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Trade of Endangered Animals in India and its Critical Analysis

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Abstract: ***The trade of endangered animals in India poses a significant threat to the biodiversity and ecological balance. Despite having stringent laws and international conventions, such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the illegal trade persists, driven by factors including demand for traditional medicine, luxury goods, and exotic pets. This abstract provides a critical analysis of the trade of endangered animals in India, focusing on its drivers, impacts, and the effectiveness of existing regulatory measures.***

In India, the trafficking of endangered animals is propelled by a number of variables, such as customs, beliefs, and financial incentives. For example, the demand for animal parts is still fueled by the traditional Chinese medicine, which contributes to the poaching and trafficking of animals like tigers, rhinos, and pangolins. Comparably, the capture and smuggling of rare species is fueled by the exotic pet trade, which furthers the species' decline in the wild[1].

The trade affects entire ecosystems in addition to the targeted species. Ecological balance is upset by the extinction of keystone species, which has a domino effect on other plants and animals. In addition, the illicit trade frequently employs techniques like poisoning and indiscriminate trapping, which harms non-target species and their habitats.

Enforcement is still difficult in spite of legislative attempts like the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 and its ensuing amendments. The efficacy of law enforcement agencies is compromised by the insufficient penalties, corruption, and scarce resources. Furthermore, it is challenging to detect and prosecute these crimes due to the porous borders and well-organized criminal networks.

Addressing the transnational aspect of trade requires international cooperation. Even though India has bilateral agreements with its neighbours and is a signatory to CITES, more coordinated efforts are required to combat cross-border trafficking. Working together with destination nations, where there is a strong market for endangered species, is essential to reducing the demand side of the trade.

Conservation programmes that prioritise habitat preservation and community involvement are essential, in addition to law enforcement. For communities that depend on wildlife, sustainable livelihood options can lessen their dependency on illicit activities. Additionally, encouraging ethical consumer behaviour and increasing the awareness can aid in lowering the demand for goods made from endangered animals.

In conclusion, the trade in endangered animals in India is a complex issue with wide-ranging effects. A comprehensive strategy including strict legal enforcement, international cooperation, community involvement, and demand reduction tactics is needed to address this problem. India can lessen the risks to its rich biodiversity and support international conservation efforts by tackling the underlying issues that fuel the trade and implementing a thorough conservation strategy.

I. INTRODUCTION

The trade in endangered animals in India is a serious issue with international ramifications. The illegal trade continues due to a combination of environmental, cultural, and economic factors, even in the face of international agreements and legislative measures. Customs, especially in traditional Chinese medicine, support the continued demand for animal parts, and high-end consumer goods like exotic pets and items derived from endangered species feed this desire. The survival of iconic species like tigers, rhinos, and pangolins is threatened by this demand, which fuels widespread poaching and trafficking.

With a wide variety of ecosystems spanning from the Western Ghats to the Himalayan mountains, India is home to an astounding variety of flora and fauna, many of which are classified as critically endangered or endangered. However, a covert industry of poaching, trafficking, and illicit trade has been fueled by the allure of exotic wildlife products, driven by traditional medicine practices and luxury markets.

[1] worldwildlife.org,illegal wildlife trade,https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/illegal-wildlife-trade(last visited 25th march 2024)

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In addition to the direct harm done to the targeted species, the trade upsets ecological balance, which has repercussions throughout entire ecosystems. In addition to reducing biodiversity, the extinction of keystone species jeopardises ecosystem services vital to human survival. Enforcement is still difficult because of low resources, corruption, and the involvement of sophisticated criminal networks, even with efforts to stop the trade[2].

In this regard, the trade in endangered animals in India is critically examined in this paper, along with its effects, underlying causes, and the effectiveness of current regulatory measures. By illuminating these intricacies, it seeks to provide insight into the policy measures and conservation tactics required to tackle this pressing conservation emergency and safeguard India's ecological legacy for posterity.

