

Pandemic throttled street vendors



Photo credit: ABHIRAM JP

ABHIRAM JP & R MAHALAKSHMI

SYogarajan, 50, is a small-scale vegetable vendor in Virudhunagar, Tamil Nadu. His life turned upside down when the country was in complete lockdown. He lost most of his customers because they were unable to leave their homes to buy vegetables from him. “I couldn’t open the shop due to risk of it being sealed by the police. But it was the only source of income for my family. I was bound to sell my goods in bus stands and other areas, as the government allowed us to open shops, but at the place of their choice and their timings. I tried home delivery, but it also gave very less profit,” said Yogarajan.

When the entire world had to be locked inside their homes, the street vendors were badly affected. Without the luxury of work-from-home, their livelihoods were hanging by a thread. Many customers switched to e-commerce sites to order fruits and vegetables, but in vain. Many e-commerce apps failed to deliver in most of the containment zones. The local street vendors were the ones who ensured perishable essentials were accessible to the public.

Another crisis they faced was transport. Public transport came to a standstill during lockdown. Yogarajan who used bus or train to bring his stock from Madurai, now had to use his personal two-wheeler to carry more than ten kilograms of vegetables. “I have to carry the load on highways. The rash driving of other vehicles

makes it difficult. I am always wary of the possibility of accidents that may happen,” worried Yogarajan.

Many vendors underwent turbulent times. Some even got arrested for not maintaining social distancing among customers including Yogarajan: “What can I do in a place with more than 50 shops with thousands of customers swarming the place? I tried my level best to control the people, and was eventually arrested for it along with 11 others. We had to pay ₹500 as fine to be relieved,” shared the vegetable vendor from Virudhunagar.

Being on the brink of impoverishment, many vendors were forced to take loans, or survive on meager means. Yogarajan had to survive on his savings, as he couldn’t make profit, and he was pushed to take loans. He couldn’t let his family starve.

With people losing their means of livelihood all over the country, the government extended the Antyodaya Anna Yojana till November, to provide five kilograms of free rations per month to eighty crore beneficiaries. Even charity organisations donated food to the needy

The street vendors who make money every day for their daily needs were the ones who provided us with fruits and vegetables. They cannot afford to lose their livelihoods anymore. People need to adapt themselves to the ‘new normal’ and follow all safety protocols diligently, to prevent another lockdown.

Empty Football Stands Affect Victory

ABHIRAM JP



Flexing for victory: Practicing for ISL pre pandemic, when nobody had an inkling of a lockdown

Lack of audience has made the players more tactical. They are choosing the ‘passing-way’ of gameplay rather than show-boating and fancy moves. This has made the game more engaging and tentatively competitive. The players are more

focused on the game than impressing football fans

It is up to the players to make hay in the sunshine and better their skills before the audience comes back to the stands to cheer for their favourite teams. The fans can even expect to be

fascinated by any new moves or strategies by the players.

The game that we loved for decades has now changed. But let us hope it is just temporary, and everything will be brighter in the future, once normalcy returns.

South Korea’s Seoul: A traveler’s paradise

ANJANA SERA MATHEW

One day of sightseeing is not enough to get the essence of Seoul, the capital of South Korea. There are sky scrapers reaching for the stars, sprawling across various parts of the city; and there are also the royal palaces standing mightily, as a remnant of Korea’s rich heritage. If you are a historical buff, do not miss *Hanoks* (traditional Korean houses), which were built and designed in the 14th century. If

you are with a loved one, you can leave locks up the Seoul Tower as a significance of your love. The adventurers can check out the world’s largest indoor theme park called Lotte World.

Shopaholics will not return empty-handed from Seoul, owing to the umpteen number of boutiques and outlets selling trendy clothes and skincare products. Going in and out of shops is bound to make one hungry, and Seoul’s street food

comes to the rescue. There are a variety of dishes sold in *Namdaemun* Market, *Gwangjang* Market, *Myeongdong* Street Food Alley. *Bibimbap* is rice dish, with vegetables, beef and fried egg topping. Another famous dish is the Korean sushi, locally called *Kimhap*, which is treated like a sandwich in Seoul. The fillings of *Kimhap* vary from carrots to strips of omelet, and it is wrapped in seaweed. Another popular food is the *Tteokbokki* or cylindrical rice cakes, which

is cooked in spicy and slightly sweet red chili sauce. It is a favourite among locals, who eat these rice cakes at lunch.

