

The Role of the National Green Tribunal in Environmental Justice and Sustainable Development: A Study on Forest and Mangrove Conservation in India

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: 23rd Sep 2025 Accepted: 08th Oct 2025 Published: 22nd Oct 2025	The National Green Tribunal (NGT), established under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010, represents a pioneering step in India's commitment to environmental justice. As a specialized body, it ensures expeditious resolution of disputes related to environmental protection, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. With its jurisdiction over key legislations such as the Forest Conservation Act, the Air and Water Acts, and the Biological Diversity Act, the NGT plays a crucial role in preventing ecological degradation and holding violators accountable. This study, based on secondary data and thematic analysis, examines the structure, governance and landmark decisions of the NGT, with special reference to mangrove and forest conservation. Findings highlight that while the tribunal has been effective in enforcing compliance, preventing deforestation and involving local communities in ecosystem protection, challenges remain in the consistent enforcement of its rulings. Nevertheless, the NGT continues to serve as a vital instrument of environmental governance, balancing ecological preservation with developmental imperatives.
Keywords: National Green Tribunal (NGT), Environmental Justice, Forest and Mangrove Conservation, Sustainable Development.	
Plagiarism Check Report: Tool Used: Turnitin Date of Report: Oct 04, 2025 Similarity Index: 9% Remarks: No significant matching text. All citations and matches are properly referenced. The manuscript is considered original.	
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How to Cite: Mali, B. B. (2025). The Role of the National Green Tribunal in Environmental Justice and Sustainable Development: A Study on Forest and Mangrove Conservation in India. IIP: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal (IIPMRJ), 2(IV), 504–510.	

Introduction

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) was established under the National Green Tribunal Act and officially became operational on October 18, 2010. Its creation marked a significant milestone in India's commitment to environmental justice, providing a specialized legal body dedicated exclusively to handling cases related to environmental protection and conservation. As a result, India became the third country in the world, after Australia and New Zealand, to establish such a dedicated environmental tribunal, and it was the first of its kind among developing nations. The NGT plays a crucial role in enforcing environmental laws, addressing ecological concerns and ensuring sustainable development by delivering swift and effective legal resolutions. Its establishment reflects India's growing recognition of the need for a strong judicial framework to balance economic progress with environmental responsibility.

Research Objectives

Research objectives of present study is given as follow.

1. To study the structure, purpose, and functioning of the National Green Tribunal (NGT).
2. To examine the effectiveness of NGT in the conservation of mangroves and forest ecosystems.

Data collection and Methodology

The present study is entirely based on secondary data which is collected from journals, NGT Report, various websites shared on this point by expert and websites. For the present study, conducting a thematic analysis of various report. The purpose of establishment of NGT, Structure and governance of NGT, Headquarter and regional branches, Significance and Landmark Decisions, Effectiveness in Mangrove conservation, Effectiveness in forest conservation of Hill areas, Effectiveness in forest conservation of National Parks action are studied under the strict actions of NGT for environment conservation etc. has taken on the secondary sources. The entire study has represented regarding the crop selection ideas for maximize profit in agriculture harvesting.

Review of Literature

Several studies have analysed the role and impact of the NGT in environmental jurisprudence.

1. **Singh and Sharma** (2017) discuss the tribunal's effectiveness in expediting environmental litigation and ensuring legal accountability.
2. **Mishra** (2019), According to Mishra, the NGT has been instrumental in shaping policy decisions on forest conservation and climate resilience.
3. **Das and Rao** (2021), A study by Das and Rao (2021) highlights how NGT rulings have influenced sustainable urban planning and pollution control measures.

4. **Gupta et al.** (2022), Research by Gupta et al. (2022) underscores the NGT's role in preventing deforestation and promoting afforestation efforts in fragile ecosystems.
5. **World Bank** (2023), The World Bank acknowledges the NGT's contribution to environmental governance in India but emphasizes the need for better enforcement mechanisms and inter-agency coordination. Collectively, these studies affirm the NGT's crucial role in India's environmental framework while identifying implementation gaps and legal challenges.

