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**An Assessment
of the Domestic
Ivory Carving
Industry and
Trade Controls
in India**

Prepared by

TRAFFIC India

February 2003

TRAFFIC

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Front cover photograph: Domesticated elephant in India.

Photograph credit: TRAFFIC India.

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE DOMESTIC IVORY CARVING INDUSTRY AND TRADE CONTROLS IN INDIA

Prepared by **TRAFFIC India**

February 2003



Credit: TRAFFIC India

Wild elephants in India

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and rationale

The native Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus* has been legally protected in India since the late 1970s, following its listing in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Ivory from the African species of elephant continued to be imported and used legally in India until the 1990s, when use and trade of elephant ivory in India became illegal, although a ruling from the Supreme Court of India endorsing this position is still outstanding. It is estimated that about 28 000 wild Asian Elephants inhabited India in 2002: whether these animals represent a source of ivory to an underground industry in India, or whether that industry actually died in the 1990s has been little studied. For this reason, TRAFFIC India began a systematic investigation of the domestic ivory trade in India as part of the Asian Rhino and Elephant Action Strategy of WWF. This report comprises the findings of that investigation.

Methodology

Information on ivory use and trade was collected from 70 craftsmen, 63 tourist guides, 152 traders/retailers, 22 elephant keepers and six medicine vendors. Locations visited were Delhi; Jaipur and Udaipur, in Rajasthan; Mysore and Bangalore, in Karnataka; Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi, in Kerala; Cuttack, Bhubaneswar and Puri, in Orissa; Murshidabad, in West Bengal and Varanasi, in Uttar Pradesh. Information was collected entirely first-hand by the chief investigator and an assistant, from July 2000 to April 2001.

Results

Awareness of, and attitudes towards, the ban on ivory use and trade

Awareness of the ban was found to be high in the vast majority of places visited and among all groups interviewed, from elephant keepers to retailers. Despite this awareness of the law, interviews revealed an attachment for ivory among craftsmen who had worked with it. Not only had the profitability of the trade brought financial reward but, in many cases, communities had enjoyed a long-standing and particular association with ivory and skilled ivory craftsmen had enjoyed high social status. On the basis of estimates made by craftsmen interviewed, about 500 of them still worked with ivory in the locations visited. Attitudes towards the ban appeared most relaxed among artisans and traders in Delhi, Jaipur, Udaipur, Murshidabad and Kerala and ivory was seen by investigators in all these places. Some traders reported supplying monthly consignments of carvings to major cities in India and, in one case, to Nepal. Those interviewed in other places, notably Karnataka, were more guarded or less interested in discussing or dealing in ivory and some artisans in Uttar Pradesh worked only under cover of night. Nonetheless, some willingness to deal in ivory was either obvious or uncovered in almost every place investigators visited. Not only craftsmen and traders, but also tourist guides and elephant keepers were found almost uniformly prepared to deal in ivory and a few medical practitioners in Kerala acknowledged medicinal use of ivory.

Use of ivory in present-day India

Statues, mostly of Hindu deities, were a popular form of carved ivory said by artisans and retailers to be available for purchase. Other items offered most commonly to investigators were jewellery, especially bangles, which are traditionally prized by some communities, and small household items. Painting on ivory, an art form dating back

to the Raj which was practised mainly in Delhi, Jaipur and Udaipur, appeared to persist in Udaipur. Furniture with ivory inlay was reportedly available in Delhi at the time of the investigation. Apart from the use of ivory for artistic work, some medical use appears to continue, according to the six medical practitioners interviewed.

Not all ivory seen by investigators was genuine and, in a few cases, sea-shell jewellery and plastic bangles were offered as real ivory. The production of fake-antique ivory was reported to be widely used in India and Kochi, in Kerala, appeared to specialize in this. Since the ban on ivory use, the Government of India has encouraged some carvers to use wood, bone and stone and, for some purposes, plastic as alternative materials for ivory. Articles made from such materials were seen by investigators. According to prices reported, the profit earned from these items could be as little as one-tenth of that which could be made from similar goods in ivory.

The nature of this investigation precluded any in-depth enquiry into the turnover of ivory by carvers and traders and, therefore, of the annual volume of ivory processed in India in 2000 and 2001.

Prices for ivory and ivory articles on sale

Investigators were quoted prices for raw ivory at several locations and these ranged between INR3000/kg and INR10 000/kg (USD64-213: INR46.85 = USD1 in April 2001). The prices cited for raw ivory from Asian Elephants in India in 1996 and 1997 were in the same range. Worked ivory pieces were reported to cost from INR500 (approximately USD10), for a small, simple item, such as a dice, to three or four hundred thousand rupees (approximately USD6400-8500) for statues about 100 cm high. Bangles were quoted at INR35 000-40 000 (USD750-850)/kg, while a typical painting on ivory (15 cm x 10 cm x 0.25 cm), with moderate detailing and depiction of a single figure was said to cost about INR4000-6000 (USD85-128).

Sources of raw ivory

Raw ivory to supply the carvers in present-day India was reported to come from four main sources: Asian Elephants poached in India, domesticated elephants in India, smuggled African ivory and ivory stocks in India. Artisans in Murshidabad and Varanasi claimed their chief source of ivory was from elephants poached in India, citing Assam and Uttar Pradesh/Uttaranchal, respectively, as States of origin. Seizures of raw ivory have been made in recent years in both these States. Domesticated elephants, kept in India for heavy work as well as for religious and ceremonial purposes, were reported to be a source of raw ivory by elephant keepers and artisans alike. Captive elephants seemed to be an important source of ivory in Kerala, a State with a traditional predilection for keeping tuskers. Seizures of raw ivory entering Mumbai airport in 2001 and 2002 and some anecdotal evidence indicate that ivory from African elephants may be reaching Indian craftsmen. While no firm evidence exists for ivory stocks providing a source of raw ivory, there have been reports of thefts from government ivory stocks and it is known that not all stocks of ivory lying with private dealers have been inventoried and sealed or destroyed, as required by law.

Buyers of Indian ivory

Both foreign nationals and native Indians are purchasers of ivory artefacts produced in India. Many instances of foreign tourists as buyers were reported. Interviews also revealed export links, particularly between Indian traders and Nepal, but some traders reported that they exported to tens of different countries. The use of courier services as a means of exporting ivory goods illegally appeared to be systematic. Prominent or wealthy Indian families were said by traders to be customers for ivory jewellery for traditional ceremonial use.

Conclusions

Although awareness of the ban on using and trading ivory in India is widespread and a certain degree of caution is exercised by those dealing in ivory, this study found that ivory use and trade were taking place in India in 2000 and 2001. Some ivory trading is opportunistic in nature, but some is regular and hundreds of carvers were estimated to use ivory in the places visited by investigators. The fact that some former ivory carvers venerate the material and the art of working with it and the fact that the Supreme Court's decision is still pending are both situations likely to weaken the effect of the ban on using ivory. Since profits to be gained from trading and working ivory were reported to high (for example, thousands of rupees per piece) and several times those to be made on articles in other materials, the penalty for breaking the law in this case appears not to deter. The penalty for poaching an elephant in India also seems inadequate, since raw ivory from Indian elephants was said to be available in several States visited. Domesticated elephants seem to provide a supply of ivory within India and some ivory may reach craftsmen from government-held or privately owned stocks, as well as from Africa.

While Orissa, Assam, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal appeared to be active as production and/or collection areas for raw ivory, Murshidabad, Jaipur, Udaipur, Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram were found to be the most active markets for worked ivory among the places visited. Nepal stood out from this investigation as an overseas destination for Indian ivory carvings.

Prices for raw ivory in 2000 and 2001 appeared not to have altered greatly since 1996. Prices for worked ivory items commanded sums equivalent to thousands of US dollars. Although an estimate of the annual amount of ivory being used on the black market in India cannot be attempted based on the findings of this report, an annual average of at least 270 kg of raw ivory were seized in India from 1996 to 2001, inclusive, (**Annex 1**) and it appears from investigators' findings that hundreds of craftsmen are using ivory in India in the present day.

Recommendations

- **Government investigative action** should be taken, using the findings of this report as a "launch pad", to find out why the law regarding ivory is being breached with apparent ease and regularity.
- **Enforcement of existing laws** regarding elephant poaching and ivory trade should be carried out more rigorously, with the aid of increased penalties.
- It is essential that government-held and privately owned **ivory stocks are registered and secured** to ensure that they can be properly accounted for.
- Details of **captive elephants and their tusks should be registered** with the appropriate government authority, to prevent their ivory entering the black market.
- **Courier services should be required to provide better accountability** for their shipments so that they do not knowingly or otherwise transport ivory illegally.
- **India's laws on ivory should be made known** to those few who remain unaware of, or confused by, the ban on use and trade: foreign tourists should be the priority group for education in this regard.

BACKGROUND and INTRODUCTION

The Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus*, also called *Gaja* and *Hathi*, has been an integral part of Indian culture, since time immemorial. Ganesh, the elephant god is one of the most venerated gods of the Hindu pantheon. Elephants in India have been numerous and ivory carving and trade have been State-sponsored handicraft industries with a pride of place of their own. Indian carvers of ivory gained a reputation for their craft and, from 1875 to 1891, India imported 250 t of ivory a year, mostly from Zanzibar, to satisfy the need for the raw material within the country and for re-export to other countries of Asia and to Europe.

DISTRIBUTION AND ESTIMATED POPULATION OF WILD ELEPHANTS IN INDIA IN 2001

There are four distinct areas of mainland India with wild elephant populations in India, as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1

Distribution and estimated populations of wild elephants in India in 2001

Region	State	Elephant population
<i>NORTH-EAST</i>	Arunachal	1607
	Assam	5312
	Meghalaya	1840
	Nagaland	147
	Mizoram	28
	Manipur	10-15
	Tripura	40
	West Bengal (north)	292
Total for north-east		9276-9281
<i>EAST</i>	West Bengal (south)	35
	Jharkhand and Bihar	618
	Orissa	1827
Total for east		2480
<i>NORTH</i>	Uttranchal	1507
	Uttar Pradesh	70-100
Total for north		1577-1607
<i>SOUTH</i>	Tamil Nadu	2971
	Karnataka	6088
	Kerala	5737
	Andhra Pradesh	73
Total for south		14 869
<i>ISLANDS</i>	Andaman and Nicobar	40-70
GRAND TOTAL		28 242-28 307

Source: *Project Elephant*, Government of India, 2002

It is interesting to note that the known centres of ivory carving and trade in India have not always been contiguous with the elephant-rich areas of north-east, east, north and south India. While Barpeta Road in the north-east, Murshidabad and Cuttack in the east, and Mysore and Thiruvananthapuram in the south, were the main ivory carving centres close to areas of elephant distribution, the origin and popularity of ivory carving away

from such areas - places like Delhi, Jaipur, Udaipur and Varanasi - can be traced to royal patronage afforded the ivory carvers by various kings and nobility.

HISTORY OF CONSERVATION ACTION FOR ASIAN ELEPHANTS IN INDIA

While *Project Tiger*, the Government of India's conservation plan for Tigers in India, was put in place in 1973, it was not until 1991-92 that the equivalent for the Asian Elephant, *Project Elephant*, came into being. One reason for this lack of interest in conservation of the species in India could be the fact that it was already a CITES Appendix I-listed species (since 1975). The incorporation of a new chapter into *The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972*, in 1977, prohibiting trade in articles derived from Asian Elephants was, to an extent, necessitated by the inclusion of the Asian Elephant in Appendix I of CITES. With these provisions in place, and the listing of the African Elephant in CITES Appendix I from 1989, some conservationists made predictions for the end of the ivory trade and the demise of the ivory carving industry (Nash, 1997). Martin (1990) found almost two-thirds of Indian carvers out of business, after the ban on international trade in ivory, but he found that 'bangles are still being bought...and Indians continue to buy carved ivory for religious, aesthetic and investment purposes'.

