REGULATING GREENWASHING IN INDIA: ARE EXISTING ESG DISCLOSURE NORMS ENOUGH?

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ABSTRACT

India has recently moved to formalise ESG reporting through SEBI's BRSR framework and CSR-related disclosures under company law, signalling a clear regulatory shift toward sustainability transparency. Yet, beyond the mandate itself, the framework remains uneven. Most ESG disclosures are still unaudited, enforcement is inconsistent, and penalties for misrepresentation are rarely felt in practice. As several commentators observe, the current regime prioritises disclosure over demonstrable outcomes. This creates space for companies to comply on paper while overstating or selectively presenting their "green" credentials. In the absence of stronger verification and enforcement mechanisms, greenwashing becomes easier to mask rather than harder to commit. This paper therefore examines whether India's existing ESG framework covering BRSR, the Companies Act, consumer protection laws, and ASCI guidelines is truly capable of preventing greenwashing and safeguarding the interests of investors, consumers, and other stakeholders.

Introduction

ESG reporting in India has grown at a striking pace, particularly since SEBI made the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report mandatory for the country's top 1,000 listed companies. On the surface, this looks like a decisive regulatory turn toward accountability. Yet, running alongside this expansion is a more uncomfortable reality: many companies continue to broadcast environmental credentials without any meaningful independent verification. Greenwashing those polished, and often deceptive, sustainability claims has steadily emerged as a serious concern, capable of shaping investor and consumer perceptions in ways that are not always honest.

The damage here is subtle but real. When ESG disclosures blur facts or lean too heavily on rhetoric, they risk corroding investor trust and, perhaps more worryingly, diluting the efforts of companies that are genuinely trying to operate sustainably. This brings the discussion to its core question: whether India's existing regulatory framework comprising corporate reporting obligations, consumer protection laws, and advertising standards has the institutional strength and enforcement depth needed to curb such practices and offer meaningful protection to stakeholders.

Understanding Greenwashing

ESG reporting in India has grown at a striking pace, particularly after SEBI made the Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR) compulsory for the top 1,000 listed companies. The regulatory architecture now looks fuller, more deliberate. Yet, alongside this expansion, a familiar unease lingers. Many companies continue to project environmental virtue without the discipline of independent verification. Greenwashing those carefully curated, and sometimes quietly deceptive, sustainability claims has increasingly been recognised as a practice that can mislead both investors and consumers. When ESG disclosures drift away from reality, they corrode investor confidence and dilute the credibility of genuine sustainability efforts. The pressing question, therefore, is whether India's existing regulatory framework spanning corporate reporting norms, consumer protection law, and advertising standards has the depth and bite required to curb such practices and meaningfully protect stakeholders. At its core, "greenwashing" refers to the creation of a false or misleading impression of environmental responsibility. It rarely appears in crude or obvious forms. More often, it surfaces through selective disclosure of favourable data, the casual use of vague and unverified labels such as "eco-friendly" or "carbon neutral," or ambitious environmental promises unaccompanied by concrete plans or measurable pathways. In the Indian context, analysts have described greenwashing as a pattern of deceptive practices in which companies exaggerate environmental achievements, omit inconvenient facts, or rely on unsubstantiated claims, ultimately steering consumers toward a carefully polished, but incomplete, picture of corporate sustainability.[1]

Greenwashing often arises under competitive pressure, as companies chase a sustainable image without undertaking the costly structural changes such an image genuinely requires. Drawing on stakeholder and legitimacy theories, firms may adopt these practices to appear responsible to investors, regulators, or consumers, even when the underlying conduct falls short. In doing so, greenwashing thrives on information asymmetry: stakeholders are asked to trust carefully crafted narratives rather than verifiable reality[2]. The consequence is a slow erosion of trust and a dilution of genuine sustainability efforts, which risk being crowded out by polished but empty claims.