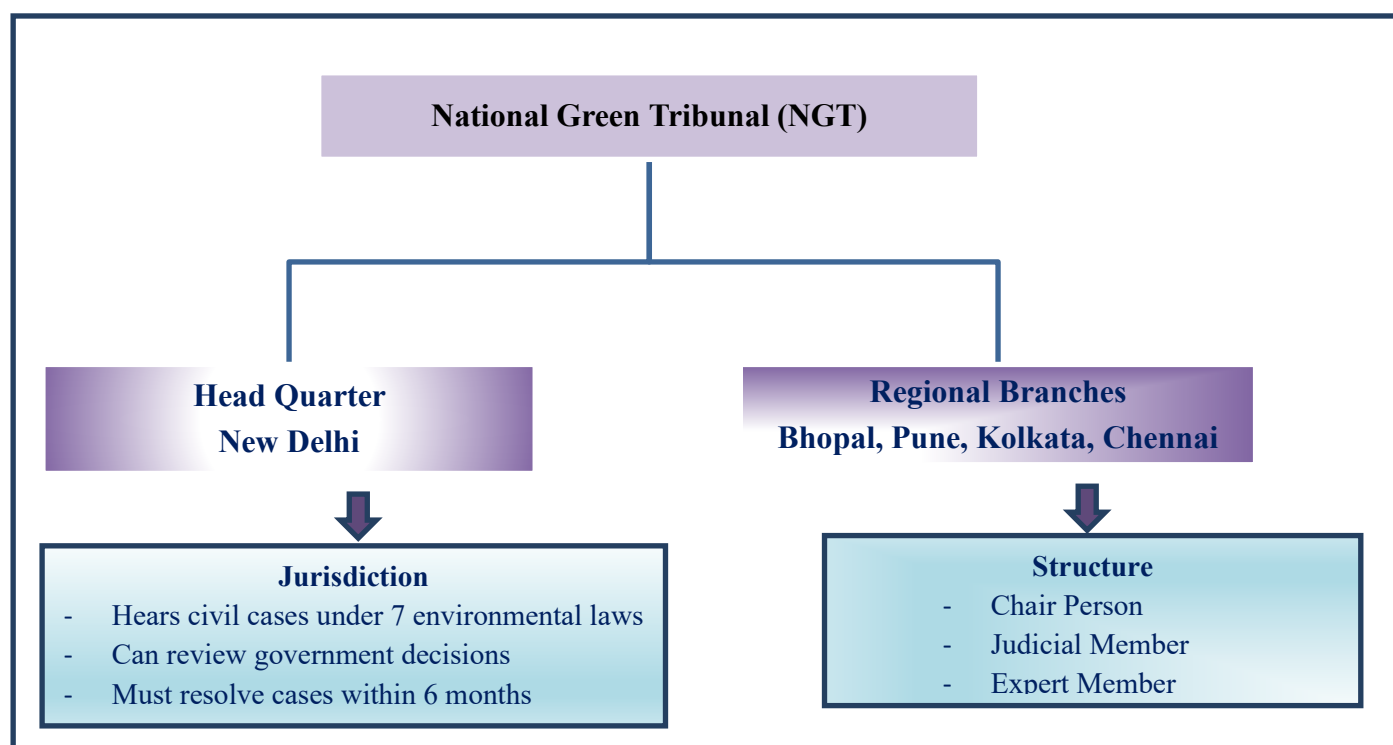
Result and Discussion

• Purpose of establishment of NGT

The primary objective of the NGT is to ensure the expeditious resolution of environmental disputes. The tribunal is mandated to resolve cases within six months, ensuring timely justice in environmental matters. It has jurisdiction over cases related to environmental laws, including the Forest Conservation Act, the Air and Water Pollution Acts, and the Biological Diversity Act, among others. The NGT possesses both original and appellate jurisdiction, allowing it to hear cases directly and review decisions made by other authorities.

