

# **Leadership Matters for Sustainability of Sanitation Efforts**

(The Case of Hazipally Gram Panchayat in Telangana State)

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## **Introduction**

*‘Sanitation is more important than independence’*

- M K Gandhi

With a view to encouraging the Gram Panchayats (GPs) that make concerted efforts to achieve total sanitation status, the Government of India (GoI) instituted Nirmal Gram Puraskar (NGP) Award in the year 2003<sup>1</sup>. First NGP Awards were given away to 40 GPs in the year 2004, and as of 2013, we have nearly 28,600 GPs in India that have won NGP award (Government of India, 2013). While the progress we make in sanitation front is encouraging, one hard fact is that studies conducted across the states to assess whether the principles of NGP are fully maintained in existing NGP awarded villages reveal that in Nirmal Gram Panchayats 15 to 34 per cent of the households either do not have access to household latrines (IHHL) or do not use IHHLs constructed (TARU, 2008). The point is that on average one fourth of Nirmal Gram Panchayats - after being in the limelight for a short while - slip back into where it was. This is a real discomfort not only to the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS), but also to the local leaders and development practitioners.

‘Sustainability’ in development sector is not merely a breath taking question; rather it is a breath taking exercise in reality. Sustainability is something like asking *how long one can hold breath being below the water*. Building a model village is inexplicably an uphill task; and sustaining it in the same glow for a longtime is something phenomenal and out of the ordinary. It requires concerted efforts by local leaders, and continual education of the community members and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> The Government of India has stopped giving away NGP Awards to Gram Panchayats after 2013. Now, Open Defecation Free (ODF) Villages are confirmed only after a complete verification process.

A Nirmal Gram Panchayat (GP) in Mahaboob Nagar district of Telengana stands extraordinary as a clean village for over a decade now. That is Hazipally Gram Panchayat near Shadnagar in Telengana State. Hazipally is found to be sustaining Nirmal Gram status (awarded by GoI) for over 8 years now. It's heartening to notice that Hazipally as a model village has gone into the school curriculum in Telengana state. Incidentally, this is also an action research village of the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Hyderabad since 2008. What marks off this village to articulate the sustainability factor so eloquently, is the single question that this study explores. This is an exploratory study that employs case study method. The conditions, people of Hazipally lived in, about 15 years ago is presented in Box – 1.

#### **Box – 1: Hazipally Village Profile: Past**

In the year 2000, Hazipally had about 160 households, and today it has 252 households. Hazipally is a single habitation Panchayat with 252 households with a population of 876. Size-wise, it is smaller than an average Telengana Gram Panchayat. That makes it close-knit, although the social composition of Hazipally has Backward Community (BC) and Scheduled caste (SC). BC households are the majority. There are about 70 households that belong to SC, and one household that is Muslim (minority). Agriculture and animal husbandry are the main stay of the people. They grow crops like paddy, maize, and vegetables, and sell them in Shadnagar market. About two decades ago, Hazipally was a typical Indian rural village with all the faiths and superstitions an Indian rural sociologist generally talks about such as caste divide, illiteracy, attributing ill-health to the anger of local deity *Pochemma* (a form of goddess *Kali*), living a life as pre-scripted by fate, and looking up to the god for fortune to rain on them.

The rural infrastructure facilities such as drinking water, drainage, household sanitation, school sanitation were all abysmally poor. Drinking water scarcity during summer months was a common feature that people had learnt to live with; household latrine was something they never gave a thought about. There are also stories narrated of outsiders driven away from Hazipally for they covertly tried 'religious conversion' on the pretext of doing development service. The role of women was confined to family, and farm. Children were left to grow up for themselves. Mothers had no idea of early child-care nor of child nutrition. Children went to school more for the noon-meal given, rather than for any educational atmosphere. In 1990s open defecation was the general social norm. Even the local primary school did not have toilets for children to use one - or at least to have seen one.

Caste system was conspicuously prevalent until late 1990s. The infamous two-tumbler system in tea-stalls was in practice in Hazipally also, which was abolished after a caste clash that exploded in 2003. That caste clash erupted over 'cooking and serving mid-day meal' in the local primary school. It went to the extent of an Ex-MLA visiting Hazipally to pacify people. After the dust got settled, local leaders (Srinivas and his friends) organized 'dinning together' function where all the caste groups gathered; sang national unity song, and had dinner together with a promise to respect each other. Since that time, there has been no mention about caste in Hazipally, and no conflicts amongst communities.