Indian law did not address prohibition of the trade in imported ivory and articles made from it until 1991 (Panjwani, 1997). Although for a limited time a fixed amount of imported raw ivory, at a fixed rate, was allocated to artisans by the government, the move to ban imports of ivory was resented by carvers and traders alike, who sought redress of their grievances through the courts. On 26 March 1992, an interim order suspending the process to prohibit trade in imported ivory articles was granted (Panjwani, 1997). However, subsequent court hearings led to a ruling that found "no ground to allow the interim order to continue" and that "the petitioners would not be entitled to deal in imported ivory". The Full Bench of the High Court later endorsed this judgment, on 20 March 1997, as cited below. It is notable that the decision was made specifically in response to *Writ petition no. 1016/92*, seeking the courts' approval to trade in pre-ban stocks of African ivory and *Writ petition no. 1303/92*, seeking to trade in mammoth ivory imported from Russia (which, petitioners contended, was not the same as ivory derived from the elephants). The High Court's endorsement reads,

"We hold that:

1. No citizen has the fundamental right to trade in ivory or ivory articles, whether indigenous or imported.
2. Assuming trade in ivory to be a fundamental right granted under Article 19(1)(g), the prohibition imposed thereon by the impugned Act is in public interest and in consonance with the moral claims embodied in Article 48A of the Constitution; and
3. The ban on trade in imported ivory and articles made therefrom is not violative of Article 14 of the Constitution, and does not suffer from any of the maladies, namely, unreasonableness, unfairness and arbitrariness.

.....The legislation was intended to cover all descriptions of ivory imported into India, including mammoth ivory. This was to prevent Indian ivory from entering into the market under pretext of mammoth ivory or African ivory. Once the mammoth ivory is shaped into an article or curio, it looks exactly like an article made from elephant ivory.....

.....When a buyer intends to buy a curio, he is not interested in knowing whether it was created from elephant ivory or mammoth ivory. An average buyer also does not have the expertise or knowledge to distinguish between articles made from mammoth ivory and Indian ivory. ...

For the foregoing reasons we do not find any merit in the writ petitions and the same are dismissed, but without any order as to cost."

In other words, the court ruled that neither trade in pre-ban ivory stocks, nor in mammoth ivory was permitted. Theoretically, this put an end to the activities of the ivory carvers and traders and reduced poaching pressure on the country's elephants. At the time the ban was announced, in 1991, there were around 2000 licensed dealers in ivory and around 6000 craftsmen of ivory in the country (Government of India, Project Elephant, 2002). After his visits to several Asian countries, including India, Martin (1990) reported that sales of ivory had plummeted by 85% after the ban on international ivory trade and, as already mentioned, that the majority of carvers in India had gone out of business. Faced with the prospect of a ruling that was to outlaw domestic sales and the obtaining of raw ivory, ivory workers and traders sought to protect their livelihoods by a petition to the Supreme Court of India against the decision of the Delhi High Court (cited above). At the time of writing, the decision from the Supreme Court is still awaited. Until it is given, ivory stocks held in India may not be used, yet are unlikely to be liquidated.

RATIONALE FOR THE CURRENT STUDY

Whether the ivory industry died in practice, or went underground since its outlawing has been little studied. The TRAFFIC network reviewed the ivory trade in Asia seven years after the CITES ban (Nash, 1997), but India was not covered in that report. In a study of the threats to the Asian Elephant in India from poaching and the ivory trade, the Asian Elephant Conservation Centre and Wildlife Protection Society of India reported that "the domestic demand for ivory is more or less negligible and a majority of ivory that enters the Indian black market is destined for foreign shores" (Menon, *et al.*, 1997). However, TRAFFIC India assisted the Regional Wildlife Preservation Office in seizures of carved and raw ivory in Varanasi, in June 1995, and of carved ivory in Delhi, in October 1996. These events, followed by seizures of ivory carvings in Bangalore, Jaipur and Delhi throughout 1997, 1998 and 1999 (see **Annex 1**), indicated some kind of a revival, or persistence, of the domestic ivory trade. It was against this background that TRAFFIC India began to investigate the traditional ivory carving centres and test the hypothesis that the use of ivory for carving and the domestic ivory trade in India had died down. TRAFFIC India had monitored ivory trade in India since 1992, but it was only in 2000 that it began a systematic investigation into the domestic ivory trade under the WWF AREAS (Asian Rhino and Elephant Action Strategy) programme, which is the basis of this report. The specific objective of the study was to determine the current state of ivory carving and trade in the known carving centres of India, with the aim of assessing the effectiveness of the ban on the use of ivory.

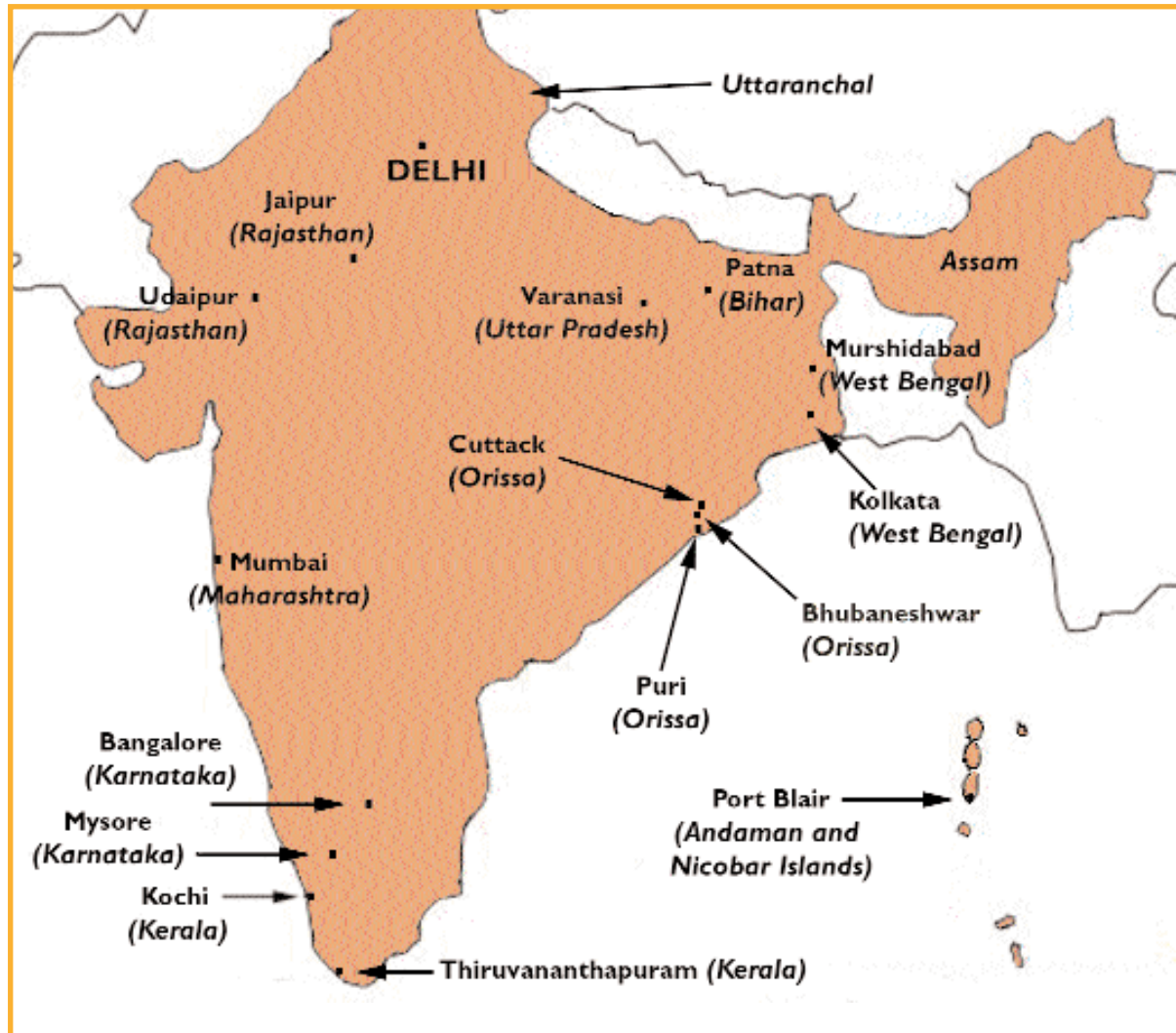
METHODOLOGY

A detailed interview with a senior retired government officer, who was closely associated with the ban on the ivory trade, provided an insight into how this trade used to work - for example, who used to be the main players, what information one should be looking for and what problems were likely to be encountered by the investigator. Fifty-three libraries and other institutions were contacted for further information on ivory trade and craft.

Initially, a pilot investigation was conducted in Delhi to understand the nature of the enterprise and to identify the key players. The master artisans/carvers, of which there are a large number in Delhi, were the obvious first choice for the collection of information on the ivory trade. Interviews with carvers were very helpful and provided leads to major markets in India, to the main players in the business (elephant keepers, craftsmen/artisans, retailers, tour agents, guides and traders/exporters) and information about the practical aspects of the craft. Useful information was also accessed from local experts, as well as from relevant government officials. An effort was also made in Delhi to assess the role of courier agencies in the export of finished ivory products (mainly carvings) to overseas clients.

Figure 1

Map showing part of India, indicating locations visited during survey work or referenced in this report



Note: This map is for reference within the context of this report only and does not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of TRAFFIC or its supporting organizations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

It was learnt that the Delhi and Jaipur markets were strongly interlinked. Many artisans from Delhi had migrated to Jaipur and its suburbs. As a result, it was decided that surveys of Jaipur and Udaipur markets should be conducted. This was done in parallel to the survey work in Delhi, to avoid exposure of the chief investigator, in view of the strong links between those in the ivory business in Delhi and Jaipur. After surveys in Delhi, Jaipur and Udaipur (in **Rajasthan** in western India), the investigations continued in Mysore and Bangalore, in **Karnataka**; Tiruvananthapuram (formerly known as Trivendrum) and Kochi (formerly known as Cochin), in **Kerala**; Murshidabad, in **West Bengal**; Cuttack, Bhubaneswar and Puri, in **Orissa** and Varanasi, in **Uttar Pradesh** (see **Figure 1**). Barpeta Road (**Assam**) in north-east India was not visited, for want of time and resources. The famous Sonepur animal fair near Patna in **Bihar** was visited during the months of October and November 2000 to understand the dynamics of the domestic elephant trade as well as to try and determine if any changes in the sale and purchase of elephants had happened there in recent years, especially since the ban.

Since ivory carving and trade is illegal in India, the single investigator (sometimes assisted by a co-investigator) travelled *incognito* and approached the key players in ivory carving and trade centres, seeking information through informal interviews. A uniform line of questioning was used, though the interviews themselves were conducted informally, sometimes spread over more than two days at one place. Therefore the findings of this report are based entirely on investigators' first-hand information collected from the people interviewed and cross-checked between respondents. A total of 313 persons, including 22 elephant keepers, 70 ivory carvers/artisans, 152 traders/retailers, 63 travel agents/tourist guides and six medicinal vendors were interviewed during the field work (see **Table 2**), which was carried out over a period of ten months, beginning July 2000. As interviews and investigations progressed, the method of locating, contacting, and questioning interviewees was continuously refined, to take account of findings as they came to light.

Table 2

Distribution and number of interviewees consulted during field investigations

Place	State	Artisans /carvers	Elephant keepers	Traders /retailers	Tourist guides	Medicinal vendors
Delhi	Delhi	16	5	14	11	
Jaipur/Udaipur	Rajasthan	12	7	24	14	
Mysore/Bangalore	Karnataka	10	5	38	10	
Thiruvananthapuram/Kochi	Kerala	9	5	35	11	6
Cuttack/Bhubaneswar/Puri	Orissa	8	-	22	7	
Murshidabad	W. Bengal	8	-	10	5	
Varanasi	Uttar Pradesh	7	-	9	5	
TOTAL		70	22	152	63	6

The investigator was under instructions not to indulge in any transaction that may be illegal in nature. Since at most places, the traders and carvers would not agree to show any ivory item until a sizeable amount of money was advanced, the investigator had to settle for information about products available and their rates based largely on either photographs of items or the amount of seriousness that the interviewee exhibited about his business. The rates for raw ivory and other ivory items quoted in this report have been arrived at after their substantiation from more than one source at each place of investigation.

Since the traders and carvers/artisans were more conversant with inches, grams and rupees the report uses these units. During the period of investigation, the exchange rate for rupees against the US dollar ranged between INR44.6:USD1 (1 July 2000) and INR46.85:USD1 (April 2001).

RESULTS

HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE IVORY TRADE IN LOCATIONS VISITED

Delhi

In the small State of Delhi, ivory carving started in the old walled city many centuries ago. Many artisans informed the investigator that their ancestors had worked for the Mughal rulers and arrived in India with these rulers, as royal carvers, seal makers and painters. Others were from the Brahmin (priest) community, again indicating the high social status accorded this profession (see also **Background and introduction**).

