without stepping on it

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Malappuram

Name of Village / City	Chemical Pollutants (Oils/ Industrial pollutants)	Household Waste (Plastic/Paper/ Packaging)	Biological (Flora and Fauna parts or Whole)	Medical Waste (Tablets / Bottles / Syringes)	Tourism industry based (Plastic or Paper based solid waste)	Sewage
Vallikkunnu	1	2	1	1	1	1
Chettipadi	1	2	1	1	1	1
Parappanangadi	1	2	1	1	1	1
Chiramangalam	1	2	1	1	1	1
Tanur	1	3	1	2	2	2
Vakkad	1	2	1	2	2	2
Kootayi	1	2	1	2	1	1
Padinjarekkara	1	2	1	1	2	1
Ponnani	1	3	1	2	3	2
Puduponnani	1	2	1	1	2	1
Veliancode	1	2	1	1	1	1
Palappetty	1	3	1	1	1	1

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SUGGESTIONS FOR MALAPPURAM:

1. The sea walls have been constantly washed off. They are not more than an expensive temporary measure throughout the region. Malappuram is a good region for **alternative experiments on soil erosion management** to start as large places have been abandoned and extremely affected.
2. There are several areas which are fighting the issue of solid waste as a community. Modelling around these villages could make a significant impact on the dwindling energy of those constantly working towards change as well as inspire those who are impacted but struggling with effective initiatives. Education programs and training can be run through them as well - **Environment Preservation based Model Villages**.
3. The fisherfolk of Kerala are open to **training and clean up based programs**. They collect quite a bit of plastic in their nets while fishing every day. This is often dumped on the shore. If it isn't picked up by the sanitation workers, it gets washed back into the ocean.
4. **Diapers need to be incinerated as medical waste**. Often they litter the ocean and spill out non-biodegradable contents as they break down. This also contributes to microplastic waste and general solid waste issues across the coast.
5. Malappuram district's streams and water bodies were significantly affected by solid waste clogging the movement causing overspill with the slightest increase in volume. Furthermore, the water had turned into sludge with the concentration of sludge. There needs to be significant unclogging of water bodies along with sewage management to ensure healthy flow and prevent flooding.

Conclusion

Solid waste is one of the largest factors in the dip in the number of fishes over the years. People are knowledgeable about the impacts of solid waste dumping. The largest issues in coastal waste dumping include:

- Medical waste
- Slippers
- Diapers
- Household Waste
- Bottles (glass and plastic)
- Fishing industry waste - nets, fishing lines, thermocol

There seem to be two major forms of solid waste dumping on the coastline in accordance to the conversations we had:

- 1) Despite solid waste management programs- Where one finds it easier to dump solid waste due to lack of education about the negative impacts of pollution, lack of concern, a belief that plastic “melts” in the ocean and degrades, cheaper (in terms of medical waste dumping or another industrial dumping), or apathy.
- 2) Lack of solid waste management programs - Good examples of these are Anchuthengu and South Thiruvananthapuram (The Valiathope, Vallakadavu, Valiyathura, Beemapally cluster) who have had no choice but to turn their homes into a large dumping ground. It is also much harder for the solid waste programs to be practised as easily as other areas due to the maze-like paths and roads, perhaps, this discourages implementation.

But, there is still hope. The coastal community is impacted deeply by environmental crises regularly whether it comes to their livelihood, their futures or their very existence. They are aware of erosion, overfishing, solid waste issues and how it ties back to the activities of people. They are also aware of how their household wastes, bottles do not allow effective breeding or movement of fish in their areas. There are often local people making an active effort in their villages to make an impact in any way and are welcome to both change and help.