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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

# The Green Invader: Prosopis juliflora and the Aravallis

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY



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# The Green Invader: *Prosopis juliflora* and the Aravallis

 **The Indian Express**    7 July 2026    **GS3**

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## THE LIFT LINE

The Aravallis are dying not from a dramatic blow but from a quiet takeover. A thorny tree brought in to green the barren land now smothers two-thirds of a protected sanctuary, teaching a hard lesson: the cure planted a century ago has become the disease.

## WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Invasive species, biodiversity loss and ecosystem restoration are core Environment themes, and the Aravallis add a topical Delhi-NCR dimension of urban ecology and pollution. The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) finding on Asola Bhatti gives it fresh, citable data.

**GS Paper 3:** Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; biodiversity; environmental impact assessment (<https://ujyari.com/terms/environmental-impact-assessment/>).

**Prelims angle:** *Prosopis juliflora* (vilayati kikar / vilayati babool); Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary; the Aravalli range; Wildlife Institute of India (Dehradun); the Northern Aravalli Leopard Wildlife Corridor; invasive alien species (<https://ujyari.com/terms/invasive-alien-species/>); the Aravalli Green Wall project.

**Mains angle:** How invasive species degrade fragile ecosystems and why native-species restoration is essential to protecting the Aravallis as Delhi-NCR's ecological buffer.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

A Wildlife Institute of India assessment found that *Prosopis juliflora*, the exotic tree known locally as vilayati kikar, covers roughly 63.5 per cent of the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary, while genuine forest accounts for less than a fifth of the area. Asola Bhatti, on Delhi's southern edge, is the last surviving vestige of the Aravalli

hill ecosystem within the National Capital Region and part of the Northern Aravalli Leopard Wildlife Corridor. That a single invasive species now dominates a protected sanctuary is a stark measure of ecological degradation.

*Prosopis juliflora*, native to Central and South America, was introduced across arid India in the colonial and post-Independence decades to green degraded land and provide fuelwood. It thrives on barren ground, spreads aggressively and forms dense thickets. But it is allelopathic and water-hungry: it suppresses the growth of native vegetation under its canopy, lowers groundwater and crowds out the indigenous species that local wildlife depends on. What was planted as a quick fix for barren land has become a slow poison for biodiversity. The Aravallis, the world's oldest fold mountains, act as a natural barrier against the westward march of the Thar Desert and as a green shield that moderates dust and pollution for Delhi-NCR. Their degradation is therefore not only a conservation loss but a public-health and climate-resilience (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/resilience/>) concern.

## THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

The central argument is that unchecked invasive species like *Prosopis juliflora* are degrading the fragile Aravalli ecosystem from within, and that saving it requires planned eradication paired with active restoration of native species, not just legal protection on paper.

### The Invasion Mechanism

*Prosopis juliflora* wins by suppressing competitors, drinking down groundwater and forming impenetrable monocultures that offer little food or habitat for native fauna. Protection status alone does not stop a biological invader.

### The Aravallis as a Green Shield

The range checks desertification, recharges groundwater and buffers Delhi-NCR against dust and heat. A sanctuary dominated by a water-guzzling invader delivers a fraction of these services.

### Restoration, Not Just Removal

Clearing the invader without replanting natives leaves bare, erosion-prone ground that the invader recolonises. Eradication must be sequenced with native afforestation to be durable.

FEATURE	PROSOPIS JULIFLORA (INVASIVE)	NATIVE ARAVALLI SPECIES
Water use	High, lowers groundwater	Adapted to arid conditions
Effect on undergrowth	Suppresses (allelopathic)	Supports diverse understorey
Habitat value	Low for native fauna	High, food and shelter
Ecosystem service	Poor recharge, monoculture ( <a href="https://ujyari.com/vocab/monoculture/">https://ujyari.com/vocab/monoculture/</a> )	Recharge, biodiversity, dust buffer

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Use the invasion-cost frame: an invasive species imposes ecological costs (biodiversity loss), hydrological costs (groundwater depletion) and service costs (loss of the dust-and-heat buffer) that rarely appear in any budget, which is why they are neglected until a sanctuary is 63 per cent overrun. A second frame is the restoration ladder: legal protection is the lowest rung; the higher rungs are active invasive removal, native replanting, hydrological recovery and community stewardship. Most Indian conservation stalls at the lowest rung. Finally, apply the precautionary and polluter-pays logic in reverse: the “solution” of yesterday (planting a hardy exotic) became today’s problem, a reminder to assess ecological risk before large-scale species introductions.

## THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Prosopis juliflora introduced to green barren land -> spreads aggressively, allelopathic and water-hungry -> covers about 63.5 per cent of Asola Bhatti sanctuary -> native vegetation and wildlife habitat collapse -> the Aravalli green shield weakens -> desertification and dust reach Delhi-NCR more easily -> planned eradication plus native-species restoration -> the ecosystem recovers.

## WAY FORWARD

- 1 **Plan phased eradication.** Remove Prosopis juliflora in stages, sequenced with immediate native replanting to prevent recolonisation and soil erosion.
- 2 **Restore native species.** Rebuild the indigenous Aravalli flora (dhau, khair, ber, indigenous grasses) that support local fauna and recharge groundwater.
- 3 **Protect the corridor.** Strengthen the Northern Aravalli Leopard Wildlife Corridor and integrate restoration with the Aravalli Green Wall initiative and NCR-wide land-use rules against **encroachment** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/encroachment/>) and mining.

- 4 **Build an invasive-species framework.** Adopt early-detection, risk-assessment and management protocols for invasive alien species nationally, and involve local communities in stewardship.

## PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has asked about invasive species and biodiversity (2019: “How does biodiversity vary in India? How is the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 (<https://ujiyari.com/terms/biological-diversity-act/>) helpful in the conservation of flora and fauna?”) and about ecological restoration. This editorial applies those to the Aravallis and Prosopis juliflora.

**Practice question:** “Invasive alien species can hollow out an ecosystem from within, as the spread of Prosopis juliflora in the Aravallis shows.” Examine the ecological threat and suggest a restoration strategy for the Aravalli region. (15 marks, 250 words)

*Sources: The Indian Express (<https://indianexpress.com/section/opinion/>)*

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