Indian Regulatory Framework on ESG & Green Claims

- **SEBI's BRSR (Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting)**

  SEBI's Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) framework marks a clear shift toward structured ESG disclosure in India. By mandating the top 1,000 listed companies, ranked by market capitalisation, to publish detailed environmental, social, and governance metrics, the regime aspires to bring a degree of uniformity and comparability to corporate sustainability narratives. In practice, however, the framework remains heavily reliant on self-declaration. Third-party assurance is not compulsory; companies may opt for limited external review, but independent auditing is not mandated. This design choice weakens the credibility of disclosures, particularly where sustainability claims are ambitious or reputationally valuable. Compounding this concern is the absence of a dedicated penalty mechanism for false or incomplete BRSR disclosures, with enforcement resting largely on SEBI's

[1] King Stubb & Kasiva, *Addressing Greenwashing in India: Laws, Regulations, and Ethical Implications* (Jan. 27, 2025), https://ksandk.com/energy/greenwashing-india-laws-regulations-ethical/.
[2] Phoenix Legal, *Safeguarding Sustainable Investments: Green Audits as the New Baseline for Due Diligence*, Lexology (Nov. 4, 2025), https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=ac1ed1cf-5ef5-4a24-9a5c-a6f49686ec74.

general investor-protection powers. Critics therefore argue that while BRSR enhances formal transparency, it does little to ensure accuracy.[3] Its application is also confined to large listed entities, leaving smaller and unlisted firms beyond its regulatory reach. BRSR, then, represents meaningful progress but one constrained by voluntary verification and limited coverage, conditions that continue to leave room for misleading green claims.

- **Companies Act, 2013 (CSR and Board Reporting)**

The Companies Act adopts a more traditional, and somewhat limited, approach to corporate sustainability. Qualifying companies are required to spend at least two per cent of their net profits on CSR activities and to disclose details of such expenditure in their annual reports. Alongside this, directors are placed under a general statutory duty to act not only in the interests of the company but also with regard to the wider community, a formulation that gestures, albeit vaguely towards social responsibility.

What the framework notably lacks, however, is any explicit engagement with greenwashing as a regulatory concern. CSR compliance is assessed largely in terms of financial outlay rather than substantive impact. As a result, companies may satisfy the letter of the law by reporting routine or peripheral social projects as CSR initiatives, even while broader environmental practices remain untouched. Sustainability-related disclosures are not subject to mandatory independent verification, and there is no mechanism specifically designed to scrutinise or penalise misleading environmental claims. In effect, the Companies Act establishes a disclosure-and-spend model of responsibility. It signals expectation, assigns general accountability, and mandates reporting but it stops short of directly policing the accuracy or authenticity of corporate sustainability narratives.[4]

- **ASCI Guidelines on Green Advertising**

The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has, in recent years, tightened its

[3] Diksha Sharma, *Bridging the ESG Enforcement Gap: A Legal Analysis of India's BRSR Framework*, Indian J. L. & Legal Rsch. (May 29, 2025), https://www.ijllr.com/post/bridging-the-esg-enforcement-gap-a-legal-analysis-of-india-s-brsr-framework.

[4] Diksha Sharma, *Bridging the ESG Enforcement Gap: A Legal Analysis of India's BRSR Framework*, Indian J. L. & Legal Rsch. (IJLLR) (May 29, 2025), https://www.ijllr.com/post/bridging-the-esg-enforcement-gap-a-legal-analysis-of-india-s-brsr-framework.

self-regulatory net by expressly bringing environmental claims within the fold of its advertising code. Advertisers are now expected to substantiate any eco-friendly assertion with credible evidence, and the use of comfortably vague labels“sustainable,” “natural,” “eco-friendly” is expressly discouraged unless carefully qualified and capable of proof. On paper, this is a welcome intervention, one that acknowledges how easily environmental language can slide from information into impression management. In practice, ASCI’s enforcement toolkit remains modest. Where an advertisement is found wanting, Advertising Standards Council of India may direct the advertiser to withdraw or suitably modify the offending claim. What it cannot do, however, is impose fines or legally binding sanctions. ASCI’s authority rests on persuasion and reputational pressure rather than statutory power. Its decisions are not enforceable in law, and compliance ultimately depends on the advertiser’s willingness to cooperate.[5]

As a result, while ASCI’s guidelines have undoubtedly curbed some of the more casual and careless green claims, their deterrent effect is limited. For determined offenders, the consequences of non-compliance are largely reputational a public rap on the knuckles rather than a regulatory penalty. Awareness is raised, language is cleaned up, but the absence of coercive power means that misleading environmental advertising can still persist at the edges, where reputational costs are easily absorbed.

