

Zero waste policy: Green hero's home now a must-visit

Bishwanath Ghosh | TNN

Chennai: For S Indra Kumar, a machine operator-turned-environment activist, charity begins at home. No chemical, save the soap he uses, enters his home. And no waste is ever let out. This makes his modest dwelling in Pammal, the southern suburbs of Chennai, a "zero-waste home".

He didn't have to read rocket science to turn his residence into an "green" home. He is inspired by the simple, age-old chemical process that every housewife in India is familiar with. "If you leave a bowl of milk behind for five days, how will it smell when you come back? Rotten, right? But if you put a drop

of buttermilk into it before you leave, you'll find fresh curd!" beams Indra Kumar (59), whose 1986-built house has now become a pilgrimage for those wanting to do their bit for the environment — be it farmers from Arakkonam or school students from Chennai.

"Here, smell it," says Indra Kumar, as he opens the lid of the septic tank in his garden. One instinctively recoils, but its contents look as harmless as accumulated rain water. "Is there smell?" No. "Do you see any mosquitoes?" No. "That's because I treat sewage with a certain bacteria," he declares. The bacteria, *Bacillus subtilis*, neutralise the sewage to turn waste into ma-



ON A MISSION: S Indra Kumar

nure for plants in his garden.

Then, the earthworm takes care of the liquid waste from the

kitchen. Under the drainage pipe, Kumar has buried some worms which not only digest the organic

matter but also feed on mosquito eggs. And at the spot where water from the bathroom drains out, he grows cama plant, whose roots treat the soap water.

Solid waste from kitchen is collected in an earthen pot and dried cowdung sprinkled on it periodically. "Any smell?" Indra Kumar asks. No. "Any fly?" No. "In 60 days this will turn into beautiful compost," he exclaims. He treats leaves from the garden similarly: collects them in drums and sprinkles dried cowdung on them till they turn into compost. "This way, you give back to nature what it gives you. People often burn dry leaves, which only causes pollution."

Indra Kumar's fascination for

composting is understandable because in 2004, he took voluntary retirement from Areva (formerly the English Electric Company, where he worked as a machine-man and then as a purchase supervisor) to take up vermi-composting. Today, as the president of Home Exnora, he is a sought-after man who is called by universities and citizens' group to speak on waste management. "If you control pollution at the micro-level, it doesn't require any money or the government's involvement. People only think about what they eat or what they drink. But what about the air that you breathe non-stop, right from the time you are born?" Kumar asks.

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