FROM DUST BARRIER TO DUST SOURCE: THE ARAVALLI HILLS' FALL AND DELHI'S RISING POLLUTION

Anchal Maurya* **Asmita Singh***

ABSTRACT

After Independence, India has significantly developed and resolved issues related to poverty, health, education, employment, etc., either by launching certain new policies or laws in relation to the economy, law, or sustainability. Due to changing needs in society, the legislature took several effective steps in the fields of law, environment, medicine, and sustainability. Today, the government has taken initiative towards the Aravalli Hills, narrowing its definition. The government argued that the changed definition resolves the inconsistencies in Rajasthan, Haryana, Gujarat, and Delhi, as it created confusion over where mining could occur and led to illegal operations. From 2020 to 2026, issues like illegal mining, deforestation, and urban sprawl have dominated headlines, transforming these ancient hills from a geological curiosity to a symbol of ecological peril. The environment isn't just a part of geography or ecosystem, but also a part of human life. Through various judgments (M.C. Mehta V. Union of India), the Supreme Court of India has identified the environment as an integral part of human life and a Fundamental Right. The Air Quality Index (AQI) of Delhi shows the environmental conditions and raises a serious concern regarding the same. Despite taking measures to improve the quality, the government shifts its focus towards the Aravalli Hills, stating various issues, demanding the Supreme Court's approval for deforesting it, neglecting the fact that it could lead to the reduction of the hills' capacity for groundwater recharge and fall of water tables in neighbouring areas. This article explores the formation and eroded appearance of the Aravalli Hills, their role in protecting Delhi from pollution by acting as a dust barrier against the desert, along with the consequences of cutting the Aravalli. This article also explores the Supreme Court judgments in this matter and certain suggestions to protect it.

*BA LLB (HONS.), SECOND YEAR, INDORE INSTITUTE OF LAW.
*BA LLB (HONS.), SECOND YEAR, INDORE INSTITUTE OF LAW.

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INTRODUCTION

When you think about India's journey since Independence in 1947, it's like watching a nation wake up from a long sleep and sprint toward progress. We've tackled massive challenges—poverty that gripped millions, health crises like widespread diseases, education gaps where kids couldn't even dream of school, and unemployment that left families scraping by. Governments didn't just sit around; they rolled out bold policies and laws to turn things around. Think about the economic reforms in the 1990s that opened up markets, or land reforms in the 1950s that aimed to give farmers their due. In law, we've seen everything from anti-corruption acts to women's rights protections, evolving with society's needs. And on sustainability? Initiatives like the Green Revolution boosted food production, while environmental laws started popping up to curb pollution and protect resources. It's all about adapting—society changes, and so do the rules to keep us moving forward without leaving anyone behind.

Fast forward to today, and the spotlight's on the Aravalli Hills, this ancient range snaking through Rajasthan, Haryana, Gujarat, and Delhi. The government's been tweaking its definition lately, narrowing it down to hills over 100 meters tall, clustered within 500 meters of each other. They say it's to clear up the mess—different states had their own takes on what counts as "Aravalli," leading to confusion over mining spots and a boom in illegal ops. It's supposed to standardise things, make enforcement easier, and stop the loopholes that let shady activities slip through. But honestly, it feels like a double-edged sword. From 2020 to now in 2026, headlines have been screaming about illegal mining blasting away at these hills, deforestation stripping them bare, and urban sprawl gobbling up land for fancy developments. What was once just a quirky geological feature—those eroded, rocky ridges—has become a stark symbol of how we're gambling with our environment.

And let's not kid ourselves: the environment isn't some distant concept tucked away in geography books or ecosystems far from our daily grind. It's woven into our lives, our health, our survival. The Supreme Court nailed this in cases like M.C. Mehta vs. Union of India, declaring a clean environment a fundamental right under Article 21—right to life. You can't separate the two; polluted air or vanishing water hits us where it hurts. Take Delhi's Air Quality Index—it's often in the "severe" red zone, choking residents with smog from vehicles, stubble

burning, and dust. We've tried odd-even car rules, bans on crackers, even artificial rain, but improvements slow. Now, the government's eyeing the Aravallis again, pushing for Supreme Court nods to clear parts for "development," arguing it fixes inconsistencies. But they're glossing over the big risks: chopping these hills could slash their groundwater recharge role, dropping water tables in nearby areas, and worsening shortages for millions.