One must not miss the *Han* River which flows through the heart of Seoul. There are activities like water-sports, river-cruising and fishing in the river. To enjoy Seoul in its bounty, a tourist must visit Seoul between March and May, if you want to see the vibrant pink of the cherry blossoms in bloom.

Editorial Board

Printed and Published by: Rev. Dr Augustine George, Principal, Kristu Jayanti College (Autonomous)

Staff Editors: Dr Gopakumar AV, Prof Anju Michael

Student Editor: Padmaja Jayaraman

Student Reporters: Anjana Sera Mathew, Padmaja Jayaraman, Shreyas J, Abhiram JP, R Mahalakshmi

Layout and Designing: Shreyas J

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I&B Ministry puts a leash on OTTs

PADMAJA JAYARAMAN

Over-the-top (OTT) platforms have come under the ambit of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting since November 2020. This was in response to a Public Interest Litigation filed for regulating online content, by an autonomous body in the Supreme Court.

Initially OTT platforms were self-regulating their content by prohibiting content that deliberately and maliciously disrespects the national emblem or national flag; any visual or story line that promotes child pornography; content that maliciously intends to outrage religious sentiments; content that deliberately and maliciously promotes or encourages terrorism and; any content that has been banned for exhibition or distribution by law or court. But the government refused to concede to this.

“The government does not want to get into this [regulating online content]. The government does not want to intervene and stop any freedom, but this is your responsibility. When the government is believing in you, you should set an example of responsible journalism and responsible freedom,” Prakash Javedkar, Minister of I&B told *ThePrint*.

There have been mixed responses to this regulatory move. “Self-regulation has had



Photo credit: SHREYAS J

a positive impact on the content’s quality. It has been able to keep a constructive check on the excesses, without snuffing out the creativity. Sadly, now the government has decided to bring OTT under the ambit of Ministry of I&B,” remarks a Delhi-based film critic, Murtaza Ali Khan. He believes many Indian films are unable to compete with major film industries on a global level because of acts like the Cinematograph Act 1952.

A *Netflix* series, ‘Delhi Crime’ bagged the ‘Best Drama’ award at the 48th International Emmy Awards in November 2020. “Today Indian OTT content is watched worldwide. That’s precisely why we cannot afford to stall this creative surge in the name of government regulation,” reasons Murtaza.

In October 2020, a girl from Haryana, Nikita Tomar was killed by Tauseef Ahmed, after she rejected his marriage

proposal. The local newspaper reported that he was inspired by an *Amazon Prime Video*’s TV-show, *Mirzapur*. “Brilliant news. Perversion and psychotic content must be regulated. They are slowly turning OTT into not just soft-porn, gore and abusive platform but also as religious, cultural and political weapons,” tweeted Vivek Agnihotri, a director, appreciating the regulatory move for online content.

“The average citizen doesn’t mind it [OTT content] as much as the fringe groups do for petty political benefits. Only a society that is tolerant and inclusive has the potential to become a true ‘Vishwa Guru’. If we don’t like something we can simply choose not to watch it. By stirring up needless controversies these fringe groups only ensure that more people end up watching the content,” pointed out Murtaza on the influence of OTT contents have on a viewer.

Lockdown decreases pollution with drop in traffic



Photo credit: SHREYAS J

Smoke-free Tin Factory: When lockdown forced vehicles to stay home, making the roads and air clear

SHREYAS J

Bengaluru: Traffic was a major player in the pollution of the city. The pollution came down as the traffic declined during the lockdown. An initiative was taken to check the levels of air pollution in various parts of the city.

Twenty-six air quality monitors had been set up in various parts (stations) of the city, to assess the health hazards of air pollution by Healthy Air Coalition, a Bengaluru-based environmental drive. Pollution levels were observed before and after the national lockdown. 21 stations recorded 20-30 percent drop in pollution. Bellandur Lake had a 75 percent drop, while Halasuru Hospital recorded only 14 per-

cent decrease. On an average air pollution in Bengaluru has declined by 28 percent during the span of the lockdown.

