

EthnoScripts

ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR AKTUELLE
ETHNOLOGISCHE STUDIEN

Post-Home:
Dwelling on Loss, Belonging and Movement

Volume 21 Issue 1 | 2019

Saakshi Joshi

'From Mangoes to Apples': Exploring Belonging in New Tehri

Ethnoscripts 2019 21 (1): 91-111

eISSN 2199-7942

Abstract

When the Tehri Dam in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand submerged the town of Tehri, the locals found themselves turned into *visthapit* (the 'displaced'). This new position, a consequence of dam induced displacement and relocation to new geographies, triggered recollections of their previous lives in Tehri. Often recalled as a local cultural centre for surrounding villages, the old town appears in daily conversations of its former residents. By discussing Tehri, the oustees return to a place they can now experience only tangentially. This article explores how displacement and belonging come to be expressed through a place that has no existing cartographic coordinates – a place living in memories. My ethnographic work in the town of New Tehri, a namesake built for the purpose of relocation, guides these arguments.

Publisher:

Universität Hamburg
Institut für Ethnologie
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1 (West)
D-20146 Hamburg
Tel.: 040 42838 4182
E-Mail: lfE@uni-hamburg.de
<http://www.ethnologie.uni-hamburg.de>

eISSN: 2199-7942



Dieses Werk ist lizenziert unter einer Creative Commons Licence 4.0 International: Namensnennung - Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen.

‘From Mangoes to Apples’: Exploring Belonging in New Tehri

Saakshi Joshi

Introduction

I have long been in conversation with Tehri Garhwal, situated within the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand in India.¹ This mountainous state lies along international boundaries, with Tibet at its north and north-east edges and Nepal to the east. It shares the north-western boundary with the state of Himachal Pradesh and the southern ones with the plains of Uttar Pradesh. Although I was born and raised in Delhi, the Garhwal mountains have been another place to which I belonged. The *pahar*,² or the mountains, as a place of attachment are kept alive through annual trips to the region, the family events, the vernaculars, the songs – as geographical markers of ancestry and the foundation on which varied family narratives rest – and through my surname (cf. Joshi 2018).

In 2006, the Tehri Dam began working in the Tehri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand. Family visits to the state in the following years included a bus trip to the dam site from the state’s capital of Dehradun.³ On such occasions, my father, born in a Tehri Garhwal village, would remind us that the former palace of the King of Tehri⁴ used to be there, whilst one of my *mausa jis*⁵ would explain how the dam, made of earth, sand and gravel, was resistant to

1 Broadly, Uttarakhand has two regional divisions, Garhwal and Kumaon. Administratively, it comprises of thirteen districts, nine of which are completely mountainous. Earlier, it was a part of Uttar Pradesh, a state dominated by plains. Uttarakhand was created in 2000, after a movement demanding the separation from Uttar Pradesh. The population of the mostly mountainous Uttarakhand region was much smaller than in the plains of Uttar Pradesh, so people felt under-represented and marginalised. A separate state was formed due to the political under-representation, disenfranchisement and economic exploitation (see Linkenbach 2012, 2007; Mawdlsey 1999 and Sachs 2011).

2 This is a Hindi word for mountain or hillside.

3 Dehradun, in the valley, is the capital of Uttarakhand, 110 km away from the Tehri dam.

4 Tehri became the capital of the Parmar/Shah dynasty of Garhwal in 1815 and a part of India in 1949.

5 *Mausa* is a word used for the maternal aunt’s (*mausi*’s) husband. *Ji*’ is a gender-neutral honorific used as a suffix in several languages like Hindi and its dialects.

earthquakes, which is an important feature in the seismically active Himalayas.⁶ Apart from the visits to the dam, the conversations about the *visthapit*⁷ and their lives became a common part of the *chai* discussions in Dehradun. In 2013, when I reached New Tehri for ethnographic work, I initially wanted to understand the meanings of *visthapit*.⁸ But, people spoke of Tehri. By recreating their old town for me, an outsider who was removed from their experience of relocation, someone who had not lived in Tehri, they articulated displacement, loss of home and the meaning of belonging to a place.

The sense and significance of *place* for humans, irrespective of the constant transformations we and our worlds undergo, seem to persist. Despite the destruction of known landscapes and the manufacturing of new ones, the struggles over homelands and borders, place is still significant for many, whether as a particular location of belonging, a sense of boundaries, or a connection to everyday life against a backdrop of power and instability (Escobar 2001, Geertz 1996). Keith Basso (1996: 55) argued that '[p]laces possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, or musings on who one might become'.