This piece dives into all that. We'll unpack how the Aravallis formed—those "line of peaks" from Sanskrit roots, born from tectonic clashes billions of years ago, now worn down by time and weather. Why do they look so rugged and low-key today? Erosion's the culprit, turning mighty mountains into humble ridges. Then, their unsung hero role in shielding Delhi from pollution—acting as a dust barrier against the Thar Desert's sandy assaults. We'll explore the fallout of cutting them: desert creep, water woes, climate flips, and more. Plus, recent Supreme Court twists—from the 100-meter rule debate to stays and calls for better protection. And finally, some real-talk suggestions to save what's left. Because if we don't act, we're not just losing hills; we're eroding our own future.

HOW ARE THE ARAVALLI HILLS FORMED, AND WHY DO THEY LOOK THE WAY THEY DO

The word Aravalli is a composite Sanskrit word which is derived from the roots “Ara” and “Vali”, where the word ‘Ara’ means point or peak, and the word ‘Vali’ means the range or line, which collectively means line of peaks, and it is also known as the Row of Awl-Shaped Hills.[1]

The Aravalli Hills are the oldest range of fold mountains in India. Its history starts from 2 billion years back in the Proterozoic era when the Indian tectonic plate was separated from the Eurasian plate, the plate collision formed the ‘ARAVALLI HILLS’ which where once highest, tallest, and towering of the Himalayas, but due to years of weathering, climate changes, and geological inactivity resulted them to how they appear today eroded, low elevation, and rocky ridges.[2]

So, the question arises how they actually formed, and what their geological origin is.

The Aravalli Range came into existence as a result of an extremely ancient mountain-building process known as the Aravalli–Delhi orogenic belt. This process was triggered when early

[1] Apte VS, The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Prasad Prakashan 1957)
[2] Valdiya KS, The Making of India: Geodynamic Evolution (2nd edn, Springer 2016)

continental landmasses, especially the Bundelkhand and Marwar cratons, gradually moved toward each other and collided. The collision caused deep compression of the Earth's crust, leading to folding, faulting, and large-scale metamorphism of rocks. These events took place during the Proterozoic Aeon, more than two billion years ago, which explains why the Aravalli rocks are counted among the oldest geological formations in India.

The evolution of the range occurred in two broad phases. The first phase led to the formation of the Aravalli Supergroup, made up largely of sediments deposited in ancient shallow seas and later transformed under pressure. This was followed by a second tectonic phase, known as the Delhi Fold Belt, which further deformed and uplifted the earlier rock structures. Although the Aravallis were once high and extensive mountains, continuous erosion over millions of years has worn them down, leaving behind the low and fragmented hills visible today.

Over an immense span of geological time, the Aravalli Hills have been subjected to intense weathering and erosion. Continuous action of rainfall, wind, and repeated temperature changes gradually wore down their once towering peaks, reducing most of the range to modest elevations of about 600 to 900 meters. Because of this extreme denudation, the Aravallis are often described as "relict mountains," representing the surviving remains of a much older and more extensive mountain system. Instead of forming a continuous chain of high, sharp peaks, the range today appears as a series of discontinuous rocky ridges and low hills. The highest point, Guru Shikhar, rising to 1,722 meters in the Mount Abu region, stands as a prominent exception to this general low relief. The exposed rock surfaces across the range clearly reveal signs of deep-seated folding and metamorphism, offering direct geological evidence of the powerful tectonic forces that shaped the mountains in their early history.[3]

THE RELATION OF ARAVALLI HILL AND DELHI POLLUTION.

The Aravalli Hills are like a natural barrier that protects the DELHI-NCR REGION. As one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world, the Aravallis form a natural geographical barrier between the Thar Desert and the fertile Indo-Gangetic plains. Over centuries, this range has performed an essential protective function by regulating air movement, moderating climate, and preventing desert expansion. In the current scenario, the ecological services provided by the Aravallis have come under serious threat due to sustained human intervention.

