

# UNCOVERING THE IMPACT OF EROSION CONSERVATION TECHNIQUES ON SOIL ATTRIBUTES IN SHIVALIKS OF LOWER HIMALAYAS OF JAMMU, India

## Abstract

The present study uncovering the impact of erosion conservation techniques on soil attributes in Shivaliks of lower Himalayas of Jammu. Soil erosion is considered as the main cause of land degradation in hilly areas especially in outer Himalayas. Although the problem persisted on the earth for a longer period, it has become severe in recent times due to increased man-environment interactions. The study was conducted in 2021 at the Merth village of Jammu and Kashmir, India, which is situated in the Kathua district. The catchment area investigated had a clay loam texture and a slope gradient of 3-6%, with a total area of 24.8 acres. The result shows that mean value of bulk density under various erosion control techniques was highest in overgrazing prevention ( $1.40\text{g cm}^{-3}$ ) followed by perimeter runoff control, terrace farming and contour plowing and was lowest in cover crop ( $1.33\text{g cm}^{-3}$ ). The carbon content also increased with the and was highest under cover crop. Carbon act as bridge between nutrient, water and soil. The study strongly recommends adoption of resource conservation techniques for reducing soil erosion & water conservation in submontane *Shivaliks*.

**Keywords:** Erosion conservation modules, bulk density, infiltration rate, water holding capacity

## 1. Introduction

“Land degradation and its potential causes on a worldwide basis are challenging the economic and social well being of the present and future generation by declining the productivity of croplands and rangelands” (Keno & Suryabhagavan, 2014, Rasool *et al.* (2014). “Most people in the developing countries are dependent completely on agriculture for their livelihood, so it has been identified as a major threat to sustainability of agriculture and economy of nations” (Gemechu, 2016). “The continuous maintenance of fertile soil is essential in order to meet basic human needs. In India land degradation is a common problem in the Shivaliks of Lower Himalayas of Jammu, extending from district Kathua in the southeast to Rajouri in the northwest. It is a dry semi-hilly belt, locally known as kandi. Increased human and cattle population

pressure along with decrease in the size of land holdings in the study area have resulted in the indiscriminate felling of trees, removal of bushes for household consumption. It has led to unabated soil loss and land degradation. Soil erosion by water is the root cause of ecological degradation in these areas. The estimated annual soil loss from the Shivaliks or sub-montane region of Jammu is more than 80 tonnes ha<sup>-1</sup>. The physiographic characteristic of the area is itself a major factor contributing to the continuous degradation of these catchments. The weak lithology of the Shivaliks of Lower Himalayas consisting of rocks like sandstone, conglomerate, shale, silt stone and limestone are relatively easily weatherable and therefore prone to quick erosion. The topography of the region ranging from gently sloping to moderately-steep sloping retards the vertical development of soils. These highly erodible soils are poor in nutrients and low in organic carbon contributing to poor physical attributes and poor productivity". (Sharma et al., 2009) "Therefore, different adoption of resource conservation techniques are very necessary in the hilly areas to control the soil loss to a tolerable limit. The different resource conservation techniques are designed to intercept sediments, reduce runoff velocity, facilitate infiltration of runoff water, transmit runoff at non erosive power and reduces sedimentation of waterways, streams, and rivers" (Blanco and L al, 2008).

## 2. Materials and Methods.

**Study Area:** The study was conducted in the Merth village of Jammu and Kashmir, India, which is situated in the Kathua district. The catchment area investigated had a clay loam texture and a slope gradient of 3-6%, with a total area of 24.8 acres. The geographic location of the study area is between 32° 17' to 32° 55' North latitude and 75° 70' to 76° 16' East longitude.

**Erosion Control Techniques:** The erosion control techniques employed in maize-wheat cropping system of the study area included:

- Terrace farming
- Perimeter runoff control
- Cover crop (Black gram, *var.* Uttara)
- Agrostological measures (Bhabar, Khus-khus, Bermuda grass, Agati, Elephant grass)

- Overgrazing prevention



**JAMMU & KASHMIR (J&K)**



**DISTRICT KATHUA, J&K**

**Fig 1: Location of study area**

**Method of implementation of resource conservation techniques:**

- Contour lines were identified. It was done by using a topographical map and in some cases by visually observing the slope.
- Terrace farming structures parallel to the contour lines were constructed. The terraces were leveled and have a slight slope to allow for water drainage.
- Perimeter runoff control structures such as bunds, trenches, and ditches along the contour lines to control the flow of water and reduce soil erosion were constructed
- The cover crops was planted in rows and spaced at regular intervals. Agrostological measures such as grasses, shrubs, and trees parallel to the contour lines. were spaced at regular intervals to provide maximum coverage.
- Overgrazing prevention measures such as limiting the number of livestock that graze on the land were by constructing fences and by providing alternative grazing areas.