Jaipur and Udaipur (Rajasthan)

In Jaipur, ivory carving is reported to have started with the making of bangles and other carvings were made from the cylindrical pieces of ivory left after cutting bangles from the tusk. (Bangles are traditionally worn during marriage ceremonies by certain communities in Rajasthan.) In the late 1950s, complete tusks were made available to the carvers of Jaipur and Udaipur and used primarily for carvings, as well as for bangles. Ivory carving in the region came to be dominated by a community called *Kumawats*. Traditionally masons, they enjoyed a good social status owing to their ivory carving.

Karnataka

The carvers of Karnataka are not primarily ivory carvers but involved mainly with carving of wood and stone. The carvers of Karnataka generally belong to the *Vishwakarma* community, comprising *Gudigars* (sandalwood carvers), *Sonars* (gold and silver jewellers), *Acharyas* (*Shilpis*, or manufacturers of chariots), *Bedigars* (carpenters) and *Supernas* (workers of brass). Of these, *Gudigars* and *Acharyas* (or *Acharis*) carved ivory. *Gurigars* originated from Sirsi, in Karwar district, close to the Goddess Manikamba Temple. Here, they began to make sandalwood carvings of the Goddess Manikamba and could carve ivory using the same tools and techniques. *Acharyas* were expert at ivory carving as they were used to carving rosewood, which is close to ivory in its hardness. *Acharyas* originated from Kerala and were especially known for excellent ivory work.

Kerala

In Kerala, ivory has been a popular medium for carving figures of gods and goddesses, national leaders and other items of novelty and for daily usage. The *Achary* community has been traditionally involved with the craft.

Orissa

The carvers of Orissa are also not primarily ivory carvers, but carvers of stone and wood. The stone and wood carvers of Orissa generally belong to *Maharana* and *Mahapatra* castes, originate from the Puri district and have been in this profession for a very long time. Some of the artisans interviewed claimed to be descendants of the artisans who created the Sun Temple of Konark, which is the crowning piece of Orissan architecture and

sculpture, built in the thirteenth century A.D., and Shri Jagannath Temple of Puri, built in the twelfth century A.D. As the tools and techniques followed for stone carving and wood carving in Orissa were similar to those required for ivory carving, these artisans had been involved with this trade, but only as a side activity.

Murshidabad (West Bengal)

In Murshidabad the carving of ivory has been a traditional art and the carvers of West Bengal, especially the *Bhaskar* community, have been involved with the craft. Literally, *bhaskar* means sculptor. *Bhaskars* settled in the Murshidabad district have developed a special proficiency in ivory carving, owing to the patronage received from the rulers of Bengal. Berhampur City in the Murshidabad district, was the capital of Bengal Suba (a former State) during Mughal rule. During those days ivory was very widely used as a material to construct articles of daily use for princes and the wealthy.

Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh)

The carving of ivory is a tradition of Varanasi, especially the carving of intricate *jali* (mesh) work, used in boxes, table lamps and other functional and novelty items. The carvers of Varanasi belong to the *Vishwakarma* community (among Hindus) and to traditional Muslim carving families. They developed a special proficiency in ivory carving, patronized by the royal rulers of Varanasi, as well as by large numbers of Indian and foreign tourists and by export trade to Nepal.

CATEGORIES OF USE FOR IVORY

The following categories of finished products made out of ivory were either seen or said to be on offer during investigations:

- a) carvings
- b) bangles and other small jewellery items
- c) miniature paintings on an ivory base - (only in Jaipur and Udaipur)
- d) items inlaid with ivory
- e) medicinal formulations

a) Ivory carvings

Ivory carvers produce a wide range of products, including intricate *jali* (mesh) work; figures of deities and animals; letter openers; lamp bases; die; ornamental boxes; handles; knobs; bookmarks; seals, etc. as well as all kinds of jewellery (see **b**) below). Some such items were seen by the investigators. Some finished products included ornaments inlaid with gold, precious stones and with silver fittings. Ivory carvings were found to be on sale in every location visited during 2000-01.

b) Ivory bangles and other small jewellery items

In Rajasthan, there is a tradition amongst the Rajput and Marwari communities of wearing ivory bangles, considered auspicious at marriage ceremonies. Traditionally, the *Lakhera* community has been associated with the cutting of ivory bangles. This community has specialised in the manufacture of ivory bangles, lacquered jewellery items and other wooden handicraft items. Earlier, these bangles were sold in sets of 40 or 48 (i.e. 20 or 24 for each arm). The ivory was cut in such a fashion that bangles of different diameters, to fit different parts

of the arm, could be cut from a single length of tusk. The cylindrical portion that remained from the tusk was used to make small items like earrings, beads for a necklace and several other small items. In 2000-01, ivory bangles were seen on offer in Udaipur and Jaipur and reported to be available in Murshidabad and Delhi.

Other jewellery items seen or reported to be sold included hat and tie pins, pendants, beads, lockets, necklaces, etc.

c) *Miniature paintings on ivory base*

The art of making miniature paintings started in the princely courts. Mainly, this art was practised in Delhi, Jaipur and Udaipur only. The base of ivory that was used for painting was a thin slice of ivory from a cross-section of tusk (i.e. a circular or oval shape), or a rectangular piece cut along the length of a tusk. The smoothness of the ivory surface, the colour of ivory and the translucent property of the ivory brings out a special grace in the miniature painting. This quality is unmatched by paper/silk or marble as a base material. Apart from this, use of pure gold, silver and precious/semi-precious stones adds to the immense beauty of these paintings and contributed to a high demand for them. This craft was patronized by the British in India and later by the Indian Government. In Delhi, most of the craftsmen involved in this trade belonged to old Muslim families that had worked for several hundred years for the Mughal emperors. Although only one old miniature ivory painting was seen during investigations for this report, in Udaipur, the traders reported brisk business.

d) *Ivory-inlay*

Ivory inlay work originated in Mysore, under royal patronage. Although there are some artisans in Delhi, Jaipur and other places in northern India who do inlay work, this art belongs mainly to Mysore, where there is a large Muslim community involved in inlay work on rosewood and teakwood. Nowadays plastic and acrylic is usually used for the inlay, but furniture inlaid with ivory was reportedly on sale in Delhi during 2000-01.

e) *Medicinal uses of ivory*

Carvers and artisans interviewed provided information on the use of ivory powder and cuttings in Ayurvedic medicines. Use of ivory for medicinal purposes is more prevalent in southern states of the country. In parts of Karnataka, ivory chips and elephant nails ground together are considered a good application against skin disorders in a general way, while ivory and lemon juice together is said to be useful against scabies (Menon, *et al.*, 1997). In Thiruvananthapuram, medicines made out of ivory are known as *Danthakshar* or *Danti Dant Mashi*. Apart from these, ivory powder called *Anakumbhpoodi* is widely known. Ivory powder mixed with coconut oil is believed to cure infections of the scalp, thus stopping hair loss and helping hair growth. During survey work for this report, elephant keepers reported that medicinal practitioners sought ivory from them and the six medicinal practitioners interviewed in Kerala reported use of ivory in treatments.

KEY PLAYERS IN INDIA ASSOCIATED WITH THE TRADE IN WORKED IVORY

Artisan communities

Literature searches revealed the status enjoyed by ivory craftsmen when the trade was legal, the royal and other patronage received by the trade (see **Historical importance**), the remuneration enjoyed by the artisans, and the profits made by the traders in this business. According to Dwivedi (1976), perfection in carving can be achieved only through long experience and it was possible to appreciate the high returns of the ivory carving business,

An assessment of the domestic ivory carving industry and trade controls in India

unmatched by any other handicrafts industry and comparable to the jewel cutting and setting business. Such status reflects the high cost of ivory as a raw material: if the tusk is wrongly cut, it cannot be re-melted and cast, as in the case with precious metals and, as such, there is a need for excellent craftsmanship in order for the final product to fetch a good price. An ivory carver was accordingly an affluent person, who had learnt his craft after a long and strenuous period of training for 12 to 15 years and who subsequently enjoyed a high social status. The



Credit: TRAFFIC India

Carvers at work in India

Indian and State governments had awarded some carvers recognition for their expertise when the trade was legal. Traditionally ivory carvers considered themselves to be much superior to other craftsmen and this prompted many to continue to use '*Hathidant wale*' ("one who deals in ivory") with their names, even after the trade had been banned and they had shifted to either sandalwood or bone carving. This suggests that it was often difficult for ivory carvers, who had practised their craft for several generations and enjoyed the accompanying high standard of living and social status, to shun the art completely once the ban came into effect.

The master artisans/carvers themselves were the obvious first choice for the collection of information on the ivory trade and interviews with carvers were very helpful and provided leads to major markets, to the main players in this business and gave information about the practical aspects of the craft.

Tourist guides

These agents are said to be key to the sale of ivory items to foreign tourists. They act as middlemen and are usually freelancers registered with major hotels and employed by hotels or tour operators. They are practised at communicating in foreign languages, typically German, French, Russian or Japanese. Many private taxi drivers also work as guides by picking up other languages and catering to tourists' requirements.

In Delhi, hotel staff typically contact the guides, who then provide transport for tourists and visits to various destinations, including emporia, and receive commission on sales. Often such emporia contain the word "Delhi" or "India" and salesmen do their best to convince tourists that these are government-owned outlets. These tourist guides are ubiquitous and are plentiful in strategic places like Old Delhi Railway Station, Nizamuddin Railway Station and around tourist sites, such as Lal Qila and Qutab Minar.

Retailers

In Delhi, large-scale traders/emporium owners, who are both suppliers and retailers, have great stakes in the business because of the capital invested by them and the very high profitability. As mentioned, they have contacts with tourist guides, hotels and taxi drivers to bring in the buyers. Retailers, in general, frequently have a good knowledge of buyers' behaviour and their language and can easily guess the country of a foreigner or the State from which a local tourist comes. They can often express themselves in many languages and thus do not require any interpreter. Generally, displays are in a large showroom and distributed in three or four halls, each sequentially containing more expensive goods than in the previous one. Separate areas, often located on upper floors, are sometimes reserved for welcoming foreign tourists.

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In Murshidabad, a particular genre of artisan-cum-retailer was found to operate. These people, artisans themselves, employed anything between five and 20 other artisans in their own residences or workshops. Although Murshidabad is not known for its prominent or numerous retail outlets, these traders reported that they could pick up business during numerous handicraft exhibitions.

AWARENESS OF THE BAN ON IVORY

The level of awareness of the ban on ivory among artisans was found to be very high at all locations visited. All the senior artisans have lived through times when all ivory was completely legal for use (i.e. pre-1977). Subsequently, they will have lived through the period when Indian ivory was banned and a system of accounting for imported ivory through inspectors was in force and, most recently, through the court actions to ban ivory use and trade totally. By this time, by and large, every artisan knew the illegality of the trade and the reasons behind it. The artisans were also found to be aware of the legal consequences of breaking the law regarding ivory (namely, a minimum fine of INR5000 - about USD100 - and between one and seven years in gaol). There was some evidence of a lack of understanding of the ban on ivory use and trade, for example, at the market at Jew Town in Kochi near Dutch Fort, where a few traders were of the view that household articles from old houses and palaces that are private property could be sold to foreigners and legally exported by them.

Middlemen, such as tourist guides and taxi drivers, operating as a link between customers and carvers and/or traders, were found to be quite aware of the ban on ivory, also. Similarly, elephant keepers were found to be aware of the illegality of cutting and selling tusks from their animals.

INCIDENCE OF USE AND SALE OF IVORY (ATTITUDES TO THE BAN)

Signs of outright disregard for the law were encountered during investigations, as well as apparent complete compliance, at the other extreme.

Artisans and traders/retailers

There was a high degree of suspicion among some of the artisans that a stranger (the investigator) should be asking probing questions. Presumably, they feared a trap by an enforcement agency. The artisans were used to dealing only with known parties and thus were curious, and sometimes worried, to know how they had been located by the investigator. Those artisans who were willing to provide ivory carvings usually refused to show any sample until an advance payment had been made and, on first contact, several refused to entertain any business enquiry. However, interviews with carvers and retailers on the subject of ivory and agreements to deal in ivory were possible in all towns and cities visited and ivory for sale was actually seen in a few cases.