Belonging has no direct translation in Hindi, the language I used during research. But it takes a coherent shape when being discussed vis-à-vis boundaries, and categories that exist as something finite, something tangible. Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin (2011) discuss belonging as an emotionally charged site. It incorporates relationships with humans, things and places, and involves different circles of attachment – for example, to one's house and other possessions, one's family, locality, lineage, nation-state – that often overlap, or intersect, but may also contradict one another.

In Tehri's case, the cartographic coordinates to enable return were gone, submerged under the waters of the Tehri Dam reservoir or the Tehri *jheel*. In a similar vein, Hirsch and Spitzer (2010) write of Czernowitz (now Chernivtsi, Ukraine) as a 'place that cannot be found in any contemporary atlas' (ibid.: xiii). Although, unlike Tehri, a physical return to the 'location' was possible for its former residents and their families, 'Czernowitz' itself remains alive only as a projection – an idea physically disconnected from its geographical

6 Tehri Garhwal lies in earthquake hazard zone V, which signifies the highest risk of effects by earthquakes. The dam structure is a rock and earth-filled dam with a clay core for flexibility.

7 This is a Hindi word that was used by my interlocutors for the actual process of displacement (*visthapit hona*, also *visthapan*), as well as a term for people who were displaced and relocated. A detailed discussion on this term is available in a separate article (Joshi 2017). Where I discuss this word in a particular narrative on the Tehri dam, there can be many more *visthapit* with their own narratives/backgrounds.

8 Here, I am referring to the ethnographic fieldwork I have conducted for my doctoral dissertation, between 2013 and 2016.

location, dependent on the ‘vicissitudes of personal, familial, and cultural memory’ (ibid.: 15). Kingsolver (2011) has written about phantom landscapes – buildings, neighbourhoods, farms, and families – which are no longer there, but by which people may still navigate. Exploring the idea of belonging to the memory of a place, Lovell writes, that

[L]ocality and belonging may be moulded and defined as much by actual territorial emplacement as by memories of belonging to particular landscapes whose physical reality is enacted only through acts of collective remembering. (1998: 1).

Thus, remembrance of the past may also relate to the people’s present and future in significant ways. If history is conventionally imagined as bound to the past *only*, the concept of ‘historicity’ allows for a conversation about the ways in which a nexus of past-present-future plays out in the present based on events, political needs, available cultural forms and emotional dispositions (see Hirsch and Stewart 2005; Stewart 2016).

To understand the remembrance of Tehri, I begin with a brief background of the Tehri Dam, which caused the people to become *visthapit*. It was through experiences of my interlocutors during displacement that Tehri was told to me. It has been a position where the past, present and future overlap (see Joshi 2017). The next section of the article introduces the voices of my interlocutors to situate the narratives of displacement. The last section of the article is an overview of the different categories that figure into the ideas of belonging for the *visthapit*.

Why does Tehri remain alive in people’s conversations and the everyday? Through various everyday instances from their narratives, like the absence of the Ganga, the changed physical landscape, or the loss of livelihood opportunities, the article considers how people recreate their belonging in New Tehri by finding markers in their former lives, prior to the forced removal.

Background

After serving as the capital of the Shah dynasty of Tehri Garhwal in the Himalayas since 1815, Tehri was annexed to the state of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), in what became known as India. After a long struggle for separate statehood and following local concerns over negligible representation in a state mostly consisting of flatland, the town became a part of the Tehri Garhwal district in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand in 2000. Tehri held significance as a transit point for travellers, tourists, and traders. Its location lay en route to popular shrines of Kedarnath and Badrinath, which beckon masses of pilgrims and tourists each year.⁹ In 2005, the town of Tehri and its surround-

9 In 2018, close to seven lakh (100,000) people had visited Kedarnath (see Sharma 2018).

ing villages were submerged (fully or partially) following the completion of the Tehri Dam. Close to six thousand families resided in the town before its submergence.

The idea of the dam was conceived in 1949 by the Geological Survey of India, upon the Bhagirathi and Bhilangana rivers, tributaries of Ganga (Werner 2014: 139). By 2005, the work on the dam was finished, and it began functioning a year later. The dam reservoir, also called the Tehri *jheel* (lake), was spread over the 55 km² of fertile agricultural land of the Bhagirathi-Bhilangana valley. As a multipurpose project, which includes flood prevention, the dam provides irrigation water to the neighbouring state of U.P., as well as drinking water and electricity to Delhi situated 316 km away.