- **Environmental Laws (EPA, Air Act, Water Act)**

India’s principal environmental statutes the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, and the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 are built with a very different regulatory imagination in mind. Their concern is concrete and operational: emissions, effluents, waste, and compliance with prescribed standards. Factories are monitored, violations are penalised, and pollution control boards act as the primary enforcers. The architecture is unmistakably command-and-control. What these laws do not address, however, is how companies choose to present their environmental conduct to the outside world. They regulate what firms do on the ground, not what they say in glossy brochures, investor

[5] Pooja Chatterjee, *Addressing Greenwashing in India: Laws, Regulations, and Ethical Implications*, King Stubb & Kasiva (Jan. 27, 2025), https://ksandk.com/energy/greenwashing-india-laws-regulations-ethical/.

decks, or advertising campaigns. Environmental marketing claims however exaggerated or selectively framed remain largely beyond the gaze of pollution regulators, unless the underlying conduct also happens to breach statutory standards. The result is a quiet but significant gap: while pollution itself is regulated, the narratives built around "green" performance often are not.

Gaps in the Indian Framework (Critical Analysis)

Despite this growing patchwork of regulation, commentators and practitioners alike continue to point to a fundamental weakness in India's approach to greenwashing. There is, quite simply, no dedicated anti-greenwashing statute. Indian law does not expressly prohibit misleading sustainability or environmental claims as a distinct regulatory wrong. Instead, greenwashing is dealt with obliquely, filtered through general consumer-protection norms and advertising standards that were never designed with climate claims in mind. The consequence is more than merely semantic. In doctrinal terms, greenwashing survives as a species of unfair trade practice rather than being recognised as a standalone offence with its own elements, thresholds, and penalties.[6] This indirect treatment dilutes regulatory clarity and weakens enforcement, allowing misleading environmental narratives to fall into the cracks between sectoral regulators rather than being confronted head-on as a specific legal harm.

Another structural weakness lies in the absence of compulsory verification. BRSR disclosures remain largely self-reported, with third-party assurance positioned as an option rather than a requirement. Companies may choose limited external review, or none at all, which makes selective reporting both easy and relatively risk-free. This problem is not confined to BRSR. Other ESG-adjacent disclosures most notably CSR reporting also operate without a mandatory independent audit layer. In such an ecosystem, exaggerated metrics, optimistic baselines, and conveniently framed narratives can pass through the system unchecked, not necessarily because regulators approve of them, but because no one is required to look closely enough. The situation is further complicated by the status of ESG rating agencies. In India, these entities function in a regulatory vacuum. There is no formal accreditation process, no binding methodological standards, and no supervisory authority overseeing how ESG scores are generated or marketed. As a result, ratings can vary widely, shaped as much by subjective

[6] Aman Avinav, Shivani Sinha & Rahul Deodhar, *Safeguarding Sustainable Investments: Green Audits as the New Baseline for Due Diligence*, Lexology (Phoenix Legal) (Nov. 4, 2025), https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=ac1ed1cf-5ef5-4a24-9a5c-a6f49686ec74.

weighting choices as by underlying data quality. For investors, this erodes confidence in ESG scores as reliable signals.[7] For companies, it creates an incentive to "shop around" for favourable assessments, turning what should be an accountability mechanism into a reputational marketplace. Together, optional audits and unregulated ratings dilute the credibility of India's ESG ecosystem, leaving ample room for polished claims unsupported by rigorous verification.

A further weakness lies in the thinness of penalties and the softness of enforcement. Even where misleading green claims are established, the consequences tend to be modest. The Consumer Protection Act permits fines that may run up to ₹10 lakh, rising to ₹50 lakh for repeat offences figures that are scarcely disquieting for large corporations with expansive marketing budgets. For many firms, such penalties function less as deterrents and more as a manageable cost of doing business. The limits of enforcement become even clearer when one looks beyond formal statutes. *Advertising Standards Council of India* can require the withdrawal or modification of misleading advertisements, but it lacks the power to impose monetary sanctions. Compliance is driven by reputational pressure rather than legal compulsion. *Securities and Exchange Board of India,* for its part, has not prescribed a dedicated penalty framework for ESG misreporting under BRSR, leaving enforcement to general provisions that are rarely invoked with precision. [8]Unsurprisingly, observers frequently note that fines are "too small" and regulatory responses too cautious to meaningfully discipline corporate behaviour. The system relies heavily on naming, shaming, and moral suasion. Punishment, where it exists, is often symbolic. In such an environment, reputational risk carries more weight than legal risk and that imbalance continues to blunt India's ability to decisively curb greenwashing.

