



## **IN RE: ISSUE RELATING TO DEFINITION OF ARAVALLI HILLS AND RANGES**

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### **BACKGROUND OF THE CASE**

The hills of Aravalli are one of the oldest mountains of India, which extends to the states of Rajasthan, Haryana, Gujarat, and Delhi. These hills are the main biodiversity and ecosystem protectors of these states. Any harm to these hills would have a negative impact on the climate, environment, wildlife and human livelihood. Since 1995, the Supreme Court has been handling environment-related cases under T.N Godavarman Thirumulpad v. UOI,<sup>1</sup> especially the petitions in relation to forest and ecological protection. The Aravalli Hills are also included in this sphere.

The problem was that the states Rajasthan, Haryana, Gujarat and Delhi also had different definitions for defining the Aravalli hills, which resulted in inconsistent environmental protection and a barrier to the regulation of mining. Historically, the areas which were considered as Aravalli were treated differently by different states. Because of this reason, to remove the ambiguity of the Aravalli definition, the Supreme Court appointed a technical committee, including the MoEF & CC, etc., to define the Aravalli Hills and Ranges scientifically, for a clear, proper and uniform definition, so that better legal and environmental protection of the Aravalli is assured.

### **FACTS OF THE CASE**

1. The Aravalli hills are the ancient mountain range of India, which spans the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi and is important for biodiversity and ecosystem.
2. Various definitions of Aravalli in various states result in unregulated mining activities and a threat to the environment.

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<sup>1</sup> T N Godavarman Thirumulpad v Union of India (1997) 2 SCC 267 (SC)

3. The issue of a uniform definition of Aravalli was raised under the framework of T.N Godavarman Thirumulpad's PIL of 1995.
4. The appointed committee recommended hills with an elevation of 100m or more to be considered as Aravalli hills and clusters within 500m to be considered as Aravalli range.
5. On 20 Nov 2025, this scientific definition was accepted by the Supreme Court, and directives were given for mining regulation in the Aravalli hills.
6. The public of India and the environmentalist groups opposed the 100m definition of the Aravalli.
7. On 29 Dec 2025, SC stayed its own order and stated that an expert committee should review further.

### **ISSUES OF THE CASE**

1. Whether there should be a specific criterion and consistent definition as to what is included in the Aravalli to avoid the different interpretations of it?
2. Whether a uniform definition should be adopted to regulate the mining activities and for environmental protection?
3. Whether a proper scientific definition of Aravalli can be made which can be applied uniformly in all the states?
4. Whether a legal framework can be made to balance the ecological functions of the Aravalli with development and mining activities?

### **ARGUMENTS**

#### **Arguments in Favour**

**Uniform Legal Definition:** Uniform height-based criteria are required to define Aravalli as there are different definitions in different states, so that equal enforcement, regulation and implementation can be assured.

**Improving Mining Regulation:** The existing framework is not enough to control illegal or minor mining properly in the Aravalli.

**Technical Definition to Avoid Confusion:** A proper technical definition will set clear standards, and there will be no confusion.

### **Arguments Against**

**90% Hills Are at risk by the 100m Rule:** The major part of the Aravalli is less than 100m, and if the definition is implemented, it will result in desertification of states, ecological imbalance, and biodiversity loss.

**Pressure of Mining on Hills:** This definition creates loopholes because the hills below 100m will suffer increased pressure from mining and urban development.

**Definition Made Without Consultation and Mapping:** The definition is made without scientific consultation and mapping of ground reality. There should be studies at the ground level and impact assessments.

**Structurally Inconsistent Definition:** The definition is not consistent, and there is an issue of ecological continuity.

### **DECISION OR ORDER OF THE COURT**

SC adopted a uniform definition of the Aravalli hills according to which the landform which is 100m or above the surrounding local land relief will be considered as the Aravalli hills. And 2 or more hill clusters within 500m will be considered as the Aravalli ranges. Slopes, associated slopes and valleys are also included in this definition. Also, the court directed strict regulation on mining and no new leases, etc. The purpose of the decision was to prevent the confusion of interpretation of the definition and to control illegal mining.

### **PRESENT STATUS OF JUDGMENT**

The Supreme Court stayed its decision of 20 Nov 2025, which was accepting the definition of Aravalli on a 100m basis. So this decision is not yet implemented, and it is stated for further review by experts. The court has stated to keep the definition as well as directions in abeyance till any further order.

