Journal of East-West Thought
ISSN: *2168-2259 (online)*
(https://jetjournal.us/)
Volume 15, Issue 1, Jan-March – 2025 Special Issue 2
Impact Factor: 7.665, Peer Reviewed and UGC CARE I

GROUNDWATER LEVELS IN BHANDARA DISTRICT: STATUS, CHALLENGES, AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Groundwater is a critical resource for drinking water, agriculture, and industrial activities in Bhandara district, Maharashtra. This research paper presents a detailed analysis of groundwater levels, their fluctuations, and the challenges associated with groundwater depletion. The research incorporates data from government reports, field surveys, and secondary sources to assess the current scenario and propose sustainable management strategies. Furthermore, a geographical analysis of groundwater levels is conducted, along with a tabular representation of groundwater data. Recommendations for conservation and management strategies are also discussed in detail.

Keywords: Groundwater, Bhandara District, Water Table, Depletion, Management Strategies, Geographical Analysis, Groundwater Conservation

Introduction

Bhandara district, recognized for its agrarian economy, is significantly reliant on groundwater for irrigation and domestic use. This dependency underscores the critical importance of understanding and managing the region's groundwater resources effectively. The district's hydrogeology, rainfall patterns, and anthropogenic activities are key factors that significantly influence groundwater levels. The interaction of these factors determines the availability and sustainability of groundwater in the region.The depletion of groundwater has become a growing concern due to excessive withdrawal, climatic variations, and pollution.

Unregulated and excessive groundwater extraction can lead to a decline in water tables, resulting in reduced well yields, increased pumping costs, and potential land subsidence. Climatic variations, particularly changes in rainfall patterns, can affect groundwater recharge rates, exacerbating the problem of depletion. Pollution from agricultural runoff and industrial activities can contaminate groundwater sources, rendering them unsuitable for drinking and other uses. This study aims to analyze the status, trends, and management practices associated with groundwater in Bhandara, providing a comprehensive understanding of its spatial and temporal variations. By examining historical groundwater data, the research aims to identify patterns of depletion or recovery and assess the current state of groundwater resources across the district. Additionally, this research explores groundwater recharge patterns, aquifer characteristics, and policy implications for sustainable groundwater use.

Understanding the factors that influence groundwater recharge, such as soil type, topography, and land use, is crucial for developing effective management strategies. Characterizing aquifer properties, such as permeability and storage capacity, is essential for assessing the potential for groundwater development and managing groundwater resources sustainably. Finally, examining existing policies and regulations governing groundwater use is necessary to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.

Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the groundwater levels and trends in Bhandara district
2. To examine the geographical factors influencing groundwater availability
3. To identify challenges affecting groundwater sustainability
4. To assess the impact of human activities on groundwater resources
5. To propose effective groundwater management and conservation strategies

Study Area

Bhandara district is situated in eastern Maharashtra, covering an area of approximately 3,717 square kilometers. It is characterized by undulating terrain, a combination of metamorphic and alluvial soil formations, and significant water bodies such as the Wainganga River. The district's geographical location and physical characteristics play a crucial role in determining its groundwater resources. The district experiences an average annual rainfall of approximately 1,200 mm, with the majority of recharge occurring during the monsoon season. The seasonal rainfall pattern significantly influences groundwater recharge rates, with most of the replenishment occurring during the monsoon months. The major crops cultivated include paddy, wheat, and pulses, which contribute to extensive groundwater extraction for irrigation purposes. The agricultural sector is heavily reliant on groundwater, making it a critical resource for the district's economy. A more detailed description of the study area's characteristics is warranted:

