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Global Trade, Climate Change, and the Spread of Invasive Alien Species: Impacts on Ecosystem Services

Babaharinand Saket[1] and Anand Chaurasia[2]

[1]Research Scholar- Department of Botany, Maharaja Chhatrasal Bundelkhand University, Chhatarpur (M.P.), India.

[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Botany, PMCoE Chhatrasal Govt. P.G. College, Panna, M.P., India.

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Corresponding Author: Dr. Anand Chaurasia, Assistant Professor, Department of Botany, PMCoE Chhatrasal Govt. P.G. College, Panna, M.P., India.

Email ID:dr.anandchaurasia@mp.gov.in

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Abstract:

The accelerating pace of global trade and climate change has significantly influenced ecological stability worldwide. One of the most critical consequences of these processes is the spread of Invasive Alien Species (IAS), which are increasingly being transported across regions through trade activities and are thriving in new environments due to changing climatic conditions. Findings reveal that IAS follow major trade routes, with climate change enhancing their survival and establishment in diverse habitats. The resulting invasions pose serious threats to provisioning, regulating, supporting, and cultural ecosystem services, disrupting biodiversity and ecosystem functions vital to human well-being. It emphasizes the urgent need for integrated strategies that combine ecological, economic, and regulatory approaches to mitigate the impacts of IAS and safeguard ecosystem resilience. The research contributes to a growing body of knowledge essential for informed policymaking and sustainable environmental management in the face of global change.

Introduction:

In an increasingly interconnected world, global trade has become a crucial driver of profitable growth. Still, it has also led to unintended ecological consequences, most notably the large-scale introduction and spread of Invasive Alien Species (IAS), Galil et al., 2021; Lamsal et al., 2019. These species, introduced either deliberately or accidentally across biogeographic boundaries, can oppressively disrupt native ecosystems Miner, et al., 2020. At the same time, climate change is altering temperature regimes, rush patterns, and niche conditions, thereby creating favorable surroundings for the establishment and proliferation of IAS Connette, et al., 2021, Ramesh, et al., 2021. The crossroad of global trade and climate change has significantly amplified the pitfalls of natural irruptions, which in turn hang vital ecosystem services such as pollination, nutrient cycling, brackish vacuity, and climate regulation.

The impact of IAS is far-reaching, affecting husbandry, forestry, mortal health, and biodiversity. As these species spread, they frequently outcompete native species, modify territories, and degrade ecosystem functions. These dislocations undermine the adaptability of ecosystems and compromise the services they give to mortal societies Juozaitienė et al., 2023; Espíndola, 2020. Despite growing mindfulness, there remains a gap in intertwined policy fabrics that address both climate change and natural disasters in the environment of global tradeNaeem, et al., 2009. This composition aims to critically examine how the concerted forces of global trade and climate change contribute to the spread of IAS and to assess their accretive impacts on ecosystem services. Understanding this liaison is essential for designing effective strategies to alleviate ecological pitfalls and promote sustainable environmental governance.

Methodology:

1. Research Design: The research is based on a mixed-methods explanatory framework, where quantitative techniques are combined with qualitative assessments. This design is chosen because the drivers of invasive alien species (IAS) – trade, transportation Puchałka, 2021 and climate change – operate at multiple scales and require both statistical evaluation and contextual interpretation. Statistical analysis, spatial mapping, and predictive models are used to explore relationships

between global trade, climate variability, and IAS spread. At the same time, an in-depth review of existing regulations and case studies provides

insight into governance challenges. In the Indian setting, this design is especially important since the country functions as both a major trade corridor and a climate-sensitive biodiversity hotspot Sintayehu, 2020. Ports such as Mumbai, Kochi, and Chennai are gateways for species introductions, while ecosystems like the Western Ghats and Indo-Gangetic plains are already under stress from IAS expansion.

