Dhāri Devī, Goddess of the Floods

Development, Disaster and
the Transitions of a Place of Worship

Frances Anke Niebuhr

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Preface

This study aims to investigate the dynamics that unfold when the following factors come together: a sacralised river in the Himalayan region, a hydroelectric power plant under construction, a temple and its presiding deity that needs to be relocated, as well as a series of flood events. Which conclusions can be drawn about prevalent cultural issues, developments and entanglements that surround the local *pahāṛī* (mountain) society and its perception and way of coping with adversity and disaster when the above key components are incorporated into multi-layered discourses by actors with different backgrounds and agendas, from different groupings and segments of society?

Disasters, among them floods, are often regarded as turning points. This is especially valid for the temple of the Goddess Dhārī Devī on river Alaknanda in the state of Uttarakhand, India. The past and present of the Goddess are intrinsically tied to such hydrological events. Floods not only determined transmitted histories regarding the emergence of the Goddess at the ford on a tributary of the Ganges, but also frequently transformed and reaffirmed her identity and the connection to her worshippers. These dynamics came increasingly to the fore, when the implementation of a hydroelectric power project in the vicinity of her temple began to take shape in 2006 and necessitated the relocation of the temple of the Goddess Dhārī. Not only became conceptions about floods part of fierce debates and protests surrounding the development project, but additionally the construction process was decisively impacted by two consecutive flood events. In particular, the occurrence of a large scale flood event in the state in 2013, the "Himalayan Tsunami," then concluded the deity's final transformative step with the transfer of her statue to a new temple. Remarkably, in the wake of the massive deluge, a story of divine retribution began to make its way through the media and to nationwide audiences and such theologically rooted interpretations eventually elevated the Goddess Dhārī to a national symbol of the catastrophe.

While the 2013 flood disaster, the "Himalayan Tsunami," serves as a starting point, this dissertation draws on other significant Himalayan floods dating back to 1885, 1924 and 2012 as further pivots. By employing an actor-network theory approach, the investigation traces the development and transformation of a local goddess from a deity with an animistic and tantric background into a constituent of a technically engineered riverscape. The narratives and discourses related to the Goddess and the accompanying flood events are examined in particular with

regard to hydro-social relations. This soon links this analysis to hegemonic discourses and leads into the realm of political ecology. Issues related to political ecology are intrinsic to dam projects. They came to the fore here notably with certain flood-related practices of the project executing entities. Power relations, however, even at a much earlier stage decisively shaped the perception of the place of worship and its hydrological entanglements. At the same time, they exposed continuing conflicts between the two distinguished social layers of the village society. Consequently, the discourse that accompanied the environmental struggle over the planned resettlement was characterised by strongly diverging and equally contested flood memories. This was exacerbated by the fact that representations about the Goddess, which used to be predominantly local in nature, gradually changed their scope and merged into conceptions propagated by a transnationally engaged political-ideological spectrum.

This research project, based primarily on the qualitative assessment of textual sources, has a strong interdisciplinary orientation. While it encompasses the social science fields of religious studies, environmental history and disaster research, it goes hand in hand with elements of political ecology and a critical analysis of the role of the media, in addition to embracing the disciplines of sociology and anthropology. Whereas the project set out with the intention to provide substantial contributions to these domains, the focus of this dissertation, however, is on identifying features of a Himalayan disaster culture as it oscillates between local and transnational dynamics. The thesis thereby seeks to provide valuable insights for an understanding of and further research on the socio-cultural angle of catastrophes.

Acknowledgments

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AHPCL   Alaknanda Hydro Power Company Limited

ANT   Actor-network Theory

ASI   Archaeological Survey of India

ASMMDS   Ādyā Śakti Mã Maitī Devī Samiti

BJP   Bharatiya Janata Party

CWC   Central Water Commission

EIA   Environmental Impact Assessment

HEP   Hydroelectric Power

HEPP   Hydroelectric Power Plant

HPP   Hydroelectric Power Project

IMD   India Meteorological Department

INTACH   Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage

LLOF   Landslide Lake Outburst Flood

MoEF   Ministry of Environment and Forests

NGRBA   National Ganga River Basin Authority

NGT   National Green Tribunal

RCC   Reinforced concrete column

RSS   Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (National Volunteer Organisation)

R&R   Resettlement and Rehabilitation

SANDRP   South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People

SHEP   Srinagar Hydro Electric Project

UKRANT   Uttarakhand Kranti Dal (Uttarakhand Revolutionary Party)

VHP   Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council)

VIBHA   Vijnana Bharati (The science wing of the RSS)

Introduction
A Major Flood Disaster

In June 2013, the dramatic images of a major disaster in the mountain state Uttara-khand, India, captured the attention of the national public and dominated the coverage of all regional and national news media. Several days of extremely heavy rain, culminating on June 16 and 17,[1] had turned the mountain zone into the venue of a mud and water battle. The rain-saturation of the soil resulted in countless landslides, while the overflowing rivers swept away people, houses and infrastructure. The widespread catastrophic situation caused by the onslaught of the water masses reached its apex with yet another major calamity in the high mountain zone of the Himalayas on the morning of June 17. Already one day before, the important pilgrimage site of Kedarnath at an altitude of 3580 m (Kala 2014:145) had been hit by a massive landslide and was partially destroyed. However, on June 17 the snowmelt and rain-fed Chorabari Lake above the little town, unable to contain the oncoming water, burst its moraine dam. Shortly after 6:15 a.m. on that date,[2] the lake emptied within 5 to 10 minutes (Dobhal et al. 2013:171) thus sending a violent surge down the valley. The flash flood swept away everything in its trail. People, pilgrims, shelters and various smaller places of worship and other infrastructures all vanished in the torrent. Yet and very symbolically, the site's sanctum sanctorum, protected by a large boulder, remained largely unscathed. Against the backdrop of these scenes of destruction, soon an emotionally charged discourse

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1 Reports about the amount of rain are inconsistent, some sources say that the state received with 4340 mm only on June 17 an amount of rain that was 375 percent above the daily average of a monsoon rainfall (Kala 2014:145). The Geological Survey of India on the other hand is cited as saying "from 14 to 17 June 2013, Uttarakhand and adjoining areas experienced heavy rainfall, which was about 375 percent more than the benchmark rainfall during a normal monsoon" (Satendra et al. 2015:34). Parkash (2013:1) again quotes the IMD according to which parts of the state had received an excess rainfall of 400 percent between June 16 and 17. This probably also in comparison to the expectable normal amount of rain for the two days. He suspects that the huge quantities of water that filled or overfilled the rivers came not only from the rain but also from the meltwater of snow and glaciers, which was more intense than usual owing to the high temperatures in the preceding two months (Parkash 2013:1).
2 The time was set by scientists who were present at the site of the Chorabari Lake (Menon 2013). According to others (Dobhal et al. 2013:174) it happened at 6:45 am.

unfolded. In public debates, politicians, journalists, religious authorities, intellectuals and environmentalists tried to fathom the "why" for this unprecedented flood catastrophe.

The extreme destructiveness of the overall disaster has been attributed to an existing heightened vulnerability of the region and in this context to multiple anthropogenic causes. One aspect of the state's vulnerability can be traced to the sacred geography attributed to Uttarakhand, which makes it the focus of religious endeavours. Already in the textual traditions of Hinduism, the area is depicted as a sacred field of merit and referred to as *dev bhūmi*, the land of the gods—and is even advertised as such today. The general perception of holiness and beneficence attached to the visit of the area had established the region as a major draw for spiritual tourism.[3] Given this framework, one of the main factors contributing to the high death toll was the timing of the catastrophe. The months of May and June are the high season of the pilgrimage to the holy places in Uttarakhand, the four *dhām* Badrinath, Kedarnath, Joshimath and Yamunotri. This meant that thousands of pilgrims as well as local and migrant workers were in the affected area. In turn, these circumstances coincided with the occurrence of a highly unusual meteorological phenomenon, as well as the premature arrival of the monsoon (A. Kumar 2015; S. P. Sati & Gahalaut 2013:196; Chevuturi & Dimri 2016).[4] While the exact number of fatalities could never be established, its gravity made the disaster a matter of national concern and attention.

One outstanding attempt to explain the catastrophe, termed the "Himalayan Tsunami" by several of the media (cf. Satendra et al. 2015:4), was the story about a goddess that had been shifted from her temple just hours before the lake breach above Kedarnath. And in fact, the transfer of that deity had taken place at 6:30 p.m. on June 16 (Gusain 2013a/b), while the lake burst out at 6:15 a.m. the next morning, June 17. As it appeared, the local population, deeply rooted in its firm religious beliefs, was convinced that this all-encompassing disaster was a sign of divine retribution. Allegedly the Goddess in her wrath about the relocation had caused the lake breach with its fatal consequences at Kedarnath.

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3   This is complemented by other forms of tourism; such as adventure tourism. Foundations for this spiritual mass tourism were already laid in the middle of the 18th century. By then the construction of the Upper Ganges Canal and the connection of Haridwar to the major railway network had been completed. As a consequence, Haridwar and also the higher elevations of the mountains had become more accessible and attractive as a place of pilgrimage for a wider range of people (Lochtefeld 2010).

4   Parkash (2013:1) attributes the "abnormally high amount of rain [. . .] to the fusion of westerlies with the monsoonal cloud system." The Times of India, in turn, describes the area's level of vulnerability in a simple equation: "Recipe for disaster in Uttarakhand: 1 crore population, 2.5 crore tourists" (Varma 2013).

Figure 1. The Statue of Dhārī Devī, on the Right a Copy
(Source: TemplePurohit.com 2016, adapted).

The goddess in question goes by the name of Dhārī Devī. Her temple is located about 12 km from the next district town Srinagar (Uttarakhand). The site is very popular with the inhabitants of surrounding villages and Srinagar town, but also draws visitors from adjoining districts and many of the pilgrims on the way to the Badrinath Dhām make a stop-over to pay obeisance to the deity. A visit to the place is deemed most significant for newlywed couples and new-born children, but also for all matters requiring divine blessings. The festival of Navaratri in particular draws huge crowds to the temple twice a year. Goddess Dhārī is usually described as a representation of the Goddess Kālī and indeed the features carved into the black stone that form her face show rather ferocious expressions (Figure 1). However, the typical wild characteristics associated with this form of Śakti do not hold much weight in everyday practice. People tend to refer to her presumed maternal side and regard her as a wish-fulfilling deity. The temple is perceived as a *siddhapīṭh* "a place where one's desires are fulfilled" (Lochtefeld 2010:119).[5] Innumerable bells, donated by grateful believers and today hanging on

5   This feature of "wish granting" is supposed to be particularly pronounced among several "shiwalik goddesses" (Lochtefeld 2010:119) (the Siwaliks are the outermost foothills of the

the fence of the bridge to the new temple, bear witness to the wishes she is said to have granted (see e.g. G. A. Thapliyal 2012).[6] Visitors are as well informed that the temple is one of the 108 *śaktipīṭhas*, the sacred places of the Goddess.[7] Also these are said to have a wish-fulfilling capacity (see Lochtefeld 2010:119).

A closer look at the deity with her temple on River Alaknanda reveals that the Goddess Dhārī has an impressive prehistory, which is likewise tied to flood events (see Chapter 2.1). This is not too surprising, considering that her temple is located directly on the watercourse. Yet, to fully grasp how the temple of Dhārī Devī and her diverse and special relationship to the river and floods became such a central theme and part of the publicly unfolding post-disaster discourse, it is first necessary to shed light on the reason for her resettlement. What made the moving of the Goddess imperative was the construction of a hydroelectric power plant on the same river. The project in question is the 330 MW (megawatt) Srinagar Hydro-electric Power Project (HPP) situated about 12 km downstream from the temple (Figure 2).

The HPP had been planned at this location since the 1980s, with the first Detailed Project Reports (DPR) drafted as early as 1981 (Das & Jindal 2011:6). Its initial version received environmental clearance on May 3, 1985 (Lahiri 2011:226). During further preparatory stages, the original 200 MW project was upgraded to 330 MW, while the dam height was raised from 77 to 90 m from the deepest foundation level (Das & Jindal 2011:22). The process from conception to implementation became extremely protracted. The project was originally pursued by the Uttar Pradesh State Electricity Board (UPSEB). But due to lack of funding and arguably the World Bank's non-cooperation in providing financial support (CDM Executive Board 2011:3; Supreme Court of India 2013), the entire plan did not

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southern Himalayas). The framing of a place of worship as wish-fulfilling or as a "field of merit" (Lochtefeld 2010:119) is also considered a kind of promotional tool to raise funds for a temple. An attributed fecundity of a place serves to convince potential donors that their offerings will be rewarded.

6 "लोगों का विश्वास है कि यहां मांगी गई मन्नत जरूर पूरी होती है। यहां घंटियां चढ़ाने की परंपरा है।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, July 8b). [People believe that the wishes put forward here will certainly be fulfilled. There is a tradition of offering bells here.]. In the last 15 years, about 75,000 bells are said to have been donated, although the figure seems somewhat questionable (G. A. Thapliyal 2012). People usually come to the temple twice, once to express their wish, and then again, when the wish has been fulfilled (Pandey personal communication 2014, Oct. 15 and 2005:16).

7 *Śaktipīṭha* or *śākta pīṭha* (Sircar 1973) designates the venerated places where the severed limbs of the Goddess Sati are believed to have fallen to earth (see e.g. Sircar 1973). Yet, with regard to the cultural sphere of the mountains, the classification of a temple as a *śaktipīṭha* should not be seen in a strict sense, e.g. as based on scriptural evidence (M. P. Pandey, personal communication, Jan. 13, 2017). It appears to be used as indicative of a power place (Lochtefeld 2010:119) and as a synonym for the location of a goddess or a goddess temple.

Figure 2. Position of Dhārī Devī Temple, Dam and the City of Srinagar on River Alaknanda (Source: Google Earth 2021, adapted).

progress for many years. Following a change in government policy towards the hydropower sector, or a liberalisation of the market aimed at increasing private sector involvement, the M/S Duncan North Hydroelectric Power Company took over the management of the project in 1994. Yet again, for a range of reasons, the venture did not move ahead, whereupon it was taken over by Tata Power Company Ltd. in October 2003. In 2004, the company was then renamed Alaknanda Hydro Power Company Limited (AHPCL), which in turn was incorporated by the GVK Group in November 2005 (CDM Executive Board 2011:3). For all these factors, the actual work on the ground did not start until 2007 (CDM Executive Board 2011:3).

That the temple was to be relocated because it fell within the submergence zone was known from the very outset. This is important to note, as the project became a controversial issue not long after the commencement of construction activities, and contention was primarily based on this plan to move the temple. A frequently used argument was that the temple fell within the inundation zone only because of the plant's extension from 200 to 330 MW (e.g. PTI 2013, May 16; Das & Jindal 2011). The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of 1985 (Section 4.2) had however already addressed this issue stating: "One old temple, a suspension bridge and a small reach of the road will be submerged. The temple would be raised and erected with a pleasing architecture" (Das & Jindal 2011:10) (see Figure 3). Despite intense resistance and the ensuing fierce debates concerning the option of relocating a goddess and several alternative ideas for models of a new

Figure 3. One of the Models of the new Temple (Niebuhr, Oct. 2014).

temple, the original construction plan was eventually implemented. To this end, a completely new temple complex had been built on a platform standing on concrete pillars above its former location (see Figure 18). The old seat was then inundated when the statue of the deity was lifted onto its new base—in the event of the 2013 catastrophe. As the transfer took place in the midst of a disaster, it was done in a hurry and did not follow a usual ceremonial. The actual new temple had also not been completed at that time, which is why the Goddess began to be worshipped in a makeshift shed in a corner of the concrete platform. It was not until almost ten years later, on 28 January 2023, that she was finally moved to her new abode. Protracted conflicts with the implementing company can be named as one of the reasons for the lengthy postponement.

1 An Outline of the diverse Aspects of the Study

1.1 *Daivy Āpadā*—Reflections on Disaster

A society and its individuals affected by a disaster pursue a variety of strategies as they try to cope with this disruptive experience. The destabilising nature of the extreme event causes people to seek ways to make sense of the traumatic episode and they attach various types of meaning to it. A catastrophe is also pictured as a void or an explanatory crisis, which can be revoked by the creation of meaning (Döring 2003). In an area steeped in religious significance, such as the Himalayan region and especially the state of Uttarakhand, one might suspect that floods and other disasters are largely analysed within a religious frame of reference. This could already be indicated by the frequent designation of the 2013 flood disaster as *daivy āpadā* (natural, or divine disaster), as well as its occurrence in a sacralised environment. When a study led by S. Kumar et al. (2015) in the high mountain zone of Ladakh asked for suggestions to reduce disaster risk, 28 percent of respondents "believed that disaster events are acts of god and nothing major can be done to prevent it and so people should perform rituals to god avoid disaster events [*sic*], [. . .]" (S. Kumar et al. 2015:189) (Figure 4). Halperin (2012) likewise provides examples of how disasters in the form of weather occurrences in the mountain district of Kullu in Himachal Pradesh are widely tackled with religious practices or within a faith-based frame of reference. Yet there are numerous influences that contribute to a so shaped dealing with a catastrophe, and this dissertation will show that the issue is significantly more complex.

Floods and other disasters are an inherent feature of the Himalayan region.[8] The Himalayas are the youngest mountain range on earth, and the very fact that they are

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8   "A report by United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), reveals, that, seven of the top ten natural disasters in 2008, occurred in the countries of the HKH regions such as Afghanistan, China, India, Myanmar, Bangladesh, China, India and Pakistan. Further, these countries also accounted for 99 % of the total deaths from disasters worldwide" (UNISDR 2008, as cited in Nibanupudi & Khadka 2015:234). "Further, from 1999 to 2008, floods affected close to one billion people in Asia, whereas the corresponding figures were about four million in Europe, 28 million in the Americas and 22 million in Africa" (Nibanupudi & Khadka 2015:234).
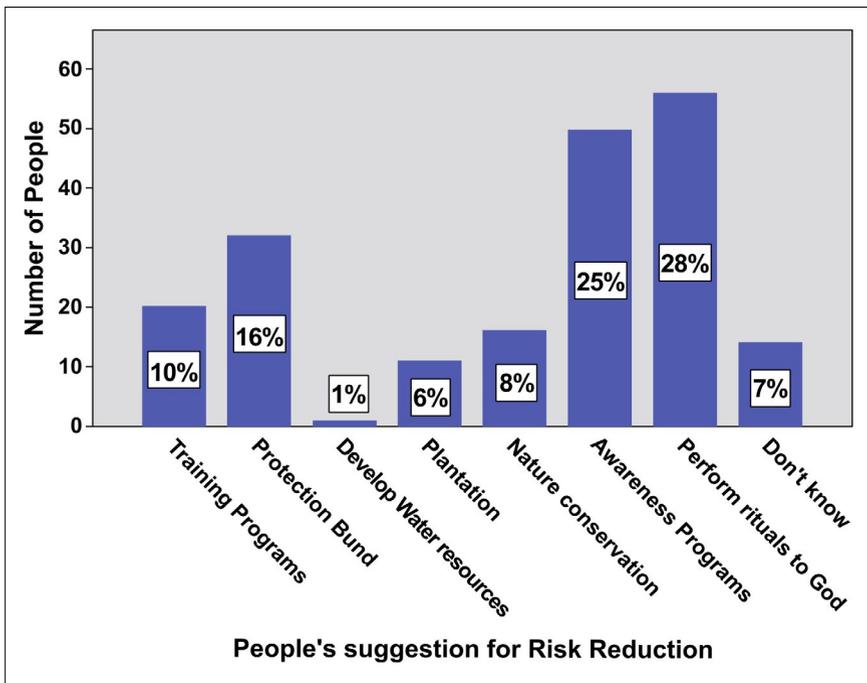
Figure 4. Table by S. Kumar et al. (2015:189)

still in a process of constant growth and expansion is in itself a formula for disaster.[9] Floods and other extreme events are also deeply carved into the social fabric and the cultural script of mountain societies. A heightened vulnerability makes the socio-cultural study of catastrophes in the Himalayan region at the same time a vital field of research. Science investigates disasters from many angles. While discourses from the geosciences discuss these phenomena prominently under premises of exploration and with regard to prediction enhancement, studies with a social science orientation focus on vulnerability assessments and questions of damage control and resilience. Disasters are generally seen as entailing transformation processes. Modern disaster studies illuminate these transformations from a number of angles, for example by examining adaptive behaviour with regard to mitigating measures after the disaster experience (Paton & Buergelt 2019). Others focus on how disasters can be utilised to achieve a higher degree of sustainability (Brundiers 2016), or they deal with the transformation of living environments from a gender viewpoint (Horton 2012). The transformative angle assumes special importance

9   This characteristic is, however, typical of the mountainous zones of the earth anyway.

from the historical disaster perspective (e.g. Schaudig 2019, V. Singh 2014, 2018). Particularly water-related catastrophes tend to be charged with mythological motifs that illustrate a transformation process. In the social science domain, disasters can thus be investigated not only to prevent future risks (Dix & Röhrs 2007), but also to understand the characteristics and dynamics of a society (Bhagarva 2007), both a contemporary and a historical one. As Hoffmann & Oliver-Smith put it:

> Disaster exposes the way in which people construct or 'frame' their peril (including the denial of it), the way they perceive their environment and their subsistence, and the ways they invent explanation, constitute their morality, and project their continuity and promise into the future. (Hoffmann & Oliver-Smith 2002:6)[10]

Major disasters have also contributed to scientific progress by catalysing various scientific discoveries (T. Roy 2012).[11] Academics promote the significance of culture in disaster assessments as a pressing issue (Bankoff et al. 2015:2), as well as urging the incorporation of cultural values into novel approaches with regard to disaster management (Medury 2001:157). Due to such views, cultural aspects and local knowledge are meanwhile recognised by the humanities disciplines as an important object of disaster research (Krüger et al. 2015; Crabtree 2015; Oliver-Smith 2015; Dhameja 2001). But this recognition does not necessarily extend to cases of a purely religiously founded conception of disaster (Schipper 2010). Even the social science branch of disaster research still treats the metaphysical view of a catastrophe with negligence. This is the case despite the fact that at least 6 billion people worldwide belong to various religious groupings and navigate the world with a corresponding orientation (Voss 2010). Voss therefore argues that the widely applied vulnerability approach must be expanded to include a religious perspective. The vulnerability of a society is closely related on the one hand to religiously informed perceptions of the human environment and on the other hand to the assessment of one's own capacity for agency in relation to higher powers (Voss 2010:36f). Religious conceptions of an event are considered a coping strategy (Voss 2008:53) and are supposed to offer support, strength and solidarity

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10   Another definition from one of the authors states, "they reveal the operation of physical, biological, and social systems and their interaction among populations, groups, institutions and practices, and their concommitant [*sic*] sociocultural constructions" (Oliver-Smith 1999:21). T. Roy similarly characterises the aim of historical disaster research in the following way: "disaster history is a story of the construction of useful knowledge about the interaction between human society and the natural environment" (T. Roy 2012:11).

11   Referring to cataclysms as a "cognitive challenge" (T. Roy 2012:22), T. Roy continues to elaborate on this statement, citing various examples from colonial India, where disasters helped to build up a geophysical understanding of the environment.

building among communities (Schipper 2010). The widespread academic igno-rance of such important influencing factors (McGeehan & Baker 2017) derives in part from the fact that the religious explanation of disasters is usually considered long overcome. Allegedly, only in past times were cataclysms generally thought to be the result of divine intervention.[12]

> In the eighteenth century, earthquakes and storms were seen as god's punishment for sins committed by whole communities; they called for atonement. In the nineteenth and twentieth cen-turies, earthquakes and storms became acts of nature; they called for quake-resistant building of river embankments rather than more frequent prayers. From the late twentieth century the dis-course shifted again. Disasters are now, at least partly, the results of human action upon nature. (T. Roy 2012:11)

This breakdown of temporal phases, however, represents a very reductionist understanding of developments, for it is not only historical disaster research that provides ample evidence of religious perceptions and ways of dealing with cat-astrophic events (see e.g. Groh 2003: Schenk 2007; Dix & Röhrs 2007). An aca-demic disregard for faith-based conceptions in many contemporary communities, on the other hand, is a shortcoming most likely related to the "secular bias of Western thought" (Reale 2010). Even if not integrated into an openly religious framework, associated belief systems may take on indirect implications in the post-disaster phase. Grandjean et al. (2008:199) describe a phenomenon desig-nated as "appraisal bias." They argue that even if certain belief systems in a society are regarded as overcome, there is still a tendency to frame events on the basis of such cultural heritage residues and with the help of corresponding traditional and deeply rooted thinking patterns. This mechanism is even considered valid in the "enlightened" European context. Today's global environmental challenges might moreover serve to re-establish or revive these "ancient" explanatory models:

> The fact that natural disasters regularly recur in a world now faced with the unpredictability of climatic change is likely to keep ancient myths alive and even create new versions of them in a never-ending cycle as man struggles to survive in a world not of his own making. (Grandjean et al. 2008:201)

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12   The conventional interpretation of a catastrophe based on faith included the idea of divine intervention after the violation of some moral codes (Schipper 2010).

It is thus contended that different forms of belief decisively determine the perception of risks and the willingness to adopt preventive behaviour. Critically, however, and viewed from a disaster management perspective, religion can foster both proactive behaviour and fatalistic passivity (Voss 2010). As Schipper explains: "principles of certain faiths may be conflicting with a risk averse approach needed to reduce the impacts of natural hazards on humans" (Schipper 2010:381; also McGeehan 2012). Whereas South and Southeast Asian religions such as Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism have been found to be particularly prone to fatalistic attitudes towards disasters (Chester et al. 2012).

When addressing the belief-based reading of a catastrophe, it is important to note that the interpretation of a disaster is also a deeply political process (Bhattarcharjee 2015).

> [. . .] disasters are not only socially and physically disruptive;
> they are also political events. Thus, disaster analysis must involve
> the analysis of political power relations among those affected as
> well as among the various agencies and institutions that stand in
> relation to the event and the victims (Button 2002:146).

This needs particular attention when it comes to India, where the religious and political spheres are closely intertwined (Alley 2000). Presumably more than the historical version of the retributory theory, today this interpretation bears clear political markings (see Bhattacharjee 2015). Even more so, as Grandjean et al. (2008:200) point out that such a disaster reading seems to be especially appealing to religious fundamentalists. Part of the political aspect also forms the discussion on authority and disaster. The elite is often held accountable for a catastrophe, which is why such events were and are understood as a challenge for rulers and the legitimation of their rule (Groh et al. 2003:26). Catastrophes can be powerful drivers of social upheaval (see e.g. Mulvany 2011, Oliver-Smith 1999)—and with regard to our focus area, they are recognised as the trigger for the formation of social movements. The flash flood in the Alaknanda River during the 1970 monsoon is regarded as one such catalytic event,[13] which ultimately found expression in the emergence of the Chipko movement.[14] The struggle for statehood, which was finally granted in 2000,

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13   This flash flood was caused by another dam break at Lake Gohna, a lake that had been created and already breached about 80 years earlier, in 1894 (for more on this issue see Chapter 2).
14   Dramatic landslides caused by the flood were perceived as resulting from predatory practices of government nominated contractors that had ruthlessly decimated the tree population across the region (Bahuguna 1997a; A. Kumar 2015). First demonstrations that sparked off in 1973, came with the demand for the purchase of food at subsidised rates to

is also seen by several scholars as a long-term effect of the earlier Alaknanda floods and the subsequent activism revolving around Chipko.[15] M. Sharma (2009:36) even traces down the origins of the opposition to dams to the flood of 1970.[16]

Whereas disaster research in general is a relatively young discipline,[17] most historical and modern disaster studies on India are even more recent.[18] This seems particularly disproportionate because the subcontinent is so overly susceptible to disasters. And as T. Roy notes, "although natural calamities have been an ingrained part of Indian history, historians have paid little attention to the effects of disasters upon societies" (T. Roy 2012:7). The higher incidence of disasters in India and in the Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) region by global standards (Nibanupudi & Khadka 2015)[19] is discussed as one of the factors contributing to distinct elements of the subcontinent's culture (T. Roy 2012).[20] Yet it is only in newer studies that cultural components complete the broader picture of cataclysms and their interconnectedness with the civilization of the subcontinent (e.g. V. Singh 2014, 2018). Consistent with the overall trend, most of the research related to disasters in the Indian and particularly the Indian-Himalayan context is conducted by the geophysical sciences (Voss 2010)[21] and same mechanisms apply to studies explicitly concentrating on flood events in the area (e.g. Rasmussen & Houze 2012). The magnitude of the Uttarakhand disaster in 2013 generated an extensive academic

ease the plight of the population hit by the catastrophe (Bahuguna 1997a). A seething discontent then further led to the birth of the Chipko, the tree-hugger movement.

15   As A. Kumar (2015:290) remarks, "[. . .] the demand for creation of Uttarakhand state, [. . .], was a logical culmination of the ecological consciousness associated with the *pahari* ethos articulated in the Chipko Movement and other social-ecological protests in the region."

16   "The unusually heavy monsoons of 1970, devastating floods in Alaknanda valley, other upcoming big projects in the region, and a brewing discontent against their perceived impact also became anchoring points for the dam opposition" (Sharma 2009:36).

17   Hoffmann & Oliver-Smith (1999) pinpoint the beginning of modern disaster research, which is endowed with an additional socio-cultural dimension, around 1980.

18   As Shukla et al. (2018) note, for example, on vulnerability studies of agricultural communities in the Indian Himalayas, all the articles they reviewed were released after 2007.

19   As data collected by the Asian Disaster Reduction Center indicated, the death risk from disasters in South Asia is twice as high as in the rest of the world (T. Roy 2012:6).

20   Whereby the greater absence of catastrophes in the European world has also contributed to its divergent cultural characteristics (see T. Roy 2012:16f).

21   Here are some counter-examples of studies with a socio-cultural focus: Ishikawa et al. (2013) explore the implications of floods for psychiatric disorders in Ladakh; Shukla et al. (2016, 2018; also Rajesh et al. 2014) examine the extent of vulnerability of agricultural communities in Uttarakhand. Some authors acknowledge the importance of local knowledge (S. Kumar et al. 2015; Jigyasu 2002), for dealing with disasters in the area. Likewise, the gendered aspect of disaster perception and experience in the Himalayan region is considered a vital research object (Nibanupudi & Khadka 2015).

body of literature that explores the causes of the event as well as possibilities for future risk mitigation (Rautela 2013; Nibanupudi et al. 2015, S. P. Sati & Gahalaut 2013). Also here, the majority of investigations adopt a natural science perspective by exploring geographical or meteorological settings (P. Kumar et al. 2015, Allen et al. 2016; Chevuturi & Dimri 2016).[22] However, most scholars take into account the specific status of the state as a pilgrimage- and tourist destination. Quite a few identify this distinctiveness of the locale as the main trigger for the severity of the disaster, or the increased vulnerability of the area (particularly Ziegler et al. 2014). Several academics therefore urge for a revised version of development for the hill state Uttarakhand (e.g. Sagar 2016; A. Kumar 2013). Chopra (2014) draws lines to historical developments, up to land use practices of the British colonial power, which abetted the particular setting and contributed to the intensified impacts of the disaster. Considering specific forms of vulnerability of the local population, Rautela (2015), Arlikatti et al. (2018) and Maikhuri et al. (2017) deal with coping strategies and the subject of local knowledge for the purpose of disaster risk reduction. Occasionally a study engages with the culturally tinged perception of floods and rainfall events while also dealing with local flood narratives (Sagar 2016). Kala (2014), with an emphasis on risk/vulnerability reduction even briefly mentions the Dhārī Devī case. Finally, Giri and Vats (2018), also in terms of improving disaster management, looked into the media discourse that unfolded after the floods in Uttarakhand.

1.1.1   Scope of the Study

The preceding elucidations have highlighted that to date limited attention has been paid to the understanding of flood disasters in the Western Himalayan region from a cultural and religious perspective. Compared to flood events unfolding in other global contexts, disasters and their perception in this territory undoubtedly have their very own form of expression.[23] Yet another key component making the setting of the case study exceptional is the emergence of the hydroelectric power plant. The issue of dams and their contested social and environmental impacts, as well as the mechanisms of the conflicts they trigger, have been widely studied. A limited section of the literature on dams also deals with their role in the context of catastrophes. Nevertheless, the questions explored usually—as even after the

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22   Anthropogenic climate change is a widely discussed topic (Cho et al. 2016, Agnihotri et al. 2017) and the role of dams in exacerbating or mitigating floods is also addressed (S. P. Sati & Gahalaut 2013; Chopra 2015).
23   See Döring's (2003:299) suggestion: "[. . .] disasters occur in unique socio-historical contexts that determine the patterns of interpretation."

flood of 2013 in Uttarakhand—are with the focus on how dams promote or aggravate disasters in their surroundings,[24] or to what extent the construction of a dam is an socio-environmental disaster in itself (Sulaiman 2007). Another strand with the view to hazard risks is the one dealing with past or potential dam failures leading to disaster and again their cultural implications (Sandesara & Wooten 2011; Huber et al. 2017; Canestrini 2003; Oliveira Andrade 2020). A second approach with regard to dam breaches looks at such structures in disaster-prone areas, as high mountain zones, and at the nature of the threat they are exposed to, especially from earthquakes (Valdiya 1992). However, the examination of the presented triangle, the interrelationship of a living place of worship with a dam and then the role of floods, and additionally as a background setting the implications of a nationwide recognised religiously meaningful space, seems to constitute a rather unique combination. Only the study of Gergan (2017) can be regarded as an example that comes close in this respect. Her paper considers the relationship between dam projects, earthquakes and their connection to deities. Yet the cultural environment and population structure in that examined part of the Himalayas differ considerably from the region of interest here, Garhwal, especially in terms of its significance for pan-Indian religious motives. The author furthermore does not engage with water-based disasters and water in particular carries with it a whole set of unparalleled meanings (see Chapter 1.2.2), which extend their influence to the interpretation of catastrophes and the appraisal of a hydropower project.

This investigation is thus intended to be part of the discussion on how religious conceptions, in exchange with a modern, technologically engineered environment, influence ideas about catastrophes in a South-Asian context. As a further aspect and following authors such as Hoffmann & Oliver-Smith (2002), Bhagarva (2007) or T. Roy (2012), the study will examine what a specific attribution of meaning to a disaster reveals about the current state of the socio-cultural fabric of a society and about different segments of society. With the diverse interplay of factors involved, the project moves across multiple research fields and academic disciplines. This is already rooted in the fact that the existing and resulting knowledge about water-based cataclysms was largely informed by the imprints of a developmental project. The presence of a dam under construction as a key component is being linked to the respective branches of research addressing such undertakings. These include questions regarding environmental justice and political ecology. However, the primary reason why the scientific field of disaster research was chosen as a starting point for the topic and as a further goal for the production of knowledge was, that everything began with a disaster. Most of the attention that was drawn to the temple and its presiding Goddess, including the author's, was by the catastrophe

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24   V. P. Sati (2015), S. P. Sati & Gahalaut (2013), Chopra (2015). See also Thomalla et al. (2018) who deal more generally with disaster risk related to developmental projects.

in 2013. Eventually, it turned out that behind a single flood event stood a whole series of other significant deluges that had shaped not only the interpretation of the 2013 disaster, but also the discourse preceding it. Floods had been an integral part of the deity's genesis and played a crucial role in the trajectory of the temple, both in the past as well as today. Finally and decisively, floods were linked to the process of dam construction in its neighbourhood. All this meant that with the onset of the research project, the agency of water, the river and its most energetic expressions in the form of floods had stepped into a pivotal position. Water-based factors appeared to have exerted a major impact on the earlier and later sequence of events—that is the story of the temple and its associated rural society, the implementation of a developmental project, as well as the ideas about floods of a great part of the public. With an analytical access like the one presented, this work aims to provide valuable results and a foundation for other scholars on disasters as well as for further academic reflections on vulnerability, hazard control and resilience. The thesis may also add some novel angles to the literature on dam projects by revealing new features of contemporary dynamics, either confirming or complementing currents that have been identified earlier.

In this way, drawing on various flood events, the study traces the transformations of a goddess and her extended and increasingly technically modified environment. The main focus thereby lies on water as the linking element and on its capacity to bring about comprehensive changes in both the physical and socio-cultural spheres. The question of how other agentive forces, such as imaginaries about sacrality as well as the role of the ubiquitous media shaped perceptions of floods and narratives about the watercourse and about a river goddess is explored simultaneously. Since floods appeared to be related to the deity's origin, it was equally important to shed light on preceding floods. Here the objective was to create a social history of the engagement with water in the form of a river and its deluges. An underlying idea was to see how such memorised relationships and imprinted events exert their influence on contemporary readings of catastrophe. While the study looks at the different factors that shape these perceptions within a mountain society and beyond, the investigation moves across different scales. It begins with the view from the local micro level and proceeds towards a national perspective on the river, on the River Goddess and the floods. In this process, the perspective continuously changes back and forth from the micro to the macro level, with both being constantly intertwined. To summarise—in order to gain an understanding of the here existent flood imaginations, five sets of key questions will be addressed and are supposed to be answered in the course of this examination:

1. Where do the floods act as agents of change in shaping the identity of the Goddess? Or, what was the trajectory of the deity's image as it was formed by the river and its floods?

2. To which extent and where did floods and other elements of the river inform the discourse on the local level with regard to the upcoming dam project? Where did—partly historically based—imaginations about the Goddess, the watercourse and its flood events unite and divide the local society? Eventually, how did these flood narratives obtained from the local level in turn show up in institutional assessments trying to evaluate the relation between temple and hydropower project?

3. How did understandings about the riverine landscape, its water and floods, structure the argumentation of actors involved in the issue of the temple of a more overarching ideological and cross-national spectre?

4. What role did floods play in the construction process of the hydropower project, how were they instrumentalised on both the material and discursive levels to advance the realisation of the project?

5. How did the case of Dhārī Devī shape the flood perceptions following the disaster of 2013 as based on the different inspected levels and elements? And in this context, how did the media, another key player in the coping with a catastrophe, inform knowledge about the flood?

1.1.2   Structure

After the presentation of the research object and the associated research questions, this section now turns to the structure. The ensuing Chapter 1.2 addresses the theoretical framework of the study. It introduces the actor-network theory and argues why it is a suitable approach for the topic under examination. Subchapters 1.2.1 to 1.2.3 explain how other important aspects of this thesis, considerations of political ecology, questions of water and the presence of divine actors, can in turn be combined with this theory. Chapter 1.3 outlines the practical steps taken during the research and then applies the actor-network theory in practice by identifying the key actors that form the network of relationships in this case study.

Each of the now following chapters explores the emergent discourses connecting the Goddess Dhārī to the river, its floods and its surrounding river-carved cultural landscape, thereby disclosing the transformations that the deity undergoes along with the meanings ascribed to her. As the study follows the floods, the transformations of a temple and the conflicts accompanying the changes in the cultural landscape, different key issues come to the fore. This required mapping each chapter to the dominant theoretical underpinnings and integrating the respective theoretical frameworks. Chapter 2 onwards looks at the historical angle to further the understanding of the complexity of the Goddess's relationship to her place, and both of their connections to floods. This part will begin in Chapter 2.1 by presenting the narrative-based versions of the first appearance of the Goddess and it

will demonstrate the extent to which historical flood events were woven into these stories. Whereas this section is still untouched by the upcoming dam project in the neighbourhood of the temple, the political nature of the stories already becomes visible here. This insight entailed a detailed analysis of how the different village groups conceive of their goddess. It equally necessitated a thorough overview of the fabric of the village society. That in turn required a critical examination of the caste structures found in this part of the Himalayas in Chapter 2.2 and in particular the situation of the lowest castes, the Dalits. The identification of such underlying themes proved important both to gain a general impression of the social dynamics impacting local narratives; but also to subsequently decipher the social forces that exerted a direct influence on the discussion about the "movability" or "immovability" of the Goddess. As a matter of fact, the issue of caste and a past marked by caste conflicts reaches deep into the discourse on the then upcoming redevelopment of the place. Clear evidence of this is a document issued by the temple *pūjārīs*, which is discussed in Chapter 2.3. While this leaflet had assumed high significance in terms of the implementation of the HPP, it equally draws an extreme picture of the socio-economic positions at the village level. In order to provide a deeper understanding of the notions of the cultural space of the mountains and the corresponding argumentation in the discussion, Chapter 2.3.1 will first expound the dimensions of mobility in relation to mountain deities. The different perspectives on the Goddess and the manifestations of the river are then illustrated from Chapter 2.3.2 to 2.3.6 by means of central historical developments and key moments.

From Chapter 2.4 onwards, the perspective shifts to a new level as the discourse draws wider circles. The theme of a disputed past and the meaning of the Goddess, the floods and other landscape elements reaches the regional public as ideas about the deity find expression in newspaper reports (Chapter 2.4.1). A brief digression at the beginning of that chapter addresses the special status of the Amar Ujālā newspaper in Uttarakhand. The handed-down narratives enter decision-making processes while being absorbed by a new category of actors—official state organs and expert panels, as well as judges representing the legislature (Chapter 2.4.1 & 2.4.2). This part also examines the status of oral narratives or a village history based on them and converted into written form before a judicial institution. In Chapter 3, the narratives about the Goddess and the river undergo a further shift to an even broader level. It will be demonstrated here how the issue of the temple was gradually incorporated into the symbolism and politics of a range of actors associated with the Hindu right, and into their vision of the riverine landscapes of Garhwal. The first part of it introduces a particular phenomenon found in this area, namely the existence of two broadly parallel, interwoven and sometimes conflicting (sacred) spaces.

The first major recent flood event in the region in 2012 was accompanied by an alleged manipulation of water flows. Corresponding Chapter 4 covers a

contextualisation into the broader dynamics that determine developmental projects. This touches upon issues of political ecology and the intrinsic factor of violence, which is often obscured in their implementation process. The extent to which planetary constellations can exert agency on the accomplishment of a hydroelectric project will become clear in the first subsection of Chapter 5 (5.1.1). A newly formed opposition to the moving of the statue instrumentalised, at least in part, the cosmic conditions prevailing at the time. Questions of movement and stasis came to the fore once again. While the slower movement of the planets and their adverse constellations conveyed a sense of stagnation, constructed memories of the previous flood served to build an urgency for "movement" (Chapter 5.1.2). Aspects of agency then completely change in the second part of the chapter (5.2) with the 2013 floods, the "Himalayan Tsunami." Apart from assigning limitless power to the Goddess, this mega-disaster unleashes another "flood" at the media level. With regard to its particular dynamic, Chapter 5.2.1 sheds light on the general modes of action that determine media coverage and the special mechanisms that come into play in the event of a disaster. The players participating in the media discourse, their interests and the political backgrounds that fed into the narrative of "divine intervention" are analysed in detail in Chapters 5.2.2 to 5.2.8. Chapter 6 offers a conclusion for this extensive trajectory of the Goddess Dhārī and her place within the intermittent occurrence of flood events.

1.2   Theoretical Framework

Alongside the examination of the overarching subject of flood disasters, the main target of the investigation of the Dhārī Devī Temple is to unearth its manifold relations and networks of interaction. The study moreover seeks to identify the attributions of meaning that accompany its various transformative phases. There is the Goddess's connection to a developmental project, both of their interactions with floods and the implications of these entanglements for the affected sections of society and likewise the cultural conceptions going along with it. Ascriptions of meaning emerged from groups, institutions and individuals either witnessing or partaking in the events, which unfolded during the period of investigation. These interpretations were related to the environment, first of all to the river and to questions concerning the multifaceted knowledge about water. The given complexity required an approach, which offered a theoretically and methodologically holistic access. In search of such a system, the actor-network theory seemed compelling because it constitutes a comprehensive concept, especially designed and applicable for fast-changing and fluctuating situations and for novel research questions in which human beings and technology are entangled (Baumgartner

2016). The following brief introduction to actor-network theory intends to map its analytical gains for this research project and highlights its particular benefits for engaging with the non-human and metaphysical agents that assumed importance in its course.

The rise of the actor-network theory (ANT) marked a revolutionary shift with regard to the understanding of social systems and the creation of meaning. The theory was originally conceived for the setting of a modern environment, where people were confronted with new technologies. This ambience demanded novel explanatory approaches in order to define the relationship between humans and technology (Belliger & Krieger 2006). Scholars such as Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law pioneered in developing new perspectives on those interrelations. Latour's (1993) critique of modernity looks at the backdrop setting of social theory prior to the emergence of these novel conceptions. Modernity came to be understood as a distinct constellation of nature, society, man and the divine. Characteristic was the radical separation of these areas (Belliger & Krieger 2006:20). In this context, the de-socialisation of the sciences, the de-mystification of nature and the subjectification of society are closely interrelated. They form a structure made up of justification and legitimation instances which determine the "constitution of modernity" (Latour 1998, as cited in Belliger & Krieger 2006:20). The division of the world into a mechanistic nature, a society consisting of freely acting subjects and a distant, indifferent God thus radically separated man and his destiny from material nature. Science and technology seemed to be positioned outside society and independent of the influences of culture (Belliger & Krieger 2006:20). This is how the autonomous subject of modern epistemology was born. And it occurred in tandem with the modern construction of an objective science and the juxtaposition of nature and society. An epistemological and ontological dualism of subject and object had become the hallmark of modernity. There remained either subjects or objects, but nothing could be both at the same time (Belliger & Krieger 2006:22). Latour (1993) and others challenged prevailing concepts by declaring that there is not nature on the one side and society on the other, but instead interaction. Society, hitherto seen as based on relatively stable explanatory schemes, then turned into a dynamic process, also referred to as "ongoing achievement," or "society in the making" (Callon 2001:62). The realisation that man and technology are inextricably coupled, turned the ANT into a key theory, as it placed its focus on the coalescence and coexistence of the two (Belliger & Krieger 2006). The initial concentration on the human and technological sphere was later expanded and adapted to other research disciplines. Eventually the theory disseminated into the social and human sciences. Various empirical studies carried out under the ANT upset the traditional separation of domains such as the "social" and the "technical" (Belliger & Krieger 2006), but also other areas previously interpreted as autonomous, for example society and nature (Nimmo 2011). The theory's most outstanding feature,

however, remains its particular emphasis on the agentive role of non-human components. Latour's central idea of the "collective" of human and non-human actors, describes networks of artefacts—material things, human beings, signs, norms, organisations, texts and many other elements—that have been integrated into action programmes, thus making them hybrid actors (Latour 2000, as cited in Belliger & Krieger 2006:15). As research under this heading gained momentum and dealt with dispersed forms of agency, the anthropocentric view of human-environment relations declined in importance (Strang 2014). Analyses of flow processes between technical and other non-human and human actors in a cluster are no longer even considered a novelty. The theory has become deeply anchored in the current scientific landscape and furthermore reveals the transformed self-understanding and conceptualisations of science, society and technology (Belliger & Krieger 2006:17).

The question of how to position ANT between a theory and a methodology is still unresolved. Latour (1996) himself had already asked whether conceptions that fall under this rubric would not rather constitute a method. If so, it would be a fairly free methodological system, or rather a modus operandi. Callon characterised the theory as "an attempt to provide analytical tools for explaining the very process by which society is constantly reconfigured" (2001:62), while it can also be viewed as a "useful set of theoretical resources" (Nimmo 2011:112). Among such ambiguities, several authors point to the problem of implementing ANT in research practice. Instead of concrete methodological directions (Nimmo 2011) there are often only vague suggestions for practical application, and so the concept tends to leave the researcher in limbo. Based on the realisation that society is not an accomplished product or system, but is in a constant dynamic process, the general proposal is to monitor these dynamics. Expressed objective is to trace the fluid processes of assembling, the formation of social networks (Baumgartner 2016). The researcher is asked to participate in this movement and the creation of relations, interconnections and linkages and the unfolding dynamics. But the advice is not to capture or freeze developments with a premature explanation (Baumgartner 2016). Since the social aspect is placed at the end of the explanatory chain, processes must be followed and even encouraged to evolve. The method is therefore descriptive, and while the researcher oversees the heterogeneous human and non-human actors as they create networks, he should be attentive to controversies and to processes of mutual translation and cooperation (Mareis 2014). To this end, approaches like participatory observation, document analysis and interviews are employed (Dankert 2011). Historiography and ethnography are also methods of choice for the ANT (Nimmo 2011:112). However, ANT is adaptable to numerous other research methods, usually depending on the focus of the study. This could be an analysis of the characteristics of the actors as they are present in an assemblage or the characteristics that define the network itself (Davey & Adamopoulos 2016).

The weak points for research with ANT arise again from its complexity. Collecting the data is time-consuming and leads to an accumulation of large amounts of material that requires a thorough separation between useful and useless. An extensive body of information, though, makes it difficult to draw transparent conclusions, and the results obtained are not statistical data and cannot be generalised or compared (Dankert 2011). It is nevertheless the method of choice for areas that are still poorly researched and in need of exploration. ANT is equally well suited for complex research questions for which traditional methods and theories do not offer conclusive solutions (Dankert 2011). One of the theory's assets is that it sensitises the researcher to multiple realities that may have been overlooked in other approaches (Nimmo 2011). Therefore, "ANT provides a corrective to the usual social scientific focus upon human beings and the 'social' domain of human 'subjects,' by directing attention to the significance of nonhumans in social life" (Nimmo 2011:109).

1.2.1 A Political Ecology Approach

Like actor network theory, political ecology formed part of the paradigm shift in the social sciences in the 1980s. A new consensus emerged that environmental problems and conflicts are part of the political and economic background in which they materialise (Nüsser 2003). This was a new perspective, distinct from earlier apolitical approaches. Political ecology came to be known as an epistemological field that aims to enhance understanding of the relation between society and nature while seeking to provide insights into issues surrounding environment and development (Epure 2015). Bryant (1998:89) defined political ecology as the study of "[. . .] political dynamics surrounding material and discursive struggles over the environment" in developing countries.[25] One focus of the domain are power relations. Power here "[. . .] is reflected in the ability of one actor to control the environment of another. Control may be 'inscribed' in the environment through land, air or water alterations [. . .]" (Bryant 1998:86). Particular attention is paid to inequalities in what Bryant (1998) called a "politicized environment." This goes hand in hand with the recognition that this environment is "constituted through struggles over material practices and struggles over meaning" (Bryant 1998:84). Political ecology shows many similarities with the ANT and the influence that ANT has had on conceptions of political ecology is well recognised (Robbins 2012). Just as the study of actor networks, political ecology takes into account network structures, albeit with a clear focus on the political context. Interdisciplinary approaches

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25 This classification would now also apply to countries that fall into the category of emerging economies.

form the foundation of inquiry to offer an understanding of the environment and development (Epure 2015). Investigating the specific political dynamics underlying environmental struggles is subject to a range of methodological approaches (Bryant 1998; Robbins 2012). Closely linked to fields such as cultural ecology and developmental geography, corresponding research must usually take into account aspects of historicity and include the cultural legacy of colonisation. By tracing the historical path, it provides an understanding on how colonialized people and their environment became integrated into "a first world-dominated global system of capitalist production" (Bryant 1998:85).

With regard to this case study, political processes and interests already shaped different interpretations about the Goddess's origin and identity throughout the village history. Yet political ecology comes into play as soon as the hydropower project and the company implementing it enter the stage and exert their strong influence on the interpretations of the Goddess, her temple and her connection to the riverscape. Manifestations of political ecology are reflected in instrumentalisations of the deity and of floods and in purported historical backgrounds or in debates around ownership issues. Questions on power and dominance, which initially concern processes of interpretation and later translate into material realities, set the tone as they emerge during the temple conflict. Such key issues exhibit their underlying political dimension, whereby they fall within the identified core concerns of political ecology—ecology, environmental knowledge and power (Robbins 2012).

The realisation of a hydropower project in India and in the ecologically sensitive zone of the Himalayas, with all its accompanying and contested ecological and social implications, automatically associates this study with the thematic area addressed here. Large dam projects in India once again look back on a history of long-standing and fierce disputes. They have been examined from various angles—among them in terms of ecological effects, but also in terms of the power relations that determine how people deal with their environment. The most outstanding dam projects in particular, have been extensively studied within a political-ecological frame of reference (see Baviskar 1995; Dwivedi 2006; Mawdsley 2010; Werner 2015). At the forefront here are the realisation of a large number of hydropower plants on the Narmada River in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh and the Tehri Dam, which is geographically close to Srinagar Dam. According to Nüsser (2003) it seems expedient to analyse "conflicts and development models associated with dam construction" with the help of "an actor-oriented approach of political ecology." Again, these frequent conflicts related to large dams unfold in a "politicised environment," and such environmental controversies cannot be separated from their political and economic background (Nüsser 2003). Questions concerning power structures are also relevant to issues related to water in general. Water can be controlled and directed and the element is understood to be "an expression of agency, identity and productivity" (Krause & Strang 2013:99). As Krause and Strang note, "water can be

both the means and the object of political action, and a statement of bio-political ide-ology" (Krause & Strang 2013:99). These reflections now lead to the next point, the importance of water for this thesis and the study of water in the context of the ANT.

1.2.2   Actor-Network Theory, Water and Disaster

The central focus and the connective element of this study is water. Water appears primarily in the form of a river and its various states; beyond that in conceptions of the watercourse and finally in its entanglements with a technical undertaking. Water's predominant property, its flowing nature, largely corresponds with a the-ory like ANT that exhibits a likewise fluent, or dynamic character. In other words, the nature of water conforms to a scheme designed for research scenarios that encompass variable factors and evolve in fluctuating environments. Krause and Strang (2016, 2013; Strang 2014), who dealt extensively with the interconnectiv-ity of water, point out the notable benefits of including actor-network theory in research on socially oriented engagements with water. Yet they suggest that water should not be regarded "as an *object* of social and cultural production—some-thing produced through social relationships and imbued with meaning through cultural schemes." It should rather be understood "as a generative and agentive co-constituent of relationships and meanings in society" (Krause & Strang 2016:633). Discussing transformed notions of meaning-making, the authors demonstrate that this process consisted in a form of projection onto the material realm in the early phases of the humanities and social sciences. Culture was assigned the role of "a veil or filter that mediates between human beings and the real world" (Krause & Strang 2016:634). According to this idea, though, "meaning" stands in the way between man and nature and thereby impedes a direct relationship to the sur-rounding material objects. Only a reversal of the separation between man and nature would allow understanding the quality of the relationship between man and water and through water. Water's characteristic fluidity in particular underlines and promotes the importance of reflecting on the relationship between people and the material realm; "water's ubiquitous capacity to flow between articulates most clearly that persons are biocultural beings, and that human-environmental rela-tionships are composed of interactions between material and social processes" (Strang 2014:135). Strang and Krause's research addresses the multifaceted impli-cations of water and its key role in shaping the past, present and future of man and Earth. They particularly emphasise the central role it plays in human con-ceptualisations, whereby it greatly exceeds its material dimension.[26] Water flows

26   Here is an excerpt from the long list of their accounts on this subject: "It is clear that water 'does' particular things, in accord with its unique properties, behaviors and

encompass a "combination of topography, power relations, built infrastructure, institutional arrangements property relations, money and market forces, ideologies, social networks, and the properties of water itself" (Krause & Strang 2016:635). Complementing this, Edgeworth (2014) highlights the uniqueness of water's agency. He describes water, based on its properties, as markedly different from notions of agency associated with other material artefacts. The special nature of water clearly comes to the fore in the interaction of humans with the element. Unique is its enormous power, which goes far beyond the simple "material resistance" of other physical phenomena. Considering water in this way, the element translated into the complexity of a river system, is consequently an "actor network." People or groups living near a river inevitably enter into a tangible dialogue with the watercourse (Edgeworth 2014). Edgeworth draws on archaeological evidence for an exemplary dialogue about the interaction of people with a river. A mutual exchange unfolds when people in view of their vital interests induce some kind of alteration to the flow pattern of the river. The watercourse then usually reacts in an unanticipated way to its obstruction, which in turn requires renewed human intervention. This form of interaction thus becomes a continuous process. Edgeworth compares such an exchange between human and non-human constituents to a wrestle—a "dynamic entanglement or enmeshment" (2014:158) with a river course. Another distinctive feature of water resides in its potential destructive power and hazardousness, which "can ravage, inundate, overcome and submerge cultural forms" (Edgeworth 2014:159). Yet even beyond its most extreme manifestations, water still intervenes actively and regularly in human affairs and objectives. Even when a river is largely controlled, the watercourse retains its wild and non-human nature. These facets of unpredictability and hazardousness therefore always lurk in the background when water is employed "as a metaphor or model for reconceptualising human-non-human relationships" (Edgeworth 2014:159).

As the last lines already indicated, the river and its water are closely linked to physical events that are experienced as adverse. These include floods and other hydrological disasters. Floods are rhythmic and the most intense phenomena that determine the watercourse. And they too can be examined in terms of their social interrelationship. During the 1980s, when theoretical considerations related to disaster research began to link economic influences with ecological mechanisms,

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capacities. It carves river valleys and shapes land and waterscapes; it provides opportunities for and obstacles to the movements of humans and other species; it mixes with other fluids and carries sediments, flora and fauna; it both destroys and enables human settlement. It also hydrates and maintains the physical processes of all living things, creating 'substantial' connections between all organisms and so highlighting the social, ecological and biopolitical relationships between humankind and other species" (Krause & Strang 2013:100; Helmreich 2009, as cited ibid.).

also the study of hazards and catastrophes underwent a radical shift towards a more holistic perspective (Bryant 1998). Research on floods and hazards has not only been fuelled by ideas that bring together social and material aspects of environmental change, but also contributed substantially to this newly defined scientific orientation.[27] A key question posed is how the effects and behaviour of floods inform the relationship between man and nature. Krause (Krause & Strang 2016:636) in fact suggests a "hydrosociality" of floods, which should be taken into account in view of a better flood risk management. Katanha and Simatele (2019) even more explicitly assert the validity of ideas of actor-network theory for hazard mitigation strategies. They highlight the persistent lack of studies investigating the complexity of human-environment relations with the aim of improving risk reduction policies. The ANT would have a special competence in expanding knowledge about "current dynamic social and ecological complexities in alternative hazard mitigation strategies in developing countries" (Katanha & Simatele 2019:4). Other practical gains of integrating the relationality of water would precipitate on and improve systems of water supply- and irrigation, flood management, aquifer governance or coastal zone protection (Krause & Strang 2016).[28]

Apart from the fact that water is a political and economic or an ecological issue and a subject to various other material and cognitive associations and meanings, water knowledge and beliefs also have a considerable transcendental dimension. While the agency of water has implications for the understanding of the divine, the transcendent in turn influences the perception of water. Given the largely sacred status of the subcontinent's water sources and streams (cf. Haberman 2006; Eck 2012, 1996; Alley 2002; Feldhaus 1995) and the prevalence of water-related practices, the agentive power of water in relation to religious beliefs is particularly pronounced in India. Especially the imaginations about the most famous of the revered rivers, the Ganges, fulfil the idea of agency in a multitude of ways and on a number of scales. The entire river is worshipped as the personification of a goddess (Gaṅgā) and represents a purifying entity (Eck 1996). Furthermore, various locally worshipped gods and spirits are also bound to the agency of the river or stand in

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27   Bryant's more general view of the role of the then new form of disaster research is reflected in his statement that the foregrounded preoccupation with real and potential catastrophes "was simultaneously a wider comment about the need for work on the political economy of environmental change in the third world. As such, it was an influential strand in the development of third-world political ecology, a point acknowledged in key political-ecology texts" (Bryant 1998:81).

28   Strang and Krause even extend the list of potential benefits to cover aspects of corporate policy—"If the social nature of water and the intrinsic links between culture, political economy, and hydrology are taken seriously, managers will be able to better deal with material infrastructures following social logics or social processes sparked by hydrological events" (Krause & Strang 2016:635).

a reciprocal relationship to the spiritual essence of the river course. These reflections on water, divinity and agency now lead to the last point, which elucidates the implications and new conceptions about the divine as an actor for this analysis.

1.2.3   The Agency of Divinity

Considering that a (river) goddess is a primary subject of the discussion, reflections on divinity and agency form the central element of this study. Based on this premise, the access offered by William S. Sax to the question of the complex mechanisms of agency in conjunction with Western Himalayan deities provided relevant inspiration in this regard. Through his numerous publications, Sax tailored reflections on agency to the distinctive pantheon in Garhwal. This was particularly interesting with regard to the prevailing practices of direct communicative exchange with local deities. When the concept of non-human agency was introduced in Latour's or Callon's system of thought to designate an agent in a ramified social system, they excluded in principle "entities that are entirely symbolic in nature" and "entities that are supernatural" (Sayes 2014:136).[29] Sax, by contrast, incorporated representations of the metaphysical into his conception of the actor-network theory. One of his motivations was the personal dilemma he encountered after establishing relationships with the people in his research environment. The rationale for his concerns was that he could not, on the one hand, build personal ties and friendships and then, in a second step, snub his companions by declaring their worldview irrelevant. In pondering on how to accommodate the divine, he asked:

> How can I write about their culture and religion, according to which the presence of this divine king in their midst is a self-evident fact, without making them appear backward and superstitious to my readers? How can I analyze the way in which they construct a world of meaning and significance—a world in which embodied deities are part of the fabric of daily life—without dismissing their understandings as mystified or deluded? (Sax 2002:158)

29   The question remains, why the creators of the new theory explicitly excluded these transcendental facets from their considerations. Under the basic premises of the idea, the understanding of agency of the divine would be largely congruent with Latour's account on the matter. The system of distributed agency, even if initially with a focus on technology, with the integration of diverse non-human actors, would logically have to extent to cosmological frameworks. Manifestations of the divine after all meet the general requirements of wielding their influence on the cluster of participants along the system of their participation.

Studies of faith and spiritual experience are generally confronted with the problem Sax addresses—how to integrate religious experience into academic research? A great part of the population of South Asia, when asked whether gods possess the capacity to act, would confirm this idea and defend the ability and volition of deities to perform actions in the physical world (U. Rao 2002). U. Rao contends, "the presence of the divine is considered to be a 'proven fact' rather than a question of belief, a fact established through 'sensory experience' and 'physical experimentation'" (2002:3).[30] However, academic research that engages directly in discussions about the veracity or non-veracity of transcendental phenomena has been accused of pursuing a "'protectionist strategy' aiming to safeguard religious experience from social scientific explanations" (Proudfoot 1985, as cited in Hollywood 2004:518). Since Enlightenment, religious studies in general have followed an approach of scientific rationality or "explanatory reductionism," while highly abstracting the research issue from its given context and explaining it with ontological concepts predefined by the natural sciences and by a rationalist worldview. It goes without saying that such interpretations are in stark contrast to the life worlds of a religious individual. As Hollywood (2004:518) points out, "the religious person's explanation of his or her experience [. . .] is not even considered as one possible explanation of the experience by the social scientific researcher." Further elaborating on the inconsistencies arising from this attitude towards religious knowledge, she notes:

> [. . .] it seems unlikely that the scholar of religion, who presumes the primacy of naturalistic explanations, will be able to describe religious experience without recourse to categories derived from such explanations. Social scientific descriptions themselves are often subtly at odds with the experiences they purport to describe. (Hollywood 2004:518)

Hollywood concludes:

> [. . .] we cannot unquestioningly presume that our own explanatory and descriptive categories are valid and those of our subject are invalid. Yet the dilemma—how to take seriously the agency of the other [. . .] when the other seems intent on ascribing her agency to God [. . .]—remains unresolved. (2004:524)

30   As Chapter 3 will show, in a contemporary context and in order to gain credibility, this belief is often supported by scientific language or arguments (U. Rao 2002).

Scholars have explored a range of options to overcome or circumvent this discrepancy.[31] Unlike other strategies, however, Sax' approach seems to allow the most intimate proximity to the experience of the divine and to the living practice of his research subjects. The central idea is that deities exercise their form of agency in a complex social system while expressing the intentions of the community. Gods are therefore not direct actors, but display their agency within a network of distributed agency. This concept obviously circumvents the delicate debate on whether the supposed metaphysical properties of deities exert their unmediated influence on the human sphere. Whitmore (2010:135) suggests that Sax thus not only avoids irreconcilable disagreements between different world views, but his concept also overcomes the immanent differences "between the world of the western anthropologist and the world of Garhwali culture." It thereby functions "as a disciplinary bridge between the study of religion and the social sciences" (Whitmore 2010:135).

Notably, studies based on the distinctive culture in the Western Himalayan mountain region and in Nepal, and dealing with local cults, either directly investigate the agency of local gods and goddesses or indirectly involve the issue (see e.g. Baltutis 2009; Michaels 1993; Jassal 2014, 2017; Smith 2018; Whitmore 2018). The very designation of the region as *dev-bhūmi* alludes on the one hand to the authoritative role attributed to the deities of the local culture, while at the same time referring to imaginaries of the sacred on a more overarching cultural level. The prominent role of the gods is reflected in Berti's various writings on the deities in Himachal Pradesh (2001, 2004, 2006; Berti & Tarabout 2009) and in their all-pervasive presence, such as in legal proceedings and land disputes (Berti 2015).[32] Even when not the focus of research, the deities' extended scope of agency appears as a significant factor in many studies conducted in this area (see e.g. Polit 2012; Drew 2011, 2014; Wagner 2013). Several authors also explicitly refer to and adopt elements of Sax's approach and understanding of agency (e.g. Halperin 2012, 2017; Polit 2012; Whitmore 2010, 2018). This fact at the same time reaffirms

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31   Hollywood considers various existing alternatives of integrating agency attributed to the divine into scientific treatises. Among others she refers to Keller, who regards cases of spirit possession within categories of "instrumental agency" (2004:525). This concentration on the adepts' own perception of religious experiences and states of possession or even on the psychological characteristics of people who are susceptible to such conditions (Dwyer 2003) largely pushes the question of direct influence by divine actors into the background. Other authors solve their predicament by integrating the divine through its materiality (cf. Pongratz-Leisten/Sonik 2015), thus seeking an understanding of how material objects associated with religious conceptions extend their influence on the experience of the adept, or the worshipper (cf. Higgins 2016).
32   She investigated the representation of the *devī-devtās* in court, but noted that that their position in court proceedings is generally not recognised.

the need to apply modified practices concerning the gods' capacity to interact, especially with respect to the mountain deities of the Himalayas.

Before turning to the practical approach of this thesis in the next step, a brief look at the practicability of ANT in relation to the metaphysical completes this section. To promote an understanding for the form of agency of divine beings, Sax pointed out the most salient characteristic of an agent, namely its potential to generate effects and bring about changes in the external world (Sax 2006, 2009). In his own words: "perhaps the most straightforward definition of agency is 'the ability to transform the world' [. . .]" (2006:474). This consideration can be regarded as a valuable tool, primarily for identifying an agent, including from the metaphysical domain, but also for the recognition of further participating elements in a distributed network.

1.3   ANT in Practice—The Research and an Account of the Different Actors

Research for this discourse-oriented study was conducted on the basis of a multipronged approach. The raw material was drawn from a wide range of sources, covering a broad spectrum of voices and perspectives. General information about the trajectory of the temple and its extended interplay with floods and a dam project was first obtained through several field visits between 2014 and 2017. As a form of participant observation, I spent these visits on site with exploration walks, longer sojourns in a road-side temple on the path to the main Dhārī Devī Temple, whilst conducting informal interviews with villagers, priests and passers-by. Further interviews were held in other places, as in Delhi and around Srinagar, with activists and experts that engaged with the issue of the Srinagar Dam or with related subjects. Such an access strategy provided an ethnographical account of the situation on the ground and an understanding of the background realities. The stays on site were particularly conducive to finding the textual sources used in this study. These were documents of court cases as well as booklets and books, some of which were only available through personal contacts, or probably only within the state. A subsequent material search was to a large degree conducted digitally. This also comprised the compilation of video and audio material, blog entries, online articles and extracts from special disaster broadcasts.

One of the reasons for exploring the topic with an overriding emphasis on textual sources arose from the initial consultations with participants in the earlier opposition to the reconstruction of the temple. These first personal contacts led to the realisation that after the relocation, detailed memories of the events and discourses before the disaster, especially of the exact sequence of events, had already

faded. Sometimes those involved were even reluctant to look back at the stages of their activism, since it was still an emotionally charged topic and accompanied by feelings of frustration and defeat. Thus not only the temporal distance seemed to have constituted a hindrance to reproduce what happened before the shifting of the Goddess, but especially the turning point of the flood of 2013 profoundly altered the memories of the former temple struggle. Obviously, the time factor and the progression of developments as well as of communication processes had led to further alterations and distortions of the flood and other memories on which I wanted to base my investigation. Textual and here mostly web-based sources along with their statements and narrations, on the other hand, are considered discourses that are "frozen in time" (Davey & Adamopoulos 2016). This means that they are preserved in the form they possessed at the time of creation. With regard to interviews, this approach also circumvented the filtering of information on the part of the interviewees and their readjustment to moral and political standards (Moran 2011; Davey & Adamopoulos 2016).

One of the foundations of this study, especially to comprehend the chronological dimension and to retrace the unfolding discourse of the socio-ecological conflict preceding the disaster in 2013, was the perusal of the local Hindi daily Amar Ujālā, Garhwal edition. The Amar Ujālā is, beside the Dainik Jāgraṇ, the leading vernacular daily of the area. The newspaper has a special status in Uttarakhand and is closely intertwined with its regional history and political developments (cf. Chapter 2.4.1). The search covered every edition from the beginning of 2009—the starting point of the newspaper's internet archive—until the end of 2013. Amar Ujālā's online archive was still academia-friendly at the time, as it consisted of text-based articles that could be searched by keyword. The retrieval of articles was based on search terms relevant to the temple and the Srinagar Hydroelectric Project: *dhārī*, *alakanandā*, *jal vidyut pariyojnā* (hydroelectric project), *visthāpan* (relocation/resettlement), *jīvīke* (GVK), *daivīya āpadā* (alternatively: *daivya āpadā, daivī āpadā;* natural disaster or divine disaster). The search option by keywords, however, was discontinued at some point when the archive was converted to a pdf-based e-paper edition that corresponds to the print edition. The number of articles collected for this period is around 346.[33] But I continued to read and collect news items from the daily paper, which is why occasionally some information from a later stage has been incorporated.

The interviews were conducted partly in English, partly in Hindi. I translated most of the written Hindi material myself. My good friend and pandit from Kaliyasaur, M. P. Pandey, assisted in the translation of a book chapter which will be presented shortly, as it contained many expressions unknown to me. The same

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33   The exact number is difficult to determine, since, for example, reports on the subject often consisted of several sub-articles.

applied to a booklet he had authored himself. This one was linguistically simpler, but he still provided valuable additional information on his publication. M. P. Pandey likewise very generously and patiently supported me in translating my collected audio and video sources, which assume relevance especially in Chapter 5 of the dissertation, respectively in the discourses after the 2013 catastrophe.

As Chapter 1.2 outlined, ANT is not clearly a method or a methodology; there are no binding instructions on how to deal with a chosen research question. Nevertheless, authors like Dankert (2011) offer some thoughts on this topic and I have tailored my approach along such vague guidelines. In his considerations on the ANT he distinguished two different paths for gaining access to a research object. On the one side there is the purely descriptive method, which would only "tell a story," use all the available data and not even lead to a conclusion. On the other end is the more epistemologically oriented research with a clear focus on knowledge gains. The aim of this study has already been clarified as putting an emphasis on disaster research and the idea of contributing to this area. The objective thus required a selection of the present material with regard to the intended gain in knowledge and a recognition of already existing academic literature. Taking the identified central actor as a starting point, the relations of this actor with the various other human and non-human participants in this ramified network are then to be investigated and disclosed (Dankert 2011). Based on such methodological considerations, the way to approach the issue of Goddess Dhārī, the floods and their multiple interrelationships, was in the first place to identify the different actors and agents that participated in her and her environment's transformation. Now confronted with a multitude of influences that impacted on further developments, and since it was impossible to identify them all, this strategy had to be restricted to a rough description of the most important and predominant agentive units. The following list and characterisation of the 13 key actors more or less reflects the order of their appearance and, to some extent, the order of the different chapters of this study:

1. The deity and its place
    The investigation begins with the Goddess herself and her abode on River Alaknanda. The deity and her place stand in tight interconnection with the local society, the inhabitants of the two adjacent villages. In many aspects, the villagers form a unity with- or an extension of their place of worship.

2. Floods
    Floods, as a focal point of research—either or not labelled disasters—form part of the temple and its multitude of constructed narratives from the very beginning of its existence. The floods, with their capacity to induce change, exert a catalytic effect on the place of worship. Although the focus of the study is on the most violent manifestations of the river, floods and their meanings could

not always be completely distinguished from other conceptions of the river. In some cases, its gentler forms or other notions of water had to be included if they helped to complete the overall picture of the cultural understandings, interests and power relations involved. Similarly, in some passages land-scape features distinguished from the river assumed a role in the discourse. Often such features possessed qualities, which were obviously opposed to the perceived nature of water and were hence formulated as a counter-concept or an "antithesis to water." In this way, they complemented the notion of the river or delimited its properties by a juxtaposition.

3. A dam project
   The agency of a dam project is first demonstrated by the fact that it changes the shape and characteristics of a riverscape and directly impacts the trajectory of a place of worship. But a dam can also assume an agentive role with regard to flood events—not only by mitigating or amplifying them, but even by gener-ating a flood. Linked to the dam project, further agentive power is distributed among the construction company, GVK and its subsidiary, AHPCL and other subcontractors and persons affiliated to it. Other strong actors were the local- and state administration, who helped to push through the implementation of the dam and the hydroelectric plant. All of them contributed to the creation of meaningful narratives about floods and the temple.

4. Village disparities
   As especially the first part of the thesis with concentration on the local level will show, not only historically informed memories about the Goddess and the temple had a decisive influence on the interpretation of flood events, but also significant divisions among the village society. These divides were to a high degree defined by caste boundaries. Obviously, old disputes and ownership issues concerning the Goddess had flared up anew in view of the upcoming dam project.

