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

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

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

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

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

Published in: Niebuhr, Frances Anke. Dhāri Devī, Goddess of the Floods.
Heidelberg: Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing, 2023.
DOI: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4037-427X

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

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

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

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

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

208 See Werner (2015) for a comprehensive overview of social and political processes in India going along with the development of hydropower and dam projects.

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

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

209 Of these projects, the majority, 133, were aimed at the five Indian Himalayan states, of which 33 were planned for the mountainous zone of Uttarakhand (Schneider 2014).

210 This strategy was reaffirmed in 2009 with the drafting of "vision 2020" (Mazoomdaar 2016).

211 The literature on dams and mega-dam projects in general and also for India is almost limitless. Here is a collection of some interesting and partly standard works focusing on India, some of them explicitly dealing with Uttarakhand: Amte (1990); Bahuguna (1997 a/b); Baghel (2014); Baviskar (1995); Drew (2007, 2011, 2014, 2017); Dwivedi (2006); Gadgil & Guha (1995); James (2004); Kothari (1996); Mawdsley (2006); Nüsser (2003, 2014), Nüsser & Baghel (2017); Pfaff-Czarnecka (2007); Routledge (2003); R. Rawat (2004); Roy (1999); Swain (1997); Werner (2015); M. Sharma (2012, 2009, 2002); Williams & Mawdsley (2006).

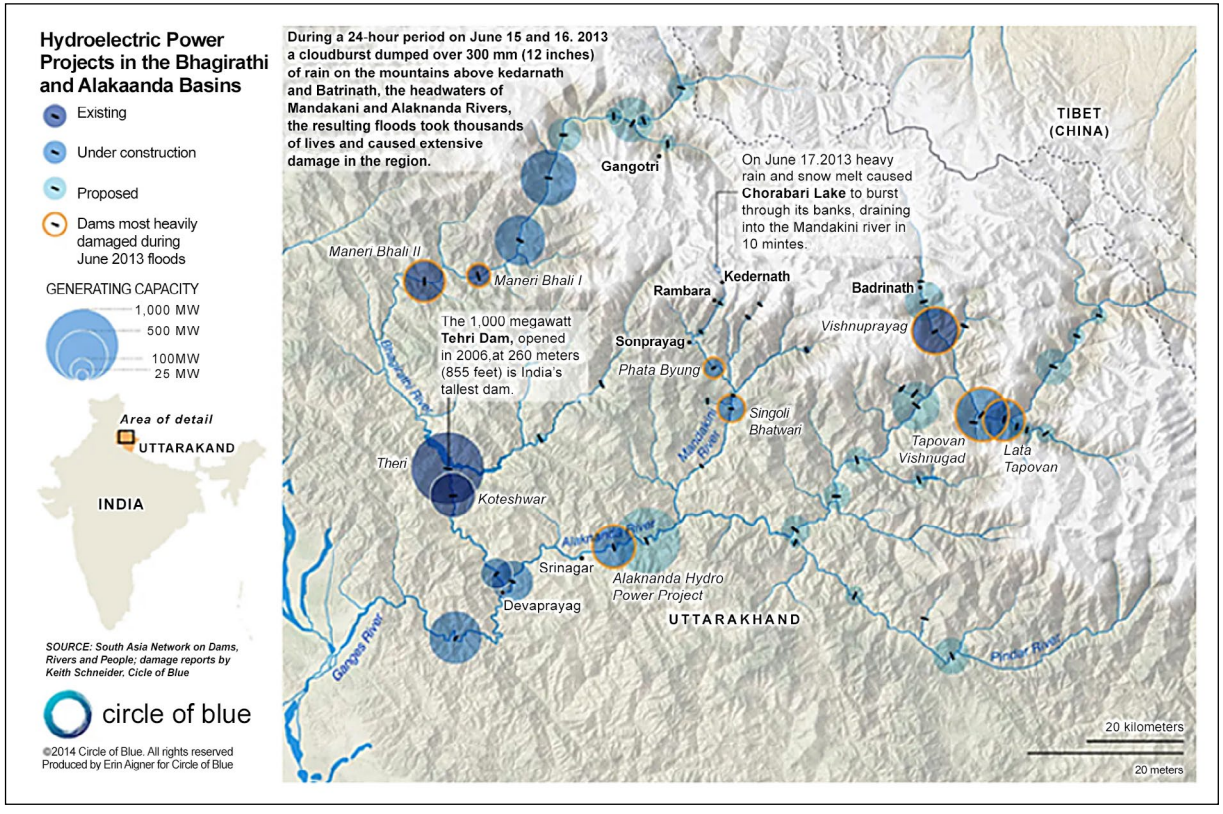

Figure 9. Existing, under construction and planned Hydroelectric Power Projects in Garhwal (Source: Schneider 2014).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

