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**Greening The Bench: The Role of Public Interest Litigation in Fostering Environmental Consciousness: A Socio-Legal Inquiry in South Asia****Ganegama, G.M.K.S.K.\****Faculty of Law, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Ratmalana, Sri Lanka*  
*[\\*kaushalyaganegama2@gmail.com](mailto:*kaushalyaganegama2@gmail.com)***Abstract**

In South Asia, Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has emerged as a transformative legal tool that has expanded access to justice while reshaping the landscape of environmental protection. PIL has acted as a catalyst for raising ecological awareness among institutions, citizens, and policymakers in addition to securing judicial remedies. This study focuses on the judicial innovation and public engagement of PIL in advancing sustainability and strengthening environmental consciousness, environmental protection as an integral component of the constitutional right to life and state responsibility, with particular emphasis on Sri Lanka and comparative insights from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. With black letter statutes and a qualitative case study approach and comparative analysis of similar jurisdictions, the study examines landmark judgments, such as *Bulankulama v Secretary, Ministry of Industrial Development* (Eppawala case, Sri Lanka), the Chunnakam Case, the Indian Supreme Court's environmental rights jurisprudence under Article 21, and Pakistan's *Shehla Zia v WAPDA*. These cases demonstrate this transformation for instance, in *Bulankulama v. Secretary, Ministry of Industrial Development*, the Court halted the Eppawala phosphate project to protect long-term resource sustainability, and in the Chunnakam case, judicial intervention compelled the shutdown of a pollution causing power plant, while in *Shehla Zia v. WAPDA*, the Pakistani Supreme Court held that environmental hazards violate the fundamental right to life. The study shows how PIL helps to promote environmental citizenship by bridging the gap between public activism and legal standards while offering insights valuable for policymakers, activists, and environmental practitioners across the region. For example, the Eppawala case sparked nationwide public debate in Sri Lanka. In India, through the Indian Article 21, civil society mobilization, such as environmental NGO participation in litigation. The study identified that South Asian courts have progressively broadened environmental rights through PIL through media coverage, civil society involvement, and court interventions, transforming litigation into a kind of public education. However, challenges remain, such as judicial overreach, procedural delays, and inconsistent enforcement, which often reduce the transformative potential of PIL. The findings demonstrate that PIL has produced tangible legal outcomes, including the suspension of environmentally harmful development projects, judicially mandated pollution controls, and the recognition of precautionary and public trust principles. Beyond legal remedies, the analysis shows that PIL contributes to heightened environmental consciousness by amplifying public discourse through media attention and civil society engagement. However, the study also finds that the long-term effectiveness of these judicial interventions is constrained by inconsistent enforcement, administrative inertia, and delays in compliance, indicating that PIL's transformative potential depends heavily on institutional follow-through. By linking PIL to the development of environmental citizenship, the study addresses an underexplored socio-legal dimension in South Asian scholarship.

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