II. EVOLUTION OF TRADE IN ENDANGERED ANIMALS IN INDIA

The history of the trade in endangered animals in India is extensive and intricate, with strong ties to economic incentives, cultural customs, and environmental dynamics. Many species of wildlife, including many that are classified as endangered or critically endangered, can be found in India's diverse ecosystems. The country's biodiversity remains seriously threatened by the trade in endangered animals, even in the face of conservation efforts and legislative measures.

Historically, the rich biodiversity and cultural traditions of India have made it a hotspot for the wildlife trade. Animal parts have long been used in traditional medical systems, including Ayurveda and traditional Chinese medicine, because of their alleged therapeutic benefits. The demand for animal parts in both domestic and foreign markets has been fueled by the targeting of species such as tigers, rhinos, elephants, and pangolins for their bones, skins, horns, and scales. The trade has also been sustained by cultural customs and beliefs related to specific animal products, such as the use of elephant ivory in religious objects or tiger bones in traditional medicine.

Colonial exploitation made India's trade in endangered animals even worse. The colonial elite engaged in widespread trophy and sport hunting during the British colonial era, which resulted in the decline of wildlife populations. Furthermore, the growth of colonial trade networks made it easier for wildlife products to be exported in order to satisfy demand in foreign markets. Many species declined during this time, most notably the Asiatic cheetah and the Indian tiger, which were hunted to almost extinction.

The Wildlife Protection Act, passed in 1972, marked the beginning of attempts to control the trade in wildlife in independent India. This law forbade the hunting, poaching, and trading of endangered species in an effort to safeguard them. The act was later amended to strengthen conservation efforts and stiffen penalties for offences pertaining to wildlife. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)[3], which governs the international trade of endangered species, is one of the international agreements that India has signed.

Due to a number of obstacles, the trade of endangered animals in India continues despite these legislative frameworks. The ongoing exploitation of wildlife is facilitated by organised crime networks, lax enforcement of laws protecting wildlife, and corruption in law enforcement. Networks involved in poaching and trafficking operate covertly, frequently taking advantage of gaps in laws to avoid being discovered and prosecuted.

Products made from endangered animals are still in high demand in both domestic and foreign markets. The demand for exotic pets, especially rare and endangered species, has increased dramatically in recent years. Because the illegal exotic pet trade frequently involves the capture and smuggling of animals from their natural habitats, it poses a serious threat to wildlife populations. A diverse strategy is needed to combat the trade in endangered animals in India. In order to effectively combat the illegal trade, it is imperative that enforcement mechanisms be strengthened, penalties for offences pertaining to wildlife be increased, and international cooperation be strengthened. Reducing demand also requires educating the public about the value of protecting wildlife and encouraging sustainable substitutes for the use of products from endangered animals[4].

Furthermore, actions to maintain and restore significant habitats as well as the involvement of local communities in conservation initiatives are necessary to preserve India's rich biodiversity. India has the potential to play a significant role in the protection endangered species and preserving its natural heritage for future generations through addressing the root causes of the wildlife trade and implementing comprehensive conservation measures.

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[2] Rana AK, Kumar N. Current wildlife crime (Indian scenario): major challenges and prevention approaches. Biodivers Conserv. 2023;32(5):1473-1491. Doi: 10.1007/s10531-023-02577-z. Epub 2023 Mar 20. PMID: 37063172; PMCID: PMC10025790.

[3] Annika Mozer ,Stefan porst,An introduction to illegal wildlife trade and its effects on biodiversity
And society(Forensic Science International: Animals and Environments),(1-4),2024

[4] Neena Singh, Sumita Dasgupta, Anju Sharma,(In dubious battle),(down to earth),(27th march 2024,9.30pm)(https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/in-dubious-battle-24137)

III. WHY TRADE OF ENDANGERED ANIMALS A PROBELM

The trade in endangered animals is a complex issue that affects human societies, ecosystems, and biodiversity in significant ways. This illegal trade is sustained by a number of factors that add to its complexity and persistence, even in the face of legal protections and conservation initiatives.

