

Reality of Animal Ride

1. Abstract

This white paper provides a comprehensive veterinary, legal, and ethical assessment of the commercial animal ride industry in India. The research primarily focuses on the physical and psychological conditions of elephants, camels, and equines utilized for tourism, joyrides, and ceremonial events.

The report exposes the hidden cruelty of traditional spirit-breaking training methods, such as the Phajaan, used by handlers to enforce submission through fear and physical conditioning. Furthermore, it analyzes the shifting legal landscape in India, identifying past enforcement gaps in the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960, and highlighting the strict penal potential of Section 325 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, which criminalizes the maiming or rendering useless of any animal.

Ultimately, the paper calls upon college communities and the public to drive a shift toward an ethical, compassionate tourism ecosystem in India

2. Introduction

This white paper examines the systemic use of animals, primarily horses, elephants, camels and mules for commercial rides, joyrides, tourist entertainment, and ceremonial processions across India. While deeply embedded in traditional tourism and festive culture, this practice subjects sentient creatures to industrial-scale captivity, unnatural environments, and physical overexertion.

The relationship between humans and animals in India is ancient, complex, and deeply contradictory. On one hand, Indian culture frequently reveres animals through folklore, religious iconography, and traditional philosophy. On the other hand, a highly commercialized, unregulated animal ride industry operates daily across the country, transforming sentient beings into tools for tourist amusement and economic gain.

3. Why This Topic is Important

People must care about this issue because animal rides present an overlapping crisis of animal welfare, public safety, and public health. Captive riding animals endure severe psychological trauma and physical mutilation “on animals”. Furthermore, frustrated or exhausted animals frequently run amok, causing tragic injuries and fatalities among tourists and handlers alike. From a health perspective, close, unregulated contact with stressed animals escalates the risk of zoonotic disease transmission, such as Tuberculosis from

elephants, Brucellosis and MERS-CoV from camels, and Ringworm and Salmonellosis from horses.

4. Current Situation in India

Animal rides continue to be a popular attraction at tourist destinations, religious sites, beaches, and fairs across India. Horses, camels, elephants, and ponies are commonly used to transport visitors and provide recreational rides. However, concerns regarding the welfare of these animals have increased in recent years.

Many ride animals are subjected to long working hours, extreme weather conditions, inadequate nutrition, insufficient rest, and limited veterinary care. Overloading, poor housing conditions, and improper training methods can lead to physical injuries, stress, and behavioral problems. Stressed or exhausted animals may become unpredictable, posing risks to both tourists and handlers. Animal rides also raise public health concerns, close contact between humans and animals.

5. Objectives of the White Paper

The primary objectives of this research document include:

- To evaluate the physical and psychological living conditions of animals utilized for joyrides across India.
- To identify major challenges and systemic gaps in how handlers train, house, and care for these animals.
- To analyze the ethical contradictions and current legal frameworks surrounding performing and captive animals.
- To suggest practical, realistic, and highly sustainable solutions that phase out animal labor while preserving human livelihoods.
- To create widespread public and institutional awareness regarding the realities of the animal entertainment sector.

6. Background Information

❖ Key Definitions

- a. **Captive Animal:** Any animal (wild or domestic) that is kept in confinement, under human supervision, or restrained from exercising natural behaviors.
- b. **Sentient Being:** is a living being that has the capacity to feel, perceive, and experience emotions or sensations, such as pain, pleasure, fear, and happiness.
- c. **Speciesism:** is discrimination against individuals based solely on their species membership, usually giving greater moral importance to humans than to other animals.

7. Basic Facts and Statistics

Equines (Horses/Ponies): Thousands of ponies are deployed across high-altitude tourist corridors (e.g., Matheran, Shimla, Sonamarg) and the wedding industry, frequently carrying weights far exceeding humane capacities.

Elephants: India is home to thousands of captive elephants. In prominent tourist locations like Amber Fort (Jaipur), over 80–100 elephants are routinely utilized for continuous tourist transport.

Camels: Migrated extensively from Rajasthan to metropolitan coastal zones (e.g., Mumbai beaches), these animals suffer from chronic foot rot due to prolonged exposure to wet sand and hard surface.