Another gap lies in the language of sustainability itself or, more accurately, the absence of any settled legal language. Terms such as "green," "eco-friendly," or "sustainable" float freely through corporate disclosures and advertisements without fixed statutory meaning. While the Central Consumer Protection Authority has issued guidelines attempting to define greenwashing and curb the use of vague or absolute environmental claims, these guidelines do not yet have the force of law. In the absence of universally accepted legal definitions, ambiguity

[7] Prachi Goel & Shreshth Singh Tomar, *Regulation of ESG Rating Providers in India*, S&R Assocs. (Sept. 21, 2022), https://www.snrlaw.in/regulation-of-esg-rating-providers-in-india/.
[8] Int'l Inst. for Sustainable Dev. & Ctr. for Responsible Bus., *Combatting Greenwashing: India's Guidelines for Prevention and Regulation of Greenwashing and Misleading Environmental Claims* (Nov. 2025), https://www.iisd.org.

becomes a resource. Companies can stretch terminology, qualify it selectively, or deploy it strategically, confident that the contours of compliance remain blurred rather than sharply drawn.[9] Closely tied to this is a deeper structural problem: India's regulatory approach remains disclosure-driven rather than outcome-driven. Existing norms focus on whether information has been reported, not on whether environmental performance has meaningfully improved. Compliance is measured in pages, tables, and checklists, not in reduced emissions, cleaner supply chains, or measurable ecological impact. This emphasis on form over substance risks turning sustainability reporting into a ritualistic exercise impressive in volume, thin in consequence. Accountability for real-world outcomes is limited, which means that even the most detailed disclosures may reveal very little about whether a company's activities are, in any meaningful sense, sustainable.

Comparative Perspective (EU vs USA vs India)

By global standards, India's regulatory response to greenwashing is still very much a work in progress. A comparison with the European Union is particularly revealing, if slightly uncomfortable. The European Union has moved decisively beyond the logic of voluntary sustainability reporting. Through measures such as the Green Claims Directive, environmental advertising is no longer treated as aspirational speech but as a regulated assertion of fact. Claims must be precise, capable of substantiation, and crucially supported by credible evidence that can withstand external scrutiny. The era of broad, feel-good environmental language is being deliberately narrowed. This shift is reinforced by the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), which requires large companies to publish detailed sustainability reports subject to mandatory, independent third-party assurance.[10] ESG data under CSRD is not merely disclosed; it is audited. Legal accountability is built into the architecture itself, reducing the space for selective narration or cosmetic compliance. Complementing this is the EU Taxonomy, which provides a common, legally grounded definition of what qualifies as "sustainable" economic activity. By fixing the meaning of sustainability in regulatory terms, the EU limits ambiguity and constrains creative interpretation. Taken together, these measures reflect a coherent regulatory philosophy: vague green claims are discouraged, verification is

[9] Press Info. Bureau, Ministry of Consumer Affs., Food & Pub. Distrib., *Central Consumer Protection Authority Issues Guidelines for 'Prevention and Regulation of Greenwashing and Misleading Environmental Claims'* (Oct. 15, 2024), https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2064963&reg=3&lang=2.
[10] *What Is the EU's Green Claims Directive?*, Greenly, https://greenly.earth/en-us/blog/company-guide/what-is-the-eus-green-claims-directive (last visited June 3, 2026).

compulsory, and sustainability is defined rather than implied. It is precisely this combination clear definitions, mandatory audits, and enforceable standards that India's current framework lacks. While Indian regulations increasingly demand disclosure, the EU insists on proof. That difference, subtle on paper, is decisive in practice.[11]