5. Written documents—a book chapter and a booklet
   How a single book chapter managed to assume a pivotal role for the future of the temple and the interpretation of floods needs some elucidation at this point. Reference is made here to the chapter on the Dhārī Devī Temple in a book on the history of temples around Srinagar "Uttarākhaṇḍ, Śrī Kṣētr Śrīnagar" (Uttarakhand, sacred field Srinagar). The volume of the historian Naithany is one of the few, and certainly the most elaborate, source available in print pro-viding historical information on the Goddess and the place of her worship. This is the case although the writings of the author may lack validation and the local newspaper also concludes that there is no "reliable history" of the temple (Amar Ujālā 2012, July 8b). Most of the knowledge, and that means the knowledge about floods pertaining to the Goddess, was therefore gained from this book by different actors. There was another booklet, which also appeared on the scene,

or which precipitated on argumentations regarding the temple and the dam project. The talk is about Pandey's booklet from 2005 "Siddhapīṭh Dhārī Devī Kā Itihās Evam Mahimā" (Siddhapīṭh Dhārī Devī's History and Glory). Its circulation was much smaller, however, and according to the author, he eventually withdrew his work altogether because of conflicts it had triggered at the village level. Thus not only did the discourse before the relocation predominantly bear the marks of the temple descriptions in Naithany's treatise, but also after the catastrophe in 2013 the information available here was used to interpret the catastrophe. Whichever media reported about the case of Dhārī Devī, especially after the 2013 flood, at some point referred back to his book, or even to other texts that had quoted it. Naithany's depiction of the temple had consequently dominated the lines of argumentation during the conflict and informed interpretive processes concerning flood events. As I suspect, the book had spent many years more or less dormant on the shelves of bookshops around Srinagar. It was only with the advent of questions of movability or non-movability that the document began to take on a key role, and Naithany's text was assigned the authority of interpretation for the history of the temple. This authoritative role became even clearer, when a committee entrusted with the task to find out if the deity's statue can be moved from her place, consulted Naithany as an expert on the temple. Obviously here not only the book chapter but also the author appear both as actors, and even in conflicting positions regarding the debates lead during the critical phase before the temple relocation (see Chapter 2.4.2). All these manifestations render the publication an integral actor in the reconstruction of the water-based transformations of the temple. As will become apparent, also the following two points are closely intertwined with this one.

6. Oral narratives

    Together with these writings and rather invisibly also a further non-human actor enters the scene here, which is the collection of locally obtained oral narratives. In spite of the existence of a few ancient documents for the reconstruction of the history of the Goddess, most of the accounts are based on an initial consultation of local actors and on the narratives they contributed—and on the choice of interview partners by the author. By this mechanism oral narratives, although translated into written form, turned into central argumentative elements in the course of an environmental conflict. The stories about the Goddess form part of the oral history and handed-down knowledge, but once they were compiled by a recognised historical expert and printed in a book, they acquired more credibility and evidential value. The narratives, having assumed a fixed form when printed on paper, thus became authoritative and a valid testimony for the place's historicity—just as the author of the book had become the authoritative person for interpreting the place's past and meaning. Oral narratives in this modified form as a result became means for legal

claims, in this case claims by different social groups and actors to their rights over a deity and a temple. The narratives eventually made their way up to the Supreme Court and impacted various hearings and the final ruling about the Srinagar Hydropower project.

7. A leaflet

There was another document that had gained prominence during the extensive debates that preceded the relocation of the temple. It was a pamphlet written and published by the temple *pūjārīs* in defence of their rights to the deity, and it constituted a response to the claims of the village's other caste group, the *dhunār*. This point is reminiscent of the village disparities already mentioned and is therefore closely related to point four. The leaflet is also interesting because an elaborate form of circular reasoning is constructed on the basis of its content. Although the pamphlet comes from the rural community and thus directly from the source of all memories, it draws its evidence in part from the Naithany chapter, even though this in turn relies on village narratives as its evidence base.

8. The local newspaper

Much of the information, such as the overview of the sequence of events on a regional scale, arguments of the activists and their opponents, as well as the background to the temple and dam project, was taken from the newspaper Amar Ujālā. The paper played a major role not only in transmitting information, but also in shaping perceptions about the temple, the project and the floods in its wake. In addition, the Amar Ujālā also occupies a special position in the state (Chapter 2.4.1). This rendered it another of the key actors in relation to the processes addressed in this thesis. As Meyrowitz (1997) elucidated, newspapers, like the other various media, do not only function as channels for the transmission of information, instead they "[. . .] are themselves social contexts that foster certain forms of interactions and social identities" (Meyrowitz 1997:59). Newspapers assume agency by influencing public dynamics, but they equally become a relevant indicator of current developments and their nature across a society. The Amar Ujālā was therefore not only best suited to reproduce the chronology of events around Srinagar, but it was also the medium of choice to identify and access contemporary narratives circulating in the public sphere of the mountains.

9. Expert committees and the court

As already indicated under point five, different bodies such as expert committees and courts contributed to the interpretation process of the Goddess's and the flood's agency and the developments thus catalysed for the riverscape.

10. Persons and groups from a religious-political spectrum

Once the conflict over the Goddess became more widespread and the countermovement against the temple relocation grew stronger, it shifted from a locally

generated protest to a broader form of opposition. At this stage, new actors entered the scene who connected the topic not only to their vision of the river and eventually also to their flood imaginations, but also to a broader political agenda in the tow of their activism. The dominant topic in this context became the nature of the Hindu Right's environmental engagement. The role of religious authorities and partially right-wing actors for the temple issue and their later reading of the flood in 2013 will be sufficiently elucidated from Chapter 3 onwards.

11. The sacralised region

   Uttarakhand is not only a cultural space for its inhabitants, but also a region of unique religious significance for a pan-Indian Hinduism. The "sacred space" of the Garhwal region is based on textual traditions of Hinduism. It is a concept fed by stories about mythological figures, by the presence of the region's sacralized watercourses and the venerated sites, the Char Dhām, but also by more general ideas about mountain landscapes and the Himalayas in particular. The reticular entanglements of these components combine to form a field of sacredness that is considered highly meritorious. The characteristics of its intertwining with the temple, the dam project and with flood disasters will soon be widely discussed.

12. Planetary conditions

   It may be a surprising point, but as will be demonstrated, astrological conditions had quite a strong share of agency. This was mainly due to them posing a significant obstacle prior to the implementation of the temple relocation and just before the main disaster. In that phase, planetary conditions were positioned as a counter player to memory-fed imaginations and anticipations about coming floods. After the disaster, on the other hand, astrological reasons were used to explain the devastating impacts of the flood.

13. The national media

   After the Flood disaster in 2013 occurred a switch of the interpretive entities. Before the flood and at the public level, the local newspaper was the main source of knowledge about the temple and its connections to its surroundings. Whereas following the catastrophe, the national media took over the stage and the interpretive authority about the deluge and its association with the deity.

2 The Flood History
Narratives about Floods and the Genesis of a Goddess

The most fascinating feature of Goddess Dhārī's various stories of origin is probably their composition from a unique mixture of different constituents of human experiential spheres and their assignments of meaning. The narratives encompass several crucial past events, which on the one hand were lived on the village level, but at the same time form more collective memories of disaster experience. Tales of the Goddess's emergence are recognisably interwoven with historical flood events, British colonial influences and their early modern forms of flood management, as well as with the historiography of the former Gurkha invaders and other rulers, and with a variety of other socially and culturally anchored ingredients.[34] The flood history of the Goddess presented here does not constitute a comprehensive ethnographic account of past flood memories or on how the local population understands their Goddess in this context. Examining the narratives about the past instead seeks to capture the most salient ideas relating to the temple and its association with the river and its floods. This means that the focus is on the representations that are most present in the public sphere and have therefore informed the discourse surrounding the development project.

Of the accounts related to Goddess Dhārī, some include elements of the Mahābhārata or of tales tied to the figure of the Ādi Śaṅkarācārya (see Chapter 2.3.2; Pandey 2005). These narratives however have a more template function and they reappear in locally adapted versions in many places in Garhwal (Handa 2001; Whitmore 2010; Sax 1990).[35] The flood-related narratives, on the other hand, exhibit a clearly more individualised, localised and autochthonous character. The tight relationship of deities to their natural habitat forms a common characteristic

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34   The Gurkha rule in Garhwal lasted from 1804 until 1815. Then they were defeated and driven out by the British army (A. S. Rawat 2002).

35   This phenomenon of reappearing themes and spiritual figures in various localities is known as "[. . .] 'localization'—a process in which pan-Indian epic and mythic narratives, events and characters are associated with particular localities: '[T]he folk renditions localize the pan-Indian epics and myths, often with the help of local names, places, motif's, and folk etymology. Various local places, hills, rivers, trees, and birds are given names that connect them with the great gods'" (Ramanujan 1986, as cited in Halperin 2012:96).

of this region, just as Halperin noted for the Western Himalayan Kullu Valley that "deities here are usually associated with natural phenomena and are often believed to have miraculously appeared out of the ground or other environmental elements" (2016:12). The genesis of the Goddess is largely consistent with such initially animistic ideas of the emergence of a deity, whose formation occurs in an intimate union with natural elements and physical phenomena. The most salient constituent on which there seems to be broad agreement in local tradition is that the Goddess came to her place with the help of the river. A frequently traded version says that she arrived from Kālīmaṭh, another sacred location, which lies about 60 km further upstream in the mountains. Narratives in this connection claim that only her upper part came down from Kālīmaṭh, while the lower one remained in that higher mountain place. In this context it is important to know that the statue consists only of a torso. The link with Kālīmaṭh might therefore be considered an aetiological justification for the fact that the statue of the Goddess exists only in this torso form. However, the idea that the statue is divided into two parts and spread over two locations, or another alternative—that the sculpture is broken, with a part missing—is a very exceptional feature. That is because the worship of broken statues is seen as taboo among the diverse prevailing traditions of the subcontinent (Naithany 1995:472). According to common understanding, if even a small detail of a statue is corrupted, a divine image loses its power, or the god abandons the statue and it becomes possessed by demonic entities (see Keul 2002; Granoff 1991). In such a case, it should be disposed of, and preferably in a holy river.[36] Giving a *jal samādhi* (water burial) to Brahmanic goddesses and gods was also an earlier Buddhist practice (Naithany 1995:491). This gives rise to the possibility that the statue could have been disposed of earlier into the river and then later recovered. So, the origin stories of Goddess Dhārī contain, in a way, elements of a transient water funeral.[37]

Different from a river-based connection between two places, P. C. Joshi (2009) interprets the bond between Dhārī Devī and Kālīmaṭh as expressing a kinship of

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36 Keul (2002:13) describes such a water burial ceremony in Benares: In the last days of June the temple priest performed a simple, quiet leaving ceremony (visarjana). After a final worship (uttarapūjā), during which the deity was asked to leave the image, the image was carefully released from its mount and carried to the riverbank by four strong men. There it was loaded onto a boat, which was rowed a little way out on the Ganges and sunken.

37 On the other hand, the statue does not look "broken" or damaged and probably the effigy was just made as the bust, which it is still today. As Naithany (1995) speculates, the statue's style may have been inspired by influences of Buddhism, or by remnants of the gandhāra period. Pointing in this direction is the existence of two similar statues in the storehouse of the Garhwal University in Srinagar. They are effigies of royal wives of the royal family of Srinagar. But all this remains speculation, and the mystery of the statue's origin and arrival at its site on the river will not be solved at this point.

Dhārī Devī with the Goddess Kālī of Kālīmaṭh. Such notions of kinship are indeed another typical cultural feature of this part of the mountain range, where the deities not only have familial bonds with the people, but the various deities in different places also have familial ties to each other (M. B. Sharma 2009; Sax 1990; Smith 2018). But apart from this author's view, there is no other information about direct family associations between Dhārī Devī and the Kālī of Kālīmaṭh, although the very notion of Dhārī's birthplace in Kālīmaṭh certainly implies the existence of family relations between the two places in some way. This spatial linkage may semantically serve to support ideas about a typically female trajectory in Indian society, since the conception of the Goddess's birthplace in a remote place like Kālīmaṭh strongly resembles the cultural pattern of a woman leaving her maternal home upon marriage and thus living in a distant location.[38] These assumptions of kinship to the Kālīmaṭh or the recurring motif of the Goddess's parental home in this place seem to be one-sided though, as conversely there is no evidence of Dhārī Devī in the location of Kālīmaṭh to support this relationship.

2.1 A Goddess Born from Floods

The first story to be introduced here about the birthplace of the deity is by Saklani (1991), who conducted research in the area about a *bākyā*, a medium regularly possessed by the Goddess Dhārī. In this narrative Dhārī was the docile daughter of a family in Kālīmaṭh, who fell victim to her brothers' jealousy:

> In the Himalayas, it is believed that Dhari was an avatar (manifestation) of the goddess Durga, born to a family in Garhwal hundreds of years ago. She became a favorite with her parents because of her noble thoughts and deeds which gave rise to jealousy among her brothers. Therefore, one day, she was killed by them and thrown into the river Ganga. As the story goes, her head flowed down the river and stopped at the banks near Srinagar where it stayed for about six months. At that time, Dhari instructed a boatman (*dhunar*) in his dream to retrieve the head which had turned into stone. In another dream, a pundit was directed to place the stone into a temple. (Saklani 1991:68)

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38   See Sax 1990 about Nandādevī's pilgrimage. Likewise, that Goddess is supposed to be a "*dhiyāṇī*" or outmarried daughter (1990:491f).

As can be seen in this and the following legends, the Goddess travelled down the river course. Floods are only implicit in these accounts, but it is easy to infer that she could not have travelled during the lean season, when the rivers carry little water or even fall dry. The river journey was only possible during periods of high flow, such as the rainy season—or in the event of a flood. Any form of movement could only be achieved with the help of the wild, gushing waters, which would transport matter—flotsam, sand and stones—from the upper reaches into the lower regions.

An analogous legend circulating at the village level deviates slightly but decisively from this written account of her emergence and exposes a much fiercer goddess. In the narrative recounted by a local pandit (M. P. Pandey, personal communication Oct. 10, 2014) and described as a popular version among the local inhabitants, it was instead Dhārī's demonic deeds that consequently landed her in her—albeit temporary—watery grave. The story depicts the Goddess with a dual personality, transforming from a friendly female by day into a blood thirsty creature by night.

> Dhārī was once the youngest daughter of the family and had seven brothers. At some point, over the course of the nights, she began to murder her brothers one by one. She cut them into pieces and threw them into the river Alaknanda. No one around her realised what was going on. Only the last brother finally became suspicious about her true nature. He reckoned that he would be the next to be killed, and when she actually came to him, he pre-emptively slew her instead. He then cut her into two parts, which he also disposed of in the river, whereupon the upper part was washed down to Dhārī, while the lower remained in Kālīmaṭh. (retold from recording 2014, Oct. 10)

Another inhabitant of the village Dhārī narrated a similar episode, available on YouTube (Jirwan's Diaries 2018). Here she ate six of her brothers instead of disposing of them, but spared the seventh, as well as another sister. She was also in this narrative killed by the seventh brother after he learned of her *kālī avatār*, her dark subpersonality. The outcome is the same in all three legends—she was thrown into the river and washed down to her current location. What is striking is how the positions of the perpetrators are reversed in the stories. While in the first one by Saklani the jealous brothers commit an atrocious act on the "noble girl," in the other two local stories she is the brutal aggressor and is ultimately murdered in self-defence. The two last and orally transmitted versions from the village level indeed bear a more ancient character with the emphasis on the fierce traits of the Goddess. The gradual transition of goddesses of local traditions from their

earlier ferocious (*ugra*) to more benign (*saumya*) representations, together with their progressive appropriation into the Hindu pantheon, is a frequently addressed development. Various authors (e.g. Michaels et al. 1996; Zeiler 2008; Handa 2001) describe how, in the course of complex cultural exchange processes (Bhardwaj 2015), formerly wild characteristics of the goddesses, often of tantric origin, gradually softened. Handa (2001) elaborates on these evolutionary flows with respect to the Himalayas:

> It was with the popularization of Brahmanism in this region that all these demonic spirits were admitted into the Puranic traditions. Many of them were given a sympathetic and pacificatory garb and projected as humane in nature, but only when appeased. They were accorded a new collective identity as Devi, but they also continued to be identified with their local traditional cognomen. New legends were woven around them, and many of them found way into the Puranas, lending to these demonic deities an aura of religiosity and spirituality. (Handa 2001:70)

The extent of this development is understood to depend on the degree of Sanskritisation and Brahmanisation of an area. It is accompanied by further modifications of centuries-old practices, such as the abolishment of animal sacrifices.[39] Related thereto, the goddesses were absorbed into the all-pervasive and terrifying manifestations of Devī-Durgā or Kālī (Handa 2001:70). This probably also pertained to the Goddess at Kaliyasaur. Different versions of the origin of Goddess Dhārī can be understood as emblematic of these transitions. Her fluid identity seems to be similarly reflected in the different names she has adopted over time.

> Under the protracted process of the age-old socio-cultural and religious syncretism, the native demonic *devis* and *devatas* have lost much of their primitive diabolic characteristics. Many of them have even been deprived of their original names, and are now known by the festered [*sic*] identities. (Handa 2001:81)

One of her former names is said to have been Tāreśvarī Tārā, possibly an indicaton of the period when Mahāyāna Buddhism was spreading in the region (Naithany

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39   The scale of this process is also understood to be dependent on the accessibility of an area. There are accordingly several inaccessible places especially in the higher mountain reaches, where leftovers of older cultural manifestations have been fairly well preserved (Bhardwaj 2015).

1995).[40] In a document from 1807, the former governor Chauntara[41] calls the Dhārī Devsthān[42] in Kaliyasaur, "Kalyāṇdeī Devī Jī" (Naithany 1995:494). In 1808 the Shrestha Thapa Sardar (a contemporary Nepali commander) writes "Durgā Kālikā," whereas in 1864 the British governor in a letter mentions the "Mandir Kalyāṇī Devī Dhārī" (Naithany 1995:494). Kalyāṇī Kālī also features in a historical document of 1893 in which the Pūjārī Brihaspati requests donations for the construction of a temple for the Goddess (Naithany 1995:469).[43] And so, as her names continued to change, the same applied to the characteristics ascribed to her.

Remarkable is that the more violent variations featuring the Goddess seem to remain exclusively in oral form, while the written accounts of her are preponderantly portrayals of a benign nature. Pandey himself has also published a booklet on the local deity, but unlike the story he told me in person, the printed version makes no mention of Dhārī's ferocious traits and the locally transmitted characteristics. Instead, the Goddess is endowed with purely benevolent, motherly and thus brahminical qualities. Such written representations are likely to serve the expectations of an external public regarding the form of representation of deities or those of temple visitors who are outside the local context. This would be similar to a pattern noted by Moran in his observations of modified accounts of a deity in the Shimla Hills of Himachal Pradesh. There the deity was considered to have taken "[. . .] a form that is more palatable to interlocutors from beyond the hills, reflecting the village's increased integration in and adaptation to mainstream Indian culture" (2011:457). The portrayal of the deity was thus altered in terms of social acceptance and adjusted to changed paradigmatic criteria, while at the local level and more covertly, the untamed and demonic depictions of the Goddess lived on.

While the tales of Goddess Dhārī's arrival from Kālīmaṭh therefore probably comprise remnants of ancient origin, the myths about her recovery from the river were obviously inspired by a relatively recent and severe flood event—the Great Flood of 1894, or the Flood of Birahi. In Garhwal, the Birahi flood represents an intergenerational collective flood memory that persists in the cultural consciousness of the region to this day. The scale of the disaster presumably had the effect of coupling even the older origin stories, and possibly accounts of a yet earlier flood, with this comparatively modern deluge. And this may have further informed

40   Handa's (2001:69) account would support such a reading as he also explains how the earlier demonic goddesses had been assimilated into the system of tantric Buddhism in the advent of Mahayana Buddhism in the area.
41   Whelpton (2004:31) mentions Chauntara as a "collateral relative of the royal family." Naithany seems to refer to Hastidal Chauntara, who was the Gorkha Governor of Garhwal (Kamboj 2003:129).
42   Place of the god or divine place, synonym of mandir/temple.
43   Kalyāṇī and Kālikā both names appear in the Devī Bhāgavatapurāṇa as variations of Durgā (Vijñanananda 1921)

the tradition of Dhārī Devī's discovery. The event of 1894 is already well documented in European historiography (Rana et al. 2013), since early British engineering expertise assumed a decisive role in mitigating the catastrophe. The common pattern of the most severe and well known floods in this area is the sequence of a landslide event (LLOF) followed by a subsequent breach of the temporary dam (Parkash 2015).[44] This was also the course of events in 1894. One year before, in September 1893, the largest known landslide in the Central Himalayas had blocked the Birahiganga River with an estimated "5000 million tonnes of rock mass" and formed a lake "270 m high, 3 km wide at the base and 600 m wide at the summit" (Rana et al. 2013:1209). District Surveyor T.H. Holland had inspected the newly created Lake Gohna together with the Superintending Army Engineer Lieutenant Colonel Pulford. A British Army soldier, Lieutenant Crookshank, was then deployed at the site of the lake to survey the situation and collect data (Shah 2014, Ray 2016) (Figure 5). With the help of a newly set up telegraph system for "real-time monitoring and timely warning of the flood" (Rana et al. 2013:1209), he was able to transmit information as well as trigger the alarm. Based on the data collected, the engineers were in the position to predict the probable moment when the dam would eventually overflow. They calculated that the water body would be stable for about a year until it was filled enough to spill over and breach the dam (Rana et al. 2013). The delegation managed also to forecast the likely flood level along the river quite accurately. They expected a flash flood all the way down to Haridwar. To mitigate the magnitude of the hazard, they took far-reaching measures.

> Around May 1894, pilgrim traffic on the way to Kedarnath and Badrinath was diverted to the new pedestrian route which was constructed much above the anticipated flood level. Similarly, eight suspension bridges between Chamoli and Haridwar were dismantled in order to protect them from being washed away from the anticipated flood. (Rana et al. 2013:1209f)

> Eventually, on August 24, 1894 the moment had come;

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44   In his study of the flash floods in 2012, Parkash has pointed out the predominant mechanisms behind these flood events. "Each time the story is almost same. A heavy precipitation infinite [*sic*] water into the scope mass and increase scope water pressure and see pace [*sic*] forces into the loosely jointed rocks in these areas and causes huge mass movement, which tumble down into the rivers and blocks them. Invariably a lake is formed. Either the impounded water overflows the natural dam or the loose barrier gives way. Net result is flash floods and heavy destruction downstream. [. . .] The question arises why such incidences are more in Garhwal as compared to the adjoining areas? The answer is steep hill with loosely jointed slope mass that has been inadverstantly [*sic*] used for anthropogenic activities, is the main reason for these disasters" (Parkash 2015:22).

> "[. . .] at 8 o'clock in the morning, an automatic bell, placed within a foot of the top of the dam, sounded the first note of alarm. The warning was communicated throughout the whole of the threatened territory almost instantaneously by means of telegraphic messages, bonfires, rockets, the beating of drums, and other signals, and the people immediately fled, with all their cattle and personal belongings, into the hills." (The Times 1894, as cited in Nature 1894:501)

Almost exactly as predicted, part of the lake overflowed at midnight on August 25 and sent a mighty flood wave down the valley. The force of the water washed away vast swathes of land and human settlements in the Alaknanda river basin (see Kala 2014:144) and the water level, which rose up to 50 metres (Agarwal & Narain 1991), destroyed the entire city of Srinagar (Rana et al. 2013; Shah 2014; Nature 1894). Yet, due to the precautionary measures described, there were only five human victims (Champati Ray et al. 2016).[45]

Figure 5. Photograph of Lieutenant Crookshank at the Gohna Lake on August 25, 1894 (Source: Shah 2014). Around midnight of the same day the upper portion of the dam collapsed.

Now in terms of the River Goddess—the flash flood also reached the site of Dhārī Devī and its impact dramatically transformed the landscape features of the location. There was apparently a resting place at this location in the past (cf. Chapter 2.2).

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45   "[. . .] no lives were lost except those five persons who insisted on remaining just below the dam. They were members of a family which had returned to the danger zone after having been forcibly removed from it" (Champati Ray et al. 2016:241). Shah (2014:6) adds that it was a family of fakirs.

An indication of this is the former name of the land that surrounded the rock on which the Goddess dwelt, namely *māṇḍā tok* (Naithany 1995)*. While *tok* as a pre-colonial expression designates the land of a temple (Kukreti 2016), the meaning of *māṇḍā* used to be *viśrāmālaya* (recreation place) or *dharmśālā*. Such a facility required a larger, flat terrain, and this is said to have existed near the village of Kaliyasaur. A document from 1886 bears testimony to the earlier presence of two state-run *dharmśālās* at the site of Kālikādevī (Dhārī) (Nathany 1995). The account of a British traveller in 1853 confirms that there were already *dharmśālās* on the way to Kedarnath (Whitmore 2010:57).[46] Another factor supporting the theory of the temple area as a former stopover of pilgrims and traders is the existence of a grotto, the Jogini Cave. Caves on important roads were seen both as dwellings of gods and served as shelters for people (Naithany 1995:495).

During Naithany's research, two elderly people from the village Dhari had told him their grandparents' accounts of this event (Naithany 1995:473); the oncoming torrent had formed a powerful sidestream which reached the temple from the opposite bank of the river. This surge of water then shot up onto the flat agricultural land on the temple side of Kaliyasaur. There, the water destroyed all the structures that existed in the place before: the stalls of the small market, the *māṇḍā* (*dharmśālā*),[47] as well as the entrance to the old cave. Moreover, this flood also razed the *sāngo*, a special rope bridge used in earlier times to cross the river (cf. Figure 6).[48]

Set up against the described background unfolds the second "origin" story of the Goddess. It begins after the powerful flood had receded and with a dispirited *dhunār* named Kunju.

> बाढ़ का पानी घटने पर सांगा/झूला के मात्र रस्सों के रहने से रोजगार से मायूस धारी का कुंजू धुनार टीपे में बनी अपनी झोपडी में बेचैन एक रात को अभी लेटा ही था कि अचानक आवाज सुनाई दी – हे कुंजू! हे कुंजू! कुंजू उठकर बहार आया। आवाज़ अभी भी उसे ही दी जा रही थी जो गंगापार (कलियासौड़ चट्टान) से आ रही थी। कुंजू! मुझे ऊपर गाड (निकाल)। कुंजू घबड़ाया पर साहस करके पूछा – तुम कौन हो! उत्तर मिला – मैं जो भी हूँ, पर मुझे निकाल। कुंजू गंगातट के घाट, बाट, पोड़, पखान, रौ, भंवर सब जानता था। धुनार जो था, इसलिए समझ गया की जहां पर करारी चट्टानें सीधे लम्बवत

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46   This fact is ascribed to the careful planning and broader development of infrastructure by the British colonisers to improve access to the pilgrimage sites of Kedarnath and Badrinath (Whitmore 2010:54).

47   While Nathany (1995) uses the term *māṇḍā* synonymously for *dharmśālā*, the *pūjārīs* (Chapter 2.3) seem to be referring to the entire marketplace with it.

48   While the reports of the British intervention state that eight suspension bridges along the course of the river were dismantled, it appears from the narrative that this did not apply to the bridge between Kaliyasaur and Dhari.

Figure 6. Illustration of a former neighbouring Sāngo
(Rope Bridge) at Srinagar not far from the Site of the Goddess
Dhārī. "The Rope Bridge at Sirinagur" by Thomas Daniell (1805).

खड़ी हैं, वहीं से आवाज आ रही है। हिम्मत करके वह रस्सों के बल पर ठपके
मारता चला आया और वहां से नीचे को झांकते हुए बोला – मैं कैसे निकलू।
कैसे उतरूँ। "तू उतरना तो शुरू कर"। [. . .] कि ज्यों-ज्यों कुंजू निचे बढ़ता,
एक पांव रखने की छोटी खुडली/सीढ़ी जैसी जगह अपने आप बनती जाती।
तब वह देवी मूर्ति को पीठ में बांधकर ले आया और अपूर्व जोश में भरकर उन्हीं
चट्टानों के मध्य में उच्च स्थान पर टिका दिया। कुंजू पर देवभाव था अतः देवी
से उसका वार्तालाप हो रहा था। (Naithany 1995:473f)

After the flood waters receded, the Dhunār Kunju from Dhari was
distressed about his work, for the only thing left from the bridge
were the ropes. One night he was already restlessly laying in bed
in the hut, which was situated on a small hill, when he suddenly
heard a voice calling: "He Kunju! He Kunju!" Kunju got up and
went out. Even then, the voice coming from the other side of the
Gaṅgā (from the rock of Kaliyasaur) spoke to him, "Kunju! Pull
me up." Kunju got scared, but gathered all his courage and asked:
"who are you?" He received the answer: "who ever I am, just
pull me up." Kunju knew everything on the banks of the Ganges,

every nook and cranny—the *ghāṭ*, the path, the rocks and stones, the little puddles and whirlpools. He was a *dhunār*, so he understood that the voice came from where the rugged, vertical rock stood. He mustered his courage and with the strength of the ropes he hurled himself to the other side and from there, peering down, he asked: "How can I pull you up? How can I come down?" "Simply start to come down." [. . .].[49] Thereupon, small stair-like patches formed by themselves, on which one could place a foot. Then he took the statue of the Devī, tied it to his back, and filled with an enthusiasm he had never experienced before, he installed it at an elevated spot in the middle of the rocks. Kunju had piety,[50] for this reason he was able to communicate with the deity.[51]

This is probably the best-known story of Dhārī Devī's discovery and rescue from the river. Apart from pointing to the putative circumstances of the Goddess's emergence at this site, the account of Kunju can be also understood as a metaphor for the process a person goes through in overcoming adversity. With the flood wave, the *dhunār* initially loses his livelihood—the bridge—and falls into a deep state of despair. But then, through interaction with the divine and the river—and with their guidance—he regains his strength and self-confidence. The story is a reminder that the river gives and takes, first it destroyed a source of income, but then it brought new hope in the form of the divine and as will soon be shown (Chapter 2.3.4), with the washed up deity it also provided a direct means of sustenance.

There is another version that I labelled the Brahmanic narrative of the, in this case rediscovery, of Dhārī Devī because it differs explicitly in that it omits the role of the *dhunār* in it, who belongs to the Scheduled Castes. As will be examined in more detail shortly, some of the origin stories respectively their different versions bear marks of communal discord (Chapter 2.3). This modified legend, however,

49   Naithany (1995) reports at this point that his interlocutor insisted on leading him to the river and onto the rocks to show him the old trail Kunju had climbed down. Under the former bridge on the Kaliyasaur side he actually saw 7–8 steps. However, he found it difficult to tell whether they were constructed by the *dhunār* people to ascend and descend for their work or whether Kunju had built them himself to retrieve the submerged statue from the water.

50   The term *devbhāv*, meaning piety, is a little vague in this context. It rather seems that Naithany is alluding to the potential function of people of lower castes as a medium for a deity.

51   This section of the narrative is followed by a second part, which appears to be quite unconnected to the first and was perhaps added later. Therein Kunju expresses his doubts about the installation of the statue on the site with a view of the village Dhari and all its exposed human abysses, and in this sense the conversation between him and the Goddess continues (Naithany 1995) (see Chapter 2.4).

does not regard the flood as the first sighting of the Goddess, but presumes an already earlier existence of the deity at this place, a hypothesis indeed backed by documents. The chapter on the deity in the historian's book (Naithany 1995) lists various evidences for land of a temple, which had existed there already before the 1894 flash flood swept through, such as some Nepali documents. The existence of a replica of Dhārī Devī's statue, still kept by her side, likewise supports the assumption that the original effigy had only temporarily disappeared from its place by the river.[52] As further attested, during the statue's absence a local *pūjārī* with the name Brihaspati had this reproduction made. This "Brahmin version" accordingly tells how the Goddess left her place merely for a certain period of time. In this episode the Goddess displays quite a share of agency. The tale actually sounds as if she consciously chose to go along with the flood as part of her personal entertainment or *līlā*, the divine play. Similarly, her rediscovery and reinstallation was also based on her active intervention.

कहते हैं कि क्षेत्रीय ग्रामवासी इन्हें अपने ईष्ट [*sic*] देवी या कुल देवी में पूजते थे, जब गढ़वाल में भयंकर बाढ़ की त्रासदी विरही नदी के जल प्रवाह के रुक जाने से हुई, तो उसी समय माँ की कौतुहल लीला भी हुई। और माँ स्वयं अलकनंदा की तलहटी में अपने मूल स्थान से हठ[53] [*sic*] कर रहने लगी। क्षेत्रीय ग्रामवासियों जिनकी मां ईष्ट देवी थी। और भक्त लोगों को मां के दिव्य विग्रह देखें बिना बड़ा ही दुःख हुआ। और मां के विग्रह की प्राप्ति हेतु बड़े व्याकुल भाव से खोज करने लगे, तब मां ने अपने भक्तों की दशा देखकर रात्रि में अपने एक भक्त के स्वप्न में आकर दर्शन दिए। पुनः दूसरे दिन उस भक्त ने मां के उसी स्थान पर दर्शन किये [*sic*], जहाँ पर उसने मां को स्वप्न में देखा था। यह बात वह उसने क्षेत्रवासियों में व अन्य ग्रामीणों में बतायी, तब सभी लोग मां के प्रति अगाध श्रद्धा लेकर उसी स्थान पर गए जहाँ सभी के दर्शन प्राप्त हुए। तभी पुनः आकाश से उन्हें अलौकिक देववाणी सुनायी दी जिसने कहा कि मेरे विग्रह को पुनः उसी स्थान पर प्रतिष्ठित करो तथा मेरी पूजा-अर्चना शुरू करो। तब भक्तों द्वारा उसी स्थान पर मां के विग्रह को पुनः प्राण प्रतिष्ठित किया गया। (Pandey 2005:15)

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52 "इसे पुजारी बृहस्पति ने स्थानीय या श्रीनगर के मूर्तिकार से बनवाया था, क्योंकि मुख्या मूर्ति विरही बाढ़ (1894 ई.) आने से लुप्त हो गई थी। बृहस्पति जी के 1895 ई. के आस-पास के आवेदन पत्र से यह बात स्पष्ट हो जाती है।" (Naithany 1995:472). "The *Pūjārī* Brihaspati had ordered it [the statue] from the local or the *mūrtikār* (sculptor) in Srinagar, because the main statue had disappeared with the arrival of the Virahi flood (1894). This fact became clear from the letter of request that the honourable Brihaspati wrote around 1895."

53 Probably it was meant to be *haṭ* (*haṭnā*: to disappear, go away and with *se*—from a place) instead of *haṭh*.

It is said that the region's villagers revered her as their *iṣṭa devī*
or *kul devī*.[54] When a terrible flood tragedy occurred in Garhwal
because the flow of the Virahi River was blocked, then at the same
time the divine play of the mother unfolded and Mã̃ [polite form
of address for "mother"] herself went away from her abode in the
foothills of the Alaknanda. The regional villagers, whose *iṣṭa devī*
was the Mã̃, and the worshippers were very sad without the sight
of the divine idol and to retrieve Mã̃'s physical embodiment, they
desperately launched a search operation. Then the Mã̃, after seeing
the condition of her devotees, appeared in a night dream of one of
her worshippers. The next day, this devotee rediscovered the Mã̃
in the exact place where he had seen her in his dream. He told the
matter to the residents of the area and other villagers, and all the
people went with deep reverence to the very spot where everyone
saw her. Then the supernatural voice sounded again from heaven
saying, "reinstall my idol in the same place and begin to worship
me." Thus, the devotees once again performed the *prāṇa pratiṣṭhit*
[installation ritual] for the idol of the Mã̃ at her former place.

Naithany adds to these legends that after the disappearance of the deity in the
Virahi Flood and the recovery of the effigy, a "vicious circle" was set in motion
as the statue was washed away again on several occasions. Another flood event in
1924 was similarly severe and the water reached about the same level as the Birahi
Flood in 1885. The disaster of 1924 was the result of three days' continuous rain in
September of the same year, leading to flash floods and landslides.

The 1924 rainstorm, with its centre 64 km east of Roorkee, lasted
over three days and was the severest on record to have affected
western Uttar Pradesh. A depression originated in the Bay of
Bengal on September 23, which finally dissipated between Sep-
tember 28–30 in the Simla-Kumaon hills. [. . .] The mountainous
portion of the Ganga basin up to Hardwar also received 350 mm
rainfall in the three days of the storm. (Agarwal & Narain 1991:33)

54   "A *kul* deity is the goddess or god of the kinship unit, termed *kula* or *kul*, to which a
Hindu belongs either by birth or by marriage. [. . .] *Kul* is therefore translated by scholars
as either 'clan,' 'lineage,' 'extended family,' or 'family.' The meaning of the terms for the
deities connected with the particular *kuls* varies accordingly from place to place and group
to group. Nevertheless, there are certain common features, the most common of which is
the belief that kul deities protect the groups with which they are associated" (Luchesi 2018).
The *iṣṭadevatā* on the other hand is the god of one's own choice, the deity an individual
chooses to worship.

There is not much information on the impact of this flood or details about its devastating force at the location of the Goddess, apart from the fact that the statue had disappeared. The accompanying narrative, as presented in the book, is rather sober and this time covers an apparent dispute within the Brahmin community. After the statue had been lost to the river one more time, people now assumed that the *devī* would remain in the "*jal samādhi* of the holy Gaṅgā" (Naithany 1995:475) for good. But after the flood, when the water was clear again, it was decided to carry out another search operation along the river bank. This time it was a Pandey from Kaliyasaur named Shivram who spotted the statue. Instead of announcing his discovery though, he kept it a secret. Later he quietly went to the temple priest, the Pūjārī Taradatta Pandey, with his request, "brother, if I tell you where the statue of the deity is, what do I get?" (ibid.). Thus forced, the *pūjārī* promised him a piece of land in Kaliyasaur. Curiously, this time too, 40 years later, it was the same Dhunār Kunju who retrieved the statue from the water, whereupon it was re-installed. Kunju allegedly had to be involved in the operation because the *pūjārī* and some other people had failed to pull the statue out of the water. The text further states that Shivram received his piece of land, but due to his deviousness, he lost the right to perform worship in the temple. This meant he could not become *pūjārī*. The events surrounding the rediscovery of the Goddess Dhārī are oddly dated with unusual precision to August 24, 1924 (ibid.). According to other sources though, the extreme precipitation event as the initial cause of the flood had not occurred until September 1924. The information about what appears to be a major family dispute or the transgression of one of the villagers is not very significant in this context, but the stories reveal several interesting aspects about the alleged characteristics of the *dhunār* people, a topic that will be explored in the next chapter.

As a first conclusion, here is a reflection on the role of the Goddess, her relationship to the village society and their both ways of coping with floods as conveyed in the collected stories. Dhārī Devī arose from the river, she arrived at her place with a flood and floods swept her away a number of times. Yet she exhibits a high degree of agency in the occurrence of the hydrological events. The concept of *līlā*,[55] the divine play, as in Pandey's story, could be taken as a central concept epitomising her particular agency in the floods. *Līlā* is the playful element in her relationship with the river and its seasonal variations. She uses the floods for her journeys and disappearances, and her active role assumes great importance in her recovery stories. In Pandey's account, she is depicted as a mother who has vanished, thereby urging her "children" to go in search for her. Then her discovery or rediscovery is equally based on the deity's agency. This is because she initiates a transcendental form of communication, she makes her voice heard in order to be found, and subsequently she reveals (*darśan*) herself to the worshippers. But

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55   See Sax (1995) on the concept of *līlā*.

the Goddess does not only play a divine game of hide-and-seek with her devotees, she simultaneously tests their faith. The worshippers, as with conducting a search operation for the divinity, have to prove themselves worthy of their Goddess and her presence. Then finally she also chooses the place on the rock where she wants to be installed (as in the *dhunār* stories), or reinstalled (as in the Pandey story). A pattern that comes to the fore here is the active role the gods play in the culture of the mountain region. One of the foundations of religious life in the Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand is the interaction of the locals with their gods. This feature also forms part of the origin stories of various deities and they are an active participant in shaping their places.[56] Even though the floods thus give and take Goddess Dhārī, she is not seen as their victim (more on this in Chapter 2.3.2), but she embraces the deluges for her own purposes. The floods, on the other hand, create her place by perpetually transforming its features, form her identity as part of the river and its rhythms, and also constantly reproduce and reaffirm her divine presence and power.

Both versions of the statue's retrieval from the river, but even more so the one covering the *dhunār*, show distinctive ways of coping with floods. What becomes evident in the perception of floods outlined here is that they are seen as a natural and sporadically recurring phenomenon. Their emergence itself is not questioned, nor labelled or subjected to further investigation. This feature may have been informed by the influential role of the members of the Scheduled Castes on these narratives. The tale of the *dhunār* in particular shows the unique skills of some members of this population group and their special connection to the Goddess and the river. There is the ability to communicate with the transcendental being, which implies the possibility of receiving her instructions and to function as a medium for the Goddess. This narrative likewise illustrates the special bond of this individual person or, more generally, of the respective part of the village society with the river. The *dhunār* story emphasises the intimacy of the protagonist with every physical detail of the shoreline, with hidden currents and the intrinsic qualities of the river. Whereas these people are thus intimately linked to the riverscape, the stream and the different states of its water and are in a constant exchange with the river's agency, this specialised form of relationship also implies their unique ecological knowledge and expertise concerning the watercourse (see next chapter). Continuous interaction processes therefore not only shaped the Dalits' conception of floods as part of nature's rhythms, but this ecological understanding contributed to shaping ideas about the Goddess's flood experience. Even the "Brahmin" story, which attempts to downplay the influential role of one person from the Scheduled Castes on the recovery of the statue—and thus on the process of the Goddess's

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56   See e.g. Sax (2009:29) on how a deity chooses the location for its installation and the place of its worship.

identity formation, had to acknowledge these special abilities of the "other" population group. The special skill in this case, however, was not so much the art of communicating with the divine, but rather the mere ability to swim. In this sense, even the modified or "brahmanised" narrative, had to assign a subordinate role to the *dhunār* people, because if there had been no one to retrieve the Goddess from the river, there would have been no deity.

2.2   The *Dhunār*, the River People

> धुनार – नदियों में झूला बांधते हैं, नव चलते हैं व मछली पकड़ने का पेशा करते हैं। (Ratūrī 1980). Dhunār—Their profession is to fix bridges, to navigate boats and to catch fish in the rivers.

> धुनार – उस जाती विशेष का व्यक्ति जो प्राचीन काल में नदियों पर रस्सियों के पुल बनाकर लोगों को नदी पार करवाती थी और बदले में किराया वसूल करती थी। (Benjwal & Purohit 2007:249). Dhunār—The specialised people of this caste in the old time built rope bridges at the rivers, then they transported people over the river and charged some fee in exchange.

The two related villages—Kaliyasaur on the side of the temple and Dhārī on the other side of the river—are located at a narrow passage of the river Alaknanda. The place used to be a ford to cross the river. The presence of the *dhunār* caste in the villages, which is the caste of the boatpeople, or people who would help passersby to traverse to the other shore with the means of a primitive rope bridge, underscores this fact. The site bears the typical marks of a physical, but also of a metaphysical transit point, a *tīrtha*, which is described as a place with heightened prospects of a transcendental experience (Eck 2012:7). Yet in the past, the location of the ford seems to have been above all an important transit point on the main trade route to Tibet and Central Asia that led along the river (Whitmore 2010). From the 13th century onwards, passage fees charged from merchants and profits from pilgrim traffic had turned into the main sources of revenue for the states of Garhwal and Kumaon (Whitmore 2010). This reflects the already existing high frequency of movements of these groups. In his chapter on the Goddess Dhārī, historian Naithany (1995) refers to the passage of the Bhotiya traders in this part of the Himalayas. Their caravans wandered on the two parallel footpaths along the Ganges/Alaknanda riverbank and also had their fixed campsites along this route. Whenever a rock fall happened, a landslide or some Ganges' erosion occurred, the trader parties passed over to the other bank and continued their journey.

Crossing places required to be narrow and to be edged by high rocks, so that a *sāngo*,[57] a traditional rope bridge, could be fixed (Figure 6). As such sites then attracted further infrastructure, settlements of *dhunār*, small shops, resting places, *dharmśālās*, as well as temples and other buildings gradually emerged. Naithany speculates that this scenario of the ford's formation could be related to the establishment of the sacred site of the Devī (Naithany 1995:490).

Consistent with the above definitions and the information I collected on the ground—the *dhunār* of village Dhari were the people who brought goods and persons via the rope bridge called *sango/sanga* to the other side of the river.[58] There are also other definitions of the ethnic group, as in the narrative of Saklani (1991:68) presented earlier, where the *dhunār* is referred to as boatman, whereas M. P. Joshi and Brown give the literal translation of *dhunār* as "people engaged in the washed-down material" (1987:309). They further state that the *dhunār* caste lived "along the course of the rivulet Panaar flowing between the Almora and Pithorgarh Districts," adding that their main occupation until the early 20th century was to collect gold dust from the said river. According to D. R. Purohit of HNB Garhwal University, Srinagar, prior to taking care of the rope bridges, the *dhunār* built a kind of inflatable boats made of rhinoceros skin to carry people across the river (personal communication, Nov. 15, 2018). Besides transport matters, they were also responsible for all kinds of rescue operations; for people who had fallen into the river or for their bodies after they had drowned (ibid.). They can obviously take on various tasks, but the central theme remains that they are considered as labourers doing work connected to the river. Thus, bound to the river they are the river people of Garhwal.

As should have become clear by now, the social production of floods and the flood-related identity building of the Goddess are significantly influenced by the presence of different social groups in the fabric of village society. This section therefore looks at the issue and significance of caste in the state of Garhwal to provide further insight into this unfolding conflict in the context of a development project. First a brief outline of the Dalits' position in relation to environmental struggles under the prevailing development paradigm. This is followed by

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57   Also called *sāṅgā jhūlā, ḍūṇḍā, ḍiṇḍālā*.
58   "यदि दिशा, ध्याणी [विवाहित बेटी], छोटे बच्चे, बकरे को लेजाना है, तो धुनार उन्हें पीठ में लादे अल्प मजदूरी (डड्वार) में सांगौ पार करा देते थे ।" (Naithany 1995:501). "When the newly married girls, small children and goats had to be taken in either direction, the *dhunār* fixed them on the back and brought them for a meagre wage (*ḍaḍvār*) over the Sango." The *ḍaḍvār* (from "tenth") system meant that after the harvesting seasons the part of the population involved in agriculture, supplied part of the harvest as a payment to craftsmen according to the work they had carried out. Further occupations bound to receive *ḍaḍvār* were "Public works workers [. . .] Village watchman, village messenger, bridge maker (Jhuliya); boatmen (Dhunar) and Tantriks [. . .]" (Kukreti 2014).

a general description of the specifics of the caste system in the mountain region. The introductory lines already depicted the particularities of the caste subgroup that is the most connected to the river—the *dhunār*. This group, belonging to the Scheduled Castes, is not only the one most affected by and connected to floods, but is consequently the most active group in the creation of accounts on floods. As a Dalit subgroup and part of the most vulnerable section of society, however, they are also those who are maximally affected by the implementation of development programmes. In the following, it will be examined how this triad of mentioned determinants mutually affects each other. That means to investigate how caste influences ideas about the river, about floods and the manifestations of the divine along the watercourse and how these according imaginations then feed into a conflict accompanying the implementation of a hydropower plant.

The mere presence of the factor caste in an environment-related discourse is an endemic feature that only emerges in a South Asian context. But even if the role of the lowest castes or strata of society in connection with an ecological and thus socio-political controversy is a meaningful topic, cultural sensitivities frequently impede examination by researchers (cf. Drew 2017:113, Sax 2009). Yet, it is precisely the special relationship of the underprivileged sections of Indian society to their environment that makes it highly relevant to consider their different interpretations of their micro- and macrocosm and their approach to environmental issues and challenges, especially from a contemporary perspective. Mukul Sharma (2017), in his book on caste and nature, discusses the particular bond of Dalits with nature and how this social group consequently developed distinctive forms of environmental thought. Portraying their experience of environment as highly divergent from that of other, higher castes groups, he states that "Dalit eco-experiences have their own vibrancy and dynamism. Living with nature, they are constantly negotiating with, and challenging, caste domination, while simultaneously articulating their environmental imagination" (M. Sharma 2017:XIV).

Dalits however are either often excluded from "certain mainstream environmental frameworks" (M. Sharma 2017:63) or, as Sharma further observes, "usually merged in the general definition of poor, marginal, vulnerable, displaced, environmental refugees, and migrants" (M. Sharma 2017:3). Most environmental dialogues are determined and permeated by Hindu thought and conducted from a Brahminical perspective. Even in contemporary research, there are few studies that include the Dalits' perceptions of the environment in relation to issues such as "labour, natural resources, village communities, food, animals, vegetarianism and development" (M. Sharma 2017:63). One explanation for the absence of Dalit positions in environmental dialogues is that their concerns are still not formulated in a contemporary environmental language (M. Sharma 2017). As a matter of fact, even environmental discourses that aim to strengthen the status of Dalits or to improve their situation are informed by a Brahmin approach. In coining the term

"eco-casteism," Sharma reasons that "[. . .] certain mainstream environmental frameworks implicitly endorse dominant Brahminical understandings of natural belonging and unnatural pollution in which Dalits are either invisible, or 'naturalized,' or present as victims to be uplifted through benevolent paternalism" (M. Sharma 2017:63). Beyond these more general aspects, M. Sharma exposes the diverse forms of subjugation of Dalits through the element water.

> Water is a deeply contentious issue, intersecting with caste, class, and gender in India in multifaceted ways and producing complex cultural meanings and social hierarchies. Culturally, politically, and economically it has been a source of power. It has been controlled by the powerful and used as a means to exert control over others. It has been a traditional medium for exclusion of Dalits in overt and covert ways: denying Dalits the right over, and access to, water; asserting monopoly of upper castes over waterbodies, including rivers, wells, tanks, and taps; constructing casteist water texts in cultural and religious domains; obscuring Dalit narratives and knowledge of water; and rendering thinking and speaking about caste, water, and Dalits together as peripheral to discourses on water. (M. Sharma 2017:162)

Not only is there this complex and conflictual relationship of Dalits and other lowest social strata to water, but also development projects based on water affect these groups significantly. A study of the social impacts in the implementation of the Narmada River Project (Neuss 2012) showed how the specifics of a resource conflict impinge on the cultural identity of different social groups. Apart from affecting compensation issues, belonging to certain castes or, as here in the Narmada Valley, Scheduled Tribes,[59] also directly influences the preservation and salvation of religious symbols, places and artefacts. In the Narmada valley a greater focus in terms of restoration and relocation of religious sites of significance had been placed on:

> [. . .] the Hindu places of worship significant for the *parikramāvāsis* [the pilgrims who wander along the Narmada] and leave aside those, which are of importance for tribal groups or which were situated in more remote areas along the banks of the river not directly adjacent to the *parikramāpatha* [the pilgrimage path]. (Neuss 2012:201)

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59   Though M. Sharma (2017) recognises an overlap in the environmental concerns of Dalits and Adivasis, he considers and treats them as two different categories.

As a result, tribal places of worship, which consisted solely of natural features, were submerged without exception. Yet despite the fact that the lowest segments of society and their cultural symbols are disproportionately affected by these projects, environmental movements not only largely exclude these groups, but often even support a conception of the world based on caste ideas.

> [. . .] several environment movements bring out their caste blindness, or more importantly, their implicit pro-caste and anti-Dalit bias. Movements such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan and the Chilka Bachao Andolan deployed a creative redefinition of human rights by closely linking their movements with rights to life and livelihood, but issues of Dalits and caste discrimination were neglected. (M. Sharma 2017:4)

Turning now to the specific features of the caste system in Garhwal. Distinct from most parts of the subcontinent, the mountain region is described as being largely dominated by only two different social groups. Saraswati categorised the social fabric prevailing in Uttarakhand as a divide between "*uttam* and *nicha*" [top and bottom] (1978:52) and observed the absence of an intermediate rank. Although the distinction between the two major groups appears to be less rigid in terms of occupational categories, a clear demarcation is found between the Brahmins and Rajputs on one end and the "others," the lower castes, on the opposite end. The Brahmins and Rajputs are generally grouped together because of their proximity in terms of equal status and the possibility of intermarriage (also P.C. Joshi 2009). This is similarly true for the lower castes. They are pooled together into a caste cluster comprising many distinct endogamous groups, commonly known as Śilpkār. Śilpkār, which originally means craftsmen or artisans, here encompasses several other occupational groups (V. Kumar 2001) classified as Dalits[60]

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60   There are still different opinions on how to appropriately name the Dalits in the Himalayan states, and several sources, especially older ones, tend to use a nomenclature that seems critical in a modern context. Saraswati (1978) for example still refers to the respective Dalit groups in the Seventies with the designation "Dom" (also Doom or Dome), even if this expression was already rejected as discriminatory as early as in 1932, respectively it was unconstitutional since independence (Kukreti 2017). The preferred term in the Western Himalayas seems to be "Harijans" (lit. born of Hari [Viṣṇu], but is commonly translated as children of God), a designation shaped by Gandhi (Sax 2009, A.K. Joshi 2001). Sax (2009) expounded in detail on his earlier dilemma regarding the wording for the respective population group. "It is difficult to decide which term to use for the lowest castes in Garhwal. 'Untouchable' is offensive to many, and 'untouchability' is in any case illegal in India. 'Scheduled Caste' is a cumbersome and rather vague term, though it is often used by people of this group. 'Dalit' (literally, 'oppressed person') is preferred by those who are politically active and aware, but the word is hardly known in the Central Himalayas"

(A. K. Joshi 2001). The *dhunār* thus belong to the various subgroups of the Dalits in the mountain region.[61] The Dalit population in the state is however much smaller in number than the upper castes. According to the 2001 Census of India, their share in Garhwal accounts for 15.3 percent (Census of India 2001:2).

The strong division between high and low castes or the presence of the two clearly delineated sections of the mountain society is often framed as a divide between "native groups and immigrants" P. C. Joshi (2009:75; also R. Rawat 2004). This is the case even though the period of "invasion" dates back far to the Mughal era between the 15th and 18th century. During this phase, the ancestors of the Brahmins and Rajputs are said to have arrived from different places in the Indian lowlands (Ratoodi 1988, as cited in Chahal et al. 2008). Historians speculate that one trigger for the migration wave was the persecution of these castes by the Mughal rulers (Chahal et al. 2008:410). Yet despite the long time span, this historical trajectory still feeds social inequality and injustice, which seems particularly remarkable given the paradox that the "immigrants" have a higher status than the "native inhabitants" (P. C. Joshi 2009; A. K. Joshi 2001). The extreme separation of the different ethnic groups, which persists due to endogamous practices, is even reflected in the genetic structure of the people of Uttarakhand:

> [. . .] all the Shilpkar groups are differentiated from the remaining groups of Brahmin, Rajput and Bhotia. The genetic constitution of the Shilpkar (a scheduled caste population of Uttarakhand) and to a lesser extent that of the Bhotia (a scheduled tribe population of Uttarakhand) are rather different from both the Brahmin and Rajput high-caste populations, which tend to show genetic similarities between them. (Chahal et al. 2008:409)

The genetic study thus supports the common assumption that the present Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs/STs) of the state were the earlier inhabitants (V. Kumar 2001) or the "autochthons of the Central Himalayas" (Chahal et al. 2008:410).

As indicated in the last paragraph, the Dalit population is exposed to long-established customs of social oppression. Despite this, there seems to be a widely accepted and even academically supported narrative among non-Dalits in the hills that the Garhwal region faces much less caste discrimination than other regions

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(2009:24). On this basis, he concluded that "Harijan" would constitute the best alternative, as it is not only ideologically neutral, but also the most widespread in its use.

61   The *dhunār* appear among the following groups, "[. . .] aujis, darjis, lobar, koli, teli, tamta, dhunar, badi, kolta, mistri, roria, kevat, dom, hurakia, od, etc [. . .]" (V. Kumar 2001:4536).

of India (e.g. P. C. Joshi 2009:73; R. Rawat 2004:15).[62] While it is true that Dalits are less economically dependent on the higher castes as they usually own some land (Sax 2009; V. Kumar 2001), the presence of discriminatory practices is unmistakable:

> Still, the suffering of the Harijans in the region is quite real. They endure constant humiliation and discrimination. They are not allowed to enter the homes of the highest castes; they are often addressed as 'boy' or 'girl,' using the familiar pronoun ('tu') that is otherwise reserved for children and animals; they must wash their own cups at the village tea-stall. (Sax 2009:25)

And even as landowners, "they usually have much less land than the higher castes, and are therefore often compelled to work for them as dependent day-laborers, with all of the humiliation such labor entails" (Sax 2009:26). Confirming the wide gap between higher and lower castes in Garhwal, Polit (2005) describes how it goes along with enormous socio-economic disparities. This includes the lack of access to medical services for Dalits, as well as their exclusion from ritual practices. Historical records of the Dalit situation, such as a study of the Dalit Reform Movement in British Kumaon (A. K. Joshi 2001), clearly demonstrate the centuries of adversity and suffering experienced by Dalits even in the mountain region of Uttarakhand. Following this account, the former situation of Dalits was also no better than in the rest of the country, and they were considered untouchables, just like their counterparts in the plains (Viyogi & Ansari 2010). One of the testimonies

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62   R. Rawat (2004) for example describes the demarcation between castes as much more informal and considers the expression of many taboos, such as those relating to food and trade, to be laxer than in the lowlands. P. C. Joshi (2009), adopting an extreme position, even talks about only negligible caste differences and an absence of caste discrimination in the mountain area (P. C. Joshi 2009:73). While this author traces the historical trajectory of the Dalits in the state, he adds a distinctly romanticising note to the description of the historical situation. "Different caste groups, though far less in numbers than in the plains, have lived in symbiotic interdependence as a harmonious unit at the level of the village for ages. Destitution and degradation of the lower castes is unknown. Society duly acknowledges the contribution of a lower caste person, who is not treated as a distant species, but rather as a pillar of social organization" (P. C. Joshi 2009:77). This supposedly paradisiacal primordial state was only brought to an end when the British appeared on the scene. "The freedom and informality of intercaste relations suffered a jolt in the British period when the Sanskritic model was applied to define intercaste status" (P. C. Joshi 2009:78). In stark contrast to these statements, other commentators tend to suggest that the conditions of the various castes eased slightly with the arrival of the British, but improved markedly only at an even later stage, with the arrival of larger nationwide political movements in the region (Negi 1995, as cited in R. Rawat, 2004:15)."

to the disadvantaged position of this social class is that even the Mahatma Gandhi suspended the Satyagraha movement in British Garhwal. He did so after learning of several assaults by high caste men on participants of a Dalit movement called *ḍolā-pālkī*.[63]

As already highlighted by M. Sharma (2017), caste differences are particularly evident in relation to questions of access to water. Strang and Krause likewise noted that the "habitation along watercourses is [. . .] indicative of social order" (2013:98). This also applies for Garhwal, where the segregation and social status of caste groups is reflected in the different distribution and location of land and spatial division, including their position to water bodies, but also in architectural features (Sax 2009). Sax (2009) pointed out that the Harijans of a village usually live separate from the living space of the higher castes and that their domain is often demarcated by a rivulet or some other natural feature (see also V. Kumar 2001:4536). These visible disparities persist even in the wake of general economic growth; while the traditional houses of the upper castes are increasingly being replaced by modern well-equipped concrete buildings, the dwellings of the lower classes tend to remain rather basic (Sax 2009).

The respective spatial distribution of the different castes is also clearly discernible in the village Dhari, even if the differences in architectural features may not be as significant nowadays. This is certainly in part because the entire village has benefited to some extent from financial grants provided by the hydropower company. While the upper caste section is located on the left side of the village (seen from the opposite side of the river), the *dhunār* settlement is a little further upstream, on the right side. Some of the Dalit houses had previously stood at a lower level closer to the river and had to be shifted during the construction process. In an obvious contrast to the observation of Krause and Strang, who attribute the priority in the arrangement of the village buildings to considerations of access to supposedly clean or "pure" water,[64] the positioning of the houses here in the area is rather determined by the evaluation of hazard posed by water. This manifested itself in the fact that the dwellings of the lower classes are or were located in a zone that is more prone

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63   "In Garhwal, the *dola-palki* movement had sparked off in 1924, which was a mass protest against the ban on the lower castes for using *dola-palkis* (crude forms of palanquins) in their marriage procession. Under the leadership of Jayanand Bharati, in a marriage procession of *shilpkars*, the bride and the bride groom were taken in a *dola-palkis* [*sic*]. On its return journey, the marriage party was looted by the upper castes near Dogadda, in Garhwal. This act of defiance against an arbitrary restriction, marked an awakening among the dalits" (A. K. Joshi 2001:978).

64   As they pointed out, families from the higher social classes tended to live upstream and therefore in places where the water was cleaner or "purer," while people from the lower social spectrum lived downstream and had to put up with "polluted" water (Krause & Strang 2013:98).

to both flooding and erosion. The location of the agricultural land of the *dhunār* and their houses in the lower zone was thus originally considered rather disadvantageous because of the proximity to the river and the greater vulnerability associated with it. However, it was precisely this position of their property that experienced a significant upgrade with the planning of the hydropower project. Owning this land had become profitable as it was the land the company needed the most. Rumours circulated about large sums of compensation that some members of the lower caste had received for their property. There was even a committee called Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar Development and Struggle Committee (Das & Jindal 2011:27f)[65] formed by the Dalits from the affected villages. In a letter to the investigation committee of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) in 2011 (Das & Jindal 2011), Dalit representatives listed the various compensation budgets they had received, or were entitled to during the construction and land acquisition processes. This was a clear indication of their positive stance towards the project (Figure 7).

This document testifies that, at least temporarily, it was mainly the Scheduled Castes of the villages who supported the hydropower project. To get their agenda across, they explicitly stressed the socially beneficial side and thus the general prospect of an improvement in the social situation that the project would mean, especially for the disadvantaged part of society.[66] At other stages though, there were indications that the Dalits in this locality were also facing the well-known problems of unequal treatment associated with development schemes. Especially dam projects are contested in terms of their social costs (Chapter 1.2.1; 4.1) and the unequal distribution of compensation for land acquisitions by development projects is a frequently ascertained phenomenon.[67] This regularly results in the weaker sections of society receiving no, inadequate or less financial compensation than the more powerful groups and actors. The manifestation of this feature here too, is evident in the complaint of an affected person at the site of the Srinagar project.

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65   "डॉ भीमराव अम्बेडकर विकास एवं संघर्ष समिति"

66   As the report of the MoEF recalls, "A group of project supporters from Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Vikas and Sangrash Samiti met with the team on 6th June, 2011 and handed over their representation [. . .]. The Samiti in general expressed its happiness with the R&R provided by the proponent and supported the project. lt further mentioned that all people from the affected area support raising of Dhari Devi Temple and its beautification and only a few outsiders who are not even related/affected by the project, are opposing the submergence of Dhari Devi Temple" (Das & Jindal 2011:7).

67   See, for example, the developments around neighbouring Tehri Dam. Here too, decades after the completion of the project, there are still recurring claims for compensation and lawsuits about unfulfilled promises on the part of disadvantaged groups and actors (see Upadhyay 2016).

डॉ० भीमराव अम्बेडकर विकास एवं संघर्ष समिति

मंगसू, गुगली, सुरासू चौरास टिहरी (गढ़वाल)

रजि० नं0- 27/2008-2009

अध्यक्ष-   महासचिव   उपाध्यक्ष

श्री वचदेव भारद्वाज (पूर्व सैनिक)   श्री प्रेम लाल कड्डकोटी (पूर्व राजस्व विभाग)   श्रीमती विनीता बहुगुणा (पूर्व प्रधान)

संरक्षक

माधवानन्द बहुगुणा
(पूर्व सैनिक)

कोषाध्यक्ष
त्रिवेदी चन्द्र

सलाहकार
महेश चन्द्र जोशी

संगठन मंत्री
रघुवीर लाल कोहली

सहसचिव
इन्द्रा देवी

प्रवक्ता
महेश चन्द्र भारद्वाज

सलाहकार
मोहन लाल राठी
जगदीश चन्द्र
(एडवोकेट) देहरादून

पत्रांक...222...   दिनांक...06...06.11

सेवा में,

माननीय, प्रधानमंत्री महोदय,
भारत सरकार, नई दिल्ली।

विषयः   श्रीनगर जलविद्युत परियोजना के निर्माण कार्य को सुचारू (continue) रखने के सम्बन्ध में।

महोदय,

उपरोक्त विषयक आपको अवगत कराना चाहते है कि देवभूमि उत्तराखण्ड के श्रीनगर चौरास क्षेत्र में जल विद्युत परियोजना निर्माण हेतु कार्यदायी संस्था अलकनन्दा हाइड्रो पावर कम्पनी लि०, द्वारा सभी प्रभावित कास्तकारों एवं समस्त प्रभावित क्षेत्रीय जनता की भावनाओं के अनुरूप सुविधाए प्रदान कर सन 2007 में प्रोजेक्ट कार्य प्रारम्भ कर दिया गया था।

महोदय आप के सज्ञान में लाना चाहते है कि सिंचाई विभाग, उत्तर प्रदेश के द्वारा भूमि एवं भवन अधिग्रहण के समय (सन 1980 में), सम्बन्धित भूमिघरों को किसी भी प्रकार का लाभ नही दिया, अलकनन्दा हाइड्रो पावर कम्पनी लि० द्वारा परियोजना निर्माण कार्य को आरम्भ में ही हमारी वार्ता इस संदर्भ में परियोजना निदेशक, महोदय के साथ हुई तथा प्रत्येक प्रभावित परिवार को व्यक्तिगत समझौते के आधार पर उनकी अपेक्षा के अनुकूल समस्त निम्नांकित सुविधाओं से लाभान्वित कर दिया गया तथा किया जा रहा है।

1. अनुसूचित जाति के प्रत्येक परिवार के भवन का सरकारी संस्था पी०डब्ल्यू०डी० द्वारा मूल्यांकन कर प्राकलन तैयार किया गया तथा कुल भवन के लागत की 10 गुना से अधिक धनराशि प्रदान कर गई।

2. पूर्व में सिंचाई विभाग द्वारा अधिग्रहित भूमि का रू0 20,000.00 प्रति नाली की दर से अतिरिक्त मुआवजा के आधार पर प्रत्येक कास्तकार को दिया गया।

3. भवन प्रभावितों के आग्रह पर, कम्पनी द्वारा पूर्व में जिन भवनों का सम्पूर्ण भुगतान कर दिया गया था उनको अतिरिक्त के रूप पूर्व में किये गये भुगतान राशि का 30 प्रतिशत भुगतान पुनः दिया गया।

4. प्रत्येक प्रभावित परिवारों के विवाहित सदस्यों को कम्पनी द्वारा रू0 2,90,000 गौशाला के लिए दिए गये।

5. कंपनी द्वारा प्रत्येक प्रभावित परिवार को स्वच्छता बनाये रखने के लिए शौचालय भत्ते के रूप में रू0 30,000.00 मुआवजा दिया गया।

6. विस्थापन के पश्चात प्रत्येक कास्तकार को भवन की चारदीवारी के लिए प्राकलन के आधार पर मुआवजा राशि प्रदान की गई।

7. अनुसूचित जाति के प्रत्येक परिवार को बच्चों की शिक्षा के लिए कम्पनी द्वारा आर्थिक सहायता प्रदान की जाती है।

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Figure 7. First Page of the Letter of the Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar Vikas evam Sangharsh Samiti to the Expert Team of the MoEF (Source: Das & Jindal 2011:27ff).

> The decision making rights are given for the privileged class people of the village and the small group of schedule castes people are away from the process consequently, they lost their rights of ownership of agricultural land." He further says, "for the construction of Dhari Devi Temple, which is coming under submergence, 9 crore rupees has been sanctioned and for those who are cultivating their crops on their own land for last 30 years are excluded for any compensation because the land is not recorded on their name in the government revenue records. (V. P. Sati 2015:2274)

Lack of documentation of land ownership, especially of the poorer sections of society, is also an often-cited problem in the implementation of large-scale projects, as it goes hand in hand with inadequate compensation. Another indication of the inequitable treatment of the village groups was the emerging protest of the Scheduled Castes in Kaliyasaur in 2015, shortly before the commissioning of the hydropower plant. When the Dalits drew attention to their situation, their demands sounded quite different from the enthusiasm shown during the earlier days and their full approval of the project.

> ग्रामीणों ने 622 मीटर की ऊंचाई तक अधिग्रहीत भूमि का प्रतिकर, 22 अप्रैल 2010 के अनुबंध पत्र के अनुसार पुजारी वर्ग के भांति अनुसूचित जाति के लोगों को भी हक-हकूक, स्थायी रोजगार, मंदिर से सटी दुकानों में रोजगार प्रभावित होने पर मुआवजा, नरसिंह और नागराजा देवताओं के मंदिर निर्माण तथा धारी देवी मंदिर की सुरक्षा के लिए पुख्ता इंतजाम करने की मांग की। (Amar Ujālā, 2015, Jan. 16)

> The villagers demanded compensation for the acquired land up to an altitude of 622 meters, and like the *pūjārī* caste, according to the contract letter from April 22, 2010, also for the Scheduled Castes people their various [temple-related] rights, permanent employment, compensation for the affected jobs in the shops adjacent to the temple, the construction of temples for the deities Narsingh and Nagraja, as well as the implementation of concrete arrangements to protect the Dhārī Devī Temple.

Other reports alleged that up to 35 *nālī* (a land measurement unit) of Scheduled Caste villagers' fields had fallen under the project (Dainik Jāgraṇ 2015, Jan. 16)[68] or

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68   "उनकी 35 नाली से अधिक खेती परियोजना की चपेट में आ चुकी है और उन्हें अभी तक कोई पैकेज नहीं मिला।" (Dainik Jāgraṇ 2015, Jan. 16). "More than 35 *nālī* of their fields have already

had already been acquired by the company in 2006–07 (Amar Ujālā 2015, May 6), but that the villagers had not received any compensation.[69] On the occasion of the 100th day of protest by the Ādyā Śakti Mã̄ Maitī Devī Samiti (ASMMDS), as the Scheduled Castes' protest committee was called, a member of the social organisation South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP) pointed out that the "[. . .] SHEP [Srinagar Hydro Electric Project] has neither acknowledged nor compensated drowning of additional 25 acres of agricultural land belonging to Schedule Cast [*sic*] tribe of *Kaliyasaur* village" (B. S. Rawat 2015). Further details of these allegations, which formed the basis for the protests in 2015, will not be discussed here, as it is beyond the period and focus of the investigation. By arguing that "caste matters," this chapter aimed to offer insights into the ramified problematic of caste. It also sought to raise awareness of the fact that the social and economic differentiation of the mountain society triggered certain processes that accompanied the implementation of the project. In this way, it was demonstrated that caste exerted an influence on the understanding of the deity and the further interpretation of floods. For the argument of the next chapter, if was also important to recognise why the lower social class of the villages around the project site strongly supported the implementation of the project.

2.3   Contested and Transitory History— Brahmin versus Dalit Narratives

> [. . .] claims about temple history have little to do with a record of past facts but, instead, provide an idiom in which individuals and groups make claims about current status hierarchies. History thus has more in common with fiction or argument than with fact. [. . .] all stories about temple history (including ethnographies) are political. Contenders in prestige battles invoke the authority of an ever-changing but supposedly stable 'tradition' to legitimize current practices, statuses, and power. (Gamburd 2000:953)

come under the grasp of the project and so far, they have not received any [compensation] package."

69 "ज्ञापन में कहा गया है कि परियोजना की कार्यदायी संस्था जीवीके ने वर्ष 2006–07 में धारी गांव के अनुसूचित जाति काश्तकारों की भूमि अधिग्रहीत की थी, लेकिन ग्रामीणों को आज तक मुआवजा नहीं दिया गया है।" (Amar Ujālā, 2015, May 6). "The memorandum stated that the implementing agency of the project, GVK, acquired the land of the Scheduled Caste farmers in 2006–07 but has not paid any compensation to the villagers till date."

As the existence of divergent versions of the story of Dhārī led into a domain permeated by caste thinking, we will now take a closer look into how divisions along caste lines and the ideas about the Goddess's relation to floods and the river fed into a debate about the deity's movability and thus influenced the discourse and the negotiations accompanying the construction of the hydroelectric power plant near Srinagar. By exploring the ramified attributions of meaning that evolved at the local level, the aim is to show how the presence of a development project not only exposed the deep chasm separating the conflicting parties in the affected villages, but also left its mark on local narratives.

At some point during the planning stage for the relocation of the temple, the Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust (2011) published and circulated a leaflet on its own behalf. It was titled "Brief description of the Ādyaśakti Mã̄ Kalyāṇeśvarī Siddhapīṭh Dhārī Devī Temple (refutation of misinformation and rumours)."[70] The notice was apparently handed out to visitors of the temple and also printed in one of the local newspapers.[71] The controversial content of the brochure illustrates that, at least temporarily, there were serious disputes between the two caste-separated village groups about the future of the local living space. The eight-page document came in response to another brochure that had previously been distributed by members of the Scheduled Castes from Dhari and other surrounding villages. Although the earlier pamphlet of the Scheduled Castes is not available and the present paper is undated, it contains a reference to a meeting of the Scheduled Castes on August 9, 2010 following which the Dalits issued their leaflet. This suggests that the publication of the text discussed here took place a few weeks later, at the latest in early 2011. Despite its absence, the content of the Dalits' brochure can be more or less inferred from the points under discussion in the *pūjārī* pamphlet. As the introduction into the flood history of the Goddess disclosed, some of these tales imply a privileged relationship of the *dhunār* people to the deity, and it is this fact in particular that became the subject of contention here. These disparities in dealing with the history of the site are, however, the only instance during the construction phase of the hydropower plant where caste-related differences surfaced so prominently.[72] The leaflet of the temple trust, in summary aims to convey to the public the following information:

70   आद्यशक्ति माँ कल्याणेश्वरी सिद्धपीठ धारी देवी मंदिर का संक्षिप्त विवरण (कुप्रचारित तथ्यों एवम बातों का खंण्डन [*sic*]).
71   However, I did not come across the publication during my newspaper research. One of the activists against the resettlement of the Goddess was in possession of the document and provided me with a copy.
72   Only later, after the statue had already been moved to the makeshift temple on the new platform, members of the Scheduled Caste protested near the site for several months because of alleged discrimination with regard to compensation issues (see previous chapter).

1. that the community of the Scheduled Castes, the *dhunār*, have no right over the Goddess,
2. that their declaration of the Goddess as movable is wrong,
3. that the *dhunār*—as evidenced by the village history—are of a low character, which accordingly renders their claims of any sort negligible.

