

Short Communication

From Global Movements to Local Laws: The Role of Courts and Movements in Shaping Environmental Jurisprudence in Northeast India

Mayashree Gharphalia^{1*}, Jakey Khan²

¹Department of Law, J.B. Law College, Guwahati-781003, Assam, India.

²University School of Law and Research (USLR), University of Science and Technology Meghalaya (USTM), Techno City, Kiling Road, Baridua, Meghalaya – 793101, India.

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper examines the role of the judiciary in environmental governance and protection in Northeast India. The paper provides an overview of environmental jurisprudence in India and its unique development, which is based on the incorporation of indigenous notions of social justice and environmental protection into the legal framework. It then focuses specifically on the environmental challenges and governance in Northeast India, a region known for its rich biodiversity and the presence of indigenous tribal communities. The article analyzes the pivotal role played by the Indian judiciary, particularly the higher courts, in promoting environmental protection in Northeast India through various landmark judgments. It elaborates on the courts' interventions in issues related to forests, wildlife, mining, dams, and ecology in the region. The paper argues that the courts have been instrumental in strengthening environmental governance by expanding the scope of fundamental rights to include the right to a clean environment and by adopting a proactive approach in enforcing environmental laws and principles. The article is an analytical study and uniquely examines the intersection of ecological integrity, community rights and judicial activism in Northeast India. It suggests that the courts have played a crucial role in bridging the gap between the law and the ground realities, and in ensuring that the interests of the indigenous communities and the environment are protected. The paper emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to environmental protection that incorporates traditional knowledge and practices of the local communities, and calls for greater coordination between the judiciary, the executive, and the legislature in addressing environmental. The researcher attempts to bring home the point that the global environmental movements and judicial activism has shaped the environmental jurisprudence in the Northeast region of India. In the discourse on environment, perspectives on environmental movements often take a back seat. This paper addresses this research gap and contributes to the existing knowledge about Northeast India a region whose integration with the rest of the country depends on balance between development and environmental protection.

Keywords: Environmental jurisprudence, Northeast India, judiciary, forests, wildlife, dams, ecology, indigenous communities.

INTRODUCTION

The eight states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura together constitute the northeastern region of India. The geographical and ecological landscape of North-East India is very unique. The terrain of the landmass, which comprises the Himalayan mountain ranges and the floodplains of the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers, shares boundaries with China, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, respectively. It supports over 3.8 percent of India's population and occupies an area of about 262,000 square kilometers, or nearly 8 percent of the country's total land area. (Dikshit and Dikshit 2014) The demographic profile of the region is peculiar; with a preponderance of indigenous population whose traditional livelihoods have strong links with regional ecology. Northeastern India is a part of the country that boasts of some of the most fantastic landscapes, rich biodiversity, and an intricately woven tapestry of cultures. This part of the country has been a hotbed for environmentalist discourse since time immemorial. Its

strategic position between the foothills of the Himalayas to the north and the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot has bestowed it with a wide range of ecosystems, which ranges from dense tropical rainforests to alpine meadows. This richness in ecology has also made it susceptible to various factors threatening the ecosystem, such as deforestation, habitat loss, pollution, and climate change.

This research paper reviews the Indian judiciary's increasingly critical role in tackling the growing environmental problems in Northeast India. It is important to deliberate on the role of judiciary and its significance in Northeast India's environmental governance because the integration of Northeast India with mainland India is a complex socio-cultural process that involves development of the region without compromising on its environment and ecology. This integration involves political unification, infrastructure development, administrative consolidation, and ongoing efforts to ensure socio-cultural inclusion. In a region where traditional knowledge of indigenous communities often

*Corresponding Author's E-mail: gharphalia.mayashree15@gmail.com

finds an intersection with formal environmental laws, the judiciary has emerged as an important player in the realm of environmental governance. The courts, through some landmark judgments, have widened the scope of environmental jurisprudence not only in India but have tried to incorporate the rights of indigenous people and protection of a healthy environment within the ambit of law. The present study therefore assesses the current status of the legal regime of environmental governance in the North-East, pertaining to interventions within the judiciary on aspects relating to the conservation of forests, protection of wildlife, regulation of mining activities, and maintenance of ecological balance within this region. Special challenges that have been thrown by the development activities in this area and their influence upon the environmental conditions, coupled with the active role of the judiciary in lessening such impacts, is at the core of this research.

