

# THRIVABLE INSIGHTS FROM THE THRIVABILITY MATTERS WEBINAR

Hello, passionate thrivability enthusiast. We live in unprecedented times. The numbers prove that climate change is here to stay, social injustices corrupt the very fabric of our society, and misinformation and false narratives clog our devices through mainstream and social media. It's important to have reliable information from people who stand to gain nothing from sharing with you. A person's agenda defines their motivation. THRIVE's agenda is to assist others to build a thrivable future for themselves, while our passionate volunteers walk our own talk to deliver an authenticity that is difficult to find elsewhere.

Every month, THRIVE delivers a power-packed [webinar](#), straight to your screens, providing statistics, facts, tips, tricks, and hints on how to lead a more environmentally friendly life. These webinars focus on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, otherwise known as the SDGs. Each month, a particular goal is highlighted for unpacking,

disseminating, and investigating, to see how it applies to us and how we can play as a global team, on the playing field of Earth, to reach these goals. It isn't enough for us to sit passively by and let governments and businesses make our decisions for us. After all, their motivation is driven by their agenda. Who can tell what that means for us?

Our aim is to arm you with what is necessary to move your life from being simply sustainable to terrifically thrivable. Therefore, I'd like to introduce you to Sanjana Swaroop. She was an esteemed guest for the July 2024 Thrivability Matters Webinar, who spoke to us on SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. Sanjana's focus was on the need to rethink what innovation means in our businesses, and implement circular economies. The thrivable insights that follow are her precious pearls of wisdom that she was generous enough to share with us during the Q&A session that follows every webinar.

## INTRODUCING SANJANA SWAROOP



Sanjana Swaroop is an international corporate lawyer turned social entrepreneur and co-founder of EcoDhaga.

EcoDhaga took roots when the founders were confronted with the waste problem in India and decided to find a solution for the 51% of textile waste that ends up in our landfills in India.

EcoDhaga is India's first ethical thrift store with a unique close-the-loop model that they've built in tandem with their patrons, donors, thrifters and community.

The journey to build a social impact business has been interesting and challenging. As with all start ups, we have good days and days we learn, but we're geared to help India achieve its global sustainable development commitments and promote women entrepreneurs.

EcoDhaga has been awarded with APAC Insider Business Award for Most Sustainable Clothing Store (Southwest India) in 2022 and in 2023, and we hope to continue to build on this journey.

What makes us different, makes us a responsible and conscious business.

## Q & A

***There must be a treatment process for the used clothes that they undergo, to get a new life. In that case, how do you strike a balance between using resources (water, chemical, dyeing etc.) for making them sellable and minimising the environmental impact.***

***Also, what is the impact of recycled clothes on people's skin? Can such clothes be safe to be worn by people with sensitive skin as well?***

We have rigorous hygiene protocols in place. We ask our donors to wash them at the first instance before decluttering. Even so, all items received are again sent for treatment.

At EcoDhaga we do not use "dyeing" as a way of salvaging garments because natural dyes are expensive and would not justify cost to consumer.

I think certain terms are used interchangeably and incorrectly so: thrifted is not the same as recycled; upcycled is not the same as recycled. I believe, there is research being carried out on textile recycling, but with current technology, textiles are recycled into coarse rough material

which is used for furnitures or rugs and does not get re-made into garments.

***What do you do with the fabrics which are difficult or may be impossible to recycle? Also, what happens to the fixtures (buttons, zip, beads, sequins)?***

At the moment, we are collecting these items and warehousing them until we find the appropriate recycling partners who can sustainably recycle polyester and blend materials.

Before any item is segregated, all trims including sequins, beads, buttons, zips, hooks are manually removed at our facility or at our partner facility. Recycling is a labour-intensive process and why reclaiming garments is expensive and time consuming business.



***What methods do you adopt for collecting and sorting used***

***clothes to ensure they can be efficiently recycled?***

We have a detailed procedure in place for segregation and sorting after conducting quality control on each item received to ensure it can be allocated to the appropriate use. We believe recycling should be a last resort, not the first option, so we try to reclaim and reuse the items received in any way possible, before deciding to allocate it to recycling.

***In your opinion, which fabric(s) have the most significant environmental impact throughout its life cycle and should be discontinued for a thrivable future?***

Polyester fabrics! And currently polyester blends are hiding in our closet under materials like “nylon, neoprene, rayon art silk” etc. Polyester is a kind of petrochemical plastic and is not recyclable - it can be shredded and baled but until use cases for that material are economically viable, it is not a solution.

