

CHENCHUS AND TIGERS OF NALLAMALA

Prelims- Environment- Biodiversity, Tribes

Mains: GS-III- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Context-

- ▶▶ **Chenchus** the Members of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) in Nallamala forest understands tigers and help them let live and multiply.

Who are Chenchus

- ▶▶ The Chenchus are a Telugu speaking food-gathering tribe living in the Nallamalai forests of Andhra Pradesh in India spread over the districts of Mahaboobnagar, Kurnool, Prakasam and Guntur.
- ▶▶ They are a **conservative tribal group** and have not made many changes in their lifestyle or tried to adapt to modernity.
- ▶▶ They live in the enclosed space and geography, leading a life of an unbroken continuity.

Nallamala Forest:

- ▶▶ Nallamala Forest is one of the largest undisturbed stretches of forest in South India.
- ▶▶ It is located in the Nallamala Hill which is a part of the Eastern Ghats
- ▶▶ The forest has a good tiger population, and a part of the forest belongs to the Nagarjunsagar-Srisailem Tiger Reserve.

How Chenchus Help Tigers?

- ▶▶ A group of five Chenchus man each of the base camps and move into the interior forests at dawn each day conscientiously **to digitally capture pug marks** and other **remnants left by the big cats in the sprawling Nallamala forests.**
- ▶▶ They work un-mindful of treacherous terrain **to provide a safe environment for the big cats** and other **wild animals and generate vast data from the ground for analysis by the NTCA** authorities who come out with the tiger census every four years.

Co-Existence with Tigers

- ▶▶ Tribes are the best conservationists and guardians of the natural world.
- ▶▶ The reason for this is that India's **tribes people have a deep and close relationship with the forest**, which they depend on for their livelihoods and survival.

- ▶▶ The forest is not just home. It is sacred, it is life, it is medicine, it is food. The tribes treat it with love and respect.
- ▶▶ A Chenchu man explained: “We love the forest as a child loves his mother.
- ▶▶ **Principle:**
 - ❖ Their customs dictate that they should never take more than they need or waste anything.
 - ❖ Many works on the principle of giving back to nature what they take from it.
- ▶▶ When Chenchus harvest honey from high in the trees, they take some for themselves and leave some near the ground for the tigers, because “tigers cannot climb the trees and harvest honey.
- ▶▶ Chenchu, worship the tiger, considering it both a god and a member of their large spiritual family, which includes other animals such as panthers and bears.

Other tribes which co-exist with Tigers:

- ▶▶ Soliga tribe, Baiga tribe
- ▶▶ A recent census has shown that the number of tigers in one tiger reserve has increased way above the national average since the **Soliga became the first tribe to have their rights to stay in a tiger reserve recognized.**

Conclusion:

- ▶▶ Evidence proves that tribal peoples are better at looking after their environment than anyone else, and therefore the best placed to protect the tiger and its forests.
- ▶▶ In spite of this, current conservation practices threaten to destroy India’s tribal guardians and their natural heritage by illegally evicting communities from their ancestral homelands and criminalizing their subsistence activities.