

Evaluating Indian Judiciary's Efforts Towards A Biocentric and Ecocentric Jurisprudence from A Green Criminological Frame of Reference

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Abstract

Indian environmental jurisprudence has historically developed through constitutional interpretation, public interest litigation, the public trust doctrine, precautionary principle, polluter pays principle, and sustainable development. These doctrines have substantially enlarged the scope of Article 21 of the Constitution of India by recognising the right to a clean and healthy environment as part of the right to life. However, the deeper question is whether Indian courts have merely protected the environment for human welfare, or whether they have moved towards a genuinely biocentric and ecocentric jurisprudence in which animals, species, ecosystems, rivers, wetlands, forests and other natural entities are recognised as having intrinsic moral and legal worth. This paper evaluates the efforts of the Indian judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court, High Courts and the National Green Tribunal, towards such a shift. It employs green criminology as its analytical framework because green criminology moves beyond narrow legal definitions of crime and examines environmental harm, ecological victimisation, species justice, state-corporate complicity and structural violence against nature. The paper argues that Indian courts have made important but uneven attempts to move from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism. Judgments such as *Centre for Environmental Law v. Union of India*, *Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja*, *Mohd. Salim v. State of Uttarakhand*, and *A. Periyakaruppan v. Principal Secretary* show a judicial aspiration towards recognising the intrinsic worth of non-human nature. Similarly, selected National Green Tribunal decisions concerning Kaziranga, Deepor Beel, Deopahar, Baghjan and other Assam-based ecological disputes demonstrate moments of ecological sensitivity. Yet, these efforts remain limited by anthropocentric statutes, development-oriented reasoning, weak enforcement, reliance on *parens patriae* guardianship, and the continued treatment of nature as a protected object rather than a rights-bearing subject. The paper concludes that Indian environmental jurisprudence is in a transitional stage: it has developed an ecocentric vocabulary, but has not yet institutionalised a fully biocentric or ecocentric legal order.

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I. Introduction

The legal history of standing before courts reveals that access to justice has never been politically neutral. In earlier legal systems, the right to petition courts was restricted to selected categories of persons, particularly male property holders, masters, patriarchs and legally recognised social subjects. With the expansion of liberal constitutionalism and human rights discourse, the legal subject widened to include all human beings as bearers of rights. Yet, the modern legal system has largely continued to exclude non-human nature from the status of legal subjecthood. Rivers, forests, wetlands, animals and ecosystems have usually been treated as property, resources, commodities, objects of regulation, or environmental assets to be managed for human benefit. [1]

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The contemporary rights of nature movement challenges this assumption. It asks whether nature should continue to be protected only because it serves human interests, or whether nature possesses intrinsic worth independent of human utility. This question is central to the distinction between anthropocentric, biocentric and ecocentric jurisprudence. Anthropocentrism places human beings at the centre of legal and moral concern. Biocentrism extends moral value to all living beings. Ecocentrism goes further by recognising the integrity of ecological systems, including land, water, species, habitats and natural processes, as worthy of protection in themselves. [2]

Across the world, legal systems have begun experimenting with rights of nature. Ecuador constitutionally recognised the rights of nature or Pachamama to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles. Bolivia enacted legal frameworks recognising Mother Earth as a subject of rights. New Zealand granted legal personhood to Te Urewera and the Whanganui River. The Lake Erie Bill of Rights in the United States, although later declared unconstitutional, represented an important democratic attempt to allow a lake to defend itself from pollution [3]. These developments indicate that law is slowly moving beyond the assumption that only human beings and artificial legal persons such as corporations can be rights-bearing subjects.

Indian environmental law occupies an important position in this global debate. The Indian judiciary has played a transformative role in expanding environmental protection through Article 21, Article 48-A and Article 51-A(g) of the Constitution. It has developed doctrines such as absolute liability, public trust, precautionary principle, polluter pays principle and sustainable development[4]. However, the critical issue is whether this jurisprudence is truly ecocentric or merely anthropocentric environmentalism. In other words, does Indian law protect the environment only because environmental degradation harms humans, or does it protect nature because nature has intrinsic worth? This paper evaluates the Indian judiciary's movement towards biocentric and ecocentric jurisprudence from a green criminological frame of reference. Green criminology is particularly useful because it broadens the concept of crime beyond statutory offences and examines environmental harms, ecological destruction, species victimisation, state negligence, corporate impunity and structural forms of ecological violence[5]. From this perspective, the question is not merely whether courts have punished polluters or ordered compensation. The deeper question is whether judicial reasoning has recognised non-human beings and ecosystems as victims of harm and as subjects of justice.

