VOLUME 5 | ISSUE 3

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED LEGAL RESEARCH

JUDICIAL APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL PIL IN INDIA

- Anamika Patel[1] & Dr. Varun Srivastava[2]
-

Climate change is now a significant issue in the global environmental narrative, and India's involvement in treaties such as the "UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, 2015" has established national climate policy and law.While Indian courts have not ruled on many public interest litigations (PILs) seeking to invoke climate change treaties, there is an increasing recognition in judicial decisions of India's international climate obligations. For example, the Court[3] directed the government to submit steps it would take to protect wetlands in the country during the course of climate change and as per international commitments to maintaining the natural sink of carbons.

Climate related PILs additionally — those questioning unsustainable infrastructure projects, air pollution, and tree felling, for example — are also increasingly using India's global environment commitments as persuasive bases for judicial intervention.

Evolution of Environmental PIL Through Judicial Activism

The evolution of PIL in Indian environmental jurisprudence is inextricable from the evolution of the Indian judiciary from a traditional dispute-resolver to a purposeful institution engaging with issues of public importance. Environmental pilots in the guise of a judicial innovation, via which the courts can take up these ecological issues for the marginalized, voiceless, and the generation to come. Central to this movement is judicial activism, a philosophy that emphasizes a departure from legal formalism toward a more purposive, participatory, and justice-oriented reading of the law.

Emergence of Judicial Activism in Environmental Matters in India in the Early 1980s This shift was driven by the understanding that environmental degradation most severely affects the poor and that access to justice must expand beyond traditional litigation-based models.

[1] Student at Amity University Noida
[2] Assistant Professor at Amity University Noida
[3] *M.K. Balakrishnan v. Union of India* (2017) 7 SCC 805.

Through PIL, as a tool of procedural innovation, courts were able to introduce innovative measures for overcoming procedural hurdles regarding intervention in matters of ecological preservation, construing the right to life within the ambit of Article 21 of the Constitution as one that encompasses the right to a healthy environment.

It was not merely legislative inertia that spurred the judiciary's foray into environmental protection but also a perceived inadequacy in existing statutory mechanisms that could contend with pressing ecological concerns. In a nation struggling with the realities of breakneck industrialization, urbanization, and resource depletion, PIL was a response to these multifaceted, systemic issues in which courts took an activist role in saving the environment and enjoyed the enforcement of the right to a healthy environment against state and non-state actors in contravention to environmental laws.

From Socio-Economic Rights to Environmental Rights

The socio-economic issues — prisoner's rights, bonded labour and slum dwellers' rights — defined the foundational years of PIL. But the pivot to environmental issues was both organic and imperative, as environmental degradation aggravates socio-economic disparities. This justiciability of environmental rights as part of the right to life in Article 21 began with an expansive interpretation, encompassing not just survival but the quality of life.

It is the same logic that, in 1985, led to "the Supreme Court shutting down limestone quarries in the Mussoorie Hills in the environmental public interest litigation case.[4]Here, the Supreme Court was able to do this on account of the large number of petitioners and their having filed a petition on behalf of the common man. The Court noted the tension between economic development and environmental protection" but gave primacy to long-term ecological balance over short-term industrial gain, marking a shift in judicial discourse.

The ruling was notable not only for its ecological ramifications, but the way it expanded standing, procedural flexibility, and judicial discretion. The Court treated letters as writ petitions, relaxed evidentiary requirements, and adopted a problem-solving approach.

Judicial Activism and theDoctrines in Environmental Jurisprudence

In the 1990s, there was a phase of doctrinal enrichment, in which the judiciary not only decided the individual cases of environmental harm but also came up with overarching principles that would guide environmental governance. Judicial activism in this sense was

[4]*Supra note,* ***20.***

not merely a means of redress, it was itself a mechanism of inscribing normative environmental standards.

The most notable example is the **Polluter Pays Principle**, formally adopted in a landmark case.[5], where the Supreme Court directed polluters to bear the cost of remediation. The Court's decision was not based on explicit statutory provisions but on international environmental principles and the judiciary's interpretation of constitutional mandates.

Similarly, in **Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union of India** [(1996) 5 SCC 647], the Court embraced the **Precautionary Principle**, stating that the lack of scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation. Here, the judiciary assumed a legislative-like role, framing policy norms under the garb of constitutional interpretation.

