

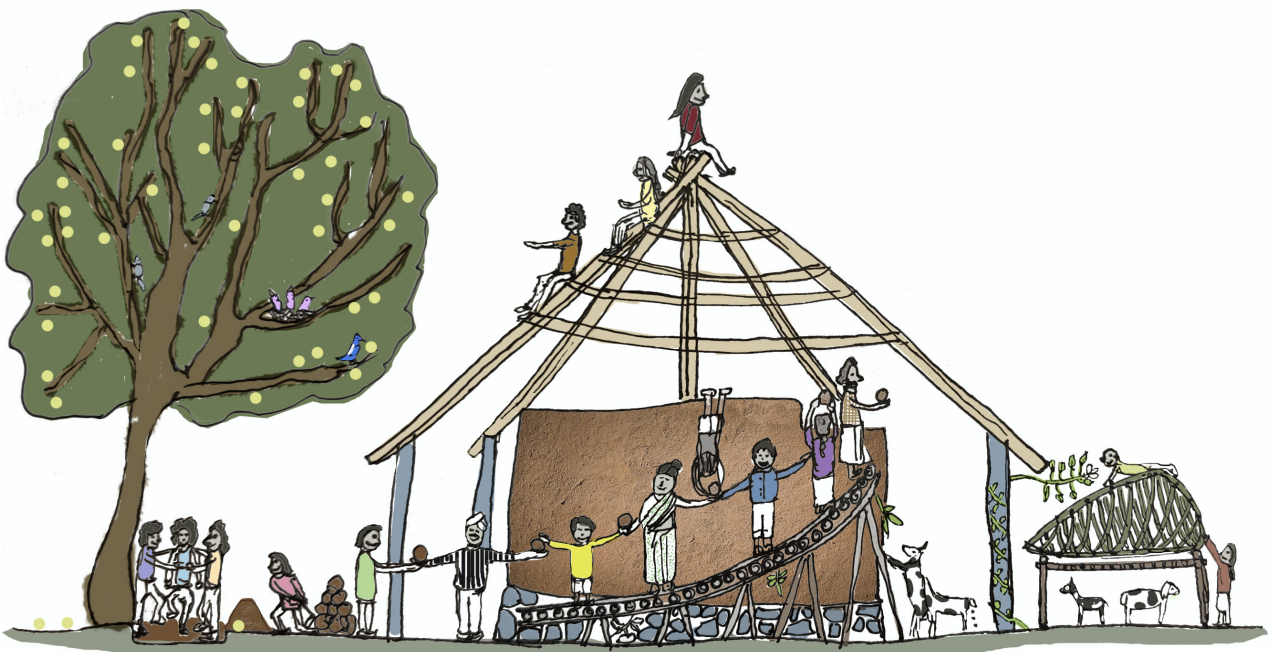
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HOME & BEYOND 2.0



25 JUNE - 1 JULY 2023

WORKSHOP REPORT

Pucca Local



• EARTH MATTERS •



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INTRODUCTION

Home and Beyond 2.0 helped us introduce another batch of enthusiastic participants to the beauty of living in harmony with nature.. We took our inspiration from *Puvidham's way of life*, where *everything is natural - the food, the clothes, the houses, and how people live together as a community.*

We had *22 adults and 7 kids* in our workshop, and even some moms came with their little ones. Our group had people of all ages, *from just 1.5 years old to 55 years* old. We even had an *11-year-old volunteer* who had been part of the first Home and Beyond workshop.

What made our workshop special is that we didn't sit and listen to boring lectures or read books. No, we *learned by actually doing things*, like making healthy food, learning about natural farming, and how to build houses that are good for the environment. It was *all about learning by doing, not just talking.*

By the end of our workshop, we all had a shared knowledge about like alternative medicine, education that's focused on kids, making yummy and healthy food, how to farm naturally, and building houses that are good for our planet. We were enriched by the free flow of knowledge in this group of young and old.



PUVIDHAM



Puvidham, in Tamil, means love for Earth. This love for Mother Earth is the inspiration behind all activities associated with this place.

