



Deemed Forest Status

Why in News?

Recently, the Supreme Court asked the state to highlight the “**steps being taken for identification and survey of Orans, De-Vans, Rundhs among others such groves as forest land**”. In response to this the Rajasthan government finally notified its sacred groves, known as Orans, as “**deemed forest**”.

Key Points

- Orans are a vital part of community life in Rajasthan community forests that are sometimes centuries old, traditionally seen as sacred, preserved and managed by rural communities, with local laws and rules governing their use.
 - Pastoralists take their livestock to the Orans for grazing.
 - These also serve as places for the communities to congregate for social events and festivals.
 - They are also the natural habitat for the critically endangered **Great Indian Bustard (GIB)**.
- The **Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980** had certain restrictive provisions, wherein the Centre’s approval was required to convert the status of forest to non-forest land. But in the amended FCA, the clearance of deemed, unclassified and private forests can be done by the state government itself.
- In a Supreme Court case where the constitutionality of these amendments has been challenged, the Court noted in an interim order that deemed forests as per the **1996 Godavarman case** should be protected.

Orans

- These are community-conserved green spaces that include indigenous trees, such as **Khejri (*Prosopis cineraria*) and Rohida (*Tecomella undulata*)**, and are usually dedicated to local deities.
- They were on the verge of destruction as revenue records marked them as a culturable wasteland of government land that could be brought under cultivation. This made it easier for Orans to be allotted for non-forest activities.