The central argument of this paper is that Indian courts have produced important ecocentric moments, but not yet a coherent ecocentric jurisprudence. The judiciary has often expressed concern for animals, species, rivers, forests and wetlands, but its reasoning remains constrained by human-centred constitutional language, development-oriented policy, statutory limitations and weak enforcement mechanisms. The National Green Tribunal, despite being India's specialised environmental adjudicatory body, is statutorily bound by principles such as sustainable development, precaution and polluter pays, which often operate within a managerial and anthropocentric framework. [6] Therefore, Indian environmental jurisprudence may be described as transitional: it is no longer purely anthropocentric, but it is not yet fully biocentric or ecocentric.

II. Research Objectives and Methodology

This paper has four major objectives. First, it explains the conceptual distinction between anthropocentric, biocentric and ecocentric jurisprudence. Secondly, it develops a green criminological framework for evaluating judicial decisions on environmental protection. Thirdly, it analyses selected Indian judicial decisions that reflect movement towards biocentric and ecocentric reasoning. Fourthly, it critically evaluates the limitations of such judicial efforts, especially in the context of the National Green Tribunal and selected Assam-based environmental disputes.

The study follows a doctrinal and analytical methodology. It relies on constitutional provisions, statutes, judicial decisions, National Green Tribunal orders, and secondary literature on green criminology, environmental justice and rights of nature. The doctrinal component examines the legal reasoning adopted by the Supreme Court, High Courts and National Green Tribunal. The analytical component evaluates whether such reasoning reflects anthropocentric, biocentric or ecocentric values. The paper does not treat environmental law merely as a body of regulatory rules. Rather, it treats environmental adjudication as a site where competing ideas of justice are negotiated. The legal question is therefore linked to a philosophical and criminological question: who is recognised as a victim when environmental harm occurs? If only humans are recognised as victims, environmental law remains anthropocentric. If animals, species, habitats, rivers and ecosystems are also recognised as victims, the law begins to move towards species justice and ecological justice[7].

III. Conceptual Framework: From Anthropocentrism to Ecocentrism

Anthropocentrism refers to a human-centred worldview in which nature is valued primarily because it satisfies human needs. Within this framework, forests are protected because they provide ecosystem services, rivers are protected because they supply water, animals are protected because cruelty offends human morality, and pollution is regulated because it threatens human health. Anthropocentric environmentalism can be progressive, but it remains limited because it treats nature as valuable only in relation to human welfare. [8]

Biocentrism challenges this hierarchy by recognising that all living beings possess moral worth. A biocentric legal approach would not protect animals merely because they are useful to humans, but because they are sentient or living beings capable of flourishing, suffering and existing for their own sake. The decision of the Supreme Court in *Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja* is significant in this regard because it recognised that animals have an intrinsic right to live with dignity and that their life cannot be reduced to mere human entertainment, sport or cultural utility. [9]

Ecocentrism is broader than biocentrism. It does not limit moral concern to individual living beings, but extends it to ecological wholes: species, habitats, ecosystems, rivers, mountains, wetlands and natural cycles. An ecocentric jurisprudence asks whether legal systems can protect the integrity, stability and continuity of ecological systems. The Supreme Court's reasoning in *Centre for Environmental Law v. Union of India*, concerning the translocation of Asiatic lions, is an important example because the Court expressly referred to eco-centrism and the intrinsic worth of wildlife beyond human instrumental value. [10]

Green criminology provides the most appropriate framework for evaluating this shift because it criticises the narrowness of conventional criminal law. Traditional criminal law usually recognises crime only when an act is legally prohibited by the state. Green criminology, by contrast, examines harm even when that harm is legal, normalised, licensed or committed with state approval. [11] Many environmentally destructive activities, such as mining, deforestation, industrial pollution, wildlife habitat fragmentation and large development projects, may be formally legal but ecologically devastating. Green criminology therefore allows us to ask whether law itself sometimes legitimises ecological harm.

