

India and Environment: A Step Forward

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The question of the environment has largely been a forgotten one in the discourse of Indian politics. If one were to highlight the major issues that have dominated discussions in India, the issue of environment would be absent. The question of the environment is significant not only in relation to the question of sustainable development but also in the framework of tribal rights. The uni-dimensional nature of India's economic planning leaves the specific needs of various tribal groups, which can be seen as a continuation of colonial discourse from the era's past.

This archaic system has not only led to environmental degradation but also to the systematic subjugation of the groups that have depended on the forest for livelihood. Therefore, the environmental history of India is replete with instances of ignorance by successive governments leading to various organised mobilisations and even violence against the state. In the contemporary political climate, we do see a change in the attitude of government officials. While the change in the attitude of government dignitaries may not signify a full rectification of the structural issues that have plagued the Indian nation, it does reflect a shift of mindset.

India has become greener during the past two years. This was the key summary of the India State of Forest Report 2019, released by the ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Forest cover has especially grown beyond restricted areas in two years – the survey found an increase of 4,306 sq km of forest cover outside the RFA/GW as compared to the previous assessment of 2017. Increase in forest cover is just one of the many ways in which the government has shown its commitment to the environment and overall sustainable development. Moreover, the massive increase in access to sanitation facilities achieved by the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan, and the clean-up of cities with the help of better solid waste management techniques are for all to see. These are leading to transformations in people's lives that have never been seen before. With over 16 crore toilets being built in rural and urban India, and door to door collection of waste reaching more than 80,000 wards in urban India, things are looking up.

These steps and the results thereof do reflect a change in the attitude of the present central government which has spent huge resources to rectify the apathy faced by environmental questions. While a lot more remains to be done, the present government has taken starting steps towards the rectification of these long-standing problems. Such steps should be lauded and many more similar projects should be initiated.

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