

## Mullaperiyar Dam

Mullaperiyar Dam is a large masonry dam located on the Periyar river in the state of Kerala. It was constructed between 1887 and 1895 by the British colonial government.

The Periyar river is one of the largest rivers in Kerala, which is of utmost significant importance to the state in economic terms.

The Mullaperiyar Dam is at the centre of a long-standing dispute between the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu regarding its usage.

It was also in the news recently when the United Nation published a report that cited the dam was one of many that need to be decommissioned due to being situated in a seismically active area with significant structural flaws and poses risk to 3.5 million people if the 100+ years old dam were to fail.

This article will further give articles about the Mullaperiyar Dam within the context of the IAS Exam.

### History of the Mullaperiyar Dam

The first attempt at damming the Periyar river was in 1850, but it was given up due to unhealthy conditions and demand for higher wages. It was again attempted in 1862 through a proposal by Captain J.G Ryves who carried out a study of the region. Following a famine in 1876-77 that devastated the Madras presidency region, the proposal to build a dam was taken seriously.

It was in 1882 the construction of the dam was put under the supervision of Major John Pennycuik, M.E. Its construction began in May 1887 ending in 1895. It was officially opened on 10 October of that year.

In 1886, a lease agreement between the Maharaja of Travancore, Vishakal Thirunal Rama Varma and the British Secretary of State for India, Periyar Irrigation Works, was signed. The lease of the dam was to be for 999 years. A result of 24 years of negotiations, the lease agreement granted full rights to the Secretary of the State for India to construct and carry out the making of the dam.

Following the independence of India in 1947 and the formation of the state of Kerala in 1956 on November 1st, the Kerala state government announced that the earlier agreement which had been signed between [British Raj](#) and Travancore was invalid and needed to be renewed.

It was renewed in 1970 when C Achutha Menon was Chief Minister of Kerala. Under the new agreement, the Tamil Nadu government would pay tax for each acre and the amount of electricity generated. However, due to rising safety concerns of the dam, both Kerala and Tamil Nadu have been locked in a dispute regarding the future functioning of the dam.

## Mullaperiyar Dam Row between Tamil Nadu and Kerala

The control and safety of the dam and the validity and fairness of the lease agreement have been points of dispute between Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Both have their own fair share of arguments regarding their stance on the ongoing dispute.

Kerala's stance:

- The state governments of Kerala have pointed out the unfairness of the 1886 lease agreement and its validity itself. Its core issue is the safety of the Mullaperiyar Dam. Kerala wants to decommission the 100+ year old dam and construct a new one in its place, as not doing so will endanger many lives in the process.
- The Kerala Government stated that it did not object in giving water to Tamil Nadu but pointed out that raising its level would add more pressure than the dam could take. The dams, as pointed out by Kerala, were leaking and had many structural faults.
- In addition, the Kerala government has accused Tamil Nadu of adopting an “obsolete” gate operation schedule dating back to 1939.

Tamil Nadu's Stance:

- For Tamil Nadu, the Mullaperiyar dam and the diverted Periyar waters act as a lifeline for Theni, Madurai, Sivaganga, Dindigul and Ramnad districts, providing water for irrigation and drinking, and also for generation of power in Lower Periyar Power Station.
- Tamil Nadu argues that building a new dam is for gaining unfair tax revenues from developing states, which is a qua within India, to the detriment of the revenue producing states, i.e., a form of wealth distribution.
- Tamil Nadu is not able to access data which is in Kerala's terrain. There is no road built, the power supply has not been restored, although Tamil Nadu has paid for it.

## Latest Developments regarding the Mullaperiyar Dam

- The safety of the dam again rose to public attention in 2021 after the flood situation in Kerala since 2018 and the destruction of Rishiganga hydroelectric project & Tapovan dam in Uttarakhand following a glacier burst, killing nearly 200 people.

- The Supreme Court, which declared the dam as hydrologically and seismically safe previously in 2014, asked Kerala and Tamil Nadu states to act seriously as 'people's lives are at risk

## Frequently Asked Questions about Mullaperiyar Dam

### **Who operates the Mullaperiyar Dam?**

Although the dam is located in Kerala, it is operated by the Tami Nadu government. There have been public concerns over the years, especially in Kerala, about the structural stability of the 126-year-old dam with demands spiking in recent times to decommission the structure.

### **When did Mullaperiyar dam last?**

The reservoir again hit the maximum limit of 142 feet on 15 August 2018, following incessant rains in the state of Kerala.