First of all, biodiversity and the survival of species are directly threatened by the trade in endangered animals. A number of factors, including pollution, habitat loss, and climate change, already put these endangered species in danger. Many species are on the verge of extinction due to the added pressure of poaching, trafficking, and illegal trade. Ecosystems are disrupted by this loss of biodiversity because every species has a distinct function in preserving ecological balance. Key species extinctions can have a domino effect on other species and ecosystem services by affecting the food chain.

Second, the trade in endangered animals jeopardises legal protections and conservation initiatives. Even with the existence of national laws and international agreements like CITES aimed at protecting wildlife, enforcement is still a major obstacle. The efficiency of law enforcement agencies is hampered by organised crime networks, corruption, and a lack of funding. Furthermore, because the wildlife trade is an international endeavour, coordination and cooperation between nations are crucial but frequently absent. Vulnerable species are further endangered by illegal traders who can operate with impunity due to lax enforcement and regulatory gaps.

Furthermore, there are socioeconomic repercussions associated with the trade in endangered animals, especially for nearby communities that depend on wildlife resources. In some areas, marginalised communities with few other options for a living rely on the poaching and trade of wildlife as a source of income. But relying too heavily on the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources feeds the vicious cycle of environmental degradation and poverty. Furthermore, indigenous knowledge systems that have coexisted with nature for generations may be threatened by the decline in wildlife populations, upsetting long-standing cultural customs.

Furthermore, there are risks to public health associated with the trade of endangered animals, especially when it comes to zoonotic illnesses. Human-wild animal disease transmission is more likely when wild animals are handled and consumed. Markets for wildlife, where live animals are exchanged and killed in unhygienic conditions, can act as havens for pathogens. The emergence of diseases like COVID-19, Ebola, and SARS has brought attention to the connection between wildlife conservation and human health, emphasising the necessity of addressing the underlying causes of wildlife trade in order to prevent pandemics in the future[5].

In summary, the trade in endangered animals is a complicated issue with many facets that affects public health, ecology, ethics, and socioeconomics. Stronger enforcement mechanisms, the promotion of sustainable alternatives, increased awareness, and addressing the underlying drivers of the trade are just a few of the coordinated efforts that must be made at the local, national, and international levels to address this issue. We can work towards a future where endangered species are protected, ecosystems are preserved, and the wildlife trade no longer poses a threat to the natural heritage of our planet by realising the connection between biodiversity conservation and human well-being.

IV. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Several tactics should be taken into account in order to stop the trade of endangered animals in India. First and foremost, it is imperative that enforcement actions be bolstered by giving wildlife protection organisations the necessary funding, expertise, and technology required. To effectively combat wildlife crime networks, this involves improving coordination between agencies at the local, national, and international levels.

Second, it's critical to promote ethical consumer choices and increase public awareness of the negative effects of the wildlife trade. Through focused outreach initiatives, educational campaigns we can emphasise the value of protecting biodiversity and deter the use of wildlife products.

It's also critical to involve nearby communities in conservation initiatives. Reducing reliance on unsustainable practices and enabling communities to take on the role of stewards of their natural resources can be achieved by offering alternative livelihood opportunities that are in line with the wildlife conservation goals.

A comprehensive strategy to combat the trade of endangered animals in India must also promote sustainable practices in industries that interact with wildlife and strengthen international cooperation to address the transnational nature of wildlife trafficking.

[5] Ms. Sejal Rushi, Dr. Archana Gadekar,(WILDLIFE CRIME IN INDIA: CAUSES, CONCERNS AND THE LAW),(DOI: 10.48047/ecb/2022.11.11.71), (WILDLIFE CRIME IN INDIA: CAUSES, CONCERNS AND THE LAW),(829-836),(2022)

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In conclusion, the trade of endangered animals in India poses a grave threat to biodiversity and ecosystems. Effective solutions require strengthened enforcement, heightened awareness, community engagement, promotion of sustainable practices, and enhanced international cooperation. By taking concerted action, India can protect its rich natural heritage, mitigate the risks associated with wildlife trade, and ensure a sustainable future for both wildlife and human communities.