8. Existing Laws and Policies in India

The legal landscape protecting these animals consists of multiple tiers:

- **The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960:**
 - Section 11(1)(a) – Overloading, Overdriving and Torture: Prohibits beating, overloading, or forcing animals to work in ways that cause unnecessary pain and suffering
 - Section 11(1)(b) – Using Unfit Animals for Work: Makes it illegal to use sick, injured, exhausted, or otherwise unfit animals for labor or rides.
 - Section 11(1)(c) – Administration of Harmful Substances: Forbids giving animals drugs or substances that may cause harm or unnecessary suffering.
 - Section 11(1)(d) – Cruel Transportation: Requires animals to be transported in a manner that does not cause injury, stress, or suffering.
 - Section 11(1)(f) – Excessive Chaining or Tethering: Bans keeping animals chained or restrained for unreasonable periods of time.

- **Section 11(1)(h) – Failure to Provide Food, Water and Shelter.** Owners are responsible for providing adequate food, clean water, and proper shelter. Lack of these basic needs can result in dehydration, malnutrition, and heat stress.
- **The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972:** Categorizes Asian elephants under Schedule I, strictly prohibiting their capture from the wild and commercial trading.
- **The Performing Animals (Registration) Rules, 2001:** Mandates that all animals used for rides or entertainment must be registered with the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI).
- **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023 (Section 325):** Replaced the older Indian Penal Code (IPC) Sections 428 and 429. It broadens protection to all animals, making the killing, poisoning, maiming, or rendering useless of any animal a cognizable offense punishable by strict fines and imprisonment.

9. Problem Statement

What Exactly is the Issue?

The core issue is that animals used for rides are treated as mechanical commodities rather than biological, sentient beings (Sentient beings are living creatures capable of feeling and experiencing emotions such as pain, pleasure, fear, and happiness. They can perceive and respond to their environment through their senses.). The infrastructure of commercial tourism demands continuous labor, leading to severe physical deformities, chronic pain, and shortened lifespans.

Who is Affected?

- **The Animals:** Suffer from systemic physical abuse, joint diseases, foot issues, malnutrition, and profound emotional distress.
- **The Handlers/Mahouts:** Often locked into generational poverty or low-wage contracts, working in highly hazardous conditions without formal safety nets.
- **The Public/Tourists:** Exposed to safety risks from unpredictable animal behavior and public health threats from zoonotic pathogens.

10. Challenges and Why It is a Concern

The primary concern centers on the **methods of control**. Because these are large, inherently wild, or strong animals, compliance is maintained through fear, dominance, and weapon use.

Case Study: The "Phajaan" or Breaking Process

Wild-caught or captive-born elephant calves are subjected to a brutal training process known as Phajaan (the crush). They are isolated in small wooden enclosures, starved, sleep-deprived, and beaten with weapons like the ankush (bullhook) until their spirit is broken and they become submissive enough to carry tourists.

Case Study: The Horse Use in Baraat

A field observation of horses used in Indian baraat processions revealed several animal welfare concerns. The horses were exposed to loud music, drums, bright lights, crowded streets, and long periods of standing, often while carrying the groom and heavy decorative equipment. Many horses showed signs of physical and psychological stress, including excessive sweating, restlessness, rapid breathing, head tossing, and attempts to move away from the noise and crowd. In some cases, inadequate access to water, poor hoof care, and unhygienic housing conditions were also observed. Such stressful conditions can negatively affect the horses' health, behavior, and overall well-being.

The study highlights the need for greater awareness, proper management practices, and humane treatment of horses used in wedding processions.

Fieldwork Observations

Inspections authorized by the AWBI reveal that a vast majority of riding elephants suffer from severe footpad abscesses, cracked nails, and visual impairment (cataracts), yet are forced to walk on hot concrete daily. Similarly, riding horses are often found with ill-fitting wooden and metal saddles that cause deep, bleeding frictional abrasions.

According to observations by the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI), horses used in baraat processions are often exposed to loud music, firecrackers, bright lights, overcrowded environments, and prolonged standing, all of which can cause considerable physical and psychological stress. AWBI has reported signs of distress such as restlessness, excessive sweating, fear responses, and attempts to escape from noisy surroundings. Inadequate access to water, poor hoof care, and improper handling have also been observed in some cases. These findings highlight the need for better regulation and humane treatment of horses used in wedding processions.

11. Research / Data Collection

Methods Used: Online Research, Observation, Survey, and Interview.

- **Online Research:** Collected information on animal welfare, management practices, and regulations.
- **Observation:** Observed animals used for rides, their behavior, health condition, workload, and living conditions.

