

'Nashik can become the cleanest city in a month'

Says Ramdas Kokare, chief officer of Vengurla Municipal Council, who is in the city to receive the Vasundhara Samman. Willing to share his Vengurla model with NMC

SHIVANI GANESH
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"When something gets in your eye you remove it at once, we must have the same attitude to any kind of garbage thrown in a public place, we must have zero tolerance for eyesores in public places," says 40-year-old Ramdas Kokare, who is in Nashik to receive yet another accolade for the work done at Dapoli and Vengurla in the Konkan region. The list of awards credited to Kokare's leadership in the state's and national cleanliness surveys is long. Vengurla has been declared the best municipality and won many awards, with a cash prize which totals more than Rs 4.5 crore. He has also won many personal awards for his leadership, of which the latest is the Vasundhara Samman.

"The most difficult thing to make Swachha Bharat a reality is changing the mentality of the people. It is not the responsibility of



Ramdas Kokare

the government alone, citizens must get a feeling of pride about their village, taluka or city," he says. It took him two years to change things in the Konkan region but Dapoli won the cleanest city award in the state in 2010 and Vengurla in 2015. Vengurla now has segregation of waste into 27 categories. Changing the mindset took constant awareness campaigns for motivation while societies who do not segregate waste are fined Rs 500.

"It must also be personally supervised. But ultimately people must make it part of their lifestyle, and be proud of their city," says Kokare.

"We recently earned Rs 3 lakh out of our plastic waste. We use the plastic for building roads as plastic has the same melting

point of 160 degrees as bitumen and mingles very well into the mixture. On the 6.5-acre municipal site where piles of trash lay until a year ago, a green patch functions as an orchard, farm and garden. Banana, coconut, corn, cashew and mango trees, marigold, rose and tulsi bushes are grown here. The dumping ground has a biogas plant that fuels waste management machines, and earns an income from selling glass and metal to recyclers.

Future plans include making an International Study Centre for Solid Waste Management in Vengurla where people can study the subject. The Kalyan-Dombivili municipality is going to implement the Vengurla model and 6,000 visitors from all over the country have visited the place to study how to replicate the success. The size of a city has nothing to do with the implementation of cleanliness.

"I have only a staff of 20, plus 30 sanitary workers. Nashik has 1,200 workers, so I do not see why things cannot change dramatically in a month," he says. He is willing to share his experiences with Nashik Municipal Corporation if they invite him to do so.