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# Harmonizing sustainable development, environmental conservation, and renewable energy: An in-depth exploration of international and Indian Legal frameworks

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### **Abstract**

The goal of the paper is to evaluate and interpret both Indian and international legal remedies for the problems with sustainable development and environmental pollution. It shows how well the judiciary of India has encouraged environmental activism and considerably enhanced the statute law to safeguard the environment and encourage sustainable development. The journey from Stockholm to Rio Sumit put us on the way that all people should be on if they want to live healthy, productive lives that are in harmony with nature. A number of environmental laws were passed as a result of the idea of sustainable development, which was one of the key drivers behind their creation. These laws were intended to safeguard the environment while also minimizing pollution. The paper will also acknowledge the existence of the specific function performed by India's court in interpreting a number of legislations regarding environmental protection in that country. Global worry regarding ecological degradation has emerged, and it now poses a problem for both the current and upcoming human generations. For the existence of life, environmental preservation must be a top priority. The responsibility of the present generation has the chance to address environmental issues since, if the current condition is allowed to persist, the next generation will not exist. The future of humanity is now at stake in the environmental agenda. The environment is a part of the people, and the reverse is also true. In addition to providing information about the role of international legal frameworks in the field of sustainable development, the current paper also offers a way to understand how the field is now developing.

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### 1. Introduction

The degradation of the environment and unsustainable development that threatens the existence of life is currently the world's biggest concern, and India in particular. Degradation of the environment has emerged as a global issue and challenge for the present and the future. For the existence of life and the defence of the right to life, environmental protection has now taken precedence. Because of the basic dependency between the biological, physical, and social environments and their interactions, which support all forms of life, human growth has historically been parasitic on the environment.

Environmental devastation results in the extinction of all living things, including humans. Environmental degradation is caused by excessive production, excessive resource use, nuclear radiation, industrial waste, industrial accidents, violent logging, indiscriminate quarrying, contamination of rivers and water supplies, and a sharp rise in air and noise pollution. The current development plan has detrimental repercussions on human life, including global warming, ozone depletion, and pollution.

The study will analyse the goals, including defining sustaina ble development and defining what it means; identifying the fundamental causes of environmental degradation and unsus tainable development; analysing current laws and comparin g them to the current international framework; and examinin g the role of the Indian judiciary in policies that relate envir onmental protection and sustainable development.

### 2. Research Methodology

The study will analyse the goals, including defining sustainable development and defining what it means; identifying the fundamental causes of environmental degradation and unsustainable development; analysing existing legislation and comparing them to the current international framework; and examining the role of the Indian judiciary in policies that link environmental safeguards to sustainable development.

### 3. Significance of the Problem

The environmental degradation has become the subject of global concern and it has become a challenge to the present and the future generations of humankind. The environmental protection has to be a priority for the existence of life and for the protection of right to life.

Environmental law is a comparatively new branch of law and has evolved mainly over the last thirty years. It is therefore in a formative stage and is undergoing a process of rapid development inspired also by a quantum leap in our understanding of the environmental challenge. responsibility of present generation has the opportunity to tackle environmental problems because the next generation will not be there if the present situation is allowed to continue. The life of human beings depends not only upon the environment but also on ecological factors. So, there is a need to protect the environment and maintain sustainable development by each and every country.

### 4. Scope of the Study

The dedication of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government is necessary for sustainable growth to be accomplished. The judiciary is crucial in advancing environmental governance, upholding the rule of law, and ensuring a just balance between development, social issues, and the environment. Each nation's policies and practices should incorporate environmental sustainability development. The purpose of the current study is to evaluate the necessity for sustainable environments and the significance of sustainable environments for the right to life. As evidenced by the frequent treaty obligation to report on legislative measures, the adoption and enforcement of laws and regulations (at the regional, national, state/provincial, or local/municipal level) are also necessary for implementation of the majority of international agreements made in the fields of environment and development.

