Frankincense

Prelims – *Environmental Ecology & Climate Change, International Relations.*

Mains – *GS-III (Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment).*

Why in news?

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has recently issued a warning, highlighting the extinction risk faced by Frankincense-producing trees (Boswellia species).

- **Frankincense** – Is a fragrant resin obtained from various species of trees belonging to the Boswellia genus.
- The five main species of Boswellia are:
    1. Boswellia carterii
    2. Boswellia serrata (Indian Frankincense)
    3. Boswellia sacra
    4. Boswellia frereana
    5. Boswellia papyrifera

Significance

- Historically famous as *one of the three gifts* (along with gold and myrrh) brought to the infant Jesus.
- Used for centuries in *perfumes and incense*.
- Research suggests *potential medicinal benefits* due to its *anti-inflammatory properties* (for conditions like ulcerative colitis, IBS, bronchitis, sinusitis) and possible use in reducing asthma risk.
- Frankincense was once considered more valuable than gold and was reserved for royalty.
- Frankincense remains *deeply embedded in Dhofari culture*, symbolizing warmth, respect, and hospitality.

> ***Dhofari culture**, found in the Dhofar region of Oman, is a rich tapestry woven from influences of the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, and the Indian subcontinent.*

- It played a significant role in *cultural exchange between Oman and India*.
- **IUCN Red List Update** – Multiple Boswellia species on Yemen's Socotra Island have recently been moved to more threatened conservation status categories (Endangered/Critically Endangered).

Causes of Decline

- **Overgrazing** – Goats graze on saplings, exacerbated by the decline of traditional rotational grazing and larger herd sizes.
- **Climate Change Impacts** – Prolonged droughts hinder sapling survival, while more frequent and intense cyclones, floods, and landslides damage or uproot mature trees.

Way forward

- Building fences to protect young trees from goats.
- *Promoting frankincense honey production* for alternative income.
- Emphasizing the *need for local action* to combat extreme weather impacts.

References

1. Down to Earth | Frankincense
2. Mint | Frankincense

