

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/pm-modi-praises-soliga-tribes-for-their-role-in-tiger-conservation-in-mann-ki-baat/article69254558.ece>

# Modi praises role of Soligas in tiger conservation

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Soligas of B.R. Hills in Chamarajanagar district are known to protect the forest habitat and coexist with wildlife. | Photo Credit: M.A. SRIRAM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a reference to Soligas of BRT Tiger Reserve in the 119th edition of Mann Ki Baat which was broadcast on Sunday and appreciated their contribution to tiger conservation.

Mr. Modi said the tiger population in the BRT Tiger Reserve has been steadily increasing and much of the credit goes to the Soliga tribes who worship tigers.

“Because of them, human-animal conflict in this region is almost non-existent,” said Mr. Modi.

The Prime Minister also referred to similar examples of the coexistence of animals and

tribal communities in other States and said that India truly has a vibrant ecosystem of flora and fauna, and these wild animals are deeply embedded in the country's history and culture. In this context, he referred to the Huli Vesha dance of Karnataka apart from citing similar examples from other States.

Incidentally, the Soligas' deep-rooted cultural links with the forest ecosystem are well documented, and given their knowledge of the terrain, the Forest Department takes their assistance in various forest-related activities, including fire protection.

"The key to coexistence is the fact that we worship not only tigers but all animals. As our lifestyle is simple and sustainable, the wildlife habitat is also saved," according to Jadeswamy, a Soliga tribal from B.R. Hills. He said that the tiger is indeed worshipped as a god and is referred to as "Dodda Nayi". There is also a temple dedicated to it, he added.

Jadeswamy said that as Soligas live in close proximity to nature, they understand the needs and behavioural patterns of animals and know when to venture out or to stay put inside to avoid conflict. Even while harvesting natural forest produce, one-fourth to one-third is left behind for wildlife, and there is a sense of mutual respect, said Mr. Jadeswamy.

He pointed out that Soligas was the first tribal community living inside a tiger reserve and getting their forest rights recognised by a court in a judgment in 2011.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) report on the tiger population for BRT Tiger Reserve indicated the presence of 69 tigers in 2014. This number went up to 86 in the 2018 report. However, the NTCA's 2022 report on the "Status of Tigers, Co-Predators, and Prey" noted a decline in the tiger population and attributed it to the presence of humans and habitat degradation, adding that this needs to be investigated to take pertinent measures.

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