

Do we expect any better Environment?

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India's priorities and performance in protecting environment has been bewildering. That was why I titled my 2021 book on the subject as "*The Green Puzzle*". Successive governments approach have been one of "one step forward and two steps backward". Unshackling protective initiatives of the past few decades is no more covert to the extent of governments being accused as "adversary"! Take, an example, Environment Protection Act has already been reduced to shambles. The latest change in July 2022 removed punitive provision for violating with fine instead of imprisonment. Two days later, on July 8, Government issued another Order which endangers forests and inhabitants. This notifies that Government can approve diversion of forests by private developers without the consent of forest dwellers. This is in violation of Forest Rights Act 2000. All this as we increasingly experience change in climate year to year. A country whose culture and customs are nature loving, and which was foremost in the world fifty years ago to come up with environment protection policies, is being ranked today in 2022 global environment index at the bottom of 180 countries and as "fourth worst country in performance". Four critical parameters considered are mitigating climate change, improving environmental health and protecting ecosystem vitality. Of course, the India Government rebutted the ranking. India is home to 21 of the 30 most polluted cities in the world. And 16 lakh people in India die from air pollution every year. And yet, economic growth continues to be priority, not sustainability.

Have we taken a serious and dispassionate review of the state of affairs to do with nature and environment or have we fallen prey to global politics or have we forgotten that challenge and task of enriching nature and environment is primarily that of civic society? Can it be safeguard without concern continuing as part of life style and living traditions of families and support of people! Are

we overlooking that “environment sustainability” is a guarantee for “economic development”, not vice versa? We seem to have forgotten or ignoring that cultural roots and heritage is far more reliable way than relying on bureaucracies and complacency of leaders in tenure positions. Can we reverse the scene without reconnect to culture, customs and communities? Can we sustain nature without realising limits of “human greed and economic growth” based outlook resulting in an all-out consumerism? Realising that, way back in 2000 Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee cautioned, while speaking to Ministers of Environment of States, about “narrow perspective of development model” and reminded about “mindless consumption and destruction” going on in the name of environment protection. And, yet, we seem to have intensified that pursuit at all levels. One can ignore what Mahatma Gandhi had said at one’s own peril. He reminded that “the earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s needs, but not every man’s greed”.

It is high time today we take a retrospective review as if it is an yet another chance for a course correction. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has historical opportunity to bring that much needed Big Bang Break in the country’s crusade for sustainable development and better environment. His special focus and appeal will go a long way not only as the Prime Minister but as the most appealing leader of the country.

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