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Save water through recycling

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While water crisis is a term on everybody's lips, interestingly many people seem to be ignorant of ways to recycle and reuse water. Most want the government to take the initiative for water conservation. Many people also think recycled water is not hygienic.

Says M. Dhanabalan, former Chief Engineer, Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage (TWAD) Board, Madurai, "People are yet to accept the idea of using recycled water."

"The acceptability of recycled sewage water is limited. People hesitate to use it. The attitude has to change," he insists.

He points out that the Directorate of Town and Country Planning has made it mandatory for real estate developers in

Chennai to establish mechanisms for recycling sewage water. “As per the norms, the recycled water must be used for gardening, cleaning the campus and flushing toilets,” he adds.

This rule is likely to be enforced soon in Madurai too.

According to Mr. Dhanabalan, individual house owners can set up recycling plants on their premises. “The water used in the kitchen and bathrooms could be separated from the sewage, recycled and used to fill flush tanks and watering the plants. People must be willing to spend for it,” he says, adding that a manual will be published next month by the Union Urban Development Ministry which will act as a guide for all sewerage related works giving importance to recycling.

Mr. Dhanabalan also suggests that rainwater collected from the roof of a 1,000 square feet house can be conserved in two ways. “Water collected on one portion of the house can be used to recharge the borewell. The other collected portion can be distilled and stored in a sump. The distilled water can then be drawn to the overhead tank.”

“Water has become a reason for envy, distrust and discord between friends and relatives,” observes K. Ganapathy, a resident of Anaiyur.

He was appalled when recently a plumber demanded Rs.300 toward labour charges for a simple job of repairing a leaking water tap. “The plumber, a regular at my house, was envious to see that I was drawing groundwater freely from my bore well, whereas many people are forced to purchase water for their daily needs. I don’t disclose to people that my bore well hasn’t dried up,” he says.

One of the lucky few

Mr. Ganapathy is perhaps among the lucky few able to draw groundwater at a time when most parts of the city remain parched despite digging bore wells beyond 500 feet. Water tankers are working overtime supplying water at high cost. These water tankers sell about 6,000 litres of water for Rs.500 if it has to be emptied into a sump.

“My house does not have a sump. The tankers have to wait for

some time and pump the water directly to the overhead tank on the second floor. For this, they charge Rs.250 for 1,000 litres,” S. Prabhu of Gomathipuram complains.

A prime reason for the city facing water scarcity is the depletion of the water sources such as innumerable Kanmois (rain fed water tanks) and water channels. Encroachment and lack of maintenance are responsible for this situation. “I came to Gomathipuram 15 years ago thinking its proximity to the Vandiyur Kanmoi (water body) will stand in good stead. But today, unfortunately, the Kanmoi is parched,” laments Mr.Prabhu.

The Vandiyur water body was originally spread over 691.26 acres. But over the years, about 52 acres of the tank were encroached upon and put to other uses. J. Vinodh who had obtained the rights for fishing in the tank through an auction three years ago, says for three years the water body has run dry. “I am sitting idle here. This water body was once used to irrigate 963 acres. But the area got reduced to 634 acres as the rest of the land got converted into housing plots,” he adds.

The state of Chinna Kanmoi, another water body that existed within the city limits, is worse as most of it has been

encroached upon by houses and commercial establishments. Says R.S. Giridharan, who lives in a rented apartment situated right on the erstwhile water body, “As a 10-year-old, I saw this place full of water. I never imagined it would dry up like this and I would be living right here.”

K. Chakrapany, former chairman, Institution of Engineers (Madurai Local Centre), says water sources need to be preserved like ancient monuments. Welcoming the announcement made in the State Budget with respect to conservation and renovation of old water tanks, he emphasises the need to preserve the water tanks and channels in Madurai on a priority basis.

A. Prathaban, Chief Engineer, Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage (TWAD) Board, Madurai, says water scarcity cannot be solved by experts alone. It requires a mass movement. Peoples’ participation is a must for conserving water.

Though recycling can be an effective solution to address drinking water shortage, the solutions for meeting out irrigation requirements are completely different, points out K. Manuraj, Joint Director, Tamil Nadu Irrigation Management Training Institute. “The State requires 1,260 TMC (Thousand million

cubic feet), whereas the capacity of 100 dams and 39,202 tanks in the State is 440 and 390 TMC respectively. There is a permanent annual shortage. We depend on adjacent States to meet the requirement.” He also suggests purchasing water at the cost of Rs.1 crore for every TMC. “With One TMC of water 6,000 acres of paddy worth Rs. 6 crore can be irrigated. So if the State spends Rs. 400 crore for water, it will also obtain Rs. 2,400 worth food grain.”