

The Living Environment around My Home

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I have been living in India for more than 20 years. When thinking about the changes in the living environment around my home, I would have to say that India's economic liberalization of 1991 and its subsequent membership in WTO from 1995 have had a big impact on that. Although more than one-fourth of the population is still living in poverty, the lifestyle of middle class people living in cities and suburbs has changed considerably -- from what I have seen -- over the ten years since economic liberalization.

Take for example the suburbs of Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal, where I live, electric home appliances have become widespread. Besides refrigerators, we can now choose from over 100 channels of cable TV, whereas before economic liberalization, there were just two or three state-run channels. Before, there were black-and-white TVs, but now most families have color TVs. Just for the record, I was surprised when chatting with housewife friends about which appliance would cause the greatest discomfort if broken. I said the washing machine, but many responded the microwave oven. We do not have a microwave in our house.

Despite the spread of home appliances, there have not been notable changes in the basic infrastructure such as electricity and water. Often during summer and the rainy season, we have about six hours of intermittent power outage a day. The reason is simply that electricity supply cannot keep up with demand. In summer, there is increased usage of fans and air conditioners, while during the rainy season, there is a shortage of coal for the fossil fuel-fired power plants. Meanwhile, household water is not available 24 hours a day but only for four hours a day. Because of the economic situation, families go to a nearby public main, collect potable water and use it for washing clothes or bathing. Or, they have water pipes run to their home so they do not have to go collect water all the time. Some families even install water tanks on their roofs and run pipes into their homes. Having water available from the faucet 24 hours a day is a personal choice and costs money.

As for houses to live in, because of an increase in government and bank loans, I would not go as far as calling it a construction boom, but over the past five or six years people have been adding second stories to their single-story homes and apartment buildings have popped up here and there. In 2000, foreign companies started doing business in

India because of promoted free trade agreements (FTA). Partially because of this and the previously mentioned diffusion of TVs and commercials, people have more choices today. One example is seen in the exterior walls of houses. I have seen recently loud colors like yellowish green, yellow and orange. Maybe it is because they want to stand out more than other families. However, be it for personal tastes or investment, it is worrisome that there is no concern about destroying the balance with the environment around the home.



The home next door was recently painted “acid green”. The sun reflects off the paint, basically blinding you.