Workplaces embracing the work-from-home culture, was one of the reasons for this trend. Few offices have asked their employees to come on alternate days of the week. “In September, it was easy to regulate traffic in the city due to lockdown,” remarks a traffic policeman in Bengaluru. Most of the commercial, industrial and transportation systems came to a halt during lockdown, making the air clear and city clean. “After three years, these days we can see fog in the morning. The rains have also increased, filling up the water-bodies in the city,” commented a resident of

Mathikare, Shekar Reddy, 40.

The variance in the pollution levels within the city, is due to the different activities contributing to pollution. According to the analysis done by Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, the percentage decrease in Halasuru Hospital is less, due to frequent patient visits contributing to vehicular emissions. Contrastingly, Bellandur Lake is near a dusty road where construction ventures were halted due to lockdown, leading to almost null vehicular movement, which led to larger percentage decrease in air pollution.

The pandemic has had a lot of downsides in the world, but it has environmentally revived the Garden City of India.

OPINION

A die-hard K-Pop Fan writes...

ANJANA SERA MATHEW

AK-Pop song broke records globally in 2013. People were doing the famous signature step of a Korean singer-dancer, PSY, whenever we heard the song beat. Korean pop culture was riding on the crest of a wave because of this song- Gangnam Style.

Korean wave or Hallyu refers to the global popularity of South Korea’s cultural economy exporting pop culture, entertainment, television dramas and movies. The pop culture began with Seo Taiji, Yang Hyun-suk and Lee Juno debuting in 1992.

They ruled the K-pop world with a string of hit songs like ‘I know’ and ‘Come Back Home’, which included the elements of heavy metal, hard rock and hip hop. The trio is known as the Kings of K-pop. They are still a global sensation with all the Korean artists idolizing them.

Another 90’s all-boys band was ‘High-five Of Teenagers’ created by SM Entertainment in 1996. Three years later, they won the ‘International Viewer’s Choice Award for MTV Korea’. SM Entertainment also gave birth to an all-girls band, ‘Girls Generation’ in 2007. The band was produc-

ing best-selling albums since its debut year in South Korea.

Each group has a unique style in their music and choreography. Music is not simply created. Artists go through a training process in singing and dancing by entertainment label companies. Though there may be very difficult tough times for a K-pop artist, like maintaining the ranking and creativity blocks, they need to be well versed in synchronising music and choreography.

One of the most successful first-generation K-pop star is Jung Ji-hoon, known by his stage name Rain. He is South

Korean singer-songwriter, actor, music producer and one of the best dancers. He entertains his fans with his looks, dancing style and his marvellous singing. He achieved breakthrough success with his album ‘It’s Raining’ (2004) which sold millions of copies in Asia, and established Rain as an international star.

My favourite band is BTS, or Bangtan Boys which debuted in 2013 under BigHit Entertainment company. BTS is the most successful and biggest boys-band group internationally. Their songs are different from the other band groups. BTS’s lyrics bring out

themes like hope, friendship, romance and self-love. The reason behind their success is their songs are extremely relatable to the fans and their lives.

K-Pop world is not as easy as it looks. Some unfortunately succumb to the hardships. One of the singers of the SHINee boys-band, Kim Jong-hyun, committed suicide due to depression caused by pressures of fame. An artiste must be tenacious and perseverant to overcome challenges. It takes a lot of practice and hard work to be successful. “The only time you should ever look back, is to see how far you’ve come,” quotes BTS band.

PADMAJA JAYARAMAN

The post offices in India offer saving schemes that include Post Office Savings Account (POSA), National Savings Recurring Deposit Account (RD), Kisan Vikas Patra (KVP) and Senior Citizens Savings Scheme (SCSS). “When it comes to high returns, then undoubtedly it is from post office savings schemes. They offer a high percentage of interest and we get tax benefits by investing in postal schemes,” says Swathi Nagaraj, a Chennai-based Chartered Accountant.



Photo credit: PADMAJA J

Post Office Savings Schemes give high returns, says a CA

People investing in a savings scheme need not go to the post office to get the interest calculated. They could do it by installing the Postinfo app in their mobile phones, and check which scheme is suitable to tap maximum benefits.

With minimum ₹500, one could start a POSA account and gain four percent interest per annum. To avail cheque book, ATM card and e-banking services, one must submit an application at the concerned post office branch, according to the Government website.