- **Geology and Hydrogeology:** The district's geology is characterized by a mix of metamorphic rocks, such as gneisses and schists, and alluvial deposits along river valleys. The metamorphic rocks are generally less permeable, limiting groundwater storage and flow, while the alluvial deposits are more permeable and can store significant amounts of groundwater. The hydrogeology of the area is complex, with different aquifers exhibiting varying characteristics in terms of storage capacity, transmissivity, and recharge rates.
- **Rainfall and Climate:** The district experiences a tropical monsoon climate, with distinct wet and dry seasons. The majority of the rainfall occurs during the southwest monsoon season, from June to September. The amount and distribution of rainfall vary from year to year, affecting groundwater recharge rates. Climate change is projected to alter rainfall patterns, potentially leading to more frequent droughts and reduced groundwater recharge.
- **Land Use and Agriculture:** Agriculture is the dominant land use in Bhandara district, with a significant portion of the population engaged in farming. The major crops cultivated include paddy, wheat, pulses, and oilseeds. Irrigation is essential for crop production, particularly during the dry season. Groundwater is the primary source of irrigation water, leading to extensive groundwater extraction.

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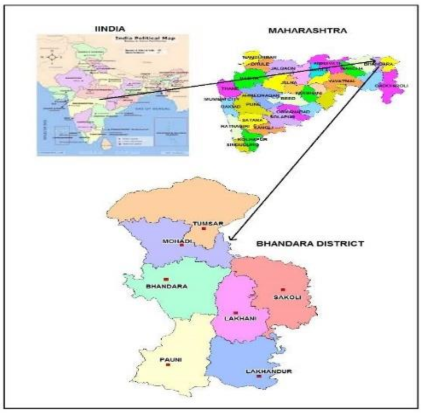
- **Socio-economic Conditions:** The socio-economic conditions of the district are closely linked to agriculture and water resources. The availability of groundwater directly affects agricultural productivity, livelihoods, and food security. Water scarcity can have significant social and economic impacts, particularly on vulnerable populations.



Methodology

1. **Research Design:** Descriptive and analytical approach using both qualitative and quantitative methods.
2. **Data Collection:**
   - **Primary Data:** Field surveys, interviews with farmers and agricultural officers, structured questionnaires, and focus group discussions.
   - **Secondary Data:** Government reports, agricultural census data, policy documents, and relevant literature.
3. **Sampling Method:** Stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different farming communities and landholding sizes.
4. **Data Analysis:**
   - Statistical tools such as mean, percentage, and trend analysis.
   - GIS mapping for spatial assessment.
   - Qualitative insights through content analysis and SWOT analysis.
5. **Geographical Focus:** Major talukas of Bhandara district, considering diverse agricultural zones, soil types, and irrigation facilities.
6. **Limitations:** Dependence on government data, time constraints in field surveys, and variations in farmer responses due to socio-economic factors.

Geographical Analysis of Groundwater Levels

Bhandara district comprises diverse geographical features, including plateaus, plains, and river basins, which significantly impact groundwater availability. The topography of the district influences surface water flow patterns and groundwater recharge rates. Plateaus and upland areas tend to have lower recharge rates due to increased surface runoff, while plains and river basins have higher recharge rates due to increased infiltration. The district is intersected by the Wainganga River and its tributaries, contributing to high groundwater recharge in low-lying areas. The Wainganga River is a major source of surface water in the district, and its tributaries play a crucial role in replenishing groundwater aquifers. Soil composition varies from black cotton soil in the western region to sandy loam in the eastern parts, influencing groundwater retention and percolation rates. Black cotton soils have high clay content and low permeability, limiting infiltration and groundwater recharge. Sandy loam soils have higher sand content and higher permeability, promoting infiltration and groundwater recharge. Spatial distribution of groundwater levels indicates that areas near riverbanks and wetlands exhibit higher water table levels, whereas upland regions with rocky substrata experience deeper water levels.