This is crucial in the Indian context. Many ecological harms are not caused only by illegal poachers, encroachers or individual polluters. They often arise from state-sanctioned development, weak regulatory enforcement, corporate negligence, extractive industries, infrastructure expansion and bureaucratic inaction. A green criminological lens therefore exposes state-corporate complicity and the "treadmill of production" that prioritises economic growth over ecological protection. [12] It also expands the category of victims to include non-human animals, future generations, ecosystems and local communities dependent on ecological integrity.

IV. Indian Environmental Jurisprudence: Foundational Anthropocentric Expansion

Indian environmental jurisprudence initially developed through the expansion of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. The judiciary interpreted the right to life to include the right to a clean, healthy and pollution-free environment. This was a major constitutional achievement because it allowed environmental claims to be treated as fundamental rights claims. Cases such as *Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra v. State of Uttar Pradesh*, *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India*, and *Subhash Kumar v. State of Bihar* played a foundational role in this development[13]. In the *Oleum Gas Leak* case, the Supreme Court developed the principle of absolute liability for hazardous industries. This represented a significant departure from the older rule of strict liability because enterprises engaged in hazardous activities could not escape liability by invoking traditional exceptions. [14] Similarly, in *Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union of India*, the Court recognised the precautionary principle and polluter pays principle as part of Indian environmental law. [15] In *M.C. Mehta v. Kamal Nath*, the public trust doctrine was applied to hold that the state is a trustee of natural resources and cannot transfer ecological wealth for private commercial use in a manner inconsistent with public interest[16].

These decisions were revolutionary in strengthening environmental protection. However, their dominant justification remained human-centred. The environment was protected because its degradation threatened human life, health, livelihood and public interest. Even the public trust doctrine, though environmentally significant, often treats the state as trustee for the people rather than as trustee for nature itself. The constitutional foundation of environmental protection in Article 21 also reinforces this human-centred structure because Article 21 is textually framed as a human fundamental right.

This does not mean that these cases are unimportant. Rather, they represent the first stage of Indian environmental jurisprudence: an anthropocentric but progressive stage. The judiciary used human rights language to create environmental accountability. Without this stage, later biocentric and ecocentric developments would have been difficult. Yet, from a green criminological perspective, this stage remains incomplete because ecological harm is recognised primarily when it harms humans.

V. Judicial Movement Towards Ecocentrism: Species, Animals and Nature

The more explicit movement towards ecocentrism appears in later judicial decisions. A major example is *Centre for Environmental Law, WWF-India v. Union of India*, concerning the translocation of Asiatic lions from Gir to Kuno. The Supreme Court held that the issue was rooted in eco-centrism and that wildlife must be protected not merely because it is instrumentally useful to humans, but because it has intrinsic worth[17]. This judgment is important because it recognised species survival as a legal concern in itself.

The decision also adopted what may be called a species justice approach. Species justice, a concept developed within green criminology and eco-justice scholarship, requires legal systems to recognise that non-human species can suffer harm through extinction, habitat destruction, captivity, cruelty and ecological displacement[18]. In the *Asiatic Lion* case, the Court did not merely ask whether humans would benefit from translocation. It considered the long-term survival of the species, the risks of confining the species to a single habitat, and the ecological need to secure a second home. Another significant decision is *Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja*. The case concerned Jallikattu and bullock-cart races. The Supreme Court held that animals have a right to live with intrinsic worth, honour and dignity. It interpreted the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 in light of constitutional duties under Article 51-A(g), which requires compassion for living creatures. [19] The judgment is one of the strongest expressions of biocentric reasoning in Indian law because it moved

beyond welfare-based regulation and recognised animals as beings whose lives cannot be reduced to human pleasure, sport or cultural assertion.