The United States approaches greenwashing from a different angle, relying less on comprehensive sustainability statutes and more on the sharp edges of consumer protection and securities law. At the consumer-facing end, *the Federal Trade Commission* has, for decades, used its Green Guides to police environmental marketing. These guidelines make one thing clear: environmental claims must be truthful, specific, and capable of substantiation. Vague or exaggerated "green" assertions are treated not as ethical lapses, but as deceptive practices. More recently, the focus has shifted decisively toward capital markets. *The Securities and Exchange Commission* has proposed a climate disclosure regime that treats ESG statements as material financial information. Under this framework, companies would be required to disclose detailed emissions data and climate-related risks, and false or misleading ESG statements could attract liability under securities law. In effect, greenwashing is reframed as a form of securities fraud rather than mere corporate puffery. This risk-based model alters the enforcement calculus. Instead of relying primarily on reputational pressure, U.S. regulators deploy fines, investigations, and enforcement actions as deterrents. The threat is not embarrassment, but legal exposure. While the regime remains contested and uneven in application, it reflects a clear regulatory instinct: when sustainability claims influence investor decisions, misleading them is not just bad marketing it is a market offence.

Placed against these comparative benchmarks, India's position becomes clearer and less flattering. The Indian framework remains largely disclosure-oriented. Companies are required to report on sustainability and ESG parameters, and overtly false or misleading advertising is discouraged through consumer and advertising laws. What is missing, however, is the harder regulatory spine seen elsewhere. Unlike the European Union, India does not impose an industry-wide mandate for independent audit or third-party assurance of sustainability disclosures. Unlike the United States, it does not clearly anchor misleading ESG statements within a fraud-based liability regime capable of triggering serious financial or legal consequences. Substantiation requirements are softer, penalties are lighter, and enforcement

[11] Directorate-Gen. for Fin. Stability, Fin. Servs. & Cap. Mkts. Union, Eur. Comm'n, *EU Taxonomy for Sustainable Activities* (Dec. 17, 2025), https://finance.ec.europa.eu/sustainable-finance/tools-and-standards/eu-taxonomy-sustainable-activities_en.

tends to rely more on compliance narratives and reputational pressure than on coercive sanctions. In short, while India has taken meaningful steps toward formalising sustainability reporting, it continues to lag behind European and American models on the two axes that matter most for curbing greenwashing: verification and enforcement. Disclosure exists, but proof is optional; regulation speaks, but it rarely bites.[12]

Impact on Stakeholders

The regulatory gaps are not merely theoretical; they translate into tangible consequences across the stakeholder spectrum. For investors, the problem is immediate and financial. ESG-focused funds and analysts increasingly depend on corporate sustainability disclosures to guide capital allocation. When those disclosures are unverified or quietly inflated, investment decisions are built on unstable ground. The result is what many now describe as "greenwashing risk" capital flowing toward companies whose environmental promises look compelling on paper but unravel in practice, often after financial damage has already been done. Consumers encounter a different, but equally corrosive, harm. Shoppers trying sometimes quite earnestly to choose eco-friendly products can be misled by ambiguous labels and carefully curated green language. Over time, repeated exposure to such claims breeds scepticism. Sustainability branding begins to lose its meaning, and trust erodes. When consumers can no longer distinguish genuinely responsible products from cleverly marketed ones, both buyers and honest businesses end up paying the price.

The effects are often most acute for employees and local communities, though they are the least visible. Workers and residents near industrial operations continue to live with pollution, degraded resources, and health risks that glossy sustainability reports quietly gloss over. Exaggerated green credentials can function as a shield, allowing harmful practices to persist with minimal scrutiny. The damage, however, is real felt in ecosystems strained beyond recovery and in communities asked to absorb costs they did not choose. Regulators, too, are constrained by the system they are meant to enforce. Agencies such as *Securities and Exchange Board of India, Central Consumer Protection Authority, and Advertising Standards Council of India* operate in an environment where definitions remain unsettled and audits are largely optional. ESG reporting is treated as a disclosure exercise rather than a legal assertion carrying

[12] Diksha Sharma, *Bridging the ESG Enforcement Gap: A Legal Analysis of India's BRSR Framework*, Indian J. L. & Legal Rsch. (May 29, 2025), https://www.ijllr.com/post/bridging-the-esg-enforcement-gap-a-legal-analysis-of-india-s-brsr-framework.

consequences. This ambiguity makes effective oversight difficult. Without reliable data or clearly bounded terminology, enforcement efforts can only reach so far.[13] Taken together, weak verification and soft regulation leave all stakeholders investors, consumers, employees, and citizens exposed to deception. Sustainability, in such a setting, risks becoming less a measure of real-world impact and more a matter of presentation. And when marketing begins to outrun reality, it is accountability, not ambition, that falls behind

