

***Our Environment – Our Responsibility***  
***- Role of Youth in Safeguarding and Nurturing the Environment***

World Environment Day is celebrated on 5<sup>th</sup> June every year. The theme for World Environment Day 2021 was **'Ecosystem Restoration'**. In line with the theme, the Department of Social Work: NSS and UBA of St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata organised a 'Talk' on ***'Our Environment – Our Responsibility: the Role of Youth in Safeguarding and Nurturing the Environment'*** on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2021 for the college students. The objective of the session was to motivate and encourage the college youth to play their part in safeguarding and nurturing the environment, even during the current raging pandemic. Around 70 students from across departments participated in this session.

Mr. Yusuf Kabir, the Water, Sanitation, Hygiene (WASH) Specialist, Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate & Emergency Focal Point and Dr. Swati Mohapatra, the Communication and Advocacy Specialist in UNICEF Maharashtra office were the resource speakers for the session. Along with them, two young climate warriors – Bodhisatva G Khanderao, aged 13 years and Varad Kubal, aged 15 years, shared about their journey in taking up responsibility to safeguard the environment.

College Principal, Rev. Dr. Dominic Savio, S.J., set the context of the 'Talk' in his inaugural address. He said, ***"With the advent of COVID-19 and the tenacity with which it is spreading and impacting us, it is important to explore ways to safeguard and protect the environment even when our mobility is largely restricted. Our Earth needs help. We humans need help. We have to act NOW to save our environment and in the process secure our lives on this beautiful planet. The rising impact of climate change on our everyday lives is alarming and detrimental. The receding green cover, air pollution, fast diminishing ground water, droughts, floods, global warming, and forest fires are only a handful of examples which indicates the dire situation we are in. We will be able to save our planet and ourselves, if only, we are determined to act NOW"***.

Mr Yusuf Kabir, in his address spoke at length as to how, during the current pandemic, many stakeholders were coming together and raising their concern about the environment. He cautioned the youngsters to be aware about what was happening to our eco system and to be committed and passionate about the environment. He stressed that, ***"Action for environment protection lies at the local level. One does not have to travel large distance to take up responsibility to protect and nurture the environment". It is very important to decide for oneself, whether we want to be part of the problem or be part of the solution"***.

Further to this, Dr. Swati Mohapatra reiterated how each one could take up action at the individual level and contribute towards safeguarding and nurturing our environment. She touched upon how YUWAAH - a flagship programme of UNICEF, engaged children and youth by giving them guidance and platform to raise their voices for pertinent contemporary issues. She added, ***"It is important to amplify the voices of young climate warriors so that others are motivated to follow their footsteps and bring about change"***.

This 'Talk' became meaningful when the two young climate worriers, Bodhisatva G Khanderao and Varad Kubal shared about their journey in safeguarding the environment. Bodhisatva hails from Yavatmal district in Maharashtra. He started working for social plantation awareness programs at different places at the age of six. He had been relentless in his pursuit of telling people about the importance of the environment and educating them how to make the best out of waste. Bodhisatva during the discourse shared about his innovation of **'Seed ball'**. He used the smart technique of reutilizing old cotton socks by putting some seeds in it, along with whatever he could find handy- leaves, soil, cow dung etc. He asked people to simply throw these Magic socks into the valleys, either side of the road, on plains or in forests areas. The socks would stick to the soil and the seeds would germinate after rain. Other than Magic socks, Multigrain- sieving machine to clean various grains is another brilliant innovation for which he was awarded Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Ignited Mind Children Creativity and Innovation Award last year. He was also awarded an International Young Eco-Hero Award for his environmental work.

Varad, who hails from Kankavli, Konkan had already made a mark when he was just 12 years old as he had rescued sea birds called Bridled Tern during a storm. It is not just birds but Varad is keenly interested in

protecting the coastal and marine biodiversity. He is full of innovative ideas for the growth and protection of flora and fauna. Varad shared about his initiative ‘seed egg’ wherein he paints eggshells with bright colours and puts a variety of seeds, which he then gifts to friends and relatives. Once the egg shell is discarded (thrown on soil) the seed germinates and grows into trees. He also shared how he used coconut shells as lanterns and made Rakhis from seeds, coir and discarded paper.

Both the teens, shared how during the current raging pandemic, they utilised their time to read about various types of saplings, trees and utilised this time to reach out to their peers to take action towards conserving nature. They also made videos on various methods of afforestation and nature conservations and shared on various social media platforms for wider dissemination of knowledge. Before the close of the session, when asked what message the young children wanted to give to our students, Bodhi vehemently said, **“Earn your oxygen by planting a tree”**. On the other hand Varad urged our students not to just think about their careers but **“spare a thought for nature, we have to save nature to save our future”**.

The college students were deeply impressed and motivated by these young champions. Subham Dokania, a Commerce-Morning student expressed, **“After hearing Bodhi and Varad share about their journey, I am encouraged to plant trees, write blogs on environment issues and create some awareness”**. Ruchi Marda a Commerce-Evening student who wants to be a social entrepreneur said, **“I learnt how even I can make a difference to the society through my initiatives and got many ideas from today’s Talk, I will definitely build on them.”**



Father Principal addressing the students



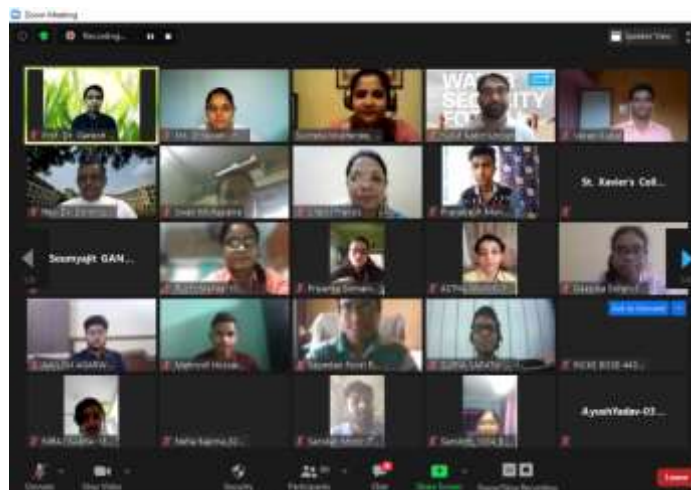
Mr. Yusuf Kabir, sharing his thoughts



Bodhisatva G Khanderao



Varad Kubal,



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