

Circular 1

International Seminar on

Water Himalaya: Past, present, and future

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Is local knowledge system capable of addressing the ever-growing demand of water and its scarce supply?

Water is a pre-requisite for human settlement and there cannot be two opinions that in antiquity wherever people settled, even if they did not practice irrigation, adequate attention was paid to watering places. Both ethnographic and archaeological evidences suggest that in primitive society people settled near natural watering places and later on, with the development of hydraulic technology, man-made watering places were developed. It is well known that the primary states of the world have flourished in the valleys of rivers like the Nile, the Tigris, the Euphrates, the Indus, and the Huang. Obviously, their authors had developed considerable skill to meet the threats of ravaging floods on the one hand, and adequate water supply for consumption and irrigation on the other. Undoubtedly, water governance was one of the key factors to their success.

Rapid growth in human population and 'developmental' activities aimed at providing physical comforts to humankind are incompatible with issues concerning preservation of natural resources. Depletion of vast stretch of forest cover to reclaim land for human settlement, for agriculture and industries, and for providing grazing grounds to animals, has taken heavy toll of water resources resulting in spread of desert area, and drying up of rivers, streams, springs, etc. Ground water level has also gone down considerably due to pumping water from the tube-wells. Water, especially its continued availability has already become a major global issue. Therefore, environmentalists and social and earth scientists coupled with several international organizations have highlighted water management as the burning problem confronting the rulers and the ruled all over the world today.

The mountain systems of the world afford the most variegated landscape, and so are their water resources from where originate most of the rivers of the world. The Himalaya, variously referred to as the Third Pole and Water Tower, is the source of several perennial rivers and one of the richest sources of fresh water. Himalayan rivers have given birth to different cultures and civilizations in northern South Asia in antiquity, and they are still the principal source of sustainable livelihood to teeming millions. However, the vast stretch of the Himalaya-Karakorum-Hindukush massif also has semi-arid pockets where scarcity of water is severely felt. Moreover, recent global warming and environmental pollution have alarmingly affected the mass of Himalayan glaciers leading to further scarcity in water supply. In response to the adverse effects of water scarcity, the inhabitants of Himalaya have developed interesting methods of preserving watering places, their maintenance, and equitable sharing of water. Significantly, in some pockets of North-West South Asia artificial glaciers have also been devised. Thus local knowledge system of human adaptation to water scarcity adds considerably to our knowledge of water management.

On the occasion of the first decade of its establishment, the Doon Library and Research Centre, Dehradun, is holding a three day International seminar on 'Water Himalaya: Past, present, and future' sometime in October 2017. Final dates and venue will be announced in our 2nd circular. For a meaningful deliberation, the seminar will focus on the following three themes.

A. Water in past

B. Water today

C. Water in future with a special session on the Ganga

Theme A. Water in past: Literary, archaeological, and ethnographic accounts unfold that from time immemorial the inhabitants of Himalaya have negotiated water-related issues with great ingenuity. Temporary river-captures in the Himalaya occur frequently due to landslides and are broken by the very volume and force of the river itself within a short span of time. However, massive captures require human efforts to break, and such events find echo in the very earliest literary work of South Asia, namely, the *Rigveda*, in which Indra is praised for slaying Vritra (the water demons) to release waters or rivers. River-capture of a massive magnitude seems to have occurred in the remote past which event was later on couched in the mythology of the Ganga's descent. In Hindu iconography, sculptural rendering of this myth is known as Śiva's *Gaṅgādhara-mūrti*. The earth scientists also do not discount such a possibility in the remote past which may have inspired the myth of the Ganga's descent. How such feats were accomplished in the absence of mechanical devices like modern earthmovers can be appraised from what we read in the *Rajatarangini* about Suyya, 'the Lord of Food (*annapati*)' under King Avantivarman (855/56–883 CE) of Kashmir. Suyya's negotiation with the Vitasta (modern Ravi) has been corroborated by archaeology. Archaeology also brings to light various types of water structures in the Himalaya which have proved the durability of their architecture by surviving recurring earthquakes for centuries. Ethnographic evidence shows that in the areas of water scarcity, the stakeholder communities devised adequate means of water harvesting, and its preservation, sanitation and equitable distribution by invoking religious ideology. Water held very special sanctity in traditional Himalayan society, and curious rites and ceremonies were devised to please rain-deities for protection against thunderstorm, excessive or torrential rains as well as for rainmaking during drought. Inscriptional evidence clearly shows that despite the state holding ultimate ownership of water resources, motivated by earning religious merit, individuals played leading role in the construction of watering places.

Thus, theme 'A' purports to attract scholars engaged in historical reconstruction of past practices in water management and their relevance today.