Such activism has not been without criticism. Detractors argue that judicial overreach compromises democratic accountability and expertise-driven governance. However, in a context where legislative and executive inertia often stalls environmental reform, judicial activism has served as a necessary counterbalance and a catalyst for systemic change.

Environmental PIL as a Tool for Procedural and Substantive Justice

Environmental PILs have expanded the procedural contours of access to justice. By granting standing to concerned citizens, NGOs, and even lawyers through epistolary jurisdiction, courts have democratized environmental governance. The focus shifted from the aggrieved individual to the collective interest—be it the right of tribal communities to forest access, the preservation of rivers from pollution, or the conservation of endangered species.

A significant instance of this approach was seen in the Ganga Case.[6], where the Court not only addressed pollution caused by tanneries along the Ganga but also issued detailed directions for their closure or relocation, and mandated the setting up of pollution control mechanisms. However, the orders in the Mehta cases also highlight how environmental PILs served as vehicles for long-term, structural reform, achieved through continuous mandamus and regular oversight by the court.

Further, those cases offered opportunities for the judiciary to create substantive environmental rights out of constitutional and statutory silences. Intergenerational equity, for

[5]*Supra note,* ***38.***
[6]*M.C. Mehta v. Union of India (Ganga Pollution Case)* (1988) 1 SCC 471.

example, was judicially innovated, which led to the recognition that environmental resources should be preserved not only for the current generation's use but also for future generations.

The judiciary's proactive role in environmental PILs, at least till now, has been lauded, but it has also put the spotlight on the limits of judicial overreach. In several cases, the courts have ventured into the hotly contested domains of administration and policy-making, ordering closures, setting emission standards, and even establishing oversight committees.

For, in the Delhi vehicular pollution cases, the Supreme Court ran with its executive policy-making by ordering the conversion of all public transport to CNG. While this decision arguably brought environmental benefits, it faced criticism for not consulting stakeholders directly impacted by it.

Notwithstanding such criticisms, judicial activism in environmental PILs has played a significant role in creating sensitivity in state machinery and initiating legislative changes. Decades of insisting by the judiciary of the need for specialized environmental adjudication inspired the federally enacting of institutions like the "National Environmental Appellate Authority(1997) and subsequently, the National Green Tribunal (2010)".

Landmark Decisions of the Supreme Court and the High Courts

The trajectory of environmental jurisprudence in India is closely intertwined with several landmark decisions rendered by the Supreme Court and different High Courts. Such judgments not only as marker of judicial proactivity in environmental governance but also establish the doctrinal and institutional underpinnings of PIL on environmental issues. In doing so, the courts have expanded the scope of the right to life embodied in Article 21, developed important principles of law regarding the environment, and ensured accountability mechanisms to control pollution and preserve the transient life-support system of nature. These are instances of the evolution of the environmental PILs and how the judiciary accommodates as a sentinel (a bridge between the parties) and a policy-maker.

RatlamMunicipality v. Vardichand (1980)

This landmark case[7]It is seen as the foundation of environmental PILs in India. Though it was not a PIL in the form that we understand today, it did set the stage for judicial intervention in the matters of public health and environmental hygiene. The case began when residents of Ratlam city griped in a petition under Section 133 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC)

[7]*Ratlam Municipality v. Vardichand* (1980) 4 SCC 162.

that while rats had set up home in open drains, garbage was never collected, and mosquitoes bred in their locality due to neglect by the municipal authorities.

Justice Krishna Iyer, who gave a powerful and socially conscious verdict, said that money should not be a reason for a municipality to neglect its statutory duties. He famously observed:

"The State shall see that the Article 47 becomes a fundamental principle of governance in as much as the State takes steps for the improvement of public health."

This ruling has a broad scope that emphasized that neglect of the environment causes direct impact to public health and therefore should be dealt with under the provisions of Article 21. This laid the ground for PILs to come by showing that courts could, in fact, compel authorities to act in the interest of the public even in the absence of individual harm or breach of contract.