Structure and Governance

Fig. No.1: Structure and Governance of NGT



The NGT consists of a Chairperson, judicial members and expert members. These members serve a tenure of three years or until they reach the age of 65, whichever comes first and they are not eligible for reappointment. The Chairperson is appointed by the central government in consultation with the Chief Justice of India. The present chairperson of NGT is Hon. Mr. Justice Prakash Shrivastava. (NGT, National Green Tribunal, National Green Tribunal- 2019) Additionally, a selection committee is formed by the central government to appoint judicial and expert members. The present judicial and expert member of NGT is Justice S.K. Singh, Justice Sudhir Agrawal, Justice B. Amit Sthalekar, Justice Arun Kumar Tyagi. (NGT, National Green Tribunal, National Green Tribunal- 2019) (NGT, National Green Tribunal- Judicial and Expert Member, National Green Tribunal- 2019) Justice Dinesh Kumar Singh and Justice Pushpa Sathyanaraya. The tribunal can have a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 20 full-time judicial and expert members to ensure efficient functioning.

• **Headquarters and Regional Branches**

The principal branch of the NGT is located in New Delhi, with regional branches in Bhopal, Pune, Kolkata and Chennai. These regional benches enable the tribunal to address environmental disputes across different parts of the country effectively.

• **Significance and Landmark Decisions**

In October 2021, the Supreme Court of India recognized the NGT as a 'special' forum for environmental litigation. It was also granted 'Suo Motu' powers, allowing it to take cognizance of environmental issues even in the absence of formal complaints. This enhancement in its powers solidifies the tribunal's role as a crucial institution for enforcing environmental laws and promoting sustainable development in India.

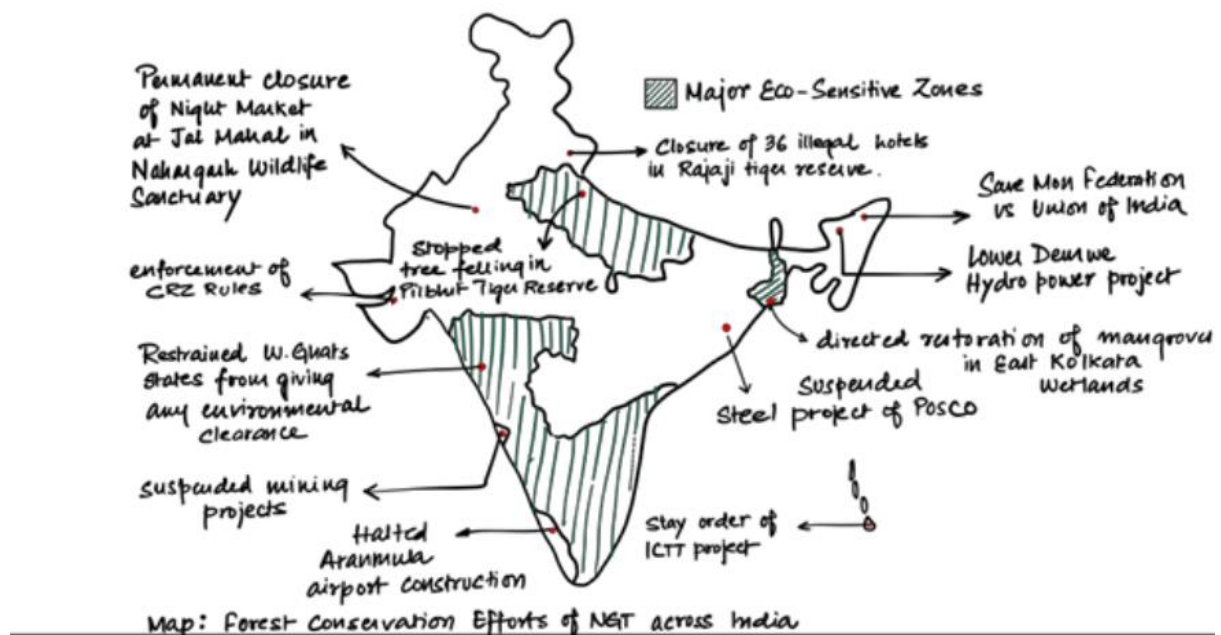
▪ **The NGT can hear civil cases under seven environmental laws**