To save for the future of a girl child below ten years, the

child’s guardian can open Sukanya Samridhi Account with a minimum deposit of ₹250. It comes with 7.6 percent interest, that is tax-free under the Income Tax Act.

The Postal Department offers banking services through the India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) There are 650 IPPB branches and 3250 post offices as access points all over India.

Zero balance savings account can be opened in IPPB, unlike POSA. But the maximum account balance is capped

at ₹1 lakh. If the balance exceeds 1 lakh, then the money is transferred to the linked POSA account. A person can link both the accounts at an IPPB access point by producing the POSA passbook.

IPPB offers Regular, Digital and Basic savings accounts with 2.75 percent interest p.a. Regular and Basic savings accounts come with QR card to help with cash transactions, money transfer, bill payments and cashless shopping. Doorstep banking facility is also available, where the postmen help with digital and cash-based transactions

at ₹15 and ₹25 respectively.

Though the Regular Savings account doesn’t have a limit on withdrawals, the Basic Savings account limits it to four per month. The Digital Savings account does not have the facilities of QR card and doorstep payments; however, it can be accessed using the IPPB app.

“Few schemes can’t be redeemed online. We need to visit the respective branch even after years to redeem our money,” comments Swathi. No cheque and debit card facilities are available in IPPB savings accounts as per its official website, <https://www.ipponline.com/>.

Queue up for Barbecue

SHREYAS J

Are you famished after a long day at work? Do you long for smoky grilled food? AB's Absolute Barbecue is definitely a place to indulge your hunger pangs

The restaurant is known for its lip-smacking dishes, including smoky grilled meats. This food joint is bound to satiate a customer's wishes, if he or she walks into the restaurant around the peak timings of 12 pm for lunch or 7 pm for dinner. There is an element of surprise every time the restaurant jumbles up a different menu each day, depending on seasonal stock availability. One day you may find grilled shark meat, which will slide into your food pipe without any hassle, as soon as you take a bite. Another day there would be crisp and tender chicken, tantalising you with its sizzle on the open rotisserie.

Even a vegetarian foodie would find paradise here, with starters ranging from Lebanese Mushrooms tempting your food palate with its subtle cinnamon aroma, to the garam masala-flavoured Pancer Angara Tikka. With sour cream and mint chutney, these starters would taste like seventh heaven. The spiciness could notch up to a higher level, making your tongue numb and fiery, and your eyes teary.

There is a live kitchen in



Photo credit: SHREYAS J

Golden Glory: Grilled starters from AB's Absolute Barbecue

the restaurant where customers could order their favourite dishes, and specified cooking instructions. This would reassure them of the cleanliness and hygiene of the restaurant, as the customers could watch the food being prepared with their very eyes.

The live kitchen prepares a variety of dishes. There are rabbit, emu, quail, octopus and even squid to satisfy an adventurous eater; while there are tofu, mushroom and sweet corn as vegetarian alternatives. The food would be ready within ten minutes, as you 'eat' with your 'eyes' in front of the live kitchen.

The restaurant's main course speciality is Mixed Meat Fried Rice, which is complemented with Chicken Tikka Labadar. Chicken Tikka Labadar

Online Classes: A Boon or A Bane?

R MAHALAKSHMI

Madurai: The school is a place where children learn and have fun with friends. They develop cognitive and interpersonal abilities in an external environment by interacting with other people. Their communication skills and manners shape up in an offline setting. But now a huge complex of an educational institution has shrunk to a device.

Covid-19 saw a national lockdown, with schools being closed for more than eight months. Although many students saw this as a mega-vacation, they longed to go back to school talk to friends. They even missed the teachers scolding: "Don't talk in class." They yearned to go out and play during the PT hours.

In reality, to control the spread of the coronavirus, digital education was the best method for teaching students during lockdown. All the students have to do is have a smartphone or a computer and a good internet connection. But the internet was a luxury of the affluent.

"I have only one smartphone which I take with me to work. Since the online classes started, all my children need phones to learn from online classes. I was not able to afford to buy another two phones," said K Subha, a shopkeeper and a mother of three school-going children.