The composite surface soil samples were collected randomly from the watershed areas by using GPS. Collection of soil samples were based on the different types of erosion control modules used. The collected soil samples were then air-dried, mixed well and passed through a 2 mm sieve for the analysis of selected soil physical attributes.

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### Analysis of soil samples

**Table 1 Methods employed for the determination of various soil physico-chemical attributes and their initial values:**

Parameters	Methods	References	Initial values
Texture	Hydrometer method	Bouyoucos, 1962	Clay loam
Bulk density ( $\text{g cm}^{-3}$ )	Core sampler method	Black, 1965	1.38
Particle density ( $\text{g cm}^{-3}$ )	Pycnometer	Black, 1965	2.63

Infiltration rate (cm hr <sup>-1</sup> )	Minidisk infiltrometer	Decagon, 2005	2.01
pH	Potentiometric method	Jackson, 1973	6.4
Electrical conductivity (dSm <sup>-1</sup> )	Salt bridge method	Jackson, 1973	0.50
Organic carbon (g kg <sup>-1</sup> )	Rapid titration method	Walkley & Black, 1934	5.2
Available N (kg ha <sup>-1</sup> )	Kjeldahl method	Subbiah & Asija, 1956	250
Available P (kg ha <sup>-1</sup> )	Olsen's method	Olsen <i>et al.</i> , 1954	11
Available K (kg ha <sup>-1</sup> )	Flame photometry method	Piper, 1966	160

Analysis was done by using analysis of variance techniques (ANOVA) and by applying DMRT test. The SPSS Software version 14.0 was used for analysis.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### Impact of resource conservation techniques on physical attributes of soil

**Table 2: Impact of resource conservation techniques on physical attributes of soil**

RCT	BD (g cm <sup>-3</sup> ) (Mean ± S.E)	PD (g cm <sup>-3</sup> ) (Mean ± S.E)	Infiltration rate (cm hr <sup>-1</sup> ) (Mean)
CC	1.33 ± 0.02 <sup>e</sup>	2.62 ± 0.01 <sup>a</sup>	7.05
AM	1.35 ± 0.03 <sup>d</sup>	2.62 ± 0.01 <sup>a</sup>	6.10
TF	1.38 ± 0.02 <sup>b</sup>	2.63 ± 0.01 <sup>a</sup>	5.25
CP	1.38 ± 0.02 <sup>b</sup>	2.62 ± 0.01 <sup>a</sup>	5.20
PRC	1.37 ± 0.02 <sup>c</sup>	2.62 ± 0.01 <sup>a</sup>	4.75
OGP	1.40 ± 0.03 <sup>a</sup>	2.62 ± 0.01 <sup>a</sup>	2.75

Note: Means with the same letter are not significantly different

RCT (Resource conservation techniques), CC (Cover crop), AM (Agrostological measures), TF (Terrace farming), CP (Contour plowing), PRC (Perimeter runoff control), OGP (Overgrazing prevention)

### Bulk Density

The result shows that mean value of bulk density under various erosion control techniques was highest in overgrazing prevention ( $1.40\text{g cm}^{-3}$ ) followed by perimeter runoff control, terrace farming and contour plowing and was lowest in cover crop ( $1.33\text{g cm}^{-3}$ ) (Fig:2). Degraded lands were found to have the highest values of bulk density. The highest bulk density of the soil in overgrazing prevention may be attributed due to low clay content and organic matter. The decrease in bulk density in cover crop might be the subsequent effects of reduced soil loss and crop residue through erosion and addition of organic matter through plants. The impact of falling raindrops also decreased under the cover crop. Decrease in bulk density in cover crop, terrace farming, contour plowing, agrostological measures have also been observed by **Franzluebbers and Stuedemann (2005)**; **Autmong et al. (2009)**; **Barreto et al. (2010)**; **Singh et al. (2011)**. The results also confirm the findings of **Sharma et al. (2007)** and **Wallia et al. (2010)**. The reduction in bulk density is related to increase of organic carbon in cover crop which results in more pore space and good soil aggregation, **Selvi et al. (2005)**; **Khursheed et al. (2012)**; **Yaduvanshi et al. (2013)**.

