The reason behind people of Chipulrapadu Gram Panchayat (GP) not using their toilets, even after the construction is intriguing at one level and at another makes one realise the strong roots that culture has in human society. “Horse-dung needs to be deposited in the toilet pan before it is used by us and we have not been able to find any over the past 3 months,” said one of the community members when asked about why they were not using their newly constructed toilets.

Cheepurlapadu GP of Kotabommili Mandal in Srikakulam District has three more small habitations under its purview. With a total of 521 households, until the last year only 40-50 households had toilets. After the launch of SBM scheme, with the wide spread campaign going on in the state, the Sarpanch of Cheepurlapadu took it as his responsibility to construct 100% toilets in the village.

Mandal level officials, with the help of field assistants and village level functionaries conducted motivation campaigns for awareness generation and were able to mobilize construction on 90 toilets in a span of six months. “We will definitely take up the construction of the remaining 400 toilets and also work towards achieving complete sanitation” says the Sarpanch.

Like in many other villages in the State, Cheepurlapadu also is facing financial, spatial and Vasthu related issues which need to be solved to achieve sanitation and the positive aspect of the GP is the strong determination among residents to overcome the hurdles. Mandal level officials are also trying constantly to build awareness among the Masons about new technologies and the need for maintaining quality in construction of toilets.
Toilets are not in use due to unavailability of horse dung. "Half to one kg horse shit should be put in the tank for it to work. This has been the practice for a very long time and nobody uses their toilets without putting horse shit," says a community member. The main challenge in front of the community is the unavailability of horse shit and the long wait for it even after paying Rs. 500. As per residents some households have been waiting for 2-3 months to acquire horse dung, meanwhile there was open defecation in practice.

Though the officials of this region are very well aware of this situation, they are hardly able to address this matter since this is a deeply rooted cultural practice.

Should the cultural practice be held on to or should one dismiss it as unscientific method, is a question that does not have a direct answer. However, there is a need for in-depth research in this aspect.

Coming to Cheepurlapadu, whether or not the method of sanitation is scientific, the intention of the community members in this GP is to achieve complete sanitation. Therefore GPs start working on sanitation by taking suitable actions to address the local issues with the help of community.

Cheepurlapadu GP presents a case of how cultural beliefs not only influence construction but also usage of toilets.