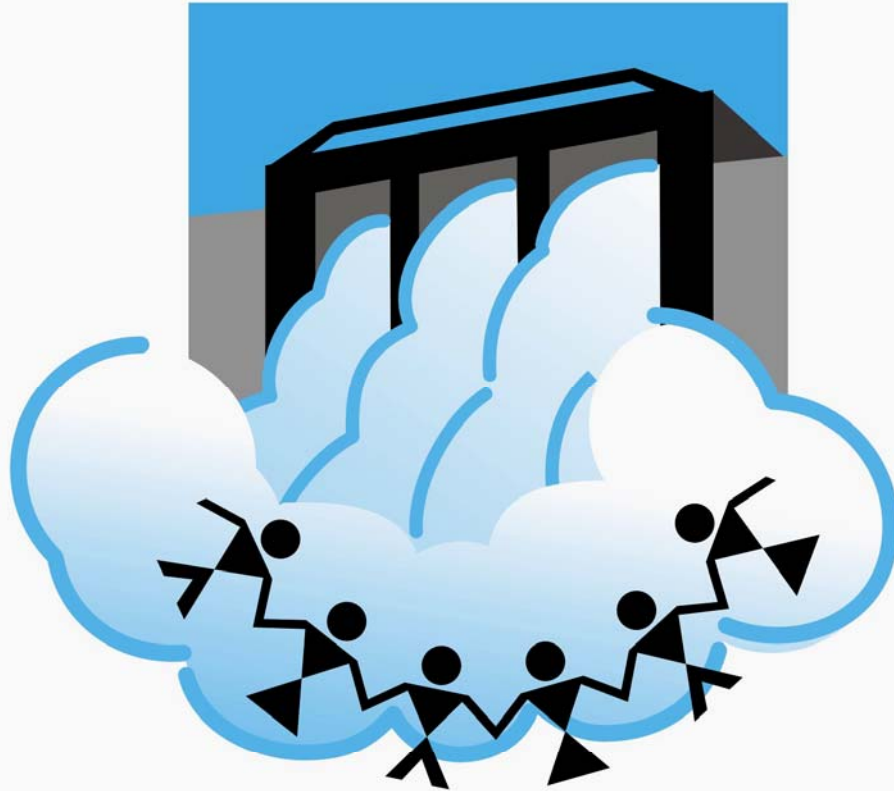


REBUILD

MULLAPERIYAR DAM



SAVE KERALA

MALAYALAM BLOGGERS MOVEMENT

If Mullaperiyar collapses...

In the recent past there have been some or the other news about Mullaperiyar in all mainstream media. The water level in the dam is going to cross 136 ft, the strength of the dam has become questionable, the dam is seeping from three more spots, and warnings issued to those living on the banks of the Periyar.....these are some headlines of the terrifying news which comes out everyday.

How many among the 35 million population in Kerala is aware of the current position of the dam or the possibilities of the Mullaperiyar spelling the cause for their tragic end. It may be that majority of the people are largely uninformed and unaware about this.

It is many years now since Mullaperiyar has been hanging like the sword of Damocles over the people of Kerala. Though at the time of construction, this was the largest dam in the world, today this 113 year old dam made of lime, granite and surkhi mixture is the oldest gravity dam in the world.

In 1896 at the time of completion of the dam, the British architect Mr. Benny Cook himself had forecasted the dam to have a life not beyond 50 years. [If this was the case, at the time of our independence itself the dam had become outdated.](#) The sole reason for the dam to have survived another 63 years can be attributed to the Englishman's flawless construction. Had it been constructed by any of our fellow countrymen, we would have in all probability commemorated the platinum jubilee of the Mullaperiyar tragedy by now.

Though Mullaperiyar dam is situated in Kerala, it is owned by the state of Tamil Nadu. If we get into the stories behind this, there is a likelihood that we may break into incessant laughter as though listening to a series of jokes.

Many times during the English regime, while the Tamil provinces Theni, Mathura, Dindigal and Ramanathapuram experienced severe draught, on the other side of the Western Ghats, the banks of the Periyar in Kerala often had to endure floods. [The Mullaperiyar dam was the Englishman's answer to this predicament.](#) The project to build a dam to restrain the Periyar waters by building a dam in Mullaperiyar and drilling a tunnel across the Western Ghats to traverse the flow to the Vaigai River in Madurai looms as a nightmare for vast majority of Keralites today.