Theme B: Water today: Three largest river systems of South Asia, namely, the Indus, the Ganges, and the Brahmaputra – arise from the Himalaya. Their basins cover territories of more than one or two nation-states. These perennial rivers are the lifelines of the regions through which they flow. Population-wise India and China are the two largest countries collectively sharing 36.4% population of the world. In recent years due to significant industrial and agricultural growth in these two countries need of water has reached alarmingly high. The gravity of situation has been further aggravated by ever increasing pollution of water from sewage, industrial waste, agrochemicals, pesticides, etc., 'driving people to a hydrocide situation where the available water becomes unfit for any use'; even 'The sacred Ganges, where millions come to purify themselves, is an open sewer', not to mention the Bagmati, particularly at the famous shrine of Pashupatinath, Kathmandu.

China is damming the Brahmaputra, which will impact already fragile hydraulic, economic, and ecological balance of North-East India and Bangladesh. Sharing the waters of international rivers among concerned nation states would be a very challenging and complex issue, and therefore needs adequate multi-track international water diplomacy. Obviously, geopolitically, South Asia is a sensitive region from the viewpoint of water sharing. This area has witnessed protracted negotiations concerning water sharing between the nation-states (e.g., India and Pakistan for sharing the Indus system; India and Nepal for the Mahakali, and India and Bangladesh for sharing the Ganga); between state and state within a nation-state (e.g., Punjab and Haryana for the Satlej-Yamuna link canal); and between the state and people concerning water management, particularly, construction of big dams causing displacement of people, or else

environmental hazards (notably, the Tehri Dam, India, and the Mangla and the Tarbela dams in Pakistan).

When nature's bounty turns into a commodity it is controlled by traders. Water is a commodity now and the concept of earning religious merit through construction of charitable waterworks has become obsolete. One can see packaged water being sold in the hotels and restaurants situated right in the very sources of the Ganga and the Yamuna. The paradox is that the 'pilgrims' staying in the guesthouses in these places do not mind polluting these holy rivers with their excretory discharges and garbage which are carried to the rivers through sewers. Whereas the Himalaya is now studded with big and small dams storing large volumes of water, vast majority of the settlements in the Himalaya are suffering from water scarcity.

The situation is alarming and there is an impending danger of water famine due to population growth and mismanagement of water distribution. Obviously, a timely pragmatic approach is needed to address water issues. We expect scholarly participation and a meaningful outcome of the deliberations in theme 'B' of the proposed seminar.

Theme C. Water in future and special session on the Ganga: Considering the present growth in human and livestock population and accompanying technology coupled with global warming there would be matching demand for water. Present crisis in water supply is symptomatic of our deficiency in water management. It has been observed that the main reason for this mismanagement is lack of coordination between the technologists, scientists, environmental managers, stakeholders, and decision makers to converge upon a common vision and a unified approach to cope with the crisis.

We hope that papers in theme 'C' would provide momentum to propel the future planning and action research to address the burning issue of modern times.

Water studies are multidisciplinary; however, we hope to address water issues through interdisciplinary approach. This approach provides more perceptive answers to hydro-ecological and management issues. Therefore, we invoke likeminded scholars to participate in this seminar to make it a brainstorming event.

Special session on the Ganga envisions participation of scholars engaged in interdisciplinary approach to addressing water problems.

Scholars willing to participate are requested to send summary of their papers within 500 words **citing their own studies (published/in progress) on water** by **July 16, 2017**, and fully completed papers by **September 16, 2017**, for circulation and peer comments to be taken up for discussion as well as to enable the DLRC to publish the proceedings at the earliest.

Please note that considering the limited resources of the host institution, only those delegates who register themselves on first-come-first basis would be provided with free board and lodging on twin sharing basis. Depending on availability of funds, needy scholars will be awarded travel subsidy. Please fill in the registration form and submit it **by June 16, 2017, to enable DLRC to apply for funds to meet travel expenses of select, needy scholars.**

Prof. Dr. B.K. Joshi,
Hon. Director, DLRC,
Dehradun.

Deadline for summary of the paper: July 16, 2017.

Deadline for full paper: September 16, 2017.

File: MS Word.

Fonts: Times New Roman

Style:

- a. For vernacular words: as in the *Himalaya: Past and Present*.
- b. Referencing and bibliography: as in the *Current Anthropology/Himalaya: Past and Present*.

Submit to:

Prof. Dr. B.K. Joshi: doonlib@yahoo.co.in;

Dr. Maheshwar P. Joshi: maheshwar1941@gmail.com; mp_joshi20@rediffmail.com

Registration form (no registration fee)

Part 1

Name:

Designation:

Institution of affiliation:

Theme chosen for participation:

Title of the paper:

Are you willing to join sightseeing tour (additional 2 days, to be decided on the convenience and response of the delegates).