With comprehensive statements supporting these claims, the text offers firstly an approximate idea of the current state of affairs and the negotiations on the relocation of the Goddess. Secondly, it paints a picture—albeit exaggerated in parts—of the social fabric of the village, its underlying hierarchical order and the features of caste dominance. To prove their point and to underline their perception of the past as the only one valid, the *pūjārīs* bring up different historical incidents and court cases, involving the two caste groups, the Dhunār Dalits and the Pandey Brahmins. When looking at these stories, what not surprisingly stands out is that the members of the upper caste inform their own, distinctive and customised versions of past memories. In this way, the document content-wise largely confirms the characteristics of caste dynamics in the mountain region as already identified in the previous chapter and at the same time reiterates that this also applies to social interaction processes at this location. After an excursus on aspects of spatial flexibility regarding embodiments of the divine, the following sections examine by which means the history of the place was successively renegotiated.

2.3.1   On the Question of Mobility— How Mobile are the Gods?

The construction of the hydropower project and the necessary relocation of the temple raised the central question of whether the Goddess Dhārī possessed an inherently mobile quality—or whether she was rather an intrinsically static deity. Already the key aspect permeating this investigation is transformation and movement. Movement is the initial focus, as the stated aim of this analysis is to trace the flow and fluidity of understandings about a place of worship. When looking at the changing determinants of the discourse on floods and the Goddess and the fluctuating entanglements of human and non-human actors, the primary emphasis is on movement. However, there are more manifestations of movement than being embedded in the sequence of events and the flow of interpretations. It comes as an intrinsic quality of water and is related to all its symbolic meanings. Movement is the main factor connecting water, the river and the Goddess, and movement is most evident when the water is in its wildest manifestation—in the form of cathartic processes like floods. It was in this regard that the river, the water and its floods emerged as crucial elements in the debates about the deity's mobile

or immobile nature. This subchapter will provide some basic reflections on how much scope there is in general for mobility and movability and thus for the modification of places of worship and the representations of their deities. With its focus on the culture of the Western Himalayan region, this approach also serves to provide a deeper insight into the cultural foundations of the *pahāṛī* (mountain) society.

The question of whether the physical manifestations of deities in the form of images and their abodes in the form of temples can change their location or be worshipped in a different place arose in many other or preceding cases. This became an issue especially when religious sites stood in the way of various kinds of development projects. Often public places of worship had to be either demolished or relocated because of the implementation of such undertakings. Recent examples of major temple relocations include the shifting of the Bali Temple from the newly constructed Mumbai-Agra Highway (Pawar 2012; Sonawane 2015), or the large-scale relocation of religious sites in the city of Jaipur due to the creation of a metro network (Press Trust of India 2015, 2018).[73] Besides the larger temples, especially the small wayside shrines are disproportionately affected by urban as well as rural development projects such as road widening (see Kent 2018).[74] The relocation of the Abu Simbel temples as early as the 1960s due to the construction of the Aswan High Dam in Egypt serves as an example on a global scale (see Brocchieri et al. 2009). The Three Gorges Dam Project in China likewise entailed the displacement of a popular temple (see Le Mentec 2006 for her case study on the temple of Zhang Fei).[75]

Ideas about mobility and stationariness or the spatial fixation of deities have undergone major transformations in the historical development of the subcontinent. In Vedic times, gods were in motion and roamed around in space, while the depiction of sacred places as immovable is a relatively recent concept. Colas

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73   Between 84 to 87 temples were demolished during the construction phase (Press Trust of India 2015).

74   From a different perspective, an article in the Times of India highlights the problem of the proliferation of roadside religious sites and their obstruction of traffic flow (P. Chakraborty 2012).

75   The motifs contained in the genesis of the temple of General Zhang Fei, which Le Mentec studied, bear a striking similarity to those in the legends told about Dhārī Devī. The severed head of the general was thrown into the river by his assassins. Then a fisherman had a dream that told him where to find the skull and thereupon he retrieved it from the water. The fisherman had another vision of Zhang Fei, in which the general ordered him to bury his head in a certain spot. Consequently, the temple was erected there and it is still a living temple today. Moreover, Zhang Fei is not only considered the protector of the district, but also the god of the boatmen. During the construction of the Three Gorges Dam the original temple of Zhang Fei was completely dismantled and rebuilt thirty kilometres upstream (Le Mentec 2006).

2.3 Contested and Transitory History—Brahmin versus Dalit Narratives

(2009) examined this early relationship between Hindu deities and territory. Since in the Vedic system "the material representation of gods" did not yet exist, the gods were "essentially mobile beings" and usually not bound to "any specific earthly territory" (Colas 2009:100). An earlier mobility of deities is associated with the nomadic existence of Indo-European tribes during the Vedic period. Only later, with the emergence of the *Purāṇas* and a "growth of urbanization and, simultaneously, the strengthening of the road-network in the Indian subcontinent in the late first millennium BC" (Ghosh 1973; Thapar 1974, as cited in Colas 2009:103), which accompanied the rise of a more stabilised cosmo-geography, deities assumed an increasingly place-defined character (Colas 2009:103).[76] In the classical Indian literature, deities are accordingly associated with " (. . .) specific geographical perceptions and with particular kingdoms" (Colas 2009:101). Sacred places became a "generally fixed point around which all kinds of architectural changes can take place but they themselves are seemingly predisposed to be immovable" (Michaels 1993:155).[77] This makes a temple, beyond its stationary state, in turn a dynamic assemblage of sacred elements.

> These sites take form—and change meanings—over time, and it is to these processes of growth and alteration [. . .]. "No temple is ever finished," [. . .] as it is continually renewed and remade through "restoration, reoccupation, and self-preservation" (Meister 2008, as cited in Orr 2012). That unfinished state [. . .] means that the temple embodies both "remnants of lived activities" and potentialities and preparations for future use and significance, growing and changing; we are mistaken if we treat temples as inert and bounded entities whose "authentic" form is that of their creation and first appearance and whose meaning is limited to an initial and 'inherent' intent of patron or architect. (Parker 2001, as cited in Orr 2012)

76   Angot points out how the newly established relationship of humans as well as those of their celestial counterparts with the terrestrial geography is expressed in the Mahābhārata, "[. . .] when Yayāti falls from Heaven and Aṣṭaka engages him in conversation, he asks (MBh V.119.15; 4078): *ko bhavān kasya vā bandhur deśasya nagarasya vā* 'Who are you? Of what race, from which country, from which town? Are you a Yakṣa, a Deva, a Gandharva, a Rākṣasa?' Henceforth you are defined by name, ancestry and place" (Angot 2009:92).

77   Kent (2018) or Larios & Voix (2018) highlight that wayside shrines occupy a special position in this respect. These vernacular sacred sites exist rather in a transitional state between temporary and potentially permanent—and are even described as being viewed with mixed feelings by urban dwellers because of "their capacity to morph quickly into a full-fledged shrine" (Kent 2018:1).

Changes to a temple take place not only in the form of structural alterations, additions and renovations, but also through regular maintenance practices.[78] More recently though institutions such as the ASI or HRCE (Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments) Department of Tamil Nadu, and INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) challenged the conception of the temple as a growing and changing unit (Orr 2012). The doctrines espoused by these bodies shifted the focus to the preservation of a supposedly "original" state of the sacred sites. An obsession with the "authentic" and hence a concentration on the central shrine of a temple complex pervades not only the ideas of named institutions, but also of architectural historians (Orr 2012). The imposition of this concept eventually led to a kind of "architectural freezing"; while simultaneously it inhibited cultural practices associated with a living temple. This is evidently in stark contrast to the popular conception of a temple as a building under construction, subject to all sorts of changes, and not as an immutable structure. Whereas notions of a temple as a place in motion often even include the demolition of its central sanctuary, the aspect of immobility resides more in its geographical position. Such an understanding is confirmed by the practices of devotees in any given place. Customs are not limited to a central sanctuary or structure, but embrace the entire spatial extent. Worship practices include several other shrines and relics of a particular site, but veneration also covers its natural features. Given that "the early literature on pilgrimage, and in praise of the dwelling places of the gods on earth, scarcely mention buildings" Orr (2012), it is the most ancient type of religious practice. And this is still true today, especially in the North Indian temple tradition: "the focus for pilgrims in North India seems as often as not to be a mountain peak, a sacred hill, or the banks of the Gaṅgā rather than a particular constructed temple" (Fuller 1988, Toomey 1994, as cited in Orr 2012).[79]

Just as the temple exists in this ambivalent condition between dynamic and static, so too is the bond between the gods and their abode a fluid one.[80] Conceptions about the embodiment of a deity can be ambiguous, as its representation is usually not concentrated in a single figure, such as a statue or symbolic object (Berti 2004:87). While different icons of a temple exhibit varying degrees of mobility, they can be divided into three subcategories. These are *cala*—mobile,

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78 As Orr describes, the necessity of regular repairs or renovations is even reflected in donation practices in Tamil Nadu.
79 Orr (2012) adds that this principle even applies to the architecturally more sophisticated South Indian temples, where the actual temple edifice is considerably less meaningful to the visitors than the location as a whole.
80 On the other hand, Orr (2012) warns of creating a separation between temple and its inherent images, arguing that "in no temple does it make sense to treat the sculpture (the "iconographic program")—or indeed the inscriptions engraved on the temple walls—as something separate from the building itself."

acala—immobile and *calācala*—mobile as well as immobile (G. Rao 1914:17). The main icon in the temple, the *mūlavigraha*, or *dhruva bera* (fixed image),[81] once installed in the *garbhagṛha* (sanctuary) and consecrated, stands for the immobile (*acala*) aspect of the deity (Robinson 1983:25; Haussig 1984:87f).[82] The removal of such an image is deemed an offence, as stated for example in the Matsya Purāṇa. Only if this central figure is seriously damaged it can be replaced by a newly constructed icon (Robinson 1983:25).[83] The *cala*/movable images on the other hand are functional material embodiments of the gods. An *utsava bera* for instance is employed for festivals and processions, or a *snapana bera* is used for ritual bathing. Auxiliary images are usually replicas of the temple's main icon.[84] A division of divine representations is however a common feature in the western Himalayan mountain states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Mobility of deities plays an essential role in the local belief system, as it is a distinctive attribute of the village gods, the *devtās* (divinities).[85] This refers to their—man-supported—customarily conducted journeys and pilgrimages. Ritual processions accompanying a divine chariot (*rath*), are generally more pronounced in the higher parts of the mountains than in their lower reaches.[86] Such differences result from the special requirements and economic necessities of the mountain dwellers and from the nature of the terrain. As people of the high mountains are more dependent on exchanges between different communities for survival, the journeys of the gods with their human entourage serve to strengthen the relationships between the different mountain communities (P. C. Joshi 2009). But the fact that the unique cosmology of the high mountains has been preserved for so long is also due to the inaccessibility of the terrain. Most likely the lower-lying areas were also formerly included in

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81   As Haussig (1984) states, the *dhruva bera*, marked by its position at the central place of the temple, is the focal point or the mental focus of veneration, even when ritual worship turns to other images and statues.

82   But also the main image of the deity can be *calācala*. "The category calācala refers to the main icon, which, in the absence of any subsidiary images, is immobile in the central shrine, but is also taken out on procession on festival occasions and is therefore mobile" (Robinson 1983:27).

83   Robinson here refers to the MP 266.60 (1983:25).

84   Their material is chosen according to function (Robinson 1983). While the movable effigies are made of different sorts of metal, the immovable ones are mostly of stone (G. Rao 1914). It is for instance stated in the Parasamhita (22.16.17) that the image of a deity for festive processions should be small and made exclusively of gold, silver or copper (Robinson 1983:27). Subsidiary images are generally more frequent in the larger South Indian temples than in the smaller North Indian temples.

85   P. C. Joshi (2009) calls them "pahari superhumans," or Berti (2004) *devī-devtā*.

86   As P. C. Joshi's (2009) examples from Himachal Pradesh show, although the custom of travelling deities is still widespread and alive in higher altitude areas like Kullu; already the middle ranges, the lower Shivalik, are inhabited by immobile gods and goddesses.

the same cultural pattern. Yet the mountainous areas below were more exposed to transit movements and were transformed further by waves of immigration from the plains.

The location of the Dhārī Devī Temple is evidently not elevated enough to exhibit clear marks of the ancient customs of the higher regions. The cult around the Goddess Dhārī in fact bears vestiges and imprints of a range of influences. In her district of Pauri only two deities still participate in regular ritual processions and the Goddess from Kaliyasaur village is not involved in this practice (D. R. Purohit,[87] personal communication 2018, Dec. 18). I was however informed about journeys to Kālīmaṭh, her supposed place of origin every 6 years, and of occasional trips to festivals such as the Kumbh Mela. On this occasion, she travels with other mountain deities to the festive sites on the Ganges (e.g. to Haridwar). But this practice seems to be an invented tradition and a predominantly political event, rather than part of an established custom.[88] Yet even if she does not regularly travel, there are other features that associate her with the high mountain cults. Conceptions about her as well as rituals in her honour are clearly influenced by this background of tradition, and so elements of this cultural heritage also informed the discussion about her mobility.

It remains to be established whether, despite an inclination of the regional gods to go on regular journeys, this attribute actually represents a form of mobility, or whether their generally static character is not rather interrupted or extended by mobile phases. The movements of the deities in the Himalayan regions are not necessarily to be understood as indicating an all-encompassing trait of mobility. Among other factors, this is the case because they always return to their fixed places. In examples from Vedic times (Angot 2009:44), the movements of the gods are still understood as acts to create space—it is a movement amorphously elevated from the physical plane and taking place in an undefined and cosmic space. In contrast, the journeys of the gods in the Himalayas take place in the context of territory, and they bear both signs of mobility and immobility. By traveling, the gods mark and assert their territory, and they reaffirm "their ancestral, permanent seat" (Michaels 1993:159). The gods themselves may also embark on spiritually motivated pilgrimages within the divine territory. As they journey to sacred power places like Kedarnath, they recharge their own spiritual energy (Whitmore 2010). Furthermore, they strengthen their "family relations" between different temples and their presiding deities. Sax (1990) describes the journey of the Goddess Nandā Devī in this context as a "divine bride's postmarital journey" (1990:493) and thereby as a clear imitation of women's journeys from their place of origin to the home of their husbands and in-laws (a motif that does indeed reappear, albeit vaguely, in the argumentation for Dhārī Devī's mobility). It is evident that even

87   Professor Emeritus D. R. Purohit of HNB Garhwal University, Srinagar.
88   D. R. Purohit, personal communication Dec. 18, 2018.

through this mobility based on family relations, territories are re-established or reinforced and locations are connected.

As the mobility of the Himalayan gods suggests, the embodiments of the *devtās* are also distributed among different *avatārs* with their respective mobile and immobile characteristics. While here too the main image of the temple is fixed and immobile, there are other journeying iconic forms of the different deities (Berti 2004). In order to facilitate movement, the divine is understood to manifest itself in these different representations. The different forms of incarnations of deities give rise to the question: Where exactly is the god located or where is its supposed presence whenever it is on the road? It is important to note at this point that according to the principles of Hindu iconography, it is not the icons themselves that are venerated, but the divine as represented by this physical or symbolic form. Before a statue can be worshipped, it must be vitalised, or the divine has to be invoked through a "life-giving ceremony (*prāṇapratiṣṭhā*)" (Robinson 1983:60).[89] Same is valid for the mobile representations of deities, they have to be vitalised or provided with the vital principle (*prāṇa*). Berti (2004) points to the problem of locating or demarcating this particular manifestation of the divine in the objects that accompany the ritual *pahāṛī* processions. The *prāṇa* is rather "delocalized and distributed throughout the various components" that are part of the procession, or Berti even argues that "the assemblage is the deity" (Berti 2004:87).[90] The temple additionally still contains the image of the deity, which is venerated even when the god is on its journey. So the deity is not regarded absent when it is on the road. As these considerations demonstrate, there remain many ambiguities, which could potentially be employed in an argument for or against the mobility of a deity and for- or against the possibility of a relocation.

Apart from these Himalayan and culturally specific considerations on mobility, Michaels (1993) noted down some pragmatic reflections on the options of shifting a place of worship along with its divine residents. He had drawn his conclusions from the cases of two different sanctuaries in Deopatan, Nepal. While it was possible to relocate one of the two shrines, this was ruled out for the second. The feasibility of

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89   Robinson describes such a ceremony as follows. "In external worship, the sādhaka first worships inwardly the mental image of the devata which the outer object assists to produce and then by the life-giving ceremony (prāṇapratiṣṭhā) he infuses the outer object with life by communicating to it light, consciousness (caitanya) and energy (tejas) of the Absolute within him" (Robinson 1983:60).

90   "[. . .] the divine presence does not seem to be concentrated in a unique object (for instance, the mohrā), but is delocalized and distributed throughout the various components—the wooden frame, the mohrā, as well as the other items with which the palanquin is prepared. This differs from palanquins and chariots elsewhere in India, in which a figure of the deity, concentrating in it all the divine power, is put on a mobile support. Here, by contrast, the deity's power is present in the whole assemblage of the representation. The assemblage is the deity" (Berti 2004:87).

moving a temple or a similar structure depended essentially on two criteria: "(a) the measure of religious care and protection being given to the deity, (b) the extent to which the deity is (literally) rooted in the soil or population (Michaels 1993:155)." Further, "it seems to be more a question of ritual attention the deities get, for the more a deity is ritually cared for and the more religious attention it gets, the more difficult it is to alterate [*sic*] its locality (1993:155)." Another important factor that surfaced was that the personalities associated with the two Goddesses largely determined the debate about their movability. Whereas Maṅgalagaurī, a form of Pārvatī who is considered a benevolent Goddess, could be resettled without hindrance, it was quite a different matter for the temple of the second Vajreśvarī/Pīgāmāī, a deity of tantric origin. Vajreśvarī/Pīgāmāī was not only respected as the city's tutelary Goddess and she bestowed a sense of identity on the town's Newari population, but she also possessed the typical fierce traits of tantric goddesses. She was known as a dangerous and vengeful Goddess who had to be appeased regularly.[91] Ruled out, however, was that the question of relocation could be answered on the basis of the origin stories of a deity. In this context, it also made no difference whether the manifestation of divinity was "considered to be self-established (svayambhuta) and was accidentaly [*sic*] found by somebody (e.g. a cow) [. . .], or whether it was established by human beings" (Michaels 1993:155). This point is certainly important to mention because, as evidenced in the discussions on the Dhārī Devī Temple, the question of mobility here is largely addressed in terms of the known, imagined and promoted history and the river-based origin stories of Dhārī Devī. In the initial planning phase of the hydropower project, the other criteria observed by Michaels nevertheless also came into play. Back then, the primary issue to be clarified was whether the temple needed to be preserved at all. The fact that this was confirmed (Das & Jindal 2011:10; Lahiri 2011:5) shows that the temple possessed all the characteristics listed: it was a living and popular temple with regularly held ceremonies and an established priesthood.

2.3.2   The 1894 Flood of the Brahmans

सन् 1894 को बिरही ताल टूटने से जब अलकनंदा नदी में भयंकर बाढ़ आई थी तो इसमें नदी किनारे बसी सारी बस्तियां बाढ़ में बहकर समूल नष्ट हो गयी थी। माण्डा नामक इस स्थान में भी देवी के पीछे वाले स्थान पर एक छोटा सा बाजार हुआ करता था तथा पुजारियों व धुनारों के मकान भी थे। बाढ़ इन सबको बहाकर ले गई और पीछे एक सपाट मैदान बनाकर छोड़ गई। पाठकों ज़रा सोचिये इस बाढ़ में जहां टनों भारी बोल्डर बहकर चले गए वहां क्या भगवती

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91   The fact that the preparatory work for the relocation of the temple was already accompanied by the accident of one of the workers responsible was ascribed to the deity; but the public also attributed a natural disaster, an earthquake, to the intention to shift the seat of the deity.

माँ की एक छोटी सी मूर्ति नहीं बह सकती थी? क्या आप इसे भगवती माँ की कृपा नहीं मानेंगे की जिस मूर्ति को अदृश्य शक्ति माँ काली मानकर सारा संसार पूज रहा है उसी मूर्ति को और अपने भक्तों की आस्था को अक्षुण [sic] रखने के लिए उसने उस मूर्ति को उसी चट्टान के नीचे किनारे लगा के बहने से बचाए रखा तथा श्री शिवराम पांडेय [. . .] के स्वप्न में दृष्टया देकर अपनी मूर्ति को फिर से प्रकट भी करवाया। (Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust 2011:1f)

[. . .] श्री शिवराम पाण्डेय जी बताए गए स्थान पर समस्त ग्रामवासी गये जिसमें श्री कुंजू धुनार भी था क्योंकि ये मछली मारने का कार्य करते थे। तथा नदी के किनारों की चट्टान से वाकिफ थे। इस कारण श्री कुंजू को (डड्वार) मजदूरी पर मूर्ति को निकालने हेतु भेजा गया। मूर्ति मिलने के पश्चात मूर्ति का शुद्धिकरण का पुनः प्रतिष्ठित की गयी। (Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust 2011:3f)

In 1894 when due to the breaching of Birahi Tāl [lake] there was a severe flooding in the Alaknanda River, all the settlements along the riverbank were destroyed in the deluge. The same happened at the place called Māṇḍā in the area behind the Goddess, where a small market had been established and where there were also houses of the *pūjārīs* and the *dhunār*. The flood inundated them all and swept them away, and after creating a flat field behind it, it withdrew. Readers think about it, in this flood, where tons of heavy boulders were washed away, couldn't a small statue of Mā̃ Bhagavatī be carried away? Would you not consider it to be the mercy of Mā̃ Bhagavatī, that this statue, which is supposed to be the invisible female energy of Mā̃ Kālī, and which is worshipped by the whole world, that she herself attached this statue—also in order to keep the faith of the devotees intact—to the bank underneath the rock and saved it from being swept away; as well as showing herself in the dream of Shivram Pandey, and thus taking care of the renewed appearance of her statue.

[. . .] All the villagers went to the place told by Shivram Pandey, at which also Kunju Dhunār was present, because he used to do the task of killing fish. Moreover, he was familiar with the rock at the bank of the river. For this reason, Kunju was sent as a labourer (*ḍaḍvār*)[92] to retrieve the statue. After the retrieval of the statue and the purification of the statue, it was reinstalled.

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92 The principle of *ḍaḍvār* has already been outlined in the preceding chapter (footnote no. 58), here a further definition from the Garhwali-Hindi dictionary. "डड्वार: फसल पर

Although the document of the Brahmins clarifies that what happened during the flood of 1894 is not the birth story of the Goddess, it nevertheless provides the above-mentioned version of her disappearance and discovery in the course of that flood. This is obviously done to set the facts straight about this incident. Just like in Pandey's (2005) booklet, the text suggests that the Goddess wields a dominant agency and that she is the mastermind behind her temporary withdrawal. What is striking when comparing the accounts of the different groups is that the extent of agency actually seems to be greater in the Brahmin stories than in those of the Dalits. While in the *dhunār* narrative she is still seen more as a part of the river and to some extent at the mercy of the natural forces—even though she later interacts with the Dhunār Kunju—in the Brahmin narrative she is made superior to the water and the devastating tidal wave that shoots down the valley. On the contrary, the Brahmanical interpretation declares it as inconceivable or sacrilegious to assume that the Goddess could be swept away by the whim of some natural element. So although the force of the water is so immensely strong that it tears away boulders and annihilates a market place, the statue or its indwelling divine presence was not truly subjected to this onslaught of the forces of nature. Instead, it deliberately and purposefully attached itself to a lower place on the rock in the course of the disaster. These different levels of affinity of the Goddess with the element water could be taken as a metaphor for the divergent experiences of the different groups with the river. The *dhunār*, with their centuries-long proximity to the stream, also illustrate in their narrative the perceived tremendous power of water. Whereas the Brahmins, who are more detached from the natural element, do not acknowledge its dominance but recognise it in a more abstracted form of the divine. In this particular case, however, the overemphasis of the Goddess's power and agency in the flood is clearly purposeful, because this version of the story seeks to prove that the disappearance of the Goddess during the flood did not represent a place change. The text of the pamphlet strongly condemns the Dalits' idea that the absence of the statue after the flood signifies that there had been a change of location.

> पर्चे में देवी की मूर्ति का सन् 1894 की बाढ़ में क्षणिक जलमग्न हो जाने को देवी के स्थान बदलने का कुप्रचार किया गया है क्योंकि ये अज्ञानी लोग इसे [*sic*] देवी का स्थान बदलना समझ रहे हैं। (Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust 2011:2)

ब्राह्मण, 'औजी' या 'लुहार' को दिया जाने वाला फसल का हिस्सा" (Benjwal & Purohit 2007:201). "Ḍaḍvār is the share of agricultural crops given from the Brahmans to the Auji or Lohar caste at the time of harvest." Although the dictionary lists only two of the Dalit occupational groups for which *ḍaḍvār* is provided, the earlier definition already showed that the *dhunār* were also typically included in this system.

> Due to the momentary submergence of the statue of the Goddess in the flood in 1894, the pamphlet [of the *dhunār* people] puts forth the malicious propaganda that the Goddess has changed the place, because these stupid people understand it as a change of the location of the Goddess.[93]

A further point that lead to strong indignation among the Pandeys is that the Dalits, based on the historical narratives, do actually claim to be the people who installed the statue. At this very idea the text fulminates:

> इनके पर्चे में केवल यह प्रयास किया गया है की मूर्ति इनके वंशजों द्वारा स्थापित की गई है और उस पर उनका हक़ बनता है जो की आगे वर्णित साक्ष्यों व प्रमाणों के आधार पर असत्य सिद्ध हो जाएगा। शायद पर्चा छपवाकर जनता को भ्रम में रखना और अपना हक़ जताना ही पर्चा छपवाने का मूल उद्देश्य लगता है। (Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust 2011:2)

> Their pamphlet simply attempts [to prove] that the statue was installed by their ancestors and would therefore fall under their right, which will be proven false based on the following described testimonies and evidence. Perhaps the main intention of publishing this pamphlet was to keep the public in confusion and to raise their entitlement.

Countering the purported appropriation of the deity by the *dhunār* community, the *pūjārī* text makes every effort to emphasise that they themselves are the people who have all rights over the Goddess. To this end, the brochure uses all stylistic finesses to show the low position of the Dalits and the fact that they have literally no rights. The most interesting deviation from earlier *dhunār* storyline in this respect is the fact that the Dhunār Kunju still participates in the recovery of the effigy after the flood, but in a subordinate role and from a cultural perspective in a secondary position.[94] From a visionary with a special transcendental connection to the Goddess, who himself has set up the statue in its proposed place, he became a simple labourer, hired to salvage the statue and rewarded in the form of *ḍaḍvār*.[95]

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93   The insulting of the Dalits as stupid in this excerpt is only one example of a string of other verbal abuses. See the section about the depiction of the *dhunār* in 2.3.4 for further elaborations on this subject.

94   This is also congruent with the second recovery story in Naithany's book, where likewise the emphasis was placed on his ability to swim for why his assistance was needed (1995:475; cf. Chapter 2.1).

95   Naithany also mentions at some point in connection with this story that the *dhunār* received a "princely salary."

Instead of exhibiting the special ability of some members of the lower caste to experience visions and communicate with the divine, the Kunju thus only fulfils a subordinate task.[96] Now his presence at the site where the statue was found is the result of mere coincidence—or even worse—he is not there by chance, but because he was involved in the menial task of catching fish in the river. In this way he is deprived of his visionary dream, which led to the discovery of the statue. This is because here it is not his dream either, but the dream of the "dishonourable" Shivram Pandey (cf. Chapter 2.1), according to the Naithany chapter a person who was not even involved in the recovery process after the flood of 1894, but in another flood event in 1924.

2.3.3 Detached from Floods—the Brahmin Account of the Goddess's Emergence

Now, if the Brahmin community rejects the claim that the Goddess is an offshoot of the natural elements or that her origin was subject to the extreme expressions of the river in the form of floods—what was the genesis of the deity according to this brahmanic understanding? What is the traditional version of her first appearance among this stratum of society? The people of Brahmin descent, when it comes to the presumed roots of the Goddess, tend primarily to base their argument on rational considerations and to emphasise that the Goddess or the site of the temple already existed before the flood of 1894. Their argumentation on this question is ostensibly more linear and substantiated by historiographical approaches, while the stories of the *dhunār*, on the other hand, show the typical features of oral history. The *pūjārīs* refer in this context to the presentation in Shivprasad Naithany's book and also to the historical records introduced in Chapter 2.1 to support their perspective on the historical setting. A member of the Pandey community is allegedly still in possession of the original documents today, which had

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96   According to D. R. Purohit (personal communication, Nov. 15, 2018), the Devī's would not possess a person from a lower caste, but only descend on members of the higher castes. The lower castes, however, would only be possessed by their "own" gods, such as Bhairav Nath. Contradicting this idea on the other hand, Berreman stated that "[. . .] Brahmins play a smaller and much less creative role in village religion than do various, usually low caste, non-Brahmanical practitioners such as shamans, diviners, exorcists, and spell-casters. [. . .] They cast spells, counteract spells, detect theft, find lost objects, cure illness, foretell the future, read omens, and do a host of related activities. It is they who determine what gods are to be worshipped, in what manner, and under what circumstances. [. . .] In this role they not infrequently pass judgement on disputes. They hold the welfare of particular households or entire villages in their hands. They do this not as low caste people, but as technical experts or as vehicles for the voices of the supernatural" (Berreman 1961:337).

allowed Naithany to access them. As the existence of these testimonies reveals, the establishment of the Goddess must have occurred even before the dates given in the Nepali documents of which the oldest one is from 1807 (Naithany 1995:477). The answer from the text of the leaflet to the question raised above as to what the Pandey caste considers to be the emergence of the deity can be derived from the following statement.

> ऐसी मान्यता है कि जगतगुरु आचार्य शंकराचार्य जी जिन्होंने श्रीनगर क्षेत्र में जब देव्यपराधक्षमापनस्त्रोत्रम की रचना की तो उन्होंने भी माँ के दर्शन किये क्योंकि श्री बद्री केदार जाने का एकमात्र पैदल मार्ग इसी मांडा नमक स्थान से था यही कारण है की आज तक माँ की आरती में इसी स्त्रोत [*sic*] को गया जाता है। (Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust 2011:8)

> It is believed that when Jagatguru Ācārya Śaṅkarācārya created the *devyaparādhakṣamāpanastotram*[97] in the Srinagar area, he also came to see (*darśan*) the mother because the only path to go to Badri Kedar led through this place called Manda. This is the reason that till today this *stotra* is chanted during the *ārti* for the mother.

Although this may not look exactly like a creation story, according to the understanding of the Brahmins, this incident is the first formally acknowledged emergence of Goddess Dhārī. Already Pandey (2005) in his booklet about the place of the Devī explicitly said that the worship of the Goddess began with the passing of the Śaṅkarācārya at this ford or narrow place on the river. The given myth comprises the meeting of a young maiden—the personification of the primordial female energy—with the Śaṅkarācārya at this place, and this brief encounter translates into the recognition of the Śakti by the Śaṅkarācārya.

> At a time when Buddhism was exerting its wide influence in Uttaranchal, the Ādi Jagat Guru Śaṅkarācārya arrived. Then the footpath to the Badrinarayan (Badrinath) and to Kedarnath led past this place. As the Śaṅkarācārya wandered by, his health suddenly deteriorated and he developed a serious stomach problem. Exhausted he laid down, but since he was without water, he became distraught. Just then, a girl came along the path, who had filled a vessel by the river with water. He asked her for water, at which point the girl began to speak with the voice of the divine

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97   The correct Sanskrit spelling would be *devyaparādhakṣamāpaṇastotram* and the translation: "Hymn to the Devī to seek forgiveness from sins."

mother saying, "you only believe in one God, but you don't believe in nature (the Śakti), go and ask this God for water." Thereupon the wise Śaṅkarācārya understood that it was not an ordinary girl, but the personification of the highest female power, the Śakti. He bowed to the mother's feet—and the mother, after she had revealed herself to him, disappeared. At the place where she had appeared, he installed the divine idol and since then there had been the *pūjā* for the mother. (own translation from Pandey 2005:15)

The Brahmin favoured testimony concerning the origin of the Goddess is thus the linkage of the place to the great tradition of the Śaṅkarācārya. Whitmore (2010) pointed out that a number of interpretations regarding the history of Garhwal associate the Brahmanisation of the region with the figure of the renowned philosopher. Despite considerable doubts that he ever came to the region in person (Wilke 1996), his alleged arrival is said to have shifted the emphasis of the prevailing ideological currents in the area away from the former dominance of Vajrayana and Mahayana Buddhism and towards Shaivism (Whitmore 2010).[98]

It is a commonly observed motif to associate places with the visit of a sage in order to increase their symbolic significance (e.g. Sax 1991; Wilke 1996).[99] Already in the Mahābhārata it was stated that the auspiciousness of pilgrimage sites is to a large extent connected to the (temporary) presence of a saintly character (Sax 1990). Given that the emergence of the stories about the Śaṅkarācārya signified a general ideological paradigm shift, it is therefore consistent with the understanding of the Brahmin part of the village society that their Goddess came into being when her territory fell under the influence of their respective cultural framework. It goes without saying that by integrating the Goddess and her imaginary past into the Brahmanic tradition, the rights to her and also to the administration of the temple fall within the scope of the Brahmans. The flood events, on the other hand, although the *pūjārī* community in its accounts acknowledges their earlier

98 As Wilke (1996:135) elucidated, there is no unequivocal evidentiary basis for the established assumption that the Śaṅkara himself founded monasteries in all parts of India. It is speculated that most of the texts attributed to Śaṅkarācārya were written by the respective leaders of the maṭhas (the monasteries of the Śaṅkara lineage), who also bore the title Śaṅkarācārya. The author further explains; "as this title had also become the designation of their famous preceptor the confusion could easily take place, even more so because all pontiffs are considered to be incarnations of Śaṅkara" (Wilke 1996:135).

99 In this context, Sax explained in more detail: "according to the Indian epic Mahābhārata, for instance, pilgrimage places are auspicious because of the extraordinary power of their earth and the efficacy of their water, and because they were frequented by the sages" (1991:12).

occurrence, are dismissed as rather meaningless for the general nature of the deity. From this perspective therefore, although the Goddess or some form of the divine may have been present in this place beforehand, the arrival of the Śaṅkarācārya is the moment when she is recognised or "born" as a legitimate Goddess. With regard to the ownership interests of the Brahmin community, namely to prove the rights to the Goddess, it was obviously necessary to establish a conceptual separation from the river and the natural elements. Otherwise, the Goddess in tight association with the stream and its vagaries would always fall within the domain of the social group that is most closely connected to the river. A re-shaping of her identity was therefore imperative, and this was done by embedding her in a more abstract ideological system and tradition. And in this way, by estranging her from the river, she was also alienated from the realm of the river people. The pattern points again back to the period of the Śaṅkarācārya, where the appropriation of goddesses into a Brahmanic system took place on a broader scale and thus constituted the general feature of historical developments. Wilke (1996) sees the historical value of the stories ascribed to the Śaṅkarācārya insofar as they indicate transformations concerning forms of goddess worship:

> Śaṅkara is styled as a great reformer who 'purified' destructive cults; he is portrayed as a powerful *yogin*; as a victorious disputant in any debate, converting his opponents; and as knowledgeable in every kind of wisdom. Being quite fanciful narratives and composed hardly prior to the 14th century, these life stories have no historical value in the literal sense. Their suggestive meaning, however, may reflect historical changes in goddess worship and its incorporation in other strata of society, from so called folk traditions and tribal origins to royal courts and Śaṅkara *maṭhas*, the institutions of orthodox Brahmanism. (Wilke 1996:138)

These—still ongoing—developments, were accompanied by a metamorphosis of the fierce goddesses into more benign manifestations of the primal female energy (Wilke 1996:124) and they clearly find their reflection in the diverging stories about Goddess Dhārī.[100] With regard to the discourse underlying the controversy about the temple relocation, however, the relatively tame and more abstract

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100 Wilke (1996) further elaborates on the religious paradigm shift that the Śaṅkara brought about first in South India and which then spread throughout South Asia; "It is claimed that Śaṅkara thus initiated a major cult reform in South India which was carried on by his successors, namely the establishment of a chaste Vedic (*vaidika*) goddess worship untainted by Tantric elements (*tāntrika*) and the elimination of 'objectionable' practices such as oblations of blood, alcohol, human flesh and sexual rites" (1996:124).

alternative story on which the Brahmins built their Dhārī Devī memoirs proved not to be too significant for the public reception. The idea of a holy sage blessing the place through his presence lacked the captivating power of dramatic stories about forces of nature forming a place and endowing it with a particular identity. This was also true for the interpretation process of the flood in 2013 (Chapter 5.2). Although the story of the Ādi Śaṅkarācārya received some mention, the stronger images of the Goddess and her connection to the flood were much more pronounced.[101]

2.3.4   Abolishment of the Sacrifice Practice

Another narrative strand in the conflictual debate that revolved around the entitlement to the Goddess arose in relation to the earlier practice of animal sacrifice. The abolishment of this practice appears to have constituted a key moment in the history of the villages, which cemented a deep-seated rift between the two communities. Moreover, it presumably shaped the attitude of the *dhunār* people concerning the temple relocation—and eventually the form of their flood related argumentation. As the different sources reveal, throughout the times, both castes kept on fighting for their specific rights over the Goddess and as the current *pūjārī* record shows, this dispute was then taken into negotiations for compensation and other questions related to the Srinagar Dam Project. Naturally, whoever had more rights to the Goddess also had more chances to benefit from the monetary remuneration that was granted by the executing agency. One important insight that is gained here is how much the temple and the Goddess were and are a part of the livelihood of all members of the village population. This clearly gave a strong impetus to the kind of arguments used in favour of, or against the construction of the new temple. Since this central event in the village history had a strong effect on the interpretation of the deity's identity, the circumstances under which the sacrificial rituals were terminated are discussed in more detail.

According to the document of the *pūjārīs*, the practice of ritual slaughtering was still prevalent at the Dhārī Devī Temple up to the year 1986. Until that time, animal sacrifices had supported both village classes in ensuring their subsistence (although even the validity of this claim turned into a point of contention). The

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101   Mallet (2017) mentions a modern equivalent of this idea as a 2013 flood interpretation. He interviewed a *sādhu*, who told him that a place like Gangotri remained protected in the overall flash flooding during the catastrophic events in June. The reason for this he saw in the presence of "good and plentiful Sadhus" (2017:18), who live in the place and surrounding caves. In this regard, not only their presence, but also their religious practice serves as a transcendental means to prevent catastrophes.

consumption of meat in combination with ritual slaughtering was a common custom in the Himalayan mountain region, however it was largely eradicated under the increased influence of Sanskritisation (P. C. Joshi 2009). Special rules for the division of the meat from a ritual sacrifice guaranteed the provision of animal protein for all strata of society (ibid).[102] From the available sources, it is revealed that the people of the *dhunār* caste in Dhari had some exceptional rights, which differed from the usual practice in the hill area. Naithany (1995:478f) referring to an article from the Garhwal Gazetteer from 1884,[103] sketches the general rules connected to the slaughtering of goats in temple premises in Garhwal. Following tradition, the back leg was given to the person butchering the animal, the performing priest received the head and the rest of the body went towards the participating parties. The sacrificial practice for Goddess Dhārī however differed in this respect, that the reward of the slaughtering person consisted in a part of the shoulder, instead of the leg, which was of a much better quality and also meant a higher amount of meat. The reason behind this deviation is explained with an incident many years ago.

> [. . .] in Dhari. There were three *dhunār* families, there were also three *pūjārī* families. One member of the *dhunār* families wielded the sword over the sacrificial animal in the course of the ceremony of the *pūjārīs*. It was like this that they (the *dhunār*) had their shift in the ceremony of the *pūjārī* and outside the ritual they were also involved in their fixed sequences at the bridge. Thus, all tasks were excellently regulated. However, one day it got mixed up. On this day it was Taradatta's turn with the *pūjā*. He called the *dhunār* to kill a goat, but after drinking alcohol, he had a hangover. He arrived, but as soon as he had killed the goat, he started drinking blood. Perhaps they assumed that the Goddess would be pleased—therefore the *pūjārī* and the host of the ceremony gave him a piece of the shoulder. Now whenever there was a goat in the *pūjā*, it remained as it had happened. After the goat was dismembered, the distribution took place, so the tradition of giving a gift to the executioner was born. Now that the hangdog had been determined, he began to make the sword blow on its neck in such a way that the shoulder became more and

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102   Joshi (2009) explained that the eating of meat was a necessity in the mountain area, in order to ensure the supply of protein to the organism in the face of a lack of dairy products and adequate amounts of plant proteins.

103   He obtained this article from E. T. Atkinson's Religion in the Himalayas (1974:129).

> more. In this way, he received one to two kilos of shoulder. With
> that he got a merit. (own translation from Naithany 1995:480)[104]

The cessation of the practice is obviously understood as a general development in the hill areas and beyond. Both the leaflet and Naithany mention that there had already been an unsuccessful attempt by a *svāmī* named Manmathan, who was on a mission in the region and had also come to the temple to promote a less cruel alternative of worship (Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust 2011:6). Although his efforts bore fruit in other temples, the slaughtering practice at Dhārī continued until precisely July 20, 1986. There are some accounts of the circumstances surrounding its abolition, but the exact nature of the events remains rather unclear.[105]

Judging from the available sources and even from references in the pūjārī document, the *dhunār* families suffered much more than the *pūjārīs* from the abrogation of their specific rights after the eradication of the established custom. The *pūjārī* document is in itself contradictious concerning the earlier extent of subsistence reached through the temple. The first statement in this regard clearly says that the upper strata of the village never had any benefit from the temple and only the *dhunār* had an income due to the practices performed in the temple.

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104   "धुनारों के तीन परिवार थे। पुजारियों के भी तीन परिवार थे। फलाना परिवार का धुनार, फलाने पुजारी के पूजा क्रम में बलिपशु पर खड्ग चलाता था। अब यह क्रम बना की जिस क्रम से पुजारी की पूजा में बारी रहती, उसी क्रम से धुनारों ने भी सांगौ में अपनी बारी लगा दी। इससे सब कार्य सुचारू और नियमित होने लगे। पर एक दिन गड़बड़ हो गई। 'उस दिन तारादत्त जी की पूजा की बारी थी। उन्होंने बकरा मारने को. . . धुनार को बुलाया तो वह दारु पी कर टैट पड़ा था। आया, तो बकरा मारते ही खून पीने लगा। शायद देवी का भाव समझ प्रसन्न होकर पुजारी और जजमान ने उसे कंधे का एक टुकड़ा दे दिया। अब पूजा में यदा-कदा बकरे तो आते ही रहते थे। बकरा काटने के बाद बंटवारा भी होता ही था, लिहाजा बधिक को शगुन देने की परम्परा चल पड़ी। अब चूंकि बधिक निश्चित थे, इसलिए वह खड्ग का वार गर्दन पर सी तरह करने लगे कि कंधा ज्यादा से निकल आए। इस तरह एक से दो किलो तक का कैदा मिलने लगा। उससे उन्हें आय होने लगी।" (Naithany 1995:480).

105   A further passage from Naithany's book chapter gives an interpretation why this practice was eventually discontinued, and attributes, if not the blame, at least part of the original impetus for it to the behavior of a Dalit person. According to this telling, one day the (*dhunār*) butcher was tired. Due to his weariness, he just managed to give the animal a slight blow that only cut half of its neck, whereupon the sacrificial goat began to scream. The *pūjārī* held the Harijan accountable for the animal's suffering, but the butcher replied sharply that the murder was the *pūjārī's* responsibility. Reportedly, this snappish remark was the trigger for change, as it left the *pūjārī* depressed at the senseless tradition of taking lives under the guise of religion. Thereupon he "took the courageous and praiseworthy first step that today the sacraments at Dhārī Devī are taken only with belfruit" (Naithany 1995:479). The *pūjārī* leaflet itself does not expound on the reasons for the abolition any further and an account in the booklet of Pandey is kept rather neutral with regard to the role of the Dalits. This narrative ascribes the termination of the sacrifice ritual to the direct agency of the Goddess. Here the deity appeared in a dream of the *pūjārī* and conveys her displeasure about the ongoing killing of animals, whereupon the practice is terminated.

> बलि करने के एवज में पूजा लाने वाला परिवार इनको बकरे की गर्दन वाला भाग (कैदो या कैंदा) के आलावा इनाम या मज़बूरी में कुछ पैसे भी देते थे किन्तु पुजारी वर्ग से कभी भी कुछ नहीं दिया जाता था। (Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust 2011:4)

> In return for sacrificing the animal, the worshipping family offered them [the *dhunār*] not only the neck part of the goat (*kaido* or *kaindā*), but also some coins as a reward or wage, but nothing was ever given to the priest class.

Nonetheless, another passage, even on the same page of the pamphlet clearly contradicts this statement, which seemed dubious in the first place.

> पर्चे में इससे आगे लिखता है की पहले मंदिर में बलि प्रथा थी जिसमें भैसा व बकरे की बलि दी जाती थी तथा जो कुछ भी चढ़ावा चढ़ता था उसमें भी दोनों वर्गों का लालन पालन होता था। कुछ समय पश्चात बलि प्रथा बंद होने से हमारा हक़ हक़ूक भी बंद हो गया जिस कारण हमारी पुजारी वर्ग से तानतनी भी हुई है [. . .]. (Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust 2011:4)

> Further in the pamphlet [referring to the pamphlet distributed by the *dhunār*] is written that earlier in the temple there was the religious practice of animal sacrifice, in which offerings of buffaloes and goats were made, and whatever the offerings that were made in the sacrifice, it was feeding both the classes. After some time, after the sacrifice practice was given up, also our rights came to an end, due to which our priest class has also experienced tension [. . .].

Evidently, the *pūjārīs* at this point already refute their own statement that they never had any income from the temple. All other evidence also strongly suggests that the temple at Kaliyasaur was not an exception to the general customs observed in Garhwal. A note from Naithany's chapter similarly contradicts the *pūjārī's* initial assertion. Based on information from his high caste interlocutors, he reports that after the abolition of the ritual sacrifice, the revenues generated in the temple increased to the benefit of the *pūjārīs*.[106] The *dhunār* on the other hand, were left with very little other options to sustain themselves. This fact lead to an

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106   "(. . .) आज धारी देवी में मनौती मात्र श्रीफल के साथ मनाई जाती है और एक बड़ा आश्चर्य पुजारी जी को यह हुआ कि इसके बाद यहाँ पीठ में भक्तों का अधिक आगमन और अधिक चढ़ावा होने से पर्याप्त आमदनी होने लगी और पीठ परिसर अधिकाधिक सज्जित होने लगा।" (Naithany 1995:479). "[. . .] today the vows at Dhārī Devī are only taken with bel fruits and to the big astonishment of

uproar among the community just few days after the cessation of the temple ritu-al.[107] The *pūjārī* pamphlet mentions instances of looting—which in this case signi-fied that the offerings in the temple were forcibly taken (Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust 2011:6). As the circumstances indicate, the Dalits felt cheated of their basic rights connected to the Goddess and the temple, their *haq hakūk*.[108] The attempt of the *dhunār* to maintain these rights and keep up their means of livelihood led them to file several lawsuits.[109] According to the *pūjārīs*, it was twelve altogether, which were all dismissed. This far-reaching event clearly provoked disputes and meant a crisis for the coexistence of the villagers. Accusations and counter-accu-sations accompanying the discord also brought to the fore the caste thematic and instigated a discussion on discrimination. According to the argumentation of the *pūjārīs*, the *dhunār* in fact never had any rights pertaining to the temple. To prove the non-existence of the Dalits' rights, the text draws again on the story of Kunju, who according to their interpretation, in no way had a personalised connection to the deity. As discussed in 2.3.2., Kunju's role in recovering the statue is classified as a mere labour task, and this framing is now extended to every other practice in the temple, which includes a member of the Dalits. And so, also in terms of the sacrificial practice, the Dalits are more or less portrayed as employees of the tem-ple administration, who perform their task of butchering and receive their wage (the shoulder), but after fulfilling their part of the "contract" can no longer lay claim to the temple or its deity. Therefore, the village Harijans are not entitled to receive any share of the offerings in the temple.

the priest, afterwards more devotees came to the *pīṭh*, and due to more offerings a sufficient income was obtained, and the surroundings of the *pīṭh* became more and more adorned."

107   Apparently the first stationary bridge between Dhari and Kaliyasaur had already been constructed by the time the sacrificial practice was abolished, so even the income from the bridge business was no longer available. Interestingly, after the destruction of the bridge during the 2012 flood, when there was a temporary trolley construction spanning the river for quite some time, it was again the duty of the *dhunār* people to maintain this provisional arrangement.

108   The term comes from Arabic and Persian. *Haq* means right or entitlement, *hakūk* is the plural form.

109   This document fully dismisses any claims in this regard, also in contradiction to the earlier statement that only the *dhunār* had an income from the temple, and also contrary to the generally followed rules for the distribution of an offering animal, which, as already pointed out, were valid throughout the state. "इसी तरह इनकी इस बात का भी खण्डन करते हैं की इनको देवी माँ पर चढ़े चढ़ावे का कालांतर से आज तक कभी भी कुछ दिया जाता रहा है जिसका इन लोगों ने अपने पर्चे में ज़िक्र किया है।" (Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust 2011:3). "In the same way, their talk is rejected that over the course of time until today, they have occasionally received some of the offerings made to the Goddess, this is what these people mentioned in their leaflet."

The abolishment of the ritual slaughter in the temple not only here, but also in general as a by-product served to draw Dalits out of the temples.[110] Under a changed paradigm that was particularly concerned with issues of purity and pollution, the practice had simultaneously taken on an increasingly defiling overtone. This meant that in terms of clearing places of worship of spiritually contaminating factors, it was also logical to expel people perceived as impure. From a Brahamanical point of view the abolishment of the sacrificial practice therefore also eradicated any kind of "impurity" from the temple. These include both the bloody activities surrounding ritual slaughter, but also the presence of the *dhunār* in—or their involvement with—the temple as an intrinsic part of the bloodshed. It is in this sense that the display of the low standard and polluted nature of the "others" in the rural society concurrently testifies to their non-existent rights over the temple and Goddess and their not even existent relationship with this local manifestation of the divine.

As even the document implicates, the *dhunār* as a consequence of this development, struggled to make ends meet. While the *pūjārīs* kept on pursuing the temple business, the Dalits resorted to doing low menial jobs. Some of them began running a little stall at the side of the temple, where the shoes of the visitors are stored and guarded during their temple worship. There is of course again a strong notion of pollution associated with this kind of business and naturally the money that visitors spend on the safety of their shoes is only a fraction of what they are willing to invest in a temple ceremony. While hailing the *pūjārī's* generosity in allowing the Dalits to start this business, the leaflet also notes that this led to further conflict within the *dhunār* community. The accompanying description extensively points out and ridicules the purported greedy and savage conduct of the Dalits. It mentions with obvious disdain that some of the Dalits or their women had resorted to begging. Even worse, they not only indulged in such illegal activities, but at the same time they "confuse and upset" the temple visitors with "false propaganda" by conveying their view on the Goddess and their related rights.[111]

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110   The following quotation contains observations on the effects of the elimination of animal sacrifices in Tamil Nadu. "Besides, abolition of animal sacrifice would indirectly allow Brahmins to permeate into all the village temples and thus impose Aryan forms of worship that would wipe away the indigenous practices. Also, the ban on animal sacrifice ruptured the earnings of slaughterers, who, in the western districts of the state earn anywhere near Rs. 5000 to Rs. 7000 per month" (Thirumaavalavan & Kandasamy 2004:217).

111   "और इस प्रकार कुप्रचार कर इनका महिलावर्ग दर्शनयार्थियों को भ्रमित व परेशान कर भिक्षावृत्ति द्वारा कानूनन अपराध करके अपना हक़ जताते रहे हैं।" (Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust 2011:2). "And in this way they claim their right after spreading false propaganda, confusing and upsetting the worshippers and committing unlawful acts by begging." Begging for alms, as described here, is obviously not only a morally reprehensible way of sustaining one's life, but became also linked to a disruptive form of political activism or public relations. This

The circumstances accompanying the termination of the sacrifice practice in the Dhārī Devī Temple shed light on the fact how closely the temple and the Goddess have always been linked to the issue of livelihood in the village. While this crucial event in the history of the temple proved a boost for the economic status of the higher section of this rural society, it apparently meant a downfall for the people of the lower strata. It was important to highlight this fact in order to understand the great hope that was apparently placed predominantly by the members of the Scheduled Caste on the construction of the hydroelectric power plant. They may have accordingly engaged in providing historical and other evidence, a great part of which related to the river, so that the temple of the Goddess could be relocated and would not pose an obstacle to the construction of Srinagar Dam. That after the abolition of ritual slaughter they had already been deprived of their special rights in connection with the temple and that it had become a far less relevant source of income for them may have contributed much to this identified attitude. In this way, the Dalits were perhaps more willing to "sacrifice" the Goddess (as in her old shape), than the *pūjārīs*, who were still and actually more connected to the temple in terms of income. The respective stance of the *pūjārīs* however remained unclear and vacillating along the construction phase of the project. Their pamphlet though, clearly sought to put the Scheduled Castes in their place, to remind them of their inherent status and the absence of any rights. By thus depriving them of any say in the matter, the intention at that time was to prevent the planned relocation of the deity.

2.3.5   The Episode of Śrī Naurtu Lal— did the Goddess cross the River at all?

Apart from the abolition of the sacrificial practice, there is reported yet another key moment in the history of the village. This episode assumes ample space in the Brahmin document, and became a central argument regarding the deity's mobility in view of the construction of a new temple. The incident also reappeared in other media that informed the public discourse, such as in the newspaper and among legal proceedings. While its central theme is mobility or "movability," the story

short quotation conveys several ideas about the *dhunār* group. First, that their "womenfolk" is morally located on a level as low as their men. Second, that they are a "nuisance" by disturbing the pure religious endeavours of the worshippers who come to the temple. They allegedly mislead them, put them in deep anxiety and thereupon demand their money. Third, that they are engaged in illegal activities (begging)—and fourth, although they are such morally creepy creatures, they still dare to claim their rights (on the Goddess). The stories in the *pūjārī* pamphlet are full of similar innuendos, see in this regard the upcoming section reflecting again on Dalit identity.

does not directly engage with the experience of deluges. However, it provides some other valuable clues about the relationship of the people towards each other, the Goddess and the river, which is why it is retold and investigated here. Indeed, this decisive past event can be considered the epitome of the relationship between the two castes.

वर्ष 1973 की होली के दिन श्री नौर्तू लाल शराब के नशे में धुत हाथ में थमला (लोहे की बड़ी दंराती [sic])[112] लिए मंदिर पहुंचा जहाँ पर पुजारी श्री कुशलानंद पांडेय जी थे जो श्री दौलत राम पुत्र श्री तोताराम पाण्डे ग्राम धारी में साथ पड़ोसी गांव ढामक से होली खेलकर गंगा में स्नान करके मंदिर लौटे थे तथा श्री दौलतराम खाना खाने गांव चले गए थे। श्री नौर्तू लाल नशे में बार-बार मूर्ति को नदी में फेंकने की बात कह रहा था। श्री कुशलानंद पाण्डेय जी के अनेक बार समझाने पर भी वह न माना और मूर्ति की ओर बढ़ने लगा। बार-बार रोकने पर वह एक बार श्री कुशलानंद जी को धक्का देने में सफल हुआ जिससे वे गिर गये और इससे पहले कि वे उठ पाते तब तक उससे मूर्ति ज़मीन पर वही गिरा दी। पुजारी जी ने उसे रोकते हुए गांव वालों को आवाजें लगाई। सर्वप्रथम श्री दौलतराम पांडेय पुत्र श्री तोताराम पांडेय जी होली खेलने के बाद श्री जनार्दन प्रसाद भट्ट जी के घर पर खाना खा रहे थे, ने पुजारी जी को आवाज़ सुनी और दौड़कर मंदिर पहुंचे। आज भी जीवित प्रथम एक मात्र चश्मदीद गवाह श्री दौलतराम जी बताते हैं की उन्होंने श्री नौर्तू लाल को शराब के नशे में हाथ में थमाला लिए देखा तथा मूर्ति नीचे गिरी हुई देखी तथा पुजारी जी को उसे मूर्ति की ओर बढ़ाने से रोकते हुए देखा। पूरा किस्सा समझने पर उन्होंने एवं पुजारी जी ने किसी तरह श्री नौर्तू लाल को पकड़ लिया व पुलिस में ले जाना चाहा। इसी बीच श्री घनानन्द बंगवाल व श्री जीतुलाल पुत्र श्री ध्याली ग्राम कलियासौड़ से मंदिर पहुंचे। कुछ देर में धारी व कलियासौड़ के अन्य लोग भी मंदिर में जुट गए। श्री जीतुलाल पुत्र श्री ध्याली लाल के कहने पर जो श्री नौर्तू लाल के रिश्ते में चचेरे भाई भी लगते थे तथा अपनी बिरादरी में उनका अपना अच्छा खासा दबदबा व मान भी था श्री घनानन्द बंगवाल व अन्य के कहने पर भी उसे पुलिस के हवाले नहीं किया गया। किन्तु अब मूर्ति की सुरक्षा का प्रश्न खड़ा हुआ और शक जाहिर किया कि कहीं रात में अगर श्री नौर्तू लाल ने वाकई मूर्ति नदी में डाल दी तो क्या होगा? अतः तय किया गया कि मूर्ति को ग्राम धारी ले जाया जाय और कल इस पर कार्यवाही करेंगे। उस समय मंदिर में मूर्ति की सुरक्षा हेतु आज की तरह कोई लोहे का जंगला नहीं था। मूर्ति खुले चट्टान पर ही विराजमान थी। यहां तक कि मंदिर के आगे जो छत है वह भी नहीं थी। ऐसा स्वयं श्री दौलतराम जी बताते हैं जो की सत्य है क्योंकि सर्वप्रथम पहली छत रुद्रप्रयाग के लाला श्री वृजलाल सेठी ने अपनी इच्छा पूरी होने के उपलक्ष में माँ भगवती के लिए डलवाई। आगे श्री दौलतराम जी बयान करते हैं कि मूर्ति को वह अपनी पीठ पर उठाकर स्वयं गांव वालों के साथ लेकर चले और उसे गांव धारी के पितरों के स्थान "पित्रकूड़ा" नामक

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112   What is probably meant here is *darāntī* (दरांती), sickle.

जगह पर रखा जो कि कई मीटर लम्बी चौड़ी जगह है। रात भर गांववासियों ने जागरण व कीर्तन किया। इस घटना को बीते केवल 37 वर्ष हुए हैं तथा ग्राम धारी व कलियासौड़ के सभी बुज़ुर्ग वासी उस घटना के चश्मदीद गवाह हैं। (Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust 2011:4f)

On the Holi day of 1973, Śrī Naurtu Lal, in an inebriated state brought on by alcohol, took a large sickle (*thamlā*) in his hand and reached the temple, where the priest Śrī Kaushalnand Pandey Jī was staying and who had played Holi with Śrī Daulatram, the son of Śrī Totaram Pandey, in Dhari village along with the neighbouring village of Dhamak. Afterwards, having bathed in the Ganges, he [the priest] returned to the temple and Śrī Daulatram went to the village to have food. Śrī Naurtu Lal, in his state of drunkenness, repeatedly spoke of throwing the statue into the river. Even after several instructions from Śrī Kushaland Pandey, he [Naurtu Lal] did not comply and started moving towards the idol. Although he was thwarted several times, once he managed to push Śrī Kushalanand Jī so that he fell, and before the latter could get up, he [Naurtu Lal] had dropped the statue to the ground. The revered priest sounded an alarm to the villagers to stop him. First of all, Śrī Daulatram Pandey, son of Śrī Totaram Pandey, who was eating food at Śrī Jarnadan Prasad Bhatt's house after playing Holi, on hearing the voice of the priest, ran to the temple. Even today, the first surviving witness, the honourable Śrī Daulatram, relates that he saw the drunken Śrī Naurtu Lal take the sickle in his hand and he watched the statue fall down and he witnessed how the priest prevented him from moving towards the statue. After realising what was going on, he and the priest somehow caught Śrī Naurtu Lal and wanted to take him to the police. In the meantime, Śrī Ghanand Bangwal and Śrī Jitulal's son, Dhyali had reached the temple from Kaliyasaur village. After a while, the other people of Dhari and other people of Kaliyasaur also gathered in the temple. At the behest of Śrī Jitul the son of Śrī Dhyali Lal, who was related to Śrī Naurtu Lal as a cousin and who was a respected man of high moral values among his community, and also on the advice of Śrī Ghananand Bangwal and others, he was not handed over to the police. But now the question of the idol's safety came up and the concern was expressed that if Śrī Naurtu Lal did indeed toss the statue into the river sometime during the night, what would happen then? It was therefore decided that the idol should be brought to Dhari

village and action would be taken the next day. At that time, there was no iron grille in the temple to protect the idol. The idol was seated only on the open rock. Even the roof that is here next to the temple was not there. This is what Śrī Daulatram Jī himself narrated, and it is the truth, for the honourable Śrī Vrijlal Sethi of Rudraprayag provided the very first roof for Mother Bhagwati on the occasion of the fulfilment of his wish. Śrī Daulatram Jī further said that he took the statue on his back and carried it along with the villagers and placed it on the site of the ancestors of the Dhari village called "*pitrakūḍā*," which is a place a few meters long and wide. The whole night villagers performed *jāgaraṇ* and *kīrtan*.[113] This incident has taken place only 37 years back and all elderly villagers of village Dhari and Kaliyasaur are the eyewitnesses of that incident.

This particular telling of the story about Naurtu Lal became another decisive argument for the *pūjārīs* to establish that the Goddess cannot change her place. The Brahmins pointed out here that the statue was moved to the other village only because it was a compelling necessity, i.e. it had to be protected from the aggressive and uncontrollable actions of one of the members of the *dhunār*. Since this was not an officially recognised act of moving the statue, but only an emergency or exceptional situation, it did not count as a change of location. Even if this rationale may seem odd at first sight, it nevertheless falls back on recognised patterns of interpretation related to religious practices. As discussed in Chapter 2.3.1, Michaels (1993:159) also mentions occasions for movements of goddesses, which are not regarded as a place change. While he refers to the periodic processions of different goddesses in Deopatan (Nepal), this principle similarly applies to the regular journeys of deities in the Western Himalayan region. The forms of locomotion of deities who leave their permanent seat for their journeys and then return, are also not perceived as changes of place. They rather represent a reconfirmation and reestablishment of their traditional site. There are evidently such possibilities for deities to perform a change of place without automatically becoming veritable mobile gods. In any case, this concept is in marked contrast to the Dalit population's conception of what a change of location of a deity means.

The leaflet, while claiming that there is just one reliable, homogenous and authentic version of the deity's past, does however seem to rewrite some parts of the history. In this context, it must be taken into account that the text represents

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113   Jāgaraṇ, from the Sanskrit root *jāgṛ*, wake, to be watchful, awake, denotes the religious ritual of a night vigil, while *kīrtan*, as a narrative and interactive style of chanting, is the musical celebration that takes place during this ritual.

an extreme and purposeful interpretation of the historically shaped identity of the Goddess. It would be a fallacy to believe that the historical account of the Brahmins is always consistent and self-contained. Other versions of the episode reveal that the memories even of the different village groups are not so clearly delineated against each other at all times. They also prove that this first variant of Naurtu Lal, the *pūjārī* and the statue does not even necessarily represent the comprehensive memories of the Brahmin community. Although the exact account of the Harijans defending the movability of Goddess Dhārī is not at hand, some of the testimonies of this incident effectively support their point. It was actually a member of the Brahmin community who had first told me a deviant record of the story. During a walk through Dhari village (Oct. 9, 2014) my interlocutor M. P. Pandey informed me about the episode, which several of his family members—father, uncle and his mother—had recounted to him. According to them, about 30–40 years before, this very person, Naurtu Lal, had a heated argument with one of the *pūjārīs* of the temple. Naurtu Lal, apparently enraged by the quarrel, then took the statue to the village of Dhari. Although this oral tradition is not too detailed, it reveals a crucial and divergent element compared to the interpretation of the temple trust. This difference is of course the substitution of characters, which turned the member of the Scheduled Caste into the one who had taken the statue with him. Needless to say, when the *dhunār* had carried the Goddess, it was no longer an extraordinary occasion that made it imperative to save the Goddess from the threat of a Dalit aggressor. This circumstance rather implies that the *dhunār* at that time still had such a close connection to the Goddess that they were in a position to decide on the at least temporary whereabouts of the deity. There is further evidence that it was indeed he, the *dhunār*, who brought the statue across the river. The report of a Commission of Inquiry of the Ministry of Environment and Forests briefly touches upon an incident in this regard, as it was raised during the Commission's visit to Naithany. "He [Shivprasad Naithany] mentioned that the idol of the devi was found near this rock however, it was earlier mounted in the village Dhari by a local person belonging to a weaker section" (Das & Jindal 2011:13f). The theme of a *dhunār* shifting the location or riverbank of the Goddess reappears from a different perspective in an article in the Amar Ujālā newspaper. In a reversal of interest, it is even a member of the Pandey families who uses the image of the Goddess crossing the river to argue for the mobility of the statue. From this person's account, the crossing took place in 1988, and the person who moved her, judging by the name, is also a member of the Dalits, though he goes by a different name, Gudad Lal.

> उसके बाद 1988 में गुदाड़ लाल मूर्ति को एक बार फिर धारी गांव ले गया था। कई दिनों तक धारी अपने पुराने स्थान पर रहने के बाद वर्तमान में कलियासौड़ स्थान पर आई। (Amar Ujālā 2010, July 4).

> After that, in 1988, Gudad Lal brought the statue to Dhari village one more time. After staying in her old place for a few days, Dhārī came to her present site in Kaliyasaur.

It remains a bit unclear whether it was yet another time that the deity crossed the river, or even one more time that the identical person, Gudad Lal, had brought the statue to the village of Dhari. His statement is noteworthy not only because it may hint at another incident where the Goddess crossed the river and did so owing to the active role of a *dhunār*, but also because it suggests that the village of Dhari is the former location of the Goddess. Some sources do indeed say that the Goddess Dhārī was named after the village (Pandey 2005:14) and that the village of Dhari is the parental home (*māyke*) of Dhārī Devī (Naithany 1995:474).[114] In the chapter of Naithany, his two interlocutors (Pandeys) explain that before she crossed the stream, the Goddess stayed in the village of Dhari. It was only since she was installed on the rocks on the opposite river side that the name of the village adjacent to her became known as Kaliyasaur.[115] This piece of information would obviously speak for the fact that she had definitely crossed the river, and even several times. These alternative stories simultaneously corroborate that it was a *dhunār* who carried the Goddess over the river. Another counterpoint to the representation of the *pūjārīs* emerges from an examination of the chronological sequence. Although the Brahmin story does not explicitly mention a time span, it creates the impression that the statue was purified and reinstalled within one day.[116]

114   "इस सिद्धपीठ वर्तमान में धारी माँ के नाम जाना जाता है. धारी देवी माँ का नाम धारी गाँव से हुआ है, परन्तु वास्तव में ये कल्याणी देवी के नाम से प्रसिद्ध है।" (Pandey 2005:14). "This *siddhapīṭh* is currently known under the name of Mā̃ Dhārī. The name of Mā̃ Dhārī Dēvī was from village Dhari, but in reality she is famous as Kalyāṇī Dēvī." As stated in Chapter 2.1, Naithany also cites her earlier name as Kalyāṇī, while Dhārī seems to be a more recent designation.

115   "अस्सी वर्षीय श्री गुणानन्द पाण्डे तथा रिटायर्ड इन्स्पेक्टर जयन्ति प्रसाद पाण्डे ग्राम धारी, बताते हैं कि यहां पर झला/सांगा के पार पहले से ही धारी गांव की मूर्ति रही है, जिसमें पार का इलाका कलियासौड़ कहने का निमित्त वहां काली मूर्ति की स्थापना चट्टान में किये जाने से हुआ था।" (Naithany 1995:473).

116   For a better understanding of this assertion, here is the further course of the story: "The very next day, the Pūjārīs Bhagatram Pandey, Ramkrishna Pandey went to the Srinagar police station of the Pauri police division and after lodging the complaint, the police stations from Kirtinagar to Rudraprayag were informed. Thereupon, the senior police officers that were on duty immediately came to the temple from all the police stations and enquired about the incident. After everyone's testimony, Śrī Naurtu Lal was found guilty. Following Śrī Naurtu Lal's plea for forgiveness and assurance that he would not commit such an act a second time in the future, and on the recommendation of the public, the police released him. The heads of the police and the administration gave instructions to install the statue at the same place, and the *pūjārīs* assured this kind of offence would not be possible in the future. If it did happen, a severe punishment would be exercised. The statue was purified again and installed at the same place. In this way, the statue had to be moved to the village for security reasons, not that the Goddess changed her place, which these people might have understood

Yet according to M. P. Pandey's recollection, the statue remained in the village of Dhari for a much longer duration, namely for about a month. Time would also be a factor to consider in this context as evidence of the occurrence or non-occurrence of a change of location. Of course, only a short period of time could be an argument that it is an exceptional circumstance and not a fixed situation.

The anecdote of Śrī Naurtu Lal presented by the *pūjārīs* follows a coherent thread, the very detailed and linear account renders it credible and authoritative, and in addition the story is corroborated by the involvement of the executive. Yet the other available versions of the incident contribute significantly to dismantling this form of account. In any case, the purpose of this section is not to judge the veracity of the exact events in the village, but to highlight the fluid nature of the temple history and to set out the arguments used to justify the changeability or fixity of the Goddess. One could see in this context that, on the one hand, the act of a deity crossing the river is understood as a change of place, but also that this principle is negotiable and comes with exceptions.

A brief digression at this point leads us back to the further agency of the river and eventually to the involvement of floods in the narrative of Śrī Naurtu Lal, as well as the other stories. The point deserves attention, even though the agency of the river appears only as a very diluted aspect. That is, in the way it is reflected in the given ideas that characterise the group of the *dhunār*. The leaflet apparently not only contradicts the *dhunār's* interpretation of the Goddess, but in an underlying thread tries to sabotage their overall credibility. The means used for this purpose is to bring into play old and familiar clichés or stereotypes associated with Dalit identity. The attributes used in the document to describe the *dhunār*, but also in the text of Naithany, as one of the foundations of the *pūjārī* document, are quite striking in a negative sense. Their depiction, often overtly aggressive, is interwoven with images of low-caste people drinking, begging, slaughtering, and they are associated with impure matter, alcohol, blood and also shoes. All of these indications and metaphors not only reveal but also reassert their overall state of pollution. This general framing appears, for example, in the story that describes the moment when the special practice of distributing the sacrificial animal came into being. By portraying how the *dhunār* butcher drinks—afflicted by a hangover—the gushing blood of a sacrificial animal, he is turned into an uncivilised savage, almost an animal or predator. In the anecdote about Śrī Naurtu Lal, too, the central figure is in an inebriated state and unsound of mind and thereby even posing a threat to the statue. Other depictions similarly create the impression that the Dalit part of the population is situated somewhere between animal and human,

as the Goddess changing her place" (own translation from the document Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust 2011:6).

and in any case they are regarded as a "distant species" (P. C. Joshi 2009:77).[117] Their portrayal in these past events thus indicates that they still exist almost undifferentiated from the natural elements or in a transitional zone between inanimate existence and humans. As a consequence, the *dhunār*, supposedly driven by their primitive nature, are also implicitly compared to a force of nature. That puts them in a way on the same level as the river and the floods. And in this way—in the form of an imagined soulless actor who is incapable to contain himself or is out of control—they become a constant risk factor. Such framing definitely confirms stereotypes of Dalits in the guise of "imaginaries of dangers posed by the presence of Dalits" (M. Sharma 2017:xiv). With regard to Naurtu Lal, it was feared that this condition could lead to the statue ending up in the river, which would have been the same outcome that the earlier floods ensued. This means that the *dhunār*, once the statue's saviours from the impact of the floods, have finally become a potential source of menace to the Goddess. Therefore, the holy place must be protected from them, from the river people, who are not only likened to the river and its destructive power, but who in all these Brahmanic interpretations seem to have become the river—that is, its dark, unpredictable and cataclysmic side.

2.3.6 Village Disparities and Floods, Summary and Conclusion

The citation at the beginning of this chapter by Gamburd (2000) describes mechanisms that lead to the creation of different temple histories. The reference relates to the history of a temple in Sri Lanka, which was examined by Whitaker (1999). As Whitaker observed, the information provided by various participating parties about the place of worship by far transcended the scope of what could be understood as historical facts, but exposed the agenda of different actors in terms of forming or reaffirming status hierarchies. Whitaker further noted that in the process of reinterpretation, history evolved into a category of "fiction" or became an "argument" rather than a fact-based picture of the past. Looking at the different interpretations of the origin of Dhārī Devī, these mechanisms also apply to the temple in Kaliyasaur. Already in the first part starting with 2.1 and with the Goddess's flood history, it emerged that the history of the temple, as indicated by Whitaker, was also in this phase to a large extent a reflection of local affairs and the interests and to some extent clashing life realities of two different groups present at the village level. Chapter 2.3 then demonstrated how these opposing positions within

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117 Reflections on Dalits are understood to be permeated by residues from times as early as the Aryan invasion and their consideration of the earlier settlers as non-human (R. Singh & Mehmi 2008; Paswan & Jaideva 2003).

the community were reactivated and intensified in the midst of the forthcoming hydroelectric project with implications for the temple. The means of addressing these conflicts was to bring into play epitomic events from the past and archetypal images related to the river and to floods. This at the same time disclosed how the implementation of a developmental project impacted local narratives.