However, the later constitutional developments concerning Jallikattu complicate the picture. In 2023, the Supreme Court upheld State amendments permitting such traditional bovine sports subject to regulatory safeguards. [20] This does not erase the biocentric value of A. Nagaraja, but it shows the fragility of animal rights jurisprudence when confronted with culture, politics, federalism and legislative intervention. From a green criminological perspective, this reveals how legal recognition of animal suffering may be diluted when human cultural claims are given priority. The High Courts have also contributed to rights-of-nature discourse. In *Mohd. Salim v. State of Uttarakhand*, the Uttarakhand High Court declared the rivers Ganga and Yamuna, along with their tributaries, as juristic/legal persons/living entities. The Court invoked the doctrine of *parens patriae* and appointed state officials as persons in *loco parentis* to protect and conserve the rivers[21]. This judgment was influenced by global developments such as the recognition of the Whanganui River in New Zealand. Although the decision was later stayed by the Supreme Court because of practical and legal complications, it remains symbolically important for Indian rights-of-nature jurisprudence[22]. Similarly, in *A. Periyakaruppan v. Principal Secretary to Government*, the Madras High Court declared Mother Nature as a living being with the status of a legal person. The Court invoked *parens patriae* jurisdiction and emphasised that nature has rights, duties and liabilities for its survival, safety, sustenance and resurgence[23]. This judgment represents an ambitious attempt to move beyond human-centred environmental law. Yet, its reasoning also reveals the difficulty of translating ecological philosophy into enforceable legal doctrine.

The use of *parens patriae* is both enabling and problematic. On the one hand, it allows courts to protect entities that cannot represent themselves. On the other hand, it positions nature as a perpetual minor requiring human guardianship. This can reproduce the very hierarchy that ecocentrism seeks to overcome. If the state is appointed as guardian of nature, but the state itself is often complicit in ecological destruction, then *parens patriae* may become conceptually inadequate[24].

VI. Rights of Nature and the Limits of *Parens Patriae*

The rights of nature movement seeks to transform nature from an object of protection into a subject of rights. In Ecuador, nature is constitutionally recognised as having the right to exist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles. In New Zealand, legal personhood for the Whanganui River is embedded in Indigenous cosmology and institutional guardianship. These models do not merely protect nature as a resource; they reconfigure the legal imagination[25]. Indian courts have drawn upon similar ideas, but their approach is less institutionally settled. In *Mohd. Salim*, river personhood was declared judicially, without a detailed statutory framework for representation, liability, jurisdiction, financial responsibility and inter-state governance. This created obvious difficulties. For example, if a river is a legal person, who bears liability for floods? Can river guardians sue polluters across state boundaries? Can state officials be held personally responsible for failure to protect the river? These unresolved questions contributed to the Supreme Court's stay of the judgment[26]. The Madras High Court's declaration of Mother Nature as a legal person raises similar questions. The phrase "Mother Nature" is philosophically powerful but legally vast. Unlike a specific river, forest or wetland, Mother Nature is not a territorially bounded entity. Without statutory detail, such declarations risk becoming symbolic rather than enforceable[27].

From a green criminological perspective, the deeper problem is that rights-of-nature jurisprudence in India still depends on human institutions that are embedded in growth-oriented political economy. If the same state that grants mining leases, approves infrastructure projects, regularises encroachments, delays environmental clearances and weakly prosecutes polluters is also made the guardian of nature,

the possibility of conflict of interest is obvious[28]. Therefore, Indian rights-of-nature jurisprudence must move beyond symbolic personhood. It requires independent ecological guardians, community participation, scientific monitoring, victim-impact assessment for non-human nature, restoration duties, and enforceable remedies. Otherwise, the recognition of nature as a legal person may remain a rhetorical flourish without transformative consequence.

VII. The National Green Tribunal and Its Statutory Imagination

The National Green Tribunal was established under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010 as a specialised environmental adjudicatory body. It was designed to provide effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection, conservation of forests and other natural resources, and enforcement of legal rights relating to the environment[29]. Section 20 of the Act requires the Tribunal to apply the principles of sustainable development, precautionary principle and polluter pays principle while passing orders, decisions or awards[30].

The NGT has played a significant role in Indian environmental governance. It has ordered compensation, restoration, compliance, committee-based monitoring, closure of polluting units and accountability of public authorities. However, the principles under Section 20 also reveal the Tribunal's anthropocentric limits. Sustainable development often requires balancing environmental protection with economic development. The precautionary principle prevents serious or irreversible harm despite scientific uncertainty. Polluter pays internalises environmental costs. All three are important principles, but they do not necessarily recognise nature as a rights-bearing subject[31].