[3] Imperial Gazetteer of India, vol 5 (Clarendon Press 1908)

A central environmental function of the Aravalli range lies in its role as a natural filter for air pollutants. The forested slopes, rocky terrain, and uneven topography of the hills slow down and obstruct dust-laden winds that originate in the Thar Desert and move toward northern India. In the absence of this barrier, large volumes of particulate matter, particularly PM10, would travel unhindered into the Delhi–NCR region.[4]

By intercepting and dispersing these winds, the Aravallis significantly reduce the concentration of dust particles entering the Indo-Gangetic plains, thereby contributing to improved air quality and public health. The range acts as a natural shield that limits the eastward expansion of the Thar Desert. Vegetation cover in the hills stabilises soil and reduces wind erosion, preventing sand and dust from being carried into urban and agricultural areas.

This function is especially vital for Delhi, where increasing population density and urbanisation have already placed significant pressure on land and air resources. The loss of this protective buffer would expose the region to more frequent dust storms and long-term environmental degradation. Despite their ecological importance, the Aravallis are experiencing extensive degradation. Illegal mining, deforestation, and large-scale construction activities have resulted in the flattening of hills and the fragmentation of forest cover.[5]

Such degradation directly undermines the ability of the Aravalli to function as an effective barrier against dust and pollution. The impact is most evident during winter months, when temperature inversion traps pollutants close to the ground. The reduced capacity of the hills to intercept dust exacerbates air pollution levels, contributing to the severe smog episodes that have become characteristic of Delhi's winters. Beyond air pollution control, the Aravalli range also plays a broader role in regional climate regulation. The hills influence local wind patterns and help moderate temperature extremes by supporting vegetation and retaining moisture.

Their presence contributes to relatively cooler microclimates and supports the movement of monsoon winds. The destruction of this system has been associated with rising temperatures, declining humidity, and increasingly arid conditions in the surrounding region, all of which further intensify air pollution and environmental stress.[6]

[4] Wildlife Institute of India, 'Ecological Assessment of Aravalli Landscape' (WII 2017)
[5] MC Mehta v Union of India [1992] 2 SCR 353
[6] Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, 'Impact of Aravalli Deforestation on Regional Microclimates' (Research Report, IITD Press 2023)

The ecological significance of the Aravallis extends beyond immediate environmental concerns. The range supports biodiversity, aids groundwater recharge, and provides a long-term, self-sustaining mechanism for environmental regulation. Unlike technological or policy-based pollution control measures, which often offer only temporary relief, the Aravallis represent a permanent natural solution to air quality management. Their degradation, therefore, constitutes not merely an environmental loss but the erosion of a foundational ecological system essential for sustainable development. The continued degradation of the Aravalli Hills poses a direct threat to the environmental health and long-term sustainability of the Delhi–NCR region. Preserving and restoring this range is not only an ecological imperative but also a critical requirement for maintaining air quality, climate stability, and human well-being in one of India's most densely populated urban regions.[7]

THE ISSUE CONCERNING THE ARAVALLI HILLS, AND WHY HAVE THEY BEEN IN THE NEWS RECENTLY?

The Aravalli Hills, one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world, stretch across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Delhi, and play a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance of north-western India. Over the years, however, this fragile range has been under severe stress due to human activities, which is the core matter behind the concern surrounding it today.

The primary issue with the Aravalli Hills is large-scale environmental degradation. Illegal mining, unchecked construction, deforestation, and urban expansion have steadily damaged the natural structure of the hills. Mining for stone, quartz, and other minerals has led to the flattening of hills and the destruction of forest cover. This not only disrupts wildlife habitats but also weakens the natural barrier that the Aravallis provide against desertification from the Thar Desert. As the hills degrade, the risk of the desert spreading eastwards increases, directly affecting agriculture, water availability, and climate stability in nearby regions.

Another serious concern is the loss of forest land due to ambiguity in land classification. In several areas, especially in Haryana and Rajasthan, parts of the Aravalli range have been recorded as "gair mumkin pahad" or non-forest land in revenue records. This loophole has allowed real estate projects, farmhouses, and commercial constructions to come up in

[7] Vellore Citizens' Welfare Forum v Union of India [1996] 5 SCC 647

ecologically sensitive zones. Such activities reduce groundwater recharge, worsen air pollution, and increase the frequency of heatwaves, particularly in the National Capital Region.

