

# Influence of Mountainous Terrain of Mendhar on Human Settlement and Infrastructure Development

Mohd Qasim Mir<sup>1</sup>, Taseer Ahmed<sup>2</sup>, Sanjeev Kumar<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, SCS GDC Mendhar, Jammu and Kashmir, India

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Department of Geography, GDC Kishtwar, Jammu and Kashmir, India

<sup>3</sup>Lecturer, Department of Geography, GDC Bhaderwah, Jammu and Kashmir, India

## ABSTRACT

The mountainous terrain of Mendhar poses unique challenges and opportunities for human settlement and infrastructure development. This study explores how the rugged landscape has shaped the growth and dynamics of settlements in the region. It examines the geographical constraints and environmental factors that influence the placement and design of infrastructure such as roads, housing, and utilities.

Through a combination of geographic analysis and case studies, the research highlights the adaptive strategies employed by communities to navigate the steep slopes and variable elevations of Mendhar. It discusses the impact of topography on land use patterns, transportation networks, and the resilience of built structures against natural hazards.

Furthermore, the study investigates the socio-economic implications of living in mountainous terrain, including access to services, economic activities, and quality of life. It identifies opportunities for sustainable development practices that leverage the natural resources and scenic beauty of the region while preserving its ecological integrity.

**KEYWORDS:** Mountainous, human settlement, landscape, topography, sustainable development

## INTRODUCTION

Mendhar, a Tehsil located in the Jammu and Kashmir Poonch district, is characterized by its rugged mountainous terrain that significantly influences human settlement patterns and infrastructure development. Mendhar's geographical characteristics, which include steep slopes, narrow valleys and high elevation that floats between 800 and 3,000 meters above sea level, play a key role in forming not only the physical landscape, but also of the socioeconomic dynamics of communities. local. These formidable natural barriers have challenges and opportunities for human housing, creating a distinct context in which settlement patterns emerge in response to the environment.

The mountainous terrain historically dictated the choices available to those who inhabit the region. Settlements are usually located in protected valleys or more affordable slopes, where agricultural activities can be sustained. This preference for certain areas is

driven by the need for arable land, as steep inclinations severely limit productivity and agricultural mobility. Consequently, the distribution of the population in Mendhar tends to be focused on affordable pockets rather than spread evenly through the Tehsil. Positioning of villages and cities is not only a reflection of land availability, but also a response to the physical challenges presented by the landscape, allowing communities to flourish in places that offer safety of natural elements and accessibility to vital resources.

In addition, Mendhar's mountainous geography has implications for the development of infrastructure in the region. The construction of roads, bridges and other essential facilities becomes a complex enterprise due to the undulating topography of the terrain. Infrastructure can usually be full of logistics challenges, requiring innovative engineering solutions to overcome natural barriers. Consequently, the

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development of Mendhar transport networks was unequal, with some areas enjoying well established connections, while others remain isolated. This disparity can lead to social and economic inequalities, as access to markets, education and health becomes dependent on geographical considerations.

The interaction between the mountainous terrain and the standards of human settlements highlights the intrinsic relationship between the environment and its inhabitants. As communities adapt to the rugged landscape, sociocultural practices evolve to align with Mendhar's geographical realities. Traditional knowledge systems usually arise, guiding local populations in their interactions with Earth. For example, agricultural practices are adapted not only to the local climate, but also to the unique characteristics of the terrain, incorporating terrace agriculture and the selection of crops that maximize performance in challenging circumstances. These adaptations emphasize the resilience of communities that, despite the probabilities presented by their environment, forge a lifestyle that recognizes and works in conjunction with Mendhar's geological characteristics.

In short, Mendhar's mountainous ground serves as a barrier and a facilitator of human settlement. The meaning of geographical characteristics in the formation of population distribution and infrastructure development cannot be exaggerated. This fundamental interaction between natural landscape and human housing establishes the foundations for a deeper analysis of how economic activities, social conditions and the resilience of the community continue to evolve within Mendhar's multifaceted ecological structure (Mughal et al., 2024). The historical perspective on Mendhar's settlement models reveals a profound relationship between the region's mountainous land and the ways in which its first inhabitants adapted to their environment. Archaeological evidence suggests that human activity in this area dates back to thousands of years, with various groups that choose to settle according to the natural resources provided by the landscape. The steep hills and the robust soil, while placing challenges for a permanent settlement, also offered protection and the opportunity for agriculture subsistence, leading to a complex interaction between geography and human adaptation.