214 Esteva 1992, as cited in Deb 2010:130.

215 "Social and economic inequities are an integral feature in the development of a politicized environment whether in Brazil of elsewhere in the third world" (Bryant 1998:85).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2 The Fabricated Floods

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2.1 The Flood Waves—and suddenly there is a Lake

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

229 F.I.R. First Information Report

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2.3 Gates wide shut— The Arbitrariness of the Company

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

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

234 "लेकिन प्रबंधन की हेकड़ी ऐसी कि प्रशासन उसके आगे बौना नजर आने लगा" (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 11). "However, such is the arrogance of the management that in front of it, the administration started to look like a midget."

235 "बीना चौधरी ने कहा कि पालिका जीवीके की मदद से सर्वश्रेष्ठ सभासदों का चुनाव कर उन्हें सोने के सिक्के बांट रही है।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, Nov. 26). "Beena Chaudhary said that the municipality, after choosing the most opportune members of the assembly with the help of the GVK, thereupon distributes gold coins to them."

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

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

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

> श्रीनगर। अलकनंदा पर निर्माणाधीन 330 मेगावाट जल विद्युत परियोजना के बैराज क्षेत्र में झील बनने से हजारों लोग दहशत में हैं, लेकिन अलकनंदा हाइड्रोपावर कंपनी मनमानी पर उतारू है। प्रशासन के लाख प्रयासों के बावजूद कंपनी ने बांध के सिर्फ दो गेट ही खोले हैं। जबकि डीएम सभी पांच गेटों को खोलने के आदेश दे चुके हैं। हैरानी की बात यह है कि जलभराव होने के बाद कंपनी के प्रशासनिक अधिकारी यहां से गायब हो गए हैं। (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 2)
>
> Thousands of people are in panic over the formation of a lake in the barrage area of the 330 MW hydroelectric project under construction at Alaknanda, but the Alaknanda Hydropower Company is banking on its arbitrariness. Despite millions of attempts by the community, the company opened only two gates, while the DM [district magistrate] already gave orders to open all five gates. What is astonishing is the fact that after the waterlogging, the company's administrative officials disappeared from here.

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

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

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

> आखिर काम पर रोक के बीच ही जुलाई मध्य तक कंपनी को सारे गेट बंद करने की जरुरत क्यों महसूस हुई? कंपनी सरकार को अपनी ताकत दिखाना चाहती थी या उफनती नदी से जोर अजमाइश करना छाती थी या धरा पांच के नाम का सहारा लेकर रुके हुए काम को शुरू करने के लिए सरकार पर दबाव डालना चाहती थी। (Maikhuri 2012:16)
>
> After all, why did the company feel the need to close all the gates until mid-July amidst the work ban? Did the company want to demonstrate its strength towards the government or to test the force of the ravaging river, or did it want to pressure the government to start the work, which was stopped in the name of paragraph five?

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

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

239 "वहीं धारी देवी मंदिर और राजमार्ग फिर जलमग्न होने के बाद भी कंपनी बार-बार हाइड्रोलिक सिस्टम न होने का बहाना बनाकर गेट खोलने में कोताही बरत रही है।" (Amar Ujālā 2012, Aug. 20). "Likewise, when the Dhārī Devī Temple and the highway were submerged, the company has repeatedly made the excuse of the non-existent hydraulic system and displayed negligence in the opening of the gates."

240 The participants were S. P. Kakran, Chairman, Central Water Commission, Ministry of Water Resources; A. S. Bakshi, Chairperson Central Electricity Authority (Kakran & Bakshi 2012). Additional members of the team: Alok Gupta, member of the Central

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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