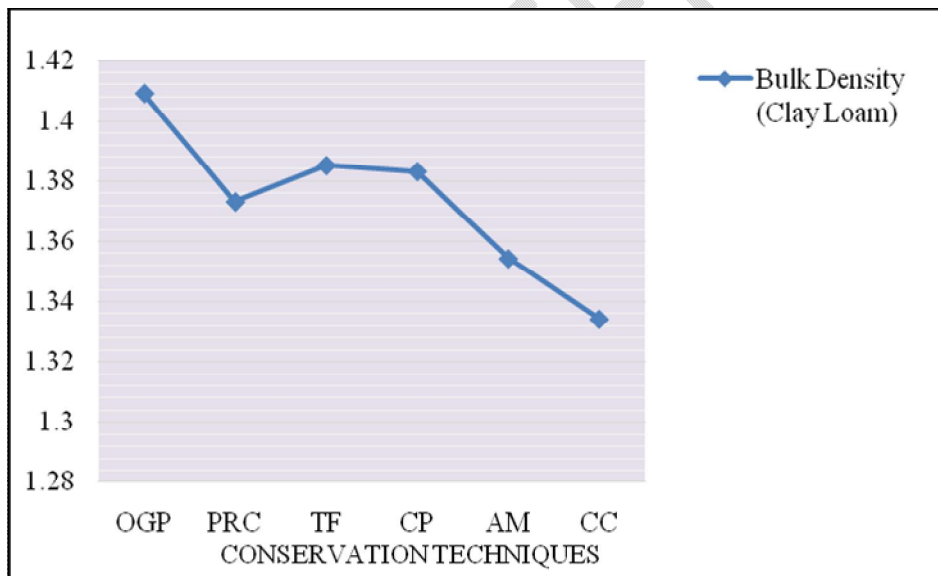


Fig 2: Impact of erosion conservation modules on bulk density in clay loam soil

### Particle density (PD)

The statistical result indicated that PD did not get significantly affected by resource conservation techniques (Table 2). Particle density is an exclusive density of soil particles and excludes pore spaces. Particle density theoretically can be changed but in practical terms it needs enormous amount of organic carbon/ biomass addition along with the addition of heavy minerals. As resource conservation techniques are effective in modifying pore space by adding organic matter and increasing microbial activity in the rhizosphere, **Chhina et al. (2019)** but particle density is totally independent of pore space, thus their impact on particle density was insignificant. Similar values and reasons had also been observed by **Baisden et al. (2002); Sollins et al. (2006); Rasool et al. (2008); Rasool and Kukal (2010); Chhina et al. (2019)**.

### **Infiltration rate**

Soil erosion conservation techniques significantly decreased the infiltration rate. The mean value of infiltration rate was highest in cover crop and lowest in overgrazing prevention. The infiltration rate as a function of elapsed time followed the trend in different erosion conservation techniques as: cover crop > Agrostological measures > Terrace farming > contour plowing > perimeter runoff control > overgrazing prevention (Table 2). “The highest infiltration rate under cover crop and other resource conservation techniques was due to the addition of organic matter, which in turn increased the total pore space of the soil. It might also be due to the loosening of the surface soil due to the lateral spread of the roots. In addition to this, infiltration rate is also affected to a great extent by the texture of the soil. Coarser texture resulted in higher infiltration rate”, **Hadda et al. (2002); Hadda et al. (2017); Chandel and Hadda (2018)**. Cover crops neutralizes the destructing power of rain drops and suppress surface compaction, hence resulted into lesser runoff and more infiltration. Similar values were observed by **McCormack et al. (1982); Singh and Khera (2008); Mandal and Sharda (2011)**.

### **Impact of resource conservation techniques on chemical attributes of soil**

#### **Soil pH**

The soil pH in clay loam soil varies between 6.64 and 7.73, depending on the resource conservation techniques employed. Interestingly, the pH values were found to be at their lowest in areas where overgrazing was prevented, while cover crops yielded the highest pH values (Table 3). No significant difference in soil pH was noted between terrace farming and contour

plowing methods. It's worth noting that the lower average pH in overgrazing prevention could be attributed to the high level of soil erosion, leading to the loss of important basic nutrients, lower base saturation percentage, and reduced soil organic matter content. Several studies by reputable researchers have confirmed that organic carbon has a positive and significant correlation with soil pH, including **Habtamu *et al.* (2009)**, **Million (2003)**, **Haweni (2015)**, **Worku (2017)**, and **Solomon *et al.* (2017)**.