As per the Periyar lease agreement of October 29th 1886, apart from 8000 acres of land 155 ft above the Periyar water level, 100 acres of land was also given on lease to the then Madras government by the Travancore Raja Vishakam Thirunal Ramavarma. As per the contract Kerala would receive a lease amount of Rs. 5 per acre, ie Rs. 40,000 per annum. [The paradox is that the lease was for a period of 999 years for a dam with an expected life span of 50 years.](#) And once the original contract expires there is still another imprudent clause that it may be renewed for another 999 years if need be!

It must be around the time when the dam started to show signs of leakage that the realization came about the infirmity of the dam and that water level may not be allowed to exceed beyond 136 ft anymore when the legal battle between Tamil Nadu and Kerala commenced. (I am unaware if there is any other politics behind this). Even if the dam was to collapse, since it posed no threat to Tamil Nadu, their strategy is to keep extracting the water as long as they can. If the dam breaks down, they also provide a lame justification that the Idukki dam which is situated below at a distance of 35km will help contain the water. It is as clear as broad daylight that the Idukki dam itself overflows on its own and that it will not be able to check the overflow from Mullaperiyar. [Let's say, even if the Idukki dam is somehow able to restrain the waters, still is there no value for the thousands of lives on the banks of the river all the way from Mullaperiyar till Idukki?](#)

If we start thinking about the condition of the Mullaperiyar dam which has approached its expiration, people of five-six districts cannot step out into the streets or sit at home peacefully. [Very recently, one of my blogger friends in Idukki told me that he is planning to learn how to climb coconut trees.](#) It is good to learn how to climb coconut trees. However, apart from it possibly providing self reliance in a time when there is scarcity for coconut pluckers, no one needs to be under any false assumption that they will be able to climb a coconut tree and rescue themselves when the dam collapses. [It is estimated that the flood waters will reach till the fourth floor of the High court building in Ernakulam , so is it not a fallacy to believe that one maybe able to escape the wrath of the flood by climbing on top of a tree in Idukki ?](#)

If the disaster strikes and the calculations are accurate, statistics point to not less than 4 million victims from the districts of Idukki, Ernakulam, Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, Alapuzha and Trissur. The educated and the illiterate, the rich and the poor, politicians, celebrities, experts, those with or without central government influence, the young and the aged alike – the corpses of millions of people shall all float across homes, streets, fields, backyards and everywhere. [Many of them will also get buried in the fathomless depths of the Arabian Sea without creating any hassle for others.](#) This figure of 4 million does not include the number of cattle, livestock and all other life forms who will also be victims of this tragedy.

If such a huge number of dead bodies trapped inside buildings and vehicles etc are not recovered and buried properly within the next 24 hours, this can lead to an outbreak of epidemics and diseases thus posing a threat to the rest of the surviving mortals and resulting in their miserable deaths. [This lot will also include millions of](#)

[Tamilians who are now raging this war against Mullaperiyar.](#) Due to water shortage as a result of the dams fall, in the areas of Theni, Dindigal, Madurai and Ramanathapuram, scores of Tamil farmers dependent solely on farming shall suffer from draught and famine. Like during the time of Indira Gandhi's assassination when people unleashed merciless attacks on the Sikh community, if Keralites decide to display their base emotions towards the Tamilians and if the Tamilians decide to retaliate, the country may become witness to still another communal outburst.

Even after all this, the Tamilians and Keralites who manage to survive will live continuing to still accuse each other. Without being able to rectify the mistakes made by an erstwhile king till this date and enjoying the tax payer's money for their vested and private interests, we will repeatedly continue to promote those ministers and their followers, vote them with huge majority in elections and send them to the capital to represent us in the centre. These political creatures shall again and again take turns left and right to plunder the Keralites.

On August 11th 1979, torrential rains devastated the Morvi Dam in Gujarat spelling out independent India's biggest dam disaster. [In 20 minutes, it was more than 15,000 mortals who became one with the soil.](#)

Two weeks ago when in Tamilnadu the Aliyar dam was opened to drain excess water due to intense heavy rains, the Mulathara regulator in Palaghat collapsed stealing many valuable lives and resulting in over 5 million worth of financial loss.

