



Question-3

Between 1880 and 1920, forest cover in the Indian subcontinent declined by 9.7 million hectares, from 108.6 million hectares to 98.9 million hectares. Discuss the role of the following factors in this decline:

- Railways
- Shipbuilding
- Agricultural expansion
- Commercial farming
- Tea/Coffee plantations
- Adivasis and other peasant users.

Solution:

Railways:

The expansion of the railways became a necessity as trade and transportation increased. Wood was needed as fuel to run the steam locomotives. Wood was also needed to lay railway line sleepers, which held the tracks together. So, forests were destroyed to provide the wood needed for the expansion of the railways.

Shipbuilding:

The British Government needed huge ships for its Royal Navy. Ships are built of strong, durable timber. When the oak forests in England began to disappear the British attacked the forest resources in India. Vast quantities of timber was exported to England from India, for ship building, thus depleting forests in India.

Agricultural expansion:

As population increased over the centuries, demand for food also increased. To meet the increased demand for food more land had to be cultivated. If more land had to be cultivated, forests had to be destroyed and brought under the plough. So, forests were cleared to meet agricultural expansion.

Commercial farming:

During the Colonial period the demand for commercial crops like jute, sugar, wheat and cotton increased. Europe needed more food grain for its growing population and more raw material for its growing industrial production. So, forests were destroyed to enable commercial farming.

Tea/Coffee plantations:

Vast areas of forests were given to European Planters, at a very cheap rate by the Colonial government. Natural forests were cleared to cultivate tea and coffee as there was a great demand for these commodities in Europe.

Adivasis and other peasant users:

Only one-sixth of India's landmass was under cultivation in the 1600s. Now, more than half the landmass is under cultivation as the population has increased rapidly. As the demand for food went up, peasants extended the boundaries of cultivation, clearing forests and cultivating new land. The Adivasis were hired by the forest department, during the colonial period to cut trees, and make sleepers for the railways. But the Adivasis were not allowed to cut trees to build their own houses.

Question-4

Why are forests affected by wars?

Solution:

The impact of the First and Second World War on forests was tremendous. In India, the forest department cut trees freely to meet British war needs. The British needed to strengthen their Navy and timber was needed to build war ships.

In Java, the Dutch enforced 'a scorched earth' policy. They destroyed sawmills, and burnt huge piles of giant teak logs so that the Japanese could not get it, during the war. The Japanese, who invaded Indonesia exploited the forests for their own war needs. They made forest villagers cut down forests. Many villagers used this opportunity to destroy forests and expand cultivation. When the war was over the Indonesian forest service was unable to get the forest land back from the villagers.

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