This pattern reflects the influence of topography, soil type, and proximity to surface water bodies on groundwater availability. Seasonal variations also show considerable fluctuations, with pre-monsoon depths being significantly lower than post-monsoon levels. This seasonal variation is primarily driven by rainfall patterns, with groundwater levels declining during the dry season due to reduced recharge and increased extraction, and rising during the monsoon season due to increased recharge. A GIS -based analysis further highlights that groundwater depletion is more severe in regions with high agricultural dependency and limited surface water resources. This analysis can help identify areas that are most vulnerable to groundwater depletion and prioritize management efforts accordingly. Expanding on the GIS-based analysis:

- **Groundwater Level Mapping:** GIS can be used to create maps showing the spatial distribution of groundwater levels across the district. These maps can be based on data from observation wells and other sources. By analyzing these maps, it is possible to identify areas with high groundwater levels and areas with low groundwater levels. This information can be used to guide groundwater development and management decisions.
- **Groundwater Recharge Potential Mapping:** GIS can also be used to create maps showing the potential for groundwater recharge in different parts of the district. These maps can be based on factors such as soil type, slope, land cover, and rainfall. By analyzing these maps, it is possible to identify areas with high recharge potential and areas with low recharge potential. This information can be used to prioritize areas for groundwater recharge projects.
- **Groundwater Vulnerability Mapping:** GIS can be used to create maps showing the vulnerability of groundwater to contamination in different parts of the district. These maps can be based on factors such as land use, soil type, aquifer characteristics, and proximity to pollution sources. By analyzing these maps, it is possible to identify areas that are most vulnerable to groundwater contamination and implement measures to protect groundwater quality.

Groundwater Levels and Trends

Data from the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) indicate that groundwater levels in the district vary between 1.92 meters below ground level (mbgl) in Bhandara block to 10.25 mbgl in Adarsa Amgaon, Pauni block. This variation highlights the spatial variability of groundwater resources across the district. The CGWB is the primary agency responsible for monitoring groundwater levels in India, and its data provides valuable insights into the state of groundwater resources in Bhandara district. The district generally enjoys stable groundwater conditions due to favorable geological formations and recharge mechanisms. The presence of permeable alluvial aquifers and adequate rainfall contribute to relatively stable groundwater levels in many parts of the district .However, unregulated extraction in certain areas has led to a gradual decline in water table levels, necessitating immediate conservation efforts. This unregulated extraction is primarily driven by agricultural activities, particularly in areas where surface water resources are limited. Elaborating on the factors contributing to groundwater level variations:

- **Geological Formations:** The geological formations underlying different parts of the district influence groundwater storage and flow. Areas with permeable alluvial aquifers tend to have higher groundwater levels, while areas with less permeable metamorphic rocks tend to have lower groundwater levels.
- **Rainfall Patterns:** The amount and distribution of rainfall vary across the district, affecting groundwater recharge rates. Areas with higher rainfall tend to have higher groundwater levels, while areas with lower rainfall tend to have lower groundwater levels.
- **Land Use and Land Cover:** Land use practices, such as agriculture and urbanization, can affect groundwater recharge and extraction rates. Areas with intensive agriculture tend to have higher groundwater extraction rates, while areas with urban development tend to have reduced groundwater recharge rates due to increased impervious surfaces.

Groundwater Data Representation

The following table presents the observed groundwater levels in different talukas of Bhandara district:

Taluka	Pre-Monsoon Depth (mbgl)	Post-Monsoon Depth (mbgl)
Bhandara	1.92	0.85
Pauni	10.25	4.75
Mohadi	5.43	2.67
Sakoli	6.21	3.12
Lakhani	4.89	2.14
Lakhandur	7.35	3.98
Tumsar	6.78	3.45

This table provides a snapshot of groundwater levels in different parts of the district. The data shows the depth to groundwater before and after the monsoon season, providing insights into the seasonal variation in groundwater levels. Further explanation and interpretation of the data are crucial:

- **Pre-Monsoon Depth:** The pre-monsoon depth represents the groundwater level at the end of the dry season, before the onset of the monsoon rains. This depth reflects the cumulative effect of groundwater extraction and limited recharge during the dry season.
- **Post-Monsoon Depth:** The post-monsoon depth represents the groundwater level at the end of the monsoon season, after the aquifers have been replenished by rainfall. This depth reflects the balance between groundwater recharge and extraction during the monsoon season.
- **Seasonal Variation:** The difference between the pre-monsoon and post-monsoon depths indicates the seasonal variation in groundwater levels. This variation reflects the extent to which groundwater aquifers are recharged during the monsoon season.

