

attempting a sustainable life in a fast-moving world

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heart, however, sank. Reality had just upended a plan I had long nurtured: that our family would buy no new non-cotton fabric. A work visit to textile mills had prompted the resolve. Yet the thought of acquiring another pile of “petroleum-based synthetics” dulled the pleasure of receiving gifts. Eco-consciousness can be a burdensome companion—one from which there is no easy escape.

I cringe at broken plastic toys, chemical glue, triple-layered packaging from online orders and even the crackle of unboxing videos that my children enjoy. The thought of managing the resulting waste unnerves me. Simply throwing things in the bin was banished from our home a decade ago, when we realised that sustainability demanded more than material minimalism. We needed to align our lives with nature if we hoped to soak in its magic. Shedding the fear (of living without a salary or comforts) took time. After the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic, we sold most of our belongings and moved to a village in Gujarat. My partner took a sabbatical from his corporate job; I picked up additional freelance work to cover expenses. The plan was enviable: slowly build an organic farm and live off it. The idealism paid off, to an extent. Freedom from office life, of not reporting to a job, was unparalleled and came with the luxury of time. We learnt to cook on a wood-fired *chulha*, grew herbs, ate fresh meals only when hungry, compost, preserved fruits from the trees, wove door mats from grass, took long walks to the weekly *haat* for vegetables. We managed without a refrigerator and eliminated chemical-laced toiletries and cleaners from the house. Our fondness for snacks meant frequent baking and carrying our own *dabba* to the market. The greatest relief was not worrying about keeping the children in “presentable” clothes.

But mindful living is “slow”. Daily chores consume hours. Washing utensils with ash without running water takes time. Conscious buying takes time. Saving jackfruit and mangoes from going to waste takes time. Learning these skills from neighbours takes time. Our urban minds, trained to assign a monetary value to every hour, began to see it as an extended vacation—one that had to end. “Use your education, earn money, advance your career,” the world seemed to insist. We listened and returned to corporate life, where time evaporates. And we were struck, more sharply than before, by how little room modern urban life allows for frugality. We now earn to pay others to perform household tasks, justifying it as job creation. We burn fuel for even short trips—no time or road space to walk—order most things online; indulge children’s demands for