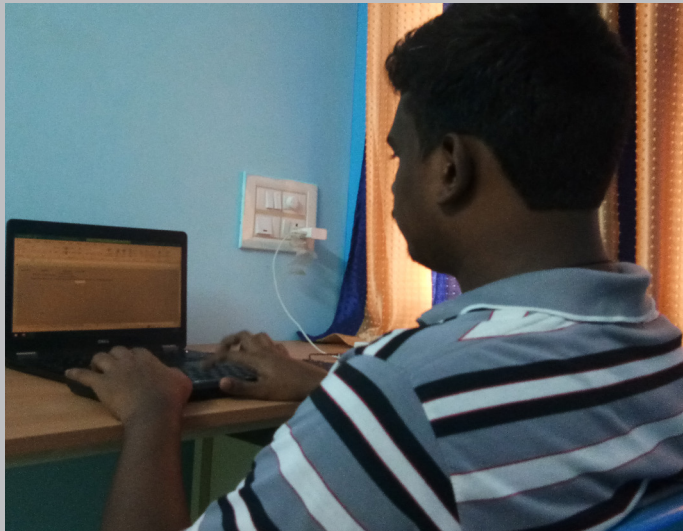


Photo credit: R MAHALAKSHMI

Blue light stares: When educational institutions shrink to a small device

She had to buy a second-hand phone for the children lesson.

It has not been a bed of roses for college students too. Online classes seem more impersonal when compared to offline. Sometimes the internet discrepancies also make it difficult to listen to lectures: "Initially, I had eye pain and headache, but I got used to it now," reveals K Vijay Kumar, a first-year college student.

Even teachers find it hard to adapt to online classes. They find it difficult to connect to the students when they cannot see the faces of the students. Most students keep their videos switched off, owing to low bandwidth of internet connection. "Sometimes I feel the students have slept while listening to the class. I

make notes and give it to them in hope that they will at least learn from it," says Suganthi Nair, a college professor.

Online education has not been a piece of cake for everyone. There are more disadvantages to it than advantages.

Screens constantly emanate blue light. This may impair the vision of students. Moreover, most of them plug in earphones to listen to classes, which would affect their hearing abilities in the long-term.

It is undeniable that technology and networking have ensured the students' safety, without letting them forego their education. One can only hope that the virus recedes and offline classes begin soon.

Juggling Film and Classical Music Like A Pro

SHREYAS J

"The greatest joy of being a musician is to watch people's faces light up to the music we [musician] make. But my least favorite part is that I cannot eat ice-creams, because I have to protect my throat," laughs, RP Shravan, a 25-year old Chennai-based singer, who was ranked top-seven in Indian Idol, season nine in 2017.

Shravan's musical journey began in 1999 as a four-year-old kid. He used to trot with his elder sister to a music class, from where he learned the ropes of Carnatic Music, only to be bolstered by his mother who played the violin, and grandmother



Musical nectar: RP Shravan singing for Chennai Thiruvaiyaru during the Margazhi Music Festival

for a Kannada film, Mythri, under the composition of Ilaiyaraaja.

Everyone thinks that child artists pick their battles of art, over studies. But Shravan chose both. He became the school topper of Padma

Seshadri Bala Bhavan Senior Secondary School, Nungambakkam, securing 97 percent in Commerce group. Subsequently he went on to do his Bachelors in Commerce in Loyola College, after which he began to pursue Chartered Ac-

countancy. "Honestly I don't have the answer to how I manage time for both singing and studies. Usually, pre-planning doesn't work out. Everything will be decided on the spot. I will ensure 100 percent of dedication on every work I do. I

don't compromise on the quality of any task," reveals the young singer.

He also curates, shoots, edits and also sings for his grandmother's cooking channel called 'Shantha Paati Samayal', which focuses on traditional South Indian recipes. Sometimes Shravan cooks while his grandmother instructs him in the videos: "I wanted to change the gender stereotype associated with cooking, where men are not supposed to work in the kitchen. I want to change that stereotype through the YouTube channel. Cooking is an important job for men too," remarks the singer-cum-cook.

His 24-hours of a day also has space for composing songs. During the initial days of lockdown, Shravan wrote a Sanskrit poem called Sukhino Bhavantu (meaning: may all beings be happy and free), and transformed it into a song, with the help of Ravi G on the keys and bass, Saurabh Joshi on the tabla, and Rangappriya on the violin.