Data Analysis of Groundwater

From the above table, the following observations can be made:

Bhandara taluka has the shallowest water table, indicating high recharge potential due to its proximity to the Wainganga River. The proximity to the river likely contributes to increased infiltration and groundwater recharge in this area.

Pauni taluka exhibits significant seasonal variation, with a deeper water table before the monsoon and a partial recharge after the monsoon. This suggests that Pauni taluka is more susceptible to groundwater depletion during the dry season and relies heavily on monsoon rainfall for recharge.

Mohadi, Sakoli, Lakhani, and Tumsar talukas display moderate groundwater availability with variations based on soil and geological structures. The groundwater levels in these talukas are likely influenced by a combination of factors, including soil type, geological formations, rainfall patterns, and groundwater extraction rates.

Lakhandur has relatively deeper groundwater levels, indicating lower recharge potential due to soil composition and topographical features. The soil composition and topography of Lakhandur taluka may limit infiltration and groundwater recharge.

The overall trend suggests that areas with sandy loam soils experience better infiltration, while regions with metamorphic formations have lower recharge rates. This highlights the importance of understanding the geological and hydrological characteristics of different areas within Bhandara district to effectively manage groundwater resources. A more detailed analysis should consider the following:

- **Comparison with Historical Data:** Comparing current groundwater levels with historical data can reveal trends in groundwater depletion or recovery. This analysis can help identify areas where groundwater resources are declining and prioritize management efforts accordingly.
- **Correlation with Rainfall Data:** Analyzing the correlation between rainfall and groundwater levels can help understand the relationship between rainfall patterns and

groundwater recharge. This analysis can be used to predict the impact of climate change on groundwater resources.

- **Assessment of Groundwater Quality:** Analyzing groundwater quality data can help identify areas where groundwater is contaminated and implement measures to protect groundwater quality.

Challenges Affecting Groundwater

Several factors impact groundwater sustainability in Bhandara, including:

- **Over-extraction for irrigation, particularly in rice and wheat-growing regions.** Excessive groundwater pumping for irrigation can lead to depletion of aquifers and declining water tables. This is a common problem in many agricultural regions, particularly those that rely heavily on groundwater for irrigation.
- **Seasonal depletion, with notable declines during summer months.** Groundwater levels typically decline during the summer months due to reduced rainfall and increased irrigation demand. This seasonal depletion can lead to water scarcity in some areas.
- **Industrial and domestic overuse, leading to localized stress on aquifers.** Increasing industrial and domestic water consumption can place additional stress on groundwater resources, particularly in urban and industrial areas.
- **Pollution from agricultural runoff and industrial waste.** Agricultural runoff containing fertilizers and pesticides, as well as industrial effluent discharge, can contaminate groundwater aquifers, rendering the water unsafe for drinking and other uses.
- **Climate change-induced variations in rainfall patterns affecting recharge rates.** Changes in rainfall patterns, such as reduced rainfall and increased frequency of droughts, can affect groundwater recharge rates, exacerbating water scarcity in the district.
- **Encroachment and loss of natural water bodies affecting recharge zones.** Encroachment on wetlands and other natural water bodies can reduce groundwater recharge zones, further contributing to groundwater depletion.
- **Lack of regulatory enforcement and unmonitored private borewell usage.** Inadequate enforcement of regulations governing groundwater extraction and the proliferation of unmonitored private borewells can lead to unsustainable groundwater use.

Expanding on these challenges with specific examples:

Inefficient Irrigation Practices: Flood irrigation, a common practice in the district, leads to significant water wastage. This inefficient irrigation technique results in low water use efficiency and contributes to groundwater depletion.