**Order for further Review:** The court has stated to form an expert committee of experts in the environment and scientific domains to review the definition, analyse the impact on the environment of mining, remove the ambiguities, etc., and the final decision will be made after the report of this committee.

**Next Hearing:** The next hearing is scheduled on 21st January 2026 for the formation of an expert panel, impact and analysis.

**Order on Mining still Maintained:** The order by the court on 20 Nov 2025 of a temporary freeze of mining activities, such as no new mining leases and strict applicability of forest and environment clearance, is still effective until the completion of the final review.

**Reason of Stay:** Save Aravalli campaigns- it was stated that the new definition will destroy the Aravalli ecosystem because 90% of Aravalli doesn't fit in the definition, and the loss of 90% of Aravalli means a negative impact on water security, desert barrier and climate control. Even though there was an order on mining activities, the definition itself was enough to open the doors for mining in the Aravalli.

So, the court instructed an expert panel to revisit the Aravalli definition and stayed the order.

### **RATIO DECIDENDI**

The Supreme Court decided that there should be a uniform scientific definition to avoid confusion and loopholes in relation to the Aravalli hills and the Aravalli range.

**Legal and Environmental Necessity:** The court acknowledged that the Aravalli ecosystem is a very essential part of the environment of north India, so a clear and uniform definition is required so that it can be enforceable in the states of Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat.

**Resolving Enforcement Problems:** The court observed that Aravalli has different definitions in different states, causing problems in enforcement. To resolve this issue, the court accepted the committee's recommendations for a uniform legal standard.

**Simple and Objective Definition:** The court decided to define Aravalli simply and objectively for proper interpretation in judgments. Landforms that are 100m or above from surrounding terrain are the Aravalli hills, and 2 or more than two hills within 500m forming ranges; those ranges are the Aravalli ranges.

**Mining Regulation:** The court did not impose a complete ban on mining, as there were chances of illegal mining. Instead, the court directed the regulation of mining activities by making a management plan for sustainable mining. Means mining is allowed but only under strict scientific regulation, and strict protection should be maintained in the core areas.

**Reconsideration and Stay:** The court acknowledged in reasoning that because of the 100m definition, smaller hills, which are sensitive ecologically, are being excluded, so the court stayed its own judgment and decided for expert review.

## CRITICAL ANALYSIS

### Positive Aspects:

1. **Attempt for a Clear Uniform Definition:** The court considered the issue of different definitions of Aravalli in different states and so tried to give a uniform, clear definition of Aravalli for better legal and environmental protection.
2. **Objective of Protecting the Environment:** A definition was made in the light of environmental protection to stop illegal mining and ensure sustainable mining to protect biodiversity and the ecosystem.
3. **Opted for a Scientific Approach:** The court tried to adopt a scientific approach by height-based criteria for defining the Aravalli hills and Aravalli ranges.

This shows that the SC tried a structured and scientific attempt to protect the environment through the rule of law.

### Negative Aspects:

1. **100m Rule excludes Major Part of Aravalli:** Many experts and environmentalists argued that a major part of Aravalli is below 100m height, so, because of the definition, the 90% Aravalli will be excluded from the legal protection.
2. **Loophole for Mining Activities:** The new definition has a loophole, because of the exclusion in the definition, a major part of the Aravalli would suffer from mining and construction.
3. **Lack of Transparency and Public Participation:** Protests by Save Aravalli campaigns and society demanded that the impact studies and public consultations be conducted properly for framing the definition of Aravalli.

**Stay and Expert Reassessment:** Because of the huge criticism and considering the definition's ambiguity, the Supreme Court put the order of 20 nov 2025 on abeyance and decided for final review by an expert committee to remove ambiguities, analyse ecological impact and for a final scientific standard to define Aravalli.

## CONCLUSION

So, right now, there is no settled law in the Aravalli case because the order of 20 November 2025 is stayed by the Supreme Court, and thus, the final definition of the Aravalli hills and ranges is yet to be decided. In the beginning, the court tried to opt for a uniform definition so that the confusion of different definitions in different states could be ended and to regulate the mining activities properly. But the Supreme Court decided to reconsider its own order because of public protests, objections by the environmentalists and ambiguities. As the court observed that a mere formula, which is height-based, cannot properly define Aravalli. That's why the court stayed its earlier order and decided on the appointment of an expert committee, and stated that the final order will be given after a detailed scientific and ecological review by the expert committee. Thus, it is clear that the Aravalli judgment is still not a landmark judgment but a "latest evolving environmental litigation".