The Aravalli Hills have been in the news recently, mainly because of judicial and governmental intervention. Courts, including the Supreme Court, have repeatedly taken note of the environmental damage caused to the Aravallis and have issued directions to stop illegal mining and construction. Recent hearings and orders have emphasised the need to protect the Aravalli range as an ecologically sensitive area, highlighting its importance for climate regulation, biodiversity conservation, and public health. At the same time, reports and expert studies warning about rising pollution levels, water scarcity, and extreme weather events have brought renewed public attention to the state of the Aravallis.

In addition, debates around development versus environmental protection have intensified. While state governments argue for infrastructure growth and economic development, environmentalists stress that continued neglect of the Aravalli Hills could lead to irreversible ecological damage. This tension has made the Aravallis a focal point in discussions on sustainable development and environmental governance.

In conclusion, the matter with the Aravalli Hills lies in their rapid environmental degradation caused by human interference and the weak enforcement of conservation laws. They are in the news because courts, environmental experts, and civil society are raising alarms about their destruction and pressing for stronger protection measures. The current attention serves as a reminder that safeguarding the Aravalli Hills is not just about preserving a mountain range, but about securing ecological stability and environmental well-being for future generations.

RECENT JUDGEMENT ON A MATTER RELATED TO ARAVALLI

In light of the emerging scenario from late 2025 to early 2026, the Supreme Court of India has adopted a proactive and precautionary approach to the Aravalli ranges, placing greater importance on environmental integrity than on height criteria. The Court has prioritised scientific mapping, environmental impact assessment, and restoration efforts, advising the state to prevent illegal mining, encroachment, and deforestation, thereby upholding the precautionary principle of environmental governance.

The 100-Meter Controversy & Initial Ruling of Nov 2025: The Ruling on November 20, 2025, the Supreme Court of India accepted a report by a committee constituted by the Ministry

of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), which identified the Aravalli hills as landforms that stand 100 meters or more above the surrounding relief.[8]

Definition & Scope: The Aravalli Range was identified as a group of such hills within 500 meters of each other to ensure a uniform application of the law in Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat.[9]

Immediate Action: The Supreme Court stayed the issuance of new mining leases until a Management Plan for Sustainable Mining (MPSM) was prepared. Satellite imaging, tough environmental clearance, and periodic compliance statements were also mandated to avoid ecological damage and unregulated commercial use.[10]

The "Stay" and Judicial Reconsideration ruling of Dec 2025 – Jan 2026: The Reversal: In the wake of severe criticism from environmental groups, amicus curiae, and activists who pointed out that the 100-meter criterion would leave more than 90% of the habitat unprotected, particularly in Haryana and Rajasthan, the Supreme Court stayed its own decision of November 20, 2025, on December 29, 2025.[11]

The Core Concern: The Court noted that the previous criterion may have "omitted to expressly clarify certain critical issues," which could lead to ecological fragmentation and potential misuse by mining companies in low-lying but ecologically sensitive areas.[12]

Extension: The stay was further extended on January 21, 2026, and a new high-powered expert committee was suggested to formulate criteria based on geomorphological, ecological, and biodiversity considerations.[13]

[8] The Indian Express. (2025, December 29). SC cites 'outcry among environmentalists',' concern over misinterpretation while staying 100- metre Aravalli definition.
[9] The Indian Express. (2025, December 29). SC cites 'outcry among environmentalists',' concern over misinterpretation while staying 100- metre Aravalli definition.
[10] The Economic Times. (2025, December 29). Apex Court keeps its earlier Aravalli order in abeyance.
[11] The Tribune. (2025, December 29). Aravalli row: Supreme Court keeps in abeyance its November 20 directions to set up a new expert committee.
[12] The Indian Express. (2025, December 29). SC cites 'outcry among environmentalists', 'concern over misinterpretation' while staying 100-metre Aravalli definition.
[13] Business Standard. (2026, January 21). SC flags 'irreversible damage', orders expert committee on Aravalli mining definition

"No Touch" Policy: The Court reaffirmed a cautious policy, mandating the maintenance of the status quo, halting new approvals, and protecting forest corridors, wildlife habitats, and groundwater recharge areas until a final decision is reached.[14]