### 5. Meaning of Sustainable Development

gave rise to the idea of sustainable development (hereafter,

A number of environmental movements from prior decades

SD). Particularly after the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, SD gained relevance. The idea of using the planet's resources sustainably has a long history. At the time of the Cocoyoc Declaration on Environment and Development in the early 1970s, the phrase "Sustainable Development" first appeared in use. Since then, it has become a trademark of international organisations dedicated to achieving environmentally benign or beneficial development (Redclift, 2003). With regard to the interests of both the present and future generations, SD provides a compromise between the objectives of environmental preservation and economic development. The entire philosophy is predicated on the idea that natural resources, like the sea floor, are not the results of the labour of current generations and may only be used with due care for the rights of future generations (Krämer, 2021). Adopting a sustainable development strategy that promotes energy efficiency, renewable energy, and other environmentally friendly practices is the most efficient method to combat climate change. (Fülöp, 2021). With the help of SD, civilization may engage with the

environment without endangering the resource's long-term health. Hence, it is a notion that calls for raising living standards without endangering the planet's ecosystems or creating environmental problems like deforestation and pollution of the air and water, which can lead to issues like climate change and the extinction of species.

For the past 30 years, SD has acquired widespread acceptance in international legal texts that are not legally binding. It is expressed in innumerable state statements, international organisation resolutions, and action plans, yet these governments are unable to create an enforceable legal rule pertaining to sustainable development. 112 multilateral treaties mention SD, 30 of which call for universal involvement (Sustainable Development, Future Generations, and Public Trust 2014). SD reconcile conflicting norms of environmental economy, social development and human rights. In many international treaties and conventions, SD is the main part of the text. The concept of SD is part of many decisions of international courts of justice. Environmental law and developmental law are not alternatives but they are integral concepts. Development should not be against the environment and the concept of environmental protection should not prevent development.

### 6. Fundamental Principles of Sustainable Development

The significant principle of SD is the set of principles mentioned in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21, Climate Change Convention, Biodiversity Convention and Non-binding Principles on Forestery, 1992 [1]. Those are

- Principle of conservation [2],
- Principle of right to development [3],
- Principle of key elements of sustainable development and interconnections precaution [4],
- Principle of integration [5],
- Principle polluter pay [6],

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21, Climate Change Convention, Biodiversity Convention and Non-binding Principles on Forestery, 1992.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Rio Declaration, Principle 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Rio Declaration, Principle 25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Climate Change Convention, Art. 3, Bio-diversity Convention.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Rio Declaration, Principle 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Rio Declaration, Principle 16.

- Principle of inter-generational equity [7] and
- Principle of common but differential responsibility [8].

### 7. International Law and Sustainable Development

The most notable legal innovation of the twenty-first century, environmental law has gained enormous global popularity. To reduce pollution, almost all of the world's countries have passed environmental protection legislation. Environmental law has been viewed from both national and international viewpoints. By case law, the Courts are gradually creating a few isolated areas of environmental law. It can be observed, in particular, in cases involving judicial activism and public interest litigation. After 30 years, due to United Nations treaties, SD has entered international law and is in use on a global scale (Reimer, 2021). The world community calls for the documentation of SD, yet SD is covered by numerous international declarations, resolutions, and treaties.

International law provides a mechanism through which the targets of the global community are made efficient and can be strengthened and clarified. As Decleris states: 'Like all social institutions created by man so far, the institution of sustainable development too will acquire its specific form via the science of law and its application by court decisions' (Directorate-General for Environment (European Commission) & Decleris, 2000).

International environmental law was not entirely absent prior to the Stockholm Conference in 1972, which first established international legal norms. This period can be divided as follows-

### a) Pre-Stockholm International Environmental Law

The public's anxiety over the global crisis increased as irreparable damage started to become apparent. This spurred initiatives to bring up International Environmental Control. Early examples of international environmental law include a few bilateral or even multilateral agreements that were mostly signed during the first decade of the twenty-first century and had provisions for the preservation of natural resources. The 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty between Great Britain (on behalf of Canada) and the United States stipulates, among other things, that waters that are designated as boundary waters and waters that flow across the border must not be polluted on either side in a way that harms the other's health or property. The border between Germany and Belgium is governed by a provision in the 1929 agreement between the two nations. Never allow water that could harm public health to run into ditches or streams in the said agreement.