The pandemic has paved way for online concerts: "I feel it is

a welcome change, though it is not equivalent to offline concerts. But these are unforeseen circumstances, and we have to adapt to them. Many artistes have reached out to their fans with unimaginable heights, which is great," believes Shravan. He gave online concerts for Maarga, Velammal Nexus, Madhuradhvani-Arkay Convention Centre and Margazhi Maha Utsavam for the Margazhi Music Season in the months of December and January 2020.

Shravan performs both Carnatic as well as film music. Juggling between both genres was a challenge initially. Both these styles are different in their own sense, and one needs to clearly understand and internalise those subtle nuances to bring out the original flavours of both styles, he explains.

He has mapped out his future plans of being a Carnatic Music tutor in a few years: "I would also teach the nuances of film music and how to present them," says Shravan. As a musician, he resolves to aim for finesse, and not popularity.

A Hope in Humanity



ANJANA SERA MATHEW

Pathanamthitta: "Before you know what kindness really is, you must lose things", quotes Naomi Shihab Nye, an American poet.

While there are people who have lost everything and are looking for means to survive, there are some who want more and more from life, despite having everything they need. In this gluttonous world, there are some kind souls who help the destitute. One such charitable organisations is *Nammude Thiruvalla* (meaning 'Our Thiruvalla')

People gets a million WhatsApp forwards asking for blood donation, fund donation for education, etc. But these just remain as mere forward-messages; only if sharing such messages generates help for them.

Nammude Thiruvalla took

these messages a bit seriously, and formed a WhatsApp group with the mission of making Thiruvalla hunger-free (*Vishappurahitha Nagaram*). The group leader, PD George joined hands with Thiruvalla's municipal chairman KV Varghese for this project. The group members come together to generate funds to feed the needy in the area. The project is supported by the Thiruvalla Vigilance Council and a Facebook group.

The charity scheme involves restaurants selling meals at lower prices to the needy. People can buy food coupons from the restaurants and deposit in boxes placed in various areas across Thiruvalla, where the needy could collect a coupon and go to the restaurant to eat at a lower price.

"We have distributed wheelchair to specially-abled people, and even rice was distributed to an old couple who were in need," shares a member of *Nammude Thiruvalla*. During the pandemic, the organisation provided hospital assistance to the specially-abled, and distributed basic supplies to the poor.

The WhatsApp group comprises of 256 members who contribute money for charity. They refuse to do a fund mobilisation drive- to donate money, one needs to be a member.

Though *Nammude Thiruvalla* started with a small group, the members are increasing. Already existing members could recommend more people to join in. "Whatever caring for others is what that is needed. Their smile and happiness make our life better and happier," says a member of the organisation.

COVID-19 opens people's eyes towards health

R MAHALAKSHMI

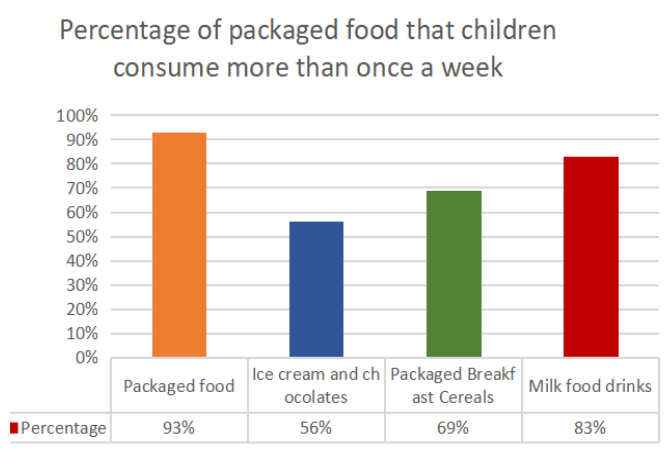
Madurai: R Rajan sells dried ginger for a living. Before the pandemic, not a lot of people used to buy from him, because of its pungent flavour.. But now he is elated because his sales have skyrocketed. People have become aware of dried ginger's immunity-boosting properties, and started buying from him regularly. Dried ginger has anti-inflammatory properties.

Pandemic has made people woke towards health. Until March 2020, people hogged on junk food mindlessly, because it is visually more appealing and tastier than healthy food. When the Coronavirus struck most of the unhealthy ones, people started becoming wary and focused more on nutritious food. They have begun to realise the alarming effects junk foods have on the immune system.