Puvidham Rural Development Trust is a registered organisation with focus on “Education for Sustainable Living,” offering a humane and child-centred education environment for children in the Nagarkoodal area of Dharmapuri, Tamil Nadu, India.

It was an initiative which began in 1992 and since then has taken strong roots. It is the culmination of a dream of Umesh, a mechanical engineer, and Meenakshi, an architect, who went about to build a community of people whose passion in farming and education could be translated into local opportunities. The Trust has now evolved into Puvidham Farm, Puvidham Learning Centre and Puvidham Development Centre. The major activities include developing a primary school, implementing effective organic farming techniques, design and construction of eco-buildings, art, craft and green product manufacturing. All activities are aimed at imbibing empathy for nature.

Through our workshop, we tried to bring Puvidham’s lifestyle and philosophy to a broader group of people. We undertook activities like community farming, natural building, composting, spinning, cloth upcycling, animal rearing, etc that gave us a glimpse of a sustainable lifestyle in harmony with fellow beings.

COMMUNITY FARMING



Community farming sessions, facilitated by Mayank, were a vital part of our workshop. They connected participants with the fundamentals of growing nutritious food. The sessions empowered participants to practically farm a small plot of land, from designing a patch of land to sowing seeds.. Feeling the soil with bare feet and experiencing the aroma of fertile soil created a profound connection to the Earth and its life-giving properties

ESSENTIALS:

In the first session, we tried to understand the essential requirements for plant growth: soil, water, air, and sunlight. We learnt how the movement and inclination of the sun changes over the seasons and how plants orient their growth respectively. We understood the impact of shadows on plant growth. Water plays an important role in plant life and we learnt how under-watering, over-watering and ill-timed watering can affect plants. *Handling plants and seeds isn't just an activity but also a relationship built with different aspects of nature.*



DESIGNING THE FARM:



We then moved on to the implementation of two distinct farming approaches: raised beds for vegetables and flat beds for green leafy vegetables. This selection was made based on the specific requirements of each type of crop.

To plan our cultivation activities effectively, we learned to measure the dimensions of the field using our strides as a unit of measurement. The field measured 17 x 13 units. We then took into consideration the dietary needs of a family of three or four, as suggested by some of the participants. By cross-multiplying and calculating the ideal crop quantities, we tried to ensure our farming efforts would fulfil the needs of the Puvudham's population.

Considering that Puvudham is in a rainshadow region, we created two main water channels to cater to the land. These channels meandered down the slope, branching out to provide water to each plant. This approach ensured efficient water usage in the challenging water situation.

LEARNING TO USE THE TOOLS:

The participants were divided into different groups, each focusing on a specific farming technique. One group, led by Naveen Anna, made ridges and furrows. Another group, guided by Mayank, discussed the nuances of raised beds. We carefully planned the dimensions of the raised beds, ensuring they were wide enough for the vegetables and the pathway was enough for easy access to pull out weeds. We settled on making beds 6 inches tall, 1 metre wide and 5 metres long. The third group worked on flat beds and prepared the soil for the flood irrigation channel.

We learned the proper use of gardening tools with appropriate body posture and motion. The sessions were focused on a thoughtful and collaborative approach to farming, with each group focusing on a specific task to create an organised and sustainable farming system.



SEED SOWING:



After preparing the land, we moved on to the sowing stage. We began by spreading vermicompost across the piece of land. Then, we uniformly sowed amaranthus, roselle, fenugreek and coriander seeds in the flat beds. We used a weeding hoe to level the top layer of the ground, gently embedding the seeds into the soil.

Guided by some adults, the children planted radish seeds over the bunds and carefully sowed lady's finger, cluster beans and onion seeds on the ridges. Gourds were stationed on the other side of a snake-like channel to protect the crops. In the end, we sowed amla, pomegranate, guava and other trees around the field.

Through these sessions, we learnt to respect the land as a living entity. Farming is not just a task but a responsibility that should be approached with conscious action and care. We learnt and saw how to transform a piece of land into a thriving ecosystem by using natural techniques to grow our food. Collaborative work added to this learning.

