

NTCA Order

What is the issue?

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The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) recently ordered that **there would be no tribal rights** under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) in critical tiger habitats.

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Does it contradict the earlier stance of Government?

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- Both the 'Guidance document for preparation of tiger conservation plan' and the Protocol/guidelines for voluntary village relocation in notified core/critical tiger habitats of tiger reserves' issued by the Environment Ministry acknowledge that although there is a need to keep forest reserves as inviolate for the purposes of tiger conservation, **this ought to be done without affecting the rights of traditional forest dwellers.**

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- The NTCA and the relevant expert committee constituted to ensure tiger conservation under the **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (WPA)** have a mandate to ensure conservation along with human coexistence.

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Can the tribal rights be compromised?

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- Compromises on the rights of Tribals can be made only where there is proof that the tribal/right holder's presence in these protected areas will create irreversible damage to their ecology.

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- While on paper the process adopted or recommended for creation and maintenance of critical tiger habitats appears fairly just, in effect its

functioning is arbitrary.

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- Neither the FRA nor the WPA has ever made a case for circumscribing the rights of Tribals in the name of environmental protection.

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- Yet this takes place as the practice of conservation is predicated on **exclusionary logic**.

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- Even in the face of significant evidence that Tribals have helped in increasing the tiger population, whether the **Soligas** in the BRT Tiger reserve in Karnataka or the **Baigas** in the Kanha National Park in M.P. (in photo), they have been periodically evicted, even as corporations and developmental projects are given a free hand to generate an environmental crisis on an unprecedented scale.

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What do the data say?

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- According to the **Global Environmental Justice Atlas data of 2016**, India registered the highest number of environment-related conflicts (222) in proportion to the population.

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- It is thus necessary for civil society and peoples' collectives to forge an alliance to **prevent dissociating indigenous communities** from the environmental conservation narrative.

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- Strengthening the FRA and eliminating instances that marginalise people in the name of conservation will require greater policy attention.

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Source: The Hindu

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