



# Saltpan Workers of Little Rann of Kutch

[Source: DTE](#)

## Why In News?

On July 18, 2023, **saltpan workers (commonly known as agariyas)** presented a representation to Gujarat Chief Minister and urged the state to intervene in response to instructions from forest department that restricted their entry into the Little Rann of Kutch.

## What is the Order of the Forest Department?

- [Little Rann of Kutch](#) declared a wild ass sanctuary in 1972.
  - Settlement survey conducted in 1997, permitting salt cultivation and leasing land to saltpan workers. Traditional agariyas were excluded from the benefits of the settlement survey.
- **Legal Implications:**
  - Ongoing scrutiny of the 1997 settlement survey is being done by Gujarat High Court and National Green Tribunal involved in the resolution of land-poaching activities.

## What are the Arguments Raised by Agariyas in Their Defence?

- **Wild Ass Population Growth vs. Man-Animal Conflict:** Census data shows a significant rise in the wild ass population in the area from 700 in 1973 to 6,082 in 2019.
  - Census data ruled out the possibility of man-animal conflict in the Wild Ass Sanctuary due to work of Saltpan workers.
- **Saltpan Workers' Land Use:** Saltpan workers use only 6% of the total land area for salt cultivation in Little Rann of Kutch, which is negligible in both quantity and space.
- **Concerns against improper Survey:** In meetings held at 16 out of 100-125 villages, forest department officials removed the names of 95% of the 8000 families of agariyas (saltpan workers).
  - Most of the agariyas listed in the settlement survey report are not alive.

## Who are the Saltpan workers?

- **Koli, Sandhi, and Miyana communities** residing in 100-125 villages around the Little Rann of Kutch in North Gujarat, Kutch, and Saurashtra regions are dependent on salt cultivation in the area called Saltpan workers.
  - They are engaged in the profession for 600-700 years, dating back to the British rule.

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### About Wild Ass Sanctuary:

- **Location:** It is in the **Little Rann of Kutch** of the **Gujarat** State in India.
- It is the **only place where the Indian wild ass**, locally called **Khacchar**, is found.
- The sanctuary is home to a sizeable population of **Rabari and Bharwad tribes**.

### Key Facts about Indian Wild Ass:

- It is a **sub-species of Asian Wild Ass**, i.e., *Equus hemionus*.



- It is characterized by **distinctive white markings** on the anterior part of the rump and on the posterior part of the shoulder and a **stripe down the back that is bordered by white**.
- **Distribution:** **World's last population** of Indian Wild Ass is restricted to **Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat**.
- **Habitat:** **Desert and grassland ecosystems**.
- **Conservation Status:**
  - **IUCN: Near threatened.**

- **CITES: Appendix II**
- **Wildlife Protection Act (1972): Schedule-I**

## **UPSC Civil Services Exam, Previous Year Questions (PYQ)**

**Q. Among the following, who is the Agaria Community? (2009)**

- (a)** A traditional toddy tappers community of Andhra Pradesh
- (b)** A traditional fishing community of Maharashtra
- (c)** A traditional silk-weaving community of Karnataka
- (d)** A traditional salt pan workers community of Gujarat

**Answer: (d)**

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