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Upasana comes full circle with sustainable fashion

Upasana creates sustainable fashion in appealing designs that make it easy to adopt an organic way of life.

[Upasana](#) Nov 5, 2015

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Born in the spiritual environs of Auroville, some 12 kilometres away from the sandy shores of Pondicherry, Upasana Studio came into being with the idea of designing socially responsibly fashion for change and with an aim to expand the scope of design to impact all aspects's of a product's life cycle, the lives of those who produce it, and their larger social contexts. Upasana founder, Uma Prajapati arrived in Auroville, aiming to explore the myriad personalities of India manifested in her textiles and weaves. The studio designs garments using traditional Indian textiles from different Indian states. It also works with khadi and uses organic cotton as a base material. The company's efforts are strongly influenced by sustainability at all levels of its practice – from the use of indigenous cotton, zero waste production using upcycling and natural dyeing, and by adopting fair trade practises.

On offer is a range of women's and men's clothing, accessories and gifts produced sustainably. Apart from their work with textiles, they are also involved in design consultancy, education and social development of the communities they work with. So, you know when you shop at Upasana that you making a conscious choice.



Uma Prajapati (second from right) and team Upasana

Building business with a conscience

“The inception of Upasana”, says Prajapati, “was meant to introduce the multi-cultural community of Auroville to the diversity and versatility of Indian fabrics and thus began the studio’s efforts with artisans to revive heritage weaving traditions.

Truly sustainable fashion is that which focuses on processes, people, and the environment. Elaborating, Prajapati adds, “At Upasana, business decisions are not made keeping in mind advantages to be reaped in the present but all of our actions are aligned towards how we can shape the future for the greatest good of everyone in our supply chain.” Her words are supported by the many development projects Upasana initiated in the aftermath of the tsunami of 2004 which altered the brand’s focus to centre a lot more on rebuilding the lives of the community around and helping them rehabilitate themselves socially and economically. Upasana initiated six different development projects that grew into independent programmes across the country adds.

Through Kapas, Upasana supports growers of organic and indigenous cotton in Madurai, Small Steps produces compact cloth bags as an eco-friendly alternative to plastic bags, Varanasi Weavers is a craft intervention with the weaving communities of Varanasi, Tsunami began as a project for sustainable livelihoods among fisherwomen along the Tamil Nadu coast, and Paruthi is an organic brand to support India’s organic farming community.



Members of the Tsunami Project (left) and the Small Steps cloth bags

Sustainable fashion is the only way forward

Says Prajapati, “Organic is only way forward for us and we believe that India and China can, by going all-organic in their home consumption, can make a significant change in the fashion industry worldwide.” Furthering its commitment to sustainable fashion, Upasana launched ‘Paruthi’ (cotton in Tamil) in 2011 with an aim of going organic in their production and supporting India’s organic farming community.

Extending their vision of sustainability to other parts of the production chain, Upasana not just recycles its textile waste it generates but also minimizing the quantity of waste generated. Recently, as part of its annual clean-up, the company was confronted with a formidable stock of textile bits and the ‘Art to Wear’ idea emerged. This limited range of upcycled dresses, Prajapati says, is in line with Upasana’s zero-waste philosophy of

converting ‘waste’ to ‘want’ using creative designs and stylish silhouettes and using fabric discards in unique ways to raise their value and appeal. “Each creation in the collection is a piece of art requiring painstaking attention to detail and design expertise. Every swatch of fabric is thoughtfully juxtaposed with another, making each piece one of a kind. The line is an amalgamation of Upasana’s sensitivity towards aesthetic design, conscious consumption, and responsible fashion”, says Prajapati.



Upasana’s Artwear collection is made by upcycling fabric discards

Design Matters

At the core of Upasana’s practice is a razor sharp focus on good design – of the final product and of the many processes that go into making it as sustainable as possible. Whether it is using locally grown cotton or safe, natural dyes, the company is faced with having to pick from multiple options, all while making sure the end product meets the colour and style needs of the average consumer.

Prajapati is aware that sustainable fashion is a nascent subject in India. She also acknowledges consumers’ low literacy of safe ingredients and ethical practices in fashion and the paucity of attention most consumers pay to the impact of their clothes on the environment. In the context of rapidly changing trends and a niche market for sustainable goods, it is challenging to match up to the rising demand for mass produced fashion while continuing to remain organic. In its designs, Upasana strives to balance sustainability with good design that inspires consumers to buy and wear fashion that is good for the environment while being aesthetically appealing and stylish. “Our designs make it easy for one to adapt to the organic way of life”, says Prajapati.



Upasana’s creations

Fashion may be fickle, yet it is a hugely powerful sector that can influence the way we produce and consume today. India, as the largest supplier of organic cotton in the world, is in an advantageous position from where it can lead the global movement for a better, more sustainable fashion industry that minimises the environmental costs it passes on to future generations.