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## The undeniable shift in our heat and rain cycles

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June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022

It was a gorgeous morning in Kausani, Uttarakhand's most picturesque hill station. When I woke up, I noticed that the sun had begun its ascent. I got ready quickly and went for a long stroll. The ambience was full of paradoxes.

On the one hand, the cool, clean breeze flowing through the dense foliage soothed the soul, while on the other, the forests on the hill were flaring up. The carbon dioxide from this fire was bound to negate the benefits of clean air.

Kausani has changed dramatically over time. Once, this peaceful hill town played a significant role in the lives of many of our country's leading lights. One of them is the Father of the Nation. When Mahatma Gandhi arrived here in June 1929 from Andhra Pradesh, he was in poor health. The bright mornings of Kausani made such an impact on him that he authored his famous book *Anasakti Yoga* based on the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* in just two weeks.

Apart from the *Anasakti Ashram* where Gandhiji stayed, there is *Sumitranandan Pant Gallery*, a museum dedicated to the great Hindi poet who was born here. Pant's poetry is known for its romanticism inspired by nature's beauty. Kausani gave so much to great people like Gandhi and Pant, but what happened to it? Not only Kausani, but the entire Himalayan region appears to be pleading for help.

It is unfortunate that deadly forest fires are raging from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. According to the Forest Survey of India, there were 1,141 major forest fires in the last week of March alone. According to the survey, 22% of India's forests are vulnerable to fire.

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) issued a report in February this year which said that "despite ambitious efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, there has been a dramatic increase in the incidence of catastrophic fires on the earth." And the number of bushfire seasons like Australia's Black Summer is expected to rise by 31-57% by the end of the century.

No continent has been spared. The smouldering in the Amazon forests of Brazil terrified the entire world the same year. This forest area alone emits 20% of the world's total oxygen.

Our planet's temperature is constantly rising due to fire and other factors. This has an immediate impact on glaciers. According to researchers from the University of Leeds in England, all of the world's glaciers have shrunk by 40%. Scientists from the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology in Dehradun have stated several times that the Gangotri's glacier is melting by 15 to 20 cm per year. Union environment minister Bhupendra Yadav confirmed in the Rajya Sabha in March that

the glacier has lost 0.23 sq km in the last 15 years. He did not rule out the possibility of black carbon affecting the Gangotri glacier.

What exactly is black carbon, though?

According to PS Negi, a scientist at the Wadia Institute, black carbon is a “particulate matter”. Its presence raises temperatures, causing glaciers to melt. It is the only pollutant that is harmful to both humans and the environment. However, according to a Cato Institute research paper, the Himalayas are still unaffected by global warming. They also reject the assertion that all glaciers will melt by 2035. They believe that the Ganga and the Brahmaputra rivers will not dry up.

The Sanskrit proverb *Munde-Munde matirbhina* (as the heads differ, so does the thinking) applies to scientists too. This explains why their claims are so contradictory. In this month’s report of The Environment Preference Index (EPI), India was ranked last out of 180 countries. Yale and Columbia Universities in the US collaborated on this report. Every two years, the report is published. This time, India is below even Myanmar, Vietnam, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The researchers had previously ranked India at 168. The Indian government, predictably, dismissed it as a ranking based on “biased metrics and biased weights.”

Irrespective of what experts and scientists claim, it is undeniable that everyone everywhere is experiencing a shift in the heat and rain cycle. Mango flowers had arrived earlier this year in the orchards of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. I met a lot of farmers and nature lovers while travelling around the hilly region of Kumaon. They all claim that it has harmed not only crops but also other living creatures, almost in a similar way.

One thing is certain: This is the moment for everyone to exercise caution. It is not only necessary to strengthen laws and regulations, but it is also imperative that they must be strictly enforced.