In this entire process, more than a hundred thousand people were uprooted, becoming the Tehri Dam *visthapit*. Their resettlement was forked into urban and rural, based upon the previous place of living (the Tehri town or a village). The urban resettlement happened in New Tehri, Rishikesh and Dehradun, and the rural resettlement was spread across Dehradun, Rishikesh and Haridwar. From living in a town or neighbouring villages, which were reachable due to smaller distances, people were relocated across different parts of Uttarakhand. Rishikesh is a semi-hilly region, 85 km away from the old town, Haridwar is a popular pilgrim city 105 km away and Dehradun is a valley 120 km away from Tehri.

Whereas the old town was at an elevation of 660 metres and surrounded by rivers, New Tehri is at an altitude of between 1350 and 1850 metres and located on a slope overlooking the dam and its reservoir. New Tehri was created for resettlement and administration. Its appearance was associated with the disappearance of the old town.

In July 2013, when I began my fieldwork, locals wound up talking about the catastrophic flash floods, which had made national headlines a month earlier. Questions related to the Tehri Dam would lead to doubts about its functioning, fears about the dam reservoir overflowing and the consequent impact on New Tehri. The Tehri Dam is among the 59 completed dams listed in the national register as 'dams of national importance' (Central Water Commission 2014).¹⁰ It is the fifth tallest dam in the world and a point in a series of examples where a nation is attempting to be defined and recognized through massive projects of landscape and social engineering (Cederlöf and Sivaramakrishnan 2012: 2). There are 600 hydroelectric dams in the Himalayan region, whether planned, under construction, or working (Dharmadhikary 2008, Vidal 2013). India leads this catastrophic charge in the mountains with roughly 400 dams in total. Increasing incidents of flash floods, landslides, cloudbursts and forest fires impacting the mountain ecosystems, especially in Uttarakhand, are tied to the concerns about global warming, climate change

10 These are dams with a height of 100 m and above, or those with a storage capacity of 1 km³ and above, and which have been completed.

and water shortage. It is within these debates that dams have found significance in recent years, as saviours from or as the causal agents of disasters. Additionally, damming, as mentioned above, highlights the social and ecological consequences of our urban water management systems, which rely heavily on the sourcing of water for urban areas from ever-increasing distances. Thus, many large Indian cities must source water from long distances, ranging between 50 and 200 kilometres, due to the exhaustion of remaining sources, or the pollution of nearby ones (Joshi 2019, Rohilla et al. 2017). After initial jibes about my arrival from Delhi and the dam being built for *me*, the people in New Tehri began telling me about their old town.

Whose Tehri is in these words?

This article is based on the analysis of unstructured interviews and focused group discussions with 62 Garhwali¹¹ women and men¹² from the Brahmin and Rajput castes. These interviews were taken across New Tehri, Dehradun and Haridwar. During the years of dam construction, most of these Tehri locals were either adults, who were in universities or working, or children. Whilst men were more visible in public spaces, working or forming groups in markets, on the roads and in their shops, women mostly had to be approached at their workplaces, informal groups in the open spaces right outside their front doors, or inside their houses. The use of ‘house’ in place of ‘home’ is deliberate and comes from my conversations with the people. Different *mohallahs* (neighbourhoods) developed over time and came together to form the old town of Tehri on the banks of the Bhagirathi-Bhilingana valley. The sloping new town has been divided into sectors which have flats, plots and tin sheds for accommodation. The shift from the inhabiting of a home to the receiving of a plot or a piece of land was a significant change people had to undergo, irrespective of the eventual sizes of the houses built on those plots. An oustee¹³ from the urban resettlement in Dehradun said:

Here, where you are sitting, is not our ghar. This is our makān. The transition from a makān to a ghar takes several generations. The former is brick and cement. The latter is filled with emotions through which it comes to life. Similarly, a town is built of brick and cement, houses and buildings. It becomes alive through con-

11 Garhwali here was used as a regional identity – specifically, to stake claim to the region through a long mountain ancestry of those who have lived here or arrived to Garhwal with the king.

12 Here, I write about the women and men I met, but the gendered realities are multiple and beyond this binary.

13 Oxford Dictionaries (2019) defines ‘oustee’ as an Indian English noun with origins in the 1970s. It is used to describe the forced ousting of a person by the ‘development of land’. Thank you for highlighting this, Dr Safet.

nection. For this to become a ghar, we need our sincerest efforts. We have a beautiful makān. There might be many here living in houses much better than the ones they had in Tehri. But these are makān.

