

Deforestation

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1. INTRODUCTION

Deforestation is the process of cutting/thinning of trees in order to make the forest land area available for other uses like development, construction of roads, houses, buildings, railway lines etc. Increased agricultural production to satisfy the hunger of growing population and animal grazing are also some of the major causes of deforestation.

The loss of forest covers and trees not only increases risks and the intensity of floods, global warming, climate change and soil erosion but also leads to extreme loss of habitat for flora and fauna both. Its is no surprise to know that more than 2/3rd of plants and animals thrive in forests and they are their natural habitat. Little do we realise that we are doing a long time mass destruction for an extremely short term gain.

In India, forest cover is 24.5% of the geography of the country. The countries with highest coverage of forest areas are Russia, Brazil, Canada, USA, China and Australia in descending order of forest area .The forest coverage of the planet Earth is 30% of its land. Since 1990, our planet lost forest cover roughly of the size of South Africa by 2019.

2. CAUSES AND EFFECTS

Trees absorb carbon di oxide from the atmosphere which is emitted by industries as waste, road vehicles by combustion of fossil fuels and natural occurrences like volcanoes and then release oxygen. Trees absorb water during rains and help increase ground water level. They also release vapours in the atmosphere that condense and become clouds. This way they help maintain the water cycle. Trees also absorb other harmful green house gases that are causing climate change like global warming, melting of ice, and rising of sea levels. With deforestation, chances of natural occurrences like floods, soil erosion, and disturbed weather cycle also become highly likely.

If there are fewer trees, carbon di oxide will linger in the atmosphere and wouldn't get absorbed. Hence it creates a thick layer in the atmosphere and traps the sun light. This in turn causes the heat to get trapped and causes the temperature to rise. Without forests, the land also heats up quickly and raises temperature of that area.

Research says that over 600 species are already extinct from the beginning of this century. 70% of the world's plants and animals are on the brink of losing their habitat of dense forests and are moving closer to extinction. One wildfire of 1997 in Indonesia destroyed 40% of the habitat of Sumatran Orangutans. Now only 6000 are estimated to survive.

Also, millions of human beings do depend on forests for livelihood. 20% of the people in the world rely on charcoal and firewood as their source of energy for cooking purposes and also for heating homes. Many households gather their raw materials of food and medicinal plants directly from forests.

Urbanization and development have been extremely crucial for human beings to prosper. We might think of our contribution as mankind to curb deforestation should be to plant at least one tree for every tree lost. We might think that this can be our small step towards decreasing the gap between reduction and plantation. Also, most of the industries also claim to have realised the impact of mass destruction of forests and do their bit by planting equal number of trees that they cut. But in truest of sense, this is not as simple as it seems.

When an intact forest is cleared off trees, its is cleared off wildlife, vegetation and diverse plants. Hence, on clearing forests, a significant amount of carbon is also emitted. Even when several trees are planted, it takes many decades to recover from this huge "carbon debt" that it leaves behind. The impact is not immediate. This carbon logging then creates more concentration of harmful green house gases in the atmosphere for a very long time.

3. SOLUTIONS AND MOVEMENTS

There are many environmental activists who are fighting against illegal mining, unnecessary agricultural expansion and rapid industrialization. Chipko Movement: This movement was started in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand in 1970s to protect the forests. This was done by villagers by hugging trees to protect them from being felled by the government

and industries. The movement also dates back to the 18th century when the Bishnoi community of Rajasthan took earnest steps to protect their forests from being cut by the King of Jodhpur.

Aarey Colony is a forest area in the heart of Mumbai city and is often referred to as “its lungs”. Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation was granted permission to cut down approximately 3000 trees from Aarey Colony to build Metro shed. An NGO filed a petition in Mumbai Court to declare Aarey Colony as “Protected Forest”. Activists and people of the city gathered in huge numbers to protest against this unlawful act with rallies echoing “Save Aarey”.

We urgently need to take extremely bold steps to preserve our forests which will help save our biodiversity and coming generations. Regulatory authorities like the Government need to make sure that the forest laws are stringently enforced and followed by the biggest of industries to local communities. We can do our bit by adopting more eco friendly products and services in our daily lives. Consuming less of packaged food, eating sustainable food, using recyclable/reusable items are some of the easy choices we can make.

Lets together try to save our planet Earth and take earnest efforts to do our bit. We can save our Mother Nature collectively.

“What we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another” - Mahatma Gandhi