NATURAL BUILDING

Building natural homes suggests more than choosing natural materials of construction. Its implications also stretch to the moulding of lifestyles as one begins to live in a natural dwelling. This workshop aimed at bringing those nuances to the forefront. We learnt from a pool of traditional knowledge regarding sustainable architecture under the guidance of Sundar, Amrutha and Dheeraj. In the process, we built seating spaces for Puvidtham's new guest block, using local mud and stones. We also visited some old natural buildings in the nearby village. We built not just structures but a bond with our roots and an appreciation for the timeless wisdom of villages and their surroundings.



DREAMING A HOME

We started with a design exercise and the group was divided into four teams aka families. Each team sat with a large chart paper to design a home that fit the team members' needs. Soon the designs began to show bedrooms, kitchens, courtyards, yoga spaces, verandahs and more. Some of them even featured sustainable technologies into their design: compost toilets, solar panels, vegetable gardens.

GAON BHRAMAN (VILLAGE WALK):

The village Balajanganhalli was a vibrant fusion of cultures and architectural wonders. With the settling of various communities over many decades, the village evolved with the surrounding culture and ecology. Showing us around was Jayameena, wife of Madhav Rajanna who has been a resident of this village since birth.

The houses showcased intricate designs: a testament of the skilled hands that crafted them. We stumbled upon board games etched on the porch of one house, which might've been a means of bonding with the community. This particular house was standing tall for over 100 years.



As we looked at the old houses, we learned about the use of lime plaster and bamboo battens, along with the distinct Mangalore and naatu odu tiles for the roofs. Every element fascinated us: from the perfect openings that allowed warm sunlight indoors, to the sturdy bricks that held centuries of history in them. We witnessed ingenious use of natural materials in thatched roofs, stone pillars, and bamboo rafters. Some houses had stone walls up to the plinth level, transitioning to mud walls above.

The villagers welcomed us with curious and casual conversations, sharing snippets of their lives and traditions. *We noticed the thoughtful layout and functionality of the spaces. Gathering areas and semi-public spaces were plentiful, encouraging social interactions and fostering bonds among the villagers.*

BUILDING WITH NATIVE MATERIALS:

In order to understand natural building materials better, we built three seating areas around the upcoming guest house. For this, we crafted three distinct wall systems. We started by levelling and binding stones for the foundation.

Next, we gathered for an adobe brick-making session and started mixing mud for the same. The children took the lead, jumping into the mud to play and enthusiastically contributing to the construction process.

Moving on to the wall systems, we explored three different techniques. One seating area saw a slab foundation with earthbag construction. In the other, the cob wall technique was applied, as guided by Dheeraj. Amrutha the third seating construction, where bricks and mud mortar were used.

While some of us packed earthbags and set adobe stones, others wove reeds for wattle-and-daub as lead by Sundar. We also observed the coconut-thatch roofing process that went simultaneously with the help of local artisans. We also saw a demonstration with Mangalore and naatu odu roof tiles.

With every step, we forged not only physical structures but a profound relationship with the Earth itself.



HOLISTIC LIVING

SPINNING

The spinning sessions introduced us to the art of using hand spindles and charkhas. Guided by Meenakshi Amma, *the participants learned the significance of the charkha as a symbol of self-reliance and a way to break free from centralised production.* We began by knowing about locally sourced cotton, how to prepare it for spinning and how to use hand spindles to turn it into yarn.



The next day, we met *Sachidananda and Abhilash, master spinners who showcased their customised spinning charkhas and wore clothes made from the thread they had spun.* During the session, the room was alive with the rhythmic motion of spinning wheels as we sat fully indulged in the craft.



During our hands-on activities, we found ourselves involved in thought-provoking discussions on charkha, a symbol closely associated

with Mahatma Gandhi. *As the days passed, we found ourselves delving deeper into the intricacies of bundling yarn and understanding the lives of weavers across India.* Sachidananda and Abhilash exchanged their insights and stories, leaving us with a profound appreciation for the craftsmanship and dedication of the artisans.

The children were enamoured in the activity. They enthusiastically continued to practise the skill every morning. Some of them expressed their determination to become master spinners themselves and wear clothes woven from yarn spun by themselves.



