

716 Bandolapalli, 007 Rajamma, Biogas ID 4144



Rajamma was just 15 when she got married. In the next few years, she had three children. At her parents' place, Rajamma had never gathered firewood. "The first time in the forest was scary. Neighbours said there were bears around. Once, I was on my way back when a bear and six cubs suddenly appeared, right in front of me. I dropped everything and ran back home," she recollects.

She and her husband would go to the forest at 9 am and return around 2 pm, each carrying 15 kg of firewood! This would last them for about a week and a half. Cooking on the earthen stove for a family of six would then take at least 2 hours. The tiny kitchen would fill with smoke and the acrid fumes burnt her throat. It was impossible to send her children to school on time. On days when she didn't have to go to collect firewood, she worked on a local landlord's lands, but was paid only in grain.

When Rajamma first joined the coolie sangha and started attending meetings, her in laws and neighbours were against it. But her husband stood by her.

In 2006, at one of the Mahila Meetings, she heard the mention of biogas and instantly decided to apply for it. Her mother-in-law opposed it, stating that manure belonged in the



fields, not in the kitchen, and that they would all fall ill. But she and her husband decided they had had enough of the trek to the forest to gather firewood.

They took three days to dig the pit, and in 15 days, she had biogas being piped into her kitchen. The entire family

watched as Rajamma lit the stove, and in that instant, she sensed all their doubts melting away. She made *payasa* with jaggery and threw a feast for all the relatives.

Rajamma has never again set foot in the forest to collect firewood. Even when the biogas unit did not function for 10 days as the dome needed repairs, she managed by collecting dry leaves from the field. Those 10 days reinforced just how crucial biogas had become to her everyday life.



She is a Balakendra Teacher and the Head Cook at the local government school. She has even taught her husband how to cook. When she had an eye operation two years ago, he took care of all chores at home. They each earn Rs 2,000 a month. Her husband herds four cows and 25 sheep, earning Rs 5,000 a year. In her spare time,

Rajamma stitches leaf plates, earning an additional Rs 900 a month. With her monthly savings of Rs 1,500, she has bought some land and wants to further invest in livestock.

With the support of the sangha, she has educated her children. Today, her oldest son works in the handloom industry, while her younger son works as a cook. She is especially proud that though she couldn't study beyond Class VII, her daughter is educated and after receiving training from ADATS, works as a cab driver.

Recently, Rajamma got the chance to attend the sangha meeting at the taluk level, where she spoke in front of 500 people about livestock rearing and animal husbandry. Biogas has given her an identity and financial literacy. It has given her recognition not just within the sangha but also in neighboring villages, she feels.