### **Influence on Tribes**

Gujjars and Bakarwals, an indigenous tribe originally from the region, exemplify the strategies used by the populations to thrive Mendhar's mountain environment. These pastoral communities have historically engaged in migration or seasonal

transformation, moving their herds between higher pastures in summer and lower valleys during the winter months. This adaptability to changing geographical conditions has not only dictated their settlement models, but has also established a fluid demographic scene. According to Ahmed (2013), the Gujjars and Bakarwals were mainly established in areas characterized by large pastures and access to water sources, which were essential to support cattle, a central component of their economy.

The socio-economic activities of these tribes were intrinsically linked to the geography of Mendhar. The Gujjars, for example, traditionally based on dairy products and livestock, which required a semi-nomadic lifestyle. Their movement models have favored a unique spatial distribution, often resulting in the formation of temporary settlements that could quickly adapt to the availability of the pasture. These movements were generally dictated by ecological considerations, indicating a profound understanding of the natural environment. In addition, their historical routes also created socio-cultural connections with the nearby regions, influencing commercial dynamics and cultural exchanges.

The mountainous soil also played a crucial role in modeling the development of infrastructures within Mendhar. The construction of access roads and other forms of infrastructure has often been dictated by the need to navigate in a demanding topography. In this context, the indigenous tribes had a significant influence on the development of transport routes, which were essential for migratory shepherds to access markets and essential resources. However, the limited infrastructure also limited the ability of external influences to penetrate deeply in the region, preserving the unique cultural identity of Gujjars and Bakarwals.

### **Influence on Population Distribution**

Demographically, the difficult living conditions imposed by the mountains have led to a relatively low population density, in particular in less accessible areas. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the highest shares, in which snow and landslides can create dangerous living conditions, discouraging permanent settlement. On the contrary, the lowest areas in elevation with more qualifying land have attracted larger populations and have become more urbanized, although still under the constraints of the mountainous landscape. The balance between accessibility and availability of resources has therefore directly influenced the demographic distribution of these tribes in all Mendhar.

In summary, the historical streets of human adaptation to Mendhar's mountainous land are

marked by a distinct series of challenges and opportunities. Gujjars and Bakarwals not only exemplify resilience in the face of geographical adversities, but also modeled the demographic trends of the region and the development of infrastructures through their settlement strategies, economic practices and cultural interactions. These settlement models illuminate the profound complexities inherent in human-environment relationships in the regions of the mountains, underlining the meaning of indigenous knowledge in the navigation of topographical challenges.

### **Influence on Economy**

Mendhar's mountainous geography plays a fundamental role in modeling the economic landscape and the models of settlement of its inhabitants. The robust soil, with its steep slopes and narrow valleys, seriously limits agricultural practices, compelling local populations to adapt to the prevalent environmental conditions. Traditional agricultural methods in Mendhar are mainly oriented towards subsistence, with growers based on terraced agriculture to maximize qualifying land and effectively manage water resources. This adaptation is necessary, given the limited availability of flat soils suitable for a large cultivation. As such, crop yields often depend on seasonal rainfall and unique microclimatic variations for mountainous environments.

Mendhar's economy is significantly influenced by its limited accessibility to external markets. The mountainous land limits the establishment of reliable commercial routes, which require the development of alternative means of transport, including pedestrian paths and traces of mules. These transport methods limit the volume and frequency of trade, thus preventing economic growth. Local markets remain in some way isolated and dependent on subsistence assets, with agricultural products often exchanged within the village community rather than sold on larger commercial stairs.

In addition to these agricultural challenges, the mountainous landscape has favored dependence on transformation and pastoral activities, in particular among the tribal communities that inhabit the region. The seasonal migration of cattle shepherds in search of pastures to pasture is a prevalent practice in Mendhar, which allows communities to exploit the verticality of the mountains. This mobility does not integrate only food sources, but also provides an alternative economic path through the exchange of cattle and animal products. The transhumance system developed in Mendhar shows off a sustainable relationship between the environment and the

economic activity, since the shepherds adapt to environmental constraints using various areas of altitude dynamically throughout the year (Kreutzmann, 2024; Ahmed et al., 2024).