The common thread running through all the stories presented, are reflections on the question of mobility or immobility with regard to the Goddess. The reasoning of the *dhunār*, mirrored in the *pūjārī* document, can be understood as depicting the Goddess as mobile based on her historical experiences of journeying. This is where the river with its fluid nature became the main constituent. The river moves and it supports movement. So everything that is associated with the river is also understood as moving and mobile, and even everything that crosses the river is mobile. The *pūjārīs*, on the other hand, vehemently contradicted this interpretation. With their examples or their counter-concept to the assertions of the *dhunār*, they describe the deity as completely static. Contrary to the argument that her mobility is rooted in her earlier changes of location and her special bond to the river and its floods, here her supposed immobility is defended with her self-determined capacity to act. This becomes apparent when she herself decides to follow the floods and make a short foray into the river and under the rocks. The self-determination in the choice of her personal whereabouts as well as related hidden motives—such as to test the faith of the disciples—contradict the idea that she experienced a formally acknowledged shift to another site. From a different angle and as investigated in detail, even a temporary change of locality is not such if it takes place under the conditions of a hazard scenario. This is all the more true if the threat emanates from a part of village society that is classified as existing in morally very low standards. Instead of showing her superior agency, the Goddess here becomes a vulnerable female or a potential victim who needs protection from this group that could drown her in the river. The latter is not only understood as impure, but as possessing similar destructive properties as the forces of nature or even as a natural disaster. Since the floods are not framed as a threat to the Goddess according to Brahmanic understanding, the Dalit part of society thus, and oddly, occupies an even more prominent position when it comes to posing a hazard risk to the divinity.

The formulation of a supposed moral standard, blended with conceptions of "pollution" pertaining to the group at the lower end of village society, however, did not only surface in terms of threat scenarios, but concurrently fed into long-standing debates about the rights to the Goddess. As has been highlighted, the socio-economic conditions and the power relations on the village level underwent a decisive shift in favour of the Brahmin part of society with the abolition of the ages old tradition of animal sacrifice. What the discussion about the cessation of the ritual slaughtering further revealed was that not only from that moment on the *dhunār* people lost a great part of their economic basis, but this was also the first

clear cut alienating not only Goddess and river people, but as well the deity from the river. When the Dalit people were stripped of their entitlements to the temple, the identity of the Goddess fell entirely under the influence of Brahmin ideology and rights. In fact, the framing of the lowest caste by the Brahmins corresponds to a certain extent with the earlier wild characteristics as ascribed to the goddesses, such as the mentioned lust for blood. For this reason also, the Brahmin agenda was to link the Goddess to narratives that endowed her with an image of purity. Since the gradual separation of the Goddess from the river people reached its culmination with the cessation of ritual slaughter, it seems reasonable to conclude that the *dhunār* rather personified the qualities attributed to the Goddess before the abolition of the sacrifice, while the Brahmins embodied those after. This phenomenon manifested in her becoming increasingly interwoven into beliefs that revolved around saints and tales from the sacred scriptures, rather than rooting her identity in narratives about the river and the floods. While this was and still is an ongoing process, the termination of the sacrifice practice marked a climax of this development. Therefore, in order to understand the further trajectory of the place of worship, it was important to note that the event of the abolition of the sacrifice practice in the temple—and the appropriation of the Goddess into a cosmos defined by Brahmanic standards—not only epitomised a decisive stage of the alienation of the Goddess from the river, but also that this circumstance significantly shaped the attitude of the part of the village society at the lower end to the hydropower project.

What is still remarkable about the question of movability or immovability, or "stationaryness" of the Goddess is that this subject is also based to a large extent on the little written historical material available about her, which was then further supplemented with other recollections circulating among the village population. Here we are again at the source of this historicity, which consists mainly of Naithany's book chapter and to a lesser degree of Pandey's booklet. Even the people from the immediate locality referred directly to the publications to obtain testimonies on their history. Although the Naithany chapter was written on the basis of oral information from the village community, this information, once converted into a written text, evidently had increased its authority. It must also be emphasised in this context that all the accounts of past incidents in Naithany's book came from members of the Pandey families. Now the recourse to this resource in the form of a feedback loop became a multiplier of the Pandey-Brahman version of the past and thus a strong reinforcement of the Brahminical perspective. This fact also became evident whenever the written material about the temple was consulted for any decision-making process, be it in the form of reports by expert commissions or quoted in court proceedings (see next chapter). Because of such dynamics, the Brahman perspective clearly gained sovereignty over the interpretation of the Goddess's identity and her related historical background, while at the same time representing a reflection of the hegemonic discourse.

Nevertheless, the emergence of the *pūjārī* leaflet marked an unusual stage of the conflict, in which the villagers were obviously divided about the prospect of the relocation of the temple. What precisely happened there during the time this text was circulating remains unclear. From the written document, however, it can be inferred that the strong emphasis on caste differences was the result of ongoing negotiations concerning either compensation issues or other interests regarding the pros and cons of the relocation of the Goddess. At this juncture, each of the communities was eager to prove its legal superiority and assert its historically significant relationship with the village deity and thus the decision-making right over the further trajectory of the place. At later stages however—at least outwardly—the villagers appear more unified on their stance on the temple matter. Especially when the threat of a suspension was looming over the entire development project, the villagers unanimously defied this prospect. On similar occasions, the temple trust or other members of the Pandey caste argued exactly the opposite way to the claims made in the pamphlet, likewise invoking the temple history. The attitudes thus proved to be transitory, and the content of the leaflet inspected shows on the one hand a degree of topicality, on the other hand it still remains an indicator of long-term attitudes and mind-sets in the village society.

2.4   How a Flood History entered the Public Sphere and permeated a Dam Conflict

Having established the fluidity and political character in village-level representations of the history of the Goddess Dhārī, this part now explores how narratives about floods, the river and the presumed past of the river goddess gradually entered the public sphere and reached an institutional level. What will become apparent is how imaginations about the deity and its river connection were transformed into arguments and evidence in public discourse and in the reports of teams of experts as well as in court proceedings. This topic is closely linked to the question of the status of oral history in the jurisdictional context and in the framework of development project-related conflicts. One emerging pattern is that the more formal the systemic level dealing with these stories, the less present are narratives about floods. This may be due to an underlying agenda shaping the line of the argument, but also to the incompatibility of oral tradition with the formal standards of institutions operating within a legal framework.

To begin with, some introductory remarks on oral history in terms of its capacity and limitations to interact with other fields of knowledge, such as in

institutional settings. India possesses a rich treasure of orally transmitted narratives and histories. Unlike in Europe, where oral cultures disappeared with industrialisation and the dissolution of the "peasant culture" (Chowdhury 2014:41), oral histories still constitute very much living traditions. Yet their widespread existence does not automatically translate into broad recognition of such specific histories in other sectors. Despite being the earliest form of historiography, orally transmitted historical knowledge was largely rejected by the scientific community in the late 19th century, and the prejudice against it persisted for more than half a century (Sharpless 2006). Only in the first third of the 20th century did this attitude subside and such form of testimony became an instrument for a differentiated view of past events. As part of the revolutionary social dynamics of the 1960s, academic attention then turned to the histories of different ethnic groups: "contesting the status quo, social historians began to explore the interests of a multiracial, multi-ethnic population with an emphasis on class relationships" (Sharpless 2006:24). This gained indigenous knowledge a certain degree of recognition for revealing histories in its own special way. Yet the earlier negative image of the narrative-based form of historicity, when oral histories were regarded as "the antithesis of written histories, and are often demeaned as coming from primitive, uncivilized societies" (Babcock 2012:35), still lingers. Specifically, the option of retracing history in its linear form through oral history has always remained controversial (Chowdhury 2014). Given the critical debate about its validity (cf. Sharpless 2006), most practitioners in the field of oral history tend to regard oral accounts as complementary to documentary records. At the same time, the focus on oral traditions has shifted to a greater emphasis on "the contemporary social contexts in which narratives are spoken or circulated, and their role as a strategic and adaptable resource for certain types of societies [. . .]" (Huber 2012:84). In narrative analysis, the stories therefore serve less to provide historical facts than to reflect the contemporary state of a society's identity. The strength of oral history, albeit, lies in its capacity to include in historiography the marginalised people of socially weaker classes who previously had no voice (cf. S. Mukherjee 2014). The recognition of their mode of narrative offered them a medium to speak for themselves and thus gain visibility.

A clash of different knowledge systems especially comes to the fore when oral histories are included as testimonies in legal institutional processes. Their image of "unreliability" stands in stark contrast to the court's concern to deal with hard facts and irrefutable evidence.[118] This notwithstanding, in different parts of the

118 The following points explain and summarise the features of the narrated history which determine its fluidity—and which stands in opposition to the common proceedings of the legal institutions.
1. As a typical mechanism of oral narration, just by repetition, the stories and inherent information change their shape over time (Babcock 2012). (An exception here constitute

globe, elements of oral tradition developed into accepted evidence, as examined, for example, by Babcock (2012) for land claims in Canada. Narratives may constitute the "only proof, indigenous groups have to establish their claim to a particular plot of land that holds significance to them"—or if applied to the present case, to certain features of their land, such as a place with sacralised meaning. Highlighting the controversial role courts find themselves in when confronted with indigenous stories as factual evidence, Babcock (2012) identified the main obstacle as being that accepted objective realities run counter to the nature of storytelling. The stories' aim is defined as teaching "moral and cultural lessons through allegory and symbols," and a static version of a story is of lesser importance "as long as its purpose—to reassert some moral, spiritual, or cultural truth—remains the same" (Babcock 2012:42). This predetermined main objective underlines the narrative's immanently changeable character on the one hand, and at the same time makes them predisposed to fall prey to certain political agendas. Vaněk critically remarks, that "the current 'boom' in oral history has had both negative and positive impacts: there exists a misuse of oral history for political purposes and the 'hunt for sensation' on the one hand, and 'giving voice' and democratisation of history on the other" (2014:48). Another crucial point is that the court or the law as part of state hegemony, may lead the state actors involved to put their weight on the dominant culture or the dominant narratives present in a society. As a consequence, "the legal idiom can favour the version of a story told by the people in power over that of the less powerful" (Babcock 2012:37). It should also be borne in mind that the individual judges play a dominant role in the approval of the produced evidence, since "[. . .] a good deal of what is admissible (accepted) depends upon the gatekeepers, those who sanction the evidentiary value of whatever statements of fact or interpretation are offered in support of an argument or proposition" (Grele 2006:43). Berti (2016) by contrast describes the predicament of Indian judges and their lack of authority, especially when confronted with narrative-based evidence.

the Vedic oral traditions that are regarded as having survived largely preserved over many centuries).

2. "The stories are generally nonlinear, not separating past from present, but rather flowing through the present, unlike non-indigenous history" (Babcock 2012:34).

3. The change of narrators in the course of time: "stories can be reworked by different storytellers" (Babcock 2012:44), their choice of stories or of their inherent details may be selective, or even "self-serving."

4. Likewise, different audiences bring about modifications of the stories. They are adapted to the recipients perceived needs or expectations.

5. Transformations of the society represented in the narrations can generate a change of the features of these accounts. Concurrently also, the modified versions reflect changes in circumstances of a community.

6. Threats to a certain place may alter and increase its cultural significance as displayed in the stories about it (Babcock 2012).

This is because judges have to comply with certain legal practices and procedures that almost resemble ritualistic performances and are characteristic of the Indian legal system. These mechanisms contribute to decisively limiting the legislature's scope for decision-making and actions.

Further alterations to the transmitted stories can be traced back to the translation process they pass through. The chronicling of oral histories inevitably reflects biases of a particular historian or of others involved in the record of orally communicated accounts and may therefore contain translation errors (Babcock 2012). In many areas of India this means not only translation from the spoken to the written language, but also from their respective vernacular into English—the language used by the courts (cf. Berti 2016). But one aspect that judges often overlook in their preference for written material is that not only oral history but also written history is fraught with a high degree of ambiguity. This is because, unlike historians who are trained to scrutinise different versions of historical accounts, judges usually treat written historical sources as if they were entirely objective (Babcock 2012).

The question of the relocatability of the temple, as addressed by organisations and institutions, requires a further look at the physical environment and the spatial orientation of the Goddess. Reason being that some of these features will come to prominence in the following sections. Apart from two rock formations on either side of the river, which served as the base of the previous bridges, there was the other striking rock at this location. This rock for many years formed the base of the statue of the Goddess. Described as "lion shaped" it is nowadays submerged in water. Possibly it was the object of veneration even before the statue had arrived at the location (B. Jhunjhunwala personal communication Oct. 22, 2014). It should be borne in mind that the temple as a building is usually not regarded as the most significant component of a sacred site. Unlike in South and Central India, architectural properties of temples in the far north of the subcontinent are often not very distinctive. This feature is even more pronounced in the mountainous region. With little adherence to architectural norms, it is the place and its meanings that exceed the importance of a building. Especially in mountainous terrain, the temple has to be adapted to topographic and other geophysical conditions of an individual location (Jettmar 1974). As the picture (Figure 8) reveals, the "temple" was rather an assemblage of pieced up walls and chambers without much architectural aspiration. A passage in the book of Naithany (1995:469; also M. P. Pandey, personal communication 2014, Oct. 28) states that the earlier temple of Goddess Dhārī was not even really seen as a temple, but rather as a structure or a bulwark (*parkoṭā*), which was built relatively recent to offer protection for the statue. All available information about the Dhārī Devī Temple, and this includes its description as a *śaktipīṭha*, points to the paramount importance of the place and the lesser relevance of the artificial structures present in it. In this, the site conforms to the earliest version of temples as described by Orr:

Figure 8. The former Temple of Dhārī Devī
(Source: Tourismguide Uttarakhand 2012).

> The earliest temples were, of course, much simpler structures. The
> least "built" among them were those in which a sacred spot—a
> tree, an altar, an image—was left open to the sky, and its ritual
> boundaries marked by an enclosing railing, or raised gallery, and
> gateways. (Orr 2012)

That the temple must remain roofless and thus open to the sky is in fact one of the
main requirements attributed to the temple of Goddess Dhārī and is understood
as a direct instruction given by the Goddess.[119] In a way, this also implies that the
deity does not require or demand a temple at all. The second essential condition
regarding a "temple" for the Goddess points in the same direction. This one is that
she must retain her unobstructed view of the village Dhari. The chapter on Dhārī
Devī in Naithany's book Uttarākhaṇḍ, Śrī Kṣētr Śrīnagar elucidates the special
relationship of the Goddess to the village of Dhari. It is a sequel to the story of

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119 As e.g. Naithany (1995:469) explains, "धारी देवी स्वभावानुरूप अपने ऊपर निराकाश [*sic*] के
अतिरिक्त अन्य कोई वितान पसंद नहीं करती ।" [Dhārī Devī, by nature, does not like any other
canopy above herself, except from the open sky].

her emergence in the Birahi Flood. When the Dhunār Kunju had just installed the statue on the rock, he reportedly became doubtful as to whether he had actually chosen the right location for the Goddess. This lead to the following conversation:

> Devī! you will like this place. But look, right on the other side is the village Dhari. The view goes straight across from here to there. There people pee and shit, they toil and moil, quarrel and swear and they will engage in immoral acts, then you will also be miserable and you will suffer as well. If you then get angry, it will only bring misfortune to the village. The Goddess said: "do not be worried. The village Dhari is my parental home. Just let me stay here. Not only in village Dhari, but wherever a married daughter who comes from there will be; if she remembers me, I will go and protect her." Thereupon Kunju became worry-free, he had fulfilled his duty to the village. From then on, the daughters of Dhari lived happily, wherever they married. The mother-in-law and the other in-laws recognised the power [*śakti*] of their personal goddess [*iṣṭa devī*]. (own translation from Naithany 1995:474)[120]

Pandey (2005:10), however, gives less weight to the notion that the Goddess's particular position is linked to her concern for protecting the village. He instead emphasises Dhārī's interest in viewing the burning *ghāṭ*, the village cremation ground on the other bank of the river. This interpretation clearly associates the deity with its dark side or its ascribed Kālī identity. Such an orientation means that while the statue gazes north, its worshippers sitting in front of it look in the southern direction. Yet a southern alignment is normally considered unfavourable for worship practices. By contrast, it is deemed appropriate when it comes to the fierce manifestation of the Goddess.[121]

The paramount importance of interaction with the surroundings in fact becomes even more significant when it is a female deity. As a manifestation of the Śakti, it has an enhanced relation with the earth or the elements that form her environment. Jettmar noted that the goddesses are all "an aspect of mother earth" (personal

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120   "देवी ! इस स्थान को तुम पसंद कर रही हो । पर देखो ठीक सामने पर धारी गाँव है । यहाँ से वहां सीधे नज़र लगती है । वहां लोग टट्टी-पेशाब, रगड़ा, झगड़ा, गाली गलौज अनीति के काम करते दिखाई देंगे तो तुम्हें बुरा भी लगेगा और कष्ट भी होगा । कहीं रुष्ट हो गई तो गांव पर आफत ही आ जायेगी । देवी ने कहा – तू चिन्ता न कर । धारी गांव मेरा मायका है । बस यहीं पर रहने दो । धारी गांव ही नहीं बल्कि वहां की दिशा ध्याणी (पुली) जहां भी रहेगी, यदि मुझे याद करेगी तो वहां जाकर उसकी रक्षा तक करूंगी । कुंजु निश्चिंत हो गया, उसने गांव के प्रति अपना फर्ज निभा दिया था । तब से धारी की बेटियां जहां भी विवाही गईं, सुख से रहने लगी । सास, ससुराल वाले उसकी इष्ट देवी की शक्ति जो पहचानते थे ।" (Naithany 1995:474).
121   The southern direction is additionally associated with Yama, the god of death, which again corresponds to the direction of the gaze towards the burning ghat.

conversation Oct. 6, 2016). This suggests not only their strong connection with the soil and other natural structures, but also their function in keeping the forces of nature at bay (Dhasmana 1995).[122]

> [. . .] The conception of Kedarkhand cosmology is based on the rubrics of the natural settings. Indigenous traditions are manifestations of the human attempt and endeavour to invoke, appease and influence the colossal forces and challenges arising from the natural phenomena of the greater Himalayan ranges. (Dhasmana 1995:42)

> As residents of the valley of gods the local people of Kedarkhand worship many local gods and deities in open air temples or oromorphic forms [. . .]. Interacting with snow, avalanches, hailstorms, excessive rainfalls, floods, landslides, forests, wild animals and other natural phenomena the highlanders have a complete inventory of gods, protecting spirits, harmful supernatural forces, benevolent and malevolent spirits controlling the entire natural phenomena which may be described as Kedarkhand cosmogony. (Dhasmana 1995:36f)

It is evident that the ideas outlined here also shaped Dhārī Devī's relationship with her immediate environment.

2.4.1 Newspaper Narratives and Expert Opinions— A *Śilā* (Rock) versus Floods

This subsection will now present some examples of how these elements of oral history—albeit already in mediated form—appeared in press coverage. It then explores how facets of the temple's history found their reflection in studies by state committees that evaluated the project in terms of its continuation or cancellation.

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122   Sax (2009:29) presents an interesting example in this respect from the Chamoli district in Garhwal. His informants, referring to the Bhairava deity they worshipped, elucidated why their ancestor too, as in the case of Dhārī Devī, refrained from building him a temple. The deity depicted likewise resided on the riverbank and near a cremation ground. In this case the villagers felt that the construction of a temple was inappropriate, and called it the "tantric method," which requires a god to remain directly on the ground. The idea is again that the deity oversees what happens at the cremation ground, but clearly this form of control extends to the wider environment.

Eventually, it will be seen how ideas about the Goddess extended their influence on the outcome of legal proceedings.

To begin with, a few elucidations on the local newspaper Amar Ujālā, which had been assigned a pivotal role in this study. The Amar Ujālā offers a number of unsurpassable advantages. despite some recognised shortcomings in the investigation of cultural phenomena through newspaper articles. These drawbacks mainly result from the inherent qualities and principles of the media and their selective way of reporting (cf. Chapter 5.2.1). Amar Ujālā is not only the highest circulation Hindi daily newspaper and the most widely read in the region,[123] but the publication also has a close connection to the history and socio-political identity of the state. A predominant feature is thus considered to be its proximity to the *pahāṛī* (mountain) society, or its intimate connection to the grassroots level.

The Amar Ujālā continues to be an expanding press product, a phenomenon that is in line with the general development of the Indian newspaper market. Growth rates of print editions are high, despite the gradual takeover of information dissemination by the Internet and social media. According to the Indian Readership Survey 2019 (first quarter), the print media on the subcontinent are defying the global downward trend. Particularly the Hindi dailies showed a significant increase of about 10 million readers between 2017 and 2019 (MRUC 2019; Choudhury 2019).[124]

Founded in Agra in 1948, the Amar Ujālā is one of the 12 newspapers that originate from the period of the Indian freedom struggle or the phase immediately following it (Amar Ujālā 2019; Panwar 2002). The paper was a major player and emerged as one of the main beneficiaries of a development that took place in the 1970s and 1980s, which is referred to as "India's newspaper revolution" (Jeffery 2000).[125] Amar Ujālā together with the Dainik Jāgraṇ, were the pioneers

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123   The distinction is made here because surveys of the Indian newspaper market usually do not calculate the amount of copies sold, but the number of individuals reading a single copy. It is assumed that several people read a single newspaper, not only in a family context, but a sole copy usually circulates among e.g. customers of tea shops, restaurants, hairdressers, rickshaw drivers, etc. Depending on the presumed number of readers of a single paper, the number of readers also varies considerably.

124   The "Amar Ujala is India's 3rd largest newspaper with total readership of 4.65 [46500000] crore readers [. . .]" (IRS 2017, as cited in Amar Ujālā 2019).

125   The salient feature of this "revolution" is that this growth in the press market was caused by newspapers in the local languages. Until that time, the English-language press had led the newspaper market. These growth rates came at a time when newspaper circulations in the Western world were already shrinking owing to increased rivalry from television. Although this competitive effect was also felt in India, it did not have the same impact on the media sector, and in particular on the local language press (A. Kumar 2011:72). A. Kumar explains this phenomenon by the fact that the formerly illiterate people who had learned to read wanted to do just that, namely read.

that began to focus on rural markets and regional issues. Initially the rise of the BKU (Bharatiya Kisan Union) peasant movement became an opportunity to spread into the rural areas of Uttar Pradesh (Panwar 2002). The expansion process was extended to Uttarakhand in the late 1980s and the state got its own edition in 1997. Here, the Amar Ujālā created an elaborate network based on news gathering- and distribution from and to the remotest corners of the state and covering the news across the region. Its management had strategically set up the innovative and highly sophisticated information system, which A. Kumar (2011:53) called the "phenomenon of hyperlocalisation of the news."[126] This scheme "constructed a regional public space that gave primacy to local politics" (ibid: 76) and even decisively "transformed the Pahari public sphere" (A. Kumar 2011:53f). 16 different regional editions existing today in Uttarakhand are indicative of this high local specialisation, which guarantees proximity to the target audience.[127]

Besides forming part of the developments in the Indian newspaper landscape, the vernacular daily has a direct historical link to the affairs of the state. Much of its success story in the region is attributable to its earlier commitment and active role in the struggle for an independent mountain state. The people's uprising ultimately led to the formation of the separate state of Uttaranchal in 2000, which was later renamed Uttarakhand. News media are generally seen as an ally and mouthpiece of people's movements, and so the two are tightly connected.

> Unlike organised political movements that are led by political parties, *jan andolans* [people's movements] do not utilise institutional means such as electoral politics to make claims on the state and other stakeholders in a democracy. Instead, in order to be seen and heard in the corridors of power, they claim public space and garner support from the news media, a relatively autonomous institution, and civil society. (A. Kumar 2011:2)

126   Before digitalisation, the problem was to transmit the information. The system created by the Amar Ujālā was tailored to the specific geophysical conditions of the mountain regions. As A. Kumar (2011) points out, the highways of the two regions Garhwal and Kumaon run along the large river valleys, where the main towns are located, while the villages tend to be higher up on the mountain ridges. The newspaper's novel courier system took advantage of the newspaper delivery vans, which undertook their daily tours all the way up to the border region of the mountains and back. On their return journey to the plains, they collected the various news items from local reporters and delivered them to the newsrooms in Dehradun and Meerut. This scheme was supplemented by the additional utilisation of public transport buses and the function of their drivers as couriers (A. Kumar 2011).

127   Separate editions can be found in the following locations: Rishikesh, Almora, Uttarkashi, Udham Singh Nagar, Kotdwar, Chamoli, Champawat, Tehri, Dehradun, Nainital, Pithoragarh, Pauri, Bageshwar, Roorkee, Rudraprayag, Haridwar.

By the time the massive social mobilisation swept through Uttarakhand in 1994, the Amar Ujālā had already established its distinctive system of news gathering and dissemination. This helped to meet the increasing demand for information exchange. While sales figures multiplied, the publication's corporate identity was also decisively shaped by the events of the time; "[. . .] the support extended by *Amar Ujala* and *Dainik Jagran* to the andolan [movement] consolidated their social position as pahari [mountain] or Uttarakhandi newspapers" (A. Kumar 2011:60). The launch of an independent Uttarakhand edition in 1997 was therefore partly due to a general increase in readership, but also to the newspaper's backing of the political campaign in 1994 (Kumar 2011). Kumar's analysis of what role the local media played during the 2013 floods nevertheless concludes that the historical significance of the Amar Ujālā, but also the Dainik Jāgraṇ, later put them in a biased position. Their function as mouthpieces of the movement and the close ties they had developed to the emergence of the independent mountain state had bound them to this new political entity and respective leading governments. This means that the way editors frame their news may be more aligned with government policy than in other states with less close ties to the authorities.

> [. . .] many reporters working for the regional news media, including Amar Ujālā and Dainik Jāgraṇ, who were seen practising activist journalism during the statehood movement in Uttarakhand before 2000, confessed that it seemed that the news media engaged in self-censorship when it came to questioning the state government's policies, especially about urban settlement and hydroelectric dams. (A. Kumar 2015:290)

In terms of this case study, a presumed lack of critical reporting as on the subject of hydropower projects would indeed be a point of concern. Yet after having personally surveyed the coverage of the dam project during this period, a different impression emerged. The reporting generally seemed to be quite objective, even though the newspaper may not have addressed the fundamental questions about the legitimacy of these development schemes. The articles gave equal space to the different parties and their arguments, and repeatedly pointed out failures on the part of the administration and the hydropower company. What cemented this notion was that during an interview with the late editor of the magazine Rījanal Riporṭar in Srinagar, it turned out that his wife was also a journalist and worked for the Amar Ujālā. The Rījanal Riporṭar though was a left-wing, highly critical publication that monitored the construction of the hydroelectric project with eagle eyes. The magazine consistently pursued legal and moral violations of the hydroelectric project as well as drawing attention to the company's nexus with regional politics. Such an entanglement suggests that this issue is more complex and there

are other factors that also need to be considered in terms of the quality of reporting. Here it would be a family constellation that arguably led to critical ideas and positions being incorporated into the coverage of the project in question, despite historical obligations.

The reasoning in the Amar Ujālā for or against the construction of the hydroelectric project and the shifting of the temple appears to be a multi-layered thread in which the mythical aspect is only a small part of the argumentation. This underscores that, in keeping with its corporate orientation, the news organ is generally more concerned with social issues on the conflict than with faith-based considerations. Yet few examples show how also the origin story or events from Dhārī Devī's past serve as a rationale for a pursued agenda concerning the trajectory of the cultural space along the river. The historical context as featured in the coverage seems to go back to a one-man campaign by a person named Premlal Pandey. He is introduced as member of a Park Planning Commission and a Working Group on Roots and Herbs; "प्रेमलाल पांडे ने यहां जारी विज्ञप्ति में कहा है कि धारी मंदिर को डूबाया नहीं जा रहा है, बल्कि अपलिफ्ट कर उसी स्वरूप में ऊंचा उठाया जा रहा है। धारी देवी का समय-समय पर स्थान परिवर्तन होता रहा है, [. . .]" (Amar Ujālā 2011, May 19). "Premlal Pandey said in a release issued here that the Dhārī Devī Temple will not be submerged but will be uplifted in the same form. Dhārī Devī from time to time changes her place [. . .]." It is apparent that Premlal Pandey, while pleading for the project, maintains that there will be essentially no change as it is only an "elevation" of the statue. In the next sentence though—and thus contradictorily—he stresses the deity's occasional habit to change places. One could decipher the message as follows: although the place change is not a change of location—an argumentation that will be encountered again in the legal context—it is nevertheless the custom of the deity to change its place. The assertion that the Goddess shifted locations at different times is based on the understanding that these shifts were caused to a large part by flood events. This point becomes evident in the next quotation. The comment probably comes from the same person, but he is presented here only as an inhabitant of the village of Gandasu:

> वहीं गडासू निवासी प्रेम लाल पांडे ने प्रकाशित कुछ पोस्टर और हैंडबिलों इस बात का जिक्र किया है कि धारी देवी एक स्थान पर कभी नहीं रही। कालीमठ से जब धारी बहकर पिटारे में आई थी तब सर्व प्रथम बार मूर्ति को धारी गांव के समीप एक निर्जन चट्टान पर रखा गया था। तभी से धारी नाम पड़ा। उसके बाद गोरखाओं ने मूर्ति को धारी गांव से उठाकर वर्तमान कलियासौड़ नदी तक पर स्थापित किया गया। उसके बाद 1988 में गुदाड़ लाल मूर्ति को एक बार फिर धारी गांव ले गया था। कई दिनों तक धारी अपने पुराने स्थान पर रहने के बाद वर्तमान में कलियासौड स्थान पर आई। (Amar Ujālā 2010, July 4)

> Then some posters and handbills published by Prem Lal Pandey
> resident of Gandasu pointed out that Dhārī Devī never remained
> in one place. When Dhārī was washed away from Kālīmaṭh
> and arrived in a hamper, then in the initial period the idol was
> kept on a secluded rock near the village of Dhari. Since then,
> she has been named Dhārī. After that, the Gorkhas took the idol
> from Dhari village and it was installed at the present Kaliyasaur
> river [site]. Thereafter, in 1988, Gudad Lal took the statue again
> to Dhari village. Having stayed in her old place for some days,
> Dhārī came to her present spot in Kaliyasaur.

Premlal Pandey specifies the various circumstances of the Devī's displacements,
which are not only related to floods, but are also the result of human intervention.
His ideas about the place-changes of the Goddess from childhood to the present
are obviously derived from information in Naithany's book and not gleaned from
local oral sources.[128] The account of the text contains some inconsistencies though,
as for instance the arrival of the Devī in a hamper is probably a misinterpretation
of the original text. In the chapter on Dhārī Devī, Naithany never mentions that
the Goddess came down the valley in any sort of carrying device. Although one
passage notes a deity being transported in a basket, it describes the arrival of the
Bhairava statue, which is now part of the temple interior. Likewise, there is no
reference to the Gurkha's involvement in any process of shifting the Goddess's
statue. Noteworthy here is that Premlal Pandey published his conceptions of the
deity in the same period that the *dhunār* dwellers in the villages around the nascent
lake released their leaflet. This would be shortly before the temple *pūjārī*s dissem-
inated their written version on the origins of the Goddess, as discussed in the last
chapter. Whilst said Premlal Pandey is according to his name a Brahmin, he uses
the arguments employed by the group of the *dhunār*—all of which were sharply
rejected by the *pūjārī*s around this time in their document.

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128   This idea is taken from another citation from the article, "वहीं इस बीच गडासू निवासी
प्रेमलाल पांडे ने यह कहकर नई बहस का जन्म दे दिया कि धारी देवी शैशव काल से लेकर वर्तमान तक
अनेकों स्थान बदल चुकी है।" (Amar Ujālā 2010, July 4). "Meanwhile Premlal Pandey, resident
of Gandasu instigated a new debate by saying that Dhārī Devī has already shifted to many
places since childhood up to the present time." Although it is not mentioned here, since she
is also seen as a village daughter and it is women's role to change home after marriage, he
probably also cashes in on the cultural understanding of women's mobility with this custom
of changing residence. The fact that also the Devī is understood to have come from one
village to the other is supported by the extension of the central origin story which is her
discussion with the Dhunār Kunju on her maternal home, the village of Dhari (see page
136f).

The next example similarly contains misrepresented information or turns mistakes from the history book into legitimate data for discussion. In the passage, in which the Municipal Chairman Mohan Lal Jain pleads that the so-called "beautification" of the temple, which denotes the construction of the new temple, should be taken up as fast as possible, he argues as follows; "कहा 1851, 1894 तथा 1924 में जब बाढ़ आई थी उसके बाद भी धारी देवी मंदिर का सौंदर्यीकरण किया गया था।" (Amar Ujālā 2010, Oct. 14). "He said that also after the floods of 1851, 1894 and 1924 the Dhārī Devī Temple was beautified." In this excerpt, the proponent does not allude to the habit of the Goddess to change her location, but argues that the floods in themselves mean or entail change. With the remarkable and euphemistic use of the term "beautification," the municipal chairman indicates that although the floods initially proved destructive for the place, it subsequently improved as it became even "more beautiful" than before. This line of reasoning suggests that also the next level of transformation of the place as an envisaged "beautification" will result in the ultimate enhancement. It is worth noting that his statement invented an extra flood. According to available records, no flood occurred in the year 1851.[129] Naithany though in a passage of his book gives a wrong date, 1851, for the flood of Birahi. Possibly a misprint, this erroneous date turned into another handed down flood. This mix-up once again illustrates the exorbitant significance that each word of the historian's book gained as one of the few written texts dealing with the Goddess. Perhaps more interesting is that this person cannot know at this point that more floods are about to come, which will replicate the scenario he describes in his declaration—that in the end it will be a flood, or rather two floods, that will result in the radical transformation of the place.

As has been sufficiently demonstrated, elements of the Goddess's origin stories and their various versions were used as argumentative means. Not only did this occur through individuals or social groups and through the temple trust, but they also found their way into official investigations and appeared in reports of expert committees on the matter. Eventually components of these stories entered the verdicts of the different court cases. One of these investigations was conducted on June 6 and 7, 2011 (NGT 2016) after the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) had suspended construction work on the project. At that time, the MoEF set up a four-member committee for the execution of a comprehensive assessment.[130] After its field survey, however, one participant of the committee came to diverging conclusions regarding the further course of the project. This member

129 See e.g. Parkash (2015) for a comprehensive list of landslides and flash floods in the area of Garhwal.
130 Dr B.P. Das, Vice-Chairman, EAC, Dr Nayanjot Lahiri, Professor, Department of History, Delhi University and Member, Delhi Urban Art Commission; Shri Bharat Bhushan, Director (IA); Ms. Sancita Jindal, Member Secretary, EAC (NGT 2016).

also continued to follow her own line, resulting in two different and contradicting assessments being produced. Both reports not only partly base their argumentation on the origin narratives, but the members of the commission even consulted the historian Shivprasad Naithani in person as an authoritative source for the temple and in order to learn his perspective on the matter (Lahiri 2011:3; Das & Jindal 2011:5).[131] The historian Nayanjot Lahiri from the University of Delhi was the deviant member of the committee. After evaluating the historical material, she regarded the rock (*śilā*), on which the deity resided and where the Dhunār Kunju found her "stuck in a part of this rock platform," the most prominent component.

> The rock promontory on which the temple stands is also histori-
> cally connected with the temple. Apparently, in the massive flood
> of 1894, the Devi image was washed away from the worship area
> and got stuck in a part of this rock platform. Eventually, Kunju
> Dhunar from the Dhari village is said to have succeeded in rescu-
> ing the Devi image from there. There is another version about the
> events relating to the 1894 flood in which the image is described
> as having been brought by the flood to this place from somewhere
> else [. . .]. However, the version where Dhari Devi was being
> worshipped at the spot of the present temple before the 1894 flood
> is likely to be the correct one, as Dr. Nathani's work has pointed
> out. To put it another way, the view of the temple management
> and local people mentioned in the previous paragraph—about
> the religious sanctity of the deity being connected with the base
> rock—has a basis in the tradition that it was this rock which pre-
> vented the image of Dhari Devi from being swept away in the
> 1894 flood. (Lahiri 2011:10)[132]

131 Lahiri introduced the author's work as follows, "A detailed and comprehensive description of the goddess, the temple, its mythological and historical associations is available in Dr. Shivprasad Naithani's *Uttarakhand Shri Kshetra Shrinagar* [. . .]" (Lahiri 2011:4).
132 Her detailed justification goes on as set out in the following: "Incidentally, Dr. Nathani refers in his book [. . .] to an epigraph of the time of Gurkha rule (1809–1814) which mentions the donation by Shri Sardar Shreshta Thapa of one buffalo and one goat for the worship of Dhari. In this inscription, a *pūjārī* named Lalli is mentioned who is the ancestor of the Pandey family that continues to conduct the puja here [. . .]. This underlines the fact that by the early 19th century, Dhari Devi was being worshipped here, and it is likely that such worship goes back to a period before the date of the abovementioned inscription. VIII. Recommendation: Keeping its religious character and its heritage value in mind, I would strongly recommend that a new plan be prepared [. . .]. Respecting the location of the temple on a natural rock, the lifted temple platform (with the rock that forms its backdrop and part of the rock on which it presently stands) should appear to rest on a rocky outcrop and harmonize with the natural setting." (Lahiri 2011:10f).

As can be seen from this excerpt, Lahiri first reasoned that the version in which the statue had stood there even before the flood was the most realistic. She maintained that the rock was the natural formation, which had prevented the statue from being washed away during the 1894 flood. With this statement the *śilā* now assumes a central role for the identity of the place. While her remark points out that the rock was able to withstand the powerful and overwhelming flood, at the same time she evokes a mythic image in which a sacred rock protects a holy site or a holy icon.[133] The conclusion is that the ensemble of the deity and *śilā* is inseparable and that the lifting of the temple according to earlier (and later implemented) plans would constitute an unacceptable interference with the historical continuum.

As opposed to Lahiri, the report of the other three members of the MoEF team regards the Goddess as movable. Their argument is that even Naithany himself downplayed the role of the rock for the Goddess and he instead emphasised her movable character.

> The importance of the rock on which the idol is mounted, as suggested by one of the pujaries was discussed with Prof. Naithani who categorically refuted the same. He mentioned that the idol of the devi was found near this rock however, it was earlier mounted in the village Dhari by a local person belonging to a weaker section. Later, the idol was mounted on this rock. Moreover, the deity has been shifted many times. On this rock itself, it has been lifted and placed on a marble platform. (Das & Jindal 2011:13f)

According to Naithany, or what the expert team understood to be his opinion, the Goddess is movable owing to the already familiar ideas—namely that the Goddess arrived with a flood, even without explicitly mentioning it—and that she was subsequently relocated several times. The views advocated here clearly echo the argumentation, or rather what we have come to know as the reading of the *dhunār* community regarding the past of the temple. That is the case, although even Naithany presents two variants of it in his book. There he rather supports the version attested by older documents, which states that the Goddess had only

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133   This motif reappeared during the flood of 2013 in Kedarnath, where it was also a rock that saved the temple in this high mountain location. "Attempts at meaning-making also include references to 'miraculous' survival of 'sacred' places of worship. One such instance of a 'miracle' that captured the imagination of people during the Uttarakhand Floods of 2013 was that the 1200-year-old Kedarnath temple, its statues, the *lingam* inside the Lord Shiva temple and the statue of Nandi (the bull) had survived while everything around it was destroyed" (Bhattarcharjee 2015).

temporarily disappeared from her place on the rock. But in the above reference, it sounds as if the statue was first, after its discovery and by the "person of a weaker section," taken to the village of Dhari and then to the rock. This account would in fact further reduce the connection between the two components, statue and rock. And on this basis, the MoEF concludes that the statue can be moved without further consideration because it has repeatedly changed its position. Next, the MoEF team supports its stance with the argument of an earlier change of location of a few centimetres within the temple premises itself. This thought already crops up in the last citation and is further elaborated in another paragraph.

> From historical view, it [the temple] has been in existence from the year 1804 but the idol of Dhari Devi has been shifted a number of times and has been lifted in the recent past and mounted on a marble platform of 5 m × 4 m size. An old rock (shila) behind the deity seems to be of religious significance. (Das & Jindal 2011:10)

This report, while acknowledging some significance of the rock behind the deity, obviously rather downplays its meaning and at the same time does not lay any importance on the attachment of the two—Goddess and *śilā*. Naithany's surprising rejection of the importance of the rock as a point of reference, despite its prominence in his book chapter, and also other circumstances of the encounter with the author made Lahiri sceptical about the reliability and legitimacy of the testimonies received. Above all, she doubted the author's independent expression of opinion during the interview. As for the interview situation, Lahiri criticised that almost all the committee's interviews with various people took place in the presence of the project advocates. And this factor may have influenced the outcome of the consultations:

> The team's interaction with groups of people and with several large gatherings, with the exception of the meeting with Dr. Bharat Jhunjhunwala and members of the Prakriti Paryavaran Sansthan, were inevitably in the presence of the project proponents. This does not usually make for frank and free discussion and it is possible that several issues and concerns articulated in those gatherings were influenced by their presence. (Lahiri 2011:3)

Not only the flood related place-changes of the Goddess assume importance in the discussion on movability, but even small-scale alterations of her position. So for example, her earlier elevation from her place on the rock to a marble altar can be interpreted as a place change. It could be construed here that the transfer

of the Goddess to the pedestal became another milestone marking the gradual separation from her natural and riverine environment to an integrated part of an artificially created landscape. In this way, even such a small step became part of the process of the deity's appropriation into a man-made and human-controlled environment.

There was another inspection of the Archaeological Survey of India, which likewise includes a very short note about the temple's legend into its report (Bhargava 2012). "Tradition has this that idol of the deity being worshiped, recovered from the Alaknanda river which installed on a rock and has been worshiped for several years [plenty of *sic*]." The document, however, unimpressed by any recovery story, concludes that "Dhari Devi temple is a modern structure hardly can be dated to 35–40 years back. Moreover, it is a flat R.C.C. [reinforced concrete column] structure on the R.C.C. columns without any architectural features." The statue of the Goddess is said to be older than the temple, but "the idol could not be dated to more than one hundred years" and further "surrounding area of the temple has also been explored but nothing significant on archaeological point of view could be found in the vicinity of the temple." The report therefore reasons that, "[. . .] the structure in question cannot be defined as an ancient monument and thus cannot be proposed for declaration as a protected monument of national importance" (Bhargava 2012). The outcome of the archaeological department's assessment is certainly an issue to be addressed by heritage discourses. In any case, it confirms Orr's (2012; cf. Chapter 2.3.1) critique of the work of such institutions, as the department only focuses on the structure of the temple and the material base of the statue, while ignoring other significant components that determine this place of worship. But even if the department did not want to take its legends into account, there would still be the Nepalese documents proving the existence of an earlier temple in whatever form (see also Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 26). Due to the institution's bias, the only element that counts for the evaluation is the material foundation and here only the stone of the rather recently built temple walls, not the bedrock. Water though, the key element for the tradition of the temple, is entirely ignored. For Jhunjhunwala, one of the activists, who tried to defend the old temple by employing its historical relevance as an argument for its preservation—and who initially gave the impetus for the archaeological department's investigation— this step apparently backfired. In his later conclusion, Jhunjhunwala (2013) soberly remarks that "ASI has not applied its mind to historic aspects and gone mainly on archaeological aspects."

2.4.2   When Imaginations and Narratives about the Place went to Court

'Evidence in which legend, mythology, politics and morality are interwoven are ill-suited for the positivist of scientific analysis characteristically employed by the court in which the aim of determining objective truth is pursued.'[134] Legal evidence and indigenous storytelling are therefore at odds with one another (Babcock 2012:42)

How the discussion about Dhārī Devī's flood-related history and the connection to her place affected the question of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of her relocation eventually became visible in the final Supreme Court ruling (Supreme Court of India 2013). The verdict was handed down after the 2013 flood, respectively after the Goddess had been moved already to the makeshift temple onto the platform. Originally filed by the activists opposing the relocation of the temple and then challenged by the AHPCL, the lawsuit was a last ditch attempt to reverse the relocation of the deity. This passage will illuminate the collision of different systems of knowledge along a juridical process and the problematic role of oral histories as evidence. Further it is investigated how the Supreme Court dealt with these identified contradictions in the case of Dhārī Devī Temple.

What the Supreme Court consulted were the mediated reports of the expert committees. These had at first transcribed the ideas about the temple and Goddess derived from consultations with villagers and other authoritative persons and converted them into English written form. The information thus gained was in turn pervaded in several ways by material from the chapter of Naithany, whose book is in Hindi but who may have collected his material at least partly in Garhwali. In the final ruling on the Dhārī Devī Temple therefore, the involved oral narratives about the Goddess appear in a multiply processed and diluted form. While the court integrates the earlier reports of different expert committees into its judgement, it concentrates the cultural concerns in its evaluation on the existence of the rock as the only discernible counter-argument against the already implemented relocation of the temple.[135] The judgement refers to the result of an investigation conducted in August 2012 by the B. P. Das Committee. The members of the inspecting group were allegedly informed by the Temple Samiti that:

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134   MacLaran et al. 2011, as cited in Babcock 2012:42.
135   "We find no reason to differ from the views expressed by the expert committee, which was submitted hearing all the affected parties, including the Trustees of the Temple, devotees, *Pujaris* etc. Committee reports to that extent stand accepted" (Supreme Court of India 2013:54).

> Maa *Dhari Devi* is not part of the base rock. It is placed on a
> marble/tiled platform on the rock. The President of Temple Samiti
> also informed that about 20–22 years back, the deity had once lifted
> [*sic*] from its earlier position. (Supreme Court of India 2013:43)[136]

Different from the portrayal in the last section, the fact that the deity was shifted from
the rock on a kind of altar is in this case not overtly promoted as a place change, but
as the moment where the unity of deity and rock ceased to exist. The temple commit-
tee even states quite drastically that the rock and the deity are not in any relation to
each other. With this, and in stark contrast to their earlier argumentation, it explicitly
propagates the mobility of the deity. The judges however do not adopt this kind of
reasoning, but approach the topic from a different perspective. Although they regard
the relation between the two components as important, their ruling argues that the
unity of the rock and the temple has not been interrupted. On the contrary, they do
not even acknowledge the construction of the new temple as a case of temple relo-
cation. As per their verdict, the representatives of the court still understand the unity
as guaranteed by the physical proximity and the possibility of a "mental association"
between the two constituents. This is despite the fact that the obvious physical con-
nection between the temple and the rock was broken by the transfer to the platform.
According to the idea that emerges in the judgement, the temple has simply remained
in the same place and just moved a little upwards: "sacred rock on which the temple
exits [*sic*] is still kept intact and only the height of the temple increased so that the
temple would not be submerged in the water" (Supreme Court of India 2013:55).

In shifting the focus to ritual practices, the court also built its assessment of the
temple case on other precedents.[137] The judges compare the Dhārī Devī Temple
issue with the landmark case of the Orissa Mining Corporation (see Sahu 2008)
and its plan to mine bauxite deposits from the Niyamgiri hills. This former scheme
threatened the rights of different local tribes, mainly the Dongaria Khondas, and
provoked strong opposition from their and other activist groups.[138] But unlike the

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136   "Discussions were held with [. . .], office bearer of Aadhyashakti Maa Dhari *Pūjārī* Nyas,
Shri V. P. Pandey, President along with Shri Vivek Pandey, Secretary and a Pujari namely Shri
Manish Pandey" (Supreme Court of India 2013:41).

137   Babcock explains that in the absence of clearly defined rules, especially in indigenous
land claim cases, the court tends to rely on precedents. Through these previous cases, cer-
tain factors have already undergone a kind of verification process: "precedent is important
as it both establishes 'the outer limits of a particular legal pronouncement' and the 'foun-
dation for subsequent interpretations of those limits' (Torres & Milun 1990, as cited in
Babcock 2012:39).

138   The ministry ultimately succeeded in preventing the project. See, however, the cri-
tique by Chakravartty and Shrivastava (2013) on the issue that the MoEF made religious
arguments the main theme in the case.

Odisha judgment, the court here concludes: "We are of the view that none of the rights of the devotees of Dhari Devi temple has been affected by raising the level of the temple, which remains attached to the sacred rock" (Supreme Court of India 2013:55; cf. India Today 2013, Aug. 13). As it transpires, the word "attachment" here takes on the meaning that as long as the cult and rites tied to the temple are not affected, the Goddess and the rock still form their earlier unity. One particular rite to which they refer is probably the circumambulation of the rock, which is still theoretically possible in the new temple. Nevertheless, it is the circumambulation of an intangible, an imaginary rock that has vanished into water and silt. The *śilā* was thus transformed into a rock of memories and legends, also thanks to the artificially created image of a boulder behind the statue.

The outmanoeuvring of one argument backed by "historicity" or long established beliefs by another became visible, when the B.P. Das Committee confronted the villagers with an option that was temporarily under discussion. This alternative intended to construct a bund well around the temple, instead of lifting up the whole complex. Apart from high costs and technical challenges associated with this option, also the resistance and reasoning of the villagers served to abolish the idea. As stated in the committee's report, the locals argued on two grounds that the Goddess could not be set up within the walls of a bund well. Firstly, that she demanded to be kept in the open air and secondly, that she required a free gaze to the other side of the river, onto the village of Dhari. The rationale for the unobstructed view in the Supreme Court ruling reads as follows: "The Temple Samiti explained that Maa *Dhari Devi* is presently facing a village called *Dhari* Village and offering its blessing to the villagers and thus, protecting them from the perils and penury of different sorts" (Supreme Court of India 2013:43).

The established notion that the Goddess has an intimate connection with the village on the other side of the river and must be facing the opposite places has already been detailed at the beginning of this chapter. Specifics of this context were not discussed in court, but the common knowledge of this conception was obviously reflected in the emerging argumentation. The discussion about the bund well demonstrates that the proponents of a spatial change to the temple place less importance on the Goddess's union with the rock than on her other vital features. These are the free space above the statue's head and her unobstructed view across the river. The rock connection now appears less relevant, whereas the other attributes that shape her identity surpass it. These features practically force a relocation of the Goddess, as they can only be maintained if the Goddess is brought onto a higher level. Otherwise she would drown or her gaze would be directed towards a wall—and ending there.

2.4.3   Past Floods in Public and Institutional Contestation, Summary and Conclusion

The chapter demonstrated how established beliefs, creation myths and other records of past events with implications for the Goddess and the place found their way from the local level via the print media to a broader public. As they underwent further transformation processes, these imaginations fed into discourses that unfolded in the institutional sphere. Here the stories moved to the forefront in the rationales of institutional bodies. They ultimately influenced the Supreme Court's final verdict in 2013 on the legality of the relocation of the Dhārī Devī Temple and retroactively on the construction or commissioning of the hydropower plant in Srinagar. Following this trajectory, it could be observed that the focus of these instances shifted from the centrality of water to a centrality of the earthen foundation and to established practices as embodiments of place identity. It was here that the main feature defining the image of the place of worship became the rock on which the statue had once been installed as an after-effect of a catastrophic flood. While the flood-based stories and the deity's affinity with the river still feature in newspaper coverage, the relationship between the Goddess and the floods diminished in significance as it moved to the institutional level. Apart from being a consequence of underlying agendas, this happened because of very contradictory approaches or rather due to different strategies of knowledge generation and the ensuing incompatibility of oral histories and water-fed legends with the language of legal authorities. Given the high degree of mutability in the flood tales, it can be surmised that the court, in its need for firm evidence, privileged the rock and long-standing tangible practices as subjects for the hearings. These more solid components ostensibly offered a greater sense of unambiguity than those narratives connected to the inconceivability of water.

However, the assumption of greater stability of evidence proved to be erroneous. As has been shown in the investigation of the different forms of the narratives, conclusions based on supposedly static evidence are equally changeable. This finds expression, on the one hand, in the fact that the voices advocating the immobility of the Goddess and her temple base their argumentation on the existence of this rock and the idea that the unity between the two is inseparable. On the other hand, the actors who promote the mobility of the Goddess or the modification of the temple, while still acknowledging the presence of the rock, either downplay this connection or massively reinterpret it. They justify their stance by asserting that the unity of the two components had already been broken on previous occasions, either by moving the statue to other locations or by slightly altering its position from the surface of the rock to an altar. The Archaeological Survey of India's assessment shifts the focus in terms of the material base even further towards the

boundary walls and general structure of the temple. In doing so, it completely leaves aside the central pillars of established beliefs and practices that are deemed important for a living temple and the worship associated with it. The court, likewise supporting the modification of the temple, sees the essential features of a living temple in established ritual performances. This means that as long as these practices are facilitated, the integrity of the sanctuary is guaranteed. From this perspective, the integrity of deity and rock is also still in place as long as the practices based on their interrelation can be carried out. Although the legal body takes into account the significance of the rock, the court in an interesting twist, simply negates the existence of a place change, or re-defines the meaning of a connection between two sacralised elements. In its judgement the drowning of the stone and the physical separation of the two are not perceived as an alteration, since both objects of worship remain united in the same imagined space. Such underlying ideas are similarly valid for the given example of the once envisaged bund well. Even though the promoters of a new temple acknowledge here the importance of the rock to a certain extent, its relevance is far surpassed by other key features concerning the beliefs about the Goddess. While the erection of the bund well was meant to guarantee a unity of stone and statue, this connection is not further discussed. Instead, special attention is laid on another attributed requirement of the Goddess, which is her particular relationship to the village on the other side of the river.

Although the Goddess does not show direct agency in all of these debates, she obviously dictates the conditions under which the reconstruction of her temple can be realised. This is evident in her demand for the maintenance of her vital river-bound entitlements from whatever perspective. As for the agency of floods—since the river and floods not only formed the physical shape but also informed the identity of the rock, they still extended their influence on the institutional assessments as a backdrop setting. While they thus form the framing factor for the discourses surrounding the Goddess and her site, the deluges still find access, and in a predominant position, to the lines of reasoning presented in the local newspaper. However, they clearly lose ground in the reports of experts, institutions and in the language of the court. In the search for "truth" drawn from a metaphysical context, these bodies ignore one of the most crucial aspects of the places' identity. Floods with their ungraspable dynamics and water with its ever-changing display of fluidity and as an antithesis to institutional proceedings obviously largely fail to enter into the temples of justice.

The problem of an argumentation based on narratives proved to be also here the changeability and susceptibility to manipulation of the stories. This applies not only because the legends already under normal conditions are subjected to change over time and among different settings. In cases such as this one, the mutable nature of stories is further reinforced by a mechanism described by Babcock

(2012). He states that threats to a particular place can alter and amplify its cultural meanings and this is reflected in the accounts of that place. But by far the most critical point is that this characteristic makes the stories vulnerable to being capitalised on by various stakeholders. As the origin stories and beliefs offer a range of diverse themes and consist of different versions, they can be easily adjusted, or a desired element can be picked out and redesigned to fit any agenda pursued.[139] In this way, narratives and beliefs assume an arbitrary shape and become highly questionable in terms of their suitability as evidence. In order to be judicially eligible, the stories had to undergo several translation processes into written and thus fixed formats. Although they have already lost some of their typical and vivid character in this process, and even if the judges chose the seemingly "more solid" features of these histories, they still retained their random character. Therefore, the main target of making them part of a legal process or socio-environmental assessment, especially in modern development projects, is probably to give these studies and subsequent legal proceedings a culturally sensitive façade (cf. Vaněk 2014). The court further tends to listen to the version of the narrative put forward by the hierarchically most dominant party (cf. Babcock 2012), which inevitably leads to the judgement reflecting the hegemonic discourse. As Lahiri (2011) pointed out the dubious circumstances of conducting a survey of various protagonists in the presence of stakeholders of the hydropower company, it can be confidently assumed that it had become part of the corporate strategy to display special consideration for cultural issues. Obviously, after various experiences of setbacks in environmental conflicts, the corporate world learned to harness the "culturally sensitive agenda" for their own objectives.[140] By means of such dynamics, however, legal proceedings become merely a kind of ritual performance (cf. Berti 2016).

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139 Werner (2015) in this regard cautions: "We have to keep in mind that 'spiritual,' 'religious' or 'faith-based' arguments can serve different agendas with regard to the support of place-based concerns: Either they mirror and thus sustain local beliefs or they project their own rationality on the locality in question. Accordingly, one has to carefully distinguish between the respective rationality of an argument and its rationalization in the scope of a political agenda. [. . .] 'tradition' can be arranged to fit 'modernity' and vice versa to justify the implementation of hydropower projects [. . .]" (Werner 2015:172).

140 Note, for example, the composition of the expert commissions, in which the participation of particular members in investigations is seen as highly critical. See e.g. Werner (2015:151), who remarked that "the constitution of the committee was criticized by many, since amongst its members were such people as Dr. B. P. Das, former member and Vice Chair of the EAC [Economic Advisory Council], in his previous function responsible for the commissioning of various hydropower projects."

3 From Rock to *Bhūmi* to *Dhārā*
The Protest against
the Goddess's Removal

While following Dhārī Devī's transformations and her relationship with the river, this part now transcends local flood memories and also the flood history of the Goddess. At this point it appears crucial to present the line of reasoning of the defenders of the former temple to highlight the significant differences in the conceptions about the place of the Goddess that accompanied the conflict. The subsequent passages demonstrate how the natural elements water and earth, notions of the native soil and of the flow of the river—and eventually of floods—have transformed from factors embedded in a local culture into symbols of national politics.

People from the neighbouring town of Srinagar initially formed the bulk of the opposition to the temple relocation, so the resistance at first crystallised from a largely local backdrop. Soon however, the symbols and rhetoric of the demonstrators merged with the imaginations of "external" actors about the place and their pursued agenda.[141] Their supra-regional ideas related to the sacred landscape encompassing the Himalayan region and the state of Uttarakhand in particular, as well as the entire Ganges system. The accompanying arguments of the protestors against Dhārī Devī's relocation spanned the arc from initial ecological, legal and site-related considerations to later concerns for the holy Himalayan region and at the heart of this concept the sanctity of the Ganges. Thereby, locally anchored representations, which include the folk tradition associated with the temple, played a diminishing role. The account of this transition process provided here begins with the ideas most closely linked to the locally formed identity of the temple. Ensuing passages will then illustrate the gradual shift in the debate onto an expanded scale and towards an overarching sacred space. This approach is going to shed light on the shifting patterns of the applied symbolism, as the title of the chapter already pointed out: "from rock to *bhūmi* (soil) to *dhārā* (flow)."

In order to better understand the social dynamics of the processes at hand, it is first necessary to elaborate on the historically evolved mechanisms at play in the mountain region. Local movements such as resistance to dam projects build on long-standing structural patterns that persisted throughout the existence of the

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141 See in this context the discussion on local identity in Chapter 5.2.4.

former mountain states or principalities that eventually merged to form the state of Uttarakhand. The region looks back on a long history of immigration and emigration as well as social, political and trade flows. At the same time, it has been marked by invasion and domination by external forces and their indiscriminate exploitation of the mountains and their inhabitants (Aryal 1995:14; Drew 2014:237; James 2004:368). This theme became evident with the invasion and occupation by the Gurkhas from 1790 onwards (A. Kumar 2011), and continued and aggravated later with the presence of the British Raj.[142] One of the first dramatic and visible effects of this seizure of local people's rights was felt when the hill communities were stripped of their centuries-old forest rights around mid-19th century (R. Rawat 2004).[143] Such practices contributed significantly to deepening the chasm between local and supra-regional interests in the area. Often, and even more pronounced after the attainment of statehood, state institutions themselves fostered those mechanisms. To this day the diversification and conflicting claims to spaces in the mountain region are repeated at various levels. They feature in the articulation of antagonisms, such as when the *pahāṛī* (mountain people) are juxtaposed with the *maidānī* (people from the plains). As a vestige of the centuries of political rule of the hill states from the Indian lowlands, these conceptions carry with them meanings of the dominant group as opposed to the dominated (Rangan 2000, as cited in R. Chakraborty 2018). Also attributes attached to the mountain dwellers, such as "backward, uneducated, superstitious and morally and spiritually inferior to the maidanis" (Whitmore 2016; Mathur 2016, as cited in R. Chakraborty 2018:18) still represent a legacy from the colonial era.

Given this background, it was hardly surprising that early mobilisation processes in this part of the Himalayas emerged as resistance to the practice of external forces claiming the mountains with the intention of extracting resources. In

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142   Due to the very violent regime of the Gurkhas in the region, and even the call for their support by the erstwhile ruler of Garhwal, king Sudarshan Shah, the invasion of the British into the mountain states was partly regarded as a salvation from the Nepali forces (A. Kumar 2011). This move was however anything but altruistic and rather part of British aggression. As an important strategic initiative, it gave them access to and control over trade routes to Central Asia and Russia, as well as other opportunities for economic gain. For that reason, the British kept the separate states of Kumaon and to some extent Garhwal under their dominion. On the other hand, they reinstated the earlier king of Garhwal (within the boundaries of present-day Tehri Garhwal), which was politically and economically of much lesser significance (Whitmore 2010:52).

143   However, the roles of outsiders and local actors are usually not so clearly delineated. During the mentioned period it were also the local princely rulers that collaborated with the British and especially they weakened the population's rights to the earlier village commons—mainly to fill their own pockets. Initial protests against these practices were thus directed at the local Rajas. See in this context also the developments leading to the Tilari massacre on May 30, 1930 (A. Kumar 2011).

fact, this was one of the factors leading to the initiation of one of the most famous social movements stemming from Uttarakhand—Chipko, the tree-hugger movement in 1973 (James 2004). Ownership questions that surfaced during this time subsequently found expression not only in the struggle against large dams in general (Werner 2015:119) and particularly in the case of the Tehri Dam (James 2004),[144] but, as scholars have argued, entailed also the struggle for an independent state (A. Kumar 2011:84).[145] The development of hydropower was eventually the point at which this paradigm of resource exploitation from the mountains clearly returned to the fore.

Apart from social and economic dimensions, the same pattern also applies to religious aspects or a geography of the sacred. Geographical assignments of meaning here led to a variety of sacred spaces in the mountains. Broadly speaking, the mountains comprise two distinct cultural strands. On the one hand, there is the lived culture of the mountain people, the *pahāṛī* culture with its own sacred geography. Then there is the imagined sacred landscape of the religious tourists. Coming from the framework of a more homogenised or normative pan-Indian Hinduism, their main focus is on the mythologically charged sites that are significant to their belief system. Authors as Whitmore (2010; also Sax 2009) in particular highlighted the features of these parallel, mutually influencing and sometimes competing spaces. Their presence comes to the fore most notably in the famous pilgrim centres, such as Kedarnath, a location of Śiva worship.[146] The mountain culture, for its part, is defined by a complex network of regional deities and the interactions with them.[147] Halperin classified the prevailing *pahāṛī* belief system as "locals follow a stream of Mountain Hinduism that centres on the *devīs* and

144   James goes so far as to draw an analogy between Tehri and the dynamics that led to the Chipko movement. In the latter case, ash trees were given to outside companies to manufacture products for a distant market, while local people were deprived of their own forest resources. Similarly, the Tehri dam would only bring benefits to other regions—electricity to Delhi and irrigation to western Uttar Pradesh. The locals, on the other hand, would only suffer losses (of "heritage, history and habitat") and not even benefit from the electricity generated (James 2004:368).

145   "Thus, the genealogy of all the socioecological protests in the post-independence period can be traced back to the struggles in the colonial period that have served as an inspiration and template for future struggles such as Chipko and even the jan andolan for Uttarakhand" (A. Kumar 2011:94).

146   [. . .], I present, as I experienced it to be, the *local-yatri* binary as the normative frame for thinking about social organization and interactions in Kedarnath" (Whitmore 2010:68f.).

147   Here a selection of literature dealing with the culture of the Western Himalayas; Sax 1990, 1991, 1995, 2002, 2006, 2009; Smith 2018, Berti 2001, 2004, 2006, 2015; Berti & Tarabout 2009; Halperin 2012, 2017, Berreman 1961, Bhardwaj 2015; Jassal 2014, 2017; Jettmar 1974; Atkinson 1974; Sutherland 1998; Wagner 2013.

devtās: village goddesses and gods, who are enshrined in relatively modest temples and worshipped mainly by community members" (2016:1f). While the mountain beliefs to a lesser extent encompass also the main pilgrim centres (Sax 2009; Whitmore 2010), they however mostly constitute a space of economic concern for the local population. A large part of the state's revenue comes from the tourism sector and provides income for a significant portion of the village population.[148] The pilgrims, on the other hand, even if they should pay tribute to the local places of worship, often regard them with a kind of exoticising curiosity.

Given that the "outsiders versus natives" motif thus plays a predominant role in the region, it is regularly cited as a crucial factor that must inevitably be taken into account in social science research on the region (Aryal 1995; Drew 2011, 2017; Werner 2015; Whitmore 2010, 2018). Also the temple in Kaliyasaur became part of the split between the "local" and "external" including all its intermediate shades. However, the notion of what is perceived as "external" in its antagonistic form proved negotiable. In the case at hand, for example, the dam construction company as an external actor was deemed trustworthy and a guarantor for the livelihood of a large part of the nearby residents. The actors involved in the protest against the temple relocation, in contrast, who were only partly "external," were accused of ignoring the basic needs of the local population (Niebuhr 2017).[149]

These dualities between outsiders and locals already assumed significance in the case of the first protagonist presented here, who was involved in the struggle for the Dhārī Devī Temple and over the dam. This part concentrates largely on the line of argumentation of the leading activist Bharat Jhunjhunwala and is based to a great

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148   According to World Bank et al. (2013:44) the tourism sector accounts for 25 percent of Uttarakhand's GDP and provides a source of income for 100,000 people.

149   Here is a noteworthy opinion from the commentary section of the Amar Ujālā in this regard; "यह सही है कि राष्ट्रहित या समाज के व्यापक हित के नाम पर कई बार ऐसी परियोजनाओं के निर्माण के समय स्थानीय समुदाय के हितों की और खासकर स्थानीय पारितंत्र पर पड़ने वाले प्रभाव की अनदेखी कर दी जाती है। उत्तराखंड में परियोजना विरोधी बाहरी लोगों के अलावा ऐसे लोग भी हैं, जिनको बांध और बैराज में फर्क नजर नहीं आता है। लोग भले ही गरीबी, भुखमरी, शोषण और महंगाई जैसे मुद्दों पर चुप रहते हैं, मगर जब धर्म की बात आती है, तो सड़कों पर उतरकर मरने-मारने पर उतारू हो जाते हैं। गंगा के मामले में भी धर्म को अफीम की तरह इस्तेमाल किया जा रहा है।" (J. Rawat 2012). "It is true that in the name of national or broader societal interest, the construction of such projects sometimes ignores the interests of the local community and especially the impact on the local ecosystem. Apart from external anti-project activists, there are people in Uttarakhand who see no difference between a dam and a barrage. Even though people may remain silent on issues like poverty, hunger, exploitation and inflation, but when it comes to religion, they take to the streets to kill and die. In the case of Gaṅgā too, religion is being used like opium." Note also an article of India Today from 2012 on the subject of support for the hydroelectric projects in Uttarakhand. The respective text even claims that "the Srinagar project is a symbol for the changing mindset and sentiments of the local people towards hydropower projects" (Babele 2012).

extent on an exhaustive body of material obtained from him. Despite the fact that additional information was collected from several local activists, he had taken a leading role and discursive dominance. This arose not only because of his activism, but also from his various publications on hydropower. As the main driver of the protest, he was the one who prepared the petitions for the court (cf. Niebuhr 2017) and who engaged in close exchange with the local opposition base. Yet, Jhunjhun- wala's approach to preserving the temple was also controversial with regard to the key issues outlined above. His way of campaigning for the temple oscillated from the outset between a local focus and an orientation driven by a more holistic vision, thereby mirroring his own position in the region. As an immigrant living intermit- tently in a village between Devprayag and Srinagar, he and his wife had to some extent assimilated into the local community and gained an understanding of its prac- tices and values. On the other hand, owing to their professional and personal back- ground and their only episodic presence on site, they remain clearly distinguished from the established social structures of their newly chosen place of residence. The social fabric in this central part of the Himalayas has always been exposed to the effects of increased transit flows. This characteristic definitely makes it difficult to distinguish features of a more demarcated "local" nature (see Chapter 5.2.4), meaning a social fabric that is less affected by external influences and whose local culture is maintained in a more homogenous form over an extended period of time. Such features of amalgamation also apply to activism in Srinagar. Although the people who led the first movement against the relocation of the temple would qual- ify as locals who have their roots in the surrounding villages, they are residents of the city and thus exposed to a hodgepodge of cultural influences. The town is a transit point for a constant flow of goods, people and pilgrims, has a large student population from all parts of the state and beyond, and even a significant proportion of Muslim residents (7.65 % according to Census India 2011). Local realities aside, Jhunjhunwala further emphasised that he was following his own individual path in this matter and thus did not necessarily represent the comprehensive views of other fellow campaigners. Although familiar with the local culture, he consciously decided against starting his engagement from a regional angle. In his opinion, a movement that deals with local and therefore mainly social issues does not provide a stable basis for his particular way of environmental activism (B. Jhunjhunwala, personal communication, Oct. 22, 2014). He was actually aware of the unstable and fluid nature of the local argumentation, especially with regard to financial aspects, such as a "buying up" of a movement by representatives of the hydropower com- panies (ibid.).[150] His attention was therefore not exclusively focused on the temple,

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150   Drew (2011:73f) also points to this problem, namely that financial benefits influence the course of environmental movements. This aspect is also one of the reasons for public support of dam projects in the mountains. Jhunjhunwala adds, "[. . .] what is important is

but rather on the hydropower project. Although he incorporated the subject into his argument, the Goddess and her temple were more of a secondary aspect.

Like other opponents of the elevation of Goddess and temple, Jhunjhunwala primarily criticised that this form of relocation would change the religious character of the temple. The key criterion in this context was that the bond between the Goddess and the rock on which she formerly resided, would be broken. Jhunjhunwala even argued that the statue itself is not actually of great importance, but that the rock (*śilā*)[151] was the central element of worship (personal communication, Oct. 22, 2014).[152] Therefore, with the removal of statue and temple, the key object of veneration would no longer be worshipped. The "change in character" that would ensue is that the "spiritual effect" of the temple would diminish and as a final consequence the temple would degenerate into a "tourist destination" (ibid Oct. 22, 2014). The spiritual significance and the possible touristic attraction value of a holy place were clearly seen as antagonists (cf. B. Chaudhary, personal communication Oct. 27, 2016).[153] This supposed incompatibility of tourism and pilgrimage

that when you make a movement mainly focused on the impacts upon the local people, the moment those impacts are mitigated or compensated, then the movement goes. [. . .] So from day one I recognised this reality, I never built this movement on local issues. My argument against this project is ecological, environmental, water quality and things of that kind, which are of totally different dimension, which don't go away. You cannot compensate it. [. . .] You cannot give me money and say that water quality will be okay" (B. Jhunjhunwala personal communication Oct. 22, 2014).

151 Note the statement of Susheela Bhandari, a committed Garhwali activist for the *aviraltā* of the Ganges—"हमारी आस्था केवल मूर्ति ही नहीं बल्कि पूरी शिला में है। इसका अंग-भंग करना हमें कतई स्वीकार नहीं।" (Amar Ujālā 2013, May 13). "Our faith is not only in the statue, but in the whole rock. Under no circumstances will we accept that it gets mutilated."

152 Jhunjhunwala, asked about his personal relationship with Goddess Dhārī, elaborates on this spiritual energy at the former site of the temple. "So my connection with Dhārī is that I see her as a symbol of the primeval energy of the universe, of the inner energy of the universe and on the mundane level, you see, I don't think that the idol is important. The reason . . . if you know the history of the Dhārī Temple, the idol was not there originally. Originally, there was a holy rock and the rock itself was worshipped. There was no idol. So what my understanding is that when a large number of people and maybe originally who knows [. . .], when this universe was created, the primeval energy entered into that rock, there was a greater concentration of primeval energy into that rock and that is the religiosity, that is sanctity of the rock. It's like a magnet, you see, you have an electromagnet and you have a permanent magnet. In order to make the permanent magnet you have to do a lot of rubbing on the iron but once it gets magnetised it stays there for a very long time. So the holy rock is something like the magnet. The primeval energy was . . . how it got there I wouldn't know [. . .] but the holy rock was energised with the primeval energy, it symbolises primeval energy" (personal communication Oct. 22, 2014).

153 Local activist Beena Chaudhary said she now regards the place as a picnic area, or a place where honeymoon couples go, and her son admits that he likes to visit the temple with his friends for recreational purposes (personal communication Oct. 27, 2016).

in fact emerges more frequently in conversations at the local level, which deal with questions on the sacrality of the mountain region (e.g. Whitmore 2018:10; Drew 2017:194), and even more distinctly in connection with the interpretation of the flood disaster in 2013 (see Chapter 5.2.4). To give an understanding of the here promoted concept of "spiritual power," Jhunjhunwala elucidates that the "power" of a temple is based in the first place on the *prāṇapratiṣṭhā,* the installation and life giving ceremony of a deity. This is then followed by the energetic charging of the place through ongoing spiritual practice, such as the "chanting of mantras and undertaking of worship" (Jhunjhunwala 2011a:10). Following the relocation of the deity the defenders of the former temple indeed claimed that the place had lost its spiritual significance and therefore refrained from further visits (cf. B. B. Chamoli, personal communication Apr. 2, 2015). As activist Beena Chaudhary clarified, the decline in the temple's spiritual potency is especially related to its former "wish-fulfilling capacity," which vanished when it was disconnected from the ground (personal communication Oct. 27, 2016).[154] But even if the comprehensive power of the place seems to have been lost by severing the connection between the statue and the rock, this does not apply to the potency of the deity herself.[155] Jhunjhunwala has elaborated on this topic of spiritual loss with regard to the Dhārī Devī Temple in his book "Economics of Hydropower" (2009). As a former economist, he summarises the non-material or indirect costs of hydropower projects in it. Prior to the temple relocation, an assistant of Jhunjhunwala conducted structured interviews with 60 randomly selected visitors to the Dhārī Devī Temple. Differentiating between local and other visitors, he found that 62 percent of local visitors and 30 percent of all others were convinced that the spiritual efficacy of a temple on pillars would decline significantly (ibid. 2009:268). Respondents also expected that the reduction in transcendental power would most likely be accompanied by a decrease in the number of visitors. And that in turn would inevitably affect the temple's income. For comparison, Jhunjhunwala presents other cases of temple

154   "दिलचस्प भी यह है की जो यह धारी देवी है यह खली मूर्ति नहीं है। अगर आपको मन्नत मांगते है न? जैसे धारी देवी की जिसे कोई मन्नत मांगते है आप, तो वह पूरी होती है। वह रियल में थी लेकिन आज के डेट में वहां कुछ नहीं है अब धारी देवी नहीं हैं खली मूर्ति है हाँ देवी का जो हम लोगों जिसको जो आस्था थी वह ख़त्म हो चुकी है" (B. Chaudhary, personal communication Oct. 27, 2016). "It is also interesting that this Dhārī Devī is not an empty idol. When you put forward a wish, right? Like, if someone makes a wish to Dhārī Devī, then it is fulfilled. This was real, but nowadays there is nothing, now there is no Goddess Dhārī, there is an empty idol. Yes, the faith in the Goddess that we had is over."