FUTURE DIRECTION & ECOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Comprehensive Evaluation: The newly formed expert committee has been asked to carry out geomorphological mapping, biodiversity analysis, and hydrological surveys to ensure that ecological connectivity, wildlife corridors, and forest patches are maintained. The aim is to prevent artificial fragmentation created by narrow, elevation-based definitions and instead follow a landscape approach to conservation.[15]

Ecosystem Services: The Supreme Court recognised the Aravallis as the "green lung" of the Delhi-NCR region, a natural safeguard against desertification, a crucial groundwater recharge zone, and a climate regulator that moderates heatwaves.[16]

Crackdown on Illegal Mining: The government has been asked to use drone surveillance, GIS mapping, and satellite monitoring to identify and shut down illegal mining activities. Precautionary Principle, In the name of intergenerational justice, the Court reiterated that no irreversible ecological harm should be caused while the case is still pending before the court.[17]

KEY ASPECTS OF THE 100-METER RULE DEBATE[18]

Pro-100m Argument: The argument in favour of the 100-meter rule states that a definitive 100-meter elevation standard is necessary for regulatory consistency and administrative standardisation in Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. The rule's dependence on the Survey of India's topographic maps and quantifiable geomorphological parameters minimises subjectivity and variability in environmental clearance. The 100-meter standard, according to

[14] Guntha, B. (2026, February 13). Will not allow anyone to touch Aravallis, says SC; Haryana's zoo safari plan on hold. TVM News.
[15] Business Standard. (2026, January 21). SC flags 'irreversible damage', orders expert committee on Aravalli mining definition.
[16] The New Indian Express. (2025, December 29). Supreme Court stays November 20 verdict to revisit definition of the Aravalli hills and ranges.
[17] Business Standard. (2026, January 21). SC flags 'irreversible damage', orders expert committee on Aravalli mining definition.
[18] The Indian Express. (2025, December 31). Aravalli definition row: Supreme Court stays order accepting '100-metre' rule.

proponents, helps to eliminate overlapping claims of jurisdiction and makes it easier to systematically prepare Sustainable Mining Plans.

Anti-100m Argument: Opponents of the 100-meter rule state that elevation is not a sufficient ecological criterion. Groundwater recharge areas, forest corridors, and ecologically rich pediments are often found below the 100-meter elevation standard. Areas that could be excluded from the 100-meter rule may be legally vulnerable to quarrying, urbanisation, and infrastructure development, leading to accelerated desertification and habitat destruction.

Wider Implication: The debate surrounding the 100-meter rule reflects a constitutional and policy conundrum—balancing mining-led economic development with ecological sustainability, climate change resilience, and environmental security in North India.

THE DEVASTATING RIPPLE EFFECTS OF CUTTING DOWN THE ARAVALLI RANGE

The Aravalli hills, some of the oldest on Earth, have quietly protected northern India for ages. But cutting them down, whether through mining blasts, illegal logging, or sprawling cities, is tearing that protection apart. Your notes captured the heart of it: stopping desert spread, safeguarding underground water, climatic shifts, droughts, rising heat, and floods linked to water troubles. The truth is, the damage runs even deeper, touching lives, farms, wildlife, and even the air we breathe. Let's break it down clearly.

Preventing Desert Expansion – Or Letting It Creep In: One of the first big jobs the Aravallis do is act as a wall against the Thar Desert. Without their trees and slopes, the sands push eastward unchecked. Farmers in places like Alwar and Gurugram already talk about fields turning dusty, with bajra and wheat yields dropping because the soil blows away. Once rare, dust storms now hit more often, especially before monsoons, carrying fine particles that irritate lungs and damage crops. If we keep cutting, experts warn the desert could edge closer to Delhi-NCR and beyond, turning fertile patches into barren land. It's not just about losing greenery; it's about entire communities watching their livelihoods dry up as the Thar moves in, sometimes just 200 km away in vulnerable spots.