1. The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974
2. The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1977
3. The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980
4. The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981
5. The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
6. The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 (Repeated in the original text, possibly an error)
7. The Biological Diversity Act, 2002

Decisions made by the government under these laws can be challenged before the NGT. The National Green Tribunal Act of 2010 is a key legal framework in India. It significantly shapes environmental conservation, especially forest protection. The Act aims to address environmental

disputes swiftly and promote sustainable development. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) plays a vital role in shaping policies and decisions on forest conservation. It actively addresses issues like deforestation, illegal logging, and habitat destruction. The Act strengthens accountability and encourages sustainable ecosystem preservation.

Over the years, the NGT has become a crucial force in environmental governance. It enforces strict regulations on deforestation, pollution control, and waste management.



Source: (Team, 2024)

Strict Measures by NGT for Environmental Protection

1. Effectiveness in Mangrove Conservation

A. Mangrove Protection Laws

The enforcement of mangrove protection laws plays a vital role in conserving coastal ecosystems and controlling environmental damage. For instance, in 2018, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) instructed the Gujarat government to implement the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules to protect mangroves along its coastline.

Objectives:

1. To ensure strict compliance with environmental norms.
2. To stop illegal cutting and destruction of mangrove forests.
3. To encourage sustainable coastal development.

Through these regulations, the government was expected to strengthen monitoring, penalize offenders and restore degraded mangrove areas, thereby maintaining ecological balance and safeguarding biodiversity.

B. NGT's Legal Actions Against Offenders

The NGT has consistently acted against individuals and organizations that violate environmental laws concerning mangroves. For example, in 2022, the tribunal ordered the demolition of unauthorized constructions near mangrove zones in Thane and Vasai-Virar, Maharashtra. These illegal structures threatened the delicate coastal ecosystem by encroaching on protected mangrove forests—natural shields against coastal erosion and habitats for marine life. This ruling underscored the importance of following environmental rules and highlighted the necessity of strict enforcement to prevent further ecological harm.

C. Proactive Monitoring of Mangrove Health and Conservation

The NGT has actively monitored the condition and conservation of mangrove ecosystems throughout India. It has intervened on multiple occasions to ensure their protection, given their role in maintaining coastal stability and supporting biodiversity. For example, in 2020, the tribunal directed the restoration of degraded mangroves in the East Kolkata Wetlands, a Ramsar site known for its biodiversity and water purification functions. This initiative aimed to repair environmental damage, restore ecological balance, and secure essential ecosystem services such as flood control, carbon storage, and wildlife habitat. Such measures highlight the tribunal's commitment to ongoing monitoring, timely intervention, and sustainable conservation practices.

D. Role of Local Communities in Sustainable Mangrove Management

The NGT has acknowledged the significant contribution of local communities in conserving and sustainably managing mangrove ecosystems. Recognizing that community involvement ensures long-term protection, it has encouraged inclusive approaches. For instance, in Odisha's Bhitarkanika mangroves, the tribunal stressed community participation in conservation. These mangroves, known for rich biodiversity and coastal protection, have been under threat from deforestation and encroachments. By involving local residents, fishermen, and other stakeholders, the NGT has promoted sustainable livelihoods, afforestation initiatives, and responsible resource use. Such strategies not only conserve mangroves but also generate socio-economic benefits for dependent communities, thereby ensuring harmony between environmental protection and human well-being.

Conclusion

The establishment of the National Green Tribunal marks a transformative step in India's environmental governance framework. By providing a specialized and time-bound mechanism for addressing ecological disputes, the NGT ensures accountability and strengthens the implementation of environmental laws. Its interventions in mangrove protection, forest conservation, and biodiversity management illustrate its proactive role in safeguarding fragile

ecosystems. Landmark decisions and suo motu actions further reinforce its authority as a guardian of environmental rights. However, limitations such as weak enforcement, lack of inter-agency coordination, and delays in compliance highlight the need for stronger institutional support. Overall, the NGT has emerged as a powerful instrument for balancing economic development with environmental sustainability, thereby ensuring ecological security for present and future generations.

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