M.C. Mehta v. Union of India (1986) – Ganga Pollution Case[8]

PILs to protect the environment. Perhaps the most famous series of environmental PILs that India ever saw was filed by advocate"M.C. Mehta. Bandi says that in the Ganga Pollution case, Mehta filed a writ petition before the Supreme Court to restrain tanneries from discharging untreated effluents into the Ganga River."

The Supreme Court found that while the industries were playing a role in economic development, they could not be permitted to pollute a river that was essential for millions. The Court had ordered closure of non-complying tanneries and for the setting up of Effluent Treatment Plants (ETPs). This case importantly established the "precautionary approach" and made it clear that development must not be at the cost of the environment.

Justice P.N. Bhagwati expanded the meaning of Article 21 by asserting:

"The right to live is a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution, and it includes the right of enjoyment of pollution-free water and air for full enjoyment of life."

The Court's approach transformed PILs from instruments of relief into mechanisms of governance reform, leading to sustained judicial monitoring and structural directives for pollution control.

[8] *M.C. Mehta vs Union Of India &Ors*. 1988 AIR 1115

Vellore CitizensWelfare Forum v. Union of India (1996)[9]

This landmark case introduced and legitimized the "**Precautionary Principle** and the **Polluter Pays Principle"** within Indian law, which until then were mostly found in international environmental instruments. "The petition was filed against the large-scale pollution caused by tanneries in Tamil Nadu, which discharged untreated effluents into agricultural fields, water bodies", and the general environment.

The Supreme Court took judicial notice of reports by expert committees and held that the pollution by tanneries violated the fundamental rights of people under Article 21. It applied the principles of sustainable development and emphasized the duty of the State to ensure ecological balance. The Court held:

"Remediation of the damaged environment is part of the process of sustainable development and as such polluter is liable to pay the cost to the individual sufferers as well as the cost of reversing the damaged ecology."

This judgment was a turning point in Indian environmental law, for it domesticated key international principles and made them justifiable under Indian constitutional and statutory frameworks.

T.N. GodavarmanThirumulpad v. Union of India (1997 onwards)[10]

A PIL to save the Nilgiri forests eventually became a sprawling environmental litigation and has had huge consequences for forest governance in India. Using this case, the Supreme Court broadly defined "forests," reasoning that these contained areas were not formally designated as such but satisfied ecological criteria.

The most significant aspect of this case was the Court's application of "the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980" to stop deforestation and regulate tree felling and non-forest diversions in forests areas. It established the "Central Empowered Committee (CEC)" to supervise compliance and advise the Court, thereby institutionalising judicial oversight.

In this case, we saw the judicial expansion of the parameters of statutory interpretation, as well as the emergence of continuing mandamus—the Court of the Period retained jurisdiction to ensure that implementation happened over the longer term. It also illustrated

[9]*Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum vs Union Of India &Ors*., AIR 1996 SUPREME COURT 2715
[10]*T.N. GodavarmanThirumulpad vs Union Of India &Ors.,* AIR 2012 SUPREME COURT 1254

how PILs could go beyond episodic litigation and develop into mechanisms of sustained policy oversight.

A.P. Pollution Control Board v. M.V. Nayudu (1999)[11]

The case involved a dispute between industrial development and drinking water protection. "The Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board had" hurriedly approved an industrial unit to build a chemical factory adjacent to two large water reservoirs. This decision was challenged by the petitioner on the grounds that the clearance was given without proper scientific evaluation of environmental risks.

This afforded the Supreme Court an opportunity to examine the role of scientific evidence in adjudication over the environment. It explored the inadequacies of adversarial legal processes as a means of assessing complex ecological data and argued for expertise-based governance of environmental issues.

In a path-breaking observation, the Court sought the establishment of environment courts manned with judicial and technical members—this eventually led to the formation of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) as well. The Court reaffirmed the Precautionary Principle and stated:

"Where there is a threat of serious or irreversible damage, lack of scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation."

The case served as an important reminder for the judiciary to continue upholding the principle of science-based action and highlighted its leadership in progressively recommending systemic reformsto improve the efficacy of the adjudication process.

Judicial Impact

Together, these judgments are demonstrative of the judiciary's progressive and transformative continued approach to environmental protection. Through liberal interpretation of constitutional provisions, acceptance of international environmental doctrines, and formulation of institutional innovations, Indian courts have made environmental PILs the cornerstone of governance.