Environmental Movements:

International Environmental Movements:

It is possible to trace the origin of the international environmental movement back to the late 19th and early 20th century nature conservation and resource management concerns. During the time, environmentalism was very much headed by the desire to protect natural landscapes and wildlife from the effects brought on by industrialization and urbanization. For early environmentalism, at least Europe and the United States, represented a plea for governmental intervention in natural resource management, since the market was seen as inadequate on various grounds to resolve environmental degradation.

Post-World War II Environmentalism and the Rise of Global Activism

The period after World War II saw a more heightened discursive shift toward the environment, with an increasingly questioned limitless belief in technological progress. In 1962, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* began a whole new public awareness of the dangers of chemical pesticides, specifically DDT, and its long-term effects on ecosystems. It epitomized the birth of environmentalism, wherein people raised concern for matters related to conservation, pollution, human health, and environmental justice. (Kirk 2010) The first Earth Day in 1970 in the United States has commonly been cited as a catalyst for the international environmental movement. (White 2010) It unified millions in their call for action around the world and resulted in the establishment of formal environmental regulatory frameworks, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA, in the U.S. Around the same period, different influential groups like the World Wildlife Fund or WWF, initiated in 1961, and Greenpeace, inaugurated in 1971 has built an international movement for environmental activism. (Sackman 2010) These agencies pursued protectionist policies regarding threatened species, ecosystems, and minimizing human impact on nature.

The 1970s and 1980s: Environmental Legislation and International Agreements

In the 1970s significant legislation and international conventions were put in place in an attempt to address major environmental issues. For instance, the United States Endangered Species Act, 1973 strove to protect

threatened and endangered species. In 1973, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was signed in an attempt to regulate the trade of endangered animals and plants across borders. (Busch and Jörgens 2005) Further support came from international conventions such as the Ramsar Convention of 1971, dedicated to wetland protection, and the World Heritage Convention of 1972 targeted at the protection of cultural and natural heritage sites. Another milestone in this direction was the formation of the International Whaling Commission which banned commercial whaling in 1986. (Busch *et al.* 2005) Environmentalism also evolved to wider issues of pollution, especially with the discovery of CFCs depleting the ozone layer. One of the most important international agreements reached, the Montreal Protocol of 1987, succeeded in the complete global phase-out of CFCs, showing what was possible if the international community marshalled the will to confront a pressing environmental threat.

Environmentalism and Climate Change: From the 1990s to the Present

During the years immediately following its establishment, the United Nations (UN) had little interest in environmental problems, *let alone* global warming. In the first 23 years, climate was handled as an operational activity by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). Thereafter, climate change or global warming was not even considered as an issue and the activities of the UN bodies was limited to find out whether the natural resources are adequate enough for the economic development of UN members which were mostly comprised of underdeveloped countries. (Finger and Princen 2013) It was the UN Scientific Conference on the conservation and utilization of resources, which was the first UN body to discuss the depletion of those resources and their use. It convened between 17th August and 6th of September 1949 at Lake Success, New York. No major UN organs took environmental issues seriously until 1968. It was the Economic and Social Council, on 29th of May 1968, which first placed those questions on its agenda as a special item and decided, following approval by the General Assembly, to convene the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. An Action Plan with suggestions for global environmental action and a Declaration outlining principles for the preservation and improvement of the human environment were adopted by the United Nations Scientific Conference, also known as the First Earth Summit, which took place in Stockholm, Sweden, between June 5th and June 16th, 1972. (Carey *et al.* 2014)

It was only in the 1980s and early 1990s that anthropogenic climate change emerged as the core concern of the environmental movement. The existence of a concerted global effort to assess the impacts of global warming and to draw up plans to address it would come into being with the formation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988.

National Environmental Movements:

Pre-Independence Period:

The British colonial period transformed the socio ecological landscape of India through the large-scale exploitation of natural resources and the related policies concerning the management of forest and land.