The accessibility of natural resources significantly alters the settlement models and influences local economies. The presence of forest areas and mineral deposits within the mountainous region presents both opportunities and challenges. The forests act as a source of wooden forest products, in wood and not unimmolar, providing vital resources for local consumption and trade. However, the robust topography complicates deforestation activities and limits the scale of the extraction of resources, limiting the economic benefits that could be derived from these natural activities.

On the contrary, the presence of mining resources attracted some local investments, which led to the creation of small scale mineral operations. These efforts, however, often meet resistance from environmental and social perspectives. The extraction processes can inflict damage to local ecosystems, causing environmental degradation that in the end undermines the agricultural productivity of the surrounding areas. Consequently, these economic activities demonstrate a complex interaction between economic potential and environmental sustainability in the context of Mendhar's mountain geography.

The economic impacts of the mountainous land are therefore multifaceted, influencing the settlement models mainly through the limits imposed on agriculture, transport and trade. The dependence on transhumance and pastoralism reflects a historical adaptation to the geographical challenges faced by the local tribes, illustrating the deep connection between humans and their environment to Mendhar. While economic activities continue to evolve in response to these geographical constraints, the social fabric of the region remains simultaneously modeled and reflective of its mountainous land. The social fabric of the mountainous regions of Mendhar is intrinsically woven with the geographic and economic realities of the region, influencing colony models and community dynamics. The accidental ground, characterized by its steep slopes, its narrow valleys and its variable climatic conditions, required a specific adaptation of social structures to these geographic characteristics. The relative isolation caused by such a terrain has led communities to develop distinct cultural practices and social networks which differ considerably from those of more accessible areas.

### **Influence on Culture**

Mainly, the mountainous nature of Mendhar has facilitated the emergence of a mosaic of tribal



communities, each with unique ethnic identities and practices. Tribes like Gujjar, Bakerwal and Pahari have not only adapted to the field, but also fed a strong feeling of local identity deeply rooted in their environment. This isolation allowed the preservation of traditional customs, languages and practices that could be diluted or lost in more interconnected regions. Like Chowdhary et al. (2017), community structures here are often organized along kinship, where family ties strengthen social cohesion and collective action.

This community -based community structure is essential for mutual support in daily tasks, as well as during crises such as natural disasters, which are not uncommon in high -altitude environments. Social networks are often closely knitted, promoting a feeling of belonging and security among residents. Interdependence cultivated through these networks is vital for the survival of these communities, especially when navigating as challenges such as food security and resource management in a landscape that is both generous and hard.

Cultural practices in Mendhar are also considerably shaped by geographic isolation facilitated by the mountainous terrain. Traditional means of subsistence, which often include pastoralism and limited agriculture, reflect an in -depth understanding of local ecology and the availability of resources. Social rallies, festivals and rites of passage often present this link with the land, because they are often linked to the seasonal cycles of agriculture and breeding. These cultural events still strengthen municipal ties and serve to instill a shared identity which is crucial for the maintenance of social harmony.

This promotes a feeling of resilience and self -sufficiency among tribal populations. It encourages the development of local governance structures based on traditional leadership, where decisions are often taken by consensus and respect for historical customs. These governance models contrast with more centralized forms typical in urbanized areas, reflecting adaptations to single social dynamics and community interactions born of geographic isolation.

Despite the strength of local traditions and social structures, it is important to note that this isolation poses challenges, in particular in terms of education and accessibility to health care. Schools and health establishments are often located in elevations that are difficult to access vulnerable populations, leading to significant variations in the level of education and health results compared to residents in less isolated areas. This deficit can exacerbate social inequalities

and hinder the development of broader social networks that could improve economic opportunities.

### **Influence on Infrastructure Development**

The development of infrastructure in mountainous region of Mendhar presents a range of challenges which are complete linked to both physical characteristics of the field and to the socio-economic context of the region. The unique topography, characterized by steep slopes and narrow valleys, complicates the construction of essential transport networks. According to Malik (2013), the mountainous landscape restricts not only the land available for development, but also increases the costs associated with the construction and maintenance of infrastructure. Consequently, the creation of roads, bridges and other vital transport links becomes both a logistical challenge and a financial burden. This has important implications for human settlement patterns and economic activities in the region.