Each case captures a distinct aspect of judicial environmentalism — the expansion of fundamental rights, doctrinal enhancement, administrative oversight scientific sensitivity.

[11] *A.P. Pollution Control Board vs Prof.M.V.Nayudu (Retd.) & Others*, AIR 1999 SUPREME COURT 812

Perhaps most crucially, the rulings carry unequivocal judicial intent: to place ecological justice within the framework of constitutional morality and democratic accountability.

While criticisms of judicial overreach endure, the result of these landmark judgments is far-reaching. They have shaped environmental policy, awakened public consciousness, and given vulnerable communities a voice in ecological governance. These decisions will continue to guide courtrooms and future legal battles as we advance, serving as both judicial touchstones and ethical guideposts for future environmental causes of action across India.

Public Trust Doctrine and Polluter Pays Principle in Judicial Rulings

The growth of Environmental PILs in India has been closely interlinked with the evolution and application of significant legal tenets, in particular,"the Public Trust Doctrine and the Polluter Pays Principle." These are two concepts that have worked, at certain times, like normative pillars for the judges' reasoning on environmental cases and also led the courts to the conclusion that can require both accountability and stewardship duties from the State and private actors. The Indian courts have not only borrowed these doctrines from international jurisprudence but also modified and indigenised them in the constitutional and statutory law. In this manner, they have played out a distinct counter-narrative in the evolution of Indian environmental law that reasserts the judiciary's commitment to ecological protection while at the same time keeping principles of equity and justice at the heart of environmental governance.

The Public Trust Doctrine: A Judicial Claim of Ecological Stewardship

The Public Trust Doctrine (PTD) is based on the ancient conception that some commons like air, water, forests, sea, etc., are held in trust by the State for the benefit of the public at large. These resources were not designed to be privately owned and should be conserved for past, present, and future generations. The doctrine found its origins in Roman law, which held that res communes—things that belong to everyone—should not be owned. Its renaissance in Anglo-American jurisprudence — born notably of the 19th century Illinois Central Railroad case in the United States — became the reference point for judicial environmentalism worldwide.

In the Indian context, the PTD was first meaningfully enunciated and applied in alandmark case.[12] The case was in contention when a privatized company associated with a previous Minister decided to imitate the appending way of the BeasRiver to safeguard a vacation spot

[12]*M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath*, (1997) 1 SCC 388.

constructed on woodland beside land rented from the State. The Supreme Court not only found that such action was illegal but based its judgment squarely on the Public Trust Doctrine. The Court observed:

"The State is the trustee of all natural resources, which are by nature meant for public use and enjoyment. The State is under a legal duty to protect the natural resources. These resources meant for public use cannot be converted into private ownership."

This decision made it clear once and for all that the government does not own natural resources outright but holds them in trust for the people. This principle is now being repeatedly relied on in many subsequent orders to 'unroot' illegal encroachments, to prevent forest diversions, to ensure access to environmental resources in a manner that will conserve it in public interest, etc.

The other important application of PTD was seen in another landmark case.[13], where the Court held that in order for the State to allow private control of resources and property of public significance, such allocation must relate to a broader public interest. Notably, PTD has also been employed in rulings relating to coastal regulation zones, protection of wetlands, and riverfront development, illustrating its universal application.

The Indian judiciary has, through this doctrine, also institutionalised the notion that environmental resources cannot simply be rendered as instruments of economic onslaught, which must be preserved as public goods. PTD is a tool for judicial protection against encroaching upon State, as well as, the private on the environment manifested through just laws governing the ecology, environmental justice, and intergenerational equity.

The Polluter Pays Principle: Remedial and Preventive Liability

The Polluter Pays Principle (PPP) emerged as a fundamental environmental principle in international discussions during the late 20th century, notably under the aegis of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)." It reflects the idea that the polluter should pay: Those responsible for pollution or environmental harm should bear the cost of remediation and compensation. Specifically,in the Indian context, PPP had been adopted not only as a remedial doctrine but also as an overarching environment accountability framework.

[13]*Fomento Resorts & Hotels Ltd. v. Minguel Martins* (2009) 3 SCC 571.