SUSTAINABLE CRAFTS AND HERBAL PRODUCTS:

Living sustainably and holistically entails making conscious lifestyle choices. In this workshop, participants were introduced to the beauty of eco-friendly craftwork, up-cycled lifestyle products, and handmade personal care products. The group was divided into three teams that took part in the activities of upcycling waste cloth, toy making and soap making.

We learnt that upcycling takes its own set of skills and creativity. In these sessions, we made beautiful mats and coasters by weaving strands of waste cloth. We also observed what other products we can make from waste. In the toy-making sessions, we made paper bags from discarded newspapers, turning waste into a useful environment-friendly item. We discovered the joy of making toys with our hands. The kids were especially proud of the toys they had made. The soap-making sessions taught us how to integrate herbs and plant products to make soap. We also learnt about herbal tooth powders, bathing powders, soaps and oils that are healthier options for the body and the environment. Learning how to make soap empowered us to take control of our personal care products, aligning with the self-reliant and holistic living principles.



EURHYTHMICS:

How often do we remember to look at ourselves and be aware of the amazing ways in which our bodies function? *Eurhythmics, the art of harmonious bodily movements, was a way for us to reconnect with our bodies. Everyday at 5 in the morning, we gathered for these sessions. We started with a poem to connect us with our senses, our surroundings and Mother Earth.* We transitioned onto moving our limbs in step with vowel sounds and consonant sounds. Gradually, it turned into a co-ordinated dance as we moved together in the pattern of an infinity symbol. The sessions culminated with a mantra emphasising the connection between our inner light and a healthy world. All of us embraced the concept of letting go, releasing anything that no longer served us.



NATURE WALK:

On our first day, Meenakshi amma led us on a walk to a spring located downhill from Puvidham. As we walked, she shared her memories of carrying water from the spring in her early days to nurture the saplings that have now grown into a lush forest on campus. Meenakshi amma told us how she collected seeds and seedlings from the local forests and the forest department to grow her trees. During the walk, we visited various areas of Puvidham that were once barren but are now rewilding. She showed us how she managed to efficiently use all the resources through crescent bunding, trenching and mulching on the land. These methods prevented soil erosion, trapped moisture for plants and strengthened plant roots.



the spring where Meenakshi amma used to fetch water from

On our next nature walk, led by Mayank and Madhav Raj anna, we went down a trail into a scrubby forest. We stopped to look at a huge ant hill, some Indian Roller birds, and surrounding thorny trees and plants. Soon we reached a trickling stream, which had dried to a great extent in the dry season. We saw the river bed thriving with reeds and green water-loving plants, in stark contrast with the scrubby vegetation around. This led to a discussion about the intricacies of ecosystems. *Mayank explained the relation between underground water and the flow of rivers, and how tapping into the underground water through borewells depletes water flowing in the streams. Our conversation, also guided by Shayoni, delved into the importance of reeds in cleaning and oxygenating of natural streams. We learnt about the reverence that native cultures had for ponds, lakes and streams, and the need to rekindle the loss of our respect and reverence as they form the lifeblood of any civilization.*



DAILY CHORES:

Students of Puvudham undertake some chores everyday at the school and hostel. During this workshop, we took over their chores in order to understand community living in a better way. In the early hours, three teams would undertake the tasks of cooking, cleaning and animal care. Each day, we would shuffle between these tasks to gain experience in all the chores.



participants using "aatangal" to grind ingredients for cooking

We would start our days with a drink of millet kanji and then carry on with respective chores. The first day of physical labour was a bit challenging for everyone, but we understood that bodies needed time to adjust to the strain. These chores were a regular part of the school children's routine and they took the lead in teaching the participants the nuances of each task.



kids actively participating and inspiring the adults

The team that was taking care of animals, would start the day by gathering hay for the cows, ensuring they had enough for the entire day. We also mixed cow dung with our bare hands to aid in biogas production. We also had to feed the goats, the hens and the ducks. Cleaning their shed was a major task. Understanding their different needs for food and protection was our next step.



sharing the animal care duties with utmost sincerity

The cleaning team's first task was to sweep and mop the dormitories. For mopping, we used bioenzyme, which was made in the school itself. The team also aided the kitchen team in cleaning vessels after the cooking was done. The process was physically demanding but invigorating as our bodies began to adapt to the lifestyle. Children, too, took part by helping their adult teammates.

