Whose responsibility is it to ensure the safety of a woman? It is as much of the other, older women of the family as it is of the menfolk and then the community. And when the woman in need of safety and protection of her privacy and rights is a daughter-in-law, the responsibility of the household is doubled.

Here is an interesting story from the Gandhinagar Gram Panchayat of Cheerala Mandal in Prakasham. It is the story of a mother-in-law who recognised the needs of her family, a daughter who took a bold stance and conveyed the message of sanitation and a daughter-in-law who fought for her right to sanitation and privacy.

It is a household of a couple and their children who are dependent on daily wage work for their living. The sons of the family joined their parents after they finished their 10th standard and the daughter was married off. It is a family that had a high level of awareness about sanitation and had built a toilet 10 years back. The facility was adequate until both the sons got married and the family grew bigger.
At this point, the second daughter-in-law pointed out that the IHHL was insufficient for three family units and its maintenance was far below desired standard. In protest, she started using open spaces for defecation. “Who is responsible for the cleaning of the only toilet” was the contentious issue.

Then, the older couple sat the family down and explained to both the daughters-in-law about the importance of using IHHL and the ills effects of open defecation, which went in vain. The daughter of the family heard about this conflict and discussed the issue with her mother. She advised her mother to have a second IHHL constructed. “My daughter gave me the strength to take the decision of constructing a new IHHL in the house though the expense was a little beyond our affordability. My daughter also told me that my daughters-in law are no different from daughters.”

At this juncture, the family learnt about the Swachh Bharat Mission, and the daughter took yet another bold step towards getting the IHHL, by lending her jewellery and adding to the mother’s jewellery which together generated the fund to initiate the construction. Finally by mortgaging jewellery, the mother-in-law initiated the construction of an IHHL for her second son’s house. In the process she is also trying to convince her daughter-in-law to end open defecation and use the common IHHL already present in the house, until the new IHHL is ready to use. Taking about the debts she said “though the money given by SBM will be enough for toilet construction, I am worried about the interest on the mortgage which will take one year to clear and get back the jewellery. I only pray that my daughter who helped should not suffer in her mother-in-law’s house for lending her jewellery. Let us see how things will work out.”

“I believe that Toilets are a basic necessity for all and specifically for women. Once a girl is born into your house, you should have a toilet for her safety, health and over-all wellbeing. That is why despite the debts and financial crunch I am constructing an IHHL for my second-daughter-in-law.”

“Dignity is most important factor for a woman. I accompany my daughter-in-law every day when she goes for open defection. I am extremely concerned about her safety.”