### Soil EC

As the statistical result indicated, EC of the soils (clay loam) did not significantly decreased by resource conservation techniques. Relatively high ( $1.33 \text{ dSm}^{-1}$ ) and low mean value of EC ( $0.33 \text{ dSm}^{-1}$ ) was recorded in overgrazing prevention and perimeter runoff control respectively. The high electrical conductivity value in overgrazing prevention compared to other resource conservation techniques could be due to the upward movement of the soluble salts to the surface, through capillary rise of water under prevailing hyperthermic temperature regime in submontane Shivaliks soil, **Sondhi (1992) and Nazir (1993)**. The results are in conformity with the findings of various workers viz. **Burle and Mielniczuk (1997)**; **Verhulst *et al.* (2010a)**; **Verhulst *et al.* (2010b)**; **Singh (2010)**; **Baishya and Sharma (2017)**.

**Table 3: Resource conservation techniques impact on soil chemical properties in clay loam soil**

RCT	pH (Mean $\pm$ S.E)	EC( $\text{dSm}^{-1}$ ) (Mean $\pm$ S.E)	OC ( $\text{g kg}^{-1}$ ) (Mean $\pm$ S.E)	Available N ( $\text{Kg ha}^{-1}$ ) (Mean $\pm$ S.E)	Available P ( $\text{Kg ha}^{-1}$ ) (Mean $\pm$ S.E)	Available K ( $\text{Kg ha}^{-1}$ ) (Mean $\pm$ S.E)
CC	$7.73 \pm 0.12^a$	$0.44 \pm 0.21^{bc}$	$8.25 \pm 0.66^a$	$440.10 \pm 74.42^a$	$30.29 \pm 4.79^a$	$309.70 \pm 46.60^a$
AM	$7.44 \pm 0.07^b$	$0.52 \pm 0.19^b$	$7.02 \pm 0.41^b$	$271.25 \pm 31.47^c$	$26.94 \pm 3.75^b$	$273.08 \pm 33.20^b$
TF	$7.18 \pm 0.12^c$	$0.35 \pm 0.17^{cd}$	$6.03 \pm 0.43^c$	$310.87 \pm 46.01^b$	$16.12 \pm 1.95^c$	$225.50 \pm 39.46^c$
CP	$7.18 \pm 0.11^c$	$0.41 \pm 0.19^{cd}$	$3.70 \pm 0.97^d$	$235.66 \pm 26.44^d$	$13.43 \pm 1.97^d$	$160.35 \pm 18.79^d$
PRC	$6.84 \pm 0.98^d$	$0.33 \pm 0.13^d$	$3.78 \pm 0.76^d$	$223.63 \pm 17.20^d$	$14.26 \pm 1.82^d$	$148.85 \pm 20.59^d$
OGP	$6.64 \pm 0.19^e$	$1.33 \pm 0.27^a$	$2.37 \pm 0.55^e$	$163.67 \pm 32.54^e$	$11.41 \pm 1.76^e$	$126.33 \pm 15.49^e$

Note: Means with the same letter are not significantly different

RCT (Resource conservation techniques), CC (Cover crop), AM (Agrostological measures), TF (Terrace farming), CP (Contour plowing), PRC (Perimeter runoff control), OGP (Overgrazing prevention).

### **Soil organic carbon**

According to Table 3, the mean value of soil organic carbon (OC) varied significantly among different resource conservation techniques, ranging from 8.25 g kg<sup>-1</sup> to 2.37 g kg<sup>-1</sup>. The highest mean value was observed in the cover crop technique, while the lowest was recorded in overgrazing prevention. The presence of root biomass and leaf litter in cover crop might have contributed to the high soil organic carbon content, particularly in the subsurface layer. On the other hand, the poor growth, high runoff, and soil erosion in overgrazing prevention could have led to the lowest soil organic carbon content, as suggested by **Hassink (1995) and Sollins *et al.* (1996)**. The results showed that cover crop had the highest soil organic carbon content compared to other resource conservation techniques, which is consistent with the findings of **Nagaraja *et al.* (2016)** and **Kumar *et al.* (2018)**. This could be attributed to the higher amount of litter production and return under this technique. Several other studies have also reported similar results, including **Bhat *et al.* (2012)**, **Feyissa *et al.* (2013)**, **Du *et al.* (2014)**, and **Araujo *et al.* (2017)**.

Despite the lower value of soil organic carbon at the initial stage, its content was observed higher in cover crop as compared to other resource conservation techniques which is in agreement with other studies, **Alvarez *et al.* (1995)**; **Halvorson *et al.* (2002)**; **Alvarez and Steinbach (2009)**. The introduction of cover crops in rotation generally significantly increases soil organic matter as reported by **Smith *et al.* (1997)**; **Drinkwater *et al.* (1998)**; **Lal (2004)**. The results in our studies confirm the importance of introducing cover crops in crop rotation for maintaining or increasing soil organic carbon in loamy texture even under submontane condition. The study is in confirmative with the work of **Drinkwater *et al.* (1998)** and **So *et al.* (2001)**, that legume cover crop in a crop rotation may easily conserve or increase soil organic matter which in turn increases the soil organic carbon.

