

CHENNAI RESIDENT SPREADS THE MESSAGE OF BIO ENZYMES IN REMOTE VILLAGE

Relevant for: Science & Technology | Topic: Biotechnology, Genetics & Health related developments

Kavitha Sivakumar

Remote work can bring adventitious benefits to rural geographies. Assuming that a considerable number of high-earning professionals operate from a certain village, improved social infrastructure is a possibility. Whether this benefit would percolate to the lowest on the totem pole in these geographies is a moot point — a topic for another day. Focussing solely on Chennai resident Kavitha Sivakumar's experience for now, knowledge transfer is a greater good that can result from remote work.

Kavitha is a homemaker and her husband's remote work enabled the family to pitch tent in their village, Neduvasal in Puddukottai district. With remote work arriving out of the blue, Kavitha had had to "change address" midway into a regular home-based sustainability exercise: bio-enzyme making.

"The batch of bio-enzymes I had made here could not be used, and I made a fresh batch in Neduvasal," recalls Kavitha. This batch of bio-enzymes were shared, and so was the know-how of making them. Whoever passed her path was introduced to this sustainable practice.

"There is a couple of cousins in Neduvasal and they got hooked on to bio enzyme making. Wherever we go, we talk about it, and people are willing to give it a try. The main reason for me to do so was that all the water that is used goes into the field. All the harsh chemicals go right into the fields and farms. Earlier, they were using cow dung cakes, and over time, they had switched to chemical cleaning agents," explains Kavitha.

A photo from Neduvasal illustrates the success of that "campaign": it spotlights the versatility of the bio-enzyme making exercise being followed by one of Kavitha's cousins. It displays bio-enzymes made out of hibiscus, orange, rose, lemon and pineapple. The photo is titled "bio-enzyme queen".

Kavitha notes that relocation to the suburbs around eleven years ago had sparked off her sustainability journey. The change in address signified a 180 degree change for her.

"As we live in Medavakkam, we are not too far from the Perungudi landfill. One has to cross some kind of a landfill, small or huge, on the way to any place. If you have to go to the city, you have to cross the Perungudi dump. That and the dump in your area. Whether you take the long route or the short route to it, you will always see a dump somewhere. Earlier, we lived in the city and we never saw any landfills. We came here in 2011, as my husband had had to commute all the way to Siruseri," she says.

A resident of 228-unit Raj Paris Harmony, Kavitha has tread quite some distance down the sustainability path. For one-and-a-half years now, Kavitha has been volunteering with Namma Ooru Foundation — a voluntary organisation that promotes sustainability practices — where she is a coordinator-volunteer.

On how she got started on bio-enzymes: "It started with composting. And you keep moving on. You hear about this when you start that journey."

Kavitha makes bio-enzymes just for her hearth, and for friends and acquaintances inspired by her example, she gives samples to nudge them into this practice.

“You can save a thousand bucks a month — because you buy fruits, and what you are going to throw away, you are going to use to make bio-enzymes. You spend some money on buying jaggery. It gets clean. Everybody is happy. The skin is happy. And you also save money on top of that. You use it for wiping the floors, bathroom cleaning, and tile cleaning. Now, I am formulating something for washing dishes, and also trying it for clothes,” she observes.

A hallmark of Kavitha’s bio-enzyme making is bold experimentation, as she always tries out new fruit peels and skins — there is a cozy corner in the kitchen that is kept sacrosanct for bio-enzymes .

“Bio enzymes made out of dragon fruit has the colour of wine, and also smells like it. We use that for wiping the floor. I have also made bio-enzymes with pine apple and apple — they are all the exotic varieties. However, when it comes to cleaning power, it is only citrus peels. Mozambi is on the highest rung of the ladder, with more cleaning power; and then there is always orange and lemon. I usually do not mix different peels, but you can. Whatever the fruits you get, their refuse can go into a bio-enzyme instead of the compost bin.”

The soap nuts used in the household also have a taste of bio-enzymes.

“Water, bio-enzymes and soap nuts — you add them in equal portions and let it rest for 10 days. If you use the soap nuts directly, they get spoilt and you need to refrigerate them. Bio-enzymes preserve soap nuts and increase their shelf life. When the soap nuts soak in the bio-enzyme, there is no need to keep it in the refrigerator. You do not have to cook it — some people do so to make shampoos.”

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