Recommendations

A growing body of expert commentary converges on a fairly clear point: incremental tweaks will not suffice. What India needs is a firmer regulatory spine one that treats sustainability claims not as aspirational storytelling but as assertions capable of verification and sanction. One frequently proposed reform is the introduction of mandatory ESG auditing. Sustainability disclosures, whether under BRSR or related regimes, would be far harder to manipulate if independent third-party assurance were no longer optional. External audits do more than validate numbers; they change behaviour. The knowledge that claims will be scrutinised tends to discipline what companies are willing to say in the first place. Equally significant is the call for a dedicated anti-greenwashing statute. At present, deceptive sustainability claims are squeezed into the ill-fitting mould of unfair trade practices. A standalone law complete with clear definitions, investigative powers, and penalties would signal that greenwashing is not a peripheral compliance issue but a distinct regulatory harm. Even a strengthened, more explicit mandate for the *Central Consumer Protection Authority* could go some distance toward closing this gap.

Attention has also turned to ESG rating agencies, which currently operate in a largely unregulated space. Bringing these entities under the supervision of Securities and Exchange Board of India or a comparable authority could standardise methodologies and curb the practice of rating-shopping. Transparency in how scores are generated is essential if investors are to treat ESG ratings as anything more than marketing aids. Penalties, too, require recalibration. Flat monetary caps ₹10 to ₹50 lakh carry little deterrent value for large corporations. Linking fines to turnover or profits, perhaps in the range of one to five per cent, would better reflect corporate scale and risk appetite. Some commentators even argue for criminal liability in cases

[13] Aman Avinav, Shivani Sinha & Rahul Deodhar, *Safeguarding Sustainable Investments: Green Audits as the New Baseline for Due Diligence*, *Lexology* (Phoenix Legal, Nov. 4, 2025).

of deliberate, large-scale deception, echoing emerging debates in the European Union. Another persistent weakness lies in language. Terms such as “green,” “recyclable,” or “organic” remain legally elastic. Legislatively defining these expressions, or formally delegating that task to recognised standards bodies, would reduce ambiguity. The CCPA’s recent guidelines gesture in this direction, but without statutory backing their impact remains limited. Finally, enforcement capacity matters. Regulators need clearer authority to investigate and penalise false ESG disclosures, whether through expanded mandates for SEBI or the creation of a specialised forum to deal with green claims. Some have even suggested a public transparency registry a central database where companies must list environmental claims alongside supporting evidence. Such visibility can be a powerful, if understated, form of accountability. Taken together, these reforms point toward a more muscular framework one that aligns India with global best practices and narrows the gap between sustainability as performance and sustainability as proof.

Conclusion

India has, without doubt, taken some meaningful steps toward embedding sustainability into corporate governance. The introduction of mandatory BRSR reporting and the statutory recognition of CSR obligations have nudged companies toward greater openness and have signalled, at least symbolically, that ESG considerations are no longer peripheral. Transparency has improved. The language of sustainability now features routinely in boardrooms and annual reports. Yet, as a growing body of analysis points out, this progress has its limits. The current framework still struggles to meaningfully curb greenwashing. Much of what is disclosed remains voluntary in substance, even when formally mandated. Verification is sporadic, audits are optional, and penalties where they exist are rarely severe enough to unsettle large corporations. In this environment, it is not difficult for companies to extract reputational value from “sustainable” branding while substantive practices lag quietly behind. The pattern is familiar: compliance becomes performative, disclosures become cosmetic, and sustainability risks sliding into a box-ticking exercise rather than a measure of real-world impact. Regulation exists, but it does not yet bite. The emerging consensus is therefore hard to ignore. If India’s ESG regime is to move beyond optics, it will need stronger verification mechanisms, clearer and enforceable standards, and deterrents that carry real weight. Audits, liability, and sustained regulatory oversight are not optional add-ons; they are the difference between aspiration and credibility. Until disclosures are backed by proof, and claims by consequences, corporate sustainability in India will remain vulnerable to manipulation. Only a framework that couples transparency with accountability can genuinely protect investors, consumers, and communities and ensure that ESG reporting reflects reality rather than rhetoric.