### **Available nitrogen**

Statistically, significant difference was observed in available nitrogen under different resource conservation techniques except contour plowing and perimeter runoff control. The mean value of available nitrogen was highest in cover crop (i.e. 440.10 kg ha<sup>-1</sup>) and lowest in overgrazing prevention (i.e. 163.67 kg ha<sup>-1</sup>).

This increase can be attributed due to the addition of root and leaf biomass in varying degree under resource conservation techniques but comparatively more addition was observed in cover crop which indirectly through the process of mineralization increases the availability of available nitrogen, **Drinkwater *et al.* (1998); Sainju *et al.* (2008); Alvarez and Steinbach (2009)**. Our results and studies by several other researchers shows that soil organic carbon content and available nitrogen are positively correlated with each other. Beside this cover crops (Black gram etc.) also has role in biological nitrogen fixation, thus increases the pool of easily mineralized organic N as revealed by **Murrell (2011)** through its roots and root exudates.

### **Available phosphorous**

Available P among different resource conservation techniques in clay loam was highly variable. It varied from 11.41 to 30.29 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> (Table 3). The mean value of available phosphorous was found highest in cover crop and lowest in overgrazing prevention. From the studies it was Recorded that availability of phosphorous has been significantly affected by resource conservation techniques, it might be due to changes in soil pH, restoration of soil organic carbon and maintenance of externally added P by reducing soil erosion and runoff.

Accumulation of organic matter through cover crop enhances the availability of phosphorous as 30 – 35% of phosphorous comes from the organic pool of the soil, this has been documented by **Arya (2007); Cao *et al.* (2011); Arya *et al.* (2016)**. Furthermore, addition of organic matter through incorporation of cover crop in crop rotation or recycling of crop residues in soil, influence the reaction of phosphate and its availability to plants. With the addition of organic matter the process of mineralization of phosphorous is enhanced and value of bonding energy (K) L Kg<sup>-1</sup> decreased, **Arya (2007)**. By adding organic matter through various means,

such as cover crops, root biomass, or composite varieties, the soil solution's inorganic phosphorous increases significantly through mineralization of organic phosphorous and solubilization of native phosphorous compounds. This phenomenon has been observed by **Vig and Chand (1993)**, **Hiradate and Uchida (2004)**, and **Guppy et al. (2005)**

### **Available potassium**

Resource conservation techniques can have a significant impact on the concentration of available potassium in clay loam soil. According to research, cover crops resulted in the highest concentration of available potassium, reaching an impressive  $309.70 \text{ kg ha}^{-1}$ . On the other hand, overgrazing prevention yielded the lowest concentration of available potassium, with only  $126.33 \text{ kg ha}^{-1}$ . The reason behind this discrepancy may be attributed to the minimal erosion impact of cover crops, as stated in a study by **Kyaruzi (2013)** which effectively control runoff and improve potassium content. Additionally, cover crops possess higher root biomass and litter fall, which indirectly enhance the availability of potassium through mineralization. Experts in the field such as **Drinkwater et al. (1998)**, **Sainju et al. (2008)**, and **Alvarez and Steinbach (2009)** have conducted studies that support these findings. So, adopting resource conservation techniques like cover crops could help improve soil fertility.

### **Conclusion:**

From the study therefore, it can be concluded that resource conservation techniques should be adopted in submontane *Shivaliks*. As these practices not only decreased the rate of runoff and sediment yield load but are also effective in maintaining the nutrient status and various physical and chemical properties of soil. Among the various resource conservation techniques at the adopted site (*viz.* cover crop, agrostological measures, terrace farming, contour plowing, perimeter runoff control and over grazing prevention), As soil erosion in major challenge in submontane *Shivaliks* the resource conservation modules offerd a good scope for conserving the soil. Resource Conservation technologies also reduced sediment yield there by reducing the nutrient loss from soil. Among all the RCTs cover crop was most efficient in trapping detached sediments and reducing velocity and volume of overland flow. The carbon content also increased with the use of resource conservation techniques which is very good indicator as carbon act as bridge between nutrient, water and soil. Resource conservation techniques exerts the least of soil

disturbance and adds root biomass along with litter fall contributes to more soil aggregation, accumulation of nutrients and soil organic carbon, better physical condition of the soil along with good soil quality. The soils of submontane *Shivaliks* are under tremendous stress because of high soil erosivity and poor soil management practices. The study strongly recommends adoption of resource conservation techniques for reducing soil erosion & water conservation in submontane *Shivaliks*.

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