Due to their constrained scope, the treaties and agreements signed during those times were unable to have a significant impact. With a few exceptions, those regional treaties and accords were mostly intended to settle disagreements over the distribution of water. Nonetheless, they have the ability to influence the growth of global environmental protection standards. In 1954, shortly after the millennium's midpoint, an international convention was held to address oil contamination of the oceans. The Convention expressly forbade the discharge from any oil tanker of any oily mixture containing oil that would contaminate the sea's surface and established penalties in accordance with the law of the

relevant area. The passage of the Antarctic Treaty gave the international environmental law movement a boost and tightened environmental regulations in areas that are shared by multiple nations. This is strongly illustrated by its emphasis on using Antarctica only for peaceful purposes and by its prohibition of nuclear explosions and the disposal of radioactive waste (Jariwala, 1993).

### a) Post-Stockholm International Environmental Law Stockholm Declaration 1972

The Stockholm Declaration of 1972 gave the SD principle more momentum. The Declaration lays out a number of principles. For instance, the Stockholm Declaration's Principle 3 states that the capacity of the Earth to create essential renewable resources must be protected and, whenever possible, restored. Non-renewable resources must be used in a way that safeguards them against the threat of future exhaustion, according to Principle 5 of this Declaration. Also, the Principle 11 of the Declaration mandates that all countries' environmental protection policies must support and not negatively impact the current or future development energy of poor nations. (Person *et al.*, 1987).

### **Brundtland Commission Report: Our Common Future** 1987

The idea of SD was first discussed by the Brundtland Commission 1987 'Report over Common Future'. Brundtland Report defines SD as follows- 'Sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without sacrificing their ability to meet their own needs for subsequent generations' [9].

According to the Brundtland Report, the concept of sustainable development contains two key concepts:

- (a) The idea of necessities, in particular the fundamental requirements of the world's poor, to which absolute precedence should be accorded,
- (b) the notion that the environment's capacity to meet existing and future needs is constrained by the state of technology and social organisation (*Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development:* 1987: P. 13).

Brundtland Report emphasizes that Sustainable development entails the incorporation of ecology and economics into all levels of decision-making. Sustainable development is seen as a tactic that would reconcile the aims of ecological integrity and economic growth, which on the surface appear to be at odds.

### **Earth Summit**

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCEP)- Earth Summit was held in June 1992 at Rio De Janerio wherein more than 150 Governments participated. The size of this UN Conference was unprecedented. The goal of UNCED was to get everyone on board with sustainable development, which attempts to protect resources for coming generations. The Earth Summit was inspired by the 1987, Brundtland Report. The Earth Summit made people around the world consider how their lifestyles impact natural resources. The Five Documents of Earth Summit are as follows-

• Rio Declaration on Environment and Development- The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Rio Declaration, Principle 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Rio Declaration, Principle 3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: 1987

Declaration outlines 27 national commitments to promote environmentally friendly growth patterns.

- Agenda 21- UNCED approved Agenda 21 as a plan of action for regional, governmental, and international action. Hundreds of pages of suggested solutions to environmental issues and the promotion of sustainable development make up Agenda 21.
- U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development 1993- In order to follow up on the Rio Conference, promote international cooperation, and rationalise the intergovernmental decision-making capacity for the integration of environmental and developmental issues, the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) was born out of Agenda 21's chapter 38. to assess the implementation of Agenda 21's progress.
- Earth Summit plus Five 1997 It was held in New York in June 1997 and was focused on the environment. "We pledge to cooperate with one another in a spirit of world collaboration to strengthen our efforts to satisfy the needs of the present and future generations." (*Take action for the sustainable development goals United Nations Sustainable Development* 2004).