Safeguarding Underground Water – The Hidden Lifeline at Risk: Your point about ensuring the safety and preservation of underground water is spot on. The Aravallis are natural recharge zones—rain soaks into their fractured rocks and forested slopes, slowly feeding

aquifers that supply wells for millions of people in Rajasthan, Haryana, and even parts of Delhi. When trees vanish, and hills get blasted for mining, that recharge stops. Water tables drop sharply—sometimes 40-60 feet in affected areas—and wells run dry faster. Villages that once had reliable groundwater now drill deeper at huge cost, or face shortages that force migration. In mining zones, contamination from dust and chemicals seeps in, too, making water unsafe. For over 50 million folks relying on this, it's turning into a full crisis: no water means no farming, no drinking, no life as we know it.

Climatic Changes – Throwing Weather Out of Balance: The Aravallis help regulate local climate in subtle but powerful ways. They moderate winds, influence monsoon patterns, and keep temperatures steadier through shade and moisture from trees. Cutting them down amps up climate chaos. Heatwaves get fiercer ("garmi badhegi," as you wrote), with northern India seeing hotter summers and erratic rains. Rainfall becomes unpredictable—some years too little, leading to prolonged dry spells, others sudden heavy bursts. This messes with agricultural cycles and makes planning harder for everyone, from small farmers to city planners. Overall, it feeds into broader climate volatility, where extremes become the new normal.

Droughts – When the Land Thirsts Permanently: Droughts follow naturally from lost recharge and soil moisture. Without forests to hold water and release it slowly, dry periods stretch longer. Crops fail, livestock suffer, and people scramble for tankers. In already arid Rajasthan and Haryana, this means more abandoned fields and farmer distress. Reduced oxygen or poorer air quality ties in here too—fewer trees mean less natural oxygen production, and dust-filled winds make breathing tougher. It's a slow-building disaster where the land itself seems to give up.

Rising Heat – Summers That Feel Unbearable: With tree cover gone, bare hills and exposed rock absorb and radiate heat like ovens. Urban areas nearby feel the burn more intensely—Delhi's already brutal summers could worsen with extra dust and lost shade. Heat-related illnesses rise, productivity drops, and vulnerable groups like the elderly and outdoor workers suffer most. It's not just discomfort; it's a health and economic hit that ripples outward.

Floods and Water Crises – The Paradox of Too Much and Too Little: Here's the cruel irony: deforestation leads to both droughts and floods ("jal sankat"). Without trees and vegetation to absorb rain, water rushes off slopes in torrents, causing flash floods in lowlands

and silting rivers. We've seen this around the Yamuna—sudden deluges overwhelm drains because upstream buffers are gone. Yet the same loss means less stored water for dry times, creating a vicious cycle of feast-or-famine water supply.

Loss of Biodiversity – Vanishing Wildlife and Ecosystems: The Aravallis host leopards, hyenas, hundreds of bird species, and unique plants. Cutting fragments habitats, pushing animals into farms and villages, sparking conflicts. Pollinators decline, affecting crop yields; pests boom without natural predators. It's a chain reaction—lose one species, and the balance tips further.

Worsening Air Pollution and Dust Storms: Bare hills mean more dust gets airborne, mixing with city smog. Delhi's pollution spikes with extra particles from eroded Aravallis, raising respiratory issues like asthma. Dust storms carry microbes, too, making health worse.

Soil Erosion and Economic Fallout: Topsoil washes away, turning land barren. Agriculture suffers, food prices rise, and tourism to wildlife spots drops. Short-term mining profits fade against long-term costs in health, water, and lost productivity.

SUGGESTIONS

Strengthen Laws and Enforcement – No More Loopholes: First things first: we need rock-solid rules that get followed. The Supreme Court has already stepped in multiple times, banning fresh mining leases in key zones and ordering a proper Sustainable Mining Management Plan. Push for that plan to get finalised quickly, with clear no-go areas for mining, especially around wildlife corridors, recharge zones, and aquifers. Make the entire range a "Critical Ecological Zone" so protections apply uniformly across states—no more state-by-state confusion where Rajasthan allows what Haryana bans.

Ramp Up Reforestation with Native Trees – Bring Back What Belongs: Planting trees is the obvious fix, but do it right. The Aravalli Green Wall project (that 5-km buffer zone across four states) is a solid start—aiming to plant millions of native species like neem, khejri, dhau, arjuna, and banyan. These handle drought well and support local birds, insects, and animals.