### **A Social Worker Getting Officially Elected as Panchayat Sarpanch**

Hazipally was in the slumber of despair due to poor socio-economic infrastructure, caste based discrimination, and lack of cooperative vision until 1990s. One young man Mr Srinivas after he obtained a B.Com degree - started involving himself in socially useful actions that set in motion ameliorating the conditions of the masses in Hazipally. This degree holder's efforts during summer months to supply drinking water from Shadnagar (a town about 8 km away) to households in Hazipally dragged some of his friends also to lend a helping hand to his efforts. Mr Srinivas invested his time and money in community development without ever asking what he was getting back. Asked why he was doing all that, who is currently the Panchayat Sarpanch of Hazipally, he says: *the contentment of having done something good to the village I was born in; and my work used to be sustained by the good words of people who benefited through the social good I produced, and later got on a faster track by the support extended by officials and government institutions.*

After the Constitutional Amendment Act got passed in 1995, when the 2<sup>nd</sup> Panchayat elections to Gram Panchayats were slated Mr Srinivas's friends suggested him to contest in the election. Srinivas did contest and as expected by his friends, he officially got elected to power as Panchayat Sarpanch of Hazipally in 2001. His position as Panchayat Sarpanch of Hazipally gave him the opportunity to try implementing things he had been dreaming of, and exposed to in the past but did not have the means to implement. His official position as Panchayat Sarpanch did away with the constraints he faced earlier trying to do things on his own. He got a team of Ward Members to work with, and also got the support of the development machinery of the government departments, and funds to carry out development works. He rolled out a series of

development interventions in sectors like: social welfare, child development, drinking water supply, sanitation, cement streets / lanes within the village, underground drainage, and health and hygiene in local school and so on.

### **Keeping Village Development on the Priority**

Tapping assistance from various schemes of the Central and State Governments (such as Janma Bhoomi), he started building social infrastructure such as drinking water facility, cement streets / lanes, centralized underground drainage system for domestic waste water disposal, latrines for every household, school sanitation, *anganwadi* sanitation etc. when the works were halfway through, his tenure as Sarpanch came to close in 2006-07. According to the Panchayats Act, the opportunity for Panchayat Sarpanch had to be passed on to a woman from SC community, who would contest and win election. Recognising the social-mindedness of one Ms Jangamma, everyone - including Mr Srinivas - supported her to become successor Sarpanch of Hazipally. Ms.Jangamma became the Panchayat Sarpanch in 2006-07. Jengamma continued implementing Hazipally Development Plan with the active support of Srinivas and his friends. They cooperated with each other for they understood that both of them work for the same goal - village development. Socially, they come from different communities; and politically, they support different political parties when it comes to Lok sabha elections. But when it comes to matters related to Hazipally development, they stand together. All the more, one can observe during visit to this village, they listen to each other, with due respect. With them, the 'purpose' took priority over themselves, as individuals coming from different caste groups or leaders belong to different political parties.

### **Hazipally Becomes a Nirmal Gram Puraskar Awardee**

The efforts made since 2001 made many household to own and use toilets since 2003. In 2003, almost all the houses had toilets, and in 2007, a few left over households (60 of them) also completed constructing one for them. So, since 2007 every household in Hazipally own a latrine, all the streets have centralized drainage network, schools and *anganwadi* toilets are functional, solar lights illuminate the streets, and permanent arrangement for street cleaning and solid waste disposal are in place. Today the local school has a usable and clean toilet that the children are

using regularly, and the children have been trained in proper use and maintenance of latrines. All the 252 households have drinking water supply through individual house service connections.

