

GARBAGE CAFÉS TRADING FOOD FOR PLASTIC WASTE ARE SPREADING ACROSS INDIA

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[Ambikapur, a city in the state of Chhattisgarh in central India, launched the first Garbage Café in 2019](#), under the slogan *More the Waste, Better the Taste*. Funded by the Ambikapur Municipal Corporation (AMC), it was set up near the city's main bus stand.

The idea was born out of two pressing problems: plastic waste and hunger. Ambikapur, once struggling with mountains of unmanaged garbage, sought to turn waste management into an opportunity. The Ambikapur Municipal Corporation (AMC) launched the café to encourage ragpickers, homeless residents, and low-income families to collect plastic waste from streets and landfills, in exchange for hot, nutritious meals.

For example, 1kg of plastic, which typically takes a couple of hours to collect, can be exchanged for a curry with rice, lentils and papadams. For half that weight, customers can receive a breakfast of samosas, lentil doughnuts or stuffed flatbreads.

The plastic collected at the café is recycled into granules for road construction or sold to recyclers, generating income for the municipality. There are more than [34,000 km of plastic roads](#) in the country, mostly in rural areas, and this type of road surface is increasingly popular because the addition of plastic can make roads more resistant to India's extreme temperatures. Plastic collected by the Garbage Café is sent to 20 decentralized specialized local waste collection centers (SLRMs). These centers, also managed by the Ambikapur Municipal Corporation (AMC), sort waste into over 60 categories to maximize recycling and recovery.

[India has a major plastic waste problem, generating around 26,000 tonnes every day](#). Plastic pollution is widespread in natural and urban environments, raising serious environmental and health concerns. Globally, plastic production and disposal significantly contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. In 2019, plastics accounted for 3.4% of emissions, with projections showing that their share could increase up to 15% by 2050 without further action. [India alone generates 26,000 tonnes of plastic waste daily, of which only a small proportion, of about 8%, is recycled. Much of it ends up in landfills or in the environment, contributing to oceans pollution and climate change.](#)

Since its launch in 2019, Ambikapur's innovative Garbage Café has collected nearly 23 tonnes of plastic waste, reducing the amount sent to landfills. While this represents only a small fraction



of the city's total plastic waste, it complements a wider city-wide initiative to reduce and recycle plastic more effectively. The city generates approximately 45 tonnes of solid waste per day, but it has significantly transformed its waste management approach significantly since 2016, when a zero-waste decentralized zero-waste system was introduced and a former 16-acre dumping ground was converted into a park.

Ambikapur has seen a notable reduction in plastic going to landfill, from 5.4 tonnes annually in 2019 to two tonnes in 2024. This improvement is part of a broader waste management strategy that includes stricter regulations on plastic use, enhanced waste sorting, and an efficient, decentralized waste management system.

The Garbage Café focuses on recovering plastic that escapes the primary waste collection network while encouraging greater community participation in sustainable practices.

Since the Garbage Café opened in 2019 in Ambikapur, several other cities in India have adopted similar models. In [Siliguri](#), West Bengal, a scheme launched in 2019 began offering free meals in exchange for plastic waste. That same year, a new scheme in the town of [Mulugu in Telangana](#) state started offering rice in exchange for each kilogram of plastic. In Mysuru, Karnataka, [a scheme launched in 2024](#) allows locals to swap 500 g of plastic at any state-funded [Indira canteen](#) for a free breakfast, or 1kg for a free meal, according to local media.

The story of Ambikapur's Garbage Café is one of creativity and resilience, turning two pressing challenges, hunger and plastic waste, into an opportunity for change. While its impact may be modest compared with the scale of India's plastic problem, it has shown how grassroot innovation can simultaneously improve lives and help clean up communities.

[Prime Minister Narendra Modi has praised Ambikapur's innovative approach to reducing plastic waste](#), highlighting the initiative, adopted in north Chhattisgarh, as a way of encouraging residents to actively participate in efforts to make the city plastic-free.

To know more

[Garbage Café in time.com](#)

[Garbage Café in azocleantech.com](#)

[Garbage Café in weforum.org](#)

[Garbage Café in bbc.com](#)

[Garbage Café in theguardian.com](#)

[Article in eurasiacpo.com](#)

[Article in borgenproject.org](#)

[Article in newindianexpress.com](#)

[Article in reasonstobecheerful.world](#)

[Article in tekedia.com](#)



The India's First "Garbage Cafe" has been launched in Ambikapur. This cafe offers a full Meal to Ragpickers or a person who collects 1 Kg of Plastic waste.

A Great Idea!!