Lack of Awareness: Many farmers and residents are unaware of the importance of groundwater conservation and sustainable water use practices. This lack of awareness can lead to irresponsible water use and depletion of groundwater resources.

Policy Gaps: Existing policies and regulations governing groundwater use may be inadequate or poorly enforced. This can lead to unregulated groundwater extraction and unsustainable water use practices.

Sustainable Groundwater Management Strategies

To ensure long-term groundwater sustainability, the following strategies are recommended:

- **Rainwater Harvesting:** Implementation of recharge pits and check dams to enhance groundwater recharge. Rainwater harvesting can capture and store rainwater, allowing it to infiltrate into the ground and replenish groundwater aquifers.
- **Efficient Irrigation Techniques:** Promotion of drip and sprinkler irrigation to reduce water wastage. Drip and sprinkler irrigation deliver water directly to plant roots, minimizing water loss through evaporation and runoff.
- **Regulation and Monitoring:** Strengthening policies for controlled groundwater extraction. This includes implementing a system for licensing and monitoring borewells, as well as enforcing penalties for illegal groundwater extraction.
- **Afforestation and Watershed Management:** Enhancing vegetation cover to improve infiltration and reduce surface runoff. Trees and other vegetation help to intercept rainfall, reduce soil erosion, and increase groundwater recharge.
- **Community Awareness Programs:** Educating farmers and residents on conservation techniques. This can help promote behavioral changes that lead to more responsible water management.
- **Industrial Wastewater Treatment:** Enforcing strict regulations on industrial effluent discharge to prevent groundwater contamination. Industries should be required to treat their wastewater to remove pollutants before discharging it into the environment.
- **Aquifer Recharge through Managed Systems:** Implementing artificial recharge techniques such as percolation tanks and subsurface dams. These techniques can help to increase the amount of water that infiltrates into the ground, replenishing groundwater aquifers.
- **GIS and Remote Sensing for Groundwater Monitoring:** Using satellite-based monitoring to assess groundwater fluctuations and identify critical recharge areas. Satellite-based monitoring can provide valuable data on groundwater levels, land use changes, and other factors that affect groundwater resources.

Adding more specific and actionable strategies

- **Promote Water-Saving Crops:** Encourage farmers to cultivate crops that require less water, such as pulses and oilseeds, instead of water-intensive crops like rice and sugarcane. This can help reduce groundwater extraction for irrigation.
- **Implement Water Pricing Mechanisms:** Introduce water pricing mechanisms that encourage efficient water use. This can help incentivize farmers and industries to reduce their water consumption.
- **Strengthen Groundwater Monitoring Networks:** Expand and improve the existing groundwater monitoring network to provide more comprehensive data on groundwater levels and quality. This data can be used to inform groundwater management decisions.

- **Promote Participatory Groundwater Management:** Involve local communities in groundwater management decisions. This can help ensure that groundwater resources are managed in a sustainable and equitable manner.

Conclusion

Bhandara district, while currently enjoying relatively stable groundwater levels, faces challenges related to over-extraction, seasonal fluctuations, and pollution. These challenges threaten the long-term sustainability of groundwater resources and the well-being of the district's population. Sustainable management practices, coupled with government interventions and community participation, can help mitigate depletion risks and ensure water security for future generations. The integration of modern techniques such as GIS-based groundwater mapping and remote sensing can further aid in monitoring and managing groundwater resources efficiently. Policy reforms and increased investments in water conservation infrastructure are necessary to maintain groundwater sustainability in the long run. This includes strengthening regulations on groundwater extraction, promoting efficient irrigation techniques, investing in rainwater harvesting and artificial recharge projects, and protecting groundwater quality from pollution. By implementing these strategies, Bhandara District can ensure the sustainable management of its groundwater resources, safeguarding water security and promoting the long-term prosperity of the region.

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