

*Law Audience Journal, Volume 6 & Issue 3, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2026,*  
*e-ISSN: 2581-6705, Indexed Journal, Impact Factor 5.988, Published at*  
<https://www.lawaudience.com/volume-6-issue-3/>, Pages: 447 to 454,

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### **Cite this article as:**

MS. MANJOT KAUR, “*The Effectiveness of Environmental Legal Framework in India: A Study*”, Vol.6 & Issue 3, Law Audience Journal (e-ISSN: 2581-6705), Pages 447 to 454 (19<sup>th</sup> April 2026), available at <https://www.lawaudience.com/the-effectiveness-of-environmental-legal-framework-in-india-a-study/>.

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## **Publisher Details:**

*Law Audience Journal (e-ISSN: 2581-6705),*

*Sole Proprietorship of Mr. Varun Kumar, Kharar, District.  
S.A.S, Nagar, Mohali, 140301,*

*Phone No(s): +91-8351033361 (WhatsApp),*

*Email ID(s): [lawjournal@lawaudience.com](mailto:lawjournal@lawaudience.com),  
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### **ABSTRACT:**

*“Environmental protection in India is a critical concern, with the country facing significant challenges such as air and water pollution, deforestation, climate change, and biodiversity loss. This research paper explores the role of environmental law in addressing these issues, tracing the historical evolution of India's environmental legislation from early conservation efforts to comprehensive modern frameworks. Through detailed examination, the paper assesses key environmental laws, including the **Environment Protection Act, Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act**, and the Forest Conservation Act, alongside the judiciary's contributions through **Public Interest Litigation (PIL)** and landmark judgments. Comparative analyses with global practices highlight differences in enforcement mechanisms and best practices from regions such as the **United States, European Union, and China**. The findings reveal that while India has made notable strides in environmental regulation, challenges such as enforcement gaps, regulatory overlaps, and limited resources continue to impede progress. Recommendations for strengthening India's environmental law framework are proposed, emphasizing improved enforcement, public participation, policy reforms, and technology integration. The study concludes by stressing the need for a balanced approach that aligns developmental and environmental objectives, ensuring sustainable growth for future generations”.*

### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

India faces numerous environmental challenges due to rapid industrialization, urbanization, and population growth, creating significant pressure on its natural resources. Some of the critical environmental issues include air and water pollution, deforestation, climate change, and waste management concerns. For example, air quality in cities like Delhi has reached hazardous levels, primarily due to vehicular emissions, industrial discharge, and construction activities, leading to severe health risks and environmental degradation. Similarly, water bodies such as the Ganges and Yamuna are heavily polluted, with industrial waste, untreated sewage, and agricultural runoff contributing to the contamination. This pollution poses risks not only to biodiversity but also to the health of millions who rely on these water sources.

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Environmental law plays a crucial role in balancing the demands of development with the imperative to protect natural resources. By establishing regulatory frameworks, environmental laws aim to control pollution, manage natural resources, and protect biodiversity. These laws are not only about prevention but also emphasize remediation and accountability, ensuring that industries and individuals adhere to standards that reduce ecological harm. The primary objective of environmental law is to create a system of checks and balances that prevents harmful activities, fosters sustainable development, and promotes the responsible use of natural resources. Environmental law in India also aligns with global standards and treaties, reflecting the country's commitment to tackling climate change and protecting biodiversity on an international scale. Furthermore, these laws facilitate the involvement of various stakeholders, including the judiciary, regulatory agencies, and civil society, in environmental governance.

## **II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS OF ENVIRONMENTAL LAW**

### **IN INDIA:**

The historical evolution of environmental law in India can be traced back to the pre independence era, where early legislation primarily focused on the conservation of forests and wildlife. Laws such as the *Indian Forest Act of 1927* were among the first to regulate forest resources, aiming to protect certain areas and restrict the exploitation of natural resources. These early regulations laid the groundwork for a more structured approach to environmental conservation, albeit limited in scope and effectiveness. In the post-independence period, there was a marked shift toward a comprehensive environmental framework, especially from the 1970s onward. This shift was largely due to rising awareness of environmental issues and the adverse impact of rapid industrialization. The 1970s and 1980s saw the enactment of key legislation, including the *Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1974* and the *Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1981*. These laws were the result of an increasing acknowledgment of the need for targeted policies to mitigate environmental degradation (*Sharma & Joshi, 2021*). Additionally, the Bhopal

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Gas Tragedy of 1984, one of the worst industrial disasters in history, served as a wake-up call for stronger regulatory frameworks, leading to the enactment of *the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986*. This law empowered the central government to take all necessary measures to protect and improve environmental quality, marking a significant turning point in India's environmental regulation. India's environmental legislation has also been influenced by its participation in international treaties and conventions. The country's commitment to global environmental standards began with the *Stockholm Conference in 1972*, which emphasized the need for international cooperation in environmental protection. India subsequently became a signatory to other major conventions, such as the *Rio Declaration (1992) and the Paris Agreement (2015)*, which reinforced its pledge to sustainable development and climate change mitigation. These international agreements have not only shaped India's policies but have also motivated the country to align its domestic laws with global environmental standards.

