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History

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Effect of Colonial Rule on Forest Cover

Colonizers all over the world thought that uncultivated land should be taken over so that that could be used for more commercial purposes. The production of commercial crops like jute, sugar, wheat and cotton increased during this period. This happened because of increasing demand from a growing population in Europe. Foodgrain was required to feed the growing population and raw materials were needed for the growing industries. the cultivated area increased by 6.7 million hectares between 1880 and 1920 in India.

The oak forests were disappearing in England by the early twentieth century. This created scarcity for the ship building industry in Britain. Ships were quite important for military power of the British. They found good source of wood for shipbuilding in the Indian forests. This began cutting of trees on a large scale in the Indian forests.

The spread of railways from the 1850s created new demand for timber. Timber was required for making sleepers for the railway line. Each mile of railway track needed 1,760 to 2,000 sleepers. About 25,500 km of track had been laid by 1890. It is obvious that a large number of trees were felled to meet this demand.

Forest Society and Colonialism

Diversity in forests has been disappearing very quickly. During the period of industrialization (between 1700 and 1995), 13.9 million square km of forest was cleared for industrial uses, cultivation, pasture and fuelwood. This turns out to be 9.3% of the total area of the world. Disappearance of forests is called deforestation. The process of deforestation began many centuries ago, but became more systematic and extensive during the colonial period.

Land to be Improved

About one-sixth of India's landmass was under cultivation in 1600. At present, almost half of the landmass in India has come under cultivation.

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