Get communities involved from day one. Involve village groups (like Joint Forest Management Committees) in choosing sites, picking species, and caring for saplings. Women and youth can lead nursery setups in every panchayat—tie it to jobs under MNREGA or CAMPA funds so

people earn while planting. Avoid exotics like Prosopis juliflora (vilayati babool); they've taken over in places and choked out natives. Focus on assisted natural regeneration in less-damaged spots—let nature regrow with a little help—and prioritise high-degradation areas near water bodies or tiger reserves.

Revive Traditional Water Systems – Recharge the Ground Naturally: To fight drought and falling groundwater, bring back old-school methods that worked for generations. Things like johads (small check dams), chaukas (square ponds), and khadins trap rainwater, let it soak in, and prevent runoff floods. Farmers in Rajasthan have revived these and seen wells refill.

Combine with modern tweaks: build more percolation tanks in hilly catchments, restore degraded lakes, and treat mine pits (the safe ones) as new wetlands for wildlife and water storage. In buffer zones, promote climate-resilient farming—drip irrigation, crop rotation with millets, and agroforestry—so land doesn't erode and pressure on hills drops.

Build Community Ownership and Alternative Livelihoods: People protect what benefits them. Shift from destructive jobs (like mining labour) to sustainable ones. Eco-tourism in restored areas—trails, birdwatching, homestays—can bring income without wrecking the place. Promote agroforestry where farmers grow fruit trees or medicinal plants alongside crops.

Run awareness drives in schools and villages: seed-bombing events, clean-up days, or apps showing before-and-after photos of restored patches. Get corporates and volunteers involved—many in Gurugram and Delhi want to help but need organised ways, like the Aravali Biodiversity Park model, where locals, NGOs, and companies turned a mined-out site into a thriving forest.

Reduce Pressure from Cities and Construction: Urban sprawl eats into the hills, too. Push for eco-sensitive zone notifications that limit big buildings, roads, or waste dumps in sensitive parts. Encourage alternative materials for construction—fly ash bricks, recycled stuff—so demand for Aravalli stone drops. Offer incentives like tax breaks for green buildings. On air and dust: stricter rules on stone crushers (better filters, distance from homes) and more green belts around cities to trap pollution before it worsens.

CONCLUSION

It's clear the Aravalli Hills aren't just rocks and ridges; they're a living testament to India's ancient past and a fragile shield for our present. Formed over two billion years in the Proterozoic era from colliding cratons like Bundelkhand and Marwar, these fold mountains once towered over the Himalayas. But relentless weathering, climate shifts, and geological quiet have sculpted them into the eroded, low-lying wonders we see today—discontinuous hills averaging 600-900 meters, with Guru Shikhar as the proud peak at 1,722 meters. Their story is one of resilience, but human hands are rewriting it fast, turning curiosity into crisis.

Look at their bond with Delhi's pollution woes: as a natural barricade, the Aravallis trap dust from the Thar, filter winds, and keep desert sands at bay. Without them, PM10 particles surge into the NCR, worsening smog that already blankets the city in winter inversions. They've regulated climate, boosted monsoons, and stabilised soil for centuries. Yet, recent years—2020 to 2026—have spotlighted the threats: illegal mining flattening peaks for stone, deforestation for quick cash, urban expansion claiming "non-forest" loopholes. It's not abstract; it's real degradation hitting biodiversity, water recharge, and air quality. It started with a committee's definition for uniformity, banning new leases till a sustainable plan. But by December, stay rolls in amid outcry, over 90% of the range could lose protection, ignoring low but vital areas. Now, in early 2026, the Court's pushing geomorphological maps, biodiversity checks, and a "no touch" stance, cracking down on illegals with drones and GIS.

The Aravallis remind us progress isn't about bulldozing nature; it's harmonising with it. India's post-Independence strides in poverty, health, and education show we can adapt policies for better lives. Now, for sustainability, let's apply that to these hills. Ignore them, and we invite peril—desertification, pollution choking our cities, water wars. Protect them, and we secure breathable air, stable climates, thriving ecosystems for generations. It's on us, governments, communities, you and me, to choose wisely. The hills have stood guard; time we return the favour.