155   Several of my interviewees made it clear that although the temple has lost its potency, the Goddess herself, although in her spiritual presence no longer bound to the temple site, is still as powerful as before. However, they established their own private ways to connect with Goddess Dhārī, for example in a domestic shrine, but thus not mediated through her official seat.

displacement related to the construction of the Tehri Dam. Sanctuaries like the Saccheshwar and the Laxmi Narayan temples were also apparently experiencing a decline in their "spiritual power," which was accompanied by reduced importance and income. Further questions in the questionnaire related to the spiritual quality of water when it is held back by a dam.[156] Here is a first allusion to the unobstructed flow, a theme that will soon crop up more extensively.

Jhunjhunwala and others had thus clarified their conviction that the rock and the *bhūmi*[157] or *dhartī* (B. Chaudhary) are the central element of worship beside the river. But Jhunjhunwala also draws on other mythical elements in his argument, on which the unique identity of the site is based. Having taken most of these historical accounts from Naithany's book, Jhunjhunwala mentions some of the dominant figures who have left their imprint on the folklore of Uttarakhand.[158] An example is the story of the Śaṅkarācārya who is said to have passed the village at the Alaknanda on his way to Badrinath and interacted with the Goddess (Jhunjhunwala 2012; cf. Chapter 2.3.2).[159] As evidenced by some land records in Naithany's book, the ground is likewise described as a direct property of the Goddess to underscore her rights. In earlier times, the land on which the Goddess is located was a "gooth" (Jhunjhunwala 2011b:1) or gūṇṭh,[160] a piece of village land that had been assigned

156   The corresponding question: "What will be the change in spiritual power of water after extraction of electricity?" (Jhunjhunwala 2009:270) appears somewhat critical in its formulation, since the water is of course not deprived of electricity and the question already implies that the water has lost some of its power.

157   *Bhūmi* does not only stand for the earth, the land or the soil, but *bhūmi* is, in terms of Indian mythology, a variant of the names for the Goddess of the Earth (cf. Venkatesan 2018).

158   Jhunjhunwala lists different mythological characters such as the Pandavas, but also an unnamed "claimant to the throne of Bhansahi" (Jhunjhunwala 2012:1) who crossed the river at this ford in 1625 and had encamped nearby. This account also provides evidence of the earlier presence of another saint. "An ancient footprint of Dheereshwar Mahadev has been found here hence the name Dhari (ibid.)." To support the uniqueness of the place he refers to other historical claims by Naithany that the temple site was an earlier Tantra cult centre. The nearby Jogini cave is adduced as a testimony to this theory. Likewise, he proclaims the previous names of Goddess Dhārī, one of which is Tārā Devī, as the basis for the fact that "the Deity's historical importance dates to the Buddhist period, at least" (ibid.).

159   This story however is taken from the booklet of M.P. Pandey (2005).

160   "गूंठ – वह गाँव जो मंदिर को भेंट किया गया है" (Benjwal & Purohit 2007). *Gūṇṭh*—"the village, which was given to the temple," is the translation of an entry in the Garhwali-Hindi dictionary. Correctly it should be (village) land given to the temple. This practice of "endowments of land for religious and charitable purposes" (Regmi 1976:46) formed part of the Guthi system, which arrived with the Gorkha rulers from Nepal. Whitmore elaborated on the establishment of two "related systems of land revenue connected to Kedarnath and other important temples" (2010:55) during the British Colonial period. They

to the temple.[161] By identifying the Goddess as landowner, Jhunjhunwala also promotes Dhārī Devī as an actor in the controversy.[162] The emphasis on the connection to the statue's earthly foundation is repeated in drafts on which Jhunjhunwala based his line of argument at a hearing before the Nainital Supreme Court.[163] Here, however, the ground on which Dhārī Devī resided begins to change its meaning. In Jhunjhunwala's presentation, it gradually transforms from a site determined by its respective local features into a place connected to the idea of the *bhūmi*. This becomes clear with a statement he quoted from Swami Chinmayanand. Chinmayanand declared with regard to the Kāmākhyā Devī Temple (Guwahati, Assam) that the "bhoomi [. . .] is itself worshipped" (Jhunjhunwala 2011a:10) and therefore there would never be any question of changing the temple's location. In a similar vein and in a document prepared for the Archaeological Survey of India, Jhunjhunwala compares the same Kamakhya temple as well as the Vaiṣṇo Devī Temple (Jammu), the Kālī Temple in Kolkata and others with the Dhārī Devī Temple (Jhunjhunwala 2012). Given the generally important position of lineages in South Asian traditions, he describes the latter as standing in line with the other, far more prominent places of worship and as equally significant.[164] Drawing of comparisons with other temples and narrowing the question of the Dhārī Devī Temple to its connection with the *bhūmi*, however, then turns to the highly critical example of the Rām Janmabhūmi case; the struggle over the alleged birthplace of the God Rāma. Jhunjhunwala notes that "The Allahabad High Court has held in the Ram Janma Bhoomi case that the bhoomi itself is worshipped in the Hindu tradition" (Jhunjhunwala 2011a:10) and then projects the relevance of this ruling directly onto the Dhārī Devī Temple. The matter is again linked to scripture-based precepts using a declaration of two religious authorities. Hansdevacharya and Maa Poorna

were called "*gūṃṭh* (*gunth*) and *sadāvart* (*sadavart*). *Gunth* refers to lands whose product belongs to the temple as the result of a donation, usually from a king. *Sadavart* 'is the term applied to an endowment provided by the land revenue of assigned villages, originally for the purposes of providing with food indigent pilgrims visiting the shrines of Kedarnath and Badrinath'" (Whitmore 2010:55; Walton 1994, as cited in Whitmore ibid.).

161   "Village Kalia Saur was categorized as 'Gooth.' The land revenue was used to maintain the temple of Dhari Devi. This may help establish that land rights belong to the Devi" (Jhunjhunwala 2011b:1).

162   Jhunjhunwala's emphasis on her agency also refers elsewhere to the aforementioned local cultural practice of mutual communication with the deities and regularly performed public enquiries about their advice or demands. Such a ritual was indeed performed during the planning phase for the new temple.

163   High Court of Uttarakhand Writ Petition (P.I.L.) No. 54 of 2011.

164   See the term *sampradāya* and its various associations with different ways of preserving traditions and transmitting knowledge in Malinar (2018).

Pragya,[165] confirmed that "lifting on [*sic*] temples is against the Hindu beliefs" (ibid.). Yet the inclusion of symbolic figures, such as that of the *svāmī* cum politician Chinmayanand, critically ties the Dhārī Devī Temple issue to the most controversial chapter of the Hindu right. His person in particular is closely associated with the ambition to build a Ram temple on the site of the demolished mosque, the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. Chinmayanand actively worked in the past towards the gradual merging of issues such as the Ram Janmabhūmi, the Ganges (and its free flow) and the propagation of "Bharat Mata" (Alley 2002:224).[166] Although Jhunjhunwala does not see himself as affiliated to any party or Hindu nationalist agenda, the examples and individuals cited here could be problematic as they create a critical proximity to such political groups and their engagement. It is suggested that this type of rhetoric, even if used unintentionally, can provide potential support for a thus shaped agenda.[167] The conceptuality of the *bhūmi* is specifically a central theme of religious thought that has been reformulated by right-wing Hindu figures and is now closely linked to such political currents (Alley 2002:224).[168] The Ram Temple, however, is apparently mentioned in this context only to criticise the general attitude of the BJP with its strict concentration on a single temple. The intention is to urge the party to give equal attention to every other place of worship as well. The text alone though makes it difficult to decipher this message.[169]

165   Swami Hansdevacharya of Swami Jagannath Dham Trust and Maa Poorna Pragya of Akhandbodh Ganga (Raiwala).
166   Further information on Chinmayanand is given in 3.2.
167   Mawdsley (2006) acknowledges that, what she calls "neo-traditionalist readings of environmental struggles and politics" as "popular amongst sections of India's academy, elites, NGOs and activists, as well as with Western audiences" (2006:387). She discusses the question if there is such thing as "guilt by association" (2006:388) asking, if "[. . .] neo-traditionalist activists and scholars, who seek to mobilise cultural precepts around the environment in positive and well-meaning ways, [are] tarred simply because their ideas share some things in common with the Hindu Right?" (2006:388).
168   See, for example, Venkatesan (2018), who describes how, under the emerging Hindu nationalism of the late nineteenth century, age-old beliefs associated with earth-worship became closely linked to a glorification of India as a geopolitical unit and merged with concepts of 'Bhārat Mātā.'
169   The website Ganga Today, run by Jhunjhunwala, Vimal Bhai and others, later also takes up the issue of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya to support Dhārī Devī's cause. But there a clearly critical attitude towards the political conflict can be seen. An essay on the website cleverly argues that the BJP government is trying so hard to reconstruct the Ram temple, but ignores the temple of the Devī, which is in a comparable situation. "A major political issue of the present Government is to build Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. Belief is that the temple of Lord Rama should be built on that same place where He was born, that is the sanctum sanctorum. But in other locations the Government behaviour is against maintaining temples at the same place. The Holy Rock at the temple of Dhari Devi was earlier located on the banks of the Alaknanda in Uttarakhand, [. . .] Question is this: If the BJP Government

As has now become evident from the discursive process, the Kaliyasaur Rock, a local feature encompassing a temple, was transformed into a component of the *bhūmi* and thus changed its entire scope of meaning. Where local activist Beena Chaudhary (personal communication, Oct. 27, 2016) still maintained that they used to worship the rock, and the *dhartī* (earth, soil) of the place, the designation *bhūmi* eventually combines the identity of the rock with the indicated reconception of the Hindu right.

There is yet another association that goes along with ideas concerning the soil, it is this of the *dev bhūmi.* The expression meaning "land of the gods" commonly denotes the state of Uttarakhand with reference to its sanskritized history as well as nowadays to its booming pilgrimage tourism. This term can be considered an epitome for the various competing interpretive scopes with regard to the mountain region of Garhwal. A so-formed conceptualisation of the region is furthermore very tempting to be woven into Hindu nationalist imaginations. This manifests itself in the form of efforts to shape the image of the state in a certain way that is in line with the Hindutva ambitions. Werner highlights the divergent interpretations in this sense, reflected in the split between local perceptions and nationalist visions of the *dev bhūmi*.

> Its significance for Hindu mythology is crucial; the region has been described in the puranas and the *Mahabharata*. Hinduism and sanskritization are strongly anchored in the hills. But ethnographic research shows that there is a great difference between the 'sacred image' that has been ascribed to the region in the scriptures, and more recently, by the efforts of a growing Hindu right-wing to create an exclusive landscape, and the beliefs of the local population. (2015:108)

Jhunjhunwala adopted another line of argumentation for a presentation in court, which in a wider sense established a connection to the *bhūmi*, but with less religious-political charge. To protect the former state of the temple, the activist invoked an existing law, the "places of worship act," which was created to preserve sacralised sites and buildings. "4(1) It is hereby declared that the religious

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is committed to maintaining the sanctity of the sanctum sanctorum of Ram Mandir, then why not maintaining the sanctity of the Holy Rock at Dhari Devi? On one side, the BJP is spreading a movement in the entire country to make a temple at the sanctum sanctorum in Ayodhya. On the other hand, they have willingly submerged the Holy Rock of Dhari Devi. The reason it seems is that the commercial interests have dominated at Dhari Devi" (A. Rawat 2018). The essay ends with the radical conclusion, "BJP should protect the sanctity of all Temples and not pander to commercial interests at its convenience; or it should abandon the movement of Ram Mandir" (A. Rawat 2018).

character of a place of worship existing on the 15th day of August, 1947 shall continue to be the same as it existed on that day" (Jhunjhunwala 2011a:9). From this paragraph he deduced that not only did the Dhārī Devī Temple fall under this law because it already existed at that time, but also that therefore the place of worship in Kaliyasaur had to be maintained in the same condition as on August 15, 1947. Knowing the eventful history of the temple, this argument is certainly problematic. As already observed in the previous chapters, the temple underwent several structural changes before the transfer of the statue, which have only been implemented in the last 30 years. Such changes were even used as arguments for the mobility of the place and the Goddess. The consensus is that before these alterations, the statue stood on the rock, while the walls and roofs surrounding the deity were only erected in the 1970s.[170] The return to a state of 1947 would therefore have been rather illusory and most probably against local interests.

3.1 *Aviral Dhārā*, Going with the Flow

Framework conditions related to development projects along the Ganges are rooted in a context that differs not only from other dam sites in India, but also from other global settings. The Ganges in particular is considered a "national" river assuming more than any other river India-wide importance. The national dimension is expressed in metaphors pertaining to the river, such as "lifeline of millions" which denotes the importance it has on the livelihoods especially of downstream communities. Furthermore, the Ganges carries cross-national conceptions that are attached to its transcendental and mythological nature. This relates to the notion of eminent sanctity bound to the river, which is recognised throughout the subcontinent and beyond. Understandings of holiness refer to properties associated with the river, such as its purity, and especially to the perception of the river as purifying (Alley 2002; Zühlke 2013). The creation of dams on the river Ganges and its subsidiaries, on the other hand, is not only considered to interfere with the river's flow from an ecological point of view, but also to have a negative impact on the inherent spiritual qualities of its water and, above all, on the efficacy of the river in a metaphysical sense. These features differ from dams on other rivers, where concerns tied to the spiritual quality of water are likely to play a lesser role. Combined with the special status of the river, development projects along the Ganges, especially the large-scale ones, attract a certain segment of politically and

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170   Some lines in the *pūjārī* leaflet (Dhārī Devī Temple Pujārī Trust 2011), describe the state of the temple from around 1973, when the statue stood on the open rock, without sheds or safety precautions around it.

religiously oriented activists (Mawdsley 2005, 2010; M. Sharma 2009, 2012). This phenomenon renders the composition of protest structures different from other dam struggles. It entails that the issue of dams is integrated into certain political and overarching ideological ideas and agendas.

The last section disclosed that the "preservers" of the earlier temple built their reasoning on the rock that housed the deity as well as other concepts that fit well with the objective of conservation. These different facets surrounding the perception of the *bhūmi*, as well as its further adornment, for example with mythological elements, support a necessary continuum of the status and thus also guarantee the sacrality of the place. Returning now to the river, it will be demonstrated in what way also the opponents of a new construction of the temple were concerned with the stream, its water and—mainly implicitly—with its floods.

Throughout the controversy surrounding the temple and Srinagar Hydropower Project, several activists from a religious spectrum and partially with a Hindu right-wing background entered the movement to oppose the relocation of Goddess Dhārī. It was however not an unwanted "takeover" of the local protest movement. The local level activists actively sought the participation of these actors. Beena Chaudhary, the leading female figure, for example, invited different members of the religio-political spectrum to strengthen the local group's campaign (See e.g. Amar Ujālā 2012, March 4). Bharat Jhunjhunwala likewise maintained networks with religious personalities such as Swami Nischalanand, Uma Bharti and G. D. Agrawal. One reason for this was that the construction of Srinagar Dam was a follow-up conflict to several other dam disputes in Uttarakhand, first and foremost the Tehri Dam struggle (see Niebuhr 2017; Werner 2015), in which several of these actors were already involved. Moreover, the dispute over the temple coincided with a climax of the movement of *sādhus* and saints for the preservation of the holiness and purity of the Ganges. The emergence of these individuals in the case of Dhārī Devī shifted the issue of the temple to a new level. In the process, the Goddess issue was absorbed by a broader debate on hydropower projects in the upper Ganges region. Top priority of the faith-oriented actors in their campaign against the dams and with regard to the pollution of the river was to maintain or restore the free or unconstrained flow of the Ganges. So when the different rallying cries, which encompassed the term "*aviral dhārā*" (unhindered flow) became closely associated with the struggle for the Dhārī Devī Temple, the imaginations and agendas of "outsiders" merged inextricably with this conflict.[171] The demand

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171   For example, "गंगा को निर्मल रहने दो, गंगा को अविरल बहने दो" (Prakash 2014); "let Gaṅgā be unspoilt, let Gaṅgā flow uninterruptedly." It is only a side thought, but possibly Dhārī Devī became appealing to the religious agitators in this context also because of the alleged kinship of the words Dhārā and Dhārī and the resulting understanding of Dhārī as the Goddess of the flow (see Chapter 5.2.3 expounding on this issue).

for a free flowing river may in itself be a legitimate interest and is also supported by activists beyond any nationalistic aspirations. However, as the tag-line had been broadly and conspicuously employed by the Hindu Right and was also particularly coined by the predecessor conflict in Tehri, this slogan was already highly ideologically charged.[172] The ideas contained in such a catchphrase consequently also infiltrated the temple issue with the often-criticised component of right-wing environmentalism and its associated rat tail of Hindu identity and nation building.

The way the defenders of the old temple coupled the issue with their broader campaign dealing with the sanctity of the Gaṅgā is evident in a memorandum from several BJP politicians to then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. It expresses criticism of the practices and alleged shortcomings of the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA).[173]

> In our opinion, one of the 'design failures' of NGRBA has been its reluctance and refusal to recognise the need to protect the cultural and spiritual heritage associated with the Ganga. This heritage manifests itself in many temples and holy places, right from the river's origin at Gangotri to its merger with the Bay of Bengal at Gangasagar. We were both surprised and destressed [*sic*] to see that the 'Function and Power of NGRBA' does not even mention the aspect of River Ganga's cultural-spiritual heritage. No plan to save the river can be regarded as holistic if it limits its concerns only to the aspects of development and abatement of pollution — both of which are undoubtedly crucial — and ignores the unique dimension of Mother Ganga as a revered symbol of India's nationhood and her civilisational legacy.

172   This is how the Gandhian activist Vimal Bhai, convenor of the social organisation Matu Jan Sangathan, framed the argument on the cover text on one of the collective's booklets: "गंगा जी बंधन मुक्त रहें, स्वच्छ रहें! सबकी रहें, बहती रहे!" (Bhai 2015:36). "May Gaṅgā Jī remain free of dams, may she remain clean, may she belong to everyone, may she flow on!" As can be seen here, although he points to the same targeted physical state of the river, his choice of words, under avoidance of *nirmal* and *aviral*, and the other connotations adopted, differentiate his statement from the rhetoric of the right-wing. Most notably the concern that the river should remain everyone's property clearly distinguishes his engagement from the ambitions of activists with the goal of a Hindu nation and their attempts to create divisions between different social groups.

173   The following persons signed: L. K. Advani, Working Chairman, National Democratic Alliance; Nitin Gadkari, President, Bharatiya Janata Party; Sushma Swaraj, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha; Arun Jaitley, Leader of Oppolsition in Rajya Sabha; Sushri Uma Bharti, Ex. C. M. Madhya Pradesh; B. C. Khanduri, Ex. C. M. Uttarakhand; B. S. Koshiyari, Ex. C. M. Uttarakhand; R. P. Nishank, Ex. C. M. Uttarakhand.

> This failure is at the heart of the grave situation that has arisen in Uttarakhand, where Dhari Devi Temple, one of the most important pilgrimage centres located on the banks of the Ganga and its tributaries, today stands threatened by a hydro-electric project. Our party is not opposed to hydro-electric and other developmental projects along the Ganga. However, we are strongly opposed to any thoughtless measure that leads to the extinction of the sacred ecology of the Ganga and the cultural-spiritual heritage along the banks of the river and its tributaries. (Advani et al. 2012)

This excerpt clearly shows the concern and the approach of the religious-political faction towards the Dhārī Devī Temple issue. Their modus operandi is to channel their interest in the Ganges by focusing their activism on a symbolic place by the river, thus "pouring" the cultural facets of the Ganges into a temple. This is accompanied by an enhancement of the significance of the temple or the deity for the sacralised and riverine landscape. "Dhari Devi Temple, one of the most important pilgrimage centres on the banks of the Ganges and its tributaries [. . .]." The temple is obviously not presented here as a local place of worship with its corresponding folk tradition and its meaning for the surrounding population, but is rather equated with the great pilgrimage sites, the *dhām*. Thereby the temple, embedded in the theme of pilgrimage and the associated understanding of the Garhwal region, becomes an element of a larger landscape and subsequently part of ideas associated with the "cultural-spiritual heritage" of the Ganges, and ultimately a matter of nationhood.

The BJP politicians involved in the drafting of the memorandum not only explicitly connect the cause of the Dhārī Devī Temple to the sanctity of the Ganges and its cultural heritage as well as the central aspect of its free flow. Beyond that, they build their engagement on a precedent for the free flow at Haridwar in the beginning of the last century.

> ***Honourable Prime Minister,*** the people of India venerate all rivers and water bodies as holy. However, they have a special emotional and spiritual attachment to the Ganga. This is evident from the fact that both Gangotri in the Himalayas and Gangasagar in Bengal are among the holiest centres of pilgrimage in India. Situated all along the course of the river are other holy places, Dhari Devi being one of them.
>
> Even Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's last will testifies to the profound civilisational significance of the Holy Ganga. We would like to mention here that no less a person than Mahamana Pandit

> Madanmohan Malaviya, who was president of the Congress four
> times, had led an agitation for the protection of the Ganga and
> its heritage in the second decade of the last century. The call for
> *Aviral Ganga* (free-flowing Ganga) was first given by him in
> 1912, when the then British government tried to divert the flow of
> the river near Hardwar. The nation celebrated Malaviyaji's 150th
> birth anniversary year in 2011. Our memorandum seeks to carry
> forward his important legacy (Advani et al. 2012).

Before going into the historical dimension, just a short remark towards the first
passage of this text. One major point of critique of the faith-based environmental
engagement and a marker of right-wing activism constitutes its focus on the river
Ganges. The allegations of other environmentalists (Seth 2016; Del Bene 2014) and
critics of a nationalist policy state that by conferring exclusive status on the river,
the Hindu extremists and their supporters ignore other river basins and areas that
would require equal ecological attention. This renders their ecological commit-
ment questionable, because even activities for the preservation of the Ganges are
not carried out with a view to issues such as maintaining the ecological balance or
sustainability. The overriding aim also of these initiatives is to preserve a symbol of
Hindu identity and to promote the manifestation of a Hindu nation. Authors such as
Mawdsley (2010) and Alley even question the existence of a genuine Hindu right-
wing environmental agenda. Based on observations in Tehri, Mawdsley described
the engagement of, in this case the VHP, as a purely political matter, entirely "[. . .]
falling in tune with political logics and timetables of the State and national elec-
tions rather than in relation to dam developments" (Mawdsley 2010:161). Addi-
tionally, most ecological struggles in India are tightly intertwined with livelihood
issues (Gadgil & Guha 1995). This subject though is not only largely ignored by
actors of the respective political spectrum, but many aspects of it are diametrically
opposed to their broader concerns (Mawdsley 2010).[174]

As the second paragraph of the above-cited passage illustrates, the discussion
about the free flow of the Ganges is already a historical topic that has recently
been revived by the proposed construction of a large number of dams along the
Ganges.[175] The politicians mentioning these historical events in their memoran-
dum obviously expect their recipients to be familiar with the story of the British

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174   See Mawdsley (2010:163) for a detailed analysis on this matter. See also Drew (2011),
M. Sharma (2002, 2009), Niebuhr (2017), Werner (2015), for a further understanding of the
criticism levelled at the linkage of Hindu nationalist aspirations with ecological issues and
especially the associated engagement with the Ganges.
175   See also Amar Ujālā 2012, July 3 on Uma Bharti creating references to the events in
Haridwar at the beginning of the century.

construction plan—and how Hindu leaders thwarted it. Mallet (2017:167) indeed depicts the outstanding figure of this early debate, Malaviya as "renowned in India as a religious champion of the Ganges and its need to flow [. . .]," while he is also considered an "Indian nationalist icon" (Lochtefeld 2010:88). The place involved, Haridwar, is the holy city, or *tīrtha*, where the Ganges, coming from the mountains, enters the plain of India. The location forms part of the mythologised landscape, as Alley (2002:107) expounds:

> For Hindus, Haridwar is the gateway to earth for Mother Gaṅgā. It is here that she descended from heaven on the locks of Lord Śivā to relieve human suffering and purify souls. Kapilā and other early names for this place suggest that this site has been connected with Gaṅgā's descent from heaven for centuries.

At the turn of the twentieth century, when the discussion about the free-flowing river unfolded, the English administration was in the process of implementing the construction of a dam along the Ganges in order to divert the water at Haridwar into a British-engineered irrigation channel (Parmanand 1985; Lochtefeld 2010; Alley 2002; Drew 2007; Mallet 2017). The Hindu community, however, became apprehensive of this plan, fearing that an obstructed water flow would hamper religious practices at Haridwar's holiest spot, the Hari ki Pauri Ghat. Further concerns about the purificatory power of the Ganges resulted in the revolt of several Hindu leaders. They "insisted that Gaṅgā's purificatory power was tied to her flow and that to alter one would ultimately affect the other" (Alley 2002:107). As a result of a prolonged agitation, the details of which will not be discussed here, an agreement was reached to ensure the consistent flow of the Ganges (Parmanand 1985). This was done in December 1916 during a conference in Haridwar with representatives of Hindu interests such as members of the All-India Hindu Sabha, the Ganga Hindu Sabha, the Indian dynastic rulers and officials of the British Raj.

Several authors, in assessing the commitment of the religious faction to the Ganges, have juxtaposed the quality of the present discourse with that of the first appearance of the said demand. But unlike the depiction in this memorandum, they note inconsistencies with the modern use of the free-flowing river slogan. While the resistance to scientific control of the river is in defence of a sacred space, the events in Haridwar were rather politically motivated: "the demands for an unobstructed flow of the river were not part of an environmental movement but rather part of a strategy to oppose political rule" (Alley 2002:210).[176] Political processes

176 Stressing again that such a demand was not based on an environmental movement, she adds that "rather, it invoked religious symbolism to bring religious leaders and nationalists together on a common platform" (Alley 2002:210).

of that time were also identified as having a communal background that fostered the emergence of a movement for a Hindu identity. "Communal rivalry between Hindus and Muslims and the government's presumed partiality to the latter, had created conditions favourable to Hindu revivalism" (Parmanand 1985:246). But unlike today, where other communities see themselves sidelined in the movements for the Ganges, Hindus and Muslims eventually joined hands and pursued the same goal of preserving the river. What becomes clear is this: when the free-flow argument is supported by historical events in a current context, ideas about past processes have been modified to fit the contemporary discourse on the Ganges. Evidently, only in later phases the creation of divisions between the different communities gained prominence. At one crucial event in 1983, the "Ekatmata Yatra (All India Harmony Expedition)," the VHP for the first time explicitly connected the cause of the Ganges with its pursuit of Hindu identity and nation building (Alley 2002; Rajagopal 2015; M. Sharma 2009). Alley delineates the inherent motives and mechanisms of this newly modified political form of pilgrimage:

> The VHP's stated aim was to teach Indians about the importance of Mother India, Mother Cow, and Mother Gaṅgā and, as they claimed, bring unity to a Hindu Community that had 'fallen asleep.' Their printed material stressed the importance of the cow for agriculture and Gaṅgā for the advent of Hindu civilization. But these themes were really meant to set the context for resurrecting their 1984 promise to destroy Muslim mosques in Ayodhya and Kashi and a Muslim Idgah (place for prayers on the Id festival) in Mathura. To these sites of Muslim worship they linked rivers held sacred by Hindus: the Sarāyū with Ayodhya, the Yamuna with Mathura, and the Gaṅgā with Kashi (Varanasi). Mother Gaṅgā, the archetype of all rivers in India, acted as the key symbol of these associations. (2002:221)

As part of a contemporary and to a great extent religiously driven environmental "movement," the argument of the *aviral dhārā* gained momentum first time with the construction of Tehri Dam. A broad and enduring protest movement accompanied the mega dam project that was implemented in the neighbouring district to Srinagar from 1978 until 2006. Many elements and political mechanisms of the struggle in Tehri resurfaced in Srinagar (Niebuhr 2017). This included some actors of the opposition who became involved in the Srinagar Dam project and temple issue. When these actors transferred and modified their previously acquired knowledge to the new conflict, they obviously rewrote their earlier used script with reference to the Ganges to fit with the subject of a threatened temple. On a general level, "the free flow argument has shaped the perception of

hydropower projects and the ensuing discourse in the region" (Werner 2015:158). Tehri, however, represented the dam struggle in which already described features of an association of the Ganges with themes of Hindu identity emerged and which was considered to have been captured by the forces of the Hindu Right. In Tehri, it was also primarily the VHP that framed the issue with the catchy slogan: 'गंगा अविरल बहती रहे,' "may the Ganges continue to flow uninterruptedly" (Rajalakshmi 2002). Various authors such as M. Sharma (2002, 2009, 2012) and Mawdsley (2010, 2006) discussed in depth the mechanisms and trope of the "Hindutva" forces used in the struggle against the Tehri Dam. It was one of the factors that is thought to have ultimately led to the weakening of the Tehri dam movement (Rajalakshmi 2002). Another motif that came to the fore was the creation of a putative hostile threat, underlined by stories of conspiracy against the dam by China and other neighbouring countries as well as Muslim aggressors (M. Sharma 2009).[177] This made the communal question a salient theme in the rhetoric on Tehri, thus distinguishing it from the debate on the Srinagar Dam. There the communal rhetoric was largely absent and the issue pervaded the conflict only by association, through the presence of the respective actors. The suggestion of a conspiracy arose in several instances, however, and this was where a threat from outsiders was evoked as well. The Amar Ujālā reported about a meeting of the VHP in Pipalkoti, where Madan Mohan Tiwari, the minister of the organisation, tried to tune the other members into the earlier rhetoric in Tehri by establishing:

कुछ विदेशी ताकतों द्वारा साजिश के तहत विश्व प्रसिद्ध सिद्धपीठ को डुबाए जाने का प्रयास किया जा रहा है। जिसका हिंदू जनसमान सड़कों पर उतरकर पुरजोर विरोध करेगा। (Amar Ujālā 2009, Nov. 19)

As part of a conspiracy, some foreign forces are trying to submerge the world-famous *siddhapīṭh*. Therefore, the masses of Hindus will take to the streets and stage fierce protests.

But this was a lone example when opposition to the project first emerged and the participation of foreign conspiratorial forces was implicated. Later, the extremist voices fell silent in this regard. What happened instead was that the existing

177   As Mawdsley notes, the Hindu Right placed the struggle over the Tehri dam in the category of the Babri Masjid conflict, thereby evoking the communal issue. She states that "the events at Ayodhya mark a deeply symbolic moment in the changing political landscape of India, and it still acts as a referent for the political debates and manoeuvrings of the Hindu Right, as well as ongoing communal violence. Situating the Tehri Dam struggle in relation to the Babri Masjid is making a clear threat to Muslims, symbolically locating them as foreigners whose presence and in influence must be purged from the nation" (2010:159).

unease towards people coming from outside the state of Uttarakhand became one of the dominant arguments of the dam proponents. They in turn now saw the conspiracy on the side of such faith-based outsiders. Allegations were levelled that external actors sought to subjugate the mountain region to their agendas. The promoters of a "Gangatva" were thereby identified as being driven by (political) self-interest and motivated by the goal of undermining local visions of the riverscape.[178]

3.2   River Flows and the Right—the most prominent Hindu National Campaigners

Swami Chinmayanand, a former Home Minister of the state government and the head of a large Ashram in Haridwar, is the first one of the now successively introduced influential players in the Dhārī Devī struggle. Alley (2002:223) categorises him as the first visible actor post-independence to incorporate the rhetoric of the "free flowing Ganges" into a political election campaign in 1998. At that time, Chinmayanand was a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party. Already before the electoral engagement, he was campaigning for the Hindu national organisation VHP in connection with the river's pollution. Chinmayanand had concurrently become a leading campaigner for other issues being pursued by the VHP and RSS, most notably the Ram Janmabhūmi movement (Alley 2002). To support the latter, he conducted a rally or a politically tinged *yātrā* prior to the 1998 parliamentary elections. Chinmayanand had formed the Ganga Raksha Samiti for this purpose and ideologically combined the issues of pollution control of the Ganges with nationalistic concepts such as the Cow-Protection movement and the conception of "Bharat Mata." Ultimately, "all three issues were to feed into the resurrection of the Ram-Janmabhumi movement" (Alley 2002:224). Speeches delivered by participants during the *yātrā* in 1997, which was conducted on the

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178   Here one of the typical statements in this regard: "उन्होंने कहा कि प्रदेश की जनता को बांधों से कोई दिक्कत नहीं है। बाहरी लोग गंगा के नाम पर राजनीति कर रहे हैं।" (Amar Ujālā 2011, May 13). "He [Diwarkar Bhatt] said that the population of the state does not have any problem with the dams. External people are making politics in the name of the Ganges." Similar comments from other speakers in Amar Ujālā 2011, May 20, 23; 2012, June 24b. Regarding the temple protesters and their position as outsiders, their relation to the local culture is also addressed, or rather their lack of it. The same speaker points out that "these people" have no knowledge of the local history, culture and geography ("ऐसे लोगों को यहां के इतिहास, भूगोल और संस्कृति का पता नहीं है।" Amar Ujālā 2011, May 23) and says with reference to Uma Bharti that she is not familiar with the history of the temple ("मंदिर का इतिहास भी उमा भारती को पता नहीं है।" Amar Ujālā 2011, May 13).

Ganges by boat from Calcutta to Allahabad, included declarations of resistance to the Tehri Dam.[179] This phase cemented the notion that the "free flow" of the Ganges inextricably meant that no dams could be built on the river. An interesting feature of the *yātrā* was the participation of several actors who later reappeared in Srinagar, such as Uma Bharti and Ashok Singhal, which puts the commitment of this core group on a solid historical footing. Although Chinmayanand was not regularly visible in Srinagar, and other activists took over the predominant roles in the conflict, it is crucial to recognise him as an important figure in the Dhārī Devī struggle. This is because of his earlier formative influence on the free flow argument and its broader associations. While he thus exercised his clout mainly as a symbolic figure, on the ground Chinmayanand occasionally expressed his views on the temple issue and engaged in emblematic actions. In 2010, he led a delegation of *sādhus* and saints from Haridwar and Rishikesh to the Dhārī Devī Temple to save the place from falling into the inundation zone.[180] Later that year, he resurfaced as a speaker at a convention held at the public assembly ground, Gola Park, in Srinagar:

> स्वामी चिंदमयानंद [*sic*] ने कहा कि श्रीनगर जल विद्युत परियोजना की ऊंचाई 63 मीटर से बढ़ाकर 95 मीटर ऊंचाई करने की स्वीकृति कैसे मिली है यह जानना जरूरी है। जिस तरह कंपनी यहाँ कुछ छुटभैया नेताओं और पुलिस को खरीदकर फूट डालो और राज करो का संदेश दे रही वह निंदनीय है। जब-जब मां धारी करवट बदलती है तब-तब कॉफर बांध टूट जाता है। (Amar Ujālā 2010, June 28)

> Swami Chinmayanand said it would be important to know how the Srinagar Hydropower Project received approval to increase the height from 63 metres to 95 metres. The way the company buys up some nondescript politicians and the police here and sends the message "put your foot down and make this your kingdom" is despicable. Every time Mā̃ Dhārī's fate changes, the cofferdam breaks.

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179   The *yātrā* called "Ganga Sanrakshan Jagaran Yatra" [Ganga Protection Awareness Yātrā] started on October 16, 1997 in Calcutta (VHP n.d.). See Jaffrelot (2009) on the ways in which Hindu nationalists frame the topic of pilgrimage and how the politicised practice it promotes is in turn subject to different recontextualisations in public space.
180   "स्वामी चिंदमयानंद [*sic*] के नेतृत्व में साधु-संतों का जत्था यहां पहुंचेगा। श्रीकोट-गंगनाली में धरने के उपरांत साधु-संत धारी मंदिर में भी पूजा-अर्चना करेंगे।" (Amar Ujālā 2010, June 27). "Under the leadership of Swami Chinmayanand the group of *sādhus* and saints will arrive here. After the *dharnā* in Srikot-Gangnali, the *sādhus* and saints will perform *pūjā-archanā* (worship) in the Dhārī Devī Temple."

Apart from the *svāmī's* criticism of allegedly faulty and fraudulent processes in connection with the construction of the hydroelectric power plant,[181] at this point appear the first references of the dam opponents to the anger of the Goddess in connection with the project—and to her ability to actively damage the enterprise as well as to cause flooding. In the above quote, Dhārī Devī is depicted as responding to injustice with destruction and floods. Chinmayanand's remark is presumably inspired by other speeches made a few days before his appearance on the protest ground. At a gathering there on the 19th day of their *dharnā*, local activists organised as Utthan Sanyukt Samiti (Joint Uplift Committee) mentioned the meanwhile triple incident of a broken cofferdam.

> वक्ताओं ने कॉफर डैम के एक बड़े हिस्से के टूटने को धारी मां का प्रकोप बताते हुए कहा कि इससे पूर्व भी दो बार जल विद्युत परियोजना का कॉफर डैम टूट चुका है। यदि इन संकेतों को नहीं समझा गया तो यह प्रकोप कभी भी कहर ढा सकता है। (Amar Ujālā 2010, June 25)

> Speakers said that the breaching of a large portion of the cofferdam was the wrath of Mā̃ Dhārī; they told that the cofferdam of the hydroelectric project had also broken twice before. If these signs were not understood, this ire could have devastating consequences at any time.

The matter of a divine or spiritually elevated expression of anger manifests on different levels, in one variant this rage is directed against the self. Not only Chinmayanand, but also other saints and *svāmīs* and Sādhvī Uma Bharti uttered in their indignation the threat that a forced flooding of the temple would entail their self-drowning, respectively that they would take *jal samādhi* by submerging themselves in the river.[182] While the river and its capacity to flood and drown is employed as a weapon of protest, here the threat of self-destruction serves as a dramatic

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181   This seemed to have been a general line of critique he had followed. Alley remarks that as early as 1997, Chinmayanand blamed the government for its failure to address the problem of river pollution. However, the rhetoric in this regard ceased at once when he was elected to office in 1998 (Alley 2002).

182   "इस मौके पर पूर्व गृह राज्य मंत्री स्वामी चिन्मयानंद ने चेतावनी दी कि यदि धारी देवी मंदिर गंगा में डूबा तो वे वहीं पर जल समाधि ले लेंगे।" (Amar Ujālā 2011, May 30). "On this occasion, the former state interior minister Swami Chinmayanand warned that if the Dhārī Devī Temple was flooded, he would immediately take *jal samādhi*." Likewise, another member of the *yātrā* group announced that if the Goddess could not be saved from the water, the religious people would practice *jal samādhi*: "योगी राकेश नाथ ने कहा कि यदि मंदिर को जबरन डुबाया जाएगा तो वे जल समाधि ले लेंगे।" (Amar Ujālā 2010, June 28). "Yogi Rakesh Nath said if the temple would be forcibly set under water, they would take *jal samādhi*."

rhetorical tool to amplify the set demands. It is obvious that the announcement to drown oneself is only a symbolic declaration in the current case. There are also no reports of activists from a religious-political spectrum drowning themselves during recent environmental struggles.[183] The threat, however, is supposed to convey and to stir sublime emotions among the audiences, while evoking mythical pictures of heroic self-sacrifice for the Ganges. Samādhi in this connection hints to the attainment of a heightened state of awareness, or transcendence connected to this mystical death ritual (Justice 2005), although the usual practice of *jal samādhi* is rather understood as a water burial reserved for the holy men, or ascetics. Suicide, as discussed in Indian scriptures is a complex issue and is rejected under most circumstances, with a few exceptions. Justice (2005) in this regard describes the probable earlier existence of a historical self-drowning ritual at the confluence of the rivers Yamuna and Ganges in Prayaga tied to the hope of attainment of immediate *mokṣa*. Other indications though suggest that these accounts may only represent an invented tradition or "re-tellings of apocryphal tales" (Justice 2005:295). The way in which this theme is addressed in the temple struggle may have been inspired by such tales, but it is probably much less sophisticated and more geared towards drawing the catchy picture of valiant self-offering in the simultaneously liberating and purifying river Ganges. The articulated intention of a *jal samādhi* is in addition reminiscent of the equally prevalent motif of martyrdom in a holy battle or war.[184] Such conceptions of a holy war do indeed surface on several occasions where defenders of the Dhārī Devī Temple frame their approach to the topic.[185]

183   Greater radicalism in relation to this statement was much more likely to be seen in relation to a people's movement. For example, in the Narmada River struggle groups of protestors came close to drowning by standing already deep in the water of the lake forming behind the dam. Yet these were not, as is of interest here, representatives of a religious spectrum, but groups of the people affected by the dam. Other than this, two saint-activists (G. D. Agrawal 2018, Swami Nigamanand 2011) are considered to have given their lives for the sake of the Ganges, albeit they died from consequences of their prolonged hunger strikes and not because they took *jal samādhi*.

184   When the question of martyrdom became a topic of the public discourse after the terrorist attack on an army convoy in Pulwama, S. Pandey (2019) asked why so much attention is given to the soldiers who died for the country, but not to the saints who sacrificed themselves for the Ganges.

185   Evocations of a holy war emerge above all with the culminating event of the gathering of the saints and *sādhus* in the Jantar Mantar in Delhi under the banner of the Ganga Mukti Mahasangram (see next section). Apart from the chosen name of the event, the saint activists in many of their statements actually conjure up motives and symbols of a holy war, which are inspired by the holy scriptures. At some point, an initiative of the national "Jal Biradari" (water community) came up to connect the annual *kā̃vaṛ yātrā* of the Śiva devotees with the Ganga Mukti Mahasangram and also explicitly with the aim of preventing the construction of the Srinagar Dam. (The objective of the annual *kā̃vaṛ yātrā* is to collect sacred water from various holy places on the Ganges. *Kā̃vaṛ* refers to a carrying

The concept of martyrdom in connection with the Ganges and the unhindered flow of its stream also permeated the engagement of the next activist to be presented, the late G. D. Agrawal. He was a retired doyen of environmental engineering with former positions as an environmental impact assessment consultant and professor at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, as well as the first member secretary of the Central Pollution Control Board. The issue of the deity's temple gained relevance at a time, which was marked by several of his long hunger strikes. Especially in 2009 and 2012, when the matter of Dhārī Devī and the Srinagar Dam turned into a bone of contention, or when the conflict reached its peak, he agitated under his spiritual name Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand against hydroelectric power projects in the upper Ganges basin. Although he followed a binary approach, drawing on his earlier academic and later spiritual identity, his main commitment embraced "faith, culture and 'Hindu tradition'" (Drew 2011:99). Agrawal assumed an influential, though controversial position as an activist. When two hydropower projects on the Bhagirathi River were scrapped, this was to a large degree seen as a consequence of his several widely noticed fasts in 2009. Because of this earlier and successful intervention, when he extended his campaign to the Dhārī Devī Temple and against the Srinagar Dam during another fast in 2009, he also became the target of fiercest resistance from dam-supportive locals and government officials. Werner describes the period since Agrawal's involvement against dams on the Ganges as a "turning point for the debates on hydropower" (2015:186f). As she points out, spiritual and cultural arguments related to water-based development projects, such as the reference to the religious significance of a location threatened by inundation, had also come up earlier in the context of protest movements. What was new in Uttarakhand, however, and a parallel to Agrawal's activism, was that such argumentation became an end in itself and not just a supportive contribution to primarily socially and politically oriented core concerns of an opposition.[186] As a matter of fact, this novel, belief-based feature of environmental conflicts over dams also created the conditions for a temple to become, as in the case of Dhārī

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pole or shoulder pole made of bamboo and to the ends of which vessels can be attached). In this context the so-called "waterman" of India and leader of the Jal Biradari, Rajendra Singh, using likewise martial rhetoric, states that "श्रीनगर बांध को रोकना देवता और राक्षसों के बीच युद्ध जैसा हो गया है। इसलिए हम देवतारूपी कांवड़ियों की टोली तैयार कर रहे हैं।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, July 6). "The activities to stop the Srinagar Dam virtually turned into a war between gods and demons. For this reason, we are setting up a troop of godlike *kã̄vaṛs*."

186   From a political point of view, Werner (2015:187) attests a high degree of dubiousness to this new faith-based approach to environmental conflicts. At the same time, she concedes that such an approach may be considered advantageous because it has the potential to appeal to much broader segments of the population through the popularity of the imaginary employed, thus creating a wider base of support.

Devī, the central aspect of a dam struggle and the focus object for religiously motivated activists like G. D. Agrawal and others.

Why then was his activism so radically rejected on the local level? Undoubtedly, the discrepancy between the local perception of the ultimate environment and the pursued visions of activists from places outside the state came to the fore especially in G. D. Agrawal's engagement.[187] Unlike in Srinagar, where local opposition was rather minuscule, in other mountain places, such as Uttarkashi, there was a strong local front against the installation of hydropower plants. Yet the forms of local resistance observed had markedly different characteristics compared to Agrawal's activism. Werner once again detailed the controversial facet of Agrawal's form of protest:

> Another aspect that renders the importance of Agrawal's agitation somewhat dubious is the fact that local objection to hydropower projects, initiated and led by villagers, has often been much more radical in its resistance against developmental projects than the construction of a sacred landscape, which seems to respond rather to nationalist sentiments than to actual livelihood issues. (2015:187)

Drew (2017) similarly exposed his rather out-of-touch attitude towards the interests of the mountain population. First of all, Agrawal regarded the majority of the population as having fallen prey to the "state-led" rhetoric of "development and economic growth" (2017:132). It was also on this basis that he deemed it the responsibility of the saints and the elderly to work for the sustenance of the Himalayan environment and the Ganges. Agrawal's position though moreover embraced, quite critically, the idea that only certain segments of society have the integrity to take charge of the societal-environmental concerns altogether (Drew 2017:13). This understanding went even further into a caste-based argumentation, declaring only the upper strata competent to fulfil such tasks. In this sense, Agrawal proclaimed the "common masses" ignorant and largely incapable, and therefore in need of leadership from elders and/or upper caste saints (Drew 2017:132). It goes without saying that his stance outlined here is very much at odds with the views of the average citizen and clearly explains his unpopularity at the local level.

Against this portrayed mind-set, the issue of the temple came in handy for his and the other faith-driven actor's agenda. First of all, imaginaries connected to the sacred place are fertile ground for their transcendental concerns and the very images they use for their activism. Although the site in Kaliyasaur was initially associated with a different understanding of the "sacred" in terms of an individualised local

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187   See Amar Ujālā 2012, April 13; May 28, 29, 31; June 1, 17, 19b, 23 etc.

culture, it nevertheless had a tendency to be used for a political agenda and to be infused with ideas of a normative Hindu culture. Secondly, because at first sight a temple was not that directly tied to social issues or the very basis of people's livelihoods. This factor ostensibly alleviated the struggle of dichotomies such as culture against subsistence. However, this was clearly a misconception. The temple was very much connected to the livelihood of the villagers and in multifaceted ways (see Chapter 2.3.4). As the shrine became downright symbolic of these social concerns of the affected villagers in the course of the struggle, this in turn also provoked the extent of the resistance against the religious groupings.[188]

The next group of actors involved in the opposition to the temple relocation took forward the promoted mission of martyrdom of Agrawal and now complemented it with the motif of a holy war. They were the members of the Save Ganga Movement, a community dominated by saints and *sādhus*, with a stronghold in the ashrams of Haridwar and Rishikesh. Their activism, under the same banner as Agrawal's protest, likewise included the preservation of the Dhārī Devī Temple in its agenda. At its peak in 2012, the saints, together with supporters from politics and different sectors of society, held a protest rally at Jantar Mantar, a traditional venue for demonstrations in Delhi.[189] They called it the Ganga Mukti Mahasangram, the great battle for a free Ganges. As the newspaper Amar Ujālā reported, the saints blew the conch horn for the *nirmaltā* and *aviraltā* of the Ganges. This is a symbolic act not only announcing prayer, but also employed as a call to battle.[190] Meanwhile, the widely revered and influential but also controversial (and

188   As an example for the widespread local attitude, serve the reports following the arrival of one of the expert committees that were to assess the dam and temple issue. The question of the dam and in its wake the temple was portrayed a matter of life and death for the villagers. The caption of the Amar Ujālā synthesises the perceived nature of the villagers' response: "काम बंद मत करना साहब, हम भूखे मर जाएंगे" (2012, June 18b). "Do not stop the work [at the project] Sahib, else we will die of hunger." On another occasion, the merchants of Srinagar decided to protest against the dam opponents. During a meeting on the subject, the chairperson of the merchants explained that some "external elements" were protesting against the dams to satisfy their political self-interest. At the same time, he demanded that these people should be prevented by the administration from entering the Srinagar territory. Another speaker at the same assembly contended that the *sādhus* and saints opposing the temple were in reality a "religious mafia" (*dharm māphiyā*) (Amar Ujālā 2012, June 24b).
189   The list of participants as published in the Amar Ujālā (2012, June 19a): The general secretary, Congress Party, Digvijay Singh; Senior leader of the BJP, Uma Bharti; Vijay Kumar Malhotra (BJP); actor Mukesh Khanna; Afzal Khwaja Nizami; the convener of Ganga Seva Abhiyanam, Swami Avimukteshwaranand; Swami Sanand [G. D. Agrawal]; Jal Purush (waterman) Rajendra Singh; Kalki Peethadheeshwar Swami Pramod Krishnam; Chakrapani Ji Maharaj; Bharatiya Kisan Union National President Thakur Bhanu Pratap Singh.
190   "दिल्ली के जंतर-मंतर पर संतों ने गंगा की निर्मलता और अविरलता के लिए शंखनाद किया।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, June 19a). See K. V. Singh (2015) expounding on this custom. "As a

2022 deceased) religious guru Shankaracharya Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati led the procession of the religious activists.[191] Due to the powerful resistance of the saffron clad fraction, the further implementation of the Srinagar Hydropower Plant was even threatened. The central government at the time was contemplating sacrificing or cancelling the project in order to meet at least some of the demands of the protesters (Faridi 2012).

Another participant of the Ganga Mukti Mahasangram had already been mentioned: Uma Bharti. She was yet another high-profile and dominant activist who incorporated her multiple identities into the agitation to save the Dhārī Devī Temple. Uma Bharti is a BJP politician from Madhya Pradesh and also a *sādhvī*, a female spiritual ascetic who is commonly portrayed as a firebrand politician owing to her prominent role in the Ram Janmabhūmi movement.[192] In 2014, she was appointed Minister for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation under the Modi government. With regard to the Dhārī Devī Temple, she showed increased activity at the political level by holding talks with Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh and also entering into dialogue with the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. In order to emphasise her demands to the state government, she too carried out a hunger strike in May 2011. In 2012, already in the midst of fierce disputes, Bharti framed her activism with the following words:

> 'मैं ना तो बांधों की विरोधी हूं और ना समर्थक। मैं तो स्थानीय लोगों के हितों की रक्षा के साथ गंगा की अविरलता व निर्मलता के लिए अभियान चला रही हूं।' (Amar Ujālā 2012, July 6)

trumpet or wind instrument, a hole is drilled near the tip of the apex of the shankha. When air is blown through this hole, it travels through the whorls producing a loud, sharp and shrill sound. This particular quality of sound is the reason why shankha was used as a war trumpet, to summon helpers and friends. The shankha continued to be used in battles for a long time. The war sound it produced was called Shankhanad" (2015:153).

191   How he too connected the Dhārī Temple with the salvation of the Ganges, reveals a statement he made a year earlier at an assembly held at the Ganga Sewa Mission. "जगतगुरु शंकराचार्य गंगा और धारी देवी को बचाने के लिए गंगा सेवा मिशन की ओर से आयोजित गोष्ठी में देशभर से आए गंगा भक्तों को संबोधित कर रहे थे।" (Amar Ujālā 2011, April 2). "The Jagatguru Shanakaracharya addressed the Ganges worshippers who had come from all over the country at a seminar organized by the Ganga-Sewa Mission to save the Ganges and Dhārī Devī." Clearly, the Ganges and Dhārī Devī are treated here as concurring concepts.

192   Although inextricably associated with a "Hindutva" cause (see Basu 1998), political experts of late attested her a metamorphosis in her political engagement: "Sadhvi Uma Bharati, to name a few—have remained controversial political players; at the same time, someone like Uma Bharati, once seen as a divisive rabble-rouser, has metamorphosed into a mature and responsible politician of sorts" (Kanungo 2017). Recommended read on the issue of "Female Political Leadership in India," Spary (2007).

> I neither oppose dams nor support them. But along with protect-
> ing the interests of the local population, I am running a campaign
> for the free flow and purity of the Gaṅgā.

As this quote and others of her statements suggest, during her activism she tried to unite and pacify various interest groups and even opposing sides.[193] While declar-ing to protect the interests of the local population and to advocate for the unhin-dered flow of the river and against its pollution, she tries to reconcile these apparent dichotomies. She not only presents these two objectives as combinable, but also implicitly the condition of the river as a vested concern of the local community. One of the reasons for this multi-pronged approach may have been, as I have pointed out elsewhere (Niebuhr 2017), that the BJP manoeuvred itself into a difficult posi-tion during the struggle over the Srinagar Dam. With the BJP's central leadership largely sympathetic to the protest against the temple relocation, the Dhārī Devī issue became a politically challenging issue for the regional branch that formed the oppo-sition in Uttarakhand at the time. Although some members of the regional branch of the party joined the protest against the temple conversion, the critical point was that by being seen to be thwarting a dam project, the regional BJP would have been associated with an anti-development orientation. Given that development is a cen-tral issue for the economically underdeveloped state with a high rate of emigration (e.g. Pal 2015), this could have cost the party dearly in the next elections. It was probably against this background that Uma Bharti, but also other actors involved, strategically emphasised that the implementation of the dam and general develop-ment is a strongly pursued agenda. This would also be true regarding the currently prevailing cultural concern as in the case of the temple (Niebuhr 2017:245). Her applied rhetoric and already the figure of Uma Bharti, however, met with resistance from all sides. From the local people and activists I spoke to, I learned that they did not place much faith in Bharti's efforts to save the temple. Her intervention was rather understood as motivated by self-interest or political ambitions (also Amar Ujālā 2013, May 13). The same reaction, and even more pronounced, came from the side of the dam supporters. Whereas the occasional visits of Uma Bharti to the dam site even triggered violent responses.[194] The advocates of a proposed new temple

193   Here is one subtitle of an article in which Bharti mentions the conflicting objectives like the dam, *aviraltā* and *nirmaltā* together. "गंगा की अविरलता निर्मलता बनाए रखते हुए बनाएं जाएं बांध" (Amar Ujālā 2012, July 3). "The dam should be built in such a way that the cleanliness of the Ganges and its obstacle-free status are maintained."

194   In 2012, when for a while it looked as if the Srinagar hydroelectric project might be shelved, supporters of the project began burning effigies of Uma Bharti, as she was considered to be one of the people behind this move of the central government (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 12b). In another earlier incident, when she visited the construction site, her car was pelted with stones and the windows were smashed (Amar Ujālā 2011, March 13).

countered Uma Bharti's activism against Dhārī Devī's relocation with references to her past activities and accused her of inconsistency:

> परियोजना प्रभावितों ने क्रमिक धरना जारी रखते हुए मध्य प्रदेश की पूर्व सीएम उमा भारती पर जमकर हमला बोला है। कहा उमा भारती भव्य राम मंदिर निर्माण की बात करती हैं और वहीं धारी मंदिर का भव्य सौंदर्यीकरण का विरोध। (Amar Ujālā 2011, May 19)

> The people affected by the project [the standard euphemism for the proponents of the HPP] fiercely attacked Uma Bharti, the former CM of Madhya Pradesh, who continues to perform a phased *dharnā*. They said that Uma Bharti talks of constructing a grand Ram temple and opposes the grand beautification of the Dhārī Temple.

Due to her earlier presence in the movement of saints and *sādhus* for the unobstructed flow, her pro-dam rhetoric also gained little credibility, as it was common knowledge that the actors involved campaigned against dam projects on the Ganges. The "free flow" argument and the earlier insistence on a sacralised Ganges waterscape with the various sacred sites it encompasses was apparently too closely interwoven with the rejection of dams to be persuasively modified in the short term. A year before the first quoted statement the objectives associated with her commitment to the Dhārī Devī Temple actually sounded very opposite and were obviously aimed at halting the construction of dams on the Ganges.

> इस मौके पर उमा भारती ने कहा कि गंगा पर बने बांधों से पैदा हो रही बिजली का लाभ सिर्फ अमीरों को मिल रहा है। उन्होंने कहा कि अनशन और धरने देश में बहुत किए जा चुके हैं। ऐसे आंदोलन का गंगा विरोधियों पर कोई असर नहीं पड़ा। उन्होंने गंगा की रक्षा के लिए आंदोलन की कमान उमा भारती के हाथों में देने की अपील की। [. . .] उन्होंने सुझाव दिया कि गंगा भक्तों के दो प्रतिनिधिमंडलों को गंगा पर बन रहे बांधों पर रोक लगाने के लिए प्रधानमंत्री और उत्तराखंड के मुख्यमंत्री से वार्ता करनी चाहिए। (Amar Ujālā 2011, Apr. 2).

In addition, supporters of the development project pointed to the perceived discrepancies in the practiced faith of Uma Bharti, who was accused of being entirely subject to political considerations and therefore only feigning her interest in the local population. "उन्होंने कहा कि उमा शुरू से ही कालीमठ जाती रहीं, लेकिन कभी यहां दर्शन करने नहीं रुकी। अब परियोजना का कार्य प्रारंभ होते ही उनकी आस्था धारी देवी में कैसे बढ़ गई।" (Amar Ujālā 2013, May 13). "They said that Uma from the beginning only went to Kālīmaṭh but never stopped here to pay obeisance. Now how did her faith in Dhārī Devī grow once the project started?"

> On this occasion [a seminar organised by the Ganga Sewa Mission in Haridwar] Uma Bharti said that only the rich will benefit from the electricity generated by the dams built on the Ganges. She said that many hunger strikes and sit-ins have already been conducted in the country. These movements had not made any impact on the opponents of the Ganges. She appealed to put the command of the movement with the aim to protect the Ganges into her hands. [. . .] She suggested that two delegations of Gaṅgā worshippers should hold talks with the prime minister and chief minister of Uttarakhand to stop the construction of the dams on the Ganges.

The first detail that stands out is that here too she is trying to get a backing from the common people by reminding them that they will be the last to benefit from the hydroelectric projects that are being implemented. With this grassroots support, she aims to be accepted as the leader for further action against the Ganges development projects. At the same time, she calls on the population to take matters into their own hands and to oppose the construction of dams. Her strategy is quite different from the one pursued by G. D. Agrawal, who sees himself as a lone and privileged warrior for the Ganges. She underscores instead that her agenda is the concerns of the people. But this is an understandable tactic for a politician as opposed to an ascetic, who holds very different sets of interests.[195] The idea presented in the last quotation is thus still without the intention to combine the preservation of the Ganges and the construction of dams. Whatever the reason for her later turnaround—a reaction to perceived pro-dam attitudes among the state's population or other political manoeuvres, for example based on the critical position of the BJP—linking the unhindered flow of the Ganges with the construction of dams proved to be a problematic issue. Werner (2015) argued that the two agendas are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather could form a critical alliance and provide a new blueprint for the line of conduct of the Hindu Right. In this context, she expresses her apprehension that "with regard to the recent Hindutva interventions in the debate, one is even tempted to assume a fatal merge of 'developmental' and 'cultural nationalism'" (2015:155). Since the construction of the Tehri Dam, not only activists, but also technical experts developed aspirations to guarantee and maintain the free flow of the river—partly for ecological, partly for spiritual reasons (Werner 2015). In Srinagar, there have similarly been various attempts to find alternative ways of development and to combine power generation with maintaining a minimum flow of the river. Not

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195   Even though U. Bharti presents herself as an ascetic, in these discussed mechanisms, the part of her personality that acts as a politician clearly takes centre stage.

only did Uma Bharti come up with several ideas in this respect, also Bharat Jhun-jhunwala brought in many suggestions for not only religiously accepted ways to preserve "sanctity," but also ecologically more sustainable options to maintain the vitality of the river. However, they were generally dismissed by the implementing agencies as unfeasible and unaffordable. It also seemed that the general resistance to the advocates of a culturally but also ecologically more sustainable vision of development was so entrenched that there was little acceptance to even consider their proposals.

3.3   Free Flow and Free Floods— Deluges as an Aspect of Flow

This section now turns back to the understanding of floods and asks what role floods play in the ideology of the groups concerned with the unhindered flow of the Ganges. Floods were only a marginally discussed topic when the temple question was coupled to the mission of activists from a religious backdrop. The varying physical states, including floods as the most dramatic expression of a river, are nevertheless part of their holistic conceptions of the sacralised Ganges riverscape. The free flow obviously not only denotes a calmly flowing river, but encompasses floods as an integral part of the Ganges' identity. The characteristics of floods along the Ganges are significantly distinguished from most other rivers in the South Asian region as well as globally. Since the rivers of the Ganges basin are known to carry one of the highest sediment loads of the world (Alley 2002), floods were the means of transport to distribute this load across the plains. Flooding during the rainy season transformed the affected soil into highly fertile agricultural acreage. For the most part, floods along the Ganges were considered a beneficial part of nature's seasons and not perceived as hazardous events. The framing of that phenomenon manifested itself rather in the notion of an over-flow "of the rivers' fresh water" because "the silt deposited serves to fertilize and improve the land and increase its productivity" (V. Singh 2018:3). This distinctive flood-defined feature shaped the mythical stories about the river and left its impact on the cultural history and the formation of the river civilisation. Bhargava (2006) contemplates the multifarious agency of rivers like the Ganges. In his view, rivers come with their own history, which is shaped by floods and the resulting frequent changes in course. The Ganges moreover "played an active role in the lives of its people and earned a place as both a dynamic but also destructive personality in Indian folk tales and songs" (Bhargava 2006:188). Yet the perception of the annual floods began to change with the introduction of flood-control measures by the British administration. These epitomised a transformation from

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an agrarian system defined by floods into an area classified as flood-prone and vulnerable (V. Singh 2018).[196]

While the Ganges floods in the countryside are primarily understood as a source of fecundity, they are also seen as a self-cleansing process of the river. Especially in relation to sacred sites or cities, floods are attributed the role of a cleansing agent and a means to purity. Excerpts from interviews conducted by Alley (Alley 2002:106) in Varanasi exemplify an urban perspective on flood events:

> As one paṇḍā of Daśāśvamedha put it, 'Gaṅgā cleans herself during the monsoon' *(Gaṅgā khud hī sāph kartī hai)*. Many described to me that, during the monsoon, Gaṅgā climbs up the ghāṭ steps and takes away the silt and gandagī [dirt]. Following this line of reasoning, one merchant said, 'From the scientific view, there is pollution, but I do not understand this. Gaṅgā takes the pollution away in floods.' In the understanding that purity is connected with flow, Hindus have argued over many centuries that the river should not be contained, manipulated, or diverted by any form of technology (Alley 2002:106).

These described specific flood imaginations with an emphasis on the gentleness of the river are obviously more oriented towards the lowlands and the delta section of the Ganges system than depicting the mountainous region. This is because floods in the elevated alpine landscape display quite different, much wilder and more destructive traits. Nevertheless, the commonly accepted and deeply ingrained understanding of the river's beneficence stretches from the source of the Ganges at Gangotri to its delta in Bengal. The mythological view of floods as blessings has a counterpart with respect to the mountain region. The rainy season with its increased river discharge is not only conducive to carrying the precious load from the mountains down to the Ganges plain, but the mountains are also mythologically seen as regulators of the unrestrained power of the Ganges water. This function emerges in the stories about Śiva, where he tames the force of Gaṅgā's fall

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196   V. Singh gives as an example the transformation of the Orissa Delta: "[. . .] British administration tried to dismantle the 'flood dependent agrarian regime' through its flood control measures, and in this process it transformed the Orissa delta into a 'flood vulnerable landscape'" (V. Singh 2018:14). Werner (2015), however, urges caution against a too romanticised picture of past water management: "As D'Souza rightly remarks, analyses of colonial and precolonial knowledge hierarchies often tend to glorify the past, more specifically the assumption that precolonial water management practices were per se egalitarian and harmonious. Primarily, it would be misleading to assume an evaluative dichotomy of 'modern' (technocratic) and 'traditional' engagements with nature" (D'Souza 2006, as cited in Werner 2015:41).

from heaven with his locks, whereas his tresses are a symbol for the Himalayas, or the Himalayan forests.[197] Even though this may not be a generally accepted reading of floods at the local level, nevertheless, also in the high mountain zone itself exist narratives about floods as instruments for purification.

> Residents of Uttarkashi often shared stories of the Ganga's movements in Uttarkashi that upheld the river's role in the sustenance of moral integrity. One example, also cited in the tourist pamphlet, was the sudden shift of the river's flow from the east to the north to the south side of the city in 1857. The changed course is linked with tales of transgression in Uttarkashi that the Ganga undid by flooding—and therefore purifying—much of the city. Such events enhance the city's importance. As the pamphlet states, 'Indeed, natural disasters including floods, earthquakes, fires, and landslides are a huge part of recent local memory but, with a startling resilience, Uttarkashi has only grown bigger after each one' (Andurai Ustav Uttarkashi 2006, as cited in Drew 2011:79).

This quoted passage, demonstrating one of the possible interpretative patterns of catastrophes in the mountain locality, exhibits several features related to the floods of the Ganges. They are considered not only as a purifying measure, but also as a corrective mechanism for various cultural infringements. Eventually, these water-based events are evaluated positively, as they have promoted development and growth for the better. Based on such a multi-layered understanding of the beneficence of Ganges floods, the arguments of the religiously motivated dam opponents inherently also embrace the mountainous section of the river when they present their idea of the free flowing river in terms of its flooding.

3.4   A Flood Vision for the Ganges and the Scientificity of Spiritual Concerns

> Natural calamities, in this case floods, are seen as a frequently occurring natural given, which must not be controlled but rather handled: 'All embankments made along the Ganga and her tributaries should be removed. Water of the Ganga must be allowed to

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197   Note, for example the translation for the Shivaliks, the Himalayan foothills—Śiva's locks. Bahuguna (1997b:50) elaborates "the locks are the natural forests of the Himalayas which help contain the water in the soil and protect the land from floods."

> spread in their natural way and replenish this holy earth. People
> should be encouraged to live with the difficulties and benefits
> associated with floods' (Werner 2015:163; Nischalanand 2009 as
> cited in Werner ibid.).

Such a quote, with its rejection of all man-made modification of the river, could
indicate that the representatives of the "free flow," in their most extreme endeav-
ours, might want to maintain a river condition before the intervention of any engi-
neering measures. In other words, they intend to return from the paradigm of flood
control, as envisaged also by the implementation of dams, to an earlier version of
flood management, or even to none at all. Of course, these few lines do not convey
a comprehensive vision of a river system without dams or embankments, or what
exactly the "natural flow" would imply. One could speculate that the underlying
vision here is of the Ganges as it was before any "outsider intervention." In the
last consequence, this could mean a condition before colonial powers took con-
trol and successively developed the river and its landscape. Especially in view of
current tendencies of the Hindu Right to erase parts of Indian history, above all
the Mughal history (Truschke 2016), one could conclude more precisely that the
ideal would be a state of the river before the invasion and interference of any party,
which is (re-)branded as foreign even centuries after its arrival.[198]

The ambivalent scenario of an unregulated water flow is also based on scien-
tific arguments and draws from an ongoing expert debate on the validity of dams
and embankments as means of flood control on India's rivers (see Baghel 2014).
In the discussion, which questions the understanding of dams with regard to this
purpose, G. D. Agrawal alias Swami Sanand, but also Bharat Jhunjhunwala openly
confront the conception of such a kind of flood regulation. They point out that
dams rather aggravate floods, instead of serving as a tool to exert control over
them. A website run by Dr Jhunjhunwala and others in this regard cites a report of
a member of the "Center for Built Environment:"

> 'The government's anti-flood measures have actually boomer-
> anged. Dams and embankments have now become an important
> cause of floods. The man-made barriers, he [Anil Agarwal] says,
> prevent drainage of excess water from floodplains into the main
> channels of rivers and streams. Embankments also tend to break

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198   Needless to say that such efforts to shape or rather "unshape" the riverscape would
prove to be rather impossible, since various forms of river management mostly at commu-
nal level are "as old as civilisation itself" (Baghel 2014:9), and generations of state rulers
were involved in the gradual transformation of the landscape and its rivers (see e.g. Mallet
2017).

> when rivers rise suddenly, sending water gushing into the coun-
> tryside. Sixteen major dams have burst in India; the worst dis-
> aster, in 1979, sent a wall of water through the town of Morvi in
> Gujarat state, killing 1,500 people.'

Based on this information the author infers,

> We must remove large dams like Tehri and cease to remove flood
> waters from barrages so that normal floods take place every year.
> Then groundwater will be recharged and more than make up for
> the loss of irrigation from dams and barrages. Also, sediments
> will get flushed to the sea and by accepting normal floods we
> will be saved from devastating floods such as those taking place
> nowadays (Ganga Today 2018).

The last quote also addresses the issue of the sediment load of the river. There
is indeed sufficient evidence telling that dams and embankments on the river
Ganges are extremely difficult to manage because of the high presence of silt.
The lower Gangetic plains are confronted with the problem of oversilting, which
increases the height of riverbeds and leads to the aggravation of floods during
monsoon times. The problem of silt accumulation is in fact also visible behind
the Srinagar Dam near the Dhārī Devī Temple. What was supposed to be a lake
had already turned in 2018 into a shallow, sand-filled waterbed. Interestingly, this
specific physical property of the Ganges—the high sludge load of the water and
the resulting problems in connection with river control and economic exploitation
schemes—predestines the river to be promoted both spiritually and ecologically
with the demand for the *aviral dhārā*.[199] Further, this underscores an exclusivity of
the river that is similar to the aforementioned critical position given to the water-
course by the "Hindutva"-driven engagement.

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199   An article by journalist D.C. Sharma (2017) highlights how also with regard to the
problem of siltation, technical and spiritual aspects of the river conflate. "For the river to
be really clean, it has to achieve the twin goals of—*nirmalta* (purity) and *aviralta* (free
flow). Oversilting comes in the way of achieving the second goal of ecological flow of the
river. An engineering solution to the problem would be to undertake large-scale desilting
by dredging. It's a costly option and not ecologically sustainable. It also goes against the
notion that silt in Indian rivers is an integral part of the rivers themselves. The Chitale
committee set up last year to keep an eye on the desiltation of Ganga has acknowledged
this in its recent report. 'Rivers should be provided with sufficient floodplains without any
hindrance to the flow. Instead of 'keeping the silt away,' a strategy to 'give the silt way'
should be adopted,' the panel has observed."

As illustrated here, it became increasingly difficult to separate arguments from a scientific context with regard to environmental issues from those pertaining to a religious background. Contrary to earlier studies, which stated that scientific considerations were largely rejected in faith-centred discussions on the purity of the Ganges (Zühlke 2005, 2013; Alley 2002; Mawdsley 2010 discussing Alley; Haberman 2006:177),[200] spiritual and scientific arguments lately converged in these debates. In the course of this development, the entanglement of sound scientific argumentation and religious aspirations became another critical factor of right-wing engagement. A particularly shaped relationship between Hindu-nationalist politics and science gained increasing prominence in recent years and reached academic debates even at the university level.[201] The practice of combining scriptural evidence with scientific truth has been identified as another popular tactic of the Hindu Right "to further their propaganda of superiority of Hinduism by making claims of its 'being scientific' in factual terms" (Tripathy 2019).[202] Such an objective is strategically supported by an agency with the name "Vijnana Bharati (VIBHA):"

> [. . .] The science wing of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS)
> [. . .] VIBHA aims to educate the masses about science and technology and harness research to stimulate India's development, but it also promotes 'Swadeshi' (indigenous) science and tries to connect modern science to traditional knowledge and Hindu spirituality (S. Kumar 2019).[203]

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200   The two authors Alley and Zühlke, who studied the problem of Ganges pollution, found that most people who came from a religious-ideological background did not acknowledge the physical condition of the river. This was because the Ganges had such a purifying agency in their system of thought that the physical pollution was considered non-existent or not important—and accordingly there was no need to take care of it. As Alley pointed out, "There are, in other words, many religious leaders and ritual specialists who are explicit transcendentalists and deny any possibility of an upper limit to Gaṅgā's purifying power" (Alley 2002:219f); or further: "several activists have argued that this 'apathy' for the problems of material pollution is most noticeable among religious leaders and pilgrim priests working and living on the banks of the Gaṅgā [. . .]" (Alley 2002:211).

201   Its most extreme manifestation consists of bizarre claims to prove that modern knowledge and technology already existed in the Vedic age. Note the statement of the Vice-Chancellor of Andhra Pradesh University that fighter jets and airports already existed in ancient India (Tripathy 2019).

202   See how Tripathy (2019) traces in great detail the historical roots of the merging of the two spheres into what he terms "pseudoscience," a process that reaches back to nineteenth century British India.

203   Swadeshi literally means "one's own country," a term that emerged in the late 19th century. After the partition of Bengal, its underlying idea led to a people's movement

These tendencies are again reflected in the approach of G. D. Agrawal towards the temple and dam issue. As Werner (2015) pointed out, in Agrawal's eyes the function of science is subordinate and the use of his scientific expertise constitutes just another instrument to "confirm faith-based knowledge" (2015:184). Drew (2011:99) similarly stated that Agrawal "[. . .] grounded his activism against hydroelectric projects in Uttarkashi District in concerns for faith, culture, and 'Hindu tradition' rather than the scientific knowledge of his engineering profession. In his view, these non-material considerations were, and continue to be, primary" (Drew 2011:99). Based on this conviction scientific arguments should not assume any major role in his dam protest because "he considered the scientific and environmental factors [. . .] to be 'meaningless auxiliaries' that are limited in their ability to affect politics and government decisions" (ibid.).

Despite the subordinate position he accorded to scientific reasoning, there was an episode in the present case when Agrawal intended to take water samples from the Alaknanda near the Dhārī Devī Temple. The aim of such an operation was to establish that the quality and hence the spiritual nature of the water changes with the erection of dams and the accompanying blockage of the hydrological flow.