Environmental movements arose during this time as a response to such policies, which had dispossessed the local communities of their traditional rights over land and forests and drastically changed the ecology of the region. These movements, although mostly suppressed, laid the bedrock for future environmental activism in India. Essentially, British colonialism constituted the economic exploitation of natural resources. By the mid-19th century, Britain had become a world leader in deforestation impelled by the pressing needs for timber required by shipbuilding and expansion of railways, along with the establishment of an agricultural plantation system. (Roy 2023) Indian teak, sal, and deodar were in great demand as timber, primarily for railway sleeper wood and for the building of ships meant for the Royal Navy. Deforestation, especially with railway expansion after 1853, marked quite a different ecological balance in substantial areas of the country.

The Indian Forest Act, 1878, represented the most significant increase in the level of control the British government assumed over Indian forests. This Act divided the forests into reserved, protected, and village forests; among them, "reserved forests" would enjoy the maximum protection with the greatest degree of control by the state. Although "village forests" were to be used by the local community, the right to regulate forest produce extraction and to enforce punishment in case of violation was retained by the state. (Guha and Gadgil 1989) The Act devised maximum commercial exploitation of forests as timber thereby causing resentment among the communities dependent on the forests. The state's monopoly over forests, aided by the imposition of new property rights over these, had extensively dislocated traditional patterns of forest use and thereby brought the state in conflict with the rural masses which were dependent on the forests for fuel, fodder, and other essential needs.

The forest movement in early 20th Century was a consequence of the growing aggressiveness of the colonial policies in extraction. This became a site of strong resistance, together with Kumaun and Garhwal, where much timber was available. From 1910 to 1920, the colonial government expanded logging activities by triggering demands due to the First World War. In 1921, large-scale protests broke out in Kumaun against British forest regulations. It was a movement fronted by the soldiers who had fought on the side of the British in this war and felt cheated in their lives by the forest regulations which barred them from accessing vital resources. The protests were so universal and overwhelming that the Kumaun Forest Grievances Committee was established in 1921 to look into the matter. (Saxena 2008) The Land Acquisition Act of 1894 further increased the mistrust between the local communities and the colonial state in giving it amendment powers to usurp private lands in the name of public good—the expansion of railways, plantations, or construction of dams. This law simply was an instrumentally strong weapon in the hands of the colonial government in displacing communities from their private lands with minimal, if any, compensation. One of the earliest significant movements against land dispossession was in 1927 at the Mulshi Dam, a hydroelectric project near Pune, Maharashtra. The Tata-family-owned project displaced around 11,000 people, most of whom were indigenous. (Khagram 2004) Despite an extended non-violent resistance movement, satyagraha, led by local activists, the project went through, and the movement was crushed by colonial authorities.

Post Independence Period:

In the post-independence period of India, a number of environmental movements came about as a result of the developmental agenda pursued by the newly independent nation. Environmental movements had achieved swift growth in India, in its industrialization and infrastructure developments which projected constructing dams, expanding agriculture, and extraction of forest resources, all being addressed through these environmental movements. The Hirakud Dam became one of the first major environmental resistance movements in post-independence India. Initiated to be constructed as early as 1946, the Hirakud Dam was indeed a multipurpose river valley project that contained elements such as flood control, irrigation, and hydropower generation. However, the local population, primarily around Sambalpur district, opposed the project due to massive displacement. (Baboo 2009) Beginning in the early 1970s in Uttar Pradesh's Himalayan region, which is now Uttarakhand, the Chipko Movement is an iconic environmental movement in post-independence India. It arose primarily as a response to the destruction caused by deforestation. This non-violent resistance, now called Chipko movement (from the Hindi word "chipko," which means "to hug"), swiftly gained attention across the whole country and the world for its innovative approach and Gandhian methods of protest. (Nabhi 2006) The Silent Valley Movement had emerged in Kerala and it was the first big victory for dam opposition movements all over post-independent India. The Kerala state government proposed building a hydroelectric dam on the Kunthipuzha River, flowing through the Silent Valley in the 1960s, as a source for electricity to power the region. The movement was supported by environmentalists, who claimed that the dam would destroy a unique and irreplaceable ecosystem and threaten species built over millions of years. (Neeraja K.S. 2021) The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), led by Medha Patkar, is India's most vibrant environmental movement. The movement began in the 1980s in response to the Sardar Sarovar Project, which was an enormous multipurpose dam project on the Narmada River designed to irrigate Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh besides providing drinking water and hydroelectric power. (Suresh 2012) The Jungle Bachao Andolan originated in Bihar in the year 1982 had picked pace after the government decided to replace commercial teak plantations with indigenous sal forests in Bihar. The majority protesters were the tribal communities that subsist on their livelihoods in the sal forests, whose traditional rights and the very biodiversity are threatened by this replacement of natural forests with monoculture plantations. (Gosai *et al.* 2024) Appiko Movement was born in Western Ghats, Karnataka in the year 1983 and just like Chipko Movement, this movement was inspired to occur in Karnataka in the Western Ghats, where the local villagers hugged trees to prevent the felling of forests protesting the heavy logging taking place throughout the vulnerable ecosystems of the Western Ghats. (Sumi and Chandrasekar, 2023) The Tehri Dam Conflict started at Tehri in the state of Uttarakhand back in 1990 against the massive construction undertaken as the Tehri Dam on the Bhagirathi River caused a great deal of protest because of fears regarding the displacement of tens of thousands, submergence of towns and villages, and seismic instability of the area. (Ishizaka 2007) Navdanya Movement was a nationwide environmental movement in India, initiated in 1991. Founded by Vandana Shiva,