2. Data Sources: The study draws entirely on secondary sources of information. Trade information is accessed from the UN Comtrade and World Bank databases, while Indian trade statistics are obtained from the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Climatic data are derived from WorldClim and CMIP6 projections. For India, additional climate records are taken from the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) and the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) [18], [19]. Invasive species data come from the Global Invasive Species Database (GISD), the CABI Invasive Species Compendium, and the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF). For the Indian context, supplementary records are consulted from the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA), the Botanical Survey of India (BSI), and the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI). Ecosystem service indicators are gathered from international sources like FAO, IUCN, and UNEP, and from Indian institutions such as the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

3. Study Population and Sampling: The global study population consists of countries and their ecosystems, but India is selected as a core case study because of its unique combination of high biodiversity and increasing global connectivity. A purposive sampling Bellard, et al., 2013, method is applied to invasive species selection. Species are included based on: Availability of reliable distribution data. Clear evidence of trade-linked introduction pathways. Documented ecological or economic impacts. In the Indian context, representative IAS such as *Parthenium hysterophorus*, *Lantana camara*, *Prosopis juliflora*, and *Eichhornia crassipes* are emphasized due to their proven damage to agriculture, forestry, and freshwater systems Shi, et al., 2015. The time frame under review extends from 2000 to 2024, covering both India's rapid economic integration and its exposure to intensified climate pressures.

4. Variables and Measurements:

Independent variables: International and domestic trade flows (imports, exports, and shipping volumes), along with climate change indicators (temperature increase, rainfall variability, extreme events). Dependent variables: IAS occurrence, geographic spread, and ecological impacts, especially their influence on ecosystem services. Control variables: National income, land-use change, and institutional quality, which may indirectly affect IAS dynamics for India, rapid urbanization, agricultural intensification, and land-use conversion are significant contextual variables enabling IAS establishment and persistence.

5. Data Collection Procedures: Data collection follows a structured process:

Retrieval of datasets from international and Indian repositories.

Cleaning and harmonizing records across time and space. Standardizing trade data using global country codes and IAS names with accepted scientific taxonomies. Integrating supplementary information from Indian legislation and official reports such as Wan, et al., 2017 the Biological Diversity Act (2002) and the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP).

6. Data Processing and Management: After collection, datasets are processed using statistical packages (SPSS, R) and GIS tools (ArcGIS, QGIS). Trade statistics are matched with IAS pathways like ballast water discharge, wood imports, and horticultural trade. Climatic data are integrated into species distribution models (e.g., MaxEnt) to project future IAS ranges, Sullivan, et al., 2010. For India, particular attention is given to ecologically fragile zones such as the Northeast Himalayas and Western Ghats. All data are stored with version control and metadata documentation to ensure transparency and reproducibility.

7. Analytical Methods: Regression techniques are used to quantify the effect of trade and climate on IAS introductions Sullivan, et al., 2010. Species distribution modeling predicts the potential spread of IAS under present and projected climatic conditions. Hotspot mapping identifies areas most vulnerable to IAS invasions, including Indian regions like the Sundarbans and Ganga basin. Panel data analysis evaluates how IAS impacts ecosystem services over the 24-year period.

8. Policy and Qualitative Analysis: The qualitative strand involves reviewing global agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), as well as Indian legal frameworks like the Plant Quarantine Order (2003) and the Biological Diversity Act (2002) Sorte, et

al., 2010.

Case studies are used to highlight governance challenges: Andaman & Nicobar Islands, where port traffic has enabled marine IAS introduction. Northeast Indi, where cross-border trade with Myanmar and China accelerates species spread. Western Ghats, where Lantana camara dominates forest ecosystems, threatening native biodiversity and forest regeneration.

9. Ethical Considerations: The research relies exclusively on secondary datasets that are publicly accessible. All sources are appropriately acknowledged, and international citation standards are followed. When referring to Indian datasets and government reports, institutional guidelines are respected Pepper, 2013. In cases where expert opinion or policy interpretation is required, anonymity and confidentiality are maintained.

10. Limitations of the Study: Despite a robust design, some limitations exist: IAS are underreported in many regions, particularly in India's Himalayan and tribal areas. Monitoring capacities differ across countries, which may create inconsistencies. The use of proxies for ecosystem services may not fully capture socio-cultural values and livelihood dependencies in India. The global focus may dilute local context, although Indian case studies are used to address this gap. To reduce these weaknesses, the study uses data triangulation, multiple datasets, and cross-verification with national records.