The construction of transport networks in Mendhar is often hampered by various geographic factors. For example, tunnels by rock and the construction of bridges on deep ravines are activities that require advanced engineering skills and significant investments. These challenges can delay infrastructure projects, leading to inadequate transport links between establishments. As Malik (2013) noted, inadequate roads negatively affect not only the movement of people but also the transport of goods. Consequently, distant areas may experience isolation, dissuading both potential residents and companies to establish operations there. This isolation can strengthen existing regulation models, where communities come together in more accessible areas, subsequently influencing the density of the population and the distribution of economic activity.

The impact of limited transport options extends to public services such as health care and education. In mountainous regions, access to clinics, hospitals and schools is often based on available roads. The difficulties in building and maintaining these roads can lead to a scenario in which residents are unable to access the essential services. Malik (2013) explains that when public services are concentrated in more accessible places, they promote urban migration, resulting in rural depopulation and additional consolidation of the human colony in urbanized areas. This migration trend emphasizes the cyclical nature of the development of infrastructure and regulation schemes, as regions with robust infrastructure develop a reputation for economic opportunity, thus attracting more residents.

Environmental considerations strengthen the challenges associated with the development of

infrastructure in mountainous areas. The risk of landslides, erosion and other natural disasters requires careful planning and engineering solutions that can be prohibitive. These environmental factors influence both government and private investments, as potential stakeholders can be dissuaded by the risks involved. Thus, Mendhar's topography submits not only the development of infrastructure to a complex geographical dynamic, but also invites socio-economic vulnerabilities which perpetuate certain regulations.

Access to health services is further complicated by environmental factors such as altitude and climatic variations. Mountain conditions often involve a hard climate, in particular during the winter months, when strong snowfalls can completely hinder the transport routes. This seasonal interruption aggravates the existing problems of accessibility and may result in delays or complete cessation of health delivery. Patients facing emergencies, such as those who require urgent medical care, can experiment with prolonged waiting times due to the prevented access, at the end to an increase in morbidity and mortality rates (Verma & Dash, 2020).

The interaction of geography and the socio-economic state is also evident in the behavior in search of health among the rural residents of Mendhar. The perceived challenges associated with access to health care can discourage people from the use of available services, leading to relying on traditional medicine practices. Cultural beliefs and normalization of some health problems can push people to seek non-professional assistance, further exacerbating the health disparities caused by access to limited health care (Verma & Dash, 2020).

## Conclusion

In summary, the evaluation of the vulnerabilities of natural disasters in Mendhar, shaped by his mountainous terrain, illuminates the critical intersections of the geographic, economic and social factors which influence human establishments and the development of infrastructure. By recognizing and approaching vulnerability problems while promoting community resilience through enlightened planning and development, the inhabitants of Mendhar can sail better in the challenges posed by their environment., Mendhar's mountainous ground serves not only as a physical barrier, but also as a significant factor that model the geopolitical panorama of the region. Tensions in progress along the control line (Loc) between India and Pakistan create a unique context to understand the settlement models and the development of infrastructures. These geopolitical

tensions basically alter traditional settlement practices, since local communities and politicians negotiate the intersecting realities of safety, economic opportunities and social cohesion.

Framed by a robust topography that presents steep slopes and narrow valleys, Mendhar's settlement models are influenced by geographical realities that are further exacerbated by the conflict. The proximity to the disputed boundaries has led to a high degree of militarization, which directly affects where and how populations accumulate. The communities are often forced to establish residences further from the boundaries, in areas perceived as safer, despite the decrease in access to agriculture and to the traditional means of subsistence that these positions may entail (Chowdhary, 2012). The consequent dispersion or clustering of settlements leads to unique urban and rural configurations, since families give priority to safety compared to economic considerations.

In light of these observations, future research ventures can deepen in various dimensions to unravel the profound complexities of these interactions. Study areas may include longitudinal evaluations of the population movement in response to infrastructure changes, comparative analysis of settlement patterns in other mountainous regions and the impact of climate change on resource availability and community resilience. In addition, exploring the role of technology on the bridge of geographical barriers could provide new ideas about the evolutionary relationship of the human-environment in Mendhar. Thus, understanding the multifaceted relationship between Mendhar's mountainous ground and the dynamics of human settlements remains a continuous and rich area for academic investigation.

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