Ivory articles were on sale in **Delhi** despite frequent seizures of ivory items in the city (see **Annex 1**). Ivory articles in Delhi were apparently sold mostly from the market area near Jama Masjid in old Delhi, from Gole Market area and Palika Bazaar in Central Delhi, and near and around Qutab Minar at Mehrauli. The investigator saw an unfinished ivory statue of Jesus in Delhi. It was reported to the investigator that artisans in Delhi procure semi-finished ivory carvings from Jaipur, where low wages and high production volumes keep costs relatively low. Traders in Delhi were found to be most tight-lipped regarding their business dealings and sometimes it took two or three meetings to persuade artisans to talk about their trade.

An assessment of the domestic ivory carving industry and trade controls in India

The investigator saw ivory bangles and raw ivory pieces in Jaipur and Udaipur. Ivory bangles were said to be sold mainly in bazaars - the Johri Bazaar area and *Purohit ji ka katla*, near Badi Chaupad, in Jaipur, and Bara Bazaar and the bangle shops of Moti Chohatta, near Hathipole, in Udaipur. Pali, also in **Rajasthan**, was mentioned as the main centre for manufacture of ivory bangles but could not be visited during this investigation. One old miniature ivory painting was seen in Udaipur. Traders there reported business to be good, despite the fact that two brothers belonging to the community specializing in such paintings (from the *Jangid Brahmin* community) were arrested in connection with a series of major seizures of ivory products in Jaipur, in September 1998. Carvings and paintings were said to be available from showrooms in Udaipur (near Chetak Circle, Sukhadia Circle and *Sahelion ki badi*) and Jaipur (at M.I. Road and Amer Road).

Many of the artisans and manufacturers (artisans who can provide bulk supplies) in **Kerala**, indicated their willingness to provide ivory carvings and were ready to arrange the raw material on their own. According to artisans, the ivory carving business had declined drastically since the ban, but they had been able to sustain their craft through using alternative materials like sandalwood and rosewood, supplementing their income with boosts from carving ivory. Kerala is a State where raw material is apparently readily available from domesticated elephants (see **Sources of ivory**) and the State has a population of over 5700 wild elephants, which may also be a steady source of ivory. These factors, and the fact that Kerala is known for its handicrafts and attracts a large number of tourists every year, probably contribute to keeping the illegal ivory trade alive in the area.

In Thiruvananthapuram, while artisans were found to be interested in arranging ivory required for carving work, they were not willing to arrange and sell raw ivory. When they carved ivory, this was carried out in a clandestine manner, as and when there was a demand. For export purposes, the artisans said they preferred to supply a wood or sandalwood sample of the ordered carving and then, after its approval, take up the actual work of ivory carving. There was a preference for making figures measuring above 22 inches (56 cm) and up to 42 inches (107 cm) in size. Some of the artisans declined to manufacture sizes smaller than these. Traders in Thiruvananthapuram showing an interest in supplying ivory carvings were on Mahatma Gandhi Road and in the Pettah area. Traders displaying an interest in ivory trading in Kochi were found on Jew Town Road and Princes Street.

The investigator actually saw ivory cuttings and shavings in Thiruvananthapuram and at a temple in Thrissur and antique ivory items were seen openly on display in Kochi.

According to tour guides, ivory carvings were also available in Kerala at handicraft outlets in Kovalam, Tekkedy and Puttur (near Palghat). In Kovalam, one emporium was found to advertise itself as “manufacturer, exporter and wholesale dealer in ivory and other products” on the business card of the proprietor.

Artisans and traders in Kerala mentioned supplying ivory carvings to buyers from Bangalore, Jaipur, Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Hyderabad.



Credit: TRAFFIC India

Ivory statues of Lord Krishna were found to be available in more than one location visited during surveys. A statue of Krishna 60 cms high was reported to cost INR125 000 (approx. USD2770) in Kerala.

An assessment of the domestic ivory carving industry and trade controls in India

In Murshidabad, the only location visited by the investigator in **West Bengal**, artisans were found still to be carving ivory according to demand and the town is allegedly a major supplier to the handicraft outlets of Kolkata, Darjeeling, Delhi, Mumbai and Nepal. The investigator saw raw ivory pieces and carved *ambari* (miniature embellished elephants) in Murshidabad. Many individual artisans indicated their willingness to provide ivory carvings, often offering to forward to a potential customer a photograph of carvings they were willing to manufacture. These artisans turned manufacturers-cum-traders, who employ groups of artisans, were reported



Credit: TRAFFIC India

The goddess Lakshmi. Carvings of this goddess, one of the many Hindu deities fashioned in ivory in India, were found to be available in Murshidabad and Kerala.

to dominate the illegal ivory trade in Murshidabad and to do business mainly direct from their houses and workshops. Carving activity was said to be based predominantly in the Khagra and Jiaganj areas of the Murshidabad district, although there could be a few carvers in other parts of West Bengal. As well as operating from their bases in Murshidabad, traders also picked up business during numerous handicraft exhibitions held all over the State and in other parts of the country. One such trader informed the investigator that he had been picking up regular orders for ivory carvings during exhibitions of sandalwood articles.

The fact that the *West Bengal Ivory Artisans and Manufacturers Cum Traders Association* of Murshidabad seemed still to be active may be indicative of a careless attitude to the law. Identity cards for members of this association for the year 1998-99 were seen in the possession of interviewees. Lack of elephants in this area, as well as a lack of retail handicraft outlets and emporia, probably keeps this small and quiet town away from enforcement agents' suspicion: raw materials and finished products transported in small bags hardly attract any attention.

A few retail outlets for ivory were said, by artisans in Murshidabad, to be found in Kolkata.

In **Uttar Pradesh**, the artisans and traders of Varanasi were initially guarded, but once their confidence was gained, they talked freely to the investigator. Ivory carvers were reported to have moved to rural areas near Varanasi (about 15-25 km distant from the town) and were said to work only for a few traders and under cover of night. Although a few outlets in Varanasi were said by tourist guides to be selling ivory products to foreign tourists, no open display of ivory articles was found at any of the showrooms. Seizures of ivory items in the city, which were well covered by the media, could have played a major role in taking ivory products out of overt circulation. A few outlets at Vishwanath Gali, in the Gowdolia area of Varanasi, were referred to by tourist guides as locations where ivory carvings and other ivory products, like bangles and *hankos*, were available to foreign tourists.

In **Orissa**, a few artisans in Bhubaneswar expressed their willingness to carve ivory, but only if the customer supplied the raw material. Traders reported small ivory carvings available for a prospective buyer (e.g. statues, bangles and pendants). A few outlets for ivory crafts were found on Lewis Road/Puri Marga in Bhubaneswar and at Bara Bazaar on Grand Road-Market, opposite Shri Jagannath Temple, in Puri. Most of the ivory from Orissa is reported to be destined for Kolkata. It was reported that raw ivory could also be smuggled out of Paradeep port in fishing boats to reach Port Blaire (Andaman and Nicobar Islands) and then smuggled out of the country.

In **Karnataka**, according to artisans, although there had been a lot of business and many of their number carving ivory prior to the ban on use of ivory, after the ban, they adjusted to it by carving woods instead. When asked, most of the artisans in Karnataka refused to supply ivory carvings, even if the buyer offered to provide the raw material. Only very few were willing to take the risk. Only *Malyali Acharis* (originally from Kerala) showed interest in the venture and were also willing to arrange the raw material, if sufficient advance money were provided.

Although the investigator did see ivory bangles, tiepins, bookmarks and pendants while in Bangalore and Mysore, very few emporia in Bangalore and Mysore were now said to keep or sell ivory carvings. Some that do so were reported to be on Commercial Street in Bangalore, Chanpatna on the Bangalore-Mysore highway, and near Mysore Zoo, Mandi Mohalla and Dhanwantri Road in Mysore. A series of seizures in Bangalore, in 1998 and 1999 (see **Annex 1**), seem to have played their role in taking ivory off the shelves in this city, as has a recent cancellation, on 25 September 2000, of all licences issued in the past to ivory traders in Karnataka by the government. On the whole, it seemed that there was not much market remaining for ivory carvings in Karnataka. This is despite the fact that wild elephants inhabit forests in Karnataka and elephant poaching has been recorded in the State (see **Annex 1**).

Active craftsmen in the trade

An estimate of the minimum number of ‘active’ ivory artisans, according to senior craftsmen interviewed at the locations surveyed, is shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3

Reported estimated number of craftsmen carving ivory in locations visited

City	Number of artisans
Delhi	60
Jaipur	120
Bangalore and Mysore	40
Thiruvananthapuram	225
Bhubaneshwar, Cuttack and Puri	20-25
Murshidabad	40-45
Varanasi	up to 25
Total	525

Source: Artisans interviewed for this study.

Tourist guides

Despite being aware of the ban on use of ivory, these guides, as already stated, were found to be unafraid of recommending ivory items to prospective customers. They stand to gain handsomely from such transactions, as emporia offer a regular commission of 20 to 30% of the sale value to them. Although in Orissa, a few travel agents and guides actually offered ivory themselves during tours, on the whole, these guides carry the least amount of risk in the business. Often they do not even accompany the customer into the emporium, yet they are key to the trade as they often arrange the first meeting between the buyer and seller. The fact that guides can take tourists to emporia situated out of a main town, e.g. the emporium Chanpatna on the Bangalore-Mysore highway (see **ATTITUDES, Artisans**), further reduces the element of risk for tourist guides, as it is difficult to police clandestine trade at such locations. Given such circumstances, tourist guides may feel they have more to gain than to lose by a relaxed attitude to the ivory ban.

Elephant keepers

Despite awareness of the illegality of such transactions, elephant keepers were not discouraged from offering small pieces of ivory - residues after tusks have been shaped. Negotiations for sales of ivory generally start only after the elephant keeper is convinced of the interest of the potential buyer and the prices are generally quoted in the safety of a secluded place, such as the elephant keeper’s residence. Elephant keepers were open to negotiation on prices and could reduce the original prices by 15 to 20% by the time of the final deal. (For further

information on availability of ivory from elephant keepers, see **Sources of ivory**.)

Medicine vendors

Most of the ayurvedic medicine shops refused to provide or sell *anakumbhpoodi*, an ivory powder which is widely known, stating that they did not have a licence for the same. According to pharmacists in Bangalore, a hair oil made of ivory powder mixed with coconut oil, believed to cure infections of the scalp, was earlier manufactured at Mandya (about half way between Bangalore and Mysore) but was no longer available. However, medical practitioners interviewed in Kerala acknowledged medicinal use of ivory.

USE OF SUBSTITUTE MATERIALS AND FAKE IVORY

Substitutes

After the ban came into force, State handicraft development corporations extended help to artisans to change from ivory carving to work with alternative materials, like sandalwood. Assistance has been mainly in the form of marketing services and, in some States, by way of allocating raw sandalwood at subsidized rates. This has not only helped the artisans, but has also contributed to the raising of awareness regarding the ban on ivory carving. The main substitute materials used are sandstone, granite and woods (such as ebony, teak and rosewood). Some notable local use of substitutes is recorded below.

In **Delhi** and **Jaipur**, for carving purposes, the main substitutes are sandalwood and bone (camel or cattle bone). Generally camel bone is regarded as much superior to cattle bone. Wood, granite and marble are also used as substitutes, although they have had their own market and identity for a very long time. Plastics are being used as a substitute for ivory in bangles and this has led to the wearing of ‘ivory-white’ bangles by communities other than the Rajputs (among whom there is a traditional demand for ivory jewellery, mainly bangles).

In **Mysore**, the inlay craft has adjusted well to using coloured wood and acrylic sheets in place of ivory and the colour combinations available in wood inlay provide much more variety than with ivory.

Relative income from ivory, wood and bone carvings

An artisan made a very good living from the ivory craft, as has been explained, and some have experienced a drastic reduction in their income and living standards as a result of the ban on ivory trade. For experienced artisans, ivory is easier to work with than sandalwood, for example, and the finish achieved is also superior. The added status of ivory, as well as the receipt of “danger money”, in view of the illegality of carving ivory nowadays, would both contribute to the greater income earned from ivory carving, relative to that earned from the carving of other materials. **Table 4** shows the relative prices quoted at various locations for items of ivory as compared with items made from an alternative.

