



PARIVARTHANE VOL.1

IT'S TIME TO BAN PLASTIC BAGS...

Plastic covers! less than 20 microns; non degradable in nature...are everywhere; stuck on trees and bushes, decorating the sides of our roads, left as fossils in soil, piled up under the kitchen sink; blocking drains, trapping cows/birds; killing livestock and spoiling the aesthetics.

Plastic! Plastic!! Everywhere...

Earth is choking out of air...

In India, plastics account to 4 per cent volume of the total of one lakh tones of solid waste generated every day. The most common plastic waste includes plastic bags, PET Bottles, plastic containers etc..

There's no such thing as free bags

...but while we enjoy the fleeting convenience of free, unlimited single use plastic bags, the real costs are to the environment; some to be paid by us, right here and others are being stored up for our future generations. Countries all over the world are waking up to the plastic bag problem and are taking radical action to address it. And yet one thing we know: long after each one of us has passed away and our bodies have turned to dust and our plastic bags will still lie in the soil, intact.

The word plastic comes from the Greek word *plastikos* means "able to be moulded."

Today in our life plastic plays most important role starting from brushes, computers to medical accessories like artificial valves, syringes etc.. The usage of plastic is very essential in certain field like electronic manufacturing industries, medical field, packing industries etc.. But one needs to be aware that plastic is dangerous up to certain thickness.

Looking into these consequences, the **Ministry of Environment & Forest** has notified a set of guidelines for usage & manufacturing of plastics especially for storage of foodstuff called "**Re-cycled Plastics Manufacture and Usage Rules, 1999**". In brief this rule states;

- Deputy Collector/Deputy Commissioners are the sole authority to enforce this rule in their concerned district;
- No carry bags having **less than 20-micron (equivalent to 0.2 mm) thickness**, can be manufactured, stored, sold and/or used;
- Carry bags made from recycled plastic would have to be coloured, specially marked and should not be used for carrying foodstuff;
- The recycling procedure should strictly follow the Bureau of Indian Standards specifications; and
- Carry bags manufactured from virgin granules should either be transparent or white.

Steps towards Green, Clean and plastic free town...



- 1. Conduct a meeting with the local community groups to help, support the idea and identify the local coordinators:** A local coordinator shall be preferably be DC or any other top officials where in SHGs, any local group, NGO, RWA, Clubs, Associations, religious institutions, school, Institution etc. should be roped in. It's a good idea at this stage to talk to Councilors and if possible get them on side.
- 2. Research sources, prices and availability of reusable bags as an alternative to plastic covers:** The local groups can be involved in preparing paper envelopes of various sizes, jute and cloth bags, recycled paper bags, handcrafted bags, hard paper carry bags etc.. The initial cost for setting the project can be pitched in through sponsor, donations, DWACUA funds, loan, other untied funds etc.. based on the decision of DC. The required training can be provided under DWACUA scheme. Prices should be very reasonable. The idea can be promoted for major shops where in alternative bags will last for years, the retailers will benefit from long lasting advertising if they have them printed with their own details.
- 3.** Identify a local plastic recycler in the market who can buy all the waste plastic at a pre-fixed price and shall collect them once in 15 days from the designated location. All the waste plastic should be collected from source and stored in this location by the waste retrievers.
- 4.** Fix a penalty under EPA Act to ensure the rules are enforced.
- 5. Organize an open meeting to discuss with the retailers, traders and merchants:** Organize a meeting with the traders, commercial establishments and medical establishments like plastic traders, hoteliers, shopkeepers, hawkers association, medical shops, hospitals, temples, marriage halls etc. and notify them about the rules and instruct them not to use plastic bags less than 20 microns. Issue an order then and there itself with consequences mentioned in it for defaulters as per the EPA act. Get their feedback on usage of alternative bags instead of plastic bags; this is about cooperation, not confrontation. **Get all the retailers to sign up to their commitment to go "Plastic Bag Free".**
- 6. Awareness among the plastic bag users and producers:** Put together a simple information sheet or pack for your local retailers on the benefits of becoming Plastic Bag Free: Include information about alternative bags and their availability. Create awareness among the community and traders by involving schools, ULBs, Clubs etc. through displaying banners, hoardings, posters, organizing street plays, flash in local channels etc. to discourage the usage of plastic.
- 7. Ban the usage of Plastic in sensitive spots:** Issue an order through DC to ban entry, sale and use of plastic carry bags, cups and containers less than four inches in height and 40 microns in thickness, in all the Government buildings, Schools, parks, lakes, tourist/temple/heritage spots in a town. Notify this in all the possible ways to the general public. Announce the same with the help of media like local newspaper, local channels etc. Strictly ban usage of plastic banners during elections.
- 8.** Form a Task Force/squad consisting of local coordinators and others like one municipal official, one DUDC's official, one volunteer, one official from police department who would monitor, raid and inspect the plastic usage as per the rule and would be delegated with the powers to levy penalty.
- 9. Set a launch date and make a formal announcement:** Make sure that enough time was allowed for everything to be in place, for the order(s) of reusable bags to arrive and for retailers to have used up most of their old stock of plastic bags. Instruct every one to pledge on the day that..." *I pledge to refuse to accept disposable bags in shops, markets, supermarkets and other food outlets. Instead I will bring my own –reusable bags for all my food shopping*".

Send pictures and a report of the event to Ban the Bag so that your town/city is in limelight.