***How difficult is it to thrive in an Indian market given the price sensitivity and competition from both local and international fashion brands?***

It is a challenge especially when we are faced against giant brands with

giant budgets, but we are focussing more on the purpose and product and believe that our community of conscious consumers will make the switch. We believe inherently, consumers want to do better, but there is a lack of information or awareness, which we are trying to bridge through organic means.

***What demographics in India are your products more popular with and how do you plan to attract the other strata of consumers?***

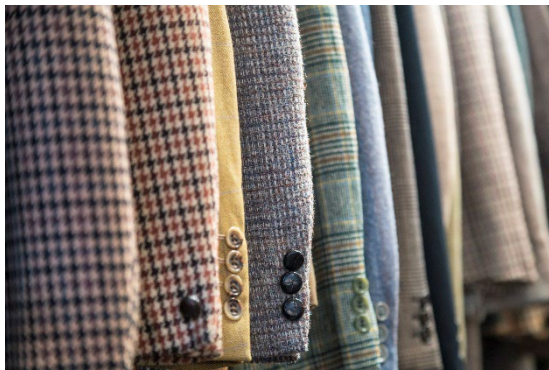
Given our circular model, each product / service attracts a different demographic or target audience. We are constantly refining our marketing strategy to find new and innovative means to engage consumers for each product / service offering through organic below the line marketing and brand collaborations. We are currently looking to raise funding to expand our operations in other cities and scale our operations in Bangalore to be able to serve more conscious consumers meaningfully. We have to sometimes refuse those who are looking to declutter because our small facility is at capacity and until we find the right sales channel for them, we do not believe in landfilling to create space, so ideally, having a larger space would allow us to serve more customers in a meaningful time.

***We see that you have collaborated with a few organisations, how have these collaborations helped / helping you to address some of the challenges in your business? Please share some experiences.***

We believe in collaboration over competition. As a purpose driven organisation, the more brands / collaborators that can help us achieve the outcome we are working towards, the better for the mission. That being said, each collaboration, especially the unlikely matches have showed us spaces where innovation can be game changers. For example, our collaboration with Meta and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry to work on a Extended Reality Open Source Challenge (XROS Programme) was a fantastic platform to explore how Retail Tech, specially AR can be used to make the fashion industry more sustainable by reducing carbon footprint up to 80% per brand. We loved working on the project, but do not have the funds or resources at this time to scale the prototype developed, but we believe that the application could be a (climate & consumerism) game changer.

***How do I know about ethical brands that I can shop in India from? Does your website have a list or a blog article where I can get these details?***

Interestingly, we can curate such a blog list for you. But unfortunately the Indian market is not immune to greenwashing tactics either. We would encourage you to ask your brand questions. As consumers we have a lot more power than we give ourselves credit for.



***What can we do to decrease the use of non-recyclable material in the fashion industry?***

Sign petitions by organisations calling for bans, get your favourite brands to sign the global fashion agenda and accord, ask your favourite brands for more transparency on the materials they are using and how they are sourcing these materials! Consumer Activism is the call of the hour. Vote with your dollar, as was mentioned over the webinar - purchase only materials which have an end-of-life cycle in

place. Do not fall for lip-service greenwashed marketing like “made from recycled materials” (such as the case of Nike which claimed shoes were made from recycled materials but on reading the fine line, it turned out only the sole which was 10% of the material was actually recycled, rest all material was virgin, polyester derived material).

***Can we make garments from material that we can either use as compost or cook as food?***

There is intensive research and experimentation happening in this space - Pinatex is a brand making vegan leather from pineapple waste, banana fibres from stems are also being used to make fabric, same with bamboo. However, there is not enough transparency about the binding agent being used in these new vegan leathers and if those are resin or plastic free, so please be discerning. I am not an authority in this field, but sharing from my own research in a quest to move away from leather. Unfortunately, I did come across a few “vegan” leather brands that do use plastic to bind, so without transparency from such brands, there is no way to assess the success of their R&D and experimentations.





If you found value in this webinar, and loved it as much as we did, please register for our next exciting webinar at [thrivabilitymatters.online](https://thrivabilitymatters.online).

We can't wait to see you there. Keep on thriving!



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