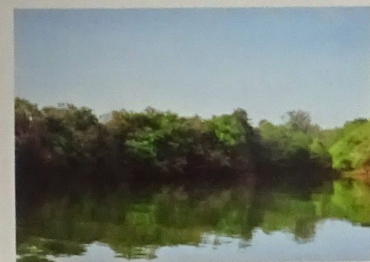
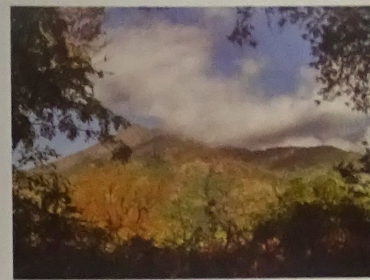


# Water resources of Pillur Area

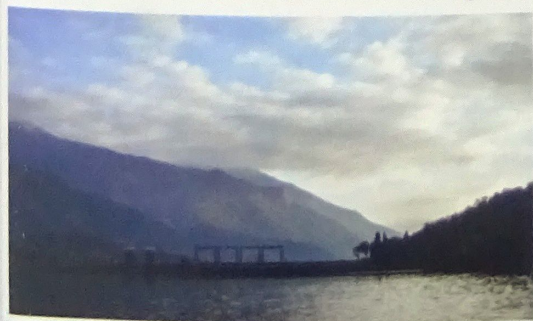
H. Gokul



## Introduction

Important sources of water in the Pillur valley are springs, wetlands, streams, and rivers. The forests in the region play a vital role in keeping the water cycle replenishes. A spring is a natural groundwater discharge or emerging point. The wetlands are saturated zones which are formed due to the natural depressions in hilly areas. A stream is a small river which based on its characteristics are called as branch, brook, creek etc. When a number of streams and rivulets join courses at points and flow down as a single course they form a river. The most important rivers that flow towards the Pillur region are the Bhavani, Athikadavu and Kundah.

The Pillur area falls in the Southern part of the Nilgiris at the foothills just below the forests of Coonoor taluk. Pillur is also famous because of the hydroelectric project and the reservoir that was built along with the dam during 1961-67. Pillur dam is 88m high and 332m long and has a catchment area of 1191 square kilometre. The area is densely forested with dry deciduous, riparian and tropical dry evergreen types of vegetation. These forests are home to the Asian Elephant,



King Cobra and an interesting diversity of plants, birds and fishes. This area is home to the Irula people who have ancestral agricultural lands on which they grow food crops like millets, beans, banana and other cash crops. The forest is an important part of the Irula culture and economy. Many forest produce like *Eecham pillu* (Phoenix leaves), *Nellikai*, *Kadukai*, wild tubers, vegetables and fruits are harvested for sale and local consumption.

Pillur area is largely drained by the Bhavani river for which the watershed extends all the way up to the Upper Bhavani catchment in the Nilgiris. There are a number of springs and streams flowing out of the forests of Pillur. Most of the habitations are along these streams and this becomes an important water source for household as well as agriculture purposes. After the river was dammed the people residing on the banks of the reservoir were prevented from using the water from the dam.

Pillur dam on river Bhavani is one among the major water sources for drinking water supply to Coimbatore city. Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage (TWAD) board manage and maintain this facility. At present the city of Coimbatore gets 65 MLD (million litres per day) of water from Pillur dam alone and this water has to be pumped from Pillur.

In our study of the water resources of Pillur area we found that the springs are drying up and when the local people were consulted about this they attributed it to changes in land use and climate. We were informed that the once perennial and ever

flowing springs and streams tend to go dry even before the month of March and April. People have earlier tapped these water through bamboos and drainage channels and now through pipelines by gravity. As the source is now running dry, people go in for alternate sources like dug wells and bore wells. And villages close to the dam, use the dam water for their daily uses like drinking, cooking, washing etc. When we tested the water in the dam we found high levels of coliform and this may be due to the prevalence of open defecation in the villages around. The quantity and quality of water are both an issue that needs to be addressed in the region.

## Pillur water is for elephants too-

The Irula people often refer to the "Periya Aalu" who lives in the forest and comes in search of water. Yes the elephants have always been respected as a 'higher person' and as part of their society. The people told us that the elephants can smell water from 5 km away and need upto 200 litres of water on an average and can live upto 4 days without water as well.

Even though the people have encountered a lot of conflicts like damage to their farm produce, water supply pipelines and sometimes even loss to life, they have still kept their respect towards the elephants. Even today people say watch out for "Periya Aalu" on your way, irrespective of the time. The elephants tend to stay close to the water and roads especially during the summer. And the people are also mindful that the elephants too need this water.

*Text by Gokul Halan, Additional Co-ordinator, Keystone Foundation*