This distinction was expanded to indicate the difference between Tehri and New Tehri. The position as *visthapit* was defined to a large extent by the specific trajectory of relocation, the compensation received, the castes one shared the neighbourhood with, the kind of housing structure or land one received and the current livelihood options. Being moved to the already inhabited new locations, where the oustees were the outsiders, as well as the altered dietary patterns, accompanied stress and other mental health issues related to the adaptation to a new environment (Kedia 2009). All of these factors led to differing accounts of the forced removal and conflicting views about the dam. And, they coloured the conversations on Tehri.

When dead places talk: anthropomorphising Tehri

home
resource
wasteland
biodiversity
carcass
*vikas*¹⁴
dynamite
deity
memory
dammed
you

What is a mountain? I ask.

(Saakshi Joshi, 'Giving meanings to mountains', 2018)

For the people now resettled in New Tehri, displacement is a shared experience. It has become a continuous part of their lives. It was not an event in hearsay. It did not happen to their ancestors. It was recent. Accompanying this life-changing course was the knowledge that there is no Tehri to return to.

The loss of this former, known way of life, attained a specific form in the anthropomorphising expressions for the old town, which punctuated both

14 *Vikas* is a Hindi term for 'development'. In the Garhwali dialect, '*bikas*' is also used. During fieldwork, *vikas* was the word used pre-dominantly, hence my own usage in the article.

the conversations and the local writings. Often, people would begin or end sentences or their accounts of events with ‘After Tehri’s death...’, or ‘When Tehri was alive...’ (Joshi 2018). There were instances, written and verbal, of 28 December being mentioned as Tehri’s birthday. On this date, the town was founded as the capital by king Sudershan Shah. In local writings, Tehri has been portrayed as a narrator, a woman, or a person left behind to drown.

In ‘*Tehri ke naam ek patr*’ (‘A letter in Tehri’s name’), the poet writes a letter to the town which is still drowning while the people have left.¹⁵ A sense of guilt becomes palpable as he tells the town that ‘we all left you to drown’ (Azad 2012: 23-24). Hindi words have been used in such ways as to suggest that the town was alive when it drowned; it was not an inanimate landscape that was submerged. In several texts, *jal samadhi* has been used in place of *doobna* to highlight that Tehri was forced under water while still alive, still flourishing, rather than just drowning. In another piece titled ‘Trihari’,¹⁶ the town is anthropomorphised as a woman, bitter that its residents left her to drown (Faruqki 2012: 30).

‘From mangoes to apples’: altered landscapes

This phrase – *from mangoes to apples* – was repeatedly used by one septuagenarian who had shifted from the resettlement in New Tehri to Dehradun due to breathing problems. He used it as a metaphor, to emphasise the climatic and geographic changes that came with New Tehri, which impacted the social lives of the oustees. External, internal. From warm to cold. From Tehri to a resettlement colony. Conversations would begin with the altered atmosphere and environment that people had to get accustomed to – the altitude, the stairs, the strong winds, the reservoir in place of the river – before describing the disappointment over the disintegrating community life and the transformed everyday.

15 All translations from Hindi to English are done by the author.

16 Several stories tell how Tehri was named. It is considered a distortion of ‘Trihari’ (union of three rivers), alluding to the union of Bhagirathi, Bhilangana and the now invisible Ghrit Ganga. It is suggested that the way Bhagirathi and Bhilangana bent around the land to meet led to the use of *tedha* (‘twisted’ or ‘bent’) which became Tehri. A third story informs that a village named Tipri was located near the area, and that ‘Tehri’ caught on from there. Yet another version, mentioned on the district website, says that the area washes away three types of sins – born out of *mansa* (‘thought’), *vacha* (‘word’) and *karmana* (‘deed’) (Tehri Garhwal: n.d.). It is also said to be the place where the three *hari* (‘lords’), Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, the Hindu trinity of the creator, the preserver and the destroyer, come together.

Where Tehri was remembered as a capital, as Ganga's *mait*,¹⁷ as a town with a market that was an active social space, New Tehri was considered a part of a development (or *vikas*) scheme where the *pahari* were sacrificed for the interests of the people from the plains and where treating some people as ends in themselves seems possible only if other people are treated as a means to achieve the first goal (De Wet 2009: 78).¹⁸ This *vikas* was built upon intensive energy consumption, consistent with a focus on expanding infrastructure projects like large dams¹⁹ and the purchase of material goods sourced from outside the town. A similar sentiment is found in Channa's (2018) work in the Himalayan upper reaches, where, she writes, the people of Kinnaur have been seen as dispensable when planning and drafting policy (of mainland population). This has led to the locals building an opposing rhetoric about dams as 'outside' their social and economic world, with a hope to merit the government's attention (ibid.). Not specific to New Tehri, but a frequent example I have been given, through-out my time in different parts of mountainous Uttarakhand, is the habit of 'outsiders' to buy land and build hotels/resorts, for which the locals then serve as cooks or housecleaning staff. Resettlement in New Tehri came to be seen in this larger scheme of things, where the dam represented the outsiders, which took over local land and resources, and in which people were moved while the water went elsewhere.

