

'Water Girl of India'

By Mitali Ragtah, Junior Runner-up from India

"And Harry, with the unerring skill of a seeker, caught the wand in his free hand as Voldemort fell backward, arms splayed, the slit pupils of his scarlet eyes rolling upward.... Voldemort was dead, killed by his own rebounding curse, and Harry stood there with two wands, staring down at his enemy's shell."



Dear Miss Garvita Gulhati,

I have always had to turn to fiction for heroes. Nobody inspired me like Harry Potter or Percy Jackson, for I believed a young hero had to have a wand, superpowers, or SOMETHING magical.

Boy, was I wrong! As Maya Angelou said "I think a hero is any person really intent on making this a better place for all people."

When I read this quote, I immediately thought of you, Miss Garvita Gulhati, the water girl of India.

I'm Mitali Ragtah, an 11-year-old who admires you and wishes to follow in your footsteps for a better and *wetter* tomorrow.

In this self-centred world, where most teens remain unfazed by global issues like inequality, global warming, food crisis etc. you, Miss Gulhati, at the young age of 13, were trying to save the world from water scarcity! Despite the academic pressure on teens, your little self was determined to fight for every drop of this elixir of life.



Your journey as a changemaker started when you decided to apply what you learnt in your environmental science class. The fact that about 14 million litres of water is left behind every year in glasses in restaurants across India troubled you so much that you began visiting restaurants to understand the problem better.

Instead of accusing others, complaining, or overlooking the problem, which most of us do, you decided to take matters into hand and in 2015 started a non-profit organisation called 'Why Waste?'.

I personally love the #GlassHalfFull initiative, which requires restaurants to only fill half a glass with water unless the customer themselves asked for more.

Of course, it wasn't easy. You struggled with the restaurant managers who didn't want to lend an ear to a teenager.

But problems aren't going to wait until you graduate or get a job. If there's a problem, face it then and there. Best to put out flames before they turn into wildfires!

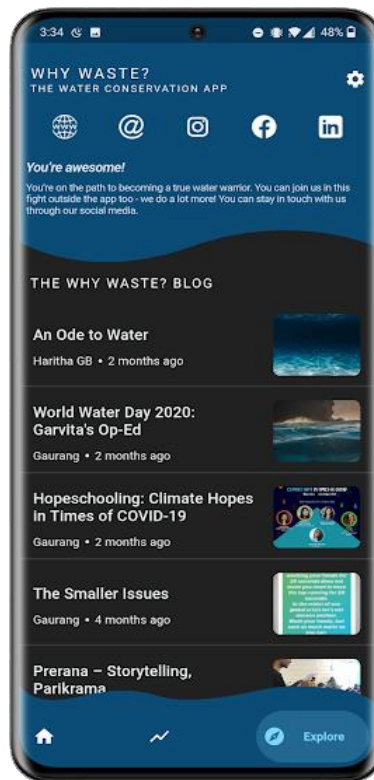
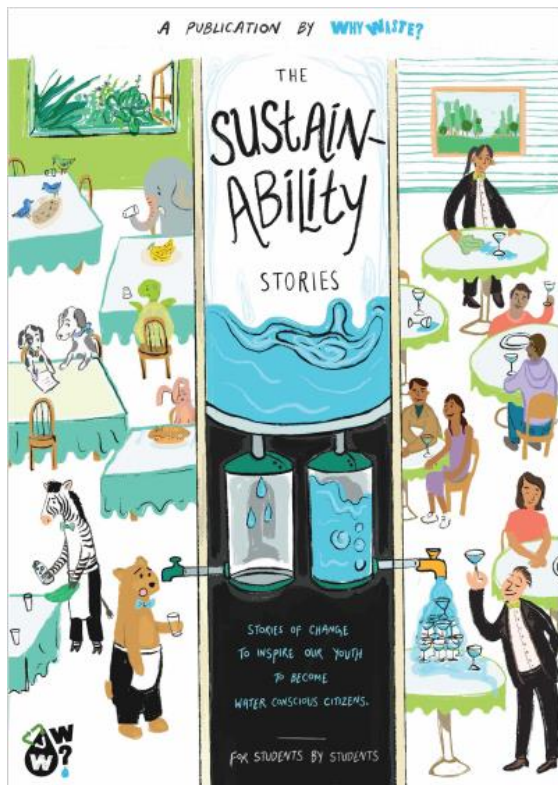
With that thought, you partnered with National Restaurant Association of India on the #GlassHalfFull initiative, which has now reached over 500,000 restaurants, saved 10 million litres of water, and touched over 6 million lives!



And that's not all. What a remarkable idea it is to clarify environmental issues and inspire children using the colourful language of stories: 'The Sustainability Stories.'

You even ensured that the stories reached the ears of rural children who couldn't read, by the initiative '**Prerana' involving NGOs to read aloud these stories.

During the pandemic, in 2021 you developed the Why Waste? App that allows users to calculate their water footprint and become a part of the change that's flipping the world right way up.



Partnering with some global organizations like Facebook, CNN Network 18, IKEA and google and being actively involved with the UN's climate campaign '*We the Change*' in India, you truly are a global changemaker.

As you said, "In a world where change is the only constant, we are now in constant need of changemakers."

For all the inspiring initiatives, you've received the prestigious Diana Award in 2020, you're the first and only Indian to be awarded a Wonder Grant from the Shawn Mendes Foundation, and you were nominated for Forbes 30 under 30 Asia 2021 for social entrepreneurship.



Your leadership skills inspire youths all over the world to follow in your glowing footsteps. You have the ability to inspire youth and channelize their changemaking energy positively. That takes a LOT of patience and courage!



Unlike most of us, you weren't afraid to stand out. When most college kids are nose-deep in academics or buzzing with social life, you are making a difference! Like how a stone creates ripples when dropped in water, your efforts created a ripple effect throughout the world!



A hero isn't defined by powers. A hero sets whatever is wrong right, and paves his/her own way to do so, not follow a path already followed!

You are my hero, Miss Garvita Gulhati, the girl who's saving the world, half glass at a time!

Sincerely,

Mitali Ragtah

21-6-2023

References

* **Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows** by J.K. Rowling, page number 608.

** *Prerana*: Hindi word meaning- inspiration