At Murshidabad, it was found that for a manufacturer-cum-trader (i.e. one who buys the raw material and employs other artisans for rough cutting/finishing or polishing) the total cost of raw material and labour for a high-quality ivory carving (for example, a statue of a deity) typically amounted to INR4000-5000 (the cost of raw ivory being about INR5000/kg and labour costs for a skilled worker to carve a typical statue being about INR2000). Since the finished article would probably cost about INR15 000, the “manufacturers” are afforded a handsome net profit on such carvings.

Fake ivory

Table 4

Relative earnings from selling ivory and non-ivory carvings

Item/size	Material	Selling price (INR)	Wages earned (INR)
Delhi and Jaipur			
Buddha/ 10 ins (25.4 cm)	Kadamb wood	1200	350
Ambari elephant/ 10 ins	Bone	700	150
Buddha/ 10 ins	Sandalwood	3000	700
Buddha/ 10 ins	Ivory	25 000	4000-4500
Mysore			
Buddha sitting/ 6 ins (15 cm)	Sandalwood	1800-2200	800
Buddha sitting/ 6 ins	Ivory	20000	2000-3000
Thiruvananthapuram			
Lakshmi/Saraswati/Krishna/22 ins (56 cm)	Sandalwood	8000-12 000	5000
Lakshmi/Saraswati/Krishna/22 ins	Ivory	100 000	25 000
Bubaneswar			
Buddha/10 ins (25.4 cm)	Gambhari wood	800-1000	250
Buddha/10 ins	Sandalwood	2500	600
Buddha/10 ins	Ivory	20 000	2000-2500
Murshidabad			
Buddha/Hanuman/ Lakshmi/Saraswati/Krishna/6 ins (15 cm)	Sandalwood	400-500	250
Buddha/Hanuman/ Lakshmi/Saraswati/Krishna/6 ins	Ivory	15 000	2000

Faking of ivory carvings is limited to small pieces. As bone is usually used in place of ivory, there is a limit to the size of these carvings. Some of the bone carvings, e.g. small pendants etc., are easily sold as ivory to gullible buyers. In Bhubaneswar, sea shells were found to be popular for the making of bangles and other jewellery. While these have sold well in their own right for a very long time, the traders sometimes advertised and sold shell bangles as ivory bangles. Similar observations were also made in the Murshidabad markets. In the case of bangles, common plastic materials with a colour and density very near to those of ivory were used and those most closely resembling ivory were on sale for the highest prices. As such, a bangle set could be priced between INR100 and INR1200 (USD2-26), depending on its likeness to ivory. Such fake ivory was offered to the investigator at Jaipur and Bangalore. Some traders at Mysore mentioned the use of white clay, cast in metal moulds with patterns similar to ivory grains, and later treated with coffee and polished to give the appearance of antique ivory.

PRICES OF IVORY ON SALE

Prices of raw ivory

The rates for raw ivory (retail level) as found at different places are shown in **Table 5**. The price of raw ivory from people near forest areas in Orissa was reported to be in the range of INR2000 to 3500 (USD43-75)/kg.

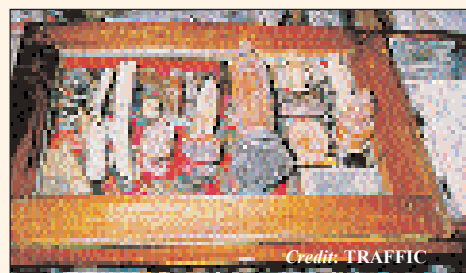
One source of raw ivory was elephant keepers and persons connected to temples (where elephants are often kept). The rates they charged for ivory varied from place to place: for example, it was found to be more costly in Thiruvananthapuram than in the nearby rural interior of Kerala. One person associated with a temple in Kerala offered the investigator 50 kg of raw ivory at INR4000 (USD85)/kg, while some of the elephant handlers at Guruvayur, also in Kerala, reported the price of raw ivory to be around INR3000 (USD64)/kg. The rate at which tusks were reported to be sold on the black market varied generally between INR3000 (USD64) and INR6000 (USD128)/kg, depending upon the quality,

Fake-antique ivory

Faking of freshly produced ivory items as antiques to get a better price occurs. Many of the traders of handicrafts and carvings in Kochi were seen doing good business in fake antiques made of ivory. The artisans who quoted prices for ivory carvings also quoted separate charges for processing the carvings to look like antiques. Some of the articles, such as pocket knives, die and miniature figures were displayed in large numbers (eight to 10 pieces in a bowl) and were of exactly the same design and dimensions and seemingly unused. There was the same peculiar yellow colour on the ivory portion of each article. The traders claimed to visit rural areas to collect old ivory articles and sell the same to foreign tourists.

Although Kochi was found to be the major centre for this among locations visited, the practice was reported to be prevalent quite widely in India. In Jaipur market *mehdi* (henna) leaves seemed to be the common material used to give a reddish brown tint to modern carvings. Artisans in Bangalore mentioned a light acidic solution used to give an antique appearance to newer ivory. At Murshidabad, many of the artisans/traders offered to give ivory articles an antique finish that could fetch a much higher price from customers. For manufacturing fake antiques, the artisans of Murshidabad recommended that the finished piece must be kept in the sun for a considerable time so that at least two or three cracks develop on the carving. Thereafter, this carving should be dipped in tea for some time, depending upon the shade of brown colour the artisan intends to give. For best results, a small piece of plain ivory is used to experiment upon for the correct shade and then the actual ivory carving is processed. The heating in the sun was reported not only to create cracks, but also to evaporate the waxy solution in the grains on the surface of the ivory. Thereafter, when the article is dipped in tea decoction, the solution was said to get sucked in by the grains, giving the carving a uniform and deep colouring on the surface. The artisans were of the opinion that only “green” Indian ivory is best suited for “conversion to an antique”.

Fake-antique ivory, among other pieces, seen here on display in Kochi, Kerala



Credit: TRAFFIC

Table 5

A summary of retail prices given for raw ivory at locations visited

Location	Raw ivory (INR/kg)	Cuttings/filings (INR/kg)
Delhi	8000	5000
Jaipur	8000-10 000	5000-7000
Mysore	5000-6000	3000
Trivendrum	3000-6000	2000-3000
Bhubaneshwar	2000-6000	2000
Murshidabad	3000-10 000	500-1000

Source: Retailers surveyed at locations given, 2000-01

149)/kg, depending upon size and demand. The price for tusk filings from domesticated elephants in Jaipur was quoted as INR6500-7000 (USD139-149)/kg.

While these were the prices cited for illegally procured ivory, a price for legally owned ivory was reported as INR7500 (USD160)/kg. This ivory (42 kg) was offered as a gift after a registered domesticated animal had died. (Legality for this transaction was allegedly conferred through surrender of the original ownership certificate and a gift agreement, in application for a fresh ownership certificate in the new owner’s name, together with a transit permit to carry the ivory to the new place of permanent residence.)

By means of comparison with the prices reported in 2000-01, in 1996 and 1997, traders were selling Asian Elephant ivory at INR6500 (USD139)/kg, in Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh, and at INR9000 (192)/kg in Orissa (Menon, *et al*, 1997).

Prices of ivory paintings

The cost of miniature paintings on ivory bases does not depend on the use of ivory alone, but also on the use of semi-precious stones and pure gold and silver as colours; on the intricacy of the painting; on the depiction of the emotions by the artist and on the name and reputation of the artist who has executed the work. As such, a typical miniature painting measuring six by four inches (15 x 10 cm), on ivory two to three millimetres thick, with a single figure painted on it, and of moderate detailing, could cost INR4000-6000 (USD85-128), while the same piece of art on marble would cost INR700-800 (USD15-17) only.

Reported prices of worked products (mainly carvings and jewellery), location by location

These are shown in **Table 6**.

In Kerala, it was possible to negotiate on the quoted prices. Initially the artisans offered a discount of about 10%, but later the discount rates offered went up to 30-35% for cash on delivery. The size and value of carvings in Kerala seemed high, with an average selling price of INR200 000 (USD4270) per statue (see **Table 6**).

In Murshidabad, after initial reluctance, the artisans agreed to offer a discount of between 10 and 20% on the prices shown in **Table 6**. The larger ivory artefacts on sale in Murshidabad were made by joining together smaller pieces of ivory.

size and age of the material, but the price of a tusk point eight to 10 inches long, cut from a domesticated elephant in Jaipur was quoted at INR8500-10 000 (USD181-213)/kg. Otherwise, the price quoted in Jaipur for pieces of tusk weighing between 500g and one kilogramme cut from domesticated elephants, was INR8500 (USD181)/kg.

The selling price for ivory filings, cuttings and very small pieces varied from INR500 to 7000 (USD11-

Table 6

Prices for worked ivory quoted by artisans at various locations visited

DELHI AND JAIPUR				
Item	Weight	Price (INR)	Price (INR)/kg	
Jewellery, such as bangles necklaces and earrings			35 000-40 000	
Tower of caparisoned elephants	600-800 g	20 000-25 000	30 000-35 000	
Figure of Ganesh	125-150 g	4000-5000	30 000-35 000	
MURSHIDABAD				
Item	Size (inches)	Price (INR)	Remarks	
Tara Ma	6	15 000	Artisan A	
Ganesh	4	3500	Artisan A	
Dorje	5.5	2500	Artisan A	
Stupa	4	3500	Artisan A	
Krishna	4	4500	Artisan A	
Saraswati	4	4500	Artisan A	
Krishna	10	15 000	Artisan A	
Bridge of six elephants	13	15 000	Artisan A	
<i>Phurba</i>	10	12 000	Artisan A	
Carrom striker	1.5	600	Artisan A	
Stamp/ <i>hanko</i>	3	20 000/kg	Artisan A	
Bangles	-	2000 to 10 000/pair	Artisan A	
Krishna	36	265 000	Artisan A	
Bridge with Buddha's life story	12	15 000	Artisan B	
Ambari elephant	9	18 000	Artisan B	
Dice (antique finish)	2.5	500	Artisan B	
Bullock cart	4	600	Artisan B	
Miniature Buddha/Ganesha	2 x 3/4	500	Artisan B	
Bangles	-	2500 to 5000/pair	Artisan B	
Buddha	5	7000	Artisan C	
Buddha	6	16 000	Artisan C	
Bangles	-	2500 to 5000/pair	Artisan C	
KERALA				
Item	Size (inches)	Price (INR)	Remarks	
Ganesha with <i>prabha</i>	22	125 000	Artisan A	
-ditto-	32	350 000	Artisan A	
Single figure of Lakshmi/ Saraswati/Krishna	22	100 000	Artisan A	
-ditto-	32	300 000	Artisan A	
Tirupati	38	425 000	Artisan B	
Vishwarupa	38	450 000	Artisan B	
Ganesh with <i>prabha</i>	36	300 000	Artisan B	
Krishna	24	125 000	Artisan B	
Ganesha	22	150 000	Artisan C	
KARNATAKA				
Item	Weight	Price (INR)	Price (INR)/kg	Remarks
Miniature carving of Ganesh	3-5 g	300-350	75 000-100 000	Price quoted by a trader in Mysore. Probably made from side shavings of tusks of a domesticated elephant.
Thin ivory bangles	6-7 g	600	100 000	Price quoted by a trader in Bangalore.
Two small Buddha heads	150 g each	3000-4000	20 000-25 000	
BHUBANESHWAR (ORISSA)				
Item	Weight/size	Price (INR)	Price/kg	Remarks
Small Ganesh	200 g	3500-4500	20 000-25 000	
Miniature carvings, e.g. of Ganesh	under 2x3 cms	1500-2000		

Note: One inch = 2.54 centimetres; INR44.6:USD1 (1 July 2000) and INR46.85:USD1 (April 2001).

VOLUME OF IVORY PROCESSED

The nature of this investigation precluded any in-depth enquiry into the monthly or annual turnover of ivory by carvers and traders at most places. One important former carver (who has since turned trader) in Murshidabad mentioned supplying about 50 carvings per month to the Nepali markets, while small-time carvers indicated they supplied around two carved idols per month to the Kolkata market. Traders at Thiruvananthapuram claimed a regular supply of carvings (five to 10 pieces in each consignment) to markets in Bangalore, Mysore, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Kolkata. In Delhi and Jaipur, the orders from retailers seemed to determine the volume and supply of carvings executed.