### **Kyoto Conference and Pact on Global Warming**

On December 11, 1997, a summit to reduce global warming was organised. A historic agreement was struck by delegates from 159 countries at the World Climate Summit, asking for industrialised countries to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases by a mandated amount in the next millennium in order to prevent possibly catastrophic global warming. By imposing strict restrictions on the emissions of greenhouse gases by industrialised nations, this agreement bolstered the 1992 Convention on Climate Change.

### **United Nations Climate Change Conference 2005**

The conference was held in Montreal, Canada, from November 28 to December 10, 2005. The majority of the participating nations were required to adhere to precise and binding emission reduction targets as a result of this climate change convention.

### **Conference of Parties 26: Together for our Planet (2021)**

- 1. Recognizing the emergency- Governments reaffirmed the Paris Agreement's objective to keep the rise in the world's average temperature to well below 2°C and pursue efforts to keep it at 1.5 °C.
- Accelerating action- The need for action "in this critical decade," when carbon dioxide emissions must be lowered by 45% to reach net zero by mid-century, was emphasized by many countries.
- Moving away from fossil fuels- Countries ultimately agreed to a provision asking for a phase-down of coal power and a phase-out of "inefficient" fossil fuel subsidies, which was possibly the most contentious decision made in Glasgow.
- 4. Delivering on climate finance-The pledge made by developed nations to provide developing nations with \$100 billion annually fell short when they arrived in Glasgow. The Glasgow conclusion reiterates the commitment and exhorts wealthy countries to fully meet the US\$100 billion aim immediately.
- 5. Stepping up support for adaptation- The Glasgow Pact

advocates for tripling the amount of money allocated to aiding developing nations in preparing for and coping with the effects of climate change.

### 8. Indian Law and Sustainable Development

Due to population growth, urbanisation, industrialization, and poverty, environmental problems have reached alarming proportions. A variety of governmental and policy initiatives were adopted at all levels in order to address these environmental issues as a worldwide responsibility. In order to effectively implement all of these measures, the diversity of environmental measures is further compounded to form multiple authorities. The numerous assessments show the insufficiency in handling development and environmental issues, despite the fact that these regulatory authorities were significantly involved in the formulation and implementation of the policy. This has seriously cast doubt on the idea that legal aspects of SD are included in India's environmental governance.

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### **Programme and Policies**

- National Environment Awareness Campaign (hereafter, NEAC), 1986- It is unnecessary to emphasise the necessity for a large-scale campaign to safeguard the environment. It is necessary to channel public environmental concerns into volunteer action. A network of grassroots organisations and nodal agencies is necessary for this. The NEAC was established in the middle of 1986 with the goal of raising national environmental consciousness. For the purpose of raising awareness and fostering action-oriented activities, NGOs, army units, government offices, schools, colleges, universities, research institutes, women's and youth organisations, etc. from around the nation are given little financial aid as part of this campaign.
- National Water Policy (hereafter, NWP) 1987 -Water development projects should serve multiple purposes and satisfy a variety of goals, including the provision of clean drinking water and flood mitigation. Using price and other methods, the initiative aims to increase water use efficiency by 20%. For the purpose of conserving water, reducing waste, and ensuring its fairer distribution both between and within States, integrated water resources management is established.
- National Environment Policy (hereafter, NEP) 2006-NEP, 2006 was a response to India's dedication to protecting the environment, which was enshrined in Articles 48A and 51A(g) of the Indian Constitution and bolstered by court interpretation of Article 21. It is agreed that every citizen has responsibility for maintaining a healthy environment, not just the state.
- National Action Plan on Climate Change (hereafter, NAPCC),2008- NAPCC was introduced by India on June 30, 2008. It emphasises the necessity of sustaining a high growth rate for raising the standard of living for the vast majority of Indians and lessening the effects of