In November 2008, Hazipally received the State Government's *Shubhram* (Clean) Award. In December 2008, Hazipally won the prestigious Nirmal Gram Puraskar (NGP) Award from the President of India. Winning these awards was not as simple as it is presented here. The efforts made by Panchayat functionaries to elevate Hazipally to attain the status of NGP require a full narration. However, we shall put them in a nutshell as follows. Other than the regular IEC campaigns, personal communication of local motivators at the door steps of every household, their efforts included:

- A resolution was passed at the Hazipally Gram Sabha meeting that Hazipally shall become Open Defecation Free (ODF) within two year period since the passing of the resolution.
- It was resolved in the Gram Sabha that the violators (those who feel comfortable 'doing it in the open') shall do it after paying a penalty of Rs.500 per day to the Gram Panchayat Office.
- There were laggards who took it easy, and went on their own dirtying in open. Srinivas along with his friends used to get up early in the morning, and went round whistling, 'illuminating the mapped area for open defecation' with torch light, and threatening to take away their Family Ration Card or cut government pension if any they were receiving, or pictures in a camera to display those pictures on important places in the village. These efforts embarrassed the resisters. This was done for almost six months to bring the laggards also to fall in line. Ms.Jangamma took the lead for it amongst women.
- With a view to stopping the use of plastic carry bags local shops adopted a system of 'pass on cloth bag system'. The means the customers who forgot to bring cloth bag from home, can borrow a cloth bag from local shops, which s/he has to return to the shop through any neighbor who might visit the shop next. Or bring it the next time you come.
- NSS volunteers from Colleges in Shadnagar used to camp in Hazipally for which Hazipally used to provide board and lodging. These volunteers also went door to door educating people on the importance of using toilets, hand washing with soap, and sanitation practices that lead to healthy living.

- The NSS volunteers also engaged themselves in cleaning up common places in the village, joining hands with local volunteers. They also educated the school children on personal hygiene and school sanitation.

The NIRDPR, Hyderabad has been supportive of all the developmental initiatives undertaken at Hazipally. NIRDPR arranged continual community education /leadership development programmes; exposure trips to Rural Technology Park (RTP), and motivated women Self Help Groups (SHGs) to move beyond savings and credit in order to take up supplementary income generating / entrepreneurship activities etc. Besides this, NIRDPR has been taking national level and international level trainees to pay a visit to Hazipally describing Hazipally as a Model Village or as one of the Cleanest Villages in India. This constant visit by such trainees from other parts of the country, and from outside the country has also indirectly necessitated the local leaders to sustain the good works, and cleanliness of the village. The efforts of the two local leaders coupled with the support rendered by various departments of the government and the NIRDPR resulted in Hazipally winning several awards and recognitions, and carve out a place for itself in the village development map of India.

Hazipally became a subject of study under Social Studies for school children in class VI in Government run schools of Telengana State in the year 2012-13 (Director of School Education, 2012). This is a real honour for the people of Hazipally, and a fitting acknowledgement to the torch bearers at Hazipally namely Mr Srinivas – now in his 40s; Ms Jengamma – now in her 50s, and of course, with their team of Panchayat functionaries. Hazipally has become an attraction for development tourists. Hazipally keeps receiving visitors almost every week. Hazipally is a model village not only for village development, but on a philosophical point. *Viz. How much we all can achieve together if only we started working without making micro-calculations on who gets the credit.* Another vital point to learn from this Gram Panchayat is *Hazipally is a typical case of how ordinary people can produce extraordinary development outcomes if only mutual support and cooperation existed between two successive Panchayat Sarpanches, who nurtured and worked on the same vision.*

## **Box – 2: Awards and Recognition that Hazipally has received**

- In November 2008, Hazipally received the State Government's *Shubhram* (Clean) Award.
- In December 2008, Hazipally won the prestigious Nirmal Gram Puraskar (NGP) Award from the President of India.
- In 2010, the Mandal Panchayat gave away *Shubhram* (Clean) Award to Hazipally.
- In March 2015, Hazipally won the prestigious Rajiv Gandhi Panchayati Swashakti Karana (RGPSA) Abhiyan Award from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (GoI), with cash prize of Rs.8 lakhs.

### **Personality Cult of the Local Leaders**

Culture plays an important role in development – the culture of trying to give back generously to the village one was born in. The cultural traits of leaders (and elders) in a given community are pivotal to set a village on a development path. In that respect, two Panchayat Presidents (Srinivas and Jengamma) of Hazipally deserve to be mentioned as torch bearers of development outcomes in Hazipally. Srinivas was elected Panchayat Sarpanch from 2001- 2006; and Jangamma was elected Panchayat Sarpanch from 2007 to 2012<sup>2</sup>. Currently, when this story was being written up in April 2016, Srinivas is the Panchayat Sarpanch again – this time unanimously selected. So, together these two leaders have steered village development in Hazipally for nearly 15 years. Leadership of Hazipally alternated between Srinivas and Jengamma, which in literal terms means – persons who got elected as Panchayat Sarpanch in the successive local body elections in Hazipally were different, but practically their development agenda was one and the same. This unified vision has caused the change desired. This has provided the continuity required in development efforts to render positive outcomes.

