Agasthyamalai Landscape

Prelims – *General issues on Environmental ecology, Bio-diversity and Climate Change*

Mains – *GS IV* – *Biodiversity, Environment, Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.*

Why in News?

The Supreme Court of India has directed the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) to conduct a detailed survey of the tropical forest ecosystems in the Agasthyamalai landscape.

Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve

- **Location** – In the Southern Western Ghats including ***Tamil Nadu and Kerala.***
- It is part of the *Western Ghats biodiversity hotspot.*
- **Status** – It is recognised by the UNESCO as a Biosphere Reserve.
- **Named After** – The Sage Agastya, with cultural and spiritual significance in Tamil tradition.
- **Fauna -** Lion-Tailed Macaques, Bengal Tiger, Nilgiri Marten, Nilgiri Tahr, Malabar Spiny Dormouse, Great Pied Hornbills, Gaur, and Sloth Bear.
- **Flora -** Abundant in *rare herbs and medicinal plants*, with around 2,000 medicinal plants used in Ayurvedic treatments found here.
- **Protected Areas**
  - Neyyar, Peppara, and Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuaries,
  - Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve,
  - Periyar Tiger Reserve and
  - Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary (TN).
- **Tribes –** Kani Tribes inhabited in this area.

Supreme court judgment on Agasthyamalai Landscape

- The judgement came on 2 separate petitions,
- **Public Interest Litigation** – It was initiated by environmental activists who sought judicial intervention to protect this biodiversity hotspot.
- **Private litigation** – It was filed by tea estate worker, seeking rehabilitation and compensation following their displacement from the Singampatti tea estate (Tamil Nadu) as it was reclassified as a reserved forest and tiger habitat between 2007 and 2018.
- **Judgement** – The Supreme Court directed the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) *to conduct a detailed survey of the Agasthyamalai landscape* to assess encroachments and non-forestry activities.

Role of Central Empowered Committee (CEC)

- It is a ***Supreme Court*** appointed body to ensure compliance with environmental norms and court orders.
- It is tasked with preparing a comprehensive report on the extent of encroachments and suggesting restorative measures.
- Will provide guidelines for the rehabilitation of affected communities, such as those evicted from forest lands.
- **Areas included in the CEC survey**
    - The Periyar Tiger Reserve
    - Kalakad and Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR)
    - Meghamalai and Tirunelveli Wildlife Sanctuaries
    - Sivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Sanctuary

Reference

The Hindu | Forest Survey for Agasthyamalai

