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P. Mahesh
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The Hindu
Rajasthan Patrika (Hindi)
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Once upon a river

Ganga and Yamuna are legal persons now. What does this mean for these cesspools of pollutants, still revered by people, but which have lost any connect to their lived experiences?



KAUSHIK DAS GUPTA

IN THE THIRD week of March, while welcoming the rivers Ganga and Yamuna as legal persons, Justice Rajiv Sharma and Justice Alok Singh of the Uttarakhand High Court observed that they were inspired by lawmakers in New Zealand. Barely a week earlier, the New Zealand Parliament had conferred legal personhood to the country's third longest river, the Whanganui, bringing to an end a more than 140-year old dispute.

In 1840, when the Maori tribes ceded sovereignty to the British colonists, the Treaty of Waitangi promised protection of their natural resources including the Whanganui. But the treaty was observed only in the breach, leading the communities, who profess a deep spiritual connection to the Whanganui, to take the issue of ownership of the river to the courts in the early 1870s. As the protracted dispute drew to a close, Maoris at the gallery in New Zealand's Parliament broke into a song of celebration. Some wept tears of joy.

In India, in contrast, where the Ganga is known to have more than 100 names (some say even 1,000), there was scarcely any rejoicing after the Uttarakhand High Court verdict. Even environmentalists were guarded in their response; some were sceptical. A month later, the Madhya Pradesh government's decision to treat the Narmada as a person passed by virtually unnoticed — except for a few media reports.

Granting legal rights to the Whanganui took eight years of careful negotiation and intense public debate that was not without its moments of fun — New Zealanders joked if the river might now buy a few "hoppy" beers, vote or be penalised for murder if a swimmer drowns. The Uttarakhand verdict, in contrast, was a matter of few days of stolid courtroom deliberation.

Rivers, it seems, have gone out of the lives of large numbers of people in India, in cities surely. They do become part of public discourse, but only as items of disputes between riparian states, or as beneficiaries — or victims — of large projects or when they go into spate and cause havoc, sometimes even when

they run dry. But the river as a part of people's day-to-day experiences is rarely a matter of public conversation.

In an article in the environment fortnightly, *Down To Earth*, the Marathi writer Karuna Futane recalls, "The river was a mother and a bosom pal to women, children, farmers, cattle, birds, insects, animals. A visit to the river meant cleansing and freshening up, inner and outer. You went back from the river rested and healed". But it's unlikely that rivers today will evoke the excitement experienced by the historian Tapan Raychaudhuri, as a child growing up in Barisal in what is now Bangladesh, in the 1930s. In his memoir, *The World in Our Time*, Raychaudhuri recalls, "The river flowing by our bungalow was a source of endless thrills. There was the fear of drowning. And what were those dark things floating too close to one for comfort? Crocodiles or pieces of dry wood? Then there were Kanagats, small river sharks."

The Hindi writer Phanishwar Nath Renu's account of the Patna floods of 1975, in *Rindjal Dhanjal*, has forebodings of the disconnect between urban life and the ways of the river. Amazed at the hordes rushing to watch the rushing waters, one villager remarks, "When Danapur was getting submerged the Pataniya babulog did not even bother to look back. It's your turn now". Futane's lament — in a different context — is more vivid. "When I told my sons I was going to write about my relationship with the rivers, they were surprised. What is there to write? And what rivers? They are just dirty nullahs. The truth of this strikes me when I look at the rivers now. Sewage and plastic bags," she writes.

The Ganga is one such sorry receptacle of garbage. Over the three decades, much money has gone into cleaning this cesspool: More than Rs 1,800 crore under the Ganga Action Plan in its various avatars. The current government intends to spend more than 10 times this amount: Rs 20,000 crore over five years on the Namami Gange Project. But the project that took off last year is an improvement on its predecessor in very few respects. There are programmes to develop interceptor drains, plant trees and improve the composition of river species. There are also plans to develop Ganga Grams — villages where people will be educated in reducing pollution. Other than that, the project is a replica of the Ganga Action Plan in its emphasis on sewage treatment plants.

Such plants can only do so much because a large section of the country's urban pollution lives outside the reach of sewer-

age networks. Under the Ganga Action Plan, for instance, the lag between the sewage generation and treatment never went below 50 per cent.

Water cleaned by the treatment plants also needs a final cleansing at the river. Where is the water for that? With more than 40 dams, barrages and weirs — and many more planned — the Ganga is drained of her lifeblood. Many of the 21 tributaries and distributaries of the Ganga are little more than seasonal streams — so are many other rivers in the country.

This state-of-affairs goes against a fundamental axiom of hydrology: A river has to keep flowing. The Ganga was once known to jump over mountains, a characteristic that gave her the name Lila Lamghita Parvata. As the Ramganga in parts of Uttar Pradesh, it changed course frequently, drawing flak in the folk song, "Tu kyun kunwari rah gayee ri Ramganga".

Legalese can only afford a stunted — and drab — expression to such characteristics. The Uttarakhand High Court observes, "The Rivers Ganga and Yamuna, all their tributaries, streams, every natural water flowing with flow continuously or intermittently of these rivers, are declared as juristic/legal persons/living entities having the status of a legal person with all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a living person in order to preserve and conserve river Ganga and Yamuna." Its inspiration, the New Zealand Parliament, asked two members of the Maori community to represent the Whanganui. In India, where the river is venerated and abused at the same time, the Uttarakhand court took an easy way out of the paradox. It named the director of the Namami Gange project, Uttarakhand's chief secretary, and the state's advocate general, as the Ganga's "legal parents".