SOURCES OF IVORY

Prior to the ban, the main supplier of ivory for artisans had been traders who were the bulk buyers and importers of the raw material, as well as suppliers of finished products to a large number of emporia. Such traders owned palatial outlets and also exported a large percentage of the finished products. Following the ban on ivory importation and use, another class of artisan-cum-manufacturer/trader seems to have emerged, especially in Thiruvananthapuram and Murshidabad. Such traders in these places arrange the supply of raw ivory, book orders and manufacture and supply ivory carvings to large emporia in metropolitan cities and other tourist spots where ivory carvings can be sold.

The raw ivory reportedly comes mainly from the following sources.

- ivory from poached Asian Elephants
- ivory from domesticated elephants
- smuggled African ivory
- ivory stocks

Otherwise, recycled ivory pieces were cited as a source of ivory used for carving thin bangles in Delhi and Jaipur and old trophies were reported to be an important source of ivory for carvers in Kerala.

Ivory from poached Asian Elephants - “wild ivory”

Ivory offered for sale by tour guides in **Orissa** was said to be from Simlipal Wildlife Sanctuary (northern Orissa) and Chandaka Forest (near Bhubaneshwar). Wild elephants are found in forests of Orissa (see **Table 1**) and there have been seizures of raw ivory in this State (see **Annex 1**). There was also mention of Koraput District as a source of ivory by a few tourist guides and traders, although the place is not known to have any substantial population of elephants. In Bhubaneshwar, artisans reported the availability of illegally acquired ivory from poached elephants, mostly coming from the Keonjhar and Phulbani districts of the State.



Credit: TRAFFIC India

Ivory seized by police in Assam, 2000

West Bengal has only a small population of elephants, yet the main source of ivory for the artisans at Murshidabad was reported to be from the wild. Ivory from the State of Assam comes to Kolkata *via* Siliguri and the artisans prefer to buy it at Kolkata. Raw ivory

has been seized in West Benagal and in Assam in recent years (see **Annex 1**). The artisans, by and large, depend upon suppliers that have been providing them with ivory for several generations. Generally, the ivory was reported to be available in the form of cut pieces only. In Murshidabad, ivory was actually shown to the investigator. The different forms of raw ivory available at Murshidabad were reported to be as shown in **Table 7**.

Table 7

Forms of raw ivory available at Murshidabad

Source of ivory	Size (inches)	Weight (g)	Rate (INR/kg)
Female elephant	Diameter 2 x length 12	800 to 900	3800
Young elephant	Diameter 2.5 x length 22	1500	4200
Adult elephant	Diameter 3.5 to 4 x length 30	10 000-12 000	4500 to 4800
Large adult elephant	Diameter five and above	Not mentioned	8000 to 10 000

Source: Interviews with artisans and traders in Murshidabad, 2000-01.

In Varanasi, also, the main source of ivory for the artisans was said to be from the wild: for ivory from the States of **Uttar Pradesh** and Uttaranchal (a new state comprising the hill districts “carved out” of Uttar Pradesh in 2001), Varanasi is the collecting centre. Seizures of raw ivory have been made in recent years in Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal (see **Annex 1**). Some *hathidant-wale* (particular dealers who formerly traded in large quantities of ivory) interviewed said that the suppliers, who had been providing ivory for them for several decades, still sometimes contacted them, but now they do not evince much interest in buying the material.

In **Kerala**, it was reported that the tusks from poached wild elephants were sometimes channelled into the market via private owners of domesticated elephants.

Elephants are found in the forests of **Karnataka** and there have been seizures of raw ivory reported from this State (**Annex 1**).

Currently the penalty under *The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972* for hunting an elephant ranges between INR5000 and INR25 000 (approximately USD100-530).

Ivory from domesticated elephants

Menon *et al.* (1997) stated that one of the findings of their study was that “a significant amount of ivory does enter the illegal ivory markets from domestic elephants”. Domesticated elephants are used in India for heavy labour, for example in timber works, in temples (for religious ceremonies and processions) and also as performing animals in circuses. As mentioned (see **Attitudes**), elephant keepers were found to be fully aware of the ban on ivory and of the illegality of cutting and selling tusks, but many also indicated that ivory was available from them.

In **Kerala**, nearly 550 domesticated elephants were reported to be registered with the forest department, including about 460 tuskers with private owners and religious institutions (Devasam Boards). A high proportion of the 550 elephants were tuskers because of a traditional local preference for these. The forest department itself owned 16 elephants, of which 10 were tuskers. According to interviewees, there could be many more animals in the State than those registered, the ivory from which would be sold on the black market, once the animals had

died. Unregistered stocks were also reportedly reaching the black market. Since the practice of keeping tuskers has been long-standing in Kerala, there could be a substantial floating stock of tusks from domesticated tuskers that have died of natural or accidental causes. According to artisans in Kerala, domesticated elephants and old tusks and trophies were one of the main sources of ivory used for carving and, in Thiruvananthapuram, ivory from domesticated animals seemed to be the main source of ivory for the artisans. Some of the artisans mentioned arranging a supply of ivory from persons connected to Devasam Boards and a person connected to a temple in Kerala offered 50 kg of raw ivory to the investigator.

The procedure for making a gift of ivory from a deceased, registered, domesticated elephant as a valid procedure to purchase, own and keep ivory carvings legally (see **Prices**) was reported to the investigator in Kerala.

In **Jaipur**, there were reported to be about 87 registered and licensed elephants. Most of the animals were owned by the *mahouts* living in the Mohalla Mahavatan–Ghat gate area of the city. These animals are used to provide rides to tourists at Amer Fort, Jal Mahal and a few other places. Of these, only six or seven were tuskers. Their tusks have been apparently thoroughly exploited by their owners, as one tusk was seen to be completely missing and cutting of the tusk was evident in another case. When the tusk point is cut, it is normally about eight to 10 inches long. Thereafter, a brass ring is fixed around the stub and after one to one-and-a-half years the growth beyond the ring can be safely cut and sold, as and when the elephant owner is approached by a customer. Tusks are also filed. Customers were reported to be traditional medicinal practitioners, traders, or private individuals purchasing the raw material to have an item of traditional jewellery made.

Credit: TRAFFIC India



Elephant in Jaipur with one tusk missing

Karnataka was reported to have 80 elephants, including 27 tuskers, with the State forest department. In Karnataka, a ban has been imposed on the allocation of forest department elephants to private parties, individuals and institutions, religious or otherwise. Also there is a ban on the use of elephants for functions and processions. These two orders have effectively discouraged the private ownership of elephants in the State and there appear to be very few elephants with private owners. In Bangalore city, no elephants were reported to be with private owners nor with any religious institution. In Mysore city, privately owned elephants were found at only two places (apart from zoos), namely, at the Maharaja's palace, where two females were kept, and at Sri Suttur Mutt, a religious institution, where one young male was kept. Elephants were also kept at Bannerghatta and Mysore zoos. At Bannerghatta Zoo there were five elephants (two tuskers, two adult females and one juvenile female). The animals were young and the tusks were found to be intact. At Mysore Zoo there were 10 animals, (seven Asian Elephants and three African Elephants). Among the Asian animals there were two females, two young females, two old tuskers and one young tusker. Among the African Elephants there was one tusker, one female and one young male. Here, also, the animals were well kept and the tusks intact, although heavily shaped.

Sonepur Animal Fair or *Sonepur Mela* as it is locally called, is an annual fair, held in Sonepur, Bihar and is the largest animal fair in Asia. Elephants are bought and sold. This festival starts at the full moon (*Pournima*) of the *Kartik* month of the Indian calendar and continues for about four to five weeks (October-November). Sonepur is situated at the confluence of the River Ganges and River Gandak, about 25 km from the State capital of Patna.

A few *mela maliks* (fair organisers), who organize elephant sales at the Sonapur fair, and some of the elephant buyers were interviewed. The *mela maliks* are the traditional organizers of this event and generally own the land along the river, where these animals are kept and displayed. They provide the general amenities to the elephant owners, who intend to sell their animals. Buyers from all over India come to this fair, since this is the only fair of its kind in the country. Some of the senior *mela maliks* informed the investigator that there was a time when about 1100 to 1200 elephants used to be brought to the fair for sale but, by the late 1970s, the number had come down to about 500 and at the time of investigation for this report, the number was around 90 to 100. During 2001, about 90 to 95 elephants were reported to have visited the fair. Of these, about two-thirds were sold, 13 to persons from Kerala, eight to buyers from Delhi, 10 to buyers from Jaipur and the remainder to buyers from northern Indian States. The officials at the *mela* seemed to be issuing on-the-spot possession certificates, circumventing the need for certificates of ownership, which are required by law. The price of an elephant depends upon its age and health. While tuskers ranged from INR350 000 to INR500 000 (USD7470-10 670), female elephants were sold for between INR250 000 and INR415 000 (USD5335-8860). There were a few *makhanas* (tuskless males) on offer.

Regarding the sale of ivory, the *mela maliks* said that until five to 10 years ago, tusk cutters and ivory buyers used to visit the fair and there used to be stalls advertising the availability of ivory, but now the elephants brought to the fair arrived with their tusks cut short, shaped and with a brass ring fixed on the end for protection. Nowadays, no cutting or shaping takes place at the fair.

Smuggled African ivory

Artisans had been using both African and Indian ivory before the ban on imports of ivory and the Government of India considered seriously its approach to the CITES proposal to list the African Elephant in Appendix I (Bist, 1989). From 1978 to 1991, the average annual amount of African ivory imported into India was about 7.7 t, according to the Government of India's *Project Elephant*.

Although during this investigation one prominent artisan interviewed in Delhi voiced his preference for African ivory, artisans interviewed in the important ivory carving centres of Murshidabad and Thiruvananthapuram reported that they mostly used ivory from Asian Elephants. This substantiates the view of an earlier study (Menon, *et al.*, 1997) which found that “most carvers in southern India preferred Indian ivory to work on while Jaipur carvers seemed to find no great difference in the ivory, some of them preferring African ivory for their work”. One carver in Delhi made a passing remark (that could not be followed up) about ivory of African origin reaching him from time to time through diplomatic sources. Recent seizures of raw ivory at Mumbai airport (see **Annex 1**) indicate that there is incidence of African ivory exported to India.

Ivory stocks

There have been reports of ivory in government stocks entering the black market through thefts (Menon, V., *et al.*, 1997). Ivory from stocks held with traders awaiting the final court judgement on their petition may also be permeating into the market.

Ivory stocks in government possession

Ivory in raw and carved form is lying in government stores and museums all over the country, from the forest range headquarters to the State capitals. These stocks comprise tusks from elephants that have died either from natural causes or from poaching instances (discovered before the tusks could be removed by poachers). Ivory from seizures that take place from time to time is also held in government stocks (**Annex 1**).

There is little consolidated information on the exact volume or nature of these widespread stocks. The quality of documentation and storage of these stocks at government offices varies from good to poor, as was discovered by the TRAFFIC investigators during a companion study to the current investigation, carried out in 2000-01 in the States of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, West Bengal, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. During this companion study, it was found that at least 7286 ivory tusks or pieces (approximately 24 840 kg) are in storage in these States (see **Table 8**).



Credit: TRAFFIC India

Government strong room housing ivory in Kaziranga National Park, Assam

The Government of India, in an executive order of 4 November 1994, directed all the State governments to liquidate all seized and confiscated wildlife items by burning (where no court case was pending), but for various

Table 8

Ivory tusks or pieces in government-owned storage in various States of India, 2000-01

State	Ivory stock - tusks, including pieces, (and approx. weight in kgs)	Remarks
Arunachal Pradesh	61 (20 kg)	At the PCCF office.
Assam	1126 (5577 kg)	At various places including treasury and forest offices
Meghalaya	82 (193 kg)	30 tusks seized by Customs on 6 November 1997 Tusks stored in government treasury. Weights of 30 pieces of tusks are not known.
West Bengal	413 (485 kg)	At various places in forest offices
Orissa	546 (3419 kg)	At various places in forest offices
Karnataka	711 (3975 kg)	Stored at a central place in Mysore.
Tamil Nadu	2298 (5400 kg)	Majority stored at AAZP, Chennai
Kerala	1825 (4700 kg)	Stored at various places - majority at Thiruvananthapuram.
Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal	156 (562 kg)	Two thefts of ivory pieces reported at Kotdwar Wildlife range office.
Bihar (including Jharkhand)	69 (329 kg)	One theft of 118 kg reported from Chaibasa Forest division
Nagaland	6 (9 kg)	Officially destroyed by burning.
TOTAL	7287 (24841 kg)	

Source: A companion study to the current investigation, carried out in 2000-01 (unpublished).

reasons very few States have actually destroyed such stocks, including those of ivory.

