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Maharashtra villages win hygiene award

From correspondents in Delhi, India, 07:30 PM IST

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President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Friday presented the Nirmal Gram Puraskar to eight villages in Maharashtra for maintaining cleanliness and hygiene.

Thanks to an Art of Living initiative to build toilets and educate the villagers on personal hygiene, the villages could meet the strict parameters for the award.

The parameters include access to household toilets, absence of open defecation and maintenance of public cleanliness, said a statement Friday issued by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's Art of Living Foundation.

Every house in the village of Kapsi, Dhumalwadi, Sokasan, Dangirewadi, Khutbav, Waki, Nidhal and Jadhavwadi uses a personal toilet built by the Foundation in collaboration with the villagers.

The award represents a major shift in the mindset of the villagers towards personal hygiene.

'It is easy to construct a toilet, but it is difficult to motivate the villagers to utilise them due to the old habit of answering nature's call in the open,' said Madhav Pol, the Satara district coordinator of the Art of Living.

Art of Living volunteers started working in these villages in 2004 and educated the villagers about the disadvantages of the age-old method of defecating in the open. So far, 3,575 sessions have been conducted to spread the importance of personal hygiene, the statement said.

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