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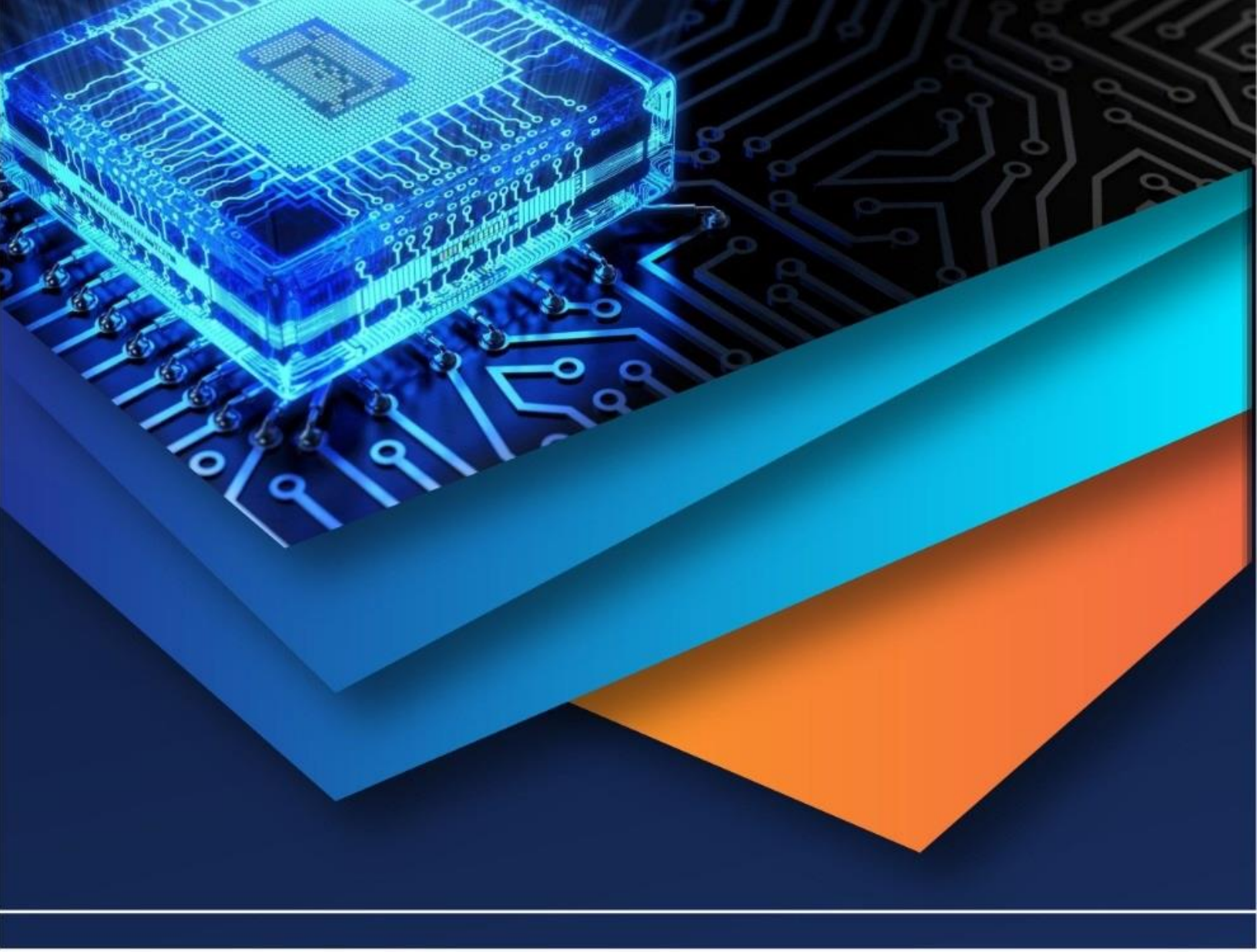

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