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

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).

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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

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)

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

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;

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).

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 माल 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

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 लगें, 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)

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 Mā̃ [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 Mā̃, and the worshippers were very sad without the sight of the divine idol and to retrieve Mā̃'s physical embodiment, they desperately launched a search operation. Then the Mā̃, after seeing the condition of her devotees, appeared in a night dream of one of her worshippers. The next day, this devotee rediscovered the Mā̃ 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 Mā̃ 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 September 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

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

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। (Ratūṛī 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

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)

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]

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

(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

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

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).

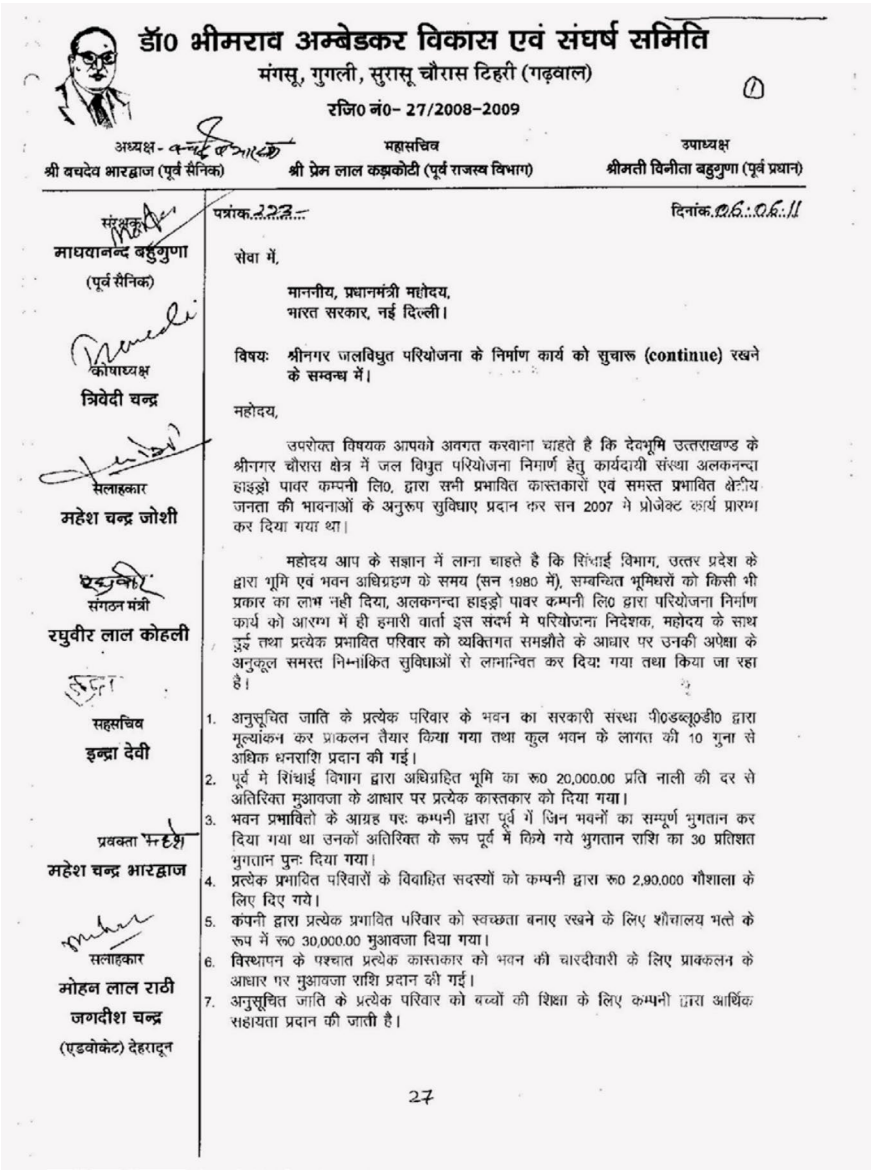
to both flooding and erosion. The location of the agricultural land of the *dhunār* and their houses in the lower zone was thus originally considered rather disadvantageous because of the proximity to the river and the greater vulnerability associated with it. However, it was precisely this position 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.

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).



डॉ0 भीमराव अम्बेडकर विकास एवं संघर्ष समिति
मंगसू, गुगली, सुरासू चौरास टिहरी (गढ़वाल)
रजि0 नं0- 27/2008-2009

अध्यक्ष - श्री बचदेव भारद्वाज (पूर्व सैनिक)
महासचिव श्री प्रेम लाल कश्मकोटी (पूर्व राजस्व विभाग)
उपाध्यक्ष 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 223 — दिनांक 06.06.11

सेवा में,

माननीय, प्रधानमंत्री महोदय,
भारत सरकार, नई दिल्ली।

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

महोदय,

उपरोक्त विषयक आपको अवगत करवाना चाहते है कि देवभूमि उत्तराखण्ड के श्रीनगर चौरास क्षेत्र में जल विधुत परियोजना निमार्ण हेतु कार्यदायी संस्था अलकनन्दा हाइड्रो पावर कम्पनी लि0, द्वारा सभी प्रभावित कास्तकारों एवं समस्त प्रभावित क्षेत्रीय जनता की भावनाओं के अनुरूप सुविधाए प्रदान कर सन 2007 मे 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 भूमिधरों को किसी भी प्रकार का लाभ नही दिया, अलकनन्दा हाइड्रो पावर कम्पनी लि0 द्वारा परियोजना निर्माण कार्य को आरम्भ में ही हमारी वार्ता इस संदर्भ मे 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 पी0डब्लू0डी0 द्वारा मूल्यांकन कर प्राकलन तैयार किया गया तथा कुल भवन के लागत की 10 गुना से अधिक धनराशि प्रदान की गई।
2. पूर्व मे 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 प्रभावितो के आग्रह परः कम्पनी द्वारा पूर्व में जिन भवनों का सम्पूर्ण भुगतान कर दिया गया था उनकों 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 बनाए 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 प्राक्कलन 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।

27

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

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 Mā̃ 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 Mā̃ 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

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).

(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,

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

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

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

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.

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]

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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 कैंधे 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 कैंधा ज्यादा से निकल आए। इस तरह एक से दो किलो तक का कैंदा 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 हकूक 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

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 ritual.[107] The *pūjārī* pamphlet mentions instances of looting—which in this case signified 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-accusations 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 temple 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 जिक्र 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]

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 जर्नादन 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

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 Jitulal 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

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 कलियासौड 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 Devī 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 झूला/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

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

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

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 (पुत्री) जहां भी रहेगी, यदि मुझे याद करेगी तो वहां जाकर उसकी रक्षा तक करूंगी। कुंजू 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.

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

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 *pūjārīs* disseminated 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.

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 historically 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 rescuing 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 prevented 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

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:

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 committee 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 relocation. 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 connection 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

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, certain 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 'foundation 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 critique 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).

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."