Ivory stocks in dealers' possession

Stocks of raw and carved ivory are lying with carvers and traders in India. On 26 November 1993, on submission of the counsel for WWF India, the court ordered: “We direct the Chief Wildlife Warden to inspect the premises of all such dealers and, after identifying, the items of ivory be placed in a sealed almirah or in the premises as the dealer may provide to him.” It was decided, in 1993, by the High Court of Delhi, that such stocks in Delhi should be inventoried and sealed by the authorities at the holders’ premises. In Delhi, there were 134 ivory traders whose premises were visited by the authorities for the identification and sealing of their ivory stocks. While the

direction of the Delhi High Court was applicable only to the State of Delhi, a few other States, for example Uttar Pradesh, took action to inventory traders' ivory stocks. In any case, since there was a grace period of six months for the traders to liquidate their stocks after the trade was banned in 1992, any stocks left with them after the expiry of this period became, *ipso facto*, a contraband item. In 1998, a series of seizures in Jaipur by the police at the premises of a few dealers revealed that the State government had inventoried items but not actually sealed them. As a result, it was difficult to determine if the seized items were part of the original stock, as claimed by the dealers, or not.

Stocks continue to remain in the possession of dealers, except in a few States (e.g. Maharashtra), even after almost a decade since the court's order of 1993, as a final decision in the matter is currently pending at the Supreme Court of India. There is no consolidated national level record of the volume and nature of these stocks, but an assessment dating from 1993-94 by CTES Management Authority staff in India put the amount of ivory stocked with 84 dealers in Delhi at 29 216 kg.

BUYERS OF INDIAN IVORY

Tourist buyers

Many instances of foreign tourists as purchasers of ivory in India were reported. Foreigners were reported to be the main buyers from the markets of Delhi (near Jama Masjid in old Delhi, the Gole Market area and Palika Bazaar in Central Delhi, and around Qutab Minar in Mehrauli). The artisans of Murshidabad referred to outlets in Kolkata selling ivory carvings, bangles and *hankos* to foreign tourists and tourist guides reported that outlets in Varanasi sold the same to foreign tourists. Japanese customers were mentioned as buyers of *hankos*. With foreign tourists, an excellent personal rapport is attempted by the traders, so that the same customers might return to the seller again and again and recommend him to other tourists. For example, general hospitality and assistance is often offered, including the keeping of luggage in safe custody or arranging dispatch of purchased items free of cost.

Export destinations

Trade links between contacts in **Nepal** and carvers and traders in Jaipur, Varanasi and Murshidabad were reported during interviews. Rajasthan State, and Jaipur in particular, has strong business links with Nepal. According to some traders who have traded in Jaipur as well as in Kathmandu, there is a large number of business families originating from Jaipur settled in Kathmandu. These families reportedly keep a close-knit society and it was said that many of the large emporia in Kathmandu were owned by immigrants from Jaipur. Interviews at Murshidabad and Varanasi revealed that there was a regular supply of ivory art work to Kathmandu, with some carvers specializing in articles most in demand there. Articles reported to be popular in Nepal included demons, Buddhas, bridges of elephants, *phurbas* (instruments to be held during meditation) and personal stamps, or *hankos*. Tibetans were mentioned as buying ivory *kara* (bracelets worn on the forearm by men) in Nepal. A major trader in Murshidabad reported that he had managed to develop special ivory articles for the Nepalese market through a chance contact with a major Nepalese wholesaler during an exhibition at Darjeeling. Thereafter his business had flourished.

Non-resident Indians, especially those working in countries of the **Middle East** (notably the Gulf region), were reported to have a role in exporting ivory from India, although no firm evidence was found for this. Menon *et al.* (1997) also cited countries in the Middle East as important destinations for Indian ivory.

The fact that Japanese tourists were reported to be purchasers of ivory within India strongly suggests that **Japan** is an export destination for ivory from India. Moreover, the seizure of worked, *hanko*-sized pieces of ivory during the 1998 seizure of ivory in Jaipur (see **Annex 1**) points to Japan as the intended destination, as these name-seals are popular in Japan.

Other foreign destinations, besides those named, seem certain to be a part of this trade, also. It was reported in Orissa that raw ivory could be smuggled out of the Paradeep port to reach Port Blaire (in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands - see **Figure 1**) in fishing boats and that from there it was smuggled out of the country. Many of the traders encountered in Kochi claimed to be exporting to 10 to 40 countries.

National and international courier agencies were reported to be involved in exporting ivory items, especially in Rajasthan and Delhi. In Udaipur, the practice of private national and international courier services exporting parcels containing ivory art works, whenever the value of the parcel was high enough to make it worth the risk, was discovered. A system of booking international parcels as samples (declared “not for sale” and substantially undervalued), their transportation to Jaipur or Delhi and their quick Customs clearance, assisted by courier agents, was reported. The courier service booking clerk is often well acquainted with emporium staff and it can be arranged so that the courier staff pack and address purchases with the buyer present. A visit to a few courier firms and to the foreign post office (a special branch of the postal service which deals with overseas post and has provision for Customs clearance prior to dispatch) revealed that handicrafts are a relatively easy thing to export in the form of a parcel. At the foreign post office there were a few efficient private agents who assisted in packing, the completion of formalities and early clearance of parcels by Customs staff. According to Customs agents, parcels cleared by Customs staff at the foreign post office could be put directly on board international flights without the need for any further checks.



Credit: TRAFFIC India

An intricate ivory carving of the god Lord Ganesh. Popular ivory items, carvings of Ganesh were reported to be available in Delhi, Jaipur, Mysore, Bhubaneshwar and in Kerala.

Investigations in Bhubaneshwar and other cities of Orissa suggested the involvement of long distance bus drivers in transporting raw ivory, as the buses, and especially the State Road Transport buses, are rarely checked at forest department check posts. This method of transport may be used as a link in exporting ivory goods.

Indian buyers

Jewellery items were reported regularly to be sold to Indian families for religious purposes. According to traders, to ensure genuine and good quality products, prominent families patronize particular jewellers for all their needs and, in this way, a strong trust is developed between buyer and seller that ensures a long-term and safe business. Wealthy Indians, who spend hundreds of thousands of rupees on wedding ceremonies, could quite conceivably afford bangle sets, used traditionally during weddings in Rajasthan, at prices between INR6000 and 50 000. Similarly, beautiful, artistic and traditional ivory carvings produced by highly skilled artisans would be equally as appealing to wealthy Indians as to rich foreign visitors.

CONCLUSIONS

EFFECT OF THE BAN ON THE USE OF IVORY

Awareness of the ban on use of ivory is widespread and its impact seems to have been a reduction in the use of ivory. For example, no overt displays of ivory articles were seen in handicraft showrooms in any of the cities surveyed, apart from Kochi. In Kerala, artisans questioned said that the ivory carving business had declined drastically since the ban. The figure of around 500 active carvers of ivory in the locations visited (believed to include most of the principal centres for ivory carving) is much lower than the figure of 6000, which was the number of ivory craftsmen estimated by the Government of India to be active in India in 1991.

Despite awareness of their illegality, however, this study found that ivory use and trade continue in India. Although most artisans and carvers were at least initially reticent in discussing any illegal activities, some, for example, in Varanasi, spoke freely once acquaintance with the investigator had been established. There was apparently no concern among carvers in Murshidabad that identity cards for membership of an ivory carvers association were on view at their premises. Moreover, large sections of those involved in the trade in ivory were by no means as guarded as artisans and traders in discussing their business. Elephant keepers, for example, talked freely of their dealings in ivory and tourist guides and other middlemen were easy to talk to on the subject. Courier companies were not inhibited in assisting illegal exports of ivory articles. Ivory items were openly exhibited in Kochi and seen in Delhi, Jaipur, Udaipur, Murshidabad, Bangalore and Mysore. In rural areas or on the outskirts of towns, observance of the ban appeared to decrease (as in the case of emporia sited in suburbs and carving workshops located some kilometres outside Varanasi). In short, it was surprisingly easy not only to locate, contact and speak to those involved in the ivory trade, but also to find those willing to supply ivory in carved as well as raw form. Overwhelming evidence, therefore, suggests that carving and trade in ivory, although reduced and largely opportunistic in nature, continues more or less clandestinely.

WHAT MOTIVATES A CARVER OR TRADER TO DEAL IN IVORY?

A temptation to maximize profit can be conjectured to be a prime motive for continuance of the ivory trade. Compared to the returns from working with substitute material, like wood or stone, working with ivory appears to generate much more income. Linked to this is the question of financial penalties for contravention of the ban on use and trade of ivory. Clearly, any profits from such activity are at risk of being reduced by fines, should the offender be caught. It could be that, since carvers and traders are prepared to take the risk of breaking the law, the fine - a minimum of INR5000 (coupled with a gaol sentence of between one and seven years) - is not considered a sufficient deterrent. Ironically, the penalty for killing an elephant illegally under the provisions of the *Elephant Preservation Act* of 1879, when elephants were relatively plentiful in India, was much more than it is now. The penalty in 1879 was INR500, which is the equivalent of around INR550 000 in today's terms, whereas the current penalty under *The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972* is INR5000-25 000. This does not act as a strong deterrent to a poacher and it seems that elephant poaching, far from being a high-risk, high-gain activity in India today, is a low-risk, high-gain pursuit.

Beyond financial motives, the elevated status enjoyed by the craftsmen when the ivory trade was legal undoubtedly causes some to harbour a preference for working in ivory. Some of the elderly carvers of ivory have a sentimental attachment for, and pride in, their craft and hence would not lose an opportunity to let their tools remain idle for long if ivory were available. The fact that the case against the ban is yet to be decided by the Supreme Court of India may allow some artisans to feel justified in continuing to work with the material. Despite

the fact that the Delhi High Court verdict is unlikely to be reversed by the Supreme Court, a faint hope may act as a justification, both morally and practically, to keep the carvers and traders in business. Lending support to what is perhaps a perceived ambiguity in legal terms, is the fact that several cases regarding seizures of raw and carved ivory in different parts of the country remain pending without any convictions of note (**Annex 1**).

WHICH SOURCES OF IVORY ARE SUPPORTING THE IVORY CARVERS?

Although there are significant stocks (at least 24 000 kg) of unworked ivory with the government departments of at least those States in India where government-held stocks were surveyed by TRAFFIC in 2000-01 and stocks of worked and unworked ivory remain with carvers and traders pending a decision by the Supreme Court of India, there was no definite evidence to suggest that ivory from these stocks was reaching the carvers to sustain their trade. Nonetheless, as long as these stocks exist there will always be scope for at least part of them to reach the black market. Stocks of ivory are also in the possession of private individuals in India and there were suggestions that some ivory from such a source may be used for re-working into new pieces.

It seems credible that ivory from wild elephants in India is supporting the ivory industry in India. Carvers and traders at Murshidabad mentioned that the main source of ivory was from wild elephants and that ivory reached them from Assam and ivory seizures have been made in the past few years in the north-east Indian States (see **Annex 1**). Orissa, Karnataka and Uttaranchal/Uttar Pradesh were mentioned by interviewees as other States where wild elephants were a source of ivory, the main source in the case of Varanasi. Seizures of raw ivory have been made in these States, too, during the period 1996-2002 (see **Annex 1**).

Domesticated elephants were found to be playing a role in supplying ivory to the carvers in Kerala and in Jaipur.

WHERE ARE THE MOST ACTIVE IVORY MARKETS IN INDIA?

Orissa, Assam and Uttaranchal (formerly part of Uttar Pradesh) seemed to be relatively fruitful sources of raw ivory, according to information collected. Kolkata and Varanasi, respectively, were mentioned as markets for the raw ivory collected from Assam and Uttaranchal/Uttar Pradesh.

Murshidabad, Jaipur, Udaipur, Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram were found to be the most 'active' markets, among those visited, for worked ivory. It is in these places that ivory articles appeared to be generated most plentifully and most easily available. Other areas of active ivory trading were found outside main towns, for example in the environs of Varanasi and of Bangalore and Mysore. In these cases, the fact that the main centres of activity had been driven out of town could be linked to the level of enforcement effort in these same cities. For example, in Bangalore and Mysore there had been a spate of seizures in 1997, 1998, and 1999 (see **Annex 1**). In Delhi and Varanasi, seizures in 1995 and 1996 had received high media coverage. Jaipur and Udaipur are special cases, where there is a strong traditional demand for ivory products (such as paintings and bangles) and hence, despite some high profile seizures, the ivory market persists.

