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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

# The Tadoba-Andhari Model — Balancing Tiger Conservation with Human Costs

INDIAN EXPRESS

22 April 2026 · ENVIRONMENT · GS3 · GS2

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# The Tadoba-Andhari Model — Balancing Tiger Conservation with Human Costs

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## INTERVIEW ANGLE

"With tiger populations reaching 3,700+ and human-wildlife conflict intensifying, is India's fortress conservation model sustainable? What does Tadoba teach us about community-centred alternatives?"

## THE CORE ARGUMENT

India's tiger conservation success story — 3,700+ tigers in 2024, up from 1,411 in 2006 — has created a new problem: a growing human-wildlife conflict crisis as expanding tiger populations press against human settlements at reserve boundaries. The **Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR)** in Vidarbha, Maharashtra, offers a replicable model: one that combines genuine community ownership, rapid compensation mechanisms, and financial decentralisation to make coexistence viable rather than *adversarial*. The editorial contrasts this with the **Nagarahole approach**, which relied more heavily on relocation, and argues that the Tadoba model must inform India's national conservation policy as the 4th tiger census cycle begins.

## INDIA'S TIGER CONSERVATION — THE NUMBERS

### Project Tiger — Background

**Project Tiger (1973):** India's flagship tiger conservation programme, launched by PM Indira Gandhi. Started with 9 reserves; now 58 tiger reserves across 18 states (as of 2026).

INDICATOR	2006	2010	2014	2018	2022-23 (LATEST)
Tiger population	1,411	1,706	2,226	2,967	3,682-3,750+
Tiger Reserves	39	42	47	50	58
Core/Critical Tiger Habitat	—	—	—	40,913 sq km	~50,000 sq km

India holds ~75% of the world’s wild tiger population — a conservation achievement of global significance.

## The Growing Conflict Problem

The tiger census growth rate (~6% per year) has outpaced habitat expansion:

- **Buffer zones** are increasingly populated — tiger territories extend beyond core areas into human-dominated landscapes
- **Human fatalities** from tiger attacks: 50-80 per year nationally
- **Cattle depredation:** Hundreds of incidents monthly across tiger states
- **Crop damage** by elephants, nilgai, wild boar (connected to reserve buffer expansion)

The conflict is most acute in **Maharashtra (Vidarbha), Uttar Pradesh (Pilibhit, Dudhwa), Odisha (Simlipal), and Karnataka (Nagarahole, BRT).**

## TADOBA-ANDHARI TIGER RESERVE — THE MODEL

### TATR — Basics

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Location	Chandrapur district, Vidarbha, Maharashtra
Area	~625 sq km (core) + ~1,101 sq km (buffer)
Tiger population	~100+ tigers (one of highest density globally)
Established	1955 (national park); Project Tiger 1995
Key features	Teak forest, grassland, perennial water bodies

### Why Tadoba Succeeds — The Four Pillars

#### 1. Financial Decentralisation

- **Tiger Conservation Foundation (TCF):** A Section 8 company that channels eco-tourism revenue directly into local communities
- Revenue from safari permits (~₹15-20 crore annually) is distributed to village-level institutions rather than consolidated in forest department budgets
- Villages adjacent to the reserve receive direct dividends from tourism — creating economic stake in tiger conservation

## 2. Rapid Compensation Mechanism

- **State government ex-gratia:** ₹15 lakh for human fatality (enhanced from earlier ₹5 lakh)
- Maharashtra has a **fast-track compensation** process — claims processed within 60 days vs. the national average of 6-18 months
- **Cattle loss compensation:** ₹15,000-30,000 per cattle head — significant in a livestock-dependent economy

## 3. Community Ownership of Buffer Zones

- Local communities manage eco-tourism in buffer zones through **Village Eco-Development Committees (VEDCs)**
- Villagers trained as naturalist guides, anti-poaching watchers, and forest frontline staff — alternative livelihood creation
- Women's self-help groups run forest resorts and homestays

## 4. Relocation as Last Resort, Not First

Unlike some reserves, TATR has not pursued large-scale village relocation from buffer zones. Voluntary relocation with full resettlement package is offered — but not compelled. This preserves social fabric while reducing conflict through compensation and livelihood alternatives.

## CONTRASTING APPROACH — NAGARAHOLE (KARNATAKA)

### Nagarahole Tiger Reserve:

- Large-scale involuntary relocation of Jenu Kuruba tribal communities in 1990s-2000s
- Court cases, displacement trauma, loss of forest livelihood access
- **Supreme Court intervention** in some cases — community rights under Forest Rights Act (FRA, 2006)
- Ongoing social conflict between tribal rights advocates and conservation authorities

**The lesson:** Fortress conservation (exclusion) without community buy-in generates long-term resistance, legal challenges, and ultimately undermines conservation goals.

## POLICY FRAMEWORK — LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

PROVISION	RELEVANCE
<b>Wildlife Protection Act 1972</b>	Defines protected areas; National Parks (no human habitation) vs. Wildlife Sanctuaries
<b>Forest Rights Act 2006</b>	Community Forest Rights (CFR) for tribal communities; gram sabha consent required for relocation
<b>National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)</b>	Statutory body under Ministry of Environment; oversees Project Tiger
<b>Tiger Conservation Plan (TCP)</b>	Mandatory for each reserve; includes buffer zone management
<b>Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB)</b>	Anti-poaching intelligence and coordination

**Critical Tension:** The Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and Forest Rights Act 2006 are sometimes in conflict — WPA allows exclusion of communities; FRA guarantees community rights. Tadoba has managed this through negotiation rather than exclusion.

## UPSC ANGLE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS3 — Environment	Project Tiger, NTCA, tiger census, human-wildlife conflict
GS3 — Environment	Buffer zones, eco-tourism, community conservation
GS2 — Governance	FRA 2006, Wildlife Protection Act 1972, tribal rights, NTCA
GS2 — Social Justice	Adivasi/tribal displacement, community forest rights

**Mains Keywords:** Project Tiger, NTCA, Tadoba-Andhari, Tiger Conservation Foundation, Forest Rights Act 2006, community forest rights, human-wildlife conflict, ex-gratia compensation, eco-tourism revenue, Nagarhole

**Probable Question:** “Human-wildlife conflict is an inevitable consequence of India’s conservation success. Suggest a framework for managing it equitably.” (GS3 Mains)

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