While that's fascinating, we must quickly add here that these two persons we refer to as leaders are atypical to the leadership traits that we are familiar with. In the sense, we need to discover a new leadership genre to describe them. For instance, Srinivas is a college degree holder, and Jangamma never went to school. They talk little - they never talk aloud; they wear smiley when

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<sup>2</sup> During a short period from 2012 – mid-2013, Panchayats in the undivided Andhra Pradesh were managed by Special Officers appointed by the government. Even during that period, the special officer assigned for Hazipally is reported to have been very supportive of the local developmental initiatives undertaken by Srinivas, Jangamma and their team of ward members.

you describe them as ‘leaders’ - and they don’t gesture approvingly. When you take a contingent of visitors to Hazipally even at a short notice, you find both of them are there for you – arranging seats for the visitors to have a development chat comfortably. At times, when Srinivas as the Sarpanch, if he is away on some official work in the town, you find Ms.Jangamma doing the local coordination for the visitors you took.

These might look strange for an outsider because these are atypical to the leaders we see today, or leaders we know of. Srinivas and Jengamma consider them as village level development workers - no matter who the Sarpanch is, they are there to work for the village. For them, they are more village level workers. For us, they belong to an indescribable leadership genre.

### **Factors that have contributed to Sustainability**

Eight important factors can be attributed as having contributed to the sustainability of Hazipally village development. They are:

1. Schumacher’s ‘Small is Beautiful’ thesis works in Hazipally. This is a small single habitation Panchayat with about 250 households. Handling a small village with one habitation is relatively easy compared to an average Telengana village where we usually have more than 2, 3 habitations with not less than 1000 households.
2. Two successive Panchayat Sarpanches – both of them unassuming and very humble – have nurtured and worked on the same vision. They have worked unmindful of who gets the credit. In fact, their eyes are on development outcomes rather than on who gets the credit for every single development mile stone they facilitate Hazipally cross.
3. Multiply the development efforts by bringing in persons and institutions that are facilitative of development (or be of assistance in Hazipally development) viz. NIRDPR and local college NSS volunteers and so on.
4. Women SHGs of Hazipally that got social awareness and economic empowerment realized the place of sanitation and personal cleanliness in improving the quality of living.
5. Hazipally after it attained the status of NGP started being viewed as a model village on several respects including community participation, good governance, total sanitation, centralized drainage network and so on. The NIRDPR has been constantly taking national

and international level development professionals to Hazipally. So, there is external expectation to keep it a model village. It naturally becomes imperative for local leaders to upkeep the status so as 'not to be viewed as not being worth the salt'.

6. Meticulous collection and proper use of house tax and land revenue cess.
7. In 2001, Srinivas had to contest in the Panchayat election to get elected as Sarpanch of Hazipally. In the recent Panchayats elections held in 2012-13, people 'unanimously announced' Mr Srinivas as Sarpanch of Hazipally. This explains the commitment in Srinivas that people could take notice of.
8. The support rendered by BDO, DRDA and the District Collector of Mahaboob Nagar district.

Asked about the reasons behind the sustainability of development efforts and benefits, Mr Srinivas says: *We got NGP Award in 2008. It was given away by the President of India. SEVENTY PEOPLE from Hazipally (along with Jangamma, then GP President) went to Pune to receive the NGP Award, although as per protocol only Jangamma was given a pass to be present in the function and get on the stage to receive the Award from the President of India. We were all eagerly waiting outside the function hall for Jangamma to come out with the award so that we did not have to wait until she arrived in Hazipalli for us to feel that award with our hands. One can imagine the 'ownership' we all felt of the award. That means we have to live up to that – so that the award makes sense. It's not a toy we were given, it is a rare award only about 30,000 Panchayats in India have qualified for, until 2015. When you receive an award – from a person of the eminence such as the President of India, we must live up to that – that's honouring the award and respecting the institution, which conferred the award. This spirit sustains us. This spirit makes us work harder to keep up the clean village status.*

## **Conclusion**

The Panchayat has all the potentials to become a model in establishing an e-governance system. Then move towards winning Gram Ratna Award.

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