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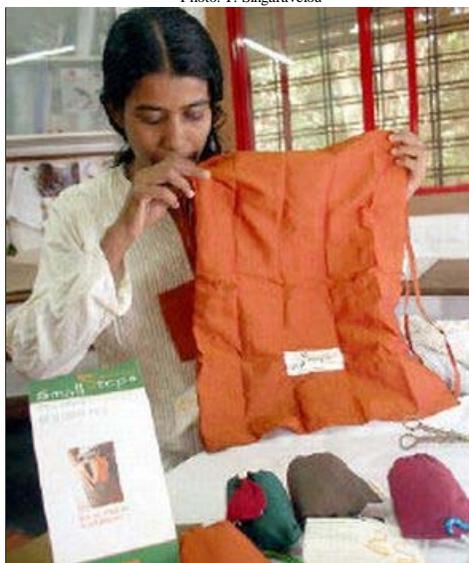
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Small steps to create a plastic-free world

Deepa H Ramakrishnan

Bag made of cotton, polyster is cynosure of all

— Photo: T. Singaravelou



AVOIDNIG PLASTIC: Uma Prajapathi of Upasana in Auroville shows a handy bag that can be used for shopping.

PUDUCHERRY: Can you put a big bag into a small bag? No... this isn't a puzzle for you to solve but an anti-plastic campaign in the form of easy-to-carry bags. Launched somewhere in north India, the Small Steps project, which trains women of a couple of coastal villages near Puducherry, tries to make a small revolution.

The bag that is made of 70 per cent cotton and 30 per cent polyester and can carry up to 7 kg is just the size of a cell phone. It comes with a handy clip that can be hung from the loop of your pants. These bags were given to participants at a seminar on coastal management in Auroville and they caught this reporter's attention.

The initiative

"We were in a small temple town and saw hundreds of plastic bags flying around us and we wanted to do something about it. We asked a hawker on the street if he got a chance to serve the country would he do something. He replied that when he wasn't able to make ends meet for himself and his family what would he be able to do for the country. We told him he could make a difference by not packing his wares in plastic and he promised to do so," explained Uma Prajapathi of Upasana Design Studio that spearheads the project. "The initiative for the project was born there and we started it in Auroville last year on Earth Day in April. Now the bags and the project have spread to several corners of the world. Non-governmental organisations in South Africa and Thailand have taken up similar bag-making projects, which would also become a source of income for hundreds of poor women, apart from being an anti-plastic campaign on its own way," she added.

And Upasana's young team of designers — Manoj Pavitrnan, Vimal Bojraj, Meenakshi Dangi and Uma — put their heads together to make this big bag inside a small bag. It comes in pretty colours and has a sophisticated yet aesthetic silky feel to it.

The bag has been tested to carry up to 10 kg but it is safe to carry up to 7 kg since it would reduce the wear and tear on the material.

When asked if such bags would help, quoting a proverb of Lao Tsu `A journey of a thousand miles starts with one small step,' Uma said every big project has small steps behind it. "Its just 20 years since we stopped carrying a bag to do our shopping. What we need is a tiny personal step to avoid or say no to plastic.

This bag gives you the possibility to always have a bag since it is tiny and handy. We are not telling everyone to buy this bag but just giving them an idea that an alternate would be welcome," she concluded. For more details about the project log on to www.smallsteps.in.

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