From Bhagirathi to Tehri *jheel*

In contrast to a river filled with stories and experiences, the unmoving Tehri dam reservoir has been a stark reminder of attempted human control over the flowing waters of the Ganga – a lifeline, a goddess, a daughter to Tehri. This shift from direct interactions with the river to berating the dammed unmoving waters of the reservoir which belong to U.P. and Delhi, is another aspect which has influenced the oustees' experience of living in a new place.

Conversations about Ganga or the Tehri *jheel* usually had one of the following central threads: the quality of the water people received in New Tehri (and its felt impact on their health), the loss of Ganga and its *ghats* as the loss

17 Local Garhwali word for maternal place. Tehri as Ganga's *mait* has roots in the tale of King Bhagirath who managed to bring Ganga to earth from the heavens. Since this was the region where Ganga touched upon earth, she was regarded as a daughter.

18 As already mentioned, the dam provides water to Delhi, 316 km away. In January-March 2019, water from the dam (12,000 cusecs) was also used during the Kumbh Mela in Allahbad (renamed Prayagraj in 2018) where more than 500 million people took ritual baths.

19 Researchers working in different Himalayan states have made similar observations on hydroelectric dams and how this *vikas* ends up excluding the local residents (see Channa 2013, Huber and Joshi 2015, Drew 2013, Linkenbach 2007 and Mawdsley 1999).

of ritual and festive landscape, the loss of the free flowing Ganga or Bhagirathi as the loss of a provider, goddess, and daughter.²⁰

Although no conclusive medical surveys for the town were undertaken, the urban region of Tehri Garhwal has recorded the maximum cases of diarrhoea or dysentery (429 persons per 10,000 population) in the state, across both urban and rural categories and among all districts (see Annual Health Survey 2012). A doctor at the district hospital reported greater cases of jaundice from the area in New Tehri where the oustees had been resettled. Several people complained of post-displacement digestive disorders, blaming the reservoir water.

Some would begin describing the old town with the river. Some would bathe in nostalgia, missing the sound that the flowing waters made. The elderly would bring up this imagery the most. The younger oustees focused more on the utilitarian aspects of the river. Several people had told me about the logs drifting in the river during monsoons. Locals would take them out, dry and store them for use during winters. The sand and clay from the riverbank were used for construction purposes. The river was also used for catching fish, which was sold at the market. There were also people who discussed the cremation rites of the deceased without their sacred river and its banks serving as the cremation area. The river was also an integral part of several festivities like *Makar Sakranti*²¹ or *Basant Panchmi* where people would light earthen lamps on its banks or take baths in its waters at certain hours on days considered auspicious. In her research, Drew (2013) notices that the reduced river waters in the dam-affected Himalayan areas were a sign to the locals that people had lost respect for such an important river goddess. For some, this transformation of the mountains and of the Ganga had the potential to cause cosmological and ontological ruptures with real implications for the practices that they valued (ibid.: 27).

Local writings have portrayed the river as a protective mother, as well as a young woman violated by oppressors. Even when dammed, the river-as-mother continues carrying the town in its womb (Joshi 2012: 29). Though exploited for its free flow, imprisoned and silenced, the river will eventually fight back – a reference to future disasters awaiting the mountains due to several dam projects. The human attempt to curb the river through damming was held as a sign of arrogance, which would see consequences. But it would not harm the river itself. Since the river is sacred, the dam cannot take away

20 Bhagirathi and Ganga have been used interchangeably by the locals from Tehri. Bhagirathi is the primary tributary of Ganga, whereas Bhilangana is a tributary of Bhagirathi.

21 Both festival days have variant names in different regions of the Indian sub-continent. Makar Sakranti is based on the Hindu solar calendar signalling a change in season, marking the end of winter solstice and advent of longer days. Basant Panchmi signals the arrival of spring towards late January or early February.

her powers. It is this valorisation of the river that has let government officials and industrialists continue its exploitation (Alley 2002: 237).