it worked in the areas of biodiversity conservation, organic farming and seed sovereignty. The Niyamgiri Movement started at Niyamgiri Hills, Odisha in the year 2003. At the core of this movement lies the concern over mining around the sacred Niyamgiri Hills, which are vital not only as a place of spiritual representation of the Dongria Kondhs but also for their living and biodiversity. (Gosai *et al.* 2024) In the year 2004, the Kudankulam Anti-Nuclear Movement was started by local communities and environmentalists against the construction of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant.

Environmental Movements in North-Eastern States:

In Northeast India, environmental movements against ecological degradation due to developmental projects, deforestation, and industrialization have erupted in this region in various ways.

Mass protests against mega-dam projects in Arunachal Pradesh is particularly from the Siang River area, as mega-dam construction here has been going on in the region since the 1990s. The natives and tribal groups have been opposing this idea of constructing 168 mega-dams initiated by the government of India for harnessing hydel power in the region. Among these groups are the Siang People's Forum, Lower Siang Dam

Environmental protests to a great extent were conducted in Assam, and these were centered on the Lower Subansiri Hydro Electric Project and the environmental degradation resulting from mining activities. Since the 2000s, groups including but not limited to the AASU, KMSS, and PMSV have argued for a full Environment Impact Assessments (EIA) of the hydroelectric project based on the region's seismic instability and the potential for catastrophic flooding. (Bhattacharjee 2013)

Meghalaya's environmental degradation is largely because of deforestation, shifting cultivation, and haphazard mining. Sacred groves are the less traditional but effective conservation practices among the Khasis, Garos, and Jaintias under the pressures exerted by all these activities. The mega-dam project meant to be constructed over the Umngot River has been protested against in Meghalaya, arguing that it will steal livelihood from tourism-dependent villages like Dawki and Shnongpdeng.

The most important stance of the environmental movements of Manipur has been against the mega-dam project and other large-scale developmental activities, which are believed to pose a threat to the state's ecosystems and the indigenous communities. Most criticized amongst these projects is the Tipaimukh Dam on the Barak River, mainly over issues with displacement and biodiversity destruction.

More famous for its environment-friendly projects, Sikkim has also witnessed a lot of protests over the construction of hydroelectric dams on the Teesta River. One such project named Teesta Stage III, V, and VI is a major point of contention between Lepcha and Bhutia indigenous communities who are worried that big constructions will uproot them and ruin the environment. In response, people in Dongzu village protested these projects, and the movement has emerged under the name Affected Citizens of Teesta, with the support of Concerned Lepcha of Sikkim and the Sangha of Dongzu. (Huber and Joshi 2017) Several protests among others, bring the social and environmental impact of large hydropower development into the public view.