रविवार को मातृसदन में पत्रकारों से स्वामी ज्ञानस्वरूप सानंद ने कहा कि बांध बनाए जाने से गंगा के जल में मौजूद महत्वपूर्ण पदार्थ वहीं रुक जाएंगे, जिससे जल शुद्ध नहीं रह जाएगा। यदि शासन-प्रशासन ने उन्हें नजरबंद नहीं किया है तो वह सोमवार को श्रीनगर के लिए कूच करेंगे। उनके साथ दो वैज्ञानिक भी जाएंगे। जो वहां से गंगा का सैंपल लेकर जांच करेंगे। (Amar Ujālā 2012, May 28).

Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand told reporters at the Mātṛsadan (Haridwar) on Sunday that the construction of dams would especially block the major substances in the water of the Ganges, which would not allow the water to remain pure. Unless the administration places him under house arrest, he will travel to Srinagar on Monday. Two scientists, who will take samples from the Ganges and examine them, would accompany him.[204]

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and later became an important component of Gandhi's freedom struggle (Bayly 1986). It has always had Indian nationalist connotations, but underwent new modifications as part of BJP's political strategies (Lakha 2002).

204   This episode grew more dramatic the next day when G. D. Agrawal tried to travel to Srinagar. Government officials stopped him at the first checkpoint behind Haridwar and arrested him for allegedly disturbing the public peace. He was then temporarily detained at an undisclosed location and later taken to Delhi (Amar Ujālā 2012, May 29).

Agrawal's or Sanand's plan to test the water quality at the gradually emerging lake near Srinagar draws on another scientifically justified feature put forward by the campaigners for a free-flowing Ganges. This is about certain types of bacteria that are said to be present in the water of the Ganges. The preservers of the Ganges cite evidence to support their thesis, which is also a common belief among Ganges worshippers, that these microorganisms are the physical explanation for the purity and purifying agency of the Ganges. This theme emerged in Jhunjhunwala's (2014) line of argument in his concern with the environmental aspects of the Ganges. When Agrawal raised the same issue, however, one can assume that his engagement is consistently oriented towards the transcendental nature of the river.[205]

Although the objective of the present study was to leave aside normative scientific considerations on the dam and temple issue, these reflections and the analysis of statements demonstrated that they cannot be considered completely separate from the faith-based argumentation. This is the case because scientific reasoning also informed the religious discourse. The last paragraphs gave a very general introduction to the notions of flow and floods as advocated by the opponents of the construction of dams on the Ganges. Direct statements related to Dhārī Devī and her connection to floods were accordingly sparse in this final passage. Yet the temple underwent the same process of generalisation in terms of a semantic change. It therefore seemed essential to provide this kind of contextualisation of the Srinagar Dam and the Dhārī Devī Temple struggle. Taking such an approach revealed the meanings given to flows and floods by the people who stepped into visibility during the conflict. The thorough exploration thereby disclosed that together with discourses on flow and floods Hindu nationalist agendas permeated the conflict over the Goddess Dhārī and her temple. This detailed discussion will ultimately prove important for the understanding of the soon to be investigated 2013 floods and their eventual interpretation.

205   However, the diverging missions of the two actors may have been difficult for the general observer to discern. The two men were closely associated in the eyes of the public. This was evident in the course of another incident in which a group of Srinagar Dam supporters simultaneously burned the portraits of G. D. Agrawal and Jhunjhunwala (Amar Ujālā 2012, June 17). A few days later a group of the project proponents first intimidated and then physically attacked G. D. Agrawal and Jhunjhunwala at the latter's home in Lakshmoli (Amar Ujālā 2012, June 23). Obviously, the group of violent dam advocates did not consider the nature of the argumentation too important, as long as they felt that it endangered the project and the benefits they expected from it.

3.5 The Temple Preservers' Perspective: Summary and Conclusion

This chapter examined the motives of the opponents and the characteristics of the movement against the relocation of the Goddess. The arguments and symbolism employed by these actors gradually transcended the narratives associated with the local temple, and by linking it to a Hindu-nationalist framework, broadened the understanding of the sacred place more and more towards implications of a larger ideological scope. This slow transition from a local site to a location of ideological relevance took place, on the one hand, via concepts related to the fixed constituents of the locality, such as the different notions concerning the earth and the soil. On the other hand, this happened through perceptions linked to the flexible aspects defining the place of worship, namely the river and the condition of its water. The gradual shift in attributions also went along with a re-emergence of historical antagonisms, which manifested in a dynamic clash of external and local participants and factors. In contrast to the flood narratives presented in the previous chapters, it became clear in the present analysis that the perspective of the "temple preservers" with their eventual focus on the "*bhūmi*" and "*dhārā*" differed considerably from the local knowledge about the temple and the river. The locals' personal connection to their place of worship turned into a depersonalised relationship in the opponents' approach. As a result, the groups involved in the conflict appeared at times as if they were talking about a different temple—as well as about a different watercourse. A direct comparison of the dichotomous positions suggests that while local imaginaries embrace floods, the sanctity of the river is not actually a very prominent component within the narratives of past events. The first and most important concern of local cognition represents the uniqueness and sacredness of the deity, whose identity is in turn largely informed by the presence of the river. The defenders of the former temple on the contrary, and as evidenced here, placed almost exclusive emphasis on the sanctity of the river and the entire sacralised landscape of the river system. For them, the characteristic identity and site of the Goddess Dhārī may have been of some significance, but in a sense she constituted only one element in the sacred terrain that forms the centre of their activism. In this way, the temple of the Goddess, having been identified as part of the Ganges, merges completely with their imagination about the venerated riverscape and framing of the Himalayan region. An obvious form of agency of the Goddess is of course quite limited here, as she or her distinct individuality had been diluted in a larger discourse. Nonetheless, embedded in the outlined dynamics, Dhārī Devī assumed the status of a symbol for the resistance against hydropower projects and the corresponding target to maintain the purity and sanctity of the Ganges and therefore its integrity in a metaphysical sense. With the transformation of the Goddess into a token of "Hindutva," the concomitant dynamics at

the same time exposed several of the specific strategies of the Hindu Right. These include supporting their argumentation by scientific findings and charging their rhetoric with mythological motives. In line with this overall process of semantic expansion, the perception of floods presented here reflects a broader and more general understanding of this phenomenon along the Ganges. This is opposed to the previously featured very specific and highly localised interpretations of floods from the surroundings of the place of worship and the people in the villages of Dhari and Kaliyasaur. In the discourse of the temple's preservers, the idea that the Goddess causes floods is also discussed for the first time. However, floods play an ambivalent role when it comes to these arguments. For one aspect, floods are idealised because they are seen as an ideal state of the river. But conversely, when floods are placed in the context of the Goddess's wrath and claimed to retribute misconduct, the emphasis is on their destructive rather than beneficial quality. Even if there is ample ethnologically based evidence that local traditions rooted in the area interpret catastrophes as a social regulative and endow them with attributions of divine (enraged) agency, this is very different from the understanding of floods in this locality as elaborated in the previous chapters and as reflected in the corresponding flood narratives. Yet despite the existing archetypal traits of a "wild goddess," especially floods in the presented narratives about the deity do not show such elements of divine ire or hostility, but rather of companionship with the raging element and compassion with the people. There is no such exaggeration that the Goddess is above the deluge or that she is its creator, but she adapts to the floods, she lives with them and can make the best out of their emergence. In this, she strongly mirrors the local people who traditionally live with the river and their interaction with nature, or specifically their ways of adapting to the given conditions. But as the temple and its Goddess became so closely linked to the distinctive features of the preservationists' rhetoric, the Goddess simultaneously assumed the role of a symbol for, or custodian of, the flow and the floods. It follows that the Goddess was required to remain in her traditional place so that the watercourse could retain its intrinsic character as a free-flowing river with unrestrained floods.

4 The Flood of 2012:
Transitions of a Waterscape
Floods as Agents of Change

Several instances of flooding during the monsoon 2012 dramatically changed the landscape features surrounding the temple of Dhārī Devī. Processes of this period decisively shaped not only the location, the identity of the Goddess and her relationship to flood events, but also the knowledge about floods in this part of the mountain region. The different phases of the flood that year and the processes in their wake turned the area visibly into a "technological hydroscape," a term coined by Baghel and Nüsser (2010).[206] Baghel (2014) elaborates on the cultural effects of such a river metamorphosis:

> The hydroscape is also a space in which relations between humans and their knowledge are radically altered, so that familiarity with the river and the landscape is no longer considered knowledge, and only codified forms of expert knowledge are used to make decisions. This highlights another important aspect of these new spaces in that they are also spaces in which the river is transformed as an object of knowledge, and which overturns existing relations of knowledge. (Baghel 2014:17)

Various heavy rain events between July 25 and September 14, 2012 during the monsoon season created an extensive lake (12 kilometres long) behind the newly constructed dam and flooded the place of the temple, endangering the Goddess and—with progressing erosion—the existence of the villages adjacent to the shoreline. The major rain and subsequent flood event during this period, apart from inundating the national highway, destroyed the bridge connecting the villages of Kaliyasaur and Dhari, thus decisively restricting movement in the area.

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206   In his book "River Control in India" Baghel (2014:16) uses the expression according to the following definition "The term "technological hydroscapes" (Baghel and Nüsser 2010) is used here to describe the complex geographical spaces that are produced through large river control projects."

The submergence of the area furthermore interrupted and averted religious practices connected to Goddess Dhārī.

While this chapter illustrates the transformation of the riverscape into a hydroscape by means of floods and flooding, and carves out the mechanisms standing behind the instances of near-submersion of Goddess Dhārī, it demonstrates how narratives about floods emerge decisively altered during and after the deluges of the monsoon 2012. Two key issues that will be illuminated and amalgamated in this context are on the one hand the socio-cultural inadequacies of established politics, processes and practices connected to hydropower projects, and on the other hand a long standing tradition of the instrumentalisation of water in conflicts.

4.1   Water as a Weapon and the Fundamental Structural Deficiencies of HPPs

Uttarakhand has the second highest hydropower potential among the Himalayan states (Chopra 2015). This is why development undertakings like hydropower projects have for many years marked the economic, ecological as well as socio-cultural fabric of the hill state. The Srinagar project is one of a series of hydro-electric power plants (HEPP) planned or already realised in the upper section of the Ganges (Chopra 2015; Satendra et al. 2015). Following independence in the 1950s "in the course of the secularization of the political sphere, water became a part of the immanent paradigm shift and transformed into a mere economic resource—a source of energy, a symbol of energy independence, as well as a vehicle of progress" (Niebuhr 2017:246).[207] Between 1951 and the mid-1980s, India became one of the five largest dam builders in the world, with around 1000 large dams built (McCully 1996:3; Werner 2015).[208] The conception of the Srinagar Hydroelectric Power Project in the 1980s took place against the backdrop of the paradigm formulated at that time. The final realisation, however, seems to have gained impetus only through new government initiatives at the beginning of the

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207   During this period on the occasion of the inauguration of Bhakra dam, Nehru made his famous exclamation that hydroelectric projects were meant to be the new temples of India (Aryal 1995; Swain 1997; Baghel 2014). See in this context Niebuhr's (2017:264) observation that the dam and the sacred site of Dhārī Devī appear to symbolise the two diametrically opposed conceptions of temples. The case of Srinagar Dam and Dhārī Devī Temple, where the temple had to give way for the HPP, is almost a metaphor for this statement by India's first prime minister (Niebuhr 2017).
208   See Werner (2015) for a comprehensive overview of social and political processes in India going along with the development of hydropower and dam projects.

millennium. The development of hydropower resources was newly intensified as part of a national plan to improve living standards in the country and was presented by the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2003. The scheme deemed "one of the most daring energy production campaigns in history" (Schneider 2014), envisaged the construction of 162 large hydropower plants by 2025.[209] This programme also corresponded with a vision of state policy formulated after Uttarakhand attained statehood in 2000.[210] Besides tourism, hydropower was to be employed as a lucrative source of revenue. It was also meant to be part of the solution to one of Uttarakhand's biggest challenges—the problem of youth unemployment. In particular, the widespread emigration of the young male population was to be counteracted with the slogan *pahāṛ kā pānī, pahāṛ kī javānī* [mountain water, mountain youth] (Mazoomdaar 2013, 2016). Articulated here is the idea that harnessing the natural resource of water would create better job opportunities for local youth and also keep families together. Such resolutions ensured that development activities were significantly accelerated from the moment the state was founded (Satendra et al. 2015:30). The result of these initiatives is reflected in the census of the organisation SANDRP in 2013, which identified 98 existing hydropower plants in the different sub-basins of Uttarakhand, 41 more under construction and 197 still waiting for implementation (Figure 6) (Thakkar 2013; also Satendra et al. 2015).

Competing interests regarding Indian water resources and the controversial role of dams in them have been a constant source of conflict since the development of corresponding national programmes. Long-standing and extensive struggles in connection with large dam undertakings, such as the opposition to the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River in Gujarat, attracted broad national and international attention. Related aspects of political ecology and mechanisms of opposition have occupied not only national and international structures of environmental activism since the late 1970s (Sims 2001), but also academic research of the last several decades.[211]

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209   Of these projects, the majority, 133, were aimed at the five Indian Himalayan states, of which 33 were planned for the mountainous zone of Uttarakhand (Schneider 2014).
210   This strategy was reaffirmed in 2009 with the drafting of "vision 2020" (Mazoomdaar 2016).
211   The literature on dams and mega-dam projects in general and also for India is almost limitless. Here is a collection of some interesting and partly standard works focusing on India, some of them explicitly dealing with Uttarakhand: Amte (1990); Bahuguna (1997 a/b); Baghel (2014); Baviskar (1995); Drew (2007, 2011, 2014, 2017); Dwivedi (2006); Gadgil & Guha (1995); James (2004); Kothari (1996); Mawdsley (2006); Nüsser (2003, 2014), Nüsser & Baghel (2017); Pfaff-Czarnecka (2007); Routledge (2003); R. Rawat (2004); Roy (1999); Swain (1997); Werner (2015); M. Sharma (2012, 2009, 2002); Williams & Mawdsley (2006).
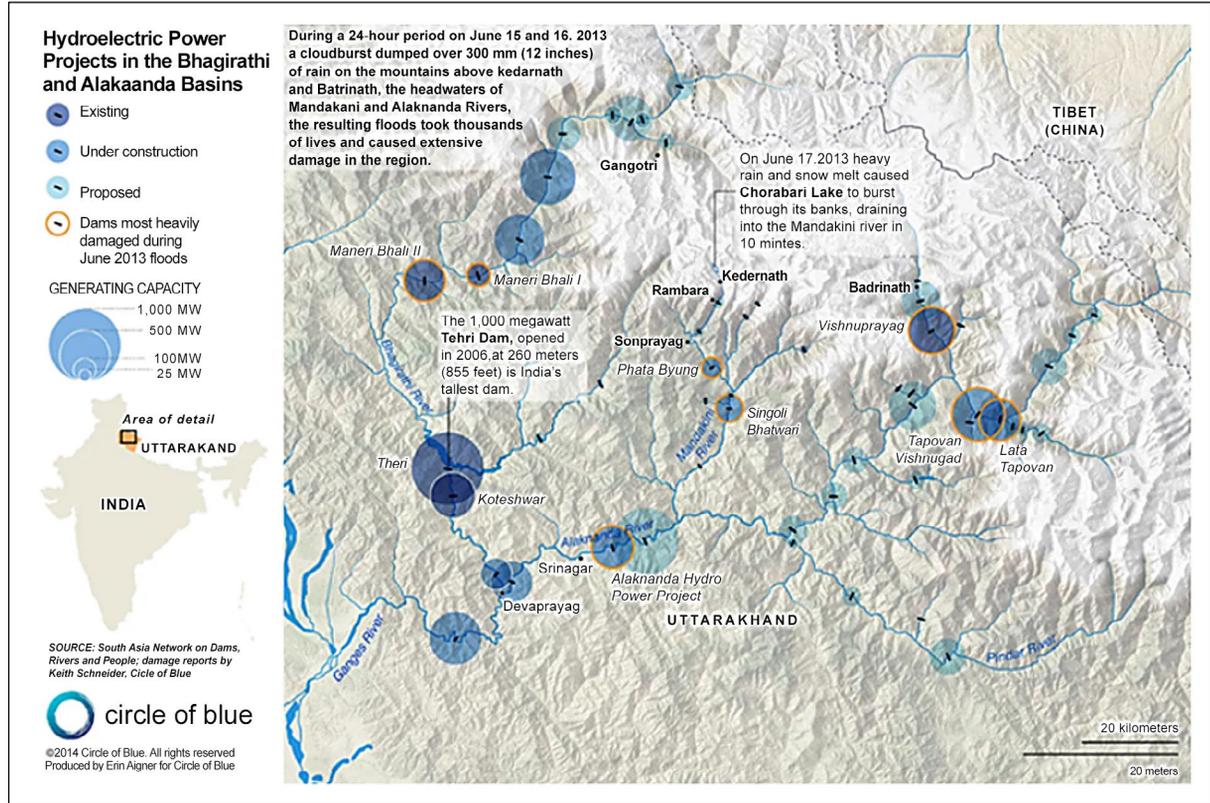
Figure 9. Existing, under construction and planned Hydroelectric
Power Projects in Garhwal (Source: Schneider 2014).

Water, owing to its essentialism and its potential force has been employed as a tool in conflicts since earliest ages and in different cultural contexts.[212] Water as an instrument of power assumes several more active and passive, respectively offensive and defensive shades: "water resources can be military goals (seize the water), military targets (bomb a hydro plant, reservoir, canal, or irrigation channel), and military means (cause a flood), and the absence of water can precipitate conflict" (Gleick 1993). In India, the Mughal emperors are known for having implemented war strategies tied to the Ganges and its floods. These were not only direct tactics to annihilate the enemy, but they also had to adjust their overall warfare to the rainy season and the annual Ganges floods (see Bhargava 2006, V. Singh 2018). Particularly in modern conflicts, dams have shifted in the focus as being vulnerable objects with the potential to drown large swathes of land and people.[213] The accumulated power of water, which on the one hand is used to generate energy, can also be unleashed against various targets. While the central concern about dams is their vulnerability to hostile forces in times of conflict, they also stand as a symbol of power and superiority through ownership or occupation of the dams. As already described in the last chapter (3.1), the risk of enemy aggression was also broadly thematised by the Hindu nationalist groups in their fight against the construction of Tehri Dam.

Hydropower projects not only easily turn into a central aspect of a water based aggression in conflicts, but already from the earliest times of their creation the issue of violence in different forms has been engraved into the script of those

212   Already accounts from antiquity chronicle the water weapon as a decisive element determining the fate of cultures and further courses of history. In the tales of the Great Flood, a motif that resurfaces in various cultures—in biblical accounts, as in the Sumerian myths, as well as in South Asian context—water, by becoming the means of divine retribution, turned into a weapon against sinners and their respective transgressions. A vivid example from the bible is found in Exodus 14 where God used the specific properties of the element by parting the waters of the Red Sea to save the Israelites from their persecutors, the Egyptian army, and then to flood the enemy troops (Brockley 2004). With that, the gods first unleashed the water weapon upon men, and thereupon men imitated their actions by transforming water into a weapon of mass destruction (Brockley 2004).

213   While the bombing of dams was a common practice in World War II (Brockley 2004), the most spectacular case of a dam destruction occurred during the second Japanese-Chinese war. Former leader of the Republic of China, Chian Kai-shek used flooding strategically against the invading Japanese Army. In 1938, on his orders, a dam was blown up in Henan Province. Although successful, this tactic proved disastrous for the country. It turned into the largest human-induced flood and environmental catastrophe. Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost and 3.9 million people were displaced (Lary 2001). Likewise, "in Vietnam, American forces commonly bombed dykes which drowned or starved 2–3 million North Vietnamese people" (Brockley 2004). One recent example constituted the advancement of the IS in Syria where the group took control of the majority of large dams (Hein 2016).

undertakings. The constitutional violence anchored in hydropower schemes corresponds to the general legacy of developmental projects, as Deb argues:

> If environmental crimes and human rights violations are a consequence of development programmes, political crimes in terms of global inequity are inherent in the very process of development. In the post-war era, the antiquated form of Western colonial governance has been replaced by economic subjugation of non-industrialized nations through the precept, politics and policies of industrial development. As the US President Harry Truman asserted, 'the old imperialism—exploitation for foreign profit—has no place in our plans;'[214] instead, globalizing the US economic hegemony is the new gamut of imperialism. (Deb 2010:130)

The structure referred to in the quotation deals with modern and modified forms of imperialism as they are established in the development policies of Western countries, with the USA at the forefront. Yet the deeply rooted mechanisms created by these hegemonic powers for developmental projects in the nations of the global south also impacted on the further implementation of nationally controlled development programmes in these countries. In this way, they carry on the imperialist legacy (see e.g. Bryant 1998).[215] Deb concludes on this basis, "crimes related to and resulting from development programmes are not confined to direct and indirect environmental harms. Development projects begin with and entail, corruption and crimes [. . .]" (Deb 2010:124).

Especially the early days of dam politics in India were marked by blatant demonstrations of ignorance and cruelty towards India's own people. The following statement by former finance minister Moraji Desai when he raised the issue of displacement in the course of the Pong Dam Project in 1961 epitomises the widespread general stance and questionable approach of Indian dam policy at that time. "We will request you to move from your houses after the dam comes up. If you move, it will be good; otherwise we shall release the waters and drown you all" (McCully1996:72). Not surprisingly the respective official attitudes "during this period were often characterized by violent and forceful relocation including burning of villages, delivery of less-than-promised (cash) compensation, and bad quality land for those who owned land titles of the submerged land. [. . .]. No compensation was paid to those who did not own any land titles" (Choudhury

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214   Esteva 1992, as cited in Deb 2010:130.
215   "Social and economic inequities are an integral feature in the development of a politicized environment whether in Brazil of elsewhere in the third world" (Bryant 1998:85).

2013:180). These forms of injustice were further entrenched by certain historical developments on the road to the exploitation of hydropower (cf. Blake and Barney 2018). Choudhury exposes the aberrations of the system established in India in the 1960s, which still determine the basic principles of dam construction today:

> While the irrigation projects in the colonial period were evaluated based on an internal rate of return, the rule was changed in the sixties and the dam projects started getting evaluated on a cost-benefit analysis. But the cost-benefit approach was susceptible to manipulations and errors that would frequently result in an underestimation of the cost and an overestimation of benefits. Moreover the cost-benefit approach did not compare a project with other options/alternatives, did not consider the environmental costs, and also did not incorporate the differential impacts it had on diverse section of the society. Singh (1997:75) argues that despite its deficiencies, the cost-benefit approach continued to be used to evaluate 'appropriate' dam projects, otherwise unproductive, to benefit the 'vested groups like landlords, politicians and the irrigation bureaucracy . . .' (Choudhury 2013:179f; Singh 1997, as cited in Choudhury 2013:180)

Since inequity and deception are built-in flaws in this very structure, it automatically makes people with their essential needs, when affected by these projects, collateral damage of such a system based on fraud.

Today's redefined standards differ markedly from the initial period of dam construction (cf. Nüsser 2003), a development partially owing due to the influence of international observing bodies (like the World Bank).[216] But recent assessments

216   However, the role of the World Bank and its relationship to development projects has also long been the subject of considerable controversy. "Although the Bank's Office of Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OESA) in the early 1980s issued guidelines for ensuring the maintenance of socio-cultural life of the indigenous people when it comes to relocation from a project site (Goodland 1982, as cited in Deb 2010:131), these guidelines are often violated during implementation of rehabilitation programmes. Environmental activists point out that development projects financed by the World Bank and IMF have always entailed gross violation of human rights, in terms of the denial of basic needs of the people affected by development projects (Pereira 1997, as cited ibid.), and police and military atrocities on people demanding social justice (Caufield 1996, as cited ibid.). Friedrichs and Friedrichs (2002:26, as cited ibid.) contend that the Bank's mode of operation is 'intrinsically criminogenic,' because it has been 'criminally negligent' in its failure to assess social impacts of its projects, its complicity with state crimes unleashed on civil society, and its disregard for international and state laws relating to human and civil rights" (Deb 2010:131f).

show that while the policies associated with the projects promise to pursue a more sensitive social agenda, in practice the implementation of corporate projects virtually never conforms to these guidelines (International Rivers 2015).[217] Violence in this context emerges not only in obvious forms of violent and forceful relocation, sometimes long time before the project is implemented, but also in variants of a smaller and less visible scale. These include "the unequal distribution of costs and benefits and issues of fair and transparent decision making processes" (Siciliano et al. 2018).[218] The effects of these mechanisms have long been known and yet "all development projects launch with promises of more employment and a better future for inhabitants of project sites, and end up destroying the local resource base, creating millions of development refugees and benefiting the elite and big businesses" (Deb 2010:132f). Still, in most cases the same modus operandi succeeds time and again in convincing local stakeholders that they are becoming the beneficiaries of unprecedented corporate generosity.[219]

Given the proven systemic faults associated with hydropower plants and the widespread practice of using water, flooding and dams in conflict situations, it is not far-fetched to speculate that in the case of the Srinagar hydropower project too, the newly constructed dam and a flood may have been used as a means to resolve a deadlock. In addition to the theoretical insights derived from the different framework conditions pertaining to dam projects, concrete precedents indicate that aggressive water-based measures were most likely applied in the implementation of the Srinagar Hydroelectric Project as well. Former Finance Minister Moraji Desai's threat to drown the people who were not willing to relocate as part of the construction of the Pong Dam, is further evidence of such deliberations from the political or corporate side when it comes to the completion of an engineering project. A scenario of drowning opponents or their property is not even limited to

217   Although the survey is about Chinese hydropower projects, it can be assumed that these results are largely consistent with the situation in India.

218   Forms of violence appear in the norms applied during the implementation of the projects, such as the handling of resettlement and rehabilitation, but even as early as during their approval processes, which are routinely accompanied by various forms of coercion.

219   Only a few years after the hydropower plant went into operation, these structural shortcomings also became apparent in the villages around the Srinagar Dam, with people desperately having to fight and protest to receive their promised compensation. In 2019, the Hydropower Company dismissed 90 of the workers from the families that had given their land for the project and were promised jobs in return (Hindustan Times 2019, May 24). The villagers had certainly been warned long in advance. Gandhian activist Vimal Bhai for example had advised the people in the villages on social problems connected to the hydropower project and the resulting relocation of Dhārī Devī Temple. It was met with little success, however, as the financial resources distributed to the villagers and the hope of future prosperity muted any signs of resistance to the project (Personal communication 2015, March 9).

mere threats. Cases of harnessing seasons and natural forces have occurred during the construction of previous dam projects (Niebuhr 2017). Such a strategy aims to create facts, a 'fait accompli,' and was applied in Gujarat, where the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Ltd. closed the dam's sluice gates at a strategically convenient time (Narula 2008). Following Del Bene et al.'s observation concerning the Sardar Sarovar Dam on River Narmada, "threats of submergence can be used as an illegal tool for forcing people to move against their will and against the law, even without providing a proper resettlement site for them" (Del Bene et al. 2018:627). The organisation South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP) (2019) recently hinted in relation to the same dam that water was being used as a strategic instrument to quell any resistance to the full implementation of the project, and asked: "submergence as weapon to kill people's movement?" Similar mechanisms applied to the Tehri Dam near Srinagar. There the flooding of Tehri was enforced before the process of resettlement was even completed. Also a study of seismicity, which should have been carried out in advance, was ignored in the process (Pathak et al. 2002).[220] With the understanding that the structural system surrounding hydroelectric power projects contains an intrinsic violent nature, we will now look at how floods that were allegedly fabricated, decisively changed the fate of Goddess Dhārī.

4.2   The Fabricated Floods

The discourse revolving around the flood of 2012 is dominated by criticism of the construction company, which is accused of having amplified the effects of the different flood events and thus created a threat scenario for the temple by engineering means. There are indeed indications that point to a strategically constructed danger scenario for the deity, for it was the deity and its temple that had become the main obstacle to the realisation of the hydroelectric power plant. The following sections discuss the various aspects that may have motivated the members of the GVK Company to pursue a plan to build up pressure in order to complete the dam and subsequently resettle the Goddess. These different points however lead to the basic premise that the flood was to a large extent a human-induced, technological flood.

220   Another recent example: Among the crisis after India revoked the special status of Kashmir in August 2019, when India released water without warning into the River Sutlej, Pakistan blamed its neighbour to use water as a weapon of fifth generation warfare to cause damage to Pakistan (South China Morning Post 2019).

To understand the processes that unfolded when the floods struck, it is essential to go back in time and look at the events that preceded the critical phase during the monsoon season in 2012. Which issues dominated the public discourse until the disaster struck? The first indication that there may have been an incentive to fabricate a flood was the general prevailing conditions in that period. This was because the company's construction plan unfolded under several serious threats to its accomplishment. One of the most crucial pieces of information for a comprehensive understanding of the 2012 floods is the curious fact that by the time the 2012 monsoon began, a dam had emerged on the River Alaknanda. The structure in Srinagar was built between October 2011 and April 2012, but from a legal point of view there should have been no dam. Officially, all construction work had been halted since June 30, 2011 (NGT 2016). It was on this date that the MoEF (Ministry of Environment and Forests) issued a suspension notice under Section Five of the Environment (Protection) Act 1986.[221] This meant that the project could not progress further until a renewed environmental impact assessment (EIA) was carried out. Despite these instructions, however, the construction of the dam near Srinagar was continued during the said period.[222] While this can be understood as an obvious demonstration of GVK's ignorance of the ministry's order, it also sheds light on the company's general practices and policies.

In addition to the official work stoppage, another danger to the completion of the dam project had materialised. The latter resulted from the protest movement of a group of spiritual leaders already portrayed in the last chapter. The activities associated with their resistance, which took place in the summer of 2012 may have contributed significantly to the dynamics that unfolded during the ensuing floods. To recapitulate—firstly, G.D. Agrawal, alias Swami Sanand, as one of the most prominent anti-dam activists, had started to get involved in the Srinagar project. As he had managed to put two hydroelectric projects on the upper Ganges on hold, dam builders and supporters were on high alert. Secondly, and related to Sanands commitment, also the protest of the other religious people against dam projects on

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221   There is divergent information on the exact date, according to Jagran Josh (2011, June 4) the construction stop was on June 2, 2011, while according to Amar Ujālā it was June 30 (Amar Ujālā 2012, June 18a).

222   "श्रीनगर जल विद्युत परियोजना को मिली पर्यावरणीय स्वीकृत के अनुरूप कार्य नहीं होने पर पर्यावरण मंत्रालय ने 30 जून 2011 को अलकनंदा हाइड्रो पावर कंपनी को अग्रिम आदेशों तक कार्य बंद करने के लिए कहा था। लेकिन स्टे नोटिस जारी होने के बावजूद परियोजना क्षेत्र में पिछले एक वर्ष से निर्माण कार्य किया जा रहा है।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, June 18a). "When the work was not being carried out in accordance with the environmental clearance received for the Srinagar Hydroelectric Project, the Environment Ministry had asked Alaknanda Hydro Power Company on June 30, 2011 to stop the work until further notice. Nevertheless, despite the suspension order being upheld, construction work has been going on in the project area for the past one year."

the Ganges was at its height. It was mid-June 2012 when the Ganga Mukti Mahasangram, the protest demonstration of the saints and *sādhus* for a free Ganges, took place at the Jantar Mantar in Delhi (see e.g. Amar Ujālā 2012, June 19a). Around the same time, news broke that the Central Government intended to sacrifice the Srinagar Hydropower Plant to appease these *svāmīs* and their movement (Faridi 2012). Despite some developments and factors that were conducive to the project, this predicament in the eyes of the project proponents may have demanded a quick response. In this sense, there are several indications to suggest that the imminent arrival of the monsoon was deliberately chosen to create facts. The project-executing agency had already been given the opportunity to assess the strength and impact of the rainy season during previous monsoons. Now it appeared to demonstrate the acquired knowledge about floods for the locality.[223] The Rījanal Riporṭar, a former monthly Hindi magazine from Srinagar, commented on the rapid pace of construction by the GVK to complete the dam in the pre-monsoon season. Monitoring the company's activities closely, it reported that on July 7, already under the risk of imminent floods, the company had fixed half of the dam's fourth gate. By the end of July, even amidst the rains, it had managed to install the remaining gates (Maikhuri 2012:16). Other observers similarly anticipated the coming course of events. The newspaper Amar Ujālā issued a warning of an impending flood about one week before the first inundation of the area (Amar Ujālā 2012, July 8a) and even described precisely the flood scenario that manifested itself at a later stage.

4.2.1   The Flood Waves—
and suddenly there is a Lake

During the monsoon season in 2012, seven intense rainfall events were reported from Uttarakhand. Here is an overview of the chronology of each rainfall and flooding episode and their effects on the dam and temple near Srinagar.

July 4   The first heavy rain event in the upper mountain range. The inflowing water carries a lot of wood, which blocks the entrance of the project tunnel. The newspaper Amar Ujālā reports on the worrying situation—that a lake could come up and that people in the area are getting nervous about this prospect (Amar Ujālā 2012, July 8a).[224]

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223   For instance, the cofferdam built for the project was destroyed by floods several times in the years before (2009, 2010).

224   "भारी बारिश के कारण अलकनंदा नदी पर निर्माणाधीन 330 मेगावाट श्रीनगर जल विद्युत परियोजना साइट पर भारी संख्या में लकड़ियां और गाद जमा होने से स्थिति खतरनाक हो गई है। परियोजना के सुरंग द्वार पर बड़ी-बड़ी लकड़ियों का ढेर लगा हुआ है। यही स्थिति रही तो सुरंग बंद होने से बड़ी झील बनने की

Figure 10. Indundated Sheds in the Area below the Temple, illustrated in the Amar Ujālā with the Headline "God Varuna arrives at Dhārī Devī's Threshold" (Source: Maithani 2012).

July 25   Intense rain in the districts of Chamoli and Rudraprayag. The incoming water—its flow being blocked by the new dam—completely submerges the area surrounding Dhārī Devī (Figure 10). A lake of 12 km in length and 20 m above the previous water level forms at the site. The water inundates the national highway and reaches up to six meters below the statue. After the water had sunk by 4 m, the company restores the road to the village Dhari. Gradually the submerged fields of the villages along the new lake re-emerge. The area of the Dhārī Devī Temple remains a swamp. A serious problem that arises with the emergence of the lake is the severe erosion rates on the edges of the villages of Dhari and others along the reservoir (Amar Ujālā 2012, July 27).

July 30   The next torrent after heavy rainfall in the upper districts submerges once again the temple's surrounding. The water level rises from 580 m in the morning to 587 m in the evening. The daily draws attention to the imminent danger

आशंका पैदा हो गई है। इससे श्रीनगर-श्रीकोट क्षेत्र के लिए संकट खड़ा हो सकता है।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, July 8a). "Due to heavy rainfall, the situation at the construction site of the 330 MW Srinagar Hydro Electric Project on the Alaknanda River has become dangerous as large amounts of wood and sediment have accumulated. Big pieces of wood have piled up at the entrance to the project tunnel. If this situation persists, there is the risk of a lake forming due to the blockage of the tunnel. As a result, the Srinagar and Srikot area would be at risk."

of the collapse of the Dhari Bridge and the possible flooding of the temporary dirt road leading to it. The access to the temple has already been interrupted for 6 days (Amar Ujālā 2012, July 31).

July 31   A further onslaught of the water, a flood wave pours into the lake and is contained by the dam. The water level reaches 588 m and comes to a halt only five meters before the statue of Dhārī Devī. The national highway leading to Badrinath is under water for a stretch of 100 m (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 1). A short period of relaxation follows, but the water level remains high (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 2) and the surrounding of the Dhārī Temple continues to be inundated (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 3).

August 3   The major catastrophe in 2012: massive cloudbursts wreak havoc in Uttarakhand, causing death (34) and extensive destruction of property, particularly in the Uttarkashi area.[225] The tremendous force of the oncoming flood wave destroys the bridge connecting the village Dhari with the other riverbank and the national highway (Figure 11). The water level in the lake climbs to over 594 m (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 5b) and hovers around that mark (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 6), in violation of the District Magistrate's order not to let it rise above 585 m. The local newspaper describes the sense of panic among the villagers along the water body. They witness drastic rates of erosion and see the shoreline creeping towards them. People stay awake at night in anticipation of the worst-case scenario, which is depicted as the "*ufān*," the boiling over of the river (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 6). Damage reports indicate that all power lines of the villages bordering the lake have been cut off.

August 19   Another flash flood after heavy rains. Again the temple area and the highway are under water, the erosion on the edges of the lake advances further (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 20). In the following days, the water level drops, then

225   According to Parkash (2015), the first lighter rain and flood events caused various landslides and blockages along the rivers that broke during this major flood, thus dramatically aggravating the situation. "Prior to the major catastrophic event on 3rd August 2012, the affected area had received heavy to extremely heavy rainfall at least two times during the previous month on 4th July and 25th July 2012. The tributaries of Asi Ganga and Bhagirathi were blocked at some places in the upper catchment areas of the valley, thereby forming transient landslide/debris dammed lakes that withheld huge amount of water, boulders, tree logs and sediments washed away from the slopes. As the area is thinly populated and has difficult access, these lakes were not well reported to the administration by the people of the affected area. However, the conditions were favourable for triggering flashfloods [*sic*] if and when the area received heavy precipitation. Thus, the very high intensity rainfall accompanied by thunder and lightning, resulted in bursting of these lakes as well as over-spilling of water from the existing lake at Dodi Tal" (2015:44).

Figure 11. River, Temple and the broken Dhari Bridge
in the wake of the Major Flood Event in August 2012
(Source: Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 5b).

rises again (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 22). Even though the third gate of the dam is now open, the water level of the lake has exceeded 590 m for the last three nights (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 23).

September 14   Yet one more rain event with catastrophic effects in the area of Ukhimath, the water reaches the first step of the temple (Amar Ujālā 2012, Sept. 15).

4.2.2   "Denying the Right of Worship" and the Absence of Transcendence

News media such as the daily Amar Ujālā report and discuss in detail the different rainfall events, the flooding of the area, the emergence of the lake and its implications for the locality. The main focus is on the incurred damages, the impairments for everyday life, e.g. traffic restrictions, but also on the constraints for spiritual worship in the Dhārī Devī Temple. Another strand of the discourse deals with the socio-political reasons for the flood conditions around Srinagar. The latter takes up the alleged involvement of the hydropower company and the administration, as well as the nexus of these groups. Although the threat and restrictions to the Dhārī Devī Temple are a central theme, a transcendental level is missing in these

reflections on the Goddess and flood events. While primarily describing mechanisms of political manoeuvring and apportioning of responsibility, the publicly conducted analysis is almost exclusively characterised by an "absence of transcendence." This feature is important to note, as it is the decisive factor distinguishing the floods in 2012 not only from the historical flood events but also from the subsequent flood disaster in 2013.

When the local newspaper specified the effects of the floods on the practice of worship, the most obvious limitation was that pilgrims and worshippers could no longer get to the temple. On several occasions the water came up to the immediate vicinity of the statue and at the same time overflowed the *parikramā*, the path for the ritual circumambulation of the temple.[226] As a result, the *pūjā*—ritual worship—could not be performed in its usual form. The adherents instead stood at some distance from the temple and prayed to the Goddess—and also received her blessings from afar (Amar Ujālā 2012, July 26a). The Amar Ujālā (2012, Aug. 2) illustrated this experienced deprivation with the title "the worshippers crave to see Mã̄ Dhārī,"[227] and added that "due to the surge of the water the movement of worshippers in the Dhārī Devī Temple came to a halt."[228] Not only was there no *darśan* of the "Mother" for the believers, but due to the worsening situation on August 4 (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 5a), the lamp of Dhārī Devī could not be lit for the first time in the temple history. The *pūjārīs* would normally light a lamp in the temple at four o'clock in the morning before sunrise (five o'clock in winter), but because of the *jalpralay* (deluge) the tradition was suspended. Soon the blame for the disruption of religious practices was put on the company's conduct. Reactions of the devotees reflected an already widespread assumption, that this was not a divine but a man-made flood. Newspaper quotes underline the impact of the allegedly planned activities of the GVK on people's faith. These accusations eventually coalesced with a demand for legal consequences for the GVK Company.

वर्षों से हजारों लोगों की आस्था का केंद्र धारी देवी मंदिर तक झील बन जाना तथा पूजा-अर्चना और भक्तों की आवाजाही बाधित होने पर श्रद्धालु नाराज हैं। स्थानीय निवासी रमेश चंद्र ममगाईं ने कहा कि मेरे पिता के दादाजी भी धारी मंदिर में पूजा के लिए जाते रहे हैं। इतने पुराने मंदिर की पूजा-अर्चना जीवीके की कारगुजारी के कारण बाधित हुई है। विपिन मैठाणी ने कहा प्रशासन को जीवीके कंपनी के खिलाफ एफआईआर कर देनी चाहिए। (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 6)

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226 "धारी देवी मंदिर भी परिक्रमा स्थल तक जलमग्न हो गया।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 5b).
227 "मां धारी के दर्शनों को तरसे भक्त" (subheading Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 2).
228 "जल भराव के कारण धारी मंदिर में भक्तों की आवाजाही पर विराम लग गया है।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 2).

> The worshippers are angry, that a lake was created up to the Dhārī Devī Temple—which is since years the centre of faith for thousands of people—as well as about the constraints on worship and movement of the devotees. Local resident Ramesh Chandra Mamgain said, that his father's grandfather also used to go for worship to the Dhārī Temple. The worship of such an old temple is interrupted because of the activities of the GVK. Vipin Mathani said that the administration should issue a FIR[229] against the GVK Company.

Even in late August, when the water finally receded, the situation around the temple remained grim. The worshippers had to wade through the water and climb over sand mounds to reach the temple. Only 30 to 40 people took up the daily challenge and walked across with the help of sticks. Some voiced their deep anger and resentment over the demeanour of the company, on this occasion even pointing out possible metaphysical consequences (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 24).[230] During the prolonged debate about the flood situation, the constraints of temple services turned into allegations of "denying the right of worship," which is classified as a criminal offence in the Indian Penal Code. Attached to it came a renewed demand for legal action against the company:

> सामाजिक पंजीकृत संस्था सोसाइटी फॉर रिवोल्यूशन अगेंस्ट करप्शन के महासचिव संतोष ममगांइं ने अलकनंदा जल विद्युत कंपनी के निदेशक के खिलाफ मुकदमा दर्ज करने की मांग की है। पुलिस को दी तहरीर में संस्था सचिव ने मांग की है कि अलकनंदा जल विद्युत कंपनी के निदेशक के खिलाफ सार्वजनिक संपत्ति को जानबूझकर क्षति पहुंचाने, सार्वजनिक मार्ग अवरुद्ध करने, जनता को पूजा-अर्चना के अधिकार से वंचित रखने पर मुकदमा पंजीकृत कर कठोर कानूनी कार्रवाई की जाए। (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 7)

> The Secretary-General of the socially registered organisation "Society for Revolution against Corruption" Santosh Mamargain, has demanded to file a lawsuit against the Director of the Alaknanda Hydroelectric Company. In the complaint given to the police, the institution secretary after filing the grievance,

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229   F.I.R. First Information Report

230   "मां के मंदिर में पूजा-अराधना [*sic*] और भक्तों की आवाजाही को रोककर जीवीके ने गलत किया है, जिसका खामियाजा कंपनी को ही भुगतना पड़ेगा।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 24). "The GVK was wrong to interrupt the *pūjā-archanā* in the Ma's temple and the movement of the worshippers, accordingly the company will have to suffer the consequences."

demanded that strict legal action should be taken against the director of the Alaknanda Hydroelectric Company for deliberately damaging public property, blocking a public road, and above all for denying the public the right to worship.

At the same time, the women activists from the Institute for Nature and Environment, together with another group, the Siddhapīṭh Mā̃ Dhārī Devī Sevā Committee, called for the initiation of legal proceedings against the GVK. Their demand prompted them to launch a *gherāv* (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 12a), i.e. a siege of government agencies or other institutions with the aim of paralysing their work until the protestors' demands are met.[231] They alleged that the GVK Company deliberately created the lake that flooded the Goddess's surroundings, thus curtailing religious practices.[232] The women also accused the company of disregarding the orders of the Supreme Court, resulting in damage to the Dhari Bridge and the National Highway (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 7).[233] After some hours of agitation, a case was indeed registered against the leaders of the company.

As just demonstrated, the flooding and constraints on the temple activities were increasingly becoming a political issue. This development continued in further debates by members of the opposition who questioned the role of the local government. The spokesperson of the UKRANT (Jan) blamed the administration for protectionism towards the company and said that the company's dogmatism created a dangerous situation for the Dhārī Devī Temple; while the government, instead of taking action, remained silent (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 13). The intensifying power game, which then revolved around pleas for the opening of the

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231   The women, under the leadership of different organisations and public representatives, surrounded the police station *(gherāv)* and protested with the demand to file a lawsuit against the GVK Company, against its director and coordinator. If the police were not ready to accept the complaint, they threatened to perform their Bhajan-Kirtan (the musical form of worship) inside the police station (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 8).

232   "कई घंटे तक चली जद्दोजहद के बाद हाईवे को नुकसान पहुंचाने, जनमानस की आस्था को प्रभावित करने तथा धारी पुल को नुकसान पहुंचाने के आरोप में कंपनी अधिकारियों पर मुकदमा दर्ज किया गया।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 12a). "After some hours of tough struggling a complaint was filed against the company officials for causing damage to the highway, putting constraints on the faith of the public as well as bringing about damage to the Dhari Bridge."

233   In the first days after the disaster, the administration still accused the Public Works Department (PWD) to be responsible for the destruction of the Dhari Bridge. But upon seeing the result of an official inspection, the Tehri administration had to admit "that the Dhari Bridge broke because of the arbitrariness of the company." (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 9). For the same reason, the PWD wrote to the Police Department that the company's negligence caused the breakage of the Dhari Bridge, which used to be under its supervision. The PWD then demanded a sum of two *lākh* 64 thousand rupees as a compensation for the damage from the GVK (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 18).

dam gates, led to the administration being perceived as weakened and impotent.[234] However, the non-interference of the local government may not have resulted from mere powerlessness, but from an unwillingness to act. As claimed by one of its (former) members, there were indications that the GVK had bought its way into the administration.[235] Given the likely degree of venality, the way in which the city administration intervened appears to be characterised by fickleness.

4.2.3   Gates wide shut— The Arbitrariness of the Company

श्रीनगर में बनाई जा रही जल विद्युत परियोजना भी ऐसी ही परियोजना है, जिसमें खुलेआम कानूनों की धज्जियां उड़ाई गई. जुलाई-अगस्त 2012 में गैर क़ानूनी तरीके से परियोजना निर्माण कार्य के कारण बनी झील यह भी स्पष्ट करा गई की शासन-प्रशासन और पुलिस किस कदर भाड़े के टट्टू की तरह कार्य करती है. भारत सरकार के कार्य रोकने के दो-दो निर्देशों के बावजूद 7 जुलाई 2012 के बाद कंपनी नदी पर बने बैराज के गेटों में शटर तो लगा सकती है, लेकिन इनको हटाने के लिए प्रशासन के निर्देशों के बावजूद कंपनी तैयार नहीं होती. थक-हारकर प्रशासन चुप और कंपनी की मनमानी जीत जाती है। (Thapliyal 2012)

The hydroelectric project under construction at Srinagar is another such project, where laws are openly trampled underfoot. Together with the lake, which was illegally created in July-August by the construction work on the project, it became visible to what extent the government and the administration as well as the police perform their duties like hirelings. Despite several directives from the Indian Government, the company after July 7, 2012, even installed the shutters on the gates of the barrage erected on the river, but is unwilling to remove them, notwithstanding the orders of the administration. The administration, tired and resigned, remains silent and the arbitrariness of the company triumphs.

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234   "लेकिन प्रबंधन की हेकड़ी ऐसी कि प्रशासन उसके आगे बौना नजर आने लगा" (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 11). "However, such is the arrogance of the management that in front of it, the administration started to look like a midget."
235   "बीना चौधरी ने कहा कि पालिका जीवीके की मदद से सर्वश्रेष्ठ सभासदों का चुनाव कर उन्हें सोने के सिक्के बांट रही है।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, Nov. 26). "Beena Chaudhary said that the municipality, after choosing the most opportune members of the assembly with the help of the GVK, thereupon distributes gold coins to them."

Particularly, the gates of the dam turned into a central topic in the discourses unfolding after the flooding of the reservoir. Once the water level had risen to previously unseen heights, for several weeks the media, members of the public, and the administration commented on the closed gates. Thereby an uphill struggle unfolded to coax the company into opening the inbuilt flaps to enable the flow of the water. The proceedings at the time turned into a veritable haggling game between the municipal administration, the district government and the company. According to allegations levelled in the quote from the local magazine Rījanal Riporṭar, these gates were successfully fixed just before the start of the rainy season. When unprecedented water masses then rushed towards the dam, the shutters of the gates remained locked and blocked the course of the river. This circumstance not only created the flood-like situation, but also served to sustain and to aggravate it. A key term permeating the public debate constitutes *"manmānī"* as an expression for the purported arbitrariness or even despotism of the company.[236] Allegations of *manmānī* recur countless times in the articles describing the dynamics during the monsoon of 2012 and therefore characterise the perceived key feature of the hydropower corporation's demeanour. Delayed responses to, or even rejections of the municipal official's orders to open the gates, issued to relieve the flood conditions, can be regarded as another proof hinting towards the deliberate set up of the situation.

Since the local newspaper illustrated daily the drama unfolding between the three groups involved, the respective articles allow an overview of the happenings related to the barrage gates. The administration of the district Tehri issued an order to open all the five gates straight after the first flood wave created the lake and water accumulated at the site of the temple (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 9). Likewise, after the second flood wave, the district magistrate Chandresh Kumar Yadav held talks with the officials of the company, advising them to keep the water level at 585 m and to open all the gates of the dam. At that time, one single shutter had apparently been raised, but this did not bring about any change in the water level. On July 31, when the water reached almost, by five metres, to the Dhārī Devī statue, a second gate was opened; three other gates remained closed, though (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 9). It was not until August 10 that, after several missed deadlines, a third gate's shutter was finally pulled up. When the next flood wave hit on August 19 the last two gates were still locked. The officials were given another deadline to open them by the end of the months (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 20). Afterwards the coverage of the gates by and large came to an end, probably due to the diminishing rains and the easing of the water situation on site.

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236   For example, in the form of a highlighted line in an article; "कंपनी मनमानी पर उतारू, प्रशासन चुप" (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 1). "The company poised for arbitrariness, the administration silent."

श्रीनगर। अलकनंदा पर निर्माणाधीन 330 मेगावाट जल विद्युत परियोजना के बैराज क्षेत्र में झील बनने से हजारों लोग दहशत में हैं, लेकिन अलकनंदा हाइड्रोपावर कंपनी मनमानी पर उतारू है। प्रशासन के लाख प्रयासों के बावजूद कंपनी ने बांध के सिर्फ दो गेट ही खोले हैं। जबकि डीएम सभी पांच गेटों को खोलने के आदेश दे चुके हैं। हैरानी की बात यह है कि जलभराव होने के बाद कंपनी के प्रशासनिक अधिकारी यहां से गायब हो गए हैं। (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 2)

Thousands of people are in panic over the formation of a lake in the barrage area of the 330 MW hydroelectric project under construction at Alaknanda, but the Alaknanda Hydropower Company is banking on its arbitrariness. Despite millions of attempts by the community, the company opened only two gates, while the DM [district magistrate] already gave orders to open all five gates. What is astonishing is the fact that after the waterlogging, the company's administrative officials disappeared from here.

As the quote from the Amar Ujālā on August 2, 2012 indicates, the company obviously did not react to the orders requiring the opening of the gates after the waterlogging occurred in the lake. In addition, the GVK officials subsequently vanished from the scene.[237] As the newspaper repeatedly informed its readers, another unlawful measure was to close the gates of a new dam before power generation begins at a hydroelectric plant (see Amar Ujālā 2012, July 27, 31, Aug, 2). In doing so, the company thus ignored not only the orders of the magistrate, but on top of that the basic general guidelines in connection with dam construction.[238] The journalist Maikhuri of the Rījanal Riporṭar indulged in speculation about the motives behind the hydropower company's conduct, he asked:

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237   "[. . .] हैरानी की बात यह है कि स्थिति भयावह होने के बावजूद कंपनी के प्रशासनिक अधिकारी यहां मौजूद नहीं हैं। जलभराव होने के दूसरे दिन से ये अधिकारी गायब हैं। कंपनी निदेशक की गैर मौजूदगी में कंपनी समन्वयक प्रशासनिक कार्यों को देखते हैं, लेकिन वे भी नदारद हैं। ऐसे में कंपनी के इंजीनियर तथा अन्य अधिकारी कुछ बोलने को तैयार नहीं हैं।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 2). "Surprisingly, although the situation is frightening, the administrative officials of the company are not present here. These officials are absent since the second day of the waterlogging. In the absence of the company director, the company coordinator overlooks the administrative functions, but also he is missing. In this case, the company's engineers and other officials are not ready to speak."

238   "नियमानुसार बिजली उत्पादन शुरू होने से पहले बांध के गेटों को बंद नहीं किया जा सकता। प्रशासन यह बात बार-बार दोहरा तो रहा है, लेकिन कंपनी कुछ सुनने को तैयार नहीं है।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 2). "As per rules, before the production of electricity is taken up, the gates of the dam cannot be closed. The administration repeated this topic over and over again, but the company is not ready to listen to anything."

आखिर काम पर रोक के बीच ही जुलाई मध्य तक कंपनी को सारे गेट बंद करने की जरुरत क्यों महसूस हुई? कंपनी सरकार को अपनी ताकत दिखाना चाहती थी या उफनती नदी से जोर अजमाइश करना छाती थी या धरा पांच के नाम का सहारा लेकर रुके हुए काम को शुरू करने के लिए सरकार पर दबाव डालना चाहती थी। (Maikhuri 2012:16)

After all, why did the company feel the need to close all the gates until mid-July amidst the work ban? Did the company want to demonstrate its strength towards the government or to test the force of the ravaging river, or did it want to pressure the government to start the work, which was stopped in the name of paragraph five?

There were some justifications from the company side for its behaviour during this critical period. In view of the subsequent actions, however, the apologies did not seem very valid and were also met with distrust.[239] In one of the incidents of flooding, rumours emerged that the company had an expensive crane standing outside the gates and in order not to ruin the machine, they refused to open them, an assumption confirmed by the manager (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 2). As a second justification, the officials stated that two of the gates did not yet have a hydraulic sytem installed, which is why they could not raise the respective shutters (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 2). Director Reddy announced on this occasion that from now on the water level would not rise again and the incoming water would continue to flow unimpeded. But days later, the great flood, the *jalpralay*, proved the opposite with new record levels of backwater in the lake. These episodes of promises and their none-fulfilment or only partial realisation stretched over the entire period. All in all, the various examples of the company's behaviour, communication and practices taken together clearly point to the application of delaying tactics—and to the creation of a human-induced flood.

Regardless of everything, in the end, the company's rapid pace of construction, the violations of existing laws and the *manmānī* paid off. This became evident after a further inspection of dam site and temple by a two-member committee of the Central Electricity Authority and the Central Water Commission from August 24 to 26, 2012.[240] Their subsequent report concludes that given that so much money

239   "वहीं धारी देवी मंदिर और राजमार्ग फिर जलमग्न होने के बाद भी कंपनी बार-बार हाइड्रोलिक सिस्टम न होने का बहाना बनाकर गेट खोलने में कोताही बरत रही है।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 20). "Likewise, when the Dhārī Devī Temple and the highway were submerged, the company has repeatedly made the excuse of the non-existent hydraulic system and displayed negligence in the opening of the gates."
240   The participants were S. P. Kakran, Chairman, Central Water Commission, Ministry of Water Resources; A. S. Bakshi, Chairperson Central Electricity Authority (Kakran & Bakshi 2012). Additional members of the team: Alok Gupta, member of the Central

had already been spent on the construction of the project—notably, a process that took place while the project was officially on hold—the MoEF should quickly withdraw the imposition of the relevant Section Five (Kakran & Bakshi 2012), the paragraph, which prohibits the continuation of construction work on the project.

> Considering the significant progress of the project, the Section 5 may be withdrawn by MoEF at the earliest so that the project works are resumed at site keeping in view the national interest of hydro power sector, benefits of local people, project specific local area development, feelings/views of project affected people, etc. otherwise it would be an end to hydro power development in Uttarakhand as well as in the country. (Kakran & Bakshi 2012:18; Supreme Court of India 2013:52)

In other words, instead that the illegally carried out operations entailed some kind of sanction, the facts thus created were in this way even rewarded. And to make matters worse, the presumably staged floods with all the destruction in their wake turned into an argument in favour the hydroelectric project.[241] The most curious reasoning in this respect was that the flood situation was caused by the construction ban under "Section Five" itself. On this note, the District Magistrate of Tehri openly blamed the work stoppage for the creation of the lake and the collapse of the Dhari Bridge (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 18). According to his logic, if the company had only been allowed to carry out its construction activity, it could have attached the hydraulic system to the shutters in time and opened them. Drinking Water and Education Minister Prasad Naithany shared the same view, while simultaneously venting his anger at the central government for not lifting the "Section Five" work stoppage even after his meeting with the prime minister. Reversing the facts, he too accused the enforcement of the said paragraph as responsible for the water-borne disaster.[242] Such arguments disregard that the flood occurred

Electricity Authority (CIA), the chairman of the CWC, Design and Engineering, Pramod Narayan; CIE member Manoj Sikdar, the CI Design of the CWC S.K.G. Pandit (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 26).

241   Yet not only the proponents of the project used the natural disaster in 2012 to push the implementation, also the opponents of the dam construction and relocation of the temple employed the existence of a flood situation to express their objection to the economic exploitation of the riverscape. This fact could be observed in their actions after the floods, such as protesting at the police station with the aim of filing a complaint against the company.

242   He equally stated that due to the application of this paragraph, the hydropower company could not carry out its further construction steps. As a result and due to the heavy monsoon, the water accumulated in the project area. This could have ultimately endangered

only because the river was blocked by an illegally constructed dam with its closed hatches, which were not equipped with a hydraulic system.[243] Another line of defence for the company's actions resurfaced in the analysis of the committee that inspected the dam during the same period. The report of the CWC (Central Water Commission), which had already been identified as advocating the project, even established a permanent flood hazard for the temple:

> [. . .] it has been reported by the local residents that this temple has submerged earlier at several times during high floods. Even on 3rd August 2012 [. . .]. Even if the dam would not have been constructed, there is always a possibility of submergence of the temple during high flash floods (Kakran & Bakshi 2012:16; Supreme Court Judgement 2013:52f).

The recipients of these lines must assume that the temple is generally threatened by floods. This means that not only the historical floods, but above all the flood of 2012—the technically engineered catastrophe—is now instrumentalised to prove that the temple is intrinsically vulnerable to be affected or damaged by floods. This account leads to the further conclusion that the temple is categorically better situated on the higher platform than at its earlier (then still existent) disaster prone place. It is obvious that the historical and current flood events in the report, even if they exhibited very different features, were closely coupled to show that there can be no valid objection to the relocation of the seat of the deity. In this artificially constructed representation, the imminent and final relocation of the Goddess thus even becomes in a way even her final salvation, for she will be liberated from the curse of the floods for good.

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even the urban centers more downstream, such as the cities of Srinagar, Devprayag, Rishikesh and Haridwar (Amar Ujālā 2012, July 26b). The newspaper, in turn, provided some well-founded counterarguments to these claims (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 4). It said that despite "Section Five" the shutters could certainly be opened, as the guidelines for implementing the paragraph in question also included instructions regarding security issues. In this context, the article points out the company's negligence in safety matters. Namely, causing the formation of a lake without proper preparation, which could lead to a major accident (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 4).

243   Contradicting the statements of the education minister and the district magistrate, the earlier Revenue Minister Diwakar Bhatt remarks that the imposition of "Section Five" of the environmental protection act is the company's fault and that the company should act according to environmental standards (Amar Ujālā 2012, July 27).

4.2.4   Altered Relationships of Deity and Community to Floods in 2012, Conclusion

This section explored the events and developments during the 2012 monsoon season, which occurred in the wake of successive waves of flooding and a major flood in Uttarakhand in early August of that year. The floods in 2012 marked a big step forward on the way to a decision on the dam conflict. Suddenly there was a lake, water inundated the former houses, fields and other smaller places of worship and there is no way to turn back the wheel and to revoke the existence of the mighty waterbody. Although in preparation for months, only the final formation and the coming into visibility of the lake created a new geophysical reality. The transformation of the river landscape is accomplished; a lake inscribed itself into the geophysical and cultural script of the land. Here it proved essential to describe the trajectory of the riverscape in the relevant season. This highlighted how, together with the physical transformation of the river and its catchment zone, the discourses on floods have also shifted significantly. In the history of the floods that affected the temple, the events during the 2012 monsoon are unprecedented; they completely revolutionise the understanding of water-related catastrophes in this place. This factor is reflected in the quality of the emerging flood narratives. The exceptional nature of the deluges is that human intervention in them reached a new dimension—by substantially controlling and deliberately directing them towards a specific target.[244] The investigation established that the floods at the site, which were considered natural and part of a divine phenomenon according to earlier narratives, had evolved into events albeit not human-induced but human-controlled. The new experience of disaster encompasses the recognition of floods as a means of aggression applied by humans, guided by experts and directed against the living culture of the place.

It was noted at the outset that much of the public debate was dominated by accusations against the project-executing agency. The preceding analysis has highlighted the evidence suggesting that these may have been justified. The initial elaborations on the use of water in historical and current conflict contexts, as well as on past dam policies with their blatant application of violence, may at first have seemed somewhat far-fetched as a comparison to the company's conduct at Srinagar. The forms of aggression displayed at this Garhwali site clearly took place on a much smaller scale. They had no open, belligerent dimension and water as a weapon materialised in a relatively hidden fashion. Yet, despite these cases of

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244   This argument of novelty remains valid, even though technical expertise played a role to some extent in flood mitigation during the past floods in Uttarakhand. See the flood of Birahi in 1894, or the Belakuchi flood of 1970 (Chapter 2.1).

violence being rather low-key in comparison,[245] there were nevertheless flagrant violations, which seem to be legitimised by the structural scripts tacitly accepted in the realisation of development projects. The facts presented proved above all that in the events of 2012, floods were not only used as a means of aggression to resolve a conflict, but at the same time as an instrument to exercise power. In this process, water with its inherent force became a symbol and a tool of territorial rule; whoever controls and dominates the water can not only produce power (electricity), but also gains sovereignty over the river and its landscape. In other words, those who tame the water hold control over gods and men, or over the trajectory of a riverscape and its associated culture. This means that water is used to cement an entirely new power structure.[246]

The argumentation of the dam advocates showed that the firm and others sharing an identical vision of the development of the area cultivate a very different narrative of the flood in 2012. Their interpretation stands in stark contrast to the stories that critical observers tell about the event and the company's actions. While the proponents' narrative was also one of reproach, the criticism was directed at the perceived inadequacy of some environmental considerations and a resulting disruption of operations. The halt in construction was in turn held responsible for the catastrophic effects of the floods, because allegedly the prevention of the further building activities stood in the way of a comprehensive response to the natural disaster. This reasoning led to the identity of the Goddess being construed into that of a historical flood victim, with the further argument that she had traditionally been threatened by deluges emanating from the river and that she will certainly be better off in a place protected from the whims of nature.

How then did the events of 2012 shape the relationship of the Goddess and the local community to floods? In the flood 2012, several of the mythic elements of the origin- and recovery stories of Goddess Dhārī reappear. The deluge is a threat to the Goddess's existence and is on the verge to sweep her away. As in the recovery stories connected to the flood of Birahi in 1894, the bridge to the other riverside collapsed and landscape features exposed to the force of the oncoming water, dramatically changed. Together with the alteration of the riverscape's physical shape at that time, the identity of the Goddess underwent a significant transformation. As a result, the narration of this flood differs distinctly from the earlier disasters. This

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245   There were other incidents during the struggle for the dam that contained more overt expressions of aggression and violence. However, as they were not part of the flood experience, they are omitted here.

246   "At one level, power is reflected in the ability of one actor to control the environment of another. Such control may be 'inscribed' in the environment through land, air or water alterations [. . .]" (Bryant 1998:86). Consequently, the physical environment simultaneously mirrors these "unequal power relations" (ibid.).

time, among the newly created and re-enacted danger scenario for the Goddess, the divine remained silent. The realisation of the project was pushed further with the help of the floods, physically threatening the deity, as well as interrupting religious practices in her name. Goddess Dhārī though did not show direct agency but simply sat still, enduring the threat of the rising waters that might wash her away at one moment or another. In the 2012 floods, the Goddess assumed the role of a victim of the water that threatened her temple and divine seat, and she was at the mercy of the putative *manmānī,* the arbitrariness of the company. The deity's passive agency on the contrary implied that she had to be saved from the threat of inundation. Her victimhood prompted others to act, as it suggested that measures needed to be taken to protect her integrity. This meant that she lost her supremacy or an essential aspect of her identity, which used to be tightly knit to floods. Her once emphasised playful connection with the flood is broken, she neither controls it, nor uses it for her purposes. The earlier flood stories represented a coping strategy to deal with the experience of disaster. Now instead, the dynamics of the water turned against her and her place. The tight relation is severed and floods became a merely hostile force, as hostile as the developmental project towards her existence. Unlike all other flood events, which encompassed an aspect of transcendence, where the deity had a voice and conveyed a divine message, in this flood she does not appear as an actor. She metamorphosed into her mere material form, a threatened statue. Certainly, this altered perception of the Goddess can be traced back in part to the change in the sources that informed her modernised identity. In contrast to the previous chapters, in which the understanding of the deity is inspired by texts that illuminate her past on the basis of oral history accounts, the information and interpretation, which dominate the current discourse, are derived to a large extent from the newspaper and magazines with a rather left-wing political background. The ideas about temple and Goddess are shaped by an ideological understanding that is rather disengaged with manifestations of divine agency, or if it is, then just in terms of recognition as an expression of socio-cultural concerns. The Goddess thus turned into a socio-cultural extension of the respective society, without playing an agentive role herself. This development may be indicative of a phenomenon identified by Strang and Krause pertaining to the idea of "living water." The Goddess as an integral part of the "waterscape" would represent an aspect of this animated water. But when water falls under the purview of development projects, it is appropriated by these commercial enterprises and tends to lose its non-human agency (Krause & Strang 2013:101). The same notion of a loss of "capacity to effect" (Sax 2006, 2009) also applies to the perception of the floods here. While subject to human control, they appear to have lost their agency and to have become complicit in the agenda of a business enterprise. Nevertheless, it would be a fallacy to believe that the river had actually lost its potential to act (see Baghel 2014), even though it may have superficially forfeited this property in the

course of the recent catastrophic events. Evidence of this was seen a year later, when the same issue returned to the fore with dramatic force.

The transformation of a river-dominated landscape into a "hydroscape" decisively changes the relationship of people and their knowledge regarding their direct environment. The present analysis reconfirmed the occurrence of alterations affecting existing knowledge relations, together with the conversion of the river into a technically created geographical space. Through the takeover by engineering experts with their then valid interpretation of the riverscape, the local population finds itself excluded from the process of knowledge production. This has left them caught in a knowledge gap created by the sudden changes in their environment. When the Goddess's bond with the floods was severed, the local people's distinctive attachment to their hydro-environment also collapsed, while in parallel their particular expertise about the river was rendered obsolete. Given that the Goddess and the people find themselves in the same (threat) scenario, this is a case of shared experience. The danger of inundation generated for the Goddess resembled the frightening situation that unfolded for the surrounding population. Gods and humans alike seemed frozen, in a state of shock, faced with the accumulated masses of water. Water that should not have existed in this place, impounded by a dam that should not have been there. The community spent the nights in fearsome uncertainty now that where once there was a river, a huge lake had emerged. This water body, roaring and churning, set out to engulf its boundaries and to crawl towards their homes. Since deities in the Western Himalayan region and their worshippers are closely interrelated and understood as existing in a system of complex agency (see Sax 2002, 2006), a deity, in its function as a complex actor, simultaneously expresses the mental state of a collective of human actors (Sax 2002). The Goddess, according to this conception an extension of the people's consciousness, not only shares the same experience but also functions as an identification figure for the local community and embodies the nature of their troubled emotions. The turmoil of the people affected by the lake results not only from the direct threat to their lives and property, but also from the newly formed perception of the loss of control over the environment.[247] Goddess Dhārī and her shifting relationship to floods thus reflects the process the local society is going through—because just as the Goddess lost her intimate relationship with the watercourse, so did the population of the villages that had lived with the stream for many generations. In view of that, not only is the Goddess at the mercy of the corporation, but the same applies to the people. When looking at the flood narratives of this year, the

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247   This is not mean to say that the population was in control of the environment beforehand, but they had their culturally grown strategies to negotiate their environment. The Goddess represents one component of this way of coping and these cultural patterns were upset with the emergence of the lake.

deity consequently assumes no or only a marginal and victimised agency, because the associated community has no more agency with respect to their riverscape. With the understanding that the management of the riverine landscape had fallen into the hands of an external actor who gained control of both the river and the living space, the experience of powerlessness meant that the flood narratives of 2012 were additionally marked by aggression and the attribution of blame to such authorities. Yet, although the events in 2012 represented a highly meaningful phase in the history of the river and its environment, the tremendous deluge in 2013 substantially eclipsed the flood memories of 2012. They almost fell into oblivion in the face of the subsequent "Himalayan Tsunami."

5   The Flood of 2013

The flood catastrophe in 2013 became the decisive catalyst that completed the transformation of the area into a hydroscape with the relocation of the Goddess onto the new concrete platform. The strength of the surge, which formed after several days of intermittent rain in the Himalayan region, ultimately forced the moving of the deity's statue, leaving only the option to save it—or that of Goddess Dhārī's terminal immersion in the river, her *jal samādhi*. At the same time, the natural disaster practically ended the debate as well as the culturally and ecologically motivated struggle that accompanied the reconstruction of the temple and the construction of the hydroelectric power plant. For the opponents, the forced resettlement of the Goddess became a symbol of their final defeat. With the created facts, the old temple (*mūl sthān*), inundated by silt and water, no longer offered a powerful vision for its once aspired preservation. This overarching sense of defeat likewise dashed any hope of preventing the completion of the dam project. The objective of this section is to shed light on the developments surrounding the 2013 flood. Within this frame, the first part describes the stagnant situation and the related discursive processes before the state of Uttarakhand was caught up in the disaster. The local perspective assumed here, suggests:

1. that the flood narratives established a year earlier exerted their influence on the further political debate and simultaneously on the progress of the hydropower plant project.
2. that in 2013 another flood event was instrumentalised, in this case for the finalisation of the temple re-settlement.

From the moment of the catastrophe, a clear cut emerges between the public discourses, namely those that unfolded before and those that followed the catastrophe. While the pre-flood phase is still largely characterised by locally debated considerations regarding the disputed temple site, in the post-flood part the theme of the deity shifts to a distinctly different level. In the post-catastrophic discourse, the local place turned into an object of national importance and became subjected to a national perspective. This was amplified by the influence of the national media, which lent a completely new quality to the narratives about the Goddess Dhārī, her place and the floods.

5.1   Stalemate—Before the Flood

5.1.1   Śubh Muhūrt—the Long Wait for the Auspicious Moment

The initial months of 2013 passed with preparations for the transfer of the God-
dess to her new base. The concrete platform for the new temple was erected; the
temple though remained under construction. The GVK had prepared a temporary
structure on the upper level to accommodate the Goddess and intended to move
the statue of Dhārī Devī at the earliest possible date. However, conditions for the
relocation of the temple did not prove very conducive during this period owing
to various factors. The first was that long negotiations were underway about the
correct or the most favourable time, the *śubh muhūrt*, to move the Goddess and
her accoutrements.[248] The discussion circled around the most auspicious plane-
tary constellation as proposed by the Hindu astrological system, the *jyotiṣ*, for the
fulfilment of this task. A first date envisaged in this regard was the day of *makar
saṅkrānti* (Thapliyal 2013a) on January 14. According to observers, the GVK Com-
pany engaged in preparations for the big occasion, but avoided announcing any
details regarding time and date, since concurrently vehement protest action was
planned from the opponents.[249] One reason for the company's hurry to finalise
this last stage of the temple transition also resided in the fact that there were more
cosmological obstacles waiting around the corner. A quote from the newspaper
attributed to Vishweshwar Prasad Pandey, president of the Dhārī Devī Temple
Pujārī Trust, informs that the upcoming period of *śukrāst*, which would last more
than two months, from February 11 to April 24, 2013, is considered highly inaus-
picious for alterations to a sacred place and for the transfer of the statue. Instead,
the trust's president advocated the day of *akṣaya tṛtīyā*[250] on May 13 as a suitable
timing for the statue's relocation.[251]

248   The headline of this chapter is inspired by a similar headline from the newspaper
Amar Ujālā: "धारी देवी की मूर्ति के अपलिफ्टिंग को मुहूर्त का इंतजार" (Amar Ujālā 2013, Jan. 12).
"The wait for the auspicious moment to lift up the Dhārī Devī statue"
249   The opponents of the relocation had already feared that the hydropower company
would carry out a sudden and secret transfer of the Goddess (Amar Ujālā 2013, Jan. 5).
250   *Akṣaya tṛtīyā* marks the beginning of the agricultural season. "Akshaya Tritiya liter-
ally means 'inexhaustible third,' and in this particular context it is the third day following
the New Moon in the month of Vaisakha (May-June). [. . .] The significance of the term
'akshaya' can be directly understood principally in relation to food. It is therefore, natural
that the agriculturist should celebrate a festival on this day in the hope of obtaining a boun-
tiful harvest so that his granary may remain 'akshaya,' i.e. always full (with no decline)"
(Gnanambal 2008:67f).
251   "शुक्रास्त में देवी का चालन या स्थापन जैसा शुभ कार्य नहीं किया जा सकता। अक्षय तृतीया के
अवसर पर पारंपरिक वाद्य यंत्रों तथा शतचंडी पाठ के साथ देवी की मूर्ति को अपलिफ्ट कराया जाएगा।

Despite the plausible requirement of an opportune time to implement changes to a sacred place, there were however motivations involved that rendered this debate about the right moment not only tenacious, but also highly political. The extra emphasis on various adverse planetary conditions presumably came to the fore as several unresolved issues loomed in the village of Dhari, as well as in the surrounding communities. The villagers and even the explicit supporters of the temple relocation, the local *pūjārīs*, after seeing that the company did not fulfil demands for resettlement and other related compensations, appeared to turn hostile towards the plans of the company (Amar Ujālā 2013, Jan. 13).[252] They began to put up obstacles—and one means to interfere with the upcoming relocation may have been the raising of concerns about adverse cosmic conditions. As already noted during the debates about the deity's history, the *pūjārīs* performed several flip-flops with respect to their stance on the transfer of the Goddess. While in some period they were seen hampering the Goddess's relocation, at other times, they even expedited its completion. The different attitudes may have reflected the momentary state of the (financial) negotiations. Amidst these complications, January 14 and thus *makar saṅkrānti* had already passed, and as the next proposed dates in May reveal—a quick solution was not in sight.