If, on the one hand, people have a belief that no harm can befall Ganga, they also question the development in which the damming of a deity becomes justified. In Tehri, apart from being a benevolent deity, a nurturer, a mother, Bhagirathi is also described as a victim, and in an angry or violent form. The river may be silently enduring human arrogance and greed (materialised through the Tehri Dam), but one day it will snap, leading to a deluge. For example, the poem '*Nahin pachhtaegi nadi*' ('The river won't repent') describes the silence of the dammed river as momentary. But, once the time comes, it will be unrepentant (Joshi 2012: 29). These texts added to the ecological risks like earthquakes, landslides and accidents concerning the dam, which people associated with their new lives. The rivers of the Ganga basin carry one of the largest sediment loads in the world, higher than in the past due to a complete deforestation of the Gangetic Plains and the ongoing deforestation of the Himalayan foothills (Alley 2002). A growing area of concern and commentary is Ganga's condition in the Himalayas, where the development projects and climate change produce a visible difference in the quality and quantity of the river flow (Drew 2013: 26). Incessant construction and deforestation make way for landslides in the mountains. These are common on the slopes surrounding the Tehri Dam, especially during the monsoons. Agricultural land of the villagers living at the dam's periphery is silting and people have pointed out the damage to their homes, especially during monsoons, which they linked to fluctuating reservoir levels.

A town without a market

The Tehri bazaar remains a favoured memory, irrespective of whether you lived in a village or the town proper. The bazaar was talked about as a gathering place. In the new town, grocery shops and vendors selling vegetables may be found in different sectors. In addition, there is a market area which consists of several shops for clothing, stationery, footwear, jewellery, hardware, electronics and meat. Whereas the bazaar sketched a sense of togetherness, the current market is mentioned in terms of the scattered shops and a strictly utilitarian quality.

Chamba, 11 km uphill from the new town, has emerged as the regional market. An oustee from New Tehri spoke of the fresh produce they purchased in the old town:

We had several villages growing vegetables like rai,²² radish, spring onion, lady finger, gourd, which the women from the villages would come and sell. So, it was providing livelihood too. Now most of our vegetables come from Bijnor, Najibabad (from

²² Rai are brown mustard seeds.

the neighbouring state of U.P.). In the old town, all our vegetables were locally grown, especially the green, leafy ones, and there would be a mad rush to buy them as they would be sold rapidly. The pulses we had were traditional seedlines grown in villages, without any harmful fertilizers. Now, what we are eating has urea and who knows what else added to it. The ones from the villages were local, packed with nutrition.

Conversations with the owner of a local department store revealed that the food supplies and goods in the new town came from two depots – Dehradun or Rishikesh.

Previously, Tehri lay on the connecting route to popular mountain destinations and revered shrines, attracting masses of people from near and afar, which provided many people's livelihoods. Interviews with some of the local hoteliers gave a glimpse into the business of the previous market. During the tourist season, from April until about October, if on average there were 50 vendor carts each day, then the numbers would double. Similarly, if there were two helpers at a hotel, the owner would keep two more due to the additional work. An oustee who had worked in the old town as a journalist explained:

The old bazaar would go on for 18 hours out of the 24 hours in a day. 320 buses used to operate. Travelers would stay overnight and wake up at three since the buses would start operating by six. So, the shopkeepers would also open their shops early since people would buy utilities to take home with them or to eat before their journeys. Uttarkashi, Ghansali, Devprayag, buses to all these routes went via Tehri.

The bus stand in the new town was usually deserted. All the routes to different regions within Tehri Garhwal, or to other districts now went via Chamba, or Rishikesh. During my stay in New Tehri, the bus stand, adjacent to the commercial area with the hotels and the market, was under different stages of construction. There were small eateries opened for travellers before or after their bus journeys. But, much like the buses, these eateries catered to a fixed clientele consisting of locals.

According to some of the locals running their shops in the commercial area, the bus stand in the old town was always packed with people, shops opening as early as three in the morning for business as travellers would come and go. Today the town stands isolated on a slope, a reason for loss of income and seasonal employment. The locals working there are from all over the district, not limited to the displaced population. The district hospital of New Tehri (2 km uphill from the market) has no specific provisions to provide employment to the ousted population, skilled or unskilled, in whatever capacity, I was told by the hospital staff and the locals.

New Tehri does not lie en route to any popular tourist places, nor has it been popularised as one itself.²³ At the reception of a hotel I used to frequent, the owner had told me pointedly that if I were not conducting my research in New Tehri, I would not bother coming there either. Being the district headquarters, people would come to New Tehri for official work. If something could not be accomplished in a day, they would either spend the night at somebody's home, or check into the hotel. Apart from that, the hotels saw their maximum activity during weddings, when they would be booked for the ceremonies as well as for guest accommodation.