From a green criminological perspective, the NGT's statutory framework is largely managerial. It regulates harm, compensates damage and enforces compliance, but does not fundamentally challenge the development model that produces ecological harm. Its orders may discipline polluters, but they do not always question the deeper political economy of extraction, infrastructure and state-corporate environmental governance[32]. This limitation becomes visible in several Assam-related NGT cases. Assam is ecologically significant because it contains protected areas, wetlands, elephant corridors, oil fields, forests, biodiversity hotspots and riverine ecosystems. It is also a region where ecological harm often occurs through the interaction of state inaction, corporate activity, infrastructure expansion, illegal extraction and weak enforcement. Thus, Assam provides an important site for evaluating whether the NGT's judicial imagination is anthropocentric, biocentric or ecocentric.

VIII. NGT, Assam and the Green Criminological Critique

In the Kaziranga stone quarrying case filed by Rohit Choudhury, the NGT dealt with unregulated quarrying and mining activities in and around Kaziranga National Park. The Tribunal ordered closure of polluting and ecologically damaging activities in the No Development Zone and recognised the need to protect wildlife habitats[33]. This decision reflects an ecocentric inclination because the survival of rhinos, elephants and other wildlife was central to the dispute. The Tribunal's reasoning was not confined only to human injury but extended to the ecological integrity of a protected landscape. The Deopahar-Numaligarh Refinery matter also reflects a biocentric orientation. The dispute concerned a boundary wall obstructing an elephant corridor. By directing demolition of the wall and recognising the need to protect elephant movement, the Tribunal acknowledged that non-human species require habitat connectivity and freedom of movement[34]. This comes close to species justice because it treats elephants not merely as objects of conservation but as beings whose ecological needs must shape legal outcomes. The Deepor Beel litigation presents a more complex picture. Deepor Beel is a Ramsar site, wetland and wildlife habitat near Guwahati. The NGT censured governmental failures relating to municipal solid waste, wetland protection and railway-related threats to wildlife. It ordered remedial action, including waste management measures and compliance

monitoring[35]. These orders were important because they addressed state inaction and sought ecological restoration. However, the judicial vocabulary largely remained within compliance, waste management and regulatory failure. The wetland was not explicitly conceptualised as a living ecological subject with its own right to maintain and regenerate its vital cycles.

This distinction is important. A compliance-based order may protect a wetland, but an ecocentric order would articulate why the wetland matters beyond human use. It would recognise the wetland as habitat, hydrological system, biodiversity space, climate regulator and ecological community. The Deepor Beel orders are therefore environmentally valuable but not fully rights-of-nature oriented. The Baghjan oil blowout case demonstrates the importance of green criminology even more sharply. The blowout and fire at an Oil India Limited well in Tinsukia district caused extensive ecological and social damage, affecting nearby communities, wetlands and biodiversity-rich areas including the Dibru-Saikhowa landscape. The NGT addressed restoration, compensation and responsibility[36]. The case illustrates state-corporate environmental harm: industrial activity, regulatory lapses, ecological fragility and community victimisation converged into a major environmental disaster. The NGT's intervention in Baghjan was significant because it recognised the need for compensation and restoration. Yet, from a green criminological standpoint, the case also shows the limits of post-facto environmental justice. Compensation after ecological damage cannot fully restore destroyed habitats, dead organisms, contaminated wetlands or disrupted ecological relationships. Polluter pays may internalise some costs, but ecological loss is often irreversible[37]. The Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project litigation further reveals the tension between ecological precaution and developmental reasoning. The Tribunal applied the precautionary principle and required expert examination, but the larger reasoning remained shaped by the perceived public benefits of electricity generation, energy security and developmental necessity[38]. Similarly, in the Mechaki oil drilling matter near Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, the Tribunal acknowledged ecological fragility and procedural concerns but allowed the project to proceed subject to safeguards[39].

These cases show that the NGT is capable of strong environmental intervention, but it often remains trapped within a balancing model. The balancing model assumes that environmental harm and development benefits can be weighed against each other. Ecocentric jurisprudence, however, would ask whether certain ecological thresholds should be non-negotiable. It would treat some habitats, corridors, wetlands and species survival concerns as limits to development rather than variables in a cost-benefit calculation.

