Ch. Raja Rao, 64, belongs to Sankuvanigunta Gram Panchayat (GP) in Kotha Patnam Mandal, Prakasam District. He belongs to the SC community and is one of the active members in the GP. He shared his views on why people are going for open defecation still when the GP already achieved the ODF status? What are the reasons? Who is still going in open?

At that point in the discussion, Raja Rao started saying that only 50-70 age group of people are still going for open defecation. It’s not a fun to go out for open defecation for anyone. Because I am also in that same age group and I am also going for open defecation, I can share a few examples of what happened in my life while using the a toilet.

Why am I still going for open defecation?

“I didn’t know what a toilet was and how to use it. Last year I went Ongole to my relative’s home in the city. First time in my life I went inside a toilet. I went inside and locked the door. After locking the door, I felt fear that the door will not open. I
saw Indian toilets before but there I found a western toilet. But I don’t know how to use that toilet. As I could not use the toilet, I started feeling pain in my stomach and I asked my granddaughter if I can go out for defecation? She said ‘no grandfather, this is a city and where can you find open place?”

Then I started walking with a bottle of water and a cigar. I walked half kilometre when I found the railway track and happily I finished my work. In just one day, I had seen hell. So six months back, Phanidhra approached us for toilet construction and initially I did not agree to it.

But, eventually I got some awareness that it is very useful for women and for them I agreed to build the toilet. After construction he came and suggested that everyone should use their toilets and the GP should not allow for open defecation. So then I respected their request and I said I will use. Again a situation such as the Second World War in front of me, because the GP monitoring team are walking around the village and ensuring that there is no open defecation. That time my situation was like a jail and cops are standing outside. For 10-15 days, I tried my level best but no results and I was having pain. So I started walking more than 1 km outside the village premises and there I use to go for open defecation like a thief. But in these 6 months, I am a little bit comfortable and in future 100% I will utilise my toilets.

Not only for me, but all my age group of people are facing this issue. Some 5% of open defecation happening due to that reason only. I can say one thing 40-50 years onwards, this is our regular habit. Suddenly, if you say to stop it, it cannot be possible. Most people of this age group are addicted to open defecation with particular reasons, such as; they can’t defecate without walking or without a smoke and smoking in the house is not possible. Also those who are having strength to walk long distances are going out and may be they will start using toilets at home when they can’t walk anymore.”

This case reflects the challenges old people face to shift from open defecation to using toilets and highlights the need to also educate people about the how to use the toilet.