The same people have now become strangers

Forced removal caused old networks of people to spread over different parts of Uttarakhand. New Tehri on a slope was away from the hustle-bustle of any surrounding villages that were part of the old town's routine life. Haridwar in the plains, Rishikesh in a semi-hilly region, and Dehradun in the valley were different topographies, with their own resident populations comprising several different groups.

Former neighbours were now more than just a door's distance away – often several kilometres apart. Friends and relatives who met each evening were now meeting only during occasions like marriages or other festivities. The displacement led to the scattering of years-old community networks strongly built around caste alliances linked to the access and allocation of resources. These networks were further enforced through caste-endogamous/village-exogamous marriages between neighbouring villages, or between the town and the surrounding villages. People's narratives about their uprooting due to the Tehri Dam were consistent with an attachment to and dislocation from their mountainous area of living. Channa (2013: 23) and Linkenbach (2012: 163), through their respective works in Uttarakhand, have reaffirmed the different ways in which people from the mountains and the plains categorise each other. Working with the Jad Bhotiyas in the Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand, Channa discusses this outlook towards the *pahari* or people living in the mountains: 'It is ironical that the *pahar* or mountain areas, although representing a most sacred complex of Hinduism, is viewed as the abode of "inferior" Hindus. The plains or *desi* Hindus look down upon the *pahari*' (Channa 2013: 23). These choices also stem from the dichotomy between the *pahar* and the plains as a metaphoric differentiation between the safe and the dangerous, between self and others, from the perspective of those living in the *pahar*, and vice-versa for those living in the plains (ibid.: 148). For Linkenbach (2012: 163), *pahari* is enacted when people try to distance themselves from the inhabitants of the plains (*maidani log*, *deshi log*). The locals in Uttarakhand described themselves to her as honest, sincere and frank, valuing brother-

23 In recent years, the promotion of Tehri *jheel* for water and adventure sports has seen mixed results.

hood, truth, helpfulness, and a sense of community. These traits were used as a measure of contrast when describing people from the plains who were all 'said to be thieves, and to be dishonest, untrustworthy, and greedy' (ibid.: 163).

People resettled in Haridwar (100 km from New Tehri) expressed fear that their children would grow up in the plains – in an environment alien to the one in the *pahar*. A visible outcome of this was the difficulty in finding marriage partners from the mountains for their children. If families were unsure about brides coming from the plains, then families from the mountains were not willing to marry their daughters into the plains either. A similar example from the consequences of the Bhakra Nangal Dam in Himachal Pradesh was discussed by Manthan Adhyayan Kendra (2009: 133-153). Families living in Himachal Pradesh (mountains) did not prefer marriages into families resettled in Haryana (situated in the plains). An important aspect of the proliferation and continuity of the caste networks had been endogamy. Displacement affected marriage alliances because distances had increased. Families in the mountains preferred marrying their daughters in nearby areas.

Through caste-endogamous but village-exogamous marriages, caste networks had a geographical spread which provided a safety net during troublesome periods. After the displacement, some oustees were helped out by their wives' parents in villages to buy land, or to set up shop, or even to start a business when the new town provided limited livelihood options.

The old town was divided into *mohallahs* (neighbourhoods), many of which had explicit regional and caste references like the Purviyana²⁴ *mohallah*. Their specific caste affiliations also decided the spatial distribution within or outside the town. Often, when meeting acquaintances on the streets, or recalling somebody, dropping neighbourhood references would be a part of their introductions to me. In New Tehri, the spatial distribution has led to different ways in which neighbourhoods have emerged. The new town is divided into sectors numbered vertically from the top of the slope going downhill. Within these different sectors are smaller neighbourhoods and administrative blocks, commercial areas and offices. With the old networks scattered, and with the migration in and out of the town, these sectors of the new town are seeing a greater mix of populations across caste lines than people had experienced before. There are now colonies with mixed-caste neighbours – a change which has not gone unnoticed.

24 'Purv' refers to the east. This neighbourhood had residents who had come to Garhwal from Kumaon, which is situated to the east of the Garhwal region.