The environmental challenges facing Tripura are largely driven by deforestation at alarming rates, mostly caused by jhum cultivation and degraded forests.

These have resulted in climate change, loss of productivity in the forests, disrupted water cycling, loss of biodiversity, and increased forest fires. Subsequent to these factors, population growth, industrialization, and mining have provided additional anthropogenic pressure on the environment and have changed the ecological balance of the state.

The above account of environmental movements in the northeastern states of India delineates a variety of challenges and local responses to environmental degradation. From protests against massive hydroelectric projects in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, grassroots movements against deforestation and mining in Assam, and Meghalaya and Nagaland have entered discussion-marking the strain between development and ecological preservation. Important forces behind such movements include local organizations, NGOs, and indigenous communities that call for sustainable development, protection of biodiversity, and rights for those affected by the development projects. These movements will remain core to shaping the future of environmental governance in this region because continuing pressure on environments is mounting. Public Interest Litigation (PIL), born out of judicial activism, has become a major tool for raising environmental concerns before Indian courts. By allowing broad locus standi, PILs enable individuals and groups to approach the judiciary even on behalf of affected communities. Courts have used PILs not only to expedite justice but also to assist in fact-finding, influence policy, and expand public awareness. As noted by Upendra Baxi (1985), PILs transformed the Supreme Court into a forum accessible to all citizens, especially in environmental matters.

Environmental jurisprudence and the Courts

Early cases such as *Ratlam Municipality v. Vardichand (1980)* marked the beginning of judicial intervention, where the Court compelled local authorities to act against public health hazards. The *Dehradun Quarrying Case (1985)* reinforced the judiciary's role by halting ecologically damaging mining and introducing the idea that development must be balanced with environmental protection. The *Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984)* exposed gaps in environmental regulation, leading to the *Bhopal Gas Leak Act, 1985* and the doctrine of absolute liability in *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India (1987)*.

From the late 1980s onward, the Supreme Court expanded environmental jurisprudence through key rulings. In the Ganga Pollution Case (1988), it ordered closure of polluting industries and established the *polluter pays* principle. Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum (1996) gave constitutional backing to the *precautionary principle* and sustainable development. Forest protection was advanced in T.N. Godavarman (1997), while S. Jagannath (1997) linked the right to livelihood under Article 21 with environmental safeguards.

In the 21st century, the Court continued its proactive stance. It mandated the shift to CNG in Delhi in *M.C. Mehta (2001)* to curb air pollution and shut down illegal mining in Goa Foundation (2013), reaffirming sustainable development as a core governance norm.

Overall, the judiciary—through PILs and progressive interpretation of Article 21—has embedded environmental protection within fundamental rights. Landmark judgments have filled legislative gaps and established guiding principles like *polluter pays*, the *precautionary principle*, and sustainable development. This judicial activism has shaped India's environmental

governance and continues to influence the balance between development and ecological preservation.

The devise of Public Interest Litigation has played a vital role and the significance of this mechanism lies on the fact that it has empowered the Judiciary to invent doctrines of Polluter pays, Precautionary Principle, Public Trust Doctrine, Intergenerational Equity, Sustainable Development. The concept of locus standi has been made flexible where anyone on behalf of the public can file a case in the courts, if the matter affects the public at large.

Environmental Legislation and Judicial Response in North East India:

The legislative framework of India on environmental protection is very comprehensive and well-developed, incorporating a number of landmark laws like the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, and the Environmental Protection Act, 1986. Together, these enactments provide a solid foundation for governance and the judiciary to supervise. These laws are quite applicable to Northeast India and the region, given the former's high biodiversity, ecological fragility, and dependence on natural resources. The judiciary has, by various rulings, buttressed legislative measures found necessary to address unique challenges such as deforestation, industrialization, and wildlife and forest land protection.