- climate change. It highlights actions that advance India's sustainable development goals while also providing advantages for combating climate change. The Ministry of Environment and Forests coordinates NAPCC, which is carried out by the nodal Ministries and aims to advance pertinent measures in certain sectors or areas.
- National Ganga River Basin Authority, (NGRBA), 2009- On February 20, 2009, the Central Government established the NGRBA and granted the Ganga the designation of a National River. Under the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986, the NGRBA was established as an empowered planning, financing, monitoring, and coordinating authority for the conservation of the Ganga River
- Constitution of India on Environment In 1976, through 42<sup>nd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, Environmental protection had been introduced in the constitution.
  - Directive Principles of State Policy -The 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act introduced Article 48-A [10] to the directive principles. It deals specifically with the protection and improvement of environment. In several environmental cases the courts have been guided by the Art. 48A [11].
  - Fundamental Duties- Fundamental Duties were introduced in the Constitution after 42nd Amendment Act, 1976 Part IVA. This was added on the recommendations of the Swarn Singh Committee, Article 51-A (g) [12] Deals with the fundamental duty with respect to the environment.
  - Fundamental Rights- Fundamental rights and directive principles in Part III and Part IV of the Indian Constitution are supplementary and complementary to each other. Part III is the means to achieve the goals in Part IV. These rights in Part III can be enforced directly in the court of law. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. [13] It ensures a fundamental right to a dignified existence, a means of support, good health, access to medical treatment, etc. Life, health, and the environment are all interconnected; without a clean environment, one cannot be healthy. Life has no value if one is not in excellent health. The judiciary has done justification by interpreting the right to live in a healthy environment which is also the sanctum sanctorum of Human Rights.

Healthy existence, the preservation of clean and healthy surroundings, and stable ecological balance are vital components of the right to live in a healthy environment.

### 9. Legislative Framework of India

 Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974-This Act makes provisions for the maintenance and restoration of the nation's water wholesomeness as well as the prevention and management of water pollution. A "Consent to Establish" for the discharge of effluents

- Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981- To prevent, regulate, and lessen air pollution in India, this Act was passed in 1981 and revised in 1987. The Act assigns the CPCB and SPCBs a number of duties at the state level.
- Biosphere Reserves Programme, 1986- In addition to the protected area system required by the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972, the Indian government has also designated several regions as biosphere reserves. The choice of a biosphere reserve in the current context is made based on factors that are typically ad hoc. Significant portions of biosphere reserves are always managed as national parks or sanctuaries, and as such, all regulations that apply to such protected areas are in effect.
- The National Environment Tribunal Act, 1995- In order to efficiently and effectively handle cases resulting from accidents and strict liability damages, a National Environment Tribunal was established. Its purpose is to provide relief and compensation for harm done to people, property, and the environment, as well as for matters related to or connected to those cases.
- Energy Conservation Act, 2001- In India, energy saving has become a key policy goal. The Indian Parliament passed the Energy Conservation Act (hence, ECA), 2001, in September of that year. The Energy Conservation Building Codes (hereafter, ECBCs), energy performance criteria, and the display of energy consumption labels are all mandated by this Act for large energy consumers, buildings, and appliances. In other words, the Act offers the nation's energy efficiency measures with a legal foundation. It has required and promotional programmes that, in general, pertain to specified consumers, standards and programmes for appliances and equipment, and ECBCs for new commercial buildings.
- National Green Tribunal Act (NGTA), 2010- NGT was officially notified on October 19, 2010. The tribunal is only concerned with environmental matters. It was created by an act of parliament (the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010), and it will have circuit benches all around the nation to hear any cases involving or resulting from environmental concerns. The tribunal consists of one chairman and other members who are experts in the field of environmental and related sciences. It has the authority to give instructions for the restitution and