OBSERVATION:

The review and data analysis revealed several critical patterns and trends demonstrating the interconnectedness of global trade, climate change, and the spread of Invasive Alien Species (IAS), as well as their cascading impacts on ecosystem services. Increased IAS excursions along trade routes. Trade Routes Regions with high volumes of international trade, such as major ports and trade hubs, exhibited a higher frequency of IAS introductions. Notably, invasive species were found to follow well-established commodity transport pathways, including maritime shipping, air cargo, and land-based logistics. This suggests a strong correlation between trade intensity and biological invasions, especially in biodiversity-rich developing nations with less stringent biosecurity measures. Climate Change Facilitating the Establishment of IAS. Climate data analysis indicated that warming temperatures, shifts in precipitation patterns, and increased frequency of extreme events are creating more favorable conditions for IAS to establish in previously inhospitable areas. For example,Hussain et al., 2021 subtropical

invasive species are expanding their range into temperate zones, and altered seasonal patterns are extending breeding and growth periods for certain aggressive invaders. Ecosystem Services Under Threat: The most heavily impacted ecosystem services include: Provisioning Services: IAS has reduced agricultural productivity by competing with native crops, introducing pests, and spreading plant diseases (e.g., Fall army worm in Africa and Asia). Regulating Services: Invasive plant species have altered fire regimes and water cycles, while invasive predators have disrupted natural pest control systems. Cultural Services: IAS invasion in ecologically sensitive or sacred areas (e.g., forests, wetlands) has affected local communities' cultural and recreational engagement with nature. Supporting Services: IAS often outcompetes or predates native pollinators, decomposers, and nitrogen-fixing organisms, thereby disrupting nutrient cycling and soil health.

Geographic Hotspots Identified: The analysis highlighted certain IAS "hotspots," such as island nations, coastal ecosystems, and tropical biodiversity hotspots (e.g., Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Pacific Islands), where both trade exposure and climate vulnerability are high Sorte, et al., 2010.

Many national strategies focus narrowly on either climate adaptation or trade regulation without accounting for their joint influence on IAS risk.

Results and Discussion

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Geographic Hotspots Identified: The analysis highlighted certain IAS "hotspots," such as island nations, coastal ecosystems, and tropical biodiversity hotspots (e.g., Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Pacific Islands), where both trade exposure and climate vulnerability are high.

Policy and Management Gaps: Observations across the literature point to a significant lack of integrated policy frameworks that simultaneously address trade, climate, and biological invasions. Many national strategies focus narrowly on either climate adaptation or trade regulation without accounting for their joint influence on IAS risk.

The findings of this study highlight the complex and often underestimated relationship between

global trade, climate change, and the spread of Invasive Alien Species (IAS). These three factors interact in a mutually reinforcing cycle that is accelerating ecological change and putting immense pressure on natural systems.

Trade as a Primary Pathway: Global trade continues to be a major driver in the unintentional transport of invasive species. As trade routes expand and become more interconnected, the likelihood of species being moved across ecosystems increases. This is especially true for container shipping, agricultural imports, and live animal and plant trade. The movement of goods is rarely accompanied by adequate inspection or treatment measures, particularly in developing countries, leading to the unchecked spread of IAS.

Climate Change as a Facilitator: Climate change does not directly introduce IAS but significantly enhances their ability to survive and thrive in new regions. Rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and more frequent extreme weather events create favorable conditions for IAS establishment. For example, species that were once limited to tropical climates are now spreading into temperate zones, where native species may not be well adapted to compete or defend themselves.

Cumulative Impact on Ecosystem Services: The combined effect of IAS and climate change is particularly destructive to ecosystem services. In many cases, IAS reduce the availability and quality of food, water, and other resources that humans and wildlife depend on. Invasive plants may consume excessive water or alter soil chemistry, while invasive predators and pathogens may directly threaten native species that play vital ecological roles. The degradation of ecosystem services also has socioeconomic consequences, especially for communities dependent on agriculture, forestry, or ecotourism. For instance, invasive pests can lead to crop failure, increased use of pesticides, and loss of pollinators, ultimately reducing food security and income sources.