- **Survey:** Conducted surveys with animal owners and handlers using a questionnaire.
- **Interview:** Interviewed owners, handlers, and caretakers to gather detailed information.
- **Number of Participants:** Approximately 8-10 participants.
- **Location:** Kotri Kalan, Madhya Pradesh, India
- **Date and time:** 31/05/2026 06:27PM
- **Type of People Interviewed:** Animal owners, handlers, caretakers, and local stakeholders.
- **Purpose:** To assess the welfare, management, and working conditions of animals used for rides.
- **Key Finding**
 - The study examined horses used for riding in tourist and recreational areas. Their health, welfare, and management practices were assessed. The aim was to identify welfare concerns and suggest improvements. These observations help understand the challenges faced by riding horses.
 - Most horses observed were in poor health condition. Many horses were found to be weak and undernourished. Signs of fatigue and poor body condition were common. Lack of proper care contributed to their health issues. This negatively affected their welfare.
 - Several horses had visible wound marks on different parts of their bodies. Many horses showed wounds and scars on their bodies. These injuries were often linked to poor equipment and rough handling. Some wounds appeared untreated. Such conditions indicate inadequate care.
 - Whips (hunters) were commonly used to control horses. Whips were frequently used to manage and direct horses. Handlers often relied on them to control animal movement. Excessive use can cause stress and discomfort. This raises animal welfare concerns.
 - Proper shade facilities were not available for many animals during rest periods. Many horses lacked access to adequate shade while resting. Exposure to direct sunlight can

cause heat stress and discomfort. Shelter is important for their well-being. Better resting facilities are needed.

- The bedding and resting areas were inadequate and poorly maintained. The resting areas were often dirty and uncomfortable. Proper bedding was lacking in many locations. Poor conditions can lead to health problems and stress. Improved maintenance is essential.
- Most owners and handlers had little or no knowledge about deworming practices. Many owners were unaware of the importance of regular deworming. Parasite control was often neglected. This can negatively affect horse health and performance. Greater awareness is needed.
- Hoof care was inadequate, with many horses showing poorly maintained hooves. Poor hoof care causes pain and difficulty in movement. Chronic discomfort increases stress and anxiety in horses. They may become irritable, withdrawn, or less active. Persistent pain can also trigger abnormal behaviors. Thus, hoof health directly affects psychological well-being.
- Waste management practices were inadequate, leading to unhygienic surroundings. Unhygienic environments create continuous stress and discomfort. Foul odors and insects disturb the animals and reduce their sense of security. Such conditions can cause restlessness and anxiety. Prolonged exposure may lead to chronic stress. Clean surroundings are essential for mental welfare.
- Poor hygiene conditions were observed in animal housing and resting areas. Dirty housing prevents animals from resting comfortably. Lack of proper rest can increase stress and frustration. Animals may become lethargic or show behavioral abnormalities. Unsanitary conditions also reduce their sense of safety. This negatively affects their emotional health.
- Some horses displayed aggressive or stressed behavior. Aggression often reflects underlying psychological distress. Confinement and lack of stimulation can lead to frustration and anxiety. Stressed horses may bite, kick, or show repetitive behaviors. These are signs of poor coping and compromised welfare. Improving management can reduce such behaviors.
- Regular veterinary care and welfare monitoring were generally lacking. Without regular health checks, pain and stress remain unnoticed. Untreated conditions can increase fear and anxiety. Animals may develop abnormal behaviors or become socially withdrawn. Welfare monitoring helps identify early signs of distress. Regular care is essential for psychological stability.

Overall, the findings indicate a need for better animal welfare, housing, health care, and owner awareness. Captive animals rely entirely on humans for their needs. Poor conditions can cause chronic stress and behavioral disorders. Proper housing and enrichment improve emotional well-being. Owner awareness is vital for recognizing signs of distress. Better welfare practices promote healthier and happier animals.

12. Challenges Identified

- **Weak Enforcement of Penalties:** Although the PCA Act protects animals, its standard base fines (ranging from ₹50) are outdated and fail to act as a deterrent, though newer amendments and BNS Section 325 offer a stronger framework if actively applied.
- **Economic Dependence:** Handlers and owners depend entirely on daily ride revenues to feed their families, creating a direct clash between animal ethics and human survival.
- **Hidden Ownership:** Many tourist animals are leased through complex underground networks, making it difficult for law enforcement to track down the actual owners when animal abuse occurs.
- **Lack of awareness:** Owners and Users don't have knowledge “about animal”, welfare and about animal health.

13. Recommendations

Recommendations must balance animal welfare with human livelihood economic transitions.

