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A new cooking experience for Dalit women

Karthik Madhavan

The women's complex, constructed in 2000, was renovated five months ago

PHOTO: M. GOVARTHAN



Women of the Dalit hamlet at Komarapalayam, near Sathyamangalam, have graduated from firewood to cooking gas. —

SATHYAMANGALAM: If 'Bogi' is all about discarding the old to embrace the new, then the dalit women in Komarapalayam Adi Dravida Colony have got it perfectly right.

They gave up cooking on firewood stove to graduate to gas stove, thanks to the support the Bannari Amman Rural Foundation and the District Rural Development Agency have provided.

The Foundation has put in place a system in the colony, near here, wherein the women get to cook in specially designed stove, which burn methane.

The gas is obtained from the men's and women's public convenience facilities, which have been repaired and renovated with funds from the Foundation and also Komarapalayam panchayat.

The Foundation renovated the women's toilet complex at Rs. 50,000 and supported the panchayat in building the men's complex by providing around Rs. 1.5 lakh, says A.N. Kolandaiswamy, executive treasurer, Bannari Rural Foundation.

"The women's complex, constructed in 2000, was in disuse for a long time and renovated about five months ago," he says and adds that the flooring has been changed and the outlet pipelines have been diverted to the newly-constructed septic tank.

Panchayat

As for the men's complex, the Foundation complimented the panchayat by tile flooring the entire toilet complex and again taking the pipeline to the septic tank, which is attached to a 25 cubic metre tank, from which the gas is tapped.

In all, around Rs. 6.5 lakh has been spent, says Mr. Kolandaiswamy and adds that the

Foundation has applied for subsidy to the District Rural Development Agency.

Project Officer, DRDA, N. Sreenivasan says the Agency has forwarded the Foundation's proposal to the Tamil Nadu Energy Development Agency, which will soon disburse Rs. 1.5 lakh.

The Foundation has taken the gas through a pipeline to a house in the Colony, where six stoves are in use. The women, most of who are employed, say they take turns to cook as they will have to leave early for wok. "The cooking starts 6 a.m. onwards and happens in two shifts," says S. Latha, councillor.

"One group of women finish work by 7 a.m., after which the next takes over," she says and adds that the cooking time has halved. "Earlier it used to take two hours to cook as the firewood takes a long time to burn; but now it is just an hour," says P. Vijaya, a resident.

Not only that the women are spared of the problems of smoke. "The smoke from firewood was a trouble, as we need to keep blowing air and it used to spread all over the house. Now that is not there," she says.

But then it was not a smooth start for the women. They had apprehensions about using gas tapped from septic tank. "Initially we had hesitations about the smell but after checking it for a couple of days, we have been able to overcome those," says Ms. Latha.

However, many women continue to hold on to those apprehensions and refuse to use the facility. Mr. Kolandaiswamy says the Foundation is in the process of constructing a community kitchen with about a dozen stoves.

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