Traders of worked ivory goods cited major urban locations, for example, Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai, as retailing centres that they supplied.

HOW DO THE MARKET RATES FOR IVORY COMPARE WITHIN THE COUNTRY AND OVER TIME?

For raw ivory, prices ranged from INR3000/kg to INR10 000/kg, depending on size and quality. While the rates

for raw ivory were relatively low in elephant-bearing places, like Kerala and Orissa, they were higher in Delhi, Jaipur and Murshidabad. It appears that there has been no significant change in the price of raw ivory on the Indian market between 1996, as reported by Menon *et al.* (1997) and 2000-2001, when investigative work for this report was conducted.

Prices for worked ivory items at the different locations visited are difficult to compare as items described were slightly different in each case. However, it appears that some prices ranged widely. For example, the price of an ivory statue of Ganesh in Delhi was INR10 000 (USD222)/kg more than a work of the same description in Bhubaneswar and a 36-inch (88 cm) statue was INR35 000 (USD777) more in Kerala than in Murshidabad. Artefacts of a similar description for sale with different vendors in the same town appeared to fall within a much narrower price band, however.

WHICH OVERSEAS MARKETS ARE RELEVANT TO INDIA?

Nepal was clearly highlighted as a market for ivory products from India. Traders in Murshidabad, Varanasi and Jaipur mentioned Nepal as a destination for ivory carvings. There were family links reported between Jaipur and Nepal, presumably providing an especially fruitful channel for business. There is a likelihood of ivory from India reaching the Middle East, especially the countries in the Gulf region. Mumbai, which is an important port for export to this region, was cited as an end point within India for ivory carvings (e.g. from Kerala and Karnataka).

Since north-east India was not covered during this investigation, it is not possible to say within the scope of this report whether ivory is traded from India to neighbouring countries in that region, for example to Myanmar or Bangladesh.

If the report that Indian ivory is exported to up to 40 different countries is to be believed, the export market for this commodity is diverse.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO ESTIMATE THE VOLUME OF IVORY ENTERING THE BLACK MARKET IN INDIA?

One of the challenges of investigating a wholly illegal market is to get to a reliable estimate of volumes consumed. Little ivory in either raw or worked form was actually seen during the investigation. The nature of the investigation did not allow the investigator to ask questions regarding traders' or carvers' monthly or annual turnover without raising doubts about his real motives. An estimated 525 carvers were working with ivory in the locations visited, but this figure does not take account of ivory carvers in other locations in India. Moreover, although carvers in Murshidabad mentioned carving about two items each per month, it is not known how representative this rate of production is for other ivory carvers. From the figures given in **Annex 1**, it appears that an annual average of at least 270 kg of raw ivory was seized, 1996-2001, inclusive, in India. It cannot be assumed, however, that all this ivory was destined for domestic carvers, as suggested by the fact that some ivory was seized at Thiruvananthapuram airport. For these reasons, it is not sensible to attempt an estimate of the amount of ivory being used on the black market in India from the findings of this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RESEARCH

Government investigative action

Given the ease with which the investigator obtained offers of illegal ivory, the Government of India should act to investigate how and why this is happening against the law. Research findings from this report could be used as a “launch pad” for investigations. Prices and other trends in the ivory market should be monitored in order to provide early warning of any major fluctuations in demand.

ENFORCEMENT

Penalties

The fact that active markets for ivory persist, are developing even, in India points to a glaring need for more effective enforcement of the ban on ivory use. Since profit is likely to be the prime motive for the persistence of the ivory trade, stiff penalties for violation of the ban on ivory use and sale should be used. Likewise, only a significant revision of the penalty for elephant poaching will be likely to make the difference in deterring illegal hunting of these animals in India.

Registration and security of ivory stocks and captive elephants

Ivory stocks

If the research is correct, privately held stocks of ivory are still lying with dealers and not necessarily being used - probably because there is still a small chance that their use could be legalized. It is very important that registration and security of these stocks is stepped up. If a legalized sale or change of ownership of ivory from such stocks does take place, quantities and ownership need to be known and recorded by authorities. Otherwise, if the ban is ultimately upheld by the Supreme Court of India, there is a risk that these stocks will be dumped on the black market, without any means of checking this. Likewise, the ivory stocks in government possession need to be accounted for fully and secured to avoid their possible laundering into the black market.

Live animals

States should take appropriate steps to ensure timely registration and regular verification of elephants in captivity and of their tusks. It is necessary that the death of a captive elephant be notified by the owner to the competent authority before disposal of the carcass. The tusks, if any, on the dead animal need to be prevented from entering the black market.

The sale of elephants at the *Sonepur Mela* needs better control and monitoring to ensure strict compliance with the laws of the land.

Courier agencies

It is evident that the functioning of national and international courier agencies needs better accountability and regulation to ensure that these do not wittingly or unwittingly promote illegal trading activities.

AWARENESS

Awareness of the ban should be raised among those few players in the trade who may remain oblivious to it or confused by it. Tourists should be a main target group in this context and, therefore, the ban should be advertised in all tourist offices and information centres; Customs offices; foreign post offices; handicraft outlets; handicraft exhibitions; major/prime shopping arcades, especially those that attract foreign tourists; domestic and international airports; railway and bus stations.

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Annex I Reported seizures of ivory in India, 1996-2002

Year	Place	State	Seized item	Inference
1996	Calcutta	W. Bengal	2 ivory articles	Carving
1996	Pilibhit	Uttar Pradesh	Tusk (15 kg)	Raw Ivory
1996	Begunia		Tusk (60 kg)	Raw ivory
1996	Baliguda	Orissa	2 tusk (7.4 kg); ivory (270 kg); 2 ivory articles	Raw ivory and carving
1996	Calcutta	W. Bengal	Ivory (12 kg)	Raw ivory
1996	Dehradun	Uttaranchal (Then UP)	2 tusks	Raw ivory
1996	Chennai	Tamil Nadu	Ivory (200 kg)	Raw ivory
1996	New Delhi	Delhi	Ivory articles (1.1 kg); 3 ivory carvings (18 kg)	Carving
1997	Kokrajhar	Assam (?)	3 tusks (9 kg)	Raw ivory
1997	Coochbehar	W. Bengal	Tusk (9 kg)	Raw ivory
1997	Corbett National Park	Uttaranchal	Tusk (500 kg)	Raw ivory
1997	Lakhimpur kheri	Uttar Pradesh	Tusk (5.5 kg)	Raw ivory
1997	Palamau	Jharkhand	1 piece (?)	?
1997	E. Sighbhum	Jharkhand	3 tusks (5.5 kg)	Raw ivory
1997	Bangalore	Karnataka	41 ivory carvings	Carving
1997	Bangalore	Karnataka	17 ivory carvings	Carving
1997	E. Midnapur	W. Bengal	5 tusks (18 kg)	Raw ivory
1997	Jowai	Meghalaya (?)	30 tusks (130 kg)	Raw ivory
1997	Bandipur National Park	Karnataka	2 tusks	Raw ivory
1998	W. Kameng		2 tusks (12 kg)	Raw ivory
1998	Bangalore	Karnataka	3 ivory carvings	Carving
1998	Mysore	Karnataka	51 ivory articles	Carving
1998	Bangalore	Karnataka	16 ivory articles	Carving
1998	Jaipur	Rajasthan	Ivory articles (604 kg)	Carving
1998	Bangalore	Karnataka	17 ivory articles	Carving
1998	Buxar	Bihar	1 tusk	Raw ivory
1998	Haridwar	Uttaranchal	2 tusks (50 kg)	Raw ivory
1998	Bandipur National Park	Karnataka	2 tusks (9.5kg)	Raw ivory
1998	Wynad	Kerala	2 tusks	Raw ivory
1998-99	-	Orissa	14 cases - ivory articles (193.750 kg)	Carving
1999	Bangalore	Karnataka	Ivory articles (38 kg)	Carving
1999	Nanjagud	Karnataka	1 tusk (19 kg); ivory articles (35 kg)	Raw ivory and Carvng
1999	Kalchini	W. Bengal	2 tusks (54 kg)	Raw ivory
1999	New Delhi	Delhi	Ivory articles (3 kg)	Carving
1999	Meerut	Uttar Pradesh	1 ivory piece (0.2 kg)	Raw ivory
1999	Moradabad	Uttar Pradesh	1 tusk (19 kg)	Raw ivory
1999-00	-	Orissa	5 cases-tusks (22.55 kg)	Raw ivory
2000	Thane	Maharastra	1 tusk (7.5 kg)	Raw ivory (domestic elephant?)
2000	Periyar	Kerala	12 tusks	Raw ivory
2000	Kozhikode	Kerala	5 pieces (17 kg)	Carving
2000	Haridwar	Uttaranchal	Tusks (20 kg)	Raw ivory
2000	Thiruvananthapuram airport	Kerala	Tusks (30 kg)	Raw ivory
2000	Haridwar	Uttaranchal	2 tusks	Raw ivory
2000	Mumbai	Maharastra	Ivory articles (3-4 kg)	Carving
2000	Satkosia	Orissa	Ivory pieces (17.3 kg)	Raw ivory
2000	Ennore	Tamil Nadu	3 tusks (10 kg)	Raw ivory
2000	Haridwar	Uttaranchal	Ivory (15.5 kg)	Raw ivory
2000	Wynad	Kerala	19 ivory pieces (26.74 kg)	Raw ivory
2000	Delhi	Delhi	2 tusks (11.8 kg)	Raw ivory
2000	Satkosia	Orissa	2 tusks (20 kg)	Raw ivory
2000	New Delhi	Delhi	1 ivory carved idol	Carving
2000	Kaladhungi	Uttaranchal	Ivory (0.30 kg)	Raw ivory
2000	Jalpaiguri	W. Bengal	3 pieces 90.87 kg); 3 tusks	Raw ivory
2000	Wynad	Kerala	15 tusks (62.35 kg)	Raw ivory
2000	Haridwar	Uttaranchal	Tusks (16 kg)	Raw ivory
2000	Mumbai	Maharastra	40 articles	Carving
2000	Chennai	Tamil Nadu	3 articles (1.15 kg)	Carving
2000	-	Orissa	Tusks (105 kg)	Raw ivory
2001	Jalpaiguri	W. Bengal	3 tusks	Raw ivory
2001	Mumbai	Maharastra	40 articles	Carving
2001	Mumbai	Maharastra	1 tusk (7.5 kg)	Raw ivory (African?)
2001	Delhi	Delhi	Ivory (26.4 kg)	Raw ivory
2001	Baripada	Orissa	Ivory (25 kg)	Raw ivory
2001	Pilibhit	Uttar Pradesh	Ivory (3.15 kg)	Raw ivory
2001	Mumbai	Maharastra	65 Ivory articles	Carving
2001	Bajpur	Uttaranchal	Ivory (28 kg)	Raw ivory
2001	New Jalpaiguri	W. Bengal	Ivory (20 kg)	Raw ivory
2001	Mumbai	Maharastra	4 ivory articles	Carving
2001	Alipurdwār	W. Bengal	1 tusk	Raw ivory
2001	Bijnor	Uttar Pradesh	Ivory (1.2 kg)	Raw ivory
2001	Jalpaiguri	W. Bengal	3 tusks	Raw ivory
2001	Jaipur	Rajasthan	91 bangles	Carving
2001	Pali	Rajasthan	589 bangles	Carving
2001	Jodhpur	Rajasthan	Bangles (15.3 kg)	Carving
2001	Ajmer	Rajasthan	Bangles (236 kg)	Carving
2001	Haridwar	Uttaranchal	2 tusks	Raw ivory
2002	Mumbai airport	Maharastra	1 tusk	Raw ivory (African?)
2002	24-Parganas	W. Bengal	21 pieces	Raw ivory
2002	Thiruvananthapuram	Kerala	9 items and 2.14 kg ivory	Carving and Raw
2002	Mallapuram	Kerala	9 items (4 kg)	Carving
2002	Thiruvananthapuram	Kerala	Ivory items (70 kg)	Carving

Source: Project Elephant, Government of India, 2002

TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, works to ensure that trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature. It has offices covering most parts of the world and works in close co-operation with the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

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