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A 25-year old IT-employee, K Vignesh used to have stomach troubles because he used to eat a lot of fast food: "I had



to eat outside because I did not have any time to cook an eat after long, tiring day at work," explains Vignesh. Since lockdown he has been at home; his health has improved because he is eating healthy, homemade food.

Even the advertising sector that has been glorifying junk foods, has now started promoting healthy foods during the pandemic. They have realised that many people who had a

fast food lifestyle turning to immunity boosting foods.

"My children never used to eat millets. But now, because of the fear of catching the coronavirus, they eat all the healthy foods that I give them," says R Valarmathi, a homemaker.

People have understood that health is the secret to a long life. It is true that, 'Health is not valued until sickness comes'.



Photo credit: PADMAJA J



Tomato plant rooted in water: The roots are held straight by a layer of gravel, to soak up the nutrient water.

PADMAJA JAYARAMAN

Fishes enable plants to grow in water, and the latter in turn clean the aquarium. A fish-enthusiast exploited this inter-dependency to save money, effort and environment.

The fish excreta from the aquarium is channelled to the plants rooted in water. The plants take in the excreta as nutrients and channel the ex-

creta-free, clean water back to the aquarium. If the aquarium's water is not filtered, the oxygen supply will reduce, and the fishes may suffocate and die.

The normal aquarium filters have to be changed every three weeks. When P Kirupanithi had to leave Villupuram for work in Chennai in 2017, this became a cause for concern, that he couldn't afford to come home

every three weeks just to change the aquarium's filter.

His fish tank has been his happy place since childhood. As a seven-year-old child, he used to feed his seven fishes three times a day, since 2004. They used to crowd near the water's surface, waiting to be fed by their loving owner.

Before he left his hometown, he found a cheaper, long-lasting filter to eliminate the fish waste- plants grown in water, instead of soil. He bought one-inch PVC pipes and an AC motor for ₹4000 to build the system in his terrace. "For the system to work, the motor ensures continuous flow of water to loop the system," says Kirupanithi. This method of integrating aquarium and soil-less gardening is called aquaponics. He initially started growing a couple of tomato plants, simultaneously sustaining his fishes.

The 2020-lockdown brought him back home, with a lot of time to kill. He watched YouTube videos to expand his system. With thirty new goldfishes, a 200-liter tank and a renewed vigour, he built a bigger system for growing bitter-gourd, tomatoes and 21 varieties of leafy greens.

He is not planning to make

a commercial set-up yet: "I started with a smaller system so that I can easily test it to observe the working of the system. I want to see how I can economically manipulate the system to its maximum. Usually, people think that aquaponics needs high investments. But I did not want to follow the herd," comments Kirupanithi. For fish-food and electricity, he spends around ₹200 every month, as maintenance cost.

Any plant can be grown in this method if one could create the environment suited for its survival. The optimum temperature for aquaponics is around 25 to 30 degree Celsius: "The temperature in my place is very high. Evaporation is inevitable. So, I am checking if the plants are growing in different climates," reveals the young gardener.

This method of gardening has its upsides and downsides: "It saves almost 95 percent of the water that is required for soil gardening. Hence it can be practised in areas having water scarcity with minimal space. The yield is also three times greater [than soil gardening]."

Aquaponics is an organic gardening method since the nutrients for plants are coming from living organisms. But the nutrition won't be readily



Plants in PVC pipes: Water rich in fish waste is channeled in the pipes, and holes are made in the pipes to grow plants.

available at the initial stages of set-up, for the plants. It will take a couple of months for the nutrients to be viable for the plants to absorb," elucidates Kirupanithi. He advises people who already grow fishes to practise aquaponics, as it is a natural filter for the aquarium. "It would take minimum six months to learn this gardening method practically," the young gardener informs. He urges the newbies to keep the plants and fishes under a shade, as warmer temperatures would affect the fishes, which would

in turn affect the plants. If the ground water is hard, Kirupanithi encourages people to use water purified by a reverse osmosis system (RO water).

Kirupanithi vlogs about his system and its technical know-how on his YouTube channel, 'Kirupanithi P'. He also offers consultation and design services for small scale aquaponics systems in Cuddalore, Villupuram and Pudukcherry, starting from ₹1000. For consultation, he could be reached at +91 7010202486.