Divested of her adulthood, the ancient river should expect more of the same after the verdict.

Meanwhile, in Kerala's Alappuzha district, a village panchayat has revived the Kuttemperoor, a channel of the Pamba and Achankovil rivers. The river, which was thick with weeds and had become a cesspool of pollutants in the past 10 years, was revived after 70 days of work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

Will the feat of 700-odd people in Alappuzha, mostly women, change the discourse on rivers in the country?

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Monsoon may hit Andaman early

No bearing on arrival in Kerala: IMD

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

Monsoon rains may come two days earlier to the Andaman & Nicobar islands, but this will have no bearing on how soon it reaches Kerala, according to K.J. Ramesh, Director-General, Meteorology, India Meteorological Department.

"Typically, the monsoon system reaches south Andaman around the 17th. There's a circulation [clouds and rain-bearing winds] developing in the Andaman. If it persists, then there's a chance it will reach there early," he told *The Hindu* over the phone, "From there, it normally takes two weeks [to reach Kerala]."

El Nino threat

Monsoon typically sets in over Kerala by June 1, but there have been instances of powerful winds gusting into the Andamans and then stalling. In 2015, for instance, the monsoon arrived five days later than the IMD's estimate of May 30.

Earlier this week, as *The Hindu* reported, the agency had indicated that the threat to the Indian monsoon from an El Nino may have re-



Monsoon typically reaches Kerala by June 1. •

ceded.

However, it is not yet clear if this would result in improved rainfall. The odds of the meteorological anomaly, known to dry up the monsoon, have dipped and so called "neutral conditions" are likely to prevail, according to D.S. Pai, Chief Forecaster, IMD Pune.

Another sea anomaly, the Indian Ocean Dipole (that refers to oscillating temperatures in that ocean), was likely to be positive. "It is already becoming positive," Mr. Pai said.

A positive dipole buffered against an El Nino's effects, but didn't on its own improve chances of rains. Mr. Ramesh said the latest assessment was in line with international models.

May - 12.5.2017

M.P. Chronicle

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SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE

Much of the work has been done by the Jankidevi Bajaj Gram Vikas Sanstha (JBGVS), the social arm of Bajaj Auto Ltd, which began working in over 50 Aurangabad villages in 2016.

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Marathwada is still recovering from drought. • FILE PHOTO

According to JBGVS officials, the work involved widening and deepening streams and nullahs over 55 km at sites upstream of the

existing cement nullah bunds (CNB) in Paithan, Vijapur, Gangapur and Fulambri taluks. Five percolation tanks were also de-silted over the past year. The efforts have

created 25,000 TCM of surface water storage capacity.

"The watershed work has recharged the aquifers. In the one-km periphery of the deepened streams, wells and borewells that had earlier dried up are now rejuvenated with water levels increasing by three to seven metres," Randhir Patil, project manager, JBGVS, said.

He added that the drinking water problem has been resolved without involving tankers in these 30 villages.

He said in many cases, multiple crops were being sown due to the availability of water.

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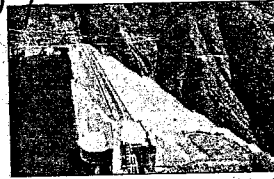
टिहरी डैम में पानी का लेवल बढ़ाने पर विवाद शुरू

नव - 12-5-17

Suresh.Upadhyay

@timesgroup.com

■ नई दिल्ली : टिहरी डैम पर एक बार फिर विवाद शुरू हो गया है। सरकार इसको 825 मीटर की ऊंचाई तक भरना चाहती है, जबकि स्थानीय लोग और पर्यावरणविद् इसे घातक फैसला करार दे रहे हैं। उनका कहना है कि डैम में पानी का लेवल बढ़ने से लोगों की दिक्कतें और बढ़ जाएंगी। उन्हें बांध के कारण विस्थापित हुए सभी लोगों का पुनर्वास न होने पर भी नाराजगी है। दरअसल, टिहरी बांध शुरू से ही विवादों में घिरा रहा है। टिहरी हाइड्रो डिवेलपमेंट कॉरपोरेशन (टीएचडीसी) बांध में 840 मीटर की ऊंचाई तक पानी भरना चाहता है, मगर



सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने इसकी इजाजत देने से मना कर दिया है। कोर्ट ने टीएचडीसी को फिलहाल 825 मीटर तक ही पानी भरने की इजाजत दी है।

बरसात में लेवल बढ़ाना चाहता

है THDC : पर्यावरणविद् और माटू जनसंगठन के विमल भाई का कहना है कि टिहरी बांध को बने हुए कई साल हो गए हैं और अभी तक सभी लोगों के पुनर्वास का काम पूरा नहीं हुआ है। उनके मुताबिक, बांध के कारण आसपास के इलाकों में भूस्खलन हो रहा है, जिसके कारण 40 गांवों के धंसने का खतरा पैदा हो गया है। वह बताते हैं कि इन गांवों के तमाम मकानों में दरारें आ गई हैं और कोई सुनने वाला नहीं है। टिहरी डैम में अभी गर्मी के कारण पानी का लेवल कम है। विमल भाई के मुताबिक, इस बांध के कारण अभी तक करीब 30 मारे जा चुके हैं और लगभग 100 मवेशी इसमें डूब चुके हैं।