Even though it is after an interlude, I have had the chance to see for myself the aftermath of the August 2006 tragedy when the Bajaj Saghar dam in Rajasthan was opened to drain surplus water due to severe downpour. [As it was in the night that the fatal waters broke loose, many villagers succumbed to death in their slumber itself.](#) Hundreds of livestock and helpless beasts became prey to the disaster. Owing to the characteristic natural terrain in this region, it continued to be water lodged for months together in the low lying areas causing continued hardships to the people there. In addition, it brought severe damage to the dam in nearby Gujarat too. I had the opportunity to learn more about this disaster from my maternal uncle, Capt Mohan, an ex serviceman and pilot who was involved in the helicopter rescue operations in Gujarat at the time.

[It may be because of all these factors that it is now more than two years that whenever I lend my ears to any news about Mullaperiyar, it is never without a shudder.](#)

Have those occupying the seats of power lost all sense of humanity? Did not the king who gave the permission to our neighboring state to exploit water resources from here for 20 times the lifespan of the dam (cannot rule out that the king may have been subjected to British compulsions) and the present ministers who continue to play political games in spite of knowing that if we proceed with this kind of a contract, it spells nothing but doom to the subjects of Kerala, not have even a touch of humanity remaining in them?

Is it not but men who are behind the nations' highest judicial and legal body, namely the Supreme Court who continue to toss and flip the lawsuit between the two states within the courts itself? Is this a wanted criminal on the run or a case lacking evidence that the judgment is being delayed for so long? It seems the next hearing is in January as both parties need 9 days each to plead their cases!

Why is there such an inordinate delay in closing this case? [Which other pending case is worthy of the Supreme Court's attention that this litigation can afford such an excessive delay in settlement?](#) What more is there to verify and establish? Even if it is within a few days, can the Supreme Court not try and understand the deplorable plight of this dam by releasing water from the dam in a planned manner without hindering any lives? Being a common man who doesn't understand the fine points of our legal system, I can only ponder why the court cannot get involved directly and initiate any action which will avoid a catastrophe for millions of people in this state?

[If the surrounding areas of the dam experience a tremor reaching 6 points on the Richter scale, everything will end there.](#) As per the instructions of the Central Water Commission it is the responsibility of the Tamil Nadu Government to keep vigil and alert the Kerala Government and its people regarding any damage or changes to the condition of the dam or any threat of disaster. It remains to be seen to appreciate how much interest the Tamil Nadu government who is also the adversary fighting the case against Kerala shall demonstrate in such an event.

Discussions are on regarding the final course of action, namely the Emergency Action Plan (EAP). This EAP is nothing but a blue print for rescue operations in case disaster strikes and the dam breaks down. **However much it is planned, to what extent would we be able to execute these plans in the event of such a deluge and massive landslide?** How many lives and properties would we be able to save when the flood waters swell and overpower – would not the rescue efforts amidst such chaos be anything more than a line etched on this watery grave?

Looking at the course of the matter, it looks as though none other than God himself can save Kerala. **The situation is such that let God salvage if he can – after all isn't this God's own country?**

Even while I offer prayers that this tragedy may never happen, I cannot but help myself from praying that if this were to happen, let it be only at a time when I am at home with my family. Whatever happens, at least we can face it together. This may be my selfishness but forgive me as I am able to think and pray only like this now.

Other than to pray, what is it that we masses can do about it? Should we release the water from the dam and be ready to go to prison? Or should we live in fear of death till the Court rules its judgment? Or is it enough that we express our anguish through writings such as these?

Sometimes it feels as though it may be better to become a terrorist than live in fear of uncertainty over our lives and possessions. While the foreign terrorist who killed hundreds of innocent souls continues to enjoy food, shelter, special protection, legal defense and emergency medical treatment at a cost of 310 million rupees, countless nationals who lead a decent civil life obeying the law of the land without committing any offenses continue to struggle for food, water, electricity and for security of life itself.

We must comprehend just one thing – **if our responsible administrators intend to continue playing games in the name of politics and invite peril, they will be held responsible to answer the biggest ever unprecedented catastrophe in today's world.** The survivors of this calamity in Kerala may not tolerate any one who is responsible for this tragedy to step out and walk devoid of fear. Without any qualms, people will stone them down like mad dogs. Let's try not to assign a price to the emotions of millions who would have lost their sanity following the loss of their near and dear ones.

Footnote: The Tamil actor, Sharath Kumar who portrayed the character of Edacheni Kunkan in the recent Malayalam movie, Pazhassi Raja deserves a huge applause in such times. He has expressed his willingness to be a mediator in the Mullaperiyar case - whether or not it is with any political motives that he has said this, it still offers some solace that at least one Tamilian has shown the sensibility to come forward and say something like this.