The first report card, the last post card from your granny, the thesis submitted after years of hard work in laboratories, we all have a few of such safely stored memories — on ‘Paper’. Paper holds an immense value in our lives.

But the mass production of paper involves the merciless cutting of trees and the options to reuse and properly dispose this amenity are very limited. The lack of awareness about paper recycling, low collection rate of paper waste and improper handling or poor segregation of the paper makes it unfit for recycling purpose. We are drowning in garbage with every passing day and the issue of waste management has assumed alarming proportions. While we cannot entirely cut down papers from our lives, we need to seriously think about preventing trees from being cut down.

With this vision and striving for some alternative and creative ideas for marketing brands at the Kellogg School of Management, Illinois, US, a Jaipur-based entrepreneur Kritika Parwal came up with an out-of-the-box innovation to tackle the burgeoning issue of paper waste. Hailing from the handmade paper hub – Jaipur city – the young lady was inspired to develop a paper that could relive after use to change its image of being an eternal nemesis of trees.

At first, she was skeptical about her idea. She returned to her home town and contemplated on the project to make it practical. She experimented with a variety of handmade papers and attained her first success in producing the plantable paper containing tomato seeds and named her company as “Tomato & Co”.

The paper with embedded seeds comes with many exemplary features. The foremost is that it does not involve any tree cutting as there is no use of wood pulp. It is handmade and completely made out of residual organic waste from
cotton factories, resins, organic binders, etc. Organic dyes like Indigo, Cochineal, Weld, Saffron and Cutch are used to give vibrant hues to the papers. Hence, the paper is biodegradable, completely safe and environment-friendly.

The process of making seed-paper involves nine comprehensive steps. Cotton shreds, binders, seeds, and resins are made into a homogenous pulp and then flattened out on screens. Papers are prepared in different thicknesses using muslin membranes. The paper is semi-dried and undergoes another process to stunt the seeds from germinating. In the final steps, the sheets are completely air dried and molded in shapes based on the diversified products sold by Tomato & Co. including calendars, postcards, greeting cards, wedding invites, visiting cards, bookmarks, coffee cup sleeves, wristbands, seed coins, and coasters too. The plantable paper and products made from it are as smooth as other normal paper made products.

The planting procedure is easy. After use, the paper can be torn or cut into shreds and sown in a pot of soil. The paper gets decomposed and seeds flourish into saplings. The fruits and vegetables thus obtained are free from chemicals and safe to consume as the paper manufacturing paper process is purely organic. Apart from tomato seeds, the papers are embedded with seeds of lavender, chilies, carrot, jasmine, basil, lemon, marigold, sunflower, orange and many others.

Isn’t it magical to sow a paper and yield a plant instead of the reverse? The profit from producing plantable paper counts not only the money, but the number of plants that can be grown by using these papers. We need more such innovative solutions towards sustainable living.

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