One of the most significant milestones in the application of PPP. In the case[14]Chemical industries located in Bichhri village, Rajasthan, were discharging toxic effluents that had contaminated groundwater and caused immense ecological devastation. The Court laid down huge financial liability on the polluters and stated:

"Once the activity carried on is hazardous or inherently dangerous, the person carrying on such activity is liable to make good the loss caused to any other person by his activity… the polluting industries are liable to compensate for the harm caused."

In this case, the Court not only negated the liability defense made by the polluter parties but made the PPP a de jure binding obligation. It represented a break with old-style, fault-based tortious liability and stamped the message that ecological harm should attract strict responsibility, even liability without finding fault.

This principle was further cemented in a judgment delivered by the Supreme Court in Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union of India (1996), where the Court held that the PPP was part of the "law of the land" in India. Justice Kuldip Singh stated:

"The 'Polluter Pays' principle as interpreted by this Court means that the absolute liability for harm to the environment extends not only to compensate the victims of pollution but also the cost of restoring the environmental degradation."

This focus on restoration instead of simply compensation demonstrates the Court's dedication to environmental sustainability. It not only penalises the polluter but makes him invest in environment remediating and technological upgradation and hence will lead to preventive long-term mechanisms.

Another landmark case[15] of PPP enforcement, where, the Supreme Court directed Sterlite to pay ₹100 crore for the pollution caused by its copper smelting facility in Tamil Nadu. This was punitive, but also reparative, with the proceeds going toward environmental restoration. Such judicial directions, though reflect a maturing jurisprudence that transcends symbolic penalties and transmutes into real world ecological rectification.

Both the "Public Trust Doctrine and the Polluter pays Principle have been harmoniously incorporated with constitutional provisions, especially Article 21 (Right to Life), Article 48A (Protection and improvement of environment) and Article 51A(g) (Fundamental Duty to

[14]*Supra note, 38.*
[15]*Sterlite Industries (I) Ltd. v. Union of India* (2013) 4 SCC 575.

Protect Environment).” These sub-doctrines have been employed by the Indian judiciary to fill the normative void between constitutional aspirations and the reality of on-ground enforcement of environmental protection.

In a landmark case[16] In context, that spoke to the importation of hazardous waste and the shipbreaking industry and also to the fact that PTD did not live in a vacuum—the Court emphasized the viability of both PTD and PPP playing a vital role in ensuring sustainable environmental governance. In connecting doctrinal principles to constitutional values, the Court has indicated that environmental protection is not merely a matter of policy preference; it is a constitutionally required end.

Role of NGT in PILs

The establishment of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in 2010 was a watershed moment in the evolution of environmental jurisprudence in India. Originally intended to be like a specialised body to provide fast and effective disposal of cases about protection and conservation of environment and natural resources, the NGT has become a significant forum for PIL in environmental litigations. Its statutory pedigree, broad mandate, and forward-thinking stance on environmental justice have given citizens and activists unprecedented access to the courts to seek redress for ecological injuries.

Legal Framework and Jurisdiction of NGT

The ruling legislation that constituted NGT is the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010. Section 14[17] of the Act bestows original jurisdiction on the Tribunal in all civil cases arising from a substantial question concerning the environment, which is related to the enactment of the following six laws:

1. “The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974
2. The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1977
3. Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980
4. The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981
5. The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
6. the Biological Diversity Act, 2002.”

[16] *Research Foundation for Science Technology and Natural Resource Policy v. Union of India* (2005) 10 SCC 510.

[17] The National Green Tribunal Act, 2010, § 14 (India).

Section 15[18]Givespower to NGT for providing relief and compensation to the victims of pollution and environmental degradation. Article 16[19]Allows styles for appeals against orders of quasi-judicial authorities under the said Acts.

The Tribunal further follows the "principles of natural justice and is not stuck with the technical procedures of the Civil Procedure Code, 1908, which makes it a relatively easy-to-approach forum for environmental PILs. Most importantly, the Act requires the NGT to apply the Polluter Pays Principle and Precautionary Principle and thereby institutionalises these doctrines into the legal framework of environmental adjudication in India.