Gaps in Management and Policy: One of the most significant challenges is the lack of coordinated global and national frameworks to manage IAS in the context of trade and climate change. While many countries have environmental or climate policies in place, few integrate IAS monitoring or prevention into their broader development agendas. Moreover,

enforcement of existing regulations is often weak due to limited resources, lack of awareness, or low political priority. There is a need for integrated policies that simultaneously address the ecological, economic, and social aspects of IAS, especially in vulnerable regions. Early detection systems, stricter trade inspections, climate-resilient ecosystems, and public awareness campaigns can play a vital role in reducing the spread and impact of invasive species.

Future Research Needs: Further research is needed to better understand how climate variables influence the biology of IAS, how global trade patterns evolve, and how different ecosystems respond to multiple stressors. Predictive modeling and risk mapping could also be enhanced to help decision-makers target interventions more effectively**.**

This study explores the growing ecological threat posed by the combined forces of global trade and climate change, particularly in accelerating the spread of Invasive Alien Species (IAS). As international trade expands, the accidental transportation of species across regions has become more frequent, with many of these species establishing themselves in non-native environments. Climate change further amplifies this issue by creating favorable conditions—such as rising temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns—that allow IAS to thrive in new ecosystems. The presence of IAS has been observed to disrupt critical ecosystem services. These include provisioning services like food and water supply, regulating services such as pest control and water purification, and supporting functions like pollination and nutrient cycling. Many native species and ecological processes are being displaced or weakened by fast-spreading invasive organisms, leading to biodiversity loss and ecological imbalance.

The study also identifies regional hotspots—such as coastal zones, island nations, and tropical ecosystems—that are particularly vulnerable due to high trade exposure and climate sensitivity. Despite these growing risks, there is a lack of integrated and coordinated policy measures to manage IAS under the dual pressures of global trade and climate change. In conclusion, the findings highlight an urgent need for stronger monitoring systems, biosecurity measures, climate-resilient policies, and international cooperation to address the complex,

interlinked challenges posed by IAS. Without proactive intervention, the degradation of ecosystem services could have severe environmental and socio-economic consequences worldwide.

Conclusion:

The spread of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) is a growing global concern, intensified by two powerful forces: international trade and climate change. This research highlights how the movement of goods and the warming of the planet together create ideal conditions for IAS to invade new ecosystems. These invasions disrupt ecological balance, harm native biodiversity, and degrade critical ecosystem services that support human livelihoods, such as agriculture, clean water, pollination, and climate regulation.

The study also reveals that regions with high trade activity and climate vulnerability—such as island nations, coastal areas, and tropical ecosystems—are most at risk. Despite the seriousness of the threat, many countries lack integrated policies or enforcement systems to prevent and manage biological invasions effectively. To address this growing challenge, there is an urgent need for global cooperation and action. Preventive strategies should include stricter trade inspections, improved climate adaptation planning, early detection systems, and public awareness initiatives. Integrated policy frameworks that consider trade, climate, and biodiversity together can help reduce the risks posed by IAS and protect ecosystem services for future generations.

Table 1: Examples of Major Invasive Alien Species (IAS) in India and their Ecosystem Impacts

Sr. No.	Invasive Species	Trade Pathway / Entry Route	Affected Region(s)	Impact on Ecosystem Service
1.	Eichhornia crassipes (Water hyacinth)	Ornamental plant trade, Ballast water	Assam, Bihar, Kerala	Block irrigation canals, reduces fisheries, water transport.
2.	Parthenium hysterophorus	Contaminated grain imports	North and Central India	Reduces crop yields, causes human allergies, decreases soil fertility
3.	Lantana camara	Forestry introduction (colonial)	Himalayan foothills, MP, Uttarakhand	Alters forest fire regimes, Displaces Native Flora.
4.	Prosopis juliflora	Introduced for afforestation	Rajsthan,Gujrat, Tamilnaddu	Reduces fodder supply, depletes groundwater, soil salinity.
5.	Spodoptera frugiperda (Fall Armyworm)	Maize import (2018)	Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha	Reduces maize production, increases pesticide use.
6.	Perna viridis (Green mussel)	Marine ballast water	Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea.	Damages fisheries, alters coral reef system.

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