IX. Anthropocentric Constraints in Indian Judicial Environmentalism

Indian judicial environmentalism faces four major anthropocentric constraints. First, the constitutional foundation of environmental protection is largely human rights-based. Article 21 has been creatively expanded to include environmental rights, but it remains a right of human persons. This makes it difficult to articulate nature's rights independently of human welfare. Article 48-A and Article 51-A(g) are more ecologically oriented, but they are Directive Principle and Fundamental Duty provisions rather than directly enforceable rights in the same sense as Article 21[40]. Secondly, Indian environmental statutes are mostly regulatory rather than rights-based. They regulate pollution, forests, wildlife, biodiversity and environmental clearance, but they rarely recognise ecosystems as subjects of rights. The NGT Act empowers adjudication, compensation and restoration, but does not establish legal personality for rivers, forests, wetlands or species[41]. Thirdly, the judiciary often relies on committees, expert reports and compliance affidavits. While this is administratively necessary, it may depoliticise environmental harm by treating it as a technical problem rather than a structural problem. Green criminology reminds us that environmental harm is not merely a failure of technique; it is often produced by political economy, state priorities, corporate influence and weak enforcement [42].

Fourthly, even when courts use ecocentric language, enforcement remains weak. Closure orders, restoration plans and compensation directions often depend on the same administrative machinery whose inaction produced the harm. This creates an implementation gap between judicial aspiration and ecological reality.

X. Towards a Green Criminological Model of Ecocentric Justice

A green criminological model of ecocentric justice for India would require several changes. First, legal standing must be expanded. Citizens, communities, ecological guardians and public institutions should be able to sue not only for human injury but also for injury to ecosystems, species and natural processes [43]. Secondly, environmental harm should be assessed through ecological victimology. Courts should ask: Who or what has been harmed? Are animals, rivers, wetlands, forests, soils, groundwater, species and future generations among the victims? This would shift the focus from compensation to humans alone towards restoration of ecological relationships. Thirdly, independent guardianship models should replace exclusive state guardianship. If nature is declared a legal person, its guardians should include ecological experts, local communities, Indigenous representatives, civil society actors and independent statutory authorities. This would reduce the risk of conflict of interest where the state is both promoter of development and guardian of nature. Fourthly, remedies must move beyond monetary compensation. Ecocentric remedies should include habitat restoration, species recovery, removal of ecological barriers, long-term monitoring, criminal prosecution of serious environmental harm, and prohibition of activities that cross ecological thresholds[44]. Fifthly, environmental courts should adopt the principle of ecological non-regression. Once a habitat, wetland, forest or species corridor has received legal protection, future state action should not dilute that protection without strict ecological justification. Finally, green criminology requires recognition of state-corporate environmental crime. Environmental harm caused by licensed industries, negligent regulators or development projects should not escape scrutiny merely because formal permission was granted. Legality and ecological legitimacy are not the same.

XI. Conclusion

The Indian judiciary has made substantial contributions to environmental protection. Through constitutional interpretation, public interest litigation and specialised environmental adjudication, it has developed a rich body of environmental jurisprudence. However, the movement towards biocentric and ecocentric jurisprudence remains partial, uneven and contested.

The Supreme Court's decisions in *Centre for Environmental Law and Animal Welfare Board v. A. Nagaraja* represent important advances towards species justice and animal dignity. The High Court decisions in *Mohd. Salim* and *A. Periyakaruppan* reflect bold attempts to recognise rivers and Mother Nature as legal persons. The National Green Tribunal's interventions in *Kaziranga*, *Deopahar*, *Deepor Beel* and *Baghjan* show moments of ecological sensitivity and institutional accountability.

Yet, these developments have not matured into a coherent ecocentric legal order. Indian courts continue to operate within anthropocentric constitutional language, regulatory statutes, sustainable development balancing and state-centred guardianship. Nature is often protected as a resource, heritage, public trust or environmental asset rather than as a rights-bearing subject. Even where ecocentric vocabulary appears, it is frequently limited by implementation gaps and developmental pressures.

From a green criminological frame of reference, the central limitation is that Indian law still struggles to recognise ecological harm as harm in itself. Non-human beings and ecosystems appear as objects of protection, but not consistently as victims of injustice. The judiciary has opened the door to biocentric and ecocentric jurisprudence, but the legal architecture remains incomplete. Therefore, the future of

Indian environmental jurisprudence requires a shift from environmental protection to ecological justice. This would mean recognising that rivers, forests, wetlands, animals and species are not merely resources for human use, but co-inhabitants of the legal and moral community. The Indian judiciary has begun this transition. The challenge now is to transform scattered ecocentric moments into a principled, enforceable and institutionally grounded jurisprudence of nature.

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