### **III. ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS IN INDIA:**

Environmental protection in India is supported by various constitutional provisions, legislative acts, and judicial interventions. The Indian Constitution incorporates environmental principles that provide a foundation for environmental laws and serve as guiding frameworks for both the government and citizens. *The Constitution's Article 48-A, introduced in 1976* as part of the Directive Principles of State Policy, directs the State to "*endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country*". Complementing this, *Article 51-A(g)* enshrines the fundamental duty of every citizen "*to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, rivers, and wildlife*". These provisions highlight the government's responsibility as well as the civic duty to prioritize environmental conservation. The Environment Protection Act, 1986, was a significant legislative response following the *Bhopal Gas Tragedy*. This Act empowers the central government to take all necessary measures to protect and improve the environment, including establishing standards for emissions and discharges, handling

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hazardous substances, and coordinating environmental policies. The Act provides a framework for setting environmental quality standards, establishing pollution control authorities, and implementing environmental safeguards across various sectors. *The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974*, was one of the earliest laws focused specifically on curbing pollution in India's water bodies. This Act empowers the establishment of Pollution Control Boards at the central and state levels, responsible for monitoring, preventing, and controlling water pollution. *The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981*, was enacted to regulate and control air pollution, with provisions for setting air quality standards and penalizing polluters. Together, these Acts mark a significant step toward addressing pollution in India. *The Forest Conservation Act, 1980*, aims to restrict the deforestation of forest lands and promote afforestation. Similarly, the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, provides comprehensive protections for wildlife, including the establishment of protected areas such as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, and aims to safeguard endangered species and their habitats.

#### **IV. ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND REGULATORY BODIES:**

The Indian government, through various ministries and regulatory bodies, plays a central role in framing, implementing, and enforcing environmental laws. *The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change* serves as the principal body responsible for environmental policymaking, conservation, and protection. MoEFCC formulates policies, oversees the implementation of environmental laws, and monitors programs aimed at reducing pollution and promoting sustainable resource use. National Action Plan on Climate Change and regulations on emissions and waste management, MoEFCC ensures that environmental considerations are incorporated into national development policies. *The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)* functions under the MoEFCC and is tasked with setting and enforcing pollution standards across the country. Established under the *Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974*, the CPCB monitors air and water quality, oversees waste management, and provides technical support to various pollution control initiatives. It

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is also responsible for establishing environmental norms for industries, advising the government on pollution-related matters, and conducting regular inspections to ensure compliance. By setting emission and discharge standards, the CPCB plays a vital role in managing pollution, though it faces challenges in enforcement due to resource constraints.

### **V. ROLE OF JUDICIARY:**

*The Ganga Action Plan (GAP), launched in 1986,* was one of India's earliest large-scale efforts at river conservation, aimed at reducing pollution in the Ganges River. Despite significant investments, the effectiveness of GAP has been limited due to issues such as inadequate infrastructure, improper sewage management, and lack of community engagement. While GAP highlighted the need for river conservation, it also underscored the challenges of implementing large-scale environmental projects without robust planning and public involvement. Recent efforts, including the *National Mission for Clean Ganga*, seek to address these shortcomings with a more integrated approach. Delhi's Air Pollution crisis has garnered attention for its severe impact on public health, leading to various policies and judicial interventions. Policies like the implementation of *compressed natural gas (CNG)* for public transport, the *Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)*, and restrictions on vehicular and industrial emissions have been introduced to curb air pollution. Judicial interventions, particularly from the Supreme Court and the *National Green Tribunal (NGT)*, have also enforced stricter regulations on construction and waste. However, seasonal factors, geographical location, and high population density continue to exacerbate the situation, demonstrating that policy interventions alone are insufficient without continuous enforcement and public compliance. *The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ)* Notifications serve as a framework to balance development with the protection of coastal ecosystems. First introduced in 1991 and revised multiple times, CRZ notifications set restrictions on construction and industrial activities within designated coastal areas to prevent habitat destruction and coastal erosion. Furthermore, stakeholders have raised concerns over

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amendments that may dilute protections, such as the CRZ 2019 amendment, which relaxes certain norms for economic activities.

## **VI. CONCLUSION:**

In summary, environmental law in India plays a pivotal role in safeguarding natural resources regulating pollution, and fostering sustainable development. The evolution of environmental legislation, from early conservation efforts to the establishment of comprehensive regulatory frameworks like the Environment Protection Act and National Green Tribunal, underscores the nation's commitment to addressing environmental challenges. such as improvements in air quality, forest conservation, and judicial interventions challenges remain in enforcement, compliance, and the allocation of resources to regulatory bodies. Issues like industrial pressures, inconsistent enforcement across states, and the growing demands of economic development complicate the effectiveness of these laws 2023). Looking ahead, India's environmental protection path must prioritize sustainable development and judicial activism. Sustainable development practices ensure that economic growth does not come at the expense of ecological stability, and continued judicial oversight can fill enforcement gaps where regulatory bodies may struggle. Furthermore, continuous policy reform is essential to keep pace with emerging environmental issues, such as climate change, plastic pollution, and biodiversity. These reforms should strengthen existing laws, incorporate stricter penalties, and support community involvement. A balanced approach to environmental protection is vital for India's future, ensuring that developmental needs and ecological preservation go hand in hand. By promoting sustainable growth, enforcing robust legal frameworks, and harnessing technological advancements, India can continue to progress while preserving its environmental resources for future generations). This balanced approach will not only protect the environment but also promote healthier communities and a resilient economy in the years to come.

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Journal  
e-ISSN: 2581-6705