A. For Government

- **Mandate Phased Transitions:** Implement a systematic ban on live-animal rides in urban and historical sites, starting with high-risk species like elephants.
- **Deploy E-Carriages and Robotics:** Fund and subsidize alternatives such as solar-powered e-carriages (to replace horse carriages) and life-sized mechanical/robotic animals.
- **Enforce BNS Section 325:** Direct local police forces to actively treat severe animal neglect and physical abuse as non-bailable, cognizable offenses.

B. For Educational Institutions

- **Integrate Humane Education:** Work alongside organizations like STRAW India to embed animal empathy and environmental compassion into primary and secondary school curricula.
- **Promote Conscious Tourism Choices:** Conduct campaigns within colleges to encourage students to boycott animal-based entertainment during educational trips and personal vacations.

C. For Communities

- **Practice "Refuse and Report":** Refuse to participate in any elephant, camel, or horse rides. Take photos/videos of visible abuse and file complaints directly with local police and the AWBI.
- **Support Local Artisans directly:** Direct tourism funds toward local cultural guides, homestays, and handicraft artisans instead of ride operators.

D. For NGO's

- **Livelihood Rehabilitation Programs:** Design upskilling workshops to help animal handlers transition into green jobs, such as operating electric vehicles or working as conservation guides.
- **Advocate for Mechanical Elephants:** Partner with technical institutes to replicate successful animal-free initiatives.
- **The Mechanical Innovation Model:** In Kerala, life-sized mechanical elephants (constructed using rubber, fiber, and iron frames) have been successfully deployed in temples to perform traditional ceremonies. This approach offers a safe, cruelty-free, and highly popular tourist alternative without harming live wildlife.

14. Conclusion

The exploration of animal rides in India reveals a stark contrast between historical traditions and modern standards of animal welfare. For centuries, animals such as horses, camels, elephants, and donkeys have been used for transportation, ceremonial events, and tourism activities. While these practices are deeply rooted in cultural heritage, increasing scientific understanding of animal sentience and welfare has highlighted the physical and psychological suffering often experienced by these animals. Long working hours, inadequate nutrition, lack of veterinary care, overcrowded living conditions, and exposure to harsh weather conditions frequently compromise their well-being. Therefore, forcing animals to work under abusive

and exploitative conditions is no longer sustainable or ethically acceptable in contemporary society.

A balanced and humane transition towards sustainable alternatives is both possible and necessary. Innovations such as mechanical safari replicas, battery-operated e-carriages, and other animal-free tourist experiences can preserve cultural and recreational values while eliminating animal suffering. Such alternatives can also create new employment opportunities and support the livelihoods of communities that currently depend on animal-based tourism. Achieving this transformation requires immediate and collaborative efforts from governments, animal welfare organizations, tourism authorities, local communities, and the general public. Through stronger regulations, awareness campaigns, rehabilitation programs, and investment in humane alternatives, India can develop a tourism sector that respects its cultural traditions while promoting compassion, sustainability, and animal welfare, ultimately moving towards a truly cruelty-free future.

15. References

Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI). Guidelines and Protection Laws for Guidance of Police, NGOs, and AWOs. Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

Bukhari, S. S. U. H., Parkes, R. S. V., Sneddon, L. U., & McElligott, A. G. (2024). The behavior and welfare of neglected species: some examples from fish and mammals. PeerJ, 12, e17149.

Christiana, H., et al. (2025). One Health alert: zoonotic scabies from dromedary camels—A case report and call for vigilance. Frontiers in Veterinary Science, 12, 1500916.

Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. (2023). The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023. Section 325: Animal Cruelty and Maiming Laws.

Animals (PETA) India. (2018). Annual Review: Highlights of Victories and Investigations for Animals in India. Captive Elephant Reports.

Rajasthan High Court. (2016). Mahaveer Bishnoi Vs. State of Rajasthan & Ors. D.B. Civil Writ Petition (PIL) No. 6176/2014.

16. Appendix

Animal General Status: Body Condition Score (BCS), presence of open saddle/tether wounds, skin texture, visibility of rib cages.

Behavioral Markers: Frequency of head-bobbing, pacing, showing aggression, or heavy unresponsiveness.

Environment Assessment: Ambient temperature, surface condition (hot asphalt, soft sand, mud), access to clean shade and running water.

Handler Tools: Presence of bullhooks (ankush), nailed sticks, heavy whips, or restrictive spiked hobbles.

-X-X-