under this Act is necessary if a proposed industrial unit is anticipated to discharge effluents into a stream, sewer, or on land. The State Pollution Control Boards enforce the Act's water quality regulations (hereafter, SPCBs). A nationwide network of water quality monitoring stations has been set up by the Central Pollution Control Board (hereinafter, CPCB), an agency of the Ministry of Environment and Forests. The network for monitoring water quality is run according to a three-tiered programme.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Article 48-A of The Constitution of India provides that 'The state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forest wildlife of the country'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Virender Gaur v. State of Haryana 1995(4) SCC 571, 580, Indian Council for Enviro-Legal Action v. Union of India (Bichhri case) AIR 1996 SC 1446-9, M.C. Mehta v. Union of India AIR 1988 SC 1037; etc.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Article 51-A (g) of The Constitution of India provides that 'It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Article 21 of The Constitution of India provides that 'No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law'.

compensation for harm brought on by negligent environmental practises. This is the only organisation of its kind whose parent statute mandates application of the sustainable development and polluter pays principles.

### 10. The Role of Judiciary

In India, progress towards sustainable development is significantly aided by the judiciary. Through its decisions, the judiciary plays a crucial role in advancing environmental governance, strengthening the rule of law, and preserving a balance between environmental, social, and developmental considerations. The legislation relating to sustainable development is one subject that is becoming more and more important. The concepts of sustainable development may be outlined in law and policymaking bodies at the international, national, provincial, and municipal levels. The judge must provide case-by-case explanations of the law of sustainable development. The sharing of judicial decisions, knowledge, and experience among jurisdictions will help national judiciaries in carrying out that role. (Global judges symposium from 18-20 August 2002, members of the... - eufje 2002).

With its decisions and declarations, the judiciary plays a crucial role in advancing environmental governance, supporting the rule of law, and creating a fair balance between environmental, social, and developmental considerations. (UNEP Global Judges programme - United Nations Environment Programme 2005).

Some famous and impactful judgments delivered by the Supreme Court of India are:

- Methods of judicial deliberation in environmental cases, as well as the significance of raising public awareness and supporting environmental education at the secondary and tertiary levels. (MC Mehta v Union of India & Ors, Supreme Court of India,) [14].
- The Supreme Court of India prohibited limestone mining operations in the Himalayan slopes, taking into account the interests of future generations in the distinctive legacy of the Himalayan ecosystem. (*Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra V. State of U.P.* [15],
- The Supreme Court of India ruled in this case that although while the leather business is crucial to the nation because it generates foreign exchange and creates employment opportunities, it has no right to ruin the ecology, degrade the environment, and present a health risk. (*Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v Union of India*,) [16]
- \*The Polluter Pays' principle has been held by the Supreme Court and the court also observed, 'Any theory developed in this regard, in our opinion, should be straightforward, workable, and appropriate for the circumstances existing in this nation. According to the Court's decision, "If the action is hazardous or inherently dangerous, the person engaging in such activity is liable to compensate any loss caused to any other person by his irrespective activity without reasonable care.' (Indian Council for Enviro Legal Action v Union of India, 1996) [17]

Although there have been substantial improvements in the legal protection of the environment, there are still a number of gaps. Environmental Impact Assessment must be prioritized, and the SD principle must be acknowledged. India should focus on socioeconomic development as a developing nation, but it must be coordinated with environmental improvement. This is only achievable if economic growth and progress are built on the notion of SD. In the end, it can be said that developed countries are not looking so interested in making the world safe, their only focus is to make their premises safe which can be seen through their conduct. From Earth Summit, 1992 to COP26. world leaders have been delivering the same speech over and over again. Their statement and promises are so articulative but their aid to the developing countries is not in the same stated manner. Even today the developed country rarely would want to share the technology which will be helpful to maintain the SD of developing countries. So, if the world's so-called great and powerful countries aim to have a safe environment, they will have to help developing countries without any greed.

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<sup>11.</sup> Conclusion

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<sup>15</sup> AIR 1988 SC 2187.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> AIR 1996 SC 2715.

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