The democratisation of environmental litigation is one of the most important contributions of the NGT. Before it was established, petitioners frequently had to resort to constitutional courts for redress, with the process being cumbersome and costly as well as procedurally convoluted. In contrast, the NGT offers a specialised, time-bound mechanism for the adjudication of environment disputes. Section 18[20]The Act also provides for this, allowing any person, even an individual, an NGO, or a government body, to approach the Tribunal.

The six-month statutory time limit for the disposal of cases (though it is not always enforced) is another factor for the increased efficiency of the Tribunal. It decentralizes access by providing for its presence in different zones (principal bench in New Delhi and four other zonal benches), thereby minimizing geographical barriers to justice.

Noteworthy PILs and Judgments by the NGT

A spectrum of incidents led to landmark decisions by the NGT, which, over the years, has paved the way for the extension and enforcement of environmental norms through the PIL mechanism. The ***Almitra H. Patel v. Union of India (2014)***[21]Case is one such example that addresses the issue of unregulated municipal solid waste. The Tribunal, while stating that states and municipalities are bound to follow the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, and ensure scientific disposal of waste, held that the Act of Conservation of Environment is one such Act under Article 21 of the Constitution as the same is fundamentally related to the right to a clean environment.

[18] The National Green Tribunal Act, 2010, § 15 (India).
[19] *ibid, see* § 16.
[20] *ibid, see* § 18.
[21] (2014) 15 SCC 591.

Another case[22], involving the Art of Living Foundation's cultural event, exemplifies the NGT's proactive stance. The Tribunal held the organisers responsible for significant damage to the Yamuna floodplains and imposed a penalty for restoration. Although the quantum of compensation was debated, the judgment highlighted the Tribunal's willingness to impose environmental costs and safeguard fragile ecosystems.

The NGT[23]Overturned the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board's closure order, though it later faced criticism and was eventually set aside by the Supreme Court. Nonetheless, the Tribunal's involvement demonstrated its central role in mediating industrial-environmental conflicts within the broader PIL framework.

Integration with Constitutional and Environmental Norms

Despite being a statutory body, the NGT functions within the larger constitutional framework that guarantees environmental rights. Its decisions usually invoke Article 21 (Right to Life), and hence its interpretations are aligned with those of the Supreme Court. Additionally, its consistent invocation of Article 48A and Article 51A(g) as expressed in various provisions of the Constitution, accords both the Directive Principles and Fundamental Duties substantive meaning in the sphere of environment.

The Tribunal has also relied on principles of international environmental rights outlined in the Rio Declaration, such as sustainable development, intergenerational equity, and the obligation to undertake environmental impact assessments. The NGT has developed a progressive rights-based approach to environmental PILs by aligning statutory interpretation with global environmental jurisprudence.

And yet, the NGT remains an underperformer besieged by delays, staff shortages, and limited enforcement powers. The issue of Suo motu powers is a long-debated conversation until, finally, the Supreme Court.[24]Held that it was correct for the NGT to take cognizance of the matter, Suo motu, in environmental cases as well. This decision radically increased the jurisdiction of the Tribunal to take a proactive approach to situations affecting the public.

Even several other states have been reluctant to comply with the NGT orders, leading to a gradual push for better implementation. The very existence of the Tribunal, however, would

[22]*Manoj Misra v. Union of India*, (2017) 11 SCC 574.
[23]*Vedanta Ltd. v. Union of India*, (2018) 15 SCC 1.
[24]*Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai v. Ankita Sinha*, (2021) 2 SCC 788.

have given a greater degree of judicial scrutiny of what were executive and industrial actions and added more teeth to environmental PILs.

Conclusion

The judicial approach to environmental Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in India has evolved into a robust tool for ensuring environmental protection and holding both the government and private entities accountable. The judiciary, especially through the Supreme Court, has played a pivotal role in expanding the scope of environmental rights and enforcing constitutional provisions like Article 21, which guarantees the right to a healthy environment. Courts have effectively used PIL as a mechanism to address violations of environmental laws, take suo motu actions, and introduce progressive concepts such as the "precautionary principle" and "polluter pays principle." The Indian judiciary has demonstrated a proactive stance in recognizing the link between environmental degradation and human rights, thereby encouraging sustainable development. However, challenges remain in balancing judicial activism with legislative and executive functions, ensuring that PIL continues to serve as an effective tool for environmental justice in the long term.