One landmark judicial intervention in forest governance came through the Godavarman Case of 1996, which fundamentally redefined the issue of forest management across India. Originally developed as an objection by groups of people affected by deforestation in the Nilgiris, this impacted forest management all over the country, including the northeastern states. Indeed, the Supreme Court judgment banned the removal of timber from the Northeast and strictly ordered regulation of felling by local authorities to become a landmark moment in the governance of forests in the region. The judgment clearly articulated the intent of the Court to bring forth a control on deforestation and allow sustainable management of the forest. In *Sandhiram Mahajan versus Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup*, (AIR 1953 GAU168) the Gauhati High Court identified land allotment in forest areas, specifically focusing on the discretionary powers of district officers, and sought clear legal directives regarding forest-land allotment. Specifically, it looked to clarify the matter at hand where allotment was for non-forest purposes such as grazing. This judgment thus held good the judicial approval regarding the need for highly regulated actions with regard to protecting the forest space from the arbitrary administrative decisions that may have an effect on the environmental integrity. In the case of *M/s Chandmari Tea Company versus State of Assam*, (AIR 2000 GAU 13) boundary disputes between tea estates and forest reserves were discussed. This especially focused on the Burachapari Reserve Forest and Kaziranga National Park issues. Gauhati High Court ruling put emphasis on protecting and enforcing environmental laws while border changes altered the limits of the forest; therefore, it restricted private estates from encroaching the reserved forest areas.

Role of Gauhati High Court in development of Environmental Jurisprudence:

Assam is one among the North-Eastern states which has achieved statehood in the year 1947 with India's

Independence. The Gauhati High Court was formerly known as the High Court of Assam, and it was established on 5th of April, 1948. It was inaugurated by the then Chief Justice of India namely H. J. Kania. (*History of the Gauhati High Court, no date*) Thus, the Gauhati High Court has played a pivotal role in shaping environmental jurisprudence in the North-Eastern states of India. This region holds sensitive ecosystems and indigenous cultures, but unplanned and rapid development through urbanization, heavy industrial activities, deforestation, and illegal mining have posed significant environmental concerns to the region. To combat such challenges, the Gauhati High Court has taken the initiative many times to protect environment laws and promote sustainable development. In various landmark judgments, the Court has demonstrated its commitment to the cause of ensuring that development in the Northeast does not come at the cost of degradation of the environment.

The Gauhati High Court has played an important role in recognizing wetlands and rivers of the northeast states as ecologically significant. In the case of *Pramod Kalita and Two Ors. vs The Union of India and Ors.* (2024), (GAHC010058202024) the Gauhati High Court underlined the importance of wetlands, which are critical ecosystems for supporting biodiversity and providing crucial ecosystem services such as flood control and groundwater recharge. The Court reached the crucial conclusion that preventing encroachment and pollution of wetlands marked a great judicial intervention in the protection of the sensitive areas. Such a judgment underscored the importance of judicial oversight in ensuring that wetlands, which are often overlooked in development planning, receive adequate protection. Relevantly, in the case of *XXX Vs State of Assam and Four Ors.* (2023), (GAHC010097922023) the Gauhati High Court took suo motu notice of river pollution and, inter alia, directed that sewage treatment plants be established along major rivers. The facts of this case exemplified the cognizance of the Court towards the development of rivers as being integral to the socio-economic as well as ecological fabric of the region. Through such a directive, the Court merely reemphasized and reinforced that environmental governance must include preserving water bodies as public goods by compelling action from the state in preventing pollution of rivers.

The Gauhati High Court has also been relatively sensitive to the need for industrial and urban development projects in the Northeast to comply with environmental legislation. In *Environment Protection Committee Vs. Union of India (UOI) and Ors.*, (2010) (MANU/GH/0835/2010) the Court underlined the necessity of integrating environmental protection into urban planning. The Court was of the opinion that unregulated construction was detrimental to the environment and instructed the state to strictly comply with environmental regulations in all their constructions. To this effect, judicial intervention helped ascertain the role that it plays in promoting sustainable urbanization; thus, development has to achieve environmental sustainability. In *Society for Protection of Environment & Biodiversity vs. Union of India and Ors.* (2016), (NGT Original Application No. 677 of 2016 Order: 08/12/2017) the National Green Tribunal held that all real estate projects have to seek environmental clearance before their commencement; a reminder that construction and infrastructure development should always be operated within some sort of environmental concern. This was because the

imposition of such clearances was to reduce the environmental impact of a real estate project, ensuring that development is carried out within sustainable practice regimes. The case of *Save Guwahati Build Guwahati vs State of Assam* (2017) further narrates the saga of the Court in regulation of air pollution in urban areas. Regulation to control vehicular emissions and industrial pollution in the city of Guwahati was an important step in consolidating the escalating issue of urban air pollution. In this decision, the Court recognized the harmful health effects resulting from bad air quality and required the state to ensure its implementation for the control of pollution.