On the other side, the protests of the religious actors continued to be fierce and even intensified in view of the imminent transfer of the statue—thus jeopardising the enterprise even more. Apart from the group of protesters sitting on a *dharnā* in Srinagar who managed to accomplish the 1100th day of their sit-in (Amar Ujālā 2013, June 12), also the opposing saints were still on a war footing against the relocation of Goddess Dhārī. One of their protest activities was to stage a Mā̃ Dhārī Devī Rath Yātrā (religious procession) starting from the Dhārī Devī Temple, first to Haridwar for a *pūjā* (devotional ceremony) and then to the *mahākumbh*[253] in Allahabad (now Prayagraj) (Amar Ujālā 2013, Jan. 11).[254] Owing to the religious

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इससे पूर्व यह कार्य संभव नहीं है। – विश्वेश्वर प्रसाद पांडे, अध्यक्ष धारी देवी मंदिर ट्रस्ट" (Thapliyal 2013b). "Auspicious tasks, such as the moving or installation of a goddess, cannot be performed during *śukrāst*. The statue of the Goddess will be relocated on the occasion of *akṣaya tṛtīyā*, accompanied by traditional instruments and the recitation of the *śatcaṇḍī pāṭh*. Vishweshwar Prasad Pandey, president of the Dhārī Devī Temple Trust." After a request to the religious authority of the Badri Kedar Temple, the local *dharmādhikārī* had calculated the recommendation for this date, more precisely for two dates, May 13 and 18, and submitted it to the temple trust (Thapliyal 2013b).

252   "पुजारी लक्ष्मी प्रसाद पांडे कहते हैं विस्थापन सहित धारी गांव की विभिन्न मांगों पर यदि जीवीके कार्रवाई नहीं करेगा तो अपलिफ्टिंग नहीं करने दी जाएगी।" (Thapliyal 2013a). "Pūjārī Lakshmi Prasad Pandey says that if the GVK does not take action on the various demands of Dhari village, including resettlement, then the transfer will not be allowed."

253   The Mahā Kumbh Melā is the largest pilgrimage gathering of the world.

254   A copy of Goddess Dhārī had been created for this purpose (see Amar Ujālā 2013, Jan. 12).

mega-event of the *mahākumbh*, which took place from January 14 until March 10, 2013, the GVK not only had to navigate its way through the jungle of cosmic prerequisites on the local level, but was now also forced to accommodate this overarching national spiritual gathering. In light of the major Hindu festival, the GVK Company officials felt obliged not interfere with the religious feelings of the people and not to incite the wrath of the saints who had gathered at the *kumbh* at that time (Thapliyal 2013b).[255] When finally May 13 had been agreed for the relocation of the Goddess, the MoEF suddenly issued another halt to any further work on the new temple and the planned transfer of the statue (Amar Ujālā 2013, May 11a). And even when this additional problem was solved and the MoEF had to withdraw its stop-work order after a court hearing, the villagers along the lake, still in the midst of unresolved compensation and resettlement issues, declared anew not to give their consent to further operations (Amar Ujālā 2013, May 22). One of the newspaper's subtitles at this point is indicative for the prevailing impasse situation: "धारी देवी मंदिर की मूर्तियों के शिफ्टिंग के मामले में गतिरोध" (Amar Ujālā 2013, May 22). "Deadlock on the matter of relocating the Dhārī Devī statue." This gridlock essentially remained until the onset of the extreme rainfall in June. Although the GVK made additional concessions to the villagers' demands (Amar Ujālā 2013, June 1, June 6), the *pūjārīs* once again stepped in and prevented the deity's swift transfer by raising a new astrological concern. On June 11, 3 days before the start of the rain and 5 days before the culmination of the catastrophe, the *pūjārīs* presented their newly chosen dates. The statement they released said that the relocation could be carried out only after the end of the *bṛhaspati ast* period (July 3), so they proposed July 10 or 14.

5.1.2   Old Flood in a New Guise, the Resurgence of Flood Memories one Year Later

In view of the stalemate described above, it is crucial to note that and in which way memories of the flood of 2012 resurfaced during this period. These flood imaginings on the one hand were meant to provide an impetus to restart the faltering processes. However, while the impact of the memorised flood proved not

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255   "बताया जा रहा है कि कुंभ में एकजुट संतों से सावधान रहने और शुक्रास्त में कोई शुभ कार्य नहीं करने की वजह से जीबीके के सिपहसलारों ने कंपनी को धारी देवी की मूर्ति को फिलहाल स्थानांतरित नहीं करने की सलाह दी है। इसी वजह से कंपनी और मंदिर ट्रष्ट [*sic*] ने फिलहाल देवी की मूर्ति को अपलिफ्ट नहीं करने का फैसला किया है।" (Thapliyal 2013b). "It is said that out of consideration for the saints united in the *kumbh*, and given the fact that no auspicious tasks are performed during *śukrāst*, the chairpersons of the GVK have advised the company not to move the statue at that time. Therefore, the company and the temple trust have taken the decision not to raise the statue of Dhārī Devī for the time being."

yet sufficient to induce the final transfer of the statue, it was only the coming flood's violent and direct agency that brought the breakthrough. Complementing the previous chapter on the flood in 2012, the following outlines how the preceding year's flood not only assumed agency along the pre-disaster discourse in 2013, but also how imaginaries about the earlier event extended their direct impact on the subsequent course of events and the upcoming flood.

Conceptions about the preceding flood first emerge as a line of reasoning against the protest activities of the saints. A key event in this respect was when Swami Sanand, one of the fiercest and most successful opponents of hydropower projects declared his intention to visit the Dhārī Devī Temple to pay obeisance to the deity. And this move came amidst an already charged atmosphere following the MoEF's work stoppage. Upon his arrival at the site, he is greeted with open hostility by local hydropower project supporters, who shout aggressive slogans and angrily wave black flags (Figure 12). As justification for their animosity towards the visiting *sādhu*, the reproachful question is raised, "where were these people when last year the disaster struck the village of Dhari?" (Amar Ujālā 2013, May 13)

उन्होंने आरोप लगाया कि सानंद उत्तराखंड विरोधी हैं और परियोजनाओं को बंद करवा कर यहां के नौजवानों को बेरोजगार करने का षडयंत्र रच रहे हैं। बीते साल जब धारी गांव में आपदा आई, तब ये लोग कहां थे?

They alleged that Sanand is anti-Uttarakhand and is hatching a conspiracy to close down the projects and make the local youth unemployed. Last year, when the disaster struck in Dhari village, then where were these people? (Amar Ujālā 2013, May 13).

By addressing him as "these people," Swami Sanand aka G. D. Agrawal, is not perceived as a single actor or activist, but as a representative of the "saffron faction," which is campaigning against the temple relocation. The reasoning of those in favour of the relocation again exhibits the deep divide between the local and supra-regional position towards the project or more generally towards development projects in the state. Sanand and his likes are depicted as enemies of the local people and ergo of the whole Uttarakhand because their demands run counter to the population's ambitions for development and future prosperity. The preceding flood is reframed in this context as a profoundly local experience and as a symbol of the detachment of the religious protesters. Following this view, only those who experienced the flood qualify as part of the local reality and therefore have the right to discuss the temple. This statement once again underlines the belief of the temple shifting supporters that the opposing *svāmīs* show no interest in the local people, their affairs and concerns. It additionally disputes their right

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Figure 12. Dam Supporters waving black Flags at the Project Site
in Protest of the Arrival of Swami Sanand (Source: Amar Ujālā
2013, May 13).

to participate in decision-making regarding matters of the temple. Accusations
that the religiously motivated actors were absent when the villagers faced dis-
aster and distress show how the memory of the 2012 flood impacts on the argu-
mentation in favour of the new temple. In the discourse of 2013, the 2012 flood
had been reshaped into an uncontrollable natural disaster that hit the locality by
surprise a year earlier. Yet this version completely disregards the human role in
the event and therefore evades holding the identified contributors to the disaster
responsible.

Taken from a different angle, the 2012 floods formed a key element in the draft-
ing of a risk scenario for the temple as the rainy season approached. This in turn
became a tool to exert pressure. Particularly in response to the MoEF directive,
stakeholders indicated on various occasions that the temple of the Goddess will
be under renewed threat of submergence with the onset of the upcoming monsoon
season—as it happened in 2012. It is obvious that the impending danger of a flood
entails the pressing need to resettle the Goddess. With this in mind, representatives
of the local administration, during an inspection visit to the temple, arbitrarily
advised the temple committee to move the statue at the earliest possible time.
According to the Amar Ujālā, the administration was concerned about the con-
dition of the Goddess because of the upcoming rainy season and therefore even
encouraged the temple officials to ignore the order of the Ministry of Environment

and Forests (Amar Ujālā 2013, May 15).[256] The temple is certainly at risk because, like last year, all eight gates of the dam are closed in this pre-monsoon season (Amar Ujālā 2013, 12 May). But apparently no one addresses the illegality of the matter anymore, at least not traceably in the newspaper.

In a further comment on the MoEF's ban on construction, the newspaper highlights "the silence that has settled over the temple's surroundings" (Amar Ujālā 2013, May 12) and portrays the apprehensions spreading among the temple's *pūjārī* community. By then, the attitude of the *pūjārī* people had apparently changed again so that they fully supported the envisaged measures concerning the sacred place. The president of the temple trust is quoted as arguing for the relocation with the same line of reasoning as the authorities:

आदेश से घबराया मंदिर ट्रस्ट

धारी देवी मंदिर की अपलिफ्टिंग को लेकर अपनी पूर्ण स्वीकृति दे चुकी धारी देवी मंदिर समिति केंद्रीय वन एवं पर्यावरण मंत्रालय के निर्देश से घबरा गई है। गत वर्ष जुलाई के अंतिम सप्ताह तथा अगस्त माह में बरसात के समय डैम साइट में गेट लगे होने के कारण धारी देवी मंदिर परिसर में झील बन गई थी। झील बन जाने के कारण श्रद्धालुओं को मंदिर में दर्शनों के लिए पहुंचना मुश्किल हो गया था। मंदिर समिति की शनिवार को देर शाम इस मामले में बैठक शुरू हो गई है, जिस पर मंदिर की सुरक्षा के लिए क्या उपाय किए जाएं, इस पर चर्चा की जाएगी। जीवीके ने अब डैम साइट पर सभी आठ गेट बंद कर दिए हैं, इससे बरसात के समय खतरा और अधिक बढ़ [*sic*] जाएगा।

मंदिर को अपलिफ्ट करना ही होगा

बीते बरसात माह में परियोजना के गेट बंद रहने से धारी गांव का पुल बह गया और मंदिर परिसर जलमग्न हो गया। इसलिए बरसात से पहले किसी तरह मंदिर को तो अपलिफ्ट करना ही होगा। – विश्वेश्वर प्रसाद पांडे, अध्यक्ष धारी देवी मंदिर ट्रस्ट। (Amar Ujālā 2013, May 12).

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256   The danger scenario is underpinned by the argument of the absence of a flood barrier. "उन्होंने माना कि सुरक्षा दीवार न होने के कारण बरसात में मंदिर के लिए खतरा है। इसलिए धारी देवी की मूर्ति बचाने के लिए शिफ्टिंग के अलावा कोई विकल्प नहीं है।" (Amar Ujālā 2013, May 15). "He [District magistrate Chandresh Yadav] believed that the lack of a protective wall would pose a threat to the temple during the rainy season. Therefore, there was no alternative but to move the statue to save it."

> Temple Trust anxious due to the directive
>
> The Dhārī Devī Temple Committee, which already gave its full approval to the elevation of the Dhārī Devī Temple, is worried by the directions of the central Ministry of Forest and Environment. Last year in the rainy season, during the last week of July and in the month of August, because the gates had been fixed at the dam site, the surroundings of the Dhārī Devī Temple turned into a lake. As a result of the formation of the lake, it was difficult for the devotees to reach the temple for *darśan*. The temple committee started a meeting on this matter late on Saturday, it will be discussed which measures should be taken to protect the temple. GVK has now closed all eight gates on the dam site, this will further increase the risk during the rainy season.
>
> The temple must be raised
>
> Due to the closure of the project gate in the last rainy season, the bridge of Dhari village was washed away and the temple complex was submerged. Therefore, the temple has to be lifted up somehow before the rainy season—Vishweshwar Prasad Pandey, Chairman Dhārī Devī Temple Trust.

Although these excerpts contain allusions to the assumed reasons for the flooding of the temple surroundings last year (the closed gates), the temple trust and its chairman nevertheless do not challenge the legitimacy of this condition. Instead of considering opening the gates as a viable solution to minimise the danger of flooding, they only view moving the Goddess to the platform as a way out of the risk situation. It remains to speculate why the temple trust, so insistent at this point on carrying out the resettlement with high urgency before the monsoon season, recommends about one month later that the same task be postponed until right in the middle of the rainy season.

Eventually, the GVK itself reiterated the risk of a 2012 type of flood scenario as an argument during a crucial hearing at the Supreme Court. This had been scheduled to review or challenge the MoEF's work ban. Given that the company is thought to have contributed to the catastrophic effects of last year's floods, its reasoning becomes very peculiar.

> कंपनी ने अदालत को यह भी बताया कि जून में मानसून सीजन शुरू होने वाला है। बांध का निर्माण लगभग पूरा है। पिछले कुछ सालों की बाढ़ की स्थिति को देखते हुए अगर मंदिर को प्रतिस्थापित नहीं किया तो वह पानी में डूब जाएगा। (Amar Ujālā 2013, May 17).

> The company also informed the court that in June the monsoon
> season will begin. The construction of the dam is almost complete.
> In view of the flood situation in recent years, if the temple is not
> relocated, it will be submerged in water.

This may have been one of the crucial arguments that tipped the scales and
convinced the Supreme Court to support the moving of the temple, ultimately
forcing the MoEF to withdraw its order of May 10 preventing the relocation of
the temple.[257] Directly after this hearing, on May 16, the MoEF declared its direc-
tive invalid and thereby the resumption of work on the new temple was officially
granted (Amar Ujālā 2013, May 17; Basu 2013).

These episodes proved once again that although the floods of the previous
year were at least partially identified as an artificially induced disaster, they were
transformed into a purely natural disaster in the course of the discursive process
that followed. Despite the critical voices that had commented on and exposed the
reasons for the flood the year before, the dominance of certain actors who claimed
interpretive sovereignty, enabled the survival of only this aspect of the flood narra-
tive and the thus publicly negotiated flood knowledge. Frequent repetitions of this
stated version further cemented the idea that it is the natural state of the Goddess
to be threatened by floods—and that it is the agency and essence of the floods to
endanger the sacred place. As an additional outcome of this interpretive develop-
ment, the emerging possibility of a new flood against the backdrop of a perceived
sequence of disasters was reformulated into a direct threat scenario for the tem-
ple. The extrapolated hazard scenario then unfolded its full impact by becoming
a generally accepted explanatory model in view of the impending monsoon. As
the exposition of these further developments has clearly shown, the interpreta-
tions of the 2012 flood and the flood narratives thus circulating have significantly
influenced ensuing events and the measures taken to deal with a perceived risk
situation.

What also becomes visible is that already established and successfully applied
practices of instrumentalising a flood were presumably perpetuated in coping
with the disaster in 2013. On June 14, the rains began (M. S. Shekhar et al. 2015).
On June 16 in the afternoon, in view of the dramatically rising water level, it was
decided that the statue had to be lifted onto the new platform immediately. As
per the *pūjārīs*, the statue was shifted at 6:30 p.m. (Gusain 2013a/b). Whether the
masses of water would also have affected the temple if there had been no dam or
if the gates of the dam had been open from the beginning is difficult to determine.

257 Of course, there were a variety of reasons for the Supreme Court's decision. The
government of Uttarakhand, for example, also strongly supported the completion of the
project.

The sheer volume and force of the water was certainly too overwhelming to be anticipated even by the dam construction company. They themselves suffered great damage on the construction site. Strangely though, shortly after the Goddess had been brought to the platform, the gates of the dam were opened. According to witnesses, it happened at 3 a.m. on June 17 (Upadhvav 2013)[258] and this measure led to another catastrophe as the force of the flash flood so unleashed swept across the lower parts of Srinagar town (Figure 13).[259] As in 2012, allegations were levelled that the company officials had waited for the most opportune time to open the gates.

> Taking advantage of this situation some representatives of GVK conspired to uplift the Dhari Devi temple, an act which for astrological reasons was proposed to be done in August 2013. In the meanwhile the gates of the dam which were earlier half open were completely closed which lead to increase in water level of dam's lake. The local administration and the district magistrate was then informed of the possible drowning of Dhari Devi temple which can lead to serious social unrest. In the above circumstances the Dhari Devi temple was lifted without any traditional, astrological or proper procedure. Due to incessant rain and cloud burst in Kedarnath, the water level of the lake kept rising continuously and started putting pressure on the dam and to prevent the dam from breaking, GVK opened the doors of the dam without any adequate warning because the reservoir water flowed down with all force and also washed away the "muck" deposited by GVK on three banks of the river. This increased the destructive power of the river. (Srinagar Bandh Aapada Sangharsh Samiti 2013)

Since only the upstream flood events with effects on the temple are of interest here, this study will not further investigate the exact circumstances of the deluge in the city of Srinagar. That the quotation is part of material collected for presentation in court reveals already that official investigations and legal proceedings took place later on. Interestingly, the extract from a letter of the Srinagar Bandh Aapada

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258   The second major event, the dam burst at Kedarnath, occurred shortly after 6:15 a.m. on 17 June, according to some scientists who were present at the Chorabari Tal (lake) site (Menon 2013).
259   However, it was not only the strength of the water, but also the masses of muck in its tow that were earlier and illegally deposited at the dam site, which led to the catastrophic impact of this part of the flood.

Figure 13. The destroyed Shastra Seema Bal Training Academy in Srinagar became one of the iconic Pictures of the 2013 Flood Disaster (Upadhyay 2013).

Sangharsh Samiti[260] to various ministers and administrative authorities in Uttarakhand and Delhi also mentions the importance of astrological constellations and, as a final result of the sudden and disaster-induced actions, the complete ignorance of all prescriptions and rites related to the relocation of a temple and statue of a deity. Different from earlier reports (see Amar Ujālā 2013, May 12), here the allegation is set up that the dam gates were closed even in view of a developing waterlogging situation (see also Basu 2014). Evidence like this suggests that company officials may have deliberately allowed the water to accumulate and then bided their time until the transfer of the statue was enforced and completed. There are other statements from witnesses that support this here emerging reading of a "flood in a flood."[261] If the veracity of these allegations were to prove true, it would imply

260   Srinagar Dam Disaster Struggle Committee
261   Here is a further reference, albeit a very biased one, to this opinion as reported by Zee News. "As per conspiracy theorists, AHPCL officials artificially raised the water level in the dam so as to hasten the process of shifting of the Dhari Devi temple. Armed with all gear, the officials arrived at the temple site at 7.30 p.m. on Sunday (June 16) and cut off

that the dam construction company not only drew on previously acquired flood knowledge, but above all on the experience of the 2012 flood. Then the obtained expertise formed the basis for their direct action in the event of a rising river level in 2013. And this would further mean that, albeit largely unnoticed in the prevailing chaos that accompanied the major catastrophe in 2013, a "micro disaster" unfolded in parallel in the shape of a multifaceted, artificially generated flood.

At the beginning of 2013, in an attempt to finalise the economic venture, the company became more and more entangled in a web of religious demands and meanings that hampered the swift relocation of the temple. Those were the only obstacles still standing in its way. Floods at this point seemed to provide the only way out of this stuck situation. This included both—on a political and legal level in the form of arguments fed by modified memories of a previous flood, or finally in the form of a disaster of unprecedented dimensions brought about by the impending flood. Floods acted as a catalyst, adopting connotations of movement, progress or even breakthrough. Thus, while in the pre-disaster period and until the onset of the calamitous events in 2013 the Goddess posed as an obstacle, the flood's role and agency was to bring about change. But probably this functional aspect was again accompanied by considerable instrumentalisation and bore the hallmarks of an anthropogenic intervention in the context of a natural phenomenon.

the idol from its base" (Zee News 2013, July 2). Another statement with allegations that it was an "artificial flood" appears on the website of the South Asia Network of Dams, Rivers and People. "*Sohanlal Shah*, protagonist of ASMMDS [Adhya Shakti Ma Maiti Devi Samiti] alleged that SHEP staffs deliberately kept the gates of dam closed to create the scene of artificial floods on 16 of June 2013" (B.S. Rawat 2015). The Internet portal "The Wire" also contributed a quote from the convenor of the social organisation Matu Jan Sangathan, Vimal Bhai, who supported the flood victims in asserting their claims. "He [Vimal] said that the 2013 floods were caused by human error. "Dam work had not been completed. They had closed the dam gates so that the Dhari Devi temple upstream gets submerged. It was an emotive issue which was also in court. The company took advantage of the rains and rising water level to say that the Dhari Devi was getting submerged. After the deity was relocated, they opened the gates and the silt mixed with water rushed down and this caused the flooding" (Bhatnagar 2017).

5.2 Dhārī Devī's Wrath and the Kedarnath Disaster— How Local is a Local Narrative?

उत्तराखंड में आई आपदा पर अभी पूरी तरह राहत कार्य शुरू भी नहीं हो पाए थे कि गढ़वाल में एक संयोग ने लोगों की धार्मिक भावनाओं को भड़का दिया है। उत्तराखंड में हुई तबाही के लिए जहां लोग प्रशासन की लापरवाही को जिम्मेदार ठहरा रहे हैं वहीं उत्तराखंड के गढ़वाल वासियों का मानना है कि माता धारी देवी के प्रकोप से ये महाविनाश हुआ। मां काली का रूप मानी जाने वाली धारी देवी की प्रतिमा को 16 जून की शाम को उनके प्राचीन मंदिर से हटाया गया था। उत्तराखंड के श्रीनगर में हाइडिल पॉवर प्रोजेक्ट के लिए ऐसा किया गया था। प्रतिमा जैसे ही हटाई गई उसके कुछ घंटे बाद ही केदारनाथ में तबाही का मंजर आया और सैकड़ों लोग इस तबाही में मारे गए। (Nigam 2013; Gusain 2013b)

The relief work for the disaster that hit Uttarakhand was not yet fully underway when a coincidence in Garhwal provoked the religious sentiments of the people. The people here are blaming the negligence of the administration for the destruction of Uttarakhand and the same residents of Garhwal in Uttarakhand, believe that the great disaster occurred due to the wrath of Mātā Dhārī Devī. The statue of Dhārī Devī, considered a form of Mã̃ Kālī, was removed from the ancient temple on the evening of June 16. This was done for a hydel power project in Srinagar, Uttarakhand. Just a few hours after the statue was removed, scenes of destruction occurred in Kedarnath and hundreds of people were killed in this catastrophe.

This chapter now turns to the discursive processes in the wake of the last and most decisive deluge with regard to the Goddess's transformations, the flood catastrophe of 2013. According to the purported conviction of the local population the deity, enraged about the sudden removal from her earlier temple, had been responsible for the lake outburst flood[262] as well as its disastrous consequences in Kedarnath.

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262 The event is categorised as a Lake Outburst Flood and demarcated to a Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF), because the lake is fed by snow and not by the water of the Chorabari Glacier. Nevertheless, the level of destruction that unfolded when the overflowing lake, which had no natural outlet, broke its moraine barrier resembles that caused by GLOFs (Menon 2013).

In the phase following the catastrophe of 2013, the quality and scope of the discourse on the deity radically shifted. The theme of the Goddess and the restructuring of her temple became an issue of national significance in several aspects. With this qualitative change in the discourse and its participants as well as its leading actors, the framework under which this topic is addressed is also changing. While the earlier chapters were more broadly positioned in areas such as political ecology, this part now moves more explicitly into the field of disaster research and within this scope focuses on media analysis. Starting from the recognition of this altered setting, and in order to understand the significance of the Goddess in the flood and the attributions of divine vengeance, the first necessity was to identify the predominant agents and their respective interconnections that exerted their influence on the interpretation of the catastrophe. Those prevailing actors and actants were:

1. The media. The occurrence of this particular major disaster in the mountains immediately triggered the attention of the nationwide media, which raised this discourse to a national level. This discourse was determined by national players and their respective interests.
2. Previous activists. Actors who were already involved in the struggle for the Goddess beforehand and who stood for specific agendas, assumed a prominent position in this particular reading of the catastrophe.
3. The sacralised space or Uttarakhand's special position as a religiously attributed region. The state's exclusive status renders it not solely an array of local spaces, but simultaneously a space of national interest. These existing spaces merged into an entangled and inextricable web during the interpretation of the flood.

Despite the presence of the other actors, it was in any case the media that played the most central role in knowledge production after the flood event. Already the sweeping designation of the flood as *daivya āpadā,*[263] a divine disaster, shows the particular framing of this catastrophe in the various media channels and thus suggests that the flood was induced by divine agency. As becomes explicit at this point, the media and their special mechanisms of operation in the event of a disaster clearly takes centre stage in this section (see Chapter 5.2.1).

The media discourse convincingly presents the myth of Dhārī Devī's revenge as a local version of a disaster reading in the aftermath of the catastrophe. Identifying a local perspective on such a disastrous event would be in fact interesting for research dealing with the understanding of a catastrophe. Yet the specific

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263   I found several variations of spelling for this term: *daivya āpadā, daivī āpadā, daivīya āpadā.*

conditions in this case seem to make the idea of deriving a local culture of dealing with and interpreting disasters problematic. Since the narrative of divine vengeance is, nevertheless, treated in public discourse as a regionally delimited interpretation of the catastrophe, the key question was posed: Can the given flood myth actually be understood as a token—and if so, to what extent—of local knowledge production with regard to a flood disaster? The argument here is that this divine narrative, although to a certain extent created at the local level, is not a local narrative in its most traditional sense. It was rather a product of various interests, ideas about a sacred space, the local conditions at the time of the catastrophe and the overwhelming influence of the media form of presentation. These factors involved, presumably in a feedback effect, in turn influenced perceptions at the local level and led to the formation of a state and nationwide narrative of divine vengeance. The narrative of Dhārī Devī's rage, rather than representing a local way of coping with a disaster, would thus have to be regarded as the product of a mass media culture in which people are exposed to "[. . .] images and stereotypes produced by globalized communication media" (Hoffman & Gardner 2006:11). To address this question, the investigation traces the putative origins of the narrative of Dhārī Devī's wrath, considers the influence of the several actors that determined its creation, and likewise the wider mechanisms that turned it into a flood myth absorbed on a national scale. Based on the premise that ideas from the local level and external notions about the local culture are inextricably mixed in this discussion, the analysis also attempts to sketch the meaning of a local identity and asks how narrowly the boundary of the local is to be drawn in pursuit of a local narrative.

5.2.1   Disaster and the Media

Floods, like other natural disasters, routinely result in massive media coverage, and for most people the news media is the primary source of information about disasters (Goltz 1984; Sikka 2001). In addition to the print media and TV news channels including their internet representation, the media landscape today is defined by the diverse involvement of social media. The demand for immediate and comprehensive information causes the use of social media to increase almost instantaneously in the event of a disaster (Haddow/Haddow 2014). The digital media have thus largely diversified the disaster discourse (see Cheong 2012).[264] This section describes in more detail the mechanisms that take effect at the level of the media discourse in the event of a catastrophe.

264   For studies investigating the role of social media in the event of a disaster, see Tim et al. 2017; Haddow & Haddow 2014; Cheong 2012.

During times of disaster, the media have been certified an agenda-setting ability (Giri & Vats 2018) and their significant implications for the perception and response to a disaster are widely recognised (Nair 2010:36). Media coverage, including social media, of natural disasters thereby not only reflects the coping and adaptation strategies of the afflicted societies and institutional responses, but also mirrors and informs public opinion and understanding as well as learning processes (Choudhury & Emdad Haque 2018). "These roles qualify news media to be considered a catalyst that captures post-disaster opportunities for some 'forward looking' changes, triggered by natural disasters" (Choudhury & Emdad Haque 2018:237). One can distinguish between two central roles of the media in the event of a disaster. The first is their potential function as a decisive communication tool during a catastrophe. In this way they are part of the disaster response process.[265] For the further course of this study the second point is of greater importance, namely the role of the media as a tool for the follow-up of a cataclysm. This is where the media can serve as an instrument for future disaster management. Yet they not only offer explanations for natural phenomena, but also contribute to the cultural representation of catastrophes (Döring 2003).

The various media are valuable sources of information on the one hand, while on the other hand their way of transmitting information also harbours many pitfalls. This makes them a contentious cooperation partner in disaster management.[266] First, there is no direct control over the content and form of the disseminated items of information (Nair 2010). Second, the media are to some extent restricted not only in their ability to convey information, but also in their determination to communicate contents comprehensively. Limitations result from the media's general criteria for the selection of news items that fall under sociostructural or media-organisational factors. Those have been identified as immediacy, proximity, prominence, unusualness, conflict and relevance (Tautz 2006). The list also embraces, and problematically so, the media's short-lived attention span, which leads to a story quickly becoming obsolete, so that it is discarded for the next "breaking

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265   "They have certain characteristics that make them advantageous for disaster communication: They provide easy access to large publics and some of them constitute a robust communication system which remains working even in cases of a partial breakdown of the infrastructure (battery-powered radio)" (Nair 2010:36). In this respect, the media are also regarded as a means for policy-makers and disaster managers, who are supposed to collaborate with the media in case of a disaster, or during its successive phase of disaster management (see Giri & Vats 2018).

266   The media are seen as both problematic and beneficial in the context of disaster management (Sood et al. 1987). On the one hand, the presence of the media may act as a source of disruption and divert additional resources, such as time, from disaster management. At the same time, the reporting, even if it is sensationalistic, generates attention and a willingness among the public to join in disaster relief and, not least, to provide financial support.

story" (see Button 2002; Döring 2003). Other factors are the missing expertise of journalists in view of scientific background knowledge, or their position as "gate keepers, interpreters and commentators" of the news items. Yet, it is not solely the journalists or the media who set the news criteria, but the demand of the audience significantly influences the selection of news (Nair 2010).

A disaster is not a short lived and onetime event but an ongoing process. Research identified three general phases of a disaster (see Rahul 2009; Nair 2010).[267] In terms of news coverage, a disaster's first phase is mainly characterised by information shortages,[268] or a "newshole" (Sood et al. 1987), which is only later replaced by a news surplus. While the first phase of the disaster is marked by the absence of information, simultaneously a high demand for information emerges (ibid. 1987). The ensuing phase is illustrated as a situation of "open gates" (Sood et al. 1987:32), which means an overwhelming amount of news pieces is available at the same time and all with potential news value. Sometimes, however, news shortages may still persist due to various circumstances, and if news personnel cannot meet the increased demand for disaster news, they will resort to information obtained directly from members of the public (ibid. 1987).

In the event of a disaster, some additional considerations for the story's news priority come into place. Sood et al. (1987:37) name the following parameters, which also exerted decisive influence during the Uttarakhand disaster:

- Severity of the disaster,
- Identity and origin of its victims,
- Geographic distance from power centers,
- Perceived audience interest in the disaster's location and hazard agent,
- The convenience factor—how easy, or difficult is it to cover the story.

Sood et al. (1987:37) propose that 33 percent of the variance in the number of reports on a disaster can be attributed to a country's popularity as a tourist destination. If this observation were to be applied to the importance of the state of Garhwal for domestic tourism, the coverage of the disaster would have been particularly emphasised due to the high death toll among people from the Indian plains. There was indeed evidence to suggest that the post-disaster focus was less on the residents and more on the tourists, as reflected, for example, in the implementation of relief measures (Gusain & Datt 2013).

267   In terms of disaster management, it covers the following three domains: "Disaster prevention (before), acute disaster situation (during), disaster coping (after)" (Nair 2010:40).
268   However, it should be noted that in the event of a disaster, the overall productivity of news agencies in the first stage tends to decline due to the resulting adverse conditions (Sood et al. 1987).

The post-disaster period is considered the crucial phase for the interpretation of the catastrophe. While it is obviously the media that frames the event, it is actually people who have access to the media that are in a position to shape its perception (Goltz 1984). In the struggle for interpretive sovereignty after the catastrophe, individuals with an affinity for the media thus assume a dominant role (see Button 2002). Often these are people who have a special celebrity status (Alexander 2015). There is nevertheless also a well-established relationship between journalists and officials and the journalists rely largely on officials for information (Button 2002; also Sood et al.1987:34; Goltz 1984). The sought-for source of the media is also referred to as the "information czar" (as cited in Sood et al. 1987:35). It is "a person with official status and relevant expertise to convey the most credible, authoritative EPI [emergency public information] available and to interpret and clarify complexity for the general reporter" (1987:35). What is therefore presented is the official view of the disaster (Sood et al. 1987). This is the version, that will leave the deepest imprint on people's understanding and memory of a disaster.[269]

5.2.2   The Narrative of Divine Intervention— a Qualitative Assessment

The India-wide interest in the Uttarakhand flood is high, primarily because thousands of people from all over the country were physically affected by the disaster. The sensational images of an apocalyptic catastrophe and its victims nevertheless also grabbed the attention of an unaffected nation-wide public. While disaster stories tend to generate a high level of public interest from the outset (Sood et al. 1987), this attention was heightened by the special sacred meaning accorded to the state of Uttarakhand. The magnitude of the Uttarakhand disaster led to a shift in coverage and thus interpretive authority into the hands of the national print and audio-visual media. The observed shift was not only from the local to the national level, but also to a large degree from print to visual media as well as social media. Prior to the disaster, the issue of the Dhārī Devī and Srinagar Dam had received rather little attention from the national news channels, although the protest of the *sādhus* and Sādhvī Uma Bharti had generated some awareness. Most of the reporting at that time however came from the local or state press. After the disaster these positions changed. The national media outlets in part created and in part jumped onto the narrative of

269   These earlier observations can still be considered largely valid, although several authors point to a weakening of authority and consequently authority over information with the advent of the internet and social media. Their argument is that "the authority of leaders diminishes when a medium allows different people to have open access and gain greater control over knowledge and social information" (Cheong 2012:72).

the flood and its alleged cause—the relocation of the statue of Dhārī Devī. The local newspapers, on the other hand, concentrated more on reporting all the damage, suffering and down-to-earth problems caused by the flood in the region.

The articles and news channels that engage with the narrative of a metaphysical connection between two events do not usually focus homogeneously on ideas of a divine wrath as the sole explanation for the disaster. Several discourses can be discerned unfolding simultaneously at this stage. They cover issues such as the ecological impact of dam projects as potential triggers, the rampant construction and unplanned development, the mushrooming of tourism etc. Another discursive strand constitutes the heroic role of the army, after state authorities largely failed with their disaster response. Giri and Vats (2018) ascertained that the quality of the news reporting on the Uttarakhand disaster was mainly driven by a focus on sensationalism, while other topics in relation to disaster preparedness, mitigation, or redevelopment were mostly missing. In particular, the English-language media, which dealt with the topic Dhārī Devī/Kedarnath, address a dichotomy between modern sciences and faith. They postulate that there is a scientific explanation for the catastrophe in Uttarakhand and treat the religious discourse rather as a curious deviation from this suggested valid understanding. Having clarified that they regard the matter against the backdrop of a rational worldview, thereby maintaining their integrity and respectability, the same sources then discuss at length the "unscientific" mythological issue. The practice of the Hindi sources is comparable; they too mention at least in the introduction some alternative explanations to that of the Goddess's wrath. To begin with here are three typical openers of those articles illustrating the contradicting approaches towards the catastrophe, or the collision of different knowledge systems.

> हालांकि विज्ञान के इस युग में इस तर्क से सहमत नहीं हुआ जा सकता फिर भी स्थानीय लोगों का मानना है कि धारी माता मंदिर विस्थापन की वजह से ही यह तबाही आई। (Prabhasakshi 2013, July 4)

> Although in this era of science, one cannot agree with this argument, yet the local people believe that this devastation occurred due to the relocation of the Dhārī Mata Temple.

> विज्ञान इस विनाशलीला के पीछे कुदरत के कहर को मानता है जबकि यहां के लोग इस विनाशलीला के पीछे धारी देवी की प्रतिमा के साथ छेड़छाड़ को बता रहे हैं। (Zee News 2013, June 27)

> Science thinks that behind this huge calamity is the destruction of nature, while the people here say that behind this catastrophe is the tampering with the statue of Dhārī Devī.

> विज्ञान भले ही इसे माने या ना माने लेकिन धर्म के जानकारों का यह ही
> विश्वास है कि दैविय सत्ता को चुनौती देना खुद के अस्तित्व को मिटाने जैसा है
> जिसकी बानगी उत्तराखंड में देखने को मिली। (P7 News Channel 2013,
> July 9).

> Whether science acknowledges it or not, but the experts of
> religion believe that challenging the divine power is like erasing
> one's own existence, the hallmark of which can be seen in
> Uttarakhand.

The Mail Today (2013, June 27), a joint venture with the UK's Daily Mail, adopts
a didactic tone to directly address the perceived metaphysical phenomenon from
the perspective of scientific knowledge. The newspaper features the explanations
of alleged experts on transcendental phenomena in this context by interviewing
two scholars from Delhi on the Dhārī Devī-Kedarnath narrative. For sociologist
Professor Anand Kumar of Jawaharlal Nehru University, the temporal concord-
ance between the Kedarnath lake outburst flood and the moving of the statue was
"mere coincidence." Then there is the opinion of an Islamic expert. Professor
Akhtar-ul Wasey, director of Zakir Hussain Institute of Islamic Studies at Jamia
Millia Islamia, agrees with his colleague and attributes the disaster to anthropo-
genic causes. The mythological view he puts down instead to people's private
choice, saying:

> 'The most important thing to remember is the treatment meted
> out to the hills and nature. This had to happen. Beliefs have their
> own place and those who believe in them can stick with them. But
> this was a disaster in the making.' (Mail Today 2013, June 27)

The theme of science and faith also turns to the discussion of belief questions
using scientific reasoning (cf. Chapter 3.4). In a scientific guise but from the theo-
logical side of the spectrum, the national Hindi language channel Zee News (2013,
July 1) aired a special program explicitly identifying the "religious and divine
reasons of the disaster in Uttarakhand." The program not only analyses in depth
the connection of Dhārī Devī to Kedarnath, but with two renowned astrologers
via live link discusses also other eligible metaphysical reasons for the catastrophe
in the high mountain region. The debating astrologers Vaibhava Nath Sharma and
Kirat Bhai[270] agree that the deluge not only happened because of the Goddess's

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270   Here an extract from the astrologer's website: "[. . .] a divine embodiment of Love,
Truth and Beauty, appeared amidst us on 21st of July, 1962 in Porbundur (Gujarat). Today,
he is known to the world as Parampujya Kirit Bhaiji. Gurudev's discourses provide spiritual

anger. According to them, it was also because the pandits in charge at Kedarnath missed the *śubh muhūrt*, the right and auspicious date to open the gates of the pilgrimage destinations, the Gangotri and Yamunotri Dhām. The respective pandits had allegedly with "great ignorance" opened the gates for the 2013 season at a moment which the astrologers deemed highly inappropriate. They elaborate that it was a time "in which the sacred task and the worship of God are prohibited," and on top during an (astrological) conjunction "which is unsuitable for the worship of the deities."[271] The astrologer Vaibhava Nath Sharma even places this astrological lapse above the relocation of Dhārī's statue in its significance for the disaster:

> महादेव के क्षेत्र में धर्म कार्य में हुए इस व्यतिक्रम को एक दैवीय आपदा का प्रमुख कारण माना जा रहा है । केदारनाथ में तबाही का दूसरा बड़ा कारण देवी का प्रकोप [. . .] (Zee News 2013, July 1).

> This deviation from the religious ceremonial in the domain of the Mahadev is believed to be the main cause for a divine disaster. The second major reason of the catastrophic destruction in Kedarnath is the wrath of the Goddess [. . .].

An online portal (OneIndia) speaks up with a critical voice and provides some introspection on the post-disaster media and communication process.[272] Author Naveen Nigam (2013) explores the dynamics of how the idea of Goddess Dhārī's involvement in Kedarnath emerged and was disseminated across the country. He describes how what also he calls a "coincidence" provoked the religious

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succour and nourishment to all the seekers. Embellished with references, anectotes [*sic*] and analogies drawn from our ancient scriptures, sua ca—The Upanishads, Vedas, Shrimad Bhagvatam, Bhagvat Geeta and the Ramayana-Gurudev's 'pravachans' are like nectarean drink, served to parched souls" (Kirit 'Bhai Ji' 2005:V).

271   "[. . .] चतुर्थी आरंभ हो रही थी जो रिक्त तिथि है साथ ही पित्र [*sic*] पूजन का योग आरंभ हो रहा था, जिसमें पवित्र कार्य और देवपूजा निषेध है, यह देवताओं की पूजा न करने का योग है, [. . .]" (Zee News 2013, July 1). "*Chaturthi* had started, which is a *rikta tithi* [a particular astrologically inauspicious time], at the same time had begun the occasion of *pitṛ pūjan*, during which auspicious tasks and the worship of gods is forbidden, this is an occasion where the worship of the gods should not be performed [. . .]."

272   One more author, Pratik Shekhar, comments on the inconsistencies found in the media process, saying "[. . .] इस चर्चा के बाद स्थानीय समाचार पत्र व सोशल साइट्स सक्रिय हो गई और इस मुद्दे पर तर्क वितर्क सामने आने लगे।" (Shekhar 2013). "[. . .] after this discussion local newspapers and social networking sites became active and the wrangling over this issue began to thrive." In spite of the author's critical stance and the fact that he holds the local media and social media responsible for the spread of the story, he nevertheless implies that some metaphysical agency was involved in the Kedarnath disaster.

sentiments of the people (see the quotation at the beginning of Chapter 5.2). On the one hand, as he puts it, the regional community holds the negligence of the administration responsible for the devastation of Uttarakhand, while on the other hand, they say it happened because of Mata Dhārī Devī's wrath. By this account, a media channel (thereby probably meaning the Zee News group) picked up this "mythological perception" and circulated it throughout the country, where it "spread like a wildfire" (Nigam 2013). Nigam admits that this channel also mentioned the "coincidental" nature of the event when publishing the narrative.[273] The journalist, therefore, does not regard the media as solely responsible for the successful dissemination of this disaster reading, but rather criticises the willingness of the recipients, the Indian public, to accept any such topic connected to their belief. "[. . .] यह हर कोई जानता है कि आस्था के इस देश में ऐसी कोई बात लोग बड़ी आसानी से ग्रहण कर लेते हैं।" (Nigam 2013). "But everybody knows that people in this land of faith pick up such a thing very easily." While implicitly criticising the average Indian with his undifferentiated attitude towards faith-based statements, he also unmasks the general inconsistency accompanying the explanations for the flood. A key point here would be that the local priests said they did everything they could to save the statue from the floods, yet then the removal of the statue was blamed for the disaster.

> देवी की मूर्ति अब मामला यह हैं कि देवी की मूर्ति को इसलिए हटाया गया कि वह कही बाढ़ में डूब न जाए लेकिन अब इस बात का प्रचार किया जा रहा हैं कि मूर्ति को हटाने से प्रलय आई। जबकि मंदिर कमेटी ने साफ कर दिया है कि 16 जून को मूर्ति को भंयकर बारिश की सूचना के बाद हटाया गया था। (Nigam 2013)

> The case of the statue of the Goddess is such, that the statue of the Goddess was removed so that she would not be submerged somewhere along the flood, but now it is propagated that the catastrophe occurred due to the removal of the idol—while the

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273   "इस संयोग से पूरे गढ़वाल में रोष व्याप्त है लेकिन इसी बीच एक राष्ट्रीय चैनल ने इस खबर को चलाकर और उस पर बहस दिखाकर अब इस बात को गढ़वाल ही नहीं पूरे भारत में आग की तरह फैला दिया है कि धारी देवी की मूर्ति हटाने से ही पूरे उत्तराखंड में तबाही मची। वैसे तो चैनल बराबर यह कहता कहा कि यह मात्र एक संयोग हो सकता है लेकिन यह हर कोई जानता है कि आस्था के इस देश में ऐसी कोई बात लोग बड़ी आसानी से ग्रहण कर लेते हैं।" (Nigam 2013). "Due to this coincidence, there is outrage all over Garhwal; but in the meantime, a national channel has circulated and debated the news, now it is spreading like wildfire not only in Garhwal, but all over India that Uttarakhand was affected by this destruction only because of the removal of the idol of Dhārī Devī. Besides, the channel likewise said that this may just be a coincidence, but everybody knows that people in this land of faith pick up such a thing very easily."

> temple committee made it clear that on June 16, the statue had
> been removed after the notification of the terrifying rain.[274]

The contradiction raised here between the situation prevailing on the ground and
the later interpretation of the disaster is addressed in more detail in the chapter
after next.

5.2.3   The Mythological Ornamentation

This part examines how the media and subsequently different online commenta-
tors and bloggers presented the Dhārī Devī case. The focus will be on examining
the ways the Goddess, her history and the story of her connection to Kedarnath
have been embellished in order to paint a comprehensive picture of a significant
and powerful "superior Goddess."

With the aim of enhancing her importance, the Goddess had been endowed
with new, expanded or inflated qualities during the media and public discourse.
Reports in this regard regularly emphasise Dhārī Devī's identity as the protector
of the Char Dhām—Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri, as well as
her role as patron of the *yātrā* (pilgrimage) to these places and of its pilgrims.[275]
She likewise became the guardian deity of the whole of Uttarakhand (Hindustan
Times 2013, June 26; Prabhasakshi 2013, July 4[276]). The description of her as the
kuldevī of the area is probably the closest to the local imagination (Prabhasakshi
2013, July 4).[277] In addition, the statue is portrayed as alive and awake (Webdunia
2013, June 24),[278] indicating her animate nature and her origin story is repeated
many times and takes multiple forms.[279] The connections drawn between her name

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274   See more on the temple committees' stance in Subchapter 5.2.4.
275   Dattopadhye 2013; Gusain 2013b (video); Zee News 2013, July 9; Mail Today 2013,
June 27; Hindustan Times 2013, June 26; Webdunia 2013, June 22.
276   "परंपरागत रूप से माना जाता है कि धारी माता, चारों धाम की यात्रा करने वाले श्रद्धालुओं और
उत्तराखण्ड की जनता की रक्षक माता हैं।" (Prabhasakshi 2013, July 4). "It is traditionally believed
that Dhārī Mata is the protector of the devotees visiting the four *dhām* and the protector of
the people of Uttarakhand."
277   "धारी देवी इस क्षेत्र की कुलदेवी भी हैं जिन्हें गांव के लोग सदियों से पूजते आए हैं। पौराणिक
मान्यता है कि पिछले 800 सालों से धारी देवी अलकनंदा नदी के बीच बैठकर नदी की धारा को काबू में
रखती थीं।" (Prabhasakshi 2013, July 4). "Dhārī Devī is also the *kuldevī* of this area, whom
the villagers have worshipped for centuries. Legend has it that Dhārī Devī resided in the
middle of the river Alaknanda for the last 800 years and kept the flow of the river under
control" (similar: IBNlive 2013, June 27a).
278   "मूर्ति जाग्रत और साक्षात है।" (Webdunia 2013, June 24).
279   "स्थानीय मान्यता के मुताबिक एक बार मंदिर में बाढ़ आ गई तो मूर्ति चल कर एक चट्टान पर आ
गई और रोने लगी, जब ग्रामीणों ने मूर्ति का रोना सुना तो वे वहां पहुंचे तब दिव्य शक्ति ने उनसे उस जगह

and her function as the regulator of the flow of the Alaknanda (Hindustan Times 2013, June 26) lend further significance to the occurrence of the disturbance of a cosmic order and its fatal consequences. A conviction of several sources that Dhārī comes from *dhār* (stream, flow, river) seems to be so clear to many Hindi-speakers, that they don't even question the etymology. As in the case of the commentary by astrologer Sanjay Rath (see 5.2.7.) and several others, she is even consistently addressed as Dhārā Devī (Inewslivenet 2013a/b; Gusain 2013b). The author Pratik Shekhar (2013) explains the name of the Goddess as coming from a Sanskrit root "*dhā,*" with meanings such as holding, having and placing and engages in a curious pun. "[. . .] धारी शब्द का मतलब 'रखना' होता है जबकि वहां से धारी देवी को हटा दिया गया। [. . .]." "[. . .] the word Dhārī means to keep, whereas Dhārī Devī was removed from there [. . .]." Apparently he wants to express that the name of the Goddess is "keep," which excludes the possibility of moving her, since her name already implies that she must be kept where she is.

Records of the event of her resettlement often bear a resemblance to tales from the Purāṇas or the Mahābhārata. They are adorned with dramatising elements, such as the supposed occurrence of special weather phenomena, "Lightning flashed and a thunderstorm broke even as the idol was being moved . . ." (Mail Today 2013, June 27) or on Zee News: "Just when the idol was lifted there was lighting and heavy rains followed by the cloud burst in Kedarnath that has left thousands dead" (Zee News 2013, July 2). The Hindi examples in this regard are even more drastic, "देवी हटीं तो हिली देवभूमि" (Gusain 2013b: 08 : 30 min.). "The *devī* was removed, therefore the land of the Gods trembled."

> जब आसमान से बारिश कयामत बनकर गिरी, ग्लेशियर फटने लगे तो उफान मारती नदियों ने किसी को नहीं बख्शा। गंगा के इस गुस्से से, इस रौद्र रूप से, इस क्रोध से भगवान भी अछूते नहीं रहे। (IBNlive 2013, June 27a).

> When the rain fell from heavens and turned into the apocalypse, the glaciers began to burst and the flooded rivers spared no one. From this wrath of Gaṅgā, this form of Rudra, this rage, even God did not remain untouched.

A programme by Aaj Tak features a comic strip story about the immediate extreme weather phenomena that accompany or are in response to the removal of the statue (Figure 14).

पर मूर्ति स्थापित करने के लिए कहा" (Prabhasakshi 2013, July 4). "According to local belief, the statue had moved once when the temple was flooded; It had arrived at a rock where it began crying. When the villagers heard the weeping idol, they reached there and the divine power asked them to install the statue at that place."

Figure 14. News Channel Aaj Tak's Portrayal
of the Resettlement of Dhārī Devī
(Source: Gusain 2013b, min.: 02∶45, 02∶49, 02∶57).

The sequence of images seems to show some criminals trying to steal the statue and who are subsequently chased away by nature's violent response to their sinister intent. With a statue that bears not the slightest resemblance to the original, this representation is obviously intended to frame emotional conceptions concerning the event. This form of the representation however reflects how some media channels convey the message of Hindu feelings and conceptions as being violated in the disaster-affected state (see Chapter 5.2.7).

5.2.4   A Simulation of the Local

> उत्तराखंड यानि देवभूमि, जहां की वादियों में धर्म और आस्था की हवा चलती है। यहां भक्ति भाव अंधविश्वास की हद तक लोगों की जिंदगी से जुड़ा है। यहां एक धारी देवी का मंदिर है। (IBNlive 2013, June 27a)

> Uttarakhand means the land of the gods, where the wind of religion and faith blows through the valleys. Here, devotion is associated with people's life to the extent of superstition. Here is a temple of Dhārī Devī.

The "local" assumes great importance concerning the narrative of the Goddess Dhārī and her agency in Kedarnath. One striking feature of the reports about the Goddess and the disaster is how often the term "local" is mentioned in connection with the people of Uttarakhand. The national news services frequently feature reports on how the local population is dealing with the disaster or how the local people perceive the catastrophe. One of the results of the regional population coping with the disaster is alleged to be the creation of the myth that the deity caused the flood in Kedarnath. The following section will look at how the media discourse constructed an image of the local and local knowledge production that is

demonstrably an artificial image and has more in common with the perception of the mountain region by people from the plains than with the self-understanding of the Garhwali population (see Chapter 3 for a more comprehensive elaboration on the binarity of the "local" and the "non-local" in the area).[280]

The idea of the "local" or of local identity is by itself quite vague, variable and depending on the frame of reference and thus requires some contextualisation. As Shao et al. (2017) point out, the ambiguity associated with the delimitation of a local identity is due to the absence of valid definitions, but is also caused by the "diversification of all the literature on different aspects of identity" (Shao et al. 2017). There is likewise no consensus on the scope of the territory to be investigated when approaching local identity. The key nature of local identity is specified as follows, "its uniqueness is derived from people's daily interactions with the local place throughout time" (2017:038), while "a local actor can be defined as an individual or organisation with a capacity for intentional behaviour (agency), and with an identity founded in a particular locality" (High et al. 2004:2). In an analysis of the factors that determine local identity, Shao et al. identified four main constituents, which they termed "physical," "social," "sensory," and "memory" (2017:035). Whereas the "physical" aspect points to the "interaction of humans and the physical environment," the social angle focuses on the social activity thereby endowing a locality with a distinct place identity. The sensory aspect, in turn, consists of individual experiences and interactions that connect an individual to a place, which leads to many different experiences and imaginations surrounding the location. Memory is recognised as a crucial contributor to the formation of local identity. The memory component denotes the legacy from the past that is generated when a community lives in a place for a long time. The bond to a place is therefore not only based on the lively exchange with the environment, but also on the memory of this interaction. It is tied to important events and the repetition and transmission of stories pertaining to them. Narratives created in this way confer a locality its distinctive and universally recognised character. Individuals and groups inhabiting a place with the different shades and versions of their memories all contribute to its particular identity (ibid. 2017). Local identity has its own distinctive features in the South Asian context. A common understanding across much of the subcontinent is "that people and the places where they

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280   Here a few more observations by Whitmore on notions of the local and non-local in Kedarnath. "*Local* is often used as a Hindi word, usually as an adjective, e.g. a local man (*ek local ādmī*). Non-locals in Kedarnath are generally those who come on *yatra,* [. . .] If their goals are explicitly nature oriented (trekking, sightseeing) rather than devotional, an assumption much easier to make if the non-locals in question are Westerners or Bengalis fitted out with trekking gear, then non-locals may be referred to as tourists *(paryaṭak-log)* (Whitmore 2010:68f.).

live are mutually determining" (Sax 2009:54). This concept is referred to by Sax as "shared mutual substance" (Sax 2009:54) and points to the multiple forms of exchange with the physical environment in which a society lives—such as with air, water and soil and their different cosmological attributions of meaning. A locality however is also subjected to constant interchange with the "outside world," which continuously negotiates and informs local identities. Today's intrusive and fast-paced interactions in particular are increasingly causing the dissolution of a "traditional" understanding of local identity and distinctiveness. This development unfolds against the backdrop of a heightened information exchange, but also because of the diffusion of global paradigms or global systems into local structures (see Harindranath 2006). Mergers that take place when "external pan-Indian and global paradigms" meet "local religious beliefs and practices" thereby lead to the emergence of "a new hybrid worldview" (Halperin 2012:4).[281]

With regard to these reflections on local identity, it remains debatable how tightly the line of the "local" is to be drawn, or who should be included and who should be excluded as a representative of the local position in this case study. For example, interpretations from the immediate vicinity of the Goddess's location often contradict views from the nearest city, Srinagar. Although the Goddess primarily belongs to the surrounding villages and is part of their daily practice, she is equally a goddess of a regionally wider circle of worshippers. Another factor, which affects narratives concerning the Goddess is that the attitude of the people at the very scene of the temple is known to have been influenced by distinct public relation campaigns of the company and the financial funds they distributed.[282] Even the local daily newspaper Amar Ujālā, the medium per se, which in Uttarakhand stands for proximity to the local population and for "local identity," comes along with a certain degree of historical bias (see Chapter 2.4.1). These points on top of that raise the question of who is even sufficiently devoid of an interest position to represent an actual voice of the "local." Such ambiguities and unanswered questions must consequently be kept in mind when analysing the media discourse dealing with the nature of the "local."

The media involved in the interpretation of the Kedarnath disaster draws on a stereotypical picture of the local society and ascribes the emergence of the divine explanation of the catastrophe to purely local dynamics. They postulate an idealised state in which the local population is largely unaffected by the penetration of

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281   This was an observation made by Halperin (2012) during his research in another part of the Western Himalayan region, the Kullu Valley in Himachal Pradesh.

282   Regarding this problem of bias through monetary factors, Antje Linkenbach (personal conversation March 2018, Dehra Dun) told me she used to give her students a particular advice to find valid ideas of the local population regarding the construction of hydroelectric power plants in the mountain zone. She asked them to interview people not from the directly affected villages, but from the villages further away from the project site, more precisely those ones, who did not receive any compensation.

external forces, such as digitalisation, the superimposed imaginations of external actors, and above all the intrusion of themselves—the media. Such a scenario may have existed in these areas decades ago.[283] Yet, what could be an expectable trajectory of an interpretive process that has a "local" character? Based on the introduced key concepts of local identity, a local narrative would emerge from the immediate interaction of the creator(s) with the environment. Since local identity consists of many divergent experiences, a narrative thus generated would most likely appear in multiple versions. Likewise, the fragmentation of local spaces would create many separate narratives across a region, each adapted to its unique local conditions. A disastrous event would be associated with other phenomena occurring in proximity to this location, or with meaning for the locality (see Halperin 2016).[284] Contrary to such principles, the narrative of the Devī was an entirely homogenous story. It was supported by a large section of the population throughout India and was also widely adopted by the locals of most parts of Uttarakhand. However, already the geographical factor in terms of a distance of roughly 130 kilometres between Kedarnath and Dhārī Devī Temple would make a strong argument against a combination of the two places among the so-defined concept of the "local." Another important reason against using Kedarnath as a point of reference for Dhārī Devī is that Kedarnath represents not even a major landmark for the people in the hills. Sax (2009) describes the holy Char Dhām sites as less relevant to the religious life of the local community—due to their status as "experientially distant" (Sax 2009:53). It is instead the local shrines that form the sacred landscape of the local population and determine their daily practice and everyday life. These

283   Here again, it should be noted that particularly the site of Dhārī Devī has always been subjected to more interaction with other regions due to its location at the pilgrimage path as compared to mountain areas more "off the track."

284   Halperin (2016) explored local coping strategies during a drought and in the face of climate change in Himachal Pradesh. In spite of large-scale transformations in that area, it was still possible to single out rather "traditional" versions of narratives describing reasons for certain weather phenomena. These explanations exposed a local thinking characterised by spatial proximity. He writes, "the ritual mechanisms target solely local conditions, and no claims are made regarding any extra-local effects. The deities' interventions tend to address specific, highly localized weather situations, indicating a meteorological logic that is quite different from the modern understanding of climate as a global system. In other words, weather conditions in the Kullu Valley are considered a local phenomenon, determined by regional deities and manipulated through place-based ritual actions performed by residents of the territory" (Halperin 2016:18). I made comparable observations during my earlier (media-) research in Himachal Pradesh. The causes of the drought mentioned in the newspaper and citing local informants, revolved around locally observable factors and in particular violations of rules and customs by the community. As an example, in the event of an invocation of a local deity the fact that the cows were not given enough grazing land was indicated as the cause of the lack of rain (see also Halperin 2016).

reflections imply that the construct of the flood narrative comprising Dhārī Devī and Kedarnath in many aspects contradicts not only a general understanding of local dynamics, but also conflicts with cultural flow processes prevailing in the area. The narrative itself, by connecting the two distant places, is already an indicator for the extended conceptual scope of this society or the sources from which it originates. Thereby it refutes the image of the "local" supported by the media sources among its large-scale coverage.

The first example at the beginning of this chapter illustrated the media-transmitted concept of the local. The description of the events at the site of Dhārī Devī assume a mythological quality and the people of the state serve as extras in this constructed mythological tale. People are supposedly superstitious or "immersed in their faith:"

> अब आस्था में डूबे सुमन नौटियाल जैसे स्थानीय लोग इस जल प्रलय को धारी देवी मंदिर से जोड़कर देख रहे हैं। (IBNlive 2013, June 27a)

> Now local people like Suman Nautiyal, who are immersed in their faith, are seeing the flood in connection with the Dhārī Devī Temple.

The intro of an article of the Mail Today (2013, June 27) in this respect even takes an offensive tone in the description of the local village people: "Garhwal's village folk, known for their childlike adherence to superstition [. . .]." Such articles then go into coupling the alleged characteristics and traditions of the local population with the story about Dhārī Devī. Many news items do not even attach any further attributes to the population, but only clarify that it is the mountain people's deep-rooted belief and their traditions, which gave rise to the narrative. "Locals believe moving Dhari Devi idol from Alaknanda after 800 years caused the cloudburst. [. . .]. In the hills, tales of nature's fury are a part folklore and a part faith" (IBNlive 2013, June 27b). Similarly, Aaj Tak claims that "उत्तराखंड के गढ़वाल वासियों का मानना है कि माता धारी देवी के प्रकोप से ये महाविनाश हुआ" (Gusain 2013b). "The residents of Garhwal in Uttarakhand believe that this devastation was due to the wrath of Mother Dhārī Devī." Examples already mentioned in the last chapter (see Prabhasakshi 2013, July 4; Zee News 2013, June 27) to illustrate the dichotomy of faith and scientific knowledge would also serve in this section to contrast scientific knowledge with "local knowledge," and in this context local knowledge is presented as largely inferior.[285] The homogenous form of picturing the local

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285   A further example: "विज्ञान इस विनाशलीला के पीछे कुदरत के कहर को मानता है जबकि यहां के लोग इस विनाशलीला के पीछे धारी देवी की प्रतिमा के साथ छेड़छाड़ को बता रहे हैं।" (Zee News 2013, June 27). "Science thinks that behind this *vināś līlā* [huge destruction] is the

population shows up likewise in the news stories that cover the former resistance against the moving of the temple. The articles and information broadcasted by the TV channels usually describe the local population as having uniformly resisted the relocation of the Goddess. According to these claims, there was even a long-standing belief on the side of the "locals" that any form of tampering with the temple might lead to dangerous consequences. Here is an evidential excerpt from the Hindustan Times:

> The locals had been protesting the temple relocation for years saying they will have to face Devi's wrath but the state government was adamant to shift the deity as without that commissioning of the project would not had been possible." [. . .]. With flash floods hitting the upper reaches of Uttarakhand on June 16, the locals believe that the tragedy was the Goddess' ire for being shifted. (Hindustan Times 2013, June 26)

In another report, the local population had even always warned of any disturbance to the Goddess—this allegedly long before the commissioning of a hydropower project:

> Since time immemorial, locals here have claimed that angering Dhārī Devī, a form of Goddess Kali, will result in destruction. And their faith has seemingly been avenged, albeit in a tragedy of unimaginable proportions. [. . .] VHP head Ashok Singhal says, 'People staged protest against the hydro power project and opposed the idea of uplifting the statue.' (Gusain 2013a)[286]

Especially in this case, the scrutiny of who speaks for the "locals" becomes crucial, as the former VHP leader is certainly not a local person or brings along a local agenda (more on him in Chapter 5.2.7). This fact is especially significant in light of the Hindu Right's pursuit of homogenising local cultures within a discourse

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degradation of the environment, while the people here say that behind this destruction is the tampering with the statue of Dhārī Devī."

286   This is the Hindi version from Aaj Tak: "विश्व हिंदु परिषद के अशोक सिंघल ने कहा, 'लोगों ने हाइड्रो पॉवर प्रोजेक्ट के खिलाफ प्रदर्शन किया था और धारी देवी की प्रतिमा को हटाए जाने का विरोध किया था। लेकिन इसके बावजूद 16 जून को धारी देवी की प्रतिमा को हटाया गया। धारी देवी के गुस्से से ही केदारनाथ और उत्तराखंड के अन्य इलाकों में तबाही मची [. . .]" (Gusain 2013b). "Ashok Singhal of Vishwa Hindu Parishad said, 'People had demonstrated against the hydro power project and protested against the removal of the statue of Dhārī Devī. Despite this, the statue of Dhārī Devī was removed on June 16. The anger of Dhārī Devī caused havoc in Kedarnath and other areas of Uttarakhand [. . .].'"

based on the "reassertion of local values" (Harindranath 2006:23). With his state-
ment, he is definitely reinventing the local perspective by saying, that it was the
"people" who protested against the relocation of the Goddess. As already detailed
(Chapter 3), there was a protest movement in Srinagar, which later merged with
the engagement of religious activists and right-wing actors, but there was no pro-
test from the direct neigbourhood of the Goddess. Quite contrary to his claim,
the people from the villages even resisted the activities of the protesters who
were against the relocation of the temple. Singhal's rhetoric, nonetheless, not
only falsely suggests that the local population was unitedly opposed to the dam,
but also that based on their understanding of the Goddess's personality, they had
always warned against her removal. What is yet more critical, however, is that he
purports to represent precisely the interests of this local population.

The reports further claim that the tragedy not only revealed but even strength-
ened people's faith, as stated on Zee News, "however, much less than shaking
people's faith, the massive tragedy has reinforced their belief in the divine" (2013,
July 2).[287] While the Mail Today adds, "Uttarakhand's raging rivers may have
washed away entire towns but belief in the bizarre remains intact in the hill state"
(2013, June 27). The assertions are interesting insofar as they ignore the fact that
in this case questions of faith are much more an issue of trans-regional concern,
at least in the current media discourse. In any case, this conclusion judgmentally
presents the local population not only as firm in its belief, but also as naïve, since
its faith does not rest on rational experience, but on a concept that is purportedly
"bizarre."

Having demonstrated the picture of the local that the different media conveyed
to the public, the following material appears more legitimate to portray events
from the local level perspective. The focus in this case is on the reporting of the
local edition of the Amar Ujālā. A first notice of the Alaknanda in spate coupled
with the relocation of the Dhārī Devī statue could be exemplary for a local cogni-
tion as it is based on immediate interaction processes with the environment.

बारिश से जन जीवन अस्त-व्यस्त

श्रीनगर। रविवार देर रात अचानक बढ़े अलकनंदा के जलस्तर को शहर के
लोग दैवीय आपदा से जोड़ रहे हैं। क्षेत्र के अधिकतर लोग कह रहे हैं कि
प्रकृति का ये प्रकोप धारी देवी मंदिर से छेड़छाड़ का नतीजा है। वजीरों का
बाग निवासी वेद प्रकाश काला, एसएन कोठियाल आदि का कहना है कि
देवी को जबर्दस्ती उनके स्थान से हटाया गया है। उनके प्रकोप के कारण ही

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287 There are in fact studies that back the notion, that people become more devout after
a disaster (see Sibley & Bulbulia 2012). However, the media rather uses this statement to
build up a certain image about the people of Uttarakhand.

अलकनंदा रौद्र रूप दिखा रही है। लोगों का मानना है कि देवी की पूजा-अर्चना से ही प्रकृति शांत होगी और तभी इस प्रलयकालीन स्थिति से बचा जा सकता है। (Amar Ujālā 2013, June 18a).

Public life disrupted by rain

Srinagar. The people of the city associate the sudden rise in the water level of the Alaknanda late on Sunday evening [June 16] with the divine disaster. Most people in the area say that this wrath of nature is the result of tampering with the Dhārī Devī Temple. Residents of Wazir Bagh, Ved Prakash Kala, S. N. Kothiyal etc., say that the Goddess was forcibly removed from her place. Due to her wrath, the Alaknanda is showing its violent form. People believe that only by worshiping the Goddess, nature will calm down and only then the flood situation can be averted.

Although this extract links the flood situation to a metaphysical background and more specifically says that it reflects the rage of Dhārī Devī, there is no mention of the Kedarnath disaster yet. The divine wrath is experienced in the neighbourhood in the form of a torrential river and in the midst of an ongoing natural disaster. A further notice in the Amar Ujālā (2013, June 18b) reveals that Kedarnath is cut off from communication services and accordingly there is very little information available on the extent of the tragedy (see also A. Kumar 2015).[288] Meanwhile, the people of Srinagar and surrounding villages have the disaster right on their doorstep—with unprecedented masses of rain, landslides, stranded people and a river gone wild—and a displaced goddess a few kilometres away. The perception on the ground is obviously oriented towards the direct experience of the natural event. Correspondingly, the interpretation of the disaster here reflects the situation in the immediate surroundings. The pilgrimage site of Kedarnath, by contrast, is not part of this first-hand experience. An association of the two events obviously emerged only some time later, after mediating instances had entered the interpretation process.[289] Another point is that it could not have been in the interest of the local people to blame a goddess for the catastrophe. This kind of an approach

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288 "सड़कें और पुल क्षतिग्रस्त होने से मंदाकिनी और केदारघाटी का संपर्क कट चुका है। संचार, विद्युत और पेयजल सेवाएं ठप हो गई हैं।" (Amar Ujālā 2013, June 18b). "The Mandakini and Kedar Valley are cut off due to the damage to roads and bridges. Communication, electricity and drinking water services have come to a standstill."

289 Moreover, while the national media and public were already busy reflecting on the events, the areas in the mountain region were still in the midst of the disaster. The articles in the Amar Ujālā in the days after the flood in Kedarnath and elsewhere were accordingly full of practical and organisational questions. They were questions of survival—how to rescue

would have limited their ability to fight for issues such as compensation after a whole neighbourhood in Srinagar had been flooded and destroyed.[290] As for the local perspective—the story of Dhārī Devī's rage is hardly covered in the Garhwal edition of the Amar Ujālā, though it is considered the news organ closest to local sentiments (Chapter 2.4.1). If this flood interpretation appears at all, it is not on the local but on the national flood special page, or the state-wide page (*pradeś*). When it does, it is ascribed to the "saints" or Uma Bharti and the other actors who accuse the relocation of the Dhārī Devī Temple of being responsible for the Kedarnath disaster.[291] As late as July 9, the Amar Ujālā mentions in one sentence that "people consider the disaster after the Dhārī Devī statue was moved on June 16 as the rage of the Goddess."[292] The related article is about some cracks in the new temple, apparently caused by the onslaught of tree trunks and other debris during and after the flood. By then it had evidently become a popular interpretation, so that these cracks were also ascribed to the wrathful intervention of Dhārī.

Similar to the first note from the Amar Ujālā, the initial reports from the local scene at the temple only address the direct experience of threat to the deity that led to her relocation. A broadcast from the Dhārī Devī Temple (India TV 2013) shows how the statue was shifted to higher ground. The scene features *pūjārīs* wading in rushing water and carrying the statue of the Goddess. While performing some hasty rituals, they rescue it from the onslaught of the torrent. The aired images reflect an atmosphere of urgency and emergency. They are dramatic scenes of the rescue of a Goddess from drowning.[293] Here is an excerpt from one of the *pūjārīs*' account of the flood and the threat to the Goddess. The reporter asks him what the picture was like at the time (of the peak of the flood), how much water there was and he enquires about the strength of the current:

इतना तेज़ बहा गया था [. . .], मतलब इतना आरती के बाद इतना भयंकर हो गया था, की हम लोग इतने पानी में, कमर तक की पानी में आ गया, किसी तरफ वह जो है, हाबड़ाबी में मन्त्रों चार के साथ में, जो भी जल्दी भाजी में होता, देवी को बचा लिया गया। अगर पांच मिनट की भी देर होती, तो हम

the people who were still stranded in different places, how to organise the distribution of relief goods to the population as well as the pilgrims etc.

290   In this context, note the concluding remarks in Chapter 6.1. These disclose how even the company commissioned with the construction of the hydroelectric power plant uses the argument of divine intervention to evade responsibility for the damage.

291   Amar Ujālā 2013, June 20, 23, 28; July 1a/b.

292   "16 जून को धारी देवी मूर्ति शिफ्टिंग के बाद आई आपदा को लोग देवी का प्रकोप मान रहे हैं।" (Amar Ujālā 2013, July 9).

293   See also Chapter 5.2.1 where the author Naveen Nigam exposes the contradiction inherent in this salvation of the deity from the rising waters. Namely, that her supposed anger would eventually be the reaction to her rescue.

लोग जो हैं सब पांच-सात आदमी जो वहां सात-आठ ब्राह्मण थे, और देवी जी अंतर्धान हो जाते, ख़तम हो जाते। (India TV 2013)[294]

It [the river] was flowing so fast, means after the *ārtī,* it had become so fierce that we guys came into so much water, until the hip reached the water, in a way it was like this, that in a hurry together with [chanting] some mantras, whatever it was very fast, the Goddess was saved. If it had been just five minutes late, then we guys, that was five men in total who were there, along with eight Brahmins, and the Goddess would have disappeared, we would have been finished.

Another article some days later reiterates the urgency that dominated the event:

16 जून को जब मंदाकिनी नदी में बाढ़ आना शुरू हुई तो मंदिर कमिटी ने धारी देवी की प्रतिमा बचाने के लिए तुरंत एक्शन लिया। धारा [*sic*] देवी मंदिर कमिटी के पूर्व सचिव देवी प्रसाद पांडे के मुताबिक, 'शाम तक मंदिर में घुटने तक पानी भर गया था। ऐसी खबरें थीं कि रात तक बहुत तेज बारिश होने वाली है। तो धारा [*sic*] देवी की प्रतिमा को हटाने के अलावा कोई और रास्ता नहीं था। हमने शाम को 6:30 बजे प्रतिमा को स्थानांतरित किया था।' (Gusain 2013)

When the floods started in the Mandakini river on June 16, the temple committee acted immediately to save the statue of Dhārī Devī. According to Devi Prasad Pandey, former secretary of the Dhārā [*sic*] Devī Temple Committee, 'By evening, the water was filled up till the knee in the temple. There were reports that there would be very heavy rains until night. There was no other way but to remove the statue of Dhārā [*sic*] Devī. We had transferred the statue at 6:30 in the evening.'