The kitchen team began working at 5 am, before all the other teams. We took charge of preparing meals for everyone. We would sit in the verandah to chop vegetables and grind coconut in a stone grinder while the food was cooked in huge vessels over a woodfire stove in the kitchen. During the chores we often indulged in delightful conversations, exchanging laughter and stories.

The mothers took care of their kids even when helping the community with the chores. The chore sessions not only taught us practical skills but also brought the participants closer together. We supported and encouraged one another, forming strong bonds of friendship and a deep sense of community spirit.



COOKING HEALTHY FOOD:



On the first day of the holistic living workshop at Puvudham, we had the opportunity to experience the Millet and Local Food Festival, celebrating the International Year of Millets and the World Localisation Day. This event offered us valuable insights into the significance of local food and the importance of millets. The gathering also allowed us to directly interact with the local farmers. We were treated to a feast of delicious food made with millets, showcasing the richness and variety of local cuisine.

Back at the workshop, we had the chance to cook using a mud oven with five mouths, fuelled by firewood. In Puvudham, the children cook all the meals for themselves and they are adept at doing all preparations. Lighting the firewood itself proved to be an exciting learning experience for us, a task that the children of Puvudham were already adept at. Over the course of seven days, all of us discovered that healthy food could be incredibly tasty and that only a small amount of oil was required to create flavourful dishes. Cooking for the community and sharing the food brought immense joy to us.



mud oven a fascinating multi purpose space for the kids



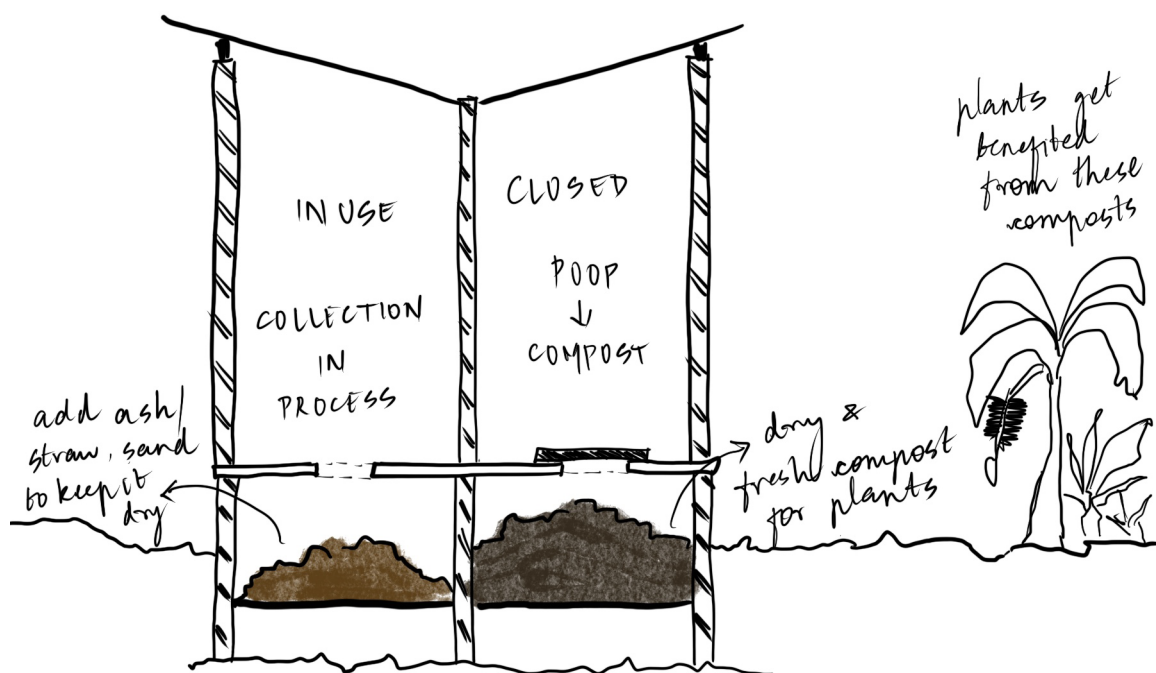
We began to look at food as medicine and the kitchen as a healing space. This approach formed the basis of all cooking at the school. Even the process of making chutney was turned into a muscle-building activity by using a stone hand grinder. We learned recipes for healthy kanji and various herbal teas. The simplicity of the food at Puvudham helped us cleanse our bodies of toxins that we often accumulate by eating junk food.