These judicial orders brought lasting compliance in term of its philosophy as an ideal for future environmental cases.

The Gauhati High Court has been an influential stride towards the growth of environmental jurisprudence in the northeastern states of India. The Court through a series of landmark judgments has pragmatically helped foster a legal landscape of protection over susceptible ecosystems of the region, while simultaneously focusing on socio-economic needs of the local and indigenous populations. Principles such as the precautionary principle, polluter pays principle, and sustainable development have helped the Court cement the fact that preservation of the environment and economic development cannot progress in isolation from one another. The intervention of the Court in the gamut of illegal mining and industrial pollution, protection of wetlands, and real estate development has brought much-needed judicial oversight to this region, since enforcing environmental laws are fraught with difficulties arising from administrative limitations. Importantly, the decisions of the Court have ensconced an intrinsic link between protection of the environment and the rights of communities having their inherent rights, so that development does not lead to widespread disenfranchisement of local communities.

CONCLUSION

The Indian judiciary, thus taking proactive engagement with environmental issues, has significantly contributed to the development of environmental jurisprudence in India. Environmental movements and judicial intervention in the northeastern region of India, namely Sikkim, Manipur, and Assam, have created a sense of ecological significance. Grassroots movements in Northeast India have played a great role in reaching out to environmental issues that the people of this region needed to be brought out before the law courts. Movements against large-scale development projects such as deforestation, mining, and dam construction have also put attention to the related environmental impacts and socio-economic effects on the lives of local communities and their ecosystems. There are a number of indigenous groups whose livelihoods are inextricably related to natural resources; in the region, there has been intense environmental activism aimed at securing both biodiversity conservation and protection of cultural heritage.

It can be said that the judiciary, especially the Supreme Court of India, the Gauhati High Court, and the National Green Tribunal (NGT), has exercised the constitutional authority to expand the scope of the environmental rights under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution by framing a clean and healthy environment as fundamental to the right to life. The landmark cases include

Godavarman Case (1996), *Lafarge Umiam Mining Case* (2010), and others like PILs relating to deforestation, wildlife conservation, and water pollution. These have shown judicial activism as one countervailing force against unsustainable industrial and infrastructural expansion. Principles such as sustainable development, the precautionary principle, and the polluter pays principle are applied in judicially administered cases, permitting the judiciary to foster a more refined understanding of the issues involved in environmental governance beyond the statutory constraint. Grassroots movements also provide impetus for judicial intervention, especially where environmental degradation directly impacts upon local livelihoods and ecosystems. From resistance against mega-dam projects to campaigns against illegal mining and deforestation, these movements empowered local communities and brought environmental issues into the public and legal domains.

In a nutshell, the relationship between environmental movements and judiciary is symbiotic. Grassroot mobilizations have played a crucial role in raising the issue of environmental degradation and mobilizing legal action, while the courts responded to it by enforcing environmental laws and making the state and industries accountable. This has led to the development of a very vigorous environmental jurisprudence that meets regional development needs while also protecting the specific ecosystems and rights of indigenous people. Judicial activism combined with a tremendous amount of activism by environmental groups has culminated in remarkable progress in environmental governance in Northeast India. Among other cases, the Gauhati High Court has severely ensured that environmental law continues to adapt to the challenges within the region. The judgments, most of which follow public interest litigation, have made it possible to envision a sustainable approach to development in one of India's most ecologically and culturally diverse regions. Therefore the key findings of the research can be summed up as-1.the courts have acted as gap fillers in the environmental jurisprudence of Northeast India.2. In an era where Indigenous knowledge has been overlooked by the state despite the various social movements to assert it, the courts have indirectly upheld them. Holistic approach that includes institutionalizing indigenous participation, strengthening local governance and judicial executive coordination can further go a long way in protecting the ecology and environment of the region of Northeast India.

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