Not surprisingly after the dramatic scenes of her salvation, one of the persons closest to the Goddess, the Pūjārī Pandey, strongly rejects the theory of the Goddess or the divine and its influence in Kedarnath. He instead blames anthropogenic causes for the deluge (Firstpost 2013, June 27; IBNlive 2013, June 27a). In his view, the problem and the ones to blame were the dams built in the mountain region. This rift between the expertise about Dhārī Devī emanating from the group of the *pūjārīs* versus the media-supported version is repeated in the interpretation of the cracks in the temple mentioned above. The temple priests again provide a more rational explanation for

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294   Interview with Lakshmi Prasad Pandey, *pūjārī* of Dhārī Devī.

these cracks, in contrast to the supposedly popular notion that recognises the fury of the Goddess in the visible fissures.[295] It is interesting that the *pūjārīs*, who one would expect to be the representatives of a transcendental explanation because of their ascribed proximity to the divine, in this case give such clearly down-to-earth reasons for the events around or in connection with the temple. The motivation for this could not only be a side effect of the dramatic rescue operation, but also because the *pūjārīs* appear to have been closely collaborating with the company's plan for the new temple at that moment. An interpretation of the Goddess as "infuriated" over her resettlement would most likely not have been supported by them, for it would also have implied that the Goddess was wrathful about the *pūjārīs*' previous policies.

But how did the flood myth in connection with Dhārī Devī come into existence? According to personal observation, the first visible emergence of the narrative was based on an interview with the local activist Suman Nautiyal in the city of Srinagar. She had participated in the movement to save the former Dhārī Devī Temple. The reports however either just mention her name, or introduce her as a "local resident" or "local devotee" (IBNlive 2013, June 27b) and do not reveal the background of their interviewee:

> [. . .] locals and right wing groups have begun blaming a hydro-electric project that forced the moving of a temple and its deity [. . .]. A local resident, Suman Nautiyal, told IBN Live that 'Dhara [*sic*] Devi protected her temple and her devotees all these years . . . then they uprooted the temple and this calamity happened.' (Firstpost 2013, June 27)[296]

This seems to have been a key interview and the information from this conversation was widely circulated. The press also spoke to other people, for example Beena Chaudhary, another central female figure who was committed to the case of the temple and opposed the construction of the hydropower plant. There may

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295   "आम जन इसे देवी का प्रकोप मान रहे हैं लेकिन पुजारियों ने इसे दैवी प्रकोप मानने से साफ इंकार किया है. पुजारियों के मुताबिक बाढ़ के दौरान मंदिर के सपोर्टिंग पिलरों पर भारी तनों और अन्य सामान के टकराने से हुए कंपन के कारण ये दरारें आई हैं." (Amar Ujālā 2013, July 9). "The common people consider it to be the wrath of the Goddess, but the priests have categorically refused to accept it as divine wrath. According to the priests, these cracks were caused by the vibrations resulting from the impact of heavy tree trunks and other items on the supporting pillars of the temple during the flood."

296   This similar quote in Hindi, which also fits in this context, was used earlier in the chapter to illustrate how the media paints a picture of the local population: "अब आस्था में डूबे सुमन नौटियाल जैसे स्थानीय लोग इस जल प्रलय को धारी देवी मंदिर से जोड़कर देख रहे हैं।" (IBNlive 2013, June 27a). "Now, local people like Suman Nautiyal, immersed in their faith, see the flood in connection with the Dhārī Devī Temple."

have been other respondents in Srinagar who held the same view, but these particular women were not chosen at random; they were activists who were used to dealing with the media. They exhibited a certain professionalism in conversations with journalists that resulted from their previous engagement. Such a background is obviously in contrast to a more classical model of the local propagated by the media, in which simple rural people apply their traditional knowledge of the environment. The flood imagination instead originated from an urban center and from well-connected environmental activists. The ostensibly local facet conveyed by the media was thus already informed in large part by ideas, statements and agendas of actors, who had dealt with the issue of the Goddess prior to this. In this way, that specific version of a disaster reading not only became a continuation of the earlier struggle for the preservation of the Dhārī Devī Temple, but at the same time the purported narrative of the locals turns into a politicised issue driven by the agency and interests of certain groups.

The question of the "local" also gains importance from another angle, which is the location of Srinagar and the limitations of access to the mountain region. Given the strong interest of the media in providing information about the catastrophe among an initial "information gap," the first basic condition for the creation of the narrative had to do with geographical conditions. The area of the disaster epicenter was cut off from the outside world for the first days after the floods and was therefore inaccessible to reporters.[297] A large part of the media personnel remained stuck in Srinagar and the city was one of the places where communication facilities were still intact.[298] This confinement to a place constituted a decisive factor that probably prompted a focus on the Dhārī Devī Temple issue and thereupon helped to create the flood narrative of the deity. The media reports themselves reveal Srinagar in Uttarakhand as an initially vital location and base for accounts on the disaster. Evidently, in the midst of this situation and under the earlier discussed media principle of interviewing members of the public in the absence of comprehensive disaster information (Sood et al. 1987), the reporters, in their urgent need

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297   In fact, already on June 17 the Amar Ujālā reported that the administration closed the Badrinath highway for at least two days and the pilgrims could not travel any further than Srinagar. "श्रीनगर से आगे न जाएं तीर्थयात्री, प्रशासन ने कहा-दो दिन बंद रहेगा बदरी-केदार मार्ग – श्रीनगर। कई स्थानों पर ऋषिकेश-बदरीनाथ राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग के बंद रहने से हजारों यात्री मार्गों पर फंसे रहे। अब पुलिस प्रशासन ने घोषणा की है कि बदरी-केदार राष्ट्रीय राजमार्ग दो दिन तक बंद रहेगा। यात्रियों से अनुरोध है कि वह श्रीनगर में ही रुकें।" (Amar Ujālā 2013, June 17). "Pilgrims advised not to go beyond Srinagar, administration said Badri-Kedar route will remain closed for two days [headline]. Srinagar. Thousands of passengers were stranded at many places on the routes due to the closure of the Rishikesh-Badrinath National Highway. Now, the police administration has announced that the Badri-Kedar National Highway will be closed for two days. Travelers are requested to stay in Srinagar itself."
298   Compare the video on Zee News (2013, July 1) min 7:12 to 7:27.

for information, and the activists, who were still trying to promote their vision of the Dhārī Devī Temple, formed a common bond of interest. The story thus partly reflects the situation of the reporters stranded halfway to Kedarnath, and at the same time embraces the mutual interests of these actors involved.

Since geographical features appear to have played a crucial role in shaping the discourse, this feature calls for a further look at geographical orientations. There was yet another geographical aspect that strongly influenced the flood interpretation with regard to the Devī. Although the narrative of Dhārī Devī and Kedarnath involves two sites, it is evident that the association of the two places with each other could only take place at one of them—and that was the one at a lower altitude. To substantiate this claim, it is necessary to look at the interpretation of the disaster from Kedarnath's perspective. Also in places like Kedarnath and the other *dhām*, the *pūjārīs* offered an analysis of the disaster. But the perspective from these uphill places is not directed towards a downstream place like the temple at Kaliyasaur. The Mail Today (2013, June 27) quotes the Pūjārī Vageeshling from Kedarnath on the catastrophe: "Prakriti ka prakop hai, Bhagwan ka krodh hai, sab nasht ho gaya (It is the wrath of nature and anger of God, everything has been destroyed)." Apparently, the *pūjārī* also detects supernatural reasons behind the catastrophe, the rage however is ascribed to nature and to god.[299] He sees a more general wrath of the divine and is not concerned with the Dhārī Devī story. As this statement illustrates, from the viewpoint of Kedarnath and the other high mountain places, it would be rather irrational to look for the explanation of a disaster in an area downstream. Cross-cultural human conceptions typically locate the divine as above or at a greater elevation (see Meier et al. 2007). Even at a high altitude, the divine is again directed upwards, ascending to the peaks or pointing towards the sky.[300] For this reason, from a location 3500 metres above sea level, it seems highly unlikely to look for the root of destruction in a tiny spot at least 2000 metres below. This could rather be understood as a sacrilege against the sublime majesty of the high mountain resort and the presiding divine powers. A reading of the disaster by Shashidharling Swami, the chief *pūjārī* of the Vishwanath temple in Guptakashi, illustrates precisely this ascendant view. While designating "the natural calamity as divine punishment for human excess" he adds, "yes this is a message from above. The message is in the destruction that rained from the skies" (as cited in VOI 2013). The human misconduct he talks about refers more explicitly to morally

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299   In this context, note Groh et al. (2003:27), who characterise the figure of avenging nature in the 20th century as a recurrence of the motif of divine punishment.

300   See Eck's poetic description of the pilgrimage path, which refers to the perceived presence of the divine beyond the horizon: "Even more, these tracks of connection stretch from this world toward the horizon of the infinite, linking this world with the world beyond" (Eck 2012:5).

reprehensible behavior on the part of modern pilgrims. Vageeshling Swami, the chief purohit of the Kedarnath Dhām, also comments on this: "so many people, who have no feeling of piety or devotion, visit Kedarnath. They go to Kedarnath only to have fun and enjoy themselves, with a mindset which has nothing to do with faith and worship" (as cited in VOI 2013).[301] So the discussion from Kedarnath's vantage point again revolves around locally meaningful and observable factors (honeymoon couples, meat eating, alcohol consumption etc.) and the divine retribution moves from top to bottom, from heaven to earth.[302] The interpretation of the connection of Dhārī Devī and Kedarnath is thus possible either from a geographically lower standpoint or from the viewpoint of an external observer. This refers to anyone viewing, or visualising, the abstract map of the Himalayan sacred space from a distance.[303]

The analysis of the issue of the "local" and locality demonstrates that the media conveyed a picture of the disaster's interpretation that is congruent with the image of Uttarakhand as it is generally cultivated among Hindus in the rest of the country, or which corresponds to their "mental landscape." To appeal to the understanding of this nation-wide audience, the media built an imaginary about an indigenous population that is still supposed to be traditional, deeply rooted in a religious world-view and in a state of "purity" as untouched by modernity. While treating the narrative as an indicator of a backward local knowledge, they present the story of the Goddess's wrath like a typical regional lore.[304] Comparisons between the media generated image and impressions from a local level rather showed that the account of the deluge is more a hallmark of a culture that is at least to some extent

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301   The correct attitude in accordance with the image of God Śiva would be as follows: "Lord Shiva is a bairagi. He has nothing to do with materialism and desire. People come here in the wrong spirit. Just as Lord Shiva has discarded everything, so should the people who come here; they should give up all worldly thoughts to cleanse themselves" (as cited in VOI 2013).

302   This flow of the divine from above to below is also reflected in the legends about the emergence of Goddess Dhārī. Her traditional birthplace is in Kālīmaṭh and from there she came travelling down to her present place by the river. In this way, a sacred site further up in the mountains is spun into the local legend. In Kālīmaṭh itself, however, there is no reference to Dhārī Devī, or any other goddess further downhill.

303   Kvanneid (2018) presented an interesting and apparently appropriated disaster reading in a village in the Himalayan foothills, where there was a fusion of the Dhārī Devī-Kedarnath narrative with conceptions of the village's cosmological preference for the God Śiva.

304   The idea of the local promoted by the media clearly bears the signature of modernist discourses. "What Dirlik terms 'modernist teleology' informed and continue to support developmental projects, whereby the local, by definition, is considered backward—a site of rural passivity opposed to the dynamic logic of industrialism and urban culture, inhabited by communities in thrall to unscientific beliefs and outmoded customs" (Harindranath 2006:21).

modern, networked and permeated by mass and other media. Evidently, this is as prevalent in the mountain region as in other parts of India.

5.2.5   A King, Kedarnath and Dhārī Devī— Invented Historicity and Geomantic Axes

इससे पहले अठारा सौ बायसी में गढ़वाल के एक राजा ने धारी देवी की मूर्ति को यहाँ से स्थापित करने का प्रयास किया था। कहते है की उस दिन भी धारी देवी ने प्राकृतिक के माध्यम से अपना गुस्सा जताया था। उस दिन बड़ी लैंडस्लैड हुए और खेदार घाटी में बड़ी नुकसान हुआ था। उस समय भी ज्योतिलिंग का कुछ नहीं बिगड़ गया था और इस बार भी ज्योतिलिंग सुरक्षित रहा। (Zee News 2013, July 1, 07 : 11 min.)

Before that, in 1882, one King of Garhwal had tried to remove the statue from here. As the saying goes, also on that day, Dhārī Devī expressed her rage through nature. On that day, a huge landslide occurred and caused great damage in the Kedar valley. Even at that time, the Jyotirlinga was not damaged, just as now the Jyotirlinga remained protected.

The investigation continues here in terms of geographical aspects as they were relevant to the formation of the Dhārī Devī-Kedarnath myth. The topic in this subchapter is even further decoupled from the local level. The above story sprang up as a co-legend along with the flood narrative of Dhārī Devī's curse as cause for the Kedarnath disaster. Most of the surveyed news channels, articles and blogs, repeated and retold this story of the king who had allegedly tried to remove the statue as early as in 1882 (or also 1880).[305] The legend not only found its way onto the official Wikipedia site about Dhārī Devī, but also into scholarly works.

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305   Here are some excerpts: "It's said that a similar attempt by a king in 1882 had resulted in a landslide that had flattened Kedarnath" (*Dainik Jāgraṇ* 2013, June 25). Zee News even saw the Hydropower Project laying in ruins: "As per believers, Uttarakhand had to face the Goddess' ire as she was shifted from her 'mool sthan' (original abode) to make way for a 330 MW hydel project that now lies in ruins. A similar attempt in 1882 by a local king had resulted in a landslide that had flattened Kedarnath" (Zee News 2013, July 2). "मां काली का रूप मानी जाने वालीं धारी देवी के इस मंदिर के बारे में यह भी कहा जाता है कि 1880 में भी धारी देवी को हटाने का प्रयास हुआ था, तब भी केदारनाथ में भयंकर बाढ़ आ गई थी। उसके पश्चात धारी देवी को फिर किसी ने हटाने का प्रयास नही किया।" (Prabhasakshi 2013, July 4). "It is also said about this temple of Dhārī Devī, who is considered a form of Mother Kālī, that also in 1880 an attempt was made to remove Dhārī Devī; even then there was a severe flood in Kedarnath. After that, nobody ever tried again to remove Dhārī Devī."

Mishra (2016) accredits the tale of a local king's attempt to move the statue, which "resulted in a landslide that flattened Kedarnath," to local historians. It appears in the various media with minor variations, for example, that the king had tried to construct a roof over Dhārī Devī's head (Gusain 2013b). The two stories became so closely interwoven, that the search term "1882 Garhwal flood" brings up a number of websites related to the Dhārī Devī Temple.

The tale of the king is particularly remarkable because, despite the explicit mention of the year 1882, there is no historical evidence for it. No such natural disaster appears to have occurred in Garhwal or Uttarakhand, all the more so as the major flood disasters of the last 200 years in this area are quite well documented (Gulia 2007; Agarwal & Narain 1991).[306] The chronologically closest heavy rainfall event occurred in 1880, a year that was also mentioned in connection with this narrative. But the major calamity in the wake of this catastrophe was a landslide in Nainital that killed 150 people,[307] and which is nowhere near Kedarnath. The verification of the historicity exposes this legend as another media construct. Presumably, the aim of its creation was to lend historical backing to the modern myth. This goes hand in hand with another practice of the media, which is to consider disasters in the context of similar events (Sood et al. 1987). Since it would mean placing them in the context of other flood events, this story would fit well with such an attempt. Secondly, a theme typical of the Indian context emerges, namely the great significance of lines of tradition (Malinar 2018). In this specific case, it would be the lineage of mytho-historical disasters that confers a heightened significance to a present-day catastrophe.

From a historical point of view, it is already questionable that in an age and at a time when there were no mass media or rapid means of communication, two events that took place so far apart from each other would have been considered connected. But what ultimately exposes this alleged historical legend as a modern myth are again topographical considerations. For this, one needs to cast a glance at the locality of Kedarnath in the past time. Two available photographs of the site from 1882 show a temple in a field of flowers and a few scattered stone huts[308] (Figure 15 and 16). The vulnerability index of the area is obviously very low—there was no human settlement, hardly any man-made structures except for the temple, and the pilgrimage to the sanctuary took the form of day trips from the nearest village of

306   See Gulia (2007:309) for a compilation of floods and other disasters in the region, or Agarwal and Narain (1991:33) who situate the chronologically closest heavy rainfall event for the Himalayas and Garhwal region in 1880.
307   The Imperial Gazetteer of India reported that "in September 1880, after three days continuous rain, a landslip occurred, which caused the death of forty-three Europeans and 108 natives, besides damage to property amounting to about 2 lakhs" (The Imperial Gazetteer of India 1908:333).
308   Called *chhan* (Uniyal 2013:1472)

Figure 15. Kedarnath Temple in 1882 (Source: Chauhan 2013).

Gaurikund (Uniyal 2013).[309] So there was hardly anything that could have been subject to devastation. A disaster though, is deemed a social construct and is above all defined by human vulnerability; a natural event in an uninhabited place lacks these crucial features of a disaster.[310] The idea of a past event resembling the flood of 2013 evidently represents a false historicity or a re-imagined past created from the ideas and framework of a modern backdrop. The alleged historical proof underlying this narrative is accordingly a modern-day product in historical disguise.

309   "For most parts of its history (at least since 8th century AD), there was no human habitation in Kedarnath, except the temple" (Centre for Education and Documentation 2013:5).
310   Definition of disaster according to Oliver-Smith (1999:73) "A disaster takes place when a destructive force intersects with a community in a socially configured pattern of vulnerability. [. . .]. A vulnerability profile is a historical and evolutionary product that influences the way a disaster develops far more than the physical force of the destructive agent." Another quote from his landmark book on disaster research is similar in content, "Disaster is seen as a process leading to an event that involves a combination of a potentially destructive agent from the natural or technological sphere and a population in a socially produced condition of vulnerability" (Oliver-Smith 1999:4).

Figure 16. "Southside of Temple, Kedarnath, Garhwal, 1882"
(Source: Chauhan 2013).

5.2.6   When the Balance is Lost, Comes the Flood

> The landscape not only connects places to the lore of gods, heroes, and saints, but it connects places to one another through local, regional, and transregional practices of pilgrimage. Even more, these tracks of connection stretch from this world toward the horizon of the infinite, linking this world with the world beyond. The pilgrim's India is a vividly imagined landscape that has been created not by homing in on the singular importance of one place, but by the linking, duplication, and multiplication of places so as to constitute an entire world. (Eck 2012:5)

Apart from the story of 1882, there have been other endeavours within the media discourse to establish a connection between the site of the Devī and Kedarnath—or to reconfirm an allegedly previously identified connection—in order to justify an impact of a local event on an event at another location. The very foundation

of theses conceptions lies in the network of sacralised rivers that form the natural links between places. Culturally conceived motifs then represent an extension of the geophysical conditions. Eck vividly illustrates in the above quote how imagined connections are made between different places through pilgrimage practices and also the wanderings of prominent historical figures (cf. Chapter 2.3.2).[311] In the media, a spatial bond is reinforced by the purported construction of the two sacred sites according to the specifications of certain *śāstras*, holy scriptures. This prerequisite not only guarantees the balance in the mountain area, but also protection against flood catastrophes.

> मान्यताओं के मुताबिक धारी देवी और केदारनाथ दोनों की स्थापना तंत्र-शास्त्र
> पर की गई है, जो पहाड़ों और नदियों की बाढ़ से इस क्षेत्र की रक्षा करती हैं।
> (Prabhasakshi 2013, July 4)

> According to belief, both Dhārī Devī and Kedarnath were installed on the basis of the Tantra Śāstras, [an arrangement] which protects the mountains and rivers in this region from floods.

The notion of a linkage between the two places, however, is shifted to a new level and unfolds an elevated transcendental quality in blogs and comments found on the web. The Delhi-based astrologer Sanjay Rath (2013) published on his business website his individual interpretation of the reasons for the disaster in Kedarnath. In his reading, it is imaginary lines between places that reveal the fundamental energetic channels and cosmic forces in the area (Figure 17).

> Now, the lower half of the deity of Kali is located in Kalimath Temple. These joint temples are aligned exactly at NE-SW direction [. . .] symbolizing Kali as sleeping with her feet in NE direction and head in the SE direction. This causes the energy to flow in the NE direction [. . .]. The upper part of the devi with the head symbolizes the calming of Kali by Shiva, the Guru. The lower part of Kali is not in the form of an [*sic*] deity and instead, is worshipped as the Sri Yantra. In this manner we learn that the Sri Yantra, as established by Adi Shankara at Kalimath, is the yoni of Shakti from which all creation proceeds. The Kedarnath jyotirlinga is exactly North from Kalimath [. . .] symbolising the husband-wife or Shiva-Shakti relationship. In this, Kedarnath

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311   In the mountain culture, the networks of kinship relations would have to be added as linkages between geographical locations.
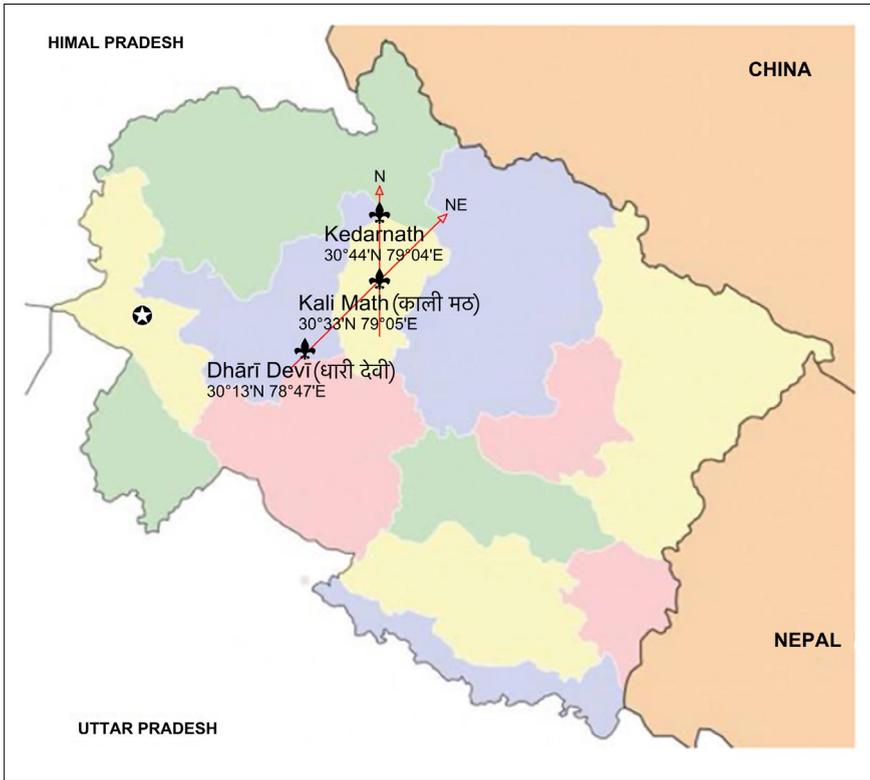
Figure 17. The Arrangement of the Geomantic Axes
in Uttarahand (Source: Rath 2013).

being to the north is constantly calming the devi who is in the
south." [. . .]. They [the villagers] were right in their belief as any
movement would lead to a change in the angle of the Dhari Devi
and Kalimath alignment, besides altering the distance. [. . .]. With
the shifting of Dhari Devi, the agitated Kali has been woken
up, and she seeks the demon Raktabija (seed of blood). [. . .].
Primarily this indicates unimaginable bloodshed and death."
(Rath 2013)

The analysis concludes that the only remedy for restoring the energetic balance
of the area and even the whole country is to return Dhārī Devī to her original

place.[312] But the disturbance at the site of Dhārī Devī did not alone trigger the event at Kedarnath. Rather, the entire balance of an energetic system was so upset that the catastrophe in the upper mountain region only marked the beginning of an even more extensive wave of destruction that would be unleashed by primordial forces throughout the subcontinent.

Discernible from this text is that the author is devoid of a local rooting or direct interaction with the local setting, and thereby the possibilities of interpreting the disaster in terms of Dhārī Devī's resettlement became limitless. Rath analyses the events against his own urban-based background and integrates the topic into a metropolitan way of knowledge production, while applying his religious beliefs and mental mapping of the Himalayan space. Regardless of the relevance or non-relevance of the presented "geomantic" ideas, these elaborations left their imprint on the web. Either owing to the author's recognised position and authority as an astrologer and spiritual guide, or because of the largely coherent and impressive nature of his text, it has been copied by several other sites.[313] The Speaking Tree website (2013), a supplement of The Times of India, published this text in full. The map drawn by the astrologer is also featured in a TV special of the South Indian Telugu-language channel Inews (Inewslivenet 2013b: 0:23 min.). A blogger (Sonalikar 2013), according to his information based in Bangalore, commented on the copied text in more detail. The nature of his introduction to the article, fits the typical image of the young, male, urban and RSS-inspired blogger identified by Udupa (2015). The opening lines referring to "atheistic Government leaders" (Sonalikar 2013) clearly mimic the rhetoric of the late RSS leader Ashok Singhal (cf. Chapter 5.2.7). This is another indication of how the astrological view on the catastrophe and its metaphysical implications were gradually integrated into a "Hindutva" discourse.[314]

> Our fore fathers placed a fierce looking idol and gave us this instructions:
> [. . .] she be called Dhari Devi—Dhari from dhara means stream – she is the one who controls the stream.
> {3} do not anger her by moving her from this location this will result in destruction

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312   "Restore the deity of Dhari Devi (Kali torso) to its original shrine and start the prayers that calm her down. Shri Yantra sadhana has to be maintained at Kalimath and Bael leaf must be offered to Kedarnath. If this is done, then Kali will calm down and the agitation of nature will stop. If this is not done, then the agitation of Kali shall spread throughout India and this will prove to be one of the worst years in the history of modern India" (Rath 2013).
313   IndiaDivine.org 2013; Chsrk 2013; Matah 2013; IS 2013.
314   A discourse on Hindu identity.

> By saying that do not move her no matter what—they told us DO
> NOT LET THE WATER LEVEL RISE ABOVE THIS POINT.
> They gave us a message in Environmental science. (Bhoj 2013)

The quote here repeats the pattern of giving faith-based ideas a scientific veneer while labelling it "environmental science." Behind it is another of the bloggers that Udupa (2015) classified as young, educated and urban, and who make up the majority of commentators on religious topics on the web. Yet he seems less concerned with Hindu nation-building, and more with giving religious backing to ecological issues. His articulations refer to an idealised state of natural equilibrium preserved by previous generations, and the Goddess is described as a central element in maintaining this equilibrium. These ancestors are said to have had a more comprehensive knowledge of the environment, but their equilibrium system has been disturbed by recent developmental activities.

   The third commentator to be introduced at this point approaches the subject of the Dhārī Devī Temple from a rather distinguished and sophisticated angle. The Delhi-based author Niraj Kumar (2013) obviously did thorough research on the Goddess and combined the story of her and the flood with his broad cultural and historical background knowledge. Having previously published a "scientific" work on a subject he calls "geophilosophy"[315] or "geometaphysics," he approaches the subject possibly with some self-promotional intent from the perspective of this esoteric system. Like other media reports, his account of the deluge resembles passages from the Purāṇas.

> Mahakali of Dhari is also the Ugratara and the Chhinamastika,
> the Goddess of the lightening.[316] The clouds burst, the dams burst,
> the reservoirs burst. The glaciers broke, the roads collapsed.
> Buildings and mules, men and vegetation were swept away in the
> pralaya. It was only when the flood water reached the sanctum
> sanctorum of Kedarnath and touched the Sivalingam, the wrath
> stopped suddenly. The goddess Mahakali calmed. It was like the
> mythical story in which Shiva had to lie down and when Kali's
> feet touched Shiva, she calmed. Kedar Shiva calmed Dhari's
> Mahakali. (N. Kumar 2013)

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315   According to his book, the core of Geophilosophy constitutes the idea that "[. . .] the geographical positioning of a country influences its thinking and thus impacts its philosophy" (N. Kumar 2014:19).
316   This comparison to other manifestations of the female primordial energy is obviously taken from Naithany's (1995) chapter on the Dhārī Devī Temple.

What he argues is that elements of Srinagar's better-researched past may instead have taken place at the very site of the Devī. From his observations, he not only concludes that "Dhari/Srinagar" might be "the place to propitiate Mahakali" (N. Kumar 2013), but he also indicates that the site could have formed the centre of the Śrī Vidyā tradition, as well as a transit point of tantric Buddhism to Tibet.[317] It exceeds the scope of the thesis to discuss such theories further; but the intention of his text is obviously to increase the historical and thus the metaphysical importance of the site. This would reinforce the assumption that interventions in its balance caused such a great catastrophe. Niraj Kumar equally advises that the temple be restored to its original site because the upset metaphysical or geo-metaphysical equilibrium needs to be reinstated. Balance in this case is based less on imaginary axes than on mytho-historical webs.[318] This account and historical substantiation of the "divine" catastrophe is by far the most elaborate, but seems to have had little impact on the online community. Perhaps because of its sophisticated complexity—the text was manifestly neither copied nor cited.

This section demonstrated how further individual and partly political interests shaped the Dhārī Devī narrative and the accompanying public discourse. It simultaneously established how the discursive process unfolded at an ever increasing distance to the local level. Different articles and especially blog entries and individual websites created meaningful connections between the two places in question, whether in the form of historical attributions, by replicating typical motifs of religious scriptures or by applying imagined, metaphysical-geographical axes. "Equilibrium" was a central theme in this section, as an alleged earlier state of balance ran through the introduced narratives. Anthropogenic agency then uprooted the balance, leading to the recent flood with its apocalyptic dimensions. This is propagated as the definite cause for the catastrophe. The underlying conceptual geography that forms the background in this chapter largely exhibits a perspective as cultivated in the Indian plains. Even though the last author displays an intimate knowledge of local tradition and historiography, his account seems far too complex and detached to present locally traded ideas about a catastrophe. As outlined in Chapter 5.2.4, these would typically take a much simpler and more down-to-earth form. In this way, he also fails to address the mountain people's understanding and essential concerns regarding a flood disaster. The various interpretations portrayed hence originate from actors with a national background who not only claim the "divine territory" for themselves in

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317   These ideas are also advocated in Naithany's (1995) book.
318   Nevertheless, he holds mainly the GVK company and, in a "criminal and sinful complicity," the state administration responsible for upsetting the balance through the transfer of the Goddess, including the disastrous consequences of this act that has claimed the lives of thousands of innocent people.

order to nourish their religious identity, but who at the same time seek to assume interpretive sovereignty over the cause of the catastrophe in the mountains.

5.2.7   The Communal Effervescence—
When a Disaster Myth turns Fundamentalist

The first half of the above heading is an excerpt from the English summary found on the same website of the Hindi article by Naveen Nigam, which sheds critical light on the Dhārī Devī question (see Chapter 5.2.4). In full, it reads, "the Communal effervescence is being seen over Dhari Devi in Uttarakhand after the natural disaster" (Nigam 2013). The following text seeks to decipher the quality and significance of this flare-up of communal rhetoric, respectively the roles and political agendas of the actors from the religious spectrum who were involved in the interpretation process of the disaster.

> Whether labelled 'man-made' or 'natural,' disaster events highlight ongoing power struggles in society. The control of information in the media or in public discourse, as well as the attempt to control the social production of meaning, is an attempt to define reality in accordance with a favored political agenda and therefore must be seen as a distinctly ideological process. The framing process both constructs and reconstructs meaning in a selective manner that legitimizes some accounts while obscuring others, privileging some political agendas and negating others. (Button 2002:146)

As this introductory quotation reiterates, the mechanisms of interpretation after a catastrophe are understood as an intrinsic political process, and even more so is a metaphysically shaped interpretation of a catastrophe strongly intertwined with ideological and political objectives (Bhattacharjee 2015). When examining religious-political agendas in this case study, it is necessary to consider the special status of religious actors in India. Since the pervasive diffusion of Hindu nationalist ideology along with the election of a "growing number of swamis and sadhus to public office at the local, state, and national levels" (McKean 1996:6);[319] the country witnessed the establishment of wide-ranging ties between politics and religion (see Alley 2000) and between religious and political leaders. This development is augmented by the formation of a religious-political celebrity culture (J. Mukherjee

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319   In this connection see the article of Verma (2018) about Saints being set up for upcoming elections.

2004).[320] Cults related to religious prominence encompass the recent emergence of the phenomenon of mega-gurus (Larios & Voix 2018), who shape the religious practice of large parts of the urban middle class. Celebrities also frequently play a special role in the post-disaster recovery phase (Alexander 2015). The merging of political agendas with the process of coping with disasters also goes hand in hand with the media's policy of basing its coverage on information from authoritative figures. The inclusion of religious actor's positions in news reports is therefore consistent with this approach (Sood et al 1987). In the case of Uttarakhand, representatives of a religious-political spectrum would be in the authoritative position to comment on events affecting a perceived sacred space or sacralised region. Nevertheless, it is not only the media that seek out the authorities, but also the religious leaders themselves who cultivate a proximity to the media. Research found that especially the Hindu right-wing sections are well aware of the role and use of the media and increasingly the social media (see Udupa 2015). Yet the use of media strategies is now a common practice among worldwide and cross-religious authorities (see Cheong 2012). It should be noted that the media themselves are also criticised for having "assiduously reinforced [. . .] culture and values" and thus have become "an important nodal point in the production and circulation of fundamentalist ideologies" (Thomas 2008:35). The right-wing interest in the region, the "*dev bhūmi*," is naturally very high, since Hindu spaces relevant to their belief system, such as this area, are mainstays of their Hindutva agenda.[321]

Already the earliest persons who—publicly noticeable—commented on the flood came with their respective political objectives, such as local actor Suman Nautiyal who, as one of the first protagonists, brought up the motif of the Devī's rage (see Chapter 5.2.4). Similarly Beena Chaudhary, who supported the divine wrath theory, was part of the movement to prevent the relocation of the Goddess and her temple. In this way, the idea of the Goddess's fury may have directly expressed the anger of the hitherto disregarded adherents of the movement. Their statements though drew wider circles and eventually ended up in the hands of the religious hardliners.

> कुछ संतों का भी कहना है कि धारी देवी की मूर्ति को हटाया गया था और इसी कारण जलप्रलय हुआ जो निश्चित रूप से धारी देवी का ही प्रकोप है। उनका यह भी कहना है कि धारी देवी के गुस्से से ही केदारनाथ और उत्तराखंड के अन्य इलाकों में तबाही मची। (Prabhasakshi 2013, July 4).

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320   As for example McKean (1996:11) states that "[. . .] leaders of religious organizations propagate beliefs and practices that assist in legitimating the power of ruling-class groups."
321   Compare how Kong and Woods (2016) depict the appropriation and configuration of space as a highly political matter.

> Some saints also say that the statue of Dhārī Devī was removed and this led to the deluge, which is definitely the wrath of Dhārī Devī. They also say that only because of Dhārī Devī's anger did the devastation occur in Kedarnath and other areas of Uttarakhand.

Since actors from the religious spectrum are obviously regarded as experts who can contribute their specialised knowledge on a sacred space, the presence of these figures in quotes and interviews is the first striking feature when looking at the variety of newspaper articles, broadcasts, blogs and news sites. While most of these faith-based authorities reflect on divine justice and retribution, they do not unanimously support the idea of Dhārī Devī's wrath. Although the discourse on this topic indeed unfolds in a nuanced and differentiated manner, it seems as if the most extreme and assertive voices have attained the interpretative dominance. The most prominent and most cited person in this regard is Uma Bharti—and with the most extreme attitude excels the religious hardliner and former VHP leader Ashok Singhal. Starting from this identified most extreme stance, it is traced here how a seemingly "innocent" or "naïve" local narrative became a political issue of right-wing ideology and Hindu identity, including its incendiary effect.

As previously noted (see Chapter 5.2.4), although Ashok Singhal's rhetoric about the mountain catastrophe implied that he was committed to and spoke for the local people, his further argumentation made clear how he used the issue of the Devī and the Kedarnath tragedy to gain political ground. At the same time, he lashed out at his opponents with his primary contention that Dhārī Devī's ire was directed against the "atheists [*nāstik log*] ruling the country" (Gusain 2013b).[322] With this remark, he openly blames the then ruling Congress Party, the party that made secularism its trademark, for the catastrophe in the mountain region. Unlike in other global contexts where the term atheist would be perceived as neutral, its meaning in the Indian political discourse has a clear negative connotation and its conception is especially construed by the Hindu Right as anti-Hindu (B. Rao 2006; Jaffrelot 2008).[323] In this respect, the designation "atheist" also assumes relevance to the communal question. The incendiary factor in Singhal's widely circulated assertion that the rage of Dhārī Devī was directed against the atheists becomes

322   The same statement reported Nigam (2013); Prabhasakshi (2013, July 4); Mail Today (2013, June 27). In an NDI news clip (Newsdeskindia 2013), Singhal in a fit of rage at a press conference in Delhi, even directly accuses the journalists interviewing him of being atheists after they had expressed doubts over his mythological analysis of the Kedarnath disaster.
323   One statement attributed to Singhal reads: "secularisation is the biggest enemy of the nation" (Rangaswami 2003). See also the conclusive article "Ravi Kumar Atheist: The Indian man fighting to be godless" (G. Pandey 2019).

manifest in the impact left by his remark in the commentary section below the main text. As one Rajesh posted on June 30, for example: "exactly these political parties will be very supportive to the Muslims and Christians" (Gusain 2013b). Thereby, the term "atheist" in the RSS context almost takes on the extremely adverse meaning of disbeliever particularly from an Islamic background. At the very least, it implicates that a non-believer either has a proximity to Islam or supports groups or mindsets that are opposed to the Hindu nation. Another note from the same comment section, referring to Ashok Singhal's declaration, confirms this impression and reveals the direction in which the debate is heading: "authorities would not have tampered with local's belief if it was a church or masjid. They do not care Hindu sentiment at all. It is our faults [sic] also. We have become disrespectful of our own culture in the name of science and freedom of thought" (Gusain 2013a).[324]

Now the alleged lesson Dhārī Devī wanted to teach the "atheists" is that these leaders should keep their hands off the Himalayas—the Himalayas here certainly not understood as an ecologically fragile area, but as a central feature of the Hindu nation. "'[. . .] धारी देवी देश के नास्तिक लोगों को समझाना चाहती थीं कि हिमालय और यहां की नदियों को ना छुआ जाए'" (Gusain 2013b). "Dhārī Devī wanted the atheists of this country to understand that they should not touch the Himalayas and its rivers." With these words, Singhal succeeds in holding the Congress government responsible not only for the presumed harmful construction of the hydropower projects, but equally for the destruction of the sanctity of the Himalayan landscape.[325] It is important to keep in mind that the agenda of activists who belonged in any way to the political spectrum, especially the BJP, was permeated by the power struggle between the BJP in opposition and the then Congress government throughout the period of the Srinagar Hydropower Plant dispute (e.g. Baniyal 2012). Yet Ashok Singhal only made a peripheral appearance during the conflict. Only in 2013, shortly before the disaster, did one of his remarks emerge that referred to the struggle over Dhārī Devī.[326] Since he had already warned of serious consequences

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324   "posted by: Ritu June 29, 2013"

325   The full paragraph, "विश्व हिंदू परिषद के अशोक सिंघल ने कहा, 'लोगों ने हाइड्रो पॉवर प्रोजेक्ट के खिलाफ प्रदर्शन किया था और धारी देवी की प्रतिमा को हटाए जाने का विरोध किया था. लेकिन इसके बावजूद 16 जून को धारी देवी की प्रतिमा को हटाया गया. धारी देवी के गुस्से से ही केदारनाथ और उत्तराखंड के अन्य इलाकों में तबाही मची. धारी देवी देश के नास्तिक लोगों को समझाना चाहती थीं कि हिमालय और यहां की नदियों को ना छुआ जाए'" (Gusain 2013b). "Ashok Singhal of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad said, 'People had demonstrated against the hydro power project and opposed the removal of the statue of Dhārī Devī. Despite this, the statue of Dhārī Devī was moved on June 16. Dhārī Devī's anger caused havoc in Kedarnath and other areas of Uttarakhand. Dhārī Devī wanted the atheists of the country to understand that the Himalayas and the rivers here should not be touched'."

326   "धारी देवी मंदिर का प्रश्न हमेशा के लिए हल होना चाहिए। सरकार भले ही कितने नाटक क्यों न करे इस मंदिर को कभी भी तोड़ने नहीं दिया जाएगा। धारी देवी उत्तराखंडवासियों की कुल देवी हैं। सरकार ने यदि इसे तोड़ने का साहस किया तो गंभीर परिणाम भुगतने पड़ेंगे। – अशोक सिंघल, अध्यक्ष विश्व हिंदू

and made cryptic threats with his statement, the catastrophe then represented a suitable moment—to appropriate the flood as the predicted consequence of the government's malpractice. This notwithstanding, his comments on Dhārī Devī must also be seen in the context of his involvement in the Tehri Dam struggle (cf. Chapter 3.1; 4.1). Since then, his attitude towards dams and his advocacy of free-flowing rivers are well known, and so his remarks on every other dam conflict reactivate certain chains of associations. In this way, he does not even have to explicitly employ communal rhetoric or articulate the objective of a Hindu nation, but merely his personal intervention in a matter involving hydropower projects, ties the issue to the associated central agendas.

The second notable right-wing personality to express her views on the catastrophe is the other controversial politician, Sādhvī Uma Bharti. As laid out previously (Chapter 3.2), she was a prominent activist in the temple issue even before the catastrophe. Because of her established position in the case, she was consequently also one of the most sought-after commentators on the mythical reading of the flood disaster (see Amar Ujālā 2013, June 20; Amar Ujālā 2013, June 23). After the deluge, she is especially fervent in promoting the Goddess as the protector of Garhwal and its pilgrimage destinations and also insists that she had warned of the disaster:[327]

> उमा भारती ने कहा है कि उन्होंने प्रशासन और शासन से पहले ही कहा था कि धारी देवी की मूर्ति को न हटाया जाए इससे उत्तराखंड में प्रलय आ जाएंगी क्योंकि धारी देवी ही इन चारों धामों की सुरक्षा करती है। उन्होंने कहा जब आप द्वारपॉल को ही हटा देंगे तो विनाश तो होगा ही। (Nigam 2013)

> Uma Bharti said she had already told the city administration and the government well in advance that the statue of Dhārī Devī should not be removed as it is precisely Dhārī Devī who protects the four Dhām and through this the flood would come to Uttarakhand. She had informed them that if they allowed the gatekeeper to be removed, there would certainly be destruction.

परिषद्" (Amar Ujālā 2013, May 11b). "The question of the Dhārī Devī Temple must be settled forever. No matter how much drama the government may put up, it will never be allowed to demolish this temple. Dhārī Devī is the *Kul devī* of the people of Uttarakhand. If the government dares to destroy it, it will face serious consequences.—Ashok Singhal, president of the Vishva Hindu Parishad."
327   "Bharti said the Central government did not pay attention to the matter and the idol of Dhārī Devī was shifted, which became the cause of the natural disaster" (Hindustan Times 2013, June 24).

Inherent in her statements about the Devī's anger is a political dimension that is probably part of the BJP's broader strategy in its post-disaster engagement. The Hindustan Times (2013, June 24) discloses the party's ulterior motives:

> As Uttarakhand battles its worst disaster in nearly 80 years, the Bharatiya Janata Party, that lost the state narrowly to the Congress in 2012 assembly polls, has pressed its Uttar Pradesh unit to assist in relief operations besides getting its UP MLAs to commit a month's salary for disaster management. [. . .] UP BJP chief Laxmikant Bajpai says he expects nearly 6–7 truck loads of relief material besides cash for the rain ravaged hill state from UP's Awadh (that comprises Lucknow) region alone. [. . .] The idea clearly is to hardsell BJP as a party that cares for the nation and rises above party considerations on such issues. It, says a source, is also to expose the "inept" handling of the post disaster scene by the Congress government in Uttarakhand (Hindustan Times 2013, June 24).

Uma Bharti's remarks about Dhārī Devī must therefore be understood in the context of the BJP's recent defeat in the 2012 state elections and the party's attempt to regain political ground in Uttarakhand. Party members as Bharti thus extend their political campaign not only to disaster relief, but also by framing the case of Goddess Dhārī as an indictment of the Congress government for provoking the destruction of the state through its mismanagement. A crucial part of the poor governance, from the BJP's angle, was the Congress's support for the development project in Srinagar and the relocation of the temple. This means that U. Bharti's rhetoric on the Goddess and the flood, like Ashok Singhal's, is permeated by the struggle between the two Indian major parties over their contested territory.

Besides her initial propagation of the religious disaster reading, Bharti was politically active on other fronts after the disaster as well. In a widely publicised press conference, she reported about her meeting with President Pranab Mukherjee in Delhi. Their conversation is understood to have been about reconsidering "development related projects in the mountain region" in the post-disaster phase (Webdunia, 2013, June 22). With the effects of the flood still fresh, the moment seemed favourable as a potential turning point to "promote an alternative vision of development in the mountain region" (ibid.). This indeed sounds as if it could be part of a valid ecologically sustainable agenda, if it were not for Bharti's long-standing Hindu national interests.[328] As her motivation is reflected in the priority given to the

328   The entanglements with "Hindutva" are also evident when immediately after the propagation of the temple myth as an issue of national concern, sub-organisations of the

protection of areas and sites important to Hindu culture, her second demand to the president was the repatriation of the statue of Dhārī Devī to its original place. Precisely in her case, one can see the fluid quality that the narrative of divine retribution possessed. Depending on the audience, Uma Bharti either explicitly or less openly advocated metaphysical reflections on the disaster and thus clearly showed how the myth of Dhārī's rage became the object of political interests and manoeuvres. At a later stage she even distanced herself from her support of this narrative altogether.[329]

Other religious leaders were more restrained and distinct in their adherence to the theory of Dhārī's wrath. For instance, a special broadcast from TV9 Gujarat (2013) made it clear that the religious faction did not uniformly support this interpretation. Although the title of the program was "saints believe movie [*sic*] Dhari Devi idol lead to cloud burst," nonetheless, only one of the saints interviewed (Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati)[330] explicitly supported this theory, while the further respondents presented their very own interpretations of the catastrophe. Swami Chidanand Saraswati runs a large ashram in Rishikesh and is known for his popularity with Western seekers and for the emphasis on ecological awareness. He refers to Dhārī Devī only in general as a manifestation of the *śakti* and in this way equates it with the Ganges. According to Chidanand Saraswati, both of them are part of *śakti*, the female energy manifestation, "Gaṅgā is *śakti* and Dhārī Devī is *śakti*" (TV9 Gujarat 2013).[331] He is of the opinion that *vikās* cannot take place in defiance of these female powers and by proclaiming that Gaṅgā should flow freely, he connects the flood to the construction of dam projects and thus anthropogenic

RSS spectrum began to endorse her cause (Hindustan Times 2013, June 28). However, the party members from Uttar Pradesh (or the local newspaper editors) proved to have so little understanding for the case of the Dhārī Devī Temple that they thought to support its reconstruction in Kedarnath. "Akhil Bharatiya Swadesh Sangh members along with members of various organisations reached the bungalow of Uma Bharti at Shyamla Hills on Thursday to extend support for reconstructing Dhari Devi Mandir in Kedarnath" (Hindustan Times 2013, June 28).

329   Her following explanation gives a reason for this move, "उमा ने कहा कि केदारनाथ मंदिर [*sic*] में आपदा मंदिर को शिफ्ट करने के कारण नहीं आई। कहा कि कोई मां अपने लाडलों की जान नहीं लेती।" (Amar Ujālā 2014, Jan. 28). "Uma said that the disaster in Kedarnath did not occur because of the shifting of the temple. She said that no mother is taking the lives of her dear children."

330   Swami Avimukteshwaranand is the official representative of Shankaracharya Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati (Nawaz 2018).

331   "गंगा भी शक्ति है, धारी देवी भी शक्ति है। गंगा की धारा या धारी देवी दोनों शक्तियां हैं। इन दोनों शक्तियों के सामने हमें अपना विकास करना है, लेकिन विकास ऐसा नहीं करना है कि धारी देवी को भूल जाए, विकास ऐसा नहीं करना है कि गंगा की पवित्रता धारा को भूल जाए।" (TV9 Gujarat 2013: 01:29 min.). "Gaṅgā is also *śakti*, Dhārī Devī is also *śakti*. The flow of the Ganges or Dhārī Devī they are both *śakti*. We have to do our development by taking into account these two *śakti*s. However, development cannot be done by disregarding Dhārī Devī; development cannot be done by neglecting the sacred flow of the Ganges."

causes in the mountains. By saying "प्रकृति के साथ छेड़छाड़ न हो" (TV9 Gujarat 2013: 01 : 36 min.), "one should not meddle with nature," he ambiguously suggests that nature has taken revenge for the rampant construction in the mountain region and since nature and Dhārī Devī both are *śakti*, one could read into it that the retribution of Dhārī Devī forms part of the reprisal of nature/*śakti*, yet he does not openly support this chain of association.

> [. . .] जगद्गुरु ने कहा कि धारीदेवी को विस्थापित करना इस आपदा का कारण बना। साथ ही कई प्रकार की परियोजनाएं विकास के लिए चलाई जा रही हैं जो उत्तराखंड के विनाश का माध्यम बन गई है। (Amar Ujālā 2013, June 8)

> The Jagadguru said that displacing Dhārī Devī was the cause for this disaster. Moreover, many types of projects are carried out for the sake of development, a process that has become the means of destruction for Uttarakhand.

The Shankaracharya Swaroopanand Saraswati, as another dominant spiritual leader, commented on the Dhārī Devī narrative. Although the Shankaracharya at the beginning of the above quote blames the relocation of Dhārī Devī as the reason for the recent catastrophe, he expands and generalises his argumentation in the next line: the various types of projects built under the premise of *vikās* were the root cause of the destruction in Uttarakhand. The raising of the Dhārī Devī statue and its further impact hence symbolises only one of the manifestations of "*vikās-vināś*"[332] that continuously take place (are implemented?) in the mountain region. As named before, the construction of roads and hotels, but also the behaviour of people in venerated places fall under the offences that undermine the sacredness of the mountain region.[333] This is also meant to express that pilgrims' behaviour has changed considerably compared to the past, as the concept of pilgrimage has gradually changed to include more and more characteristics that would fall within the conceptual framework of tourism. Whereas the Shankaracharya thus endorsed the narrative of the enraged Devī, this idea slowly recedes into the background in view of all the other signs of destruction in the mountains. One reason for his less supportive stance in this matter could be his traditionally established affiliation with the Congress Party. Since Ashok Singhal's speech had transformed the tale of Dhārī Devī's wrath into an open indictment of the Congress regime, this could

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332   The combination of these two words is a catchy and often used pun, since the Hindi terms for development—*vikās*—and destruction—*vināś*—exhibit phonetic similarity.
333   Alcohol consumption, honeymooning couples and meat consumption are the commonly cited reasons, see the purohit of Kedarnath in 5.2.4.

be another motive for favouring alternative readings of the catastrophe. His stance may nonetheless have been fed by the wider developments, as after the flood a conflict broke out between different religious camps about the future of the worship towards "Baba Kedār" (the presiding deity in Kedarnath) (Amar Ujālā 2013, July 1b). This may have led to his focus being more on the Kedar region.[334]

As the investigation showed, the discourse within the religious and religious-political spectrum evolved in a multifaceted way. There was a variety of perspectives on the disaster from faith-based actors, some of whom supported the Dhārī version, while others expressed their own more nuanced ideas. These individual opinions simultaneously appeared coupled with—and allowed insights into—the featured person's social standing and political agenda. The image painted by the news sources, however, was an affirmation of the most extreme voices of the right-wing ideologues. Although the engagement of these actors came first, it was then supported by the media which generalised, actively promoted and foregrounded their message. In this process of news preparation and dissemination, two of the principles of media transmission in particular came to the fore, firstly the requirement to produce a sensational, attention-grabbing story and secondly, as discussed at the beginning, a tendency to spread the message of the fundamentalist spectrum (Thomas 2008). The first point also follows the finding of Giri and Vats (2018) that the coverage of the disaster in Uttarakhand was characterised by a concentration on sensational maxima. Due to such mechanisms, Hindu nationalist conceptions dominated the discourse in the wake of the Uttarakhand catastrophe and managed to "control the social production of meaning" (Button 2002:146)—that is, the religious angle of it. What thus persists in the public mind is the narrative of the Goddess's wrath, the most extreme and spectacular interpretation, which was apparently pushed by the various media channels and favoured by Hindu right-wing forces.

334   The ramified political controversies following the flood became apparent at one point when the Shankaracharya was held directly responsible for the catastrophe. In July 2013, a delegation of the VHP, led by the district chairman Premballabh Naithany, filed a complaint against the spiritual leader at a police station in Srinagar. The reason given was that he caused the catastrophe by setting up a crystal *liṅga* in Kedarnath. They argued that the "*svayaṁbhū*" *liṅga* already existed in this place, while religious laws forbid the establishment of a second lingam. The Shankaracharya accordingly disrupted the cosmological order of the pilgrimage site, the *tīrtha*, and thereby triggered the catastrophe (Amar Ujālā 2013, July 30).

5.2.8   The Flood of 2013, Summary and Conclusion

The subchapters dealing with the 2013 flood disaster in Uttarakhand and the interpretation of the catastrophe revealed the multiple agendas as well as mechanisms behind this reading of the catastrophe. They exposed the dynamics that managed to turn the story about a goddess and her divine intervention into a nation-wide adopted flood myth. The multi-layered entanglements of interests comprised religiously tinged expectations of the public in conjunction with a sacred landscape, patterns of action that determine organisations, political power relations and not least general and temporary geophysical conditions. The media, however, were not only one of the main drivers in the production of the flood accounts, but also the central connector to the agenda of the other actors.

To conclude, another look at the agency of the Goddess. The role of the deity, as it is evident in the flood myth, appears more powerful than ever. Yet, despite her dominant position in the flood, the perceived extent of her agency is debatable and requires differentiated reflection. Already in the light of the flood 2012 (Chapter 4), the change of identity of the Goddess was pointed out with her relocation to the platform and her inclusion into the hydroscape. Both of these most recent flood events share some elements with the historical floods, for they all either swept her away or threatened to do so and then entailed a transformation of ideas about the Goddess. Judging from the circumstances how the statue was shifted in 2013 in order to save it from the flood, the deity emerges devoid of agency, or rather as in 2012, solely displayed a victimised agency in need of an urgent rescue operation (see Chapter 5.2.4; also 4.2.4). This event as reflected in her immediate surroundings, was flanked by according narratives of danger and salvation. Her rescue to the new concrete platform meant not only that she had transformed into a sacralised feature of the hydroscape, but also visibly, that her nature as Goddess of the river and of its floods no longer existed. Saved from the floods, her interaction with the river and also with the rock on which she had previously resided came to an end. As mentioned earlier, Strang and Krause argue that concepts of living water, when they fall under developmental projects, are appropriated by such enterprises and are inclined to forfeit their non-human agency (2013:101). Here it is evident that elements closely associated with the river, such as in this case a river goddess, suffer the same fate.

As for the identity of the Goddess—although so all-encompassingly represented as local, the deity apparently transcended her local identity throughout the discourse unfolding after the disaster. Representations of her agency in the flood made her to become part of a national flood memory. The picture of an avenging goddess turned into a means for the national public to deal with the catastrophe mentally and emotionally, but also to reaffirm and uphold the cherished image of Uttarakhand. Goddess Dhārī thus became instrumental in a national disaster

coping strategy. At the same time, she turned into a vehicle for Hindu national political efforts and the image promoted by these actors of the sacralized region, together with their ideological exploitation of this very image for their own political ends. Even if the reading of her identity as an avenging goddess was widely accepted among the inhabitants of the region, the cessation of her direct interaction with the environment and the flood during this period was also accompanied by the loss of her local character. Not only was she severed from a more sensory flood experience, but also from her earlier grown image that had been created at the local level. Incorporated into an artificially built land- and waterscape, the Goddess is saved from natures' whims. Elevated on the concrete platform, she is estranged from her natural surroundings, though it was precisely the exchange with the environment that was considered one of her key attributes and those of local deities in general (cf. Chapter 2). The connection between the Goddess and the flood, reproduced in the subsequent disaster reading, remained an impersonal, artificial and distant association. Such a conception failed to bridge the gap between her and her environment and rather served to confirm or reflect it. Her proximity to the forces of nature, revived in the narratives of divine retribution, resembles a local narrative, but is as distant and abstract as the spatial distance of the two places it encompasses (Kaliyasaur and Kedarnath). In earlier representations of the Goddess, she appeared as a companion of the floods, closely interwoven with these periodic events. Portrayals of this interplay always bore the typical, assigned characteristics of the deity and involved the society associated with her. The interpretation of her agency in 2013, however, unfolded largely detached from this context and exhibited an arbitrary nature that reflected how decoupled the story and its (co-)creators were from local conditions and identities. A direct example for this modification of the earlier qualities in the narratives about the deity is not only that the Goddess in former flood accounts did not appear as an avenging deity, but rather showed tender and caring traits towards her worshippers. Similarly, the implicit agency of the flood is presented as a given expression of the river and not as a retaliation against the human world or to revenge the violation of culturally defined moral standards. This is, of course, a complex issue and such representations may only be valid for this one location under study. As has been mentioned elsewhere, there are also accounts of floods as a cultural corrective in the mountain region (Chapter 3.3). Nevertheless, such transformed understanding of flood events may also be indicative of the general change in the perception of disasters, which some argue has led to a contemporary "inflated sense of disaster consciousness" (Furedi 2007:486).

Eventually, the relation of the Goddess to floods depicts the state of the human-environment relationship in this area. As the understanding of the Goddess as part of the river, of the elements and disasters has evolved into a deity who is now distanced and alienated from her natural surroundings, she again

became a symbol of the local people's experience, similar to the 2012 flood. This population is, for one, now deprived of its interaction with the river, after having become part of the hydroscape with the river's transformation into a lake, and for another, in the midst of such a large-scale disaster, people still find themselves threatened by a flood. This means that just as the local population remains cut off from their river in a hydroscape where external elements took over the management of their environment (Baghel & Nüsser 2010; Baghel 2014), so external forces even usurped the interpretation of the flood and recreated the relationship between flood and Goddess on their own terms. In this reinterpretation of her nature by external actors, she is supposed to be the cause of a flood elsewhere. At the same time, the orientation of the regional population also shifted to these external information factors instead of drawing from the unmediated experience of the river, which would have led to the creation of their own, more personalised narratives.

6 The Narrative of the Goddess
Disaster Research
and concluding Thoughts

A question that remains to be answered regarding this study of floods and concerning the narrative of Dhārī Devī and her alleged role in the Kedarnath disaster—what is the contribution of this present examination to the field of disaster research? The investigation has traced the trajectory of conceptions of the river and of flood events in a local place in the Himalayas. This was done with a focus on the location's central place of religious worship by exploring the nature of the site's transitions and the accompanying flood interpretations. As authors engaging with historical disaster research often stress the value of the historical angle in understanding how cultural norms influence the reading of "adversity and hazards" (Furedi 2007:486, e.g. Schenk 2017), this thesis by drawing a "genealogy of disaster" revealed the fluctuating perceptions of floods along the history of a temple. In this course, it illustrated how the meaning of flood events underwent several metamorphoses as part of a transforming relationship of a society and its deity to the river. This also facilitated the identification of a variety of local cultural characteristics, as understandings of the watercourse and its extreme events markedly reflected the state of the society being studied and its embeddedness into wider webs of meaning. The selected approach thereby showed how the ideas and narratives about the river and its most extreme manifestations elucidated social processes and cultural understandings of floods. Yet this methodology drew attention also to other, more general trends in societal evolution. Even the earliest histories of the deity's emergence reflected not only local idiosyncrasies, such as conflicts between the various groups in the village community, but also several other more overarching historical developments. These include the changing representation of female deities of tantric origin over the centuries (see e.g. Michaels 1996, Zeiler 2008), or equally shifting cultural practices in the mountain region in the context of Sanskritisation processes, such as the phasing out of animal sacrifices. Another major aspect was the gradually changing framings of "disaster" or "adversity" (cf. Walter 2010). Floods as a central indicator and the readings of the whims of the river helped to trace all these developments and key social moments. Alongside the gradual shifts, a pivotal turning point for the cultural representation of floods and the identity of the Goddess proved to

be the emergence of the hydroelectric project on river Alaknanda. Already at an early stage, it became apparent how the coming into existence of such a project not only revived old caste-based disruptions at the village level, but in its new flare-up transformed the ancient narratives into new and partly distorted variants. Even though this was already a predominant characteristic in the past, it was precisely from this point on that it became clearly noticeable how politicised and interest-driven the reading of flood events was. A comparable tendency of politicisation continued within the framework of institutionalised evaluation processes. Here an oscillation between questions of movement and stasis unfolded, while the identity of the Goddess and the understandings of the stream gradually widened their discursive range. First they became accessible to a broader public via local media dissemination, then they exerted their impact on legal procedures. In these epistemic reflections on the stream and its surroundings, the significance of the river tended to diminish, while the emphasis shifted towards other, less fluid and more stable material foundations, as well as to practice-based aspects with meaning for the place of worship. Broadly discussed was how, at a later stage, floods and the river's water, as well as understandings regarding sacredness fed into a discourse of Hindu identity. This crystallised the increased meaning of the Goddess and her relation to the watercourse for even broader political and ideological social dynamics. Parallel to that and under the impact of another flood event, the temple's relation to water and the developmental project exhibited all the features of a political environmental discourse, while exposing well-known problematic practices taking place under the paradigm of "development." From that moment on, floods shifted their meaning another time. As they were instrumentalised by hegemonic powers, they not only transitioned from the interpretative to the material level, but later also subverted precepts that came from a belief-based and herein cosmological context. What became clear is that only by breaking down these established and fluctuating relationships between human and non-human actors, could the narrative of "a wrathful deity bringing a flood upon the land" be understood as the last step or culmination point in a whole chain of social developments, causalities and contingencies and as a product of the conflicts of interest of the participating entities.

While this study thus provides a comprehensive picture of the changing patterns of disaster or interpretation of adversity in a given area, it predominantly reveals how and that, especially in the Western Himalayan context, religious readings of disasters, but especially of floods, continue to play an important role. This still applies, even if the aspect of transcendence at a certain stage in the pursuit of these water-based events disappeared from the scene and gave way to a more modern, technocratic and globally informed discourse influenced by issues of dominance and shaped by political-ecological concerns. Although it can be said that in the illuminated socio-cultural context faith-inspired ascriptions of meaning remain

an essential element in coping with a catastrophe,[335] it needs to be noted here that the religious dimension in it is very distinguished from other investigations into this facet. This refers to studies with a focus on more localised perspectives, as e.g. earlier mentioned works by Gergan (2017) and by S. Kumar et al. (2015, see table in Figure 4). The metaphysical angle that emerged in the case under investigation is no longer or only to a small extent locally generated, but proved to be a distorted recurrence, or almost a revenant of a locally produced narrative. The corresponding reading of the catastrophe by broader social strata was again a consequence of the fact that the identity of the temple had transgressed its local significance with the construction of the HEPP. What can be deduced from this is the following. While it was clearly dynamics associated with the implementation of a development project that led to the later religiously infused flood interpretations, the central factor behind conflicting ideas on how to deal with the watercourse and the ensuing disaster reading was the presence of the imagined sacred space surrounding the mountain region. Belief-based notions about the region not only had a determining effect on the environmental conflict before the disaster (as particularly in Chapter 3), but also on interpretation processes post-disaster. Initially the conception of the 2013 disaster formed an extension of the preceding debate, which unfolded around the Goddess's relocation and which was already imbued with ideas pointing to the sacred space imaginary. This imaginary constituted also the very reason why there was an interest and intervention of the respective actors in the pre- and post-disaster discourse. Beyond that, involved concepts of a homogenous, trans-regional as well as religiously tinged perception of the mountain space exerted their influence in several more ways on the general dynamics of the catastrophe. In the first place, ideas about the sacredness of the landscape already determined the region's vulnerability due to the massive presence of people on a spiritual journey and the unplanned development which had occurred for this end. Subsequently notions of a particular space affected the response to the disaster, as visible for example in the form of a concentration on the domestic tourists in relief operations (Gusain & Datt 2013), and finally they exerted their influence on a certain strand of the ensuing interpretation of the catastrophe.

As the region's distinct and unique meaning is clearly an endemic feature in its unique combination of supporting elements in the form of a mountainous landscape or geophysical conditions, scriptural framings and longstanding pilgrimage practices, it stands out from all other areas whose importance is, for instance, of a purely tourist nature. This applies even if spiritual and leisure tourism often

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335   On the other hand, it remains to be seriously considered that the flood events of the previous year were clearly seen in connection with the construction of the hydroelectric power plant and that blame was almost exclusively placed on the executing company and state authorities.

and in many ways intersect and cannot be clearly demarcated from one another (see Thomases 2019). Nonetheless, due to the strong identification of the public with the area, the collective cognitive and emotional processing of the catastrophe in 2013 also remained oriented towards- and took place in line with the existing image of the region. This understanding further implies that previous academic knowledge gained in connection with disasters in other, or in explicit tourist areas, has only limited validity here (see Rosselló et al. 2020; Cró & Martins 2017). The public's interest in a region is more flexible if it is a tourist destination and tourist flows can more easily switch to alternative places.[336] But for a destination with a long-established identity, as is the case with the *dev bhūmi*, this is rather unlikely. The India-wide attribution of meaning to the region proved so dominant that in the 2013 disaster, it helped to form a leading narrative that overrode all other possible, i.e. locally generated and more diverse, flood stories. The emergence of different narratives though would have revealed more about a local, spatially limited and individualised flood experience. The key finding of the analysis of the conception of divine retribution, therefore, was the great dominance and importance of a collectively "imagined space" in the assessment of a catastrophe. What this further suggests is that disaster research must inevitably recognise and take into account the specifics of causal attributions of meaning for a particular area or a region, as they exist in the area studied.

Since the 2013 tale of divine retaliation for the unsuspecting observer could easily have been mistaken as an authentic and regionally generated narrative, this leads to the broader question: How then to deal adequately with an academic interest in local disaster perception in the Indian Western Himalayas? The investigative process conducted here highlighted why the metaphysical reading of the catastrophic event in 2013, with its particular mechanisms and the role of the actors involved, actually exhibits very few characteristics that can be classified as distinctly local. This is still broadly valid, despite the fact that the analysis simultaneously brought to light some responses to the disaster that seemed to reflect more direct dynamics of the mountain society under consideration. Research today, first of all, must continually challenge the question of the extent to which it is still possible to identify distinct characteristics of local cultures in an ever more globalised world and with societies that are increasingly connected via digital communication facilities. In this sense, the overall post-disaster discourse revealed a "local culture" in that it paints a picture of a rapidly and progressively changing rural society. What has been evidenced is that in places as these, too, the local population participates in contemporary information flows and is just as much a part of mass media discourses

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336   For comparison, take mountain regions like Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir. These not only have a very different identity construction, but also exert a much more secular tourist draw.

and other digital networking and communication practices as large sections of the Indian population are today. Against this backdrop, the narrative of Dhārī Devī's wrath shows a local dimension in the form that media induced exchange processes do not exempt this region, or seemingly remote places in the Himalayas. Research that seeks to identify a more spatially limited view on a catastrophe is evidently required to be aware of the pitfalls of a narrative as exposed in this case. With regard to future research in pursuance of an understanding for local readings of disaster, I am still convinced that a thorough investigation in parts of Uttarakhand with direct interaction and through interviews with the local population and especially in rural places rather off the pilgrimage tracks, would paint a different or more diverse picture of a disaster response, evaluation- and interpretation. A study of this kind, however, will have to limit the scope of contributing factors or participating actors. For one, it should be conducted in a locality that is less subject to a transnational sphere of imaginary, in other words, less influenced by the presence or flow of a national religious tourism. For another, such a location should also not be marked by dominant developmental-based predecessor conflicts, or more generally by any kind of large-scale technological undertaking. Such an investigation would be additionally recommended in the event of a smaller disaster, which does not generate such overwhelming coverage in the national media and an accompanying high level of national public attention.

6.1 Epilogue

This point now turns to some more general considerations about the identity of floods. Among a paradigm of control of the natural environment as implied by the various developmental projects in the mountain region, the 2013 flood, at least for a short moment in time and as disasters do quite generally, shattered prevailing concepts that indicate the controllability of hazard risks (see Williams 2008). This constituted a dramatic antithesis to the framing of the flood events in 2012, where it seemed that the strict regulation of the waterscape around Srinagar had subjugated, the river anyway, but also floods to serve human, or in this case rather corporate purposes. As opposed to this, time and again it became evident that the river together with its floods had retained its agency, albeit under different conditions. Baghel (2014) elaborated on how a river still adheres to its own nature and maintains its capacity to effect, even in the face of various engineered controlling projects.

> Contrary to governmental perceptions or the ultimate engineering objective of a completely controlled river, the river itself has agency, and the new river control structures simply alter the

> expression of this agency, without removing it. So, in case of flood control embankments, the river is not a passive recipient of engineering interventions, and in the newly created hydroscapes, it behaves differently from earlier slow onset of floods to the new form of breach flooding. The new form of flooding due to erosion of the embankments is not a product of engineers or of local people or relations of knowledge and instead can only represent the agency of the river in creating a new form of expression for itself. (Baghel 2014:18)

This observation assumes importance with regard to contemporary disaster thought and at the same time highlights the shortcomings of the paradigm underlying it. Evidently, in vulnerability approaches and mitigation discourses, a "misplaced faith" comes to the fore, to the point of a "presumed infallibility" in the capabilities of organisations. These in turn tend to present risks among the evolution of disaster knowledge "as more manageable and acceptable" (Williams 2008:1117). Research on disasters and institutions involved in disaster management are constantly accumulating new knowledge to improve strategies for dealing with such events, both in theory and in practice. Yet these bodies are confronted with a large proportion of, or even increasing, uncertainty and constant setbacks (Williams 2008:1120). Mega-disasters are immensely complex phenomena and their interplay of various factors is accompanied by a high degree of ambiguity, that Williams refers to as "not knowing" (2008:1129) or "non-knowledge" (2008:1130). More precisely this indicates "the limits to modern knowledge" (2008:1130) about disasters. While this unknowingness in connection with catastrophes is a factor to be acknowledged on the one hand, this very understanding comes in tandem with a call for a „a lessening of scientific arrogance and technological hubris" (Williams 2008:1130). Indeed, the sheer scale of the Uttarakhand disaster, consisting of unique, unprecedented and unpredictable meteorological triggers and correspondingly largely unimaginable dramatic physical impacts, would have been difficult to envisage in foresight. Now, the story of divine intervention, apart from its agenda-driven propagation, could also be seen as a sign or recognition of the inconceivability and "unknowingness" and the persistently limited scope of control in the face of a catastrophe. In this sense, the divine may serve to fill the gaps that delimit the boundaries of human knowledge.[337]

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337   This is noteworthy in view of the fact that modern accounts dealing with the "wrath of nature" are also regarded as an advancement or a modern version of the theory of divine retribution, and that moreover a renaissance of this theological pattern of interpretation is attested (cf. Walter 2010). The metaphysical, in a way, steps into the gap or the empty space created by these not yet (or never) understood dynamics.

There was still a subsequent and problematic development in relation to this broader understanding, which attributes disasters to a large extent to factors that are not yet fully understood or may be beyond human comprehension, and this is worth mentioning here. The idea of the flood as an expression of divine agency took another curious twist in the aftermath of the 2013 flood event in Srinagar. Here it was the dam building company that took recourse to this form of reasoning in a later court case regarding compensation for the damage caused by the flood wave that hit the lower reaches of the city (see also Chapter 5.1.2). In yet another act of instrumentalising floods, the Alaknanda Hydro Power Co Ltd denied any responsibility for the destruction that took place after the gates of the dam had been opened, claiming that the inundation was caused by divine forces. The corporation openly argued that the flood was beyond their accountability since it was a "divine" flood.[338] This form of declaration actually corresponds to a kind of observed standard mechanism of government agencies and involved companies. By seeking to naturalise a disaster, or similarly as in the present case, to attribute it to divine bodies, the attempt is made to evade liability for damages incurred. Looking at technological disasters, Button elucidates this strategy employed by government and corporate entities, "the response to disaster is depicted as a valiant and often vain struggle with Mother Nature, a scenario that places much responsibility outside of human control" (2002:154). In addition to formulating the disaster in this way, spokespersons for the company also touted the dam as a safety feature that had protected the rest of the city from flooding. Nevertheless, the court rejected this kind of justification and ordered AHPCL to pay a large amount of compensation to the citizens of Srinagar, citing "the improper waste disposal of the project" (Tripathi 2016) as the main cause of the damage inflicted on the town.

As a final note—the temporal ascension of Goddess Dhārī to a deity of national importance and a symbol of the 2013 "Himalayan tsunami" was then followed by a shrinking back of her inflated significance into her more locally known form. The long-term effects for Goddess and temple, however, can be considered quite favourable. Her status as a symbol of the 2013 flood had increased her fame and assumed "potency," which eventually translated into higher visitor numbers to the Dhārī Devī Temple. Moreover, with the ebbing of the flood discourse, and equally with the waning of media and national public attention to the temple site, it seems that over time also this "alien" or "external" and imposed upon flood narrative was re-appropriated to the local level. The understanding of the impact of Dhārī's

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338   In this context, the company just spoke of the general divine and not Dhārī's rage, since this would have allowed conclusions to the company's own action—i.e. the Goddess being enraged about her relocation. Yet even if they did not include the Goddess into their flood narrative, perhaps only speculations about her agency contributed to the general idea that the divine had its share in the flood in one form or another.

Figure 18. The new Dhārī Devī Temple (Khandige 2021).

rage in Kedarnath thereby became a commonly shared story to and among the temple visitors. It clearly remains a living temple, now enriched by yet another flood narrative. And even though it bears this unusual and perhaps aesthetically questionable form, being built on a concrete platform (Figure 18), it still attracts the local audiences for its rhythm-bound and traditional ritual performances.

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The trajectory of the Dhārī Devī Temple epitomises the idea of catastrophes as watersheds. In particular, flood disasters have accompanied transformation processes of the site located on Alaknanda River in the Indian Himalayas. As early as 1894, a flash flood had a significant impact on the site and the identity of the deity. Local flood legends gained new topicality with the planning of a hydroelectric power plant in the vicinity. They became part of debates surrounding the construction scheme that required the relocation of the sacred site. This case study explores flood discourses and illuminates their influence on a development project. It further demonstrates how previous controversies framed the public interpretation of two flood disasters in 2012 and specifically of the "Himalayan Tsunami" in 2013.