DRY COMPOST TOILETS:

We mostly deal with waste with ignorance, disgust and indifference. Once the waste we create is out of sight, dumped in a yard we can't see, we forget all about it. Little do we realise the havoc it creates to our water bodies and the overall environment. However, during our time at Puvudham, we were introduced to one of the most sustainable ways of managing human waste - the dry compost toilets.

Regular flush toilets use almost 7-10 litres of water just to flush excreta into septic tanks, where the excreta doesn't decompose fully because of the excess water content. Through the use of compost toilets, we got to know about the transformation of our excreta into a valuable resource: rich compost that could nourish the soil. It was a revelation to witness how simple elements like soil, dry leaves and ash could be utilised to create an effective composting system.

Embracing the concept of dry toilets at Puvudham rekindled a deep connection with the Earth and the soil that sustains us. We learned to treat waste as a valuable resource and to respect the delicate balance of nature. The experience served as a gentle reminder that our actions have far-reaching consequences, and every small step towards sustainable living can make a significant difference in preserving our environment for future generations.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The transformative experience of Home and Beyond 2.0 was made possible through the collaboration and support of several organisations and individuals. Puvudham, along with Iyal Nadi, PuccaLocal, Mudhive, and Urvee Trust, played a crucial role in curating and facilitating the workshop. We are deeply grateful for the Center for Embodied Knowledge, whose support and resources made the workshop a reality. Their belief in the importance of fostering a deeper connection with nature and promoting sustainable practices allowed us to explore and embrace a new way of living.

The success of the workshop would not have been possible without the collective effort of many hands coming together. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the organisers, facilitators, volunteers, and participants who contributed their time, skills and passion to create a meaningful and enriching experience for all of us. A special note of gratitude goes to the entire Puvudham community for opening their hearts and homes to us. Their warmth, love and care made us feel like part of their family. It was their spirit of community and their commitment to sustainable living that inspired us and left a lasting impact on our lives.

As we carry the lessons and experiences from this workshop with us, we are reminded of the power of collaboration and the potential for positive change when like-minded individuals and organisations come together with a shared vision. With deep appreciation, we look forward to continuing our journey towards a more conscious and sustainable way of life, knowing that we are part of a larger community working towards a greener and more harmonious world.

OUR TEAM

- Meenakshi Umesh, Host and Co-facilitator
- Dheeraj Reddy, Co-facilitator (Natural Building)
- Mayank Ale, Co-facilitator (Farming, Ecology and Documentation)
- Sundar Rajaganesh, Co-facilitator (Natural Building)
- Amruta Naidu, Co-facilitator (Natural Building)
- Shayoni Das, (Documentation and Kitchen Management)
- Aryaman, Resource management
- Abhilash CA, Guest Facilitator (Spinning)
- Sachidananda KJ, Guest Facilitator (Spinning)
- Nimalan, Volunteer



Supported by:

- G.Madhavaraj, Administration
- Kumar Anna, Resource Management
- Naveen Anna, Farming
- K Krishna Devi, Teacher and Hostel Incharge
- Shakuntala Akka, Co-facilitator (Craft)
- Sakshi, Co-facilitator (Herbal products and soap making)
- Simi, Teacher
- Sini, Co-facilitator (crafts) and teacher

Special Mention:

- Dhanushya, Documentation
- Sneha B, Documentation and Designing
- Maheswari, Volunteer

THANK YOU