When people had begun moving from Tehri in the early 1990s, there were villages opposed to 'lower' castes being resettled on their land.²⁵

In Dehradun, I would often hear comments like 'All our people are here', or 'The kind of community we have here, New Tehri does not'. What was this community that New Tehri lacked? A walk around the neighbourhood provided clues – most of the nameplates had Garhwali Brahmin surnames on them. An oustee retired from government service told me there were five to seven Rajput families apart from the majority Brahmin families in this urban resettlement. Upon asking about other castes, he said there were none. After a pause, he added that there was one mason family, which sold its plot and left. As an explanation to my 'Why?', he continued:

We are from Tehri, you are from Tehri. We know who you are, you know who we are. Here it would have gotten uncomfortable, right in our midst. Outside where nobody knows you, you can be anybody, Joshi, Bahuguna, Rawat [Garhwali Brahmin and Rajput surnames], nobody would find out. Here we all are from Tehri so it would have been uncomfortable. Even if we would not have done or said anything, they would have felt that 'we are scheduled castes,'²⁶ living in their midst.

Caste groups were a deciding factor in people's social lives before displacement, and during the process of resettlement and receiving compensation.

We are used to open spaces

An elderly oustee, who had lost both her village and her town to the dam, had the space for a kitchen garden behind her house. Here, I often found her bent over, growing greens and collecting whatever dry twigs and tree branches she could. 'I am used to living like this, not staying inside'.

Driving back from the dam in 2014, we passed by a group of women unloading the cement they were carrying on their heads. The two locals in the car with us urged me to get out and talk to the group. We sat by the roadside where they were taking a break from their work as daily wage labourers, before their male contractor shouted for them to return. The women had been

25 Caste/*jaati* was referenced in the field. 'Lower' or 'upper' caste comes from how locals used it. Brahmin and Rajput locals' use of the term 'lower' caste was associated with social hierarchy based on caste-specific occupations considered 'polluting' like cutting hair, butchery, scavenging. This caste-based hierarchy also allowed for discrimination (overt or otherwise) through opposition to inter-caste marriages, spatial placing of different caste groups, and even in relocation.

26 Here the person used scheduled caste as a synonym to 'lower' caste. Broadly, scheduled castes are formally recognised in the Constitution of India as groups which are socially disadvantaged.

resettled in Rishikesh after their village was submerged for the dam. In a chorus of Garhwali and Hindi, they told us that they preferred being in the mountains, and so kept returning, spending time with relatives. Some had purchased land here again after selling their land in Rishikesh and made new houses in the mountains. 'We are unable to live there, with so many mosquitoes. And, it is hot. We are inside a room, with a fan on the ceiling. We are used to open spaces. So, we keep returning here.'

In Tehri Garhwal, 66% of the population practices cultivation, of which 83.60% are women and 49.99% are men (see Census of India 2011). Migration of men from the mountains to the regional urban centres or further away has been an important feature of Garhwali societies due to scarce livelihood options and a majorly farming society, which is not enough to sustain the people (Rajendra Dobhal et al. 2011: 1-15). In the mostly rural Garhwal hills, it is the women who cultivate the land and take on the household chores, which also include outdoor activities like collecting dry wood. Activities like firewood or water collection coupled with household and agricultural work have been viewed as exploitative or as a burden by the women I interacted with. But the outdoor chores have also been a way to get away from the house. Gurunani (2014) similarly noted, during her fieldwork in Uttarakhand, the amount of work women have to do. Women worked long hours to collect fuel wood, water, and take care of the seasonal crops, but it was through the idiom of work that women's subject positions and their sense of self came to be constituted. They compared their lives to that of their cattle: 'We live like cattle; we work like cattle'.

A few who had resettled in Dehradun were relieved that they did not have to walk several kilometres to fetch water any longer. However, one person suggested that the displacement had reduced their roles and voices within the household. She explained that this was a result of those activities where women were most involved, like agriculture, tending to cattle, or firewood collection, becoming redundant. Husbands talked about the resettlement 'freeing their wives' from the earlier physically arduous work, even as the wives would be in the background – washing the clothes, mopping the floor, cleaning the kitchen, or running after the children.

Conversations with women who had been widowed, separated, or were victims of domestic abuse revealed that they had started independent businesses or shops, be it knitting sweaters, or selling paper bags made from old newspapers. This was made possible through networks from the old town when no monetary respite came from their earning husbands. The social networks in the former town acted as filters for some, but also a motivation to earn money for themselves and their children if things came to a naught between the married couple.

An oustee in New Tehri, who had grown up in Tehri, spoke about the difference she feels in her routine now:

Going and meeting somebody has turned into a formal event based on invitations. Then, in Tehri, let us say a marriage was happening. Everybody would pitch in to fill the water, just like in the village, everybody would clean the rice. Here, you just go to the market for things. Everything has finished. Yes, we do not have to do all that work anymore, but then, we have become unemployed too, right?

If the resettlement was favoured for its material comforts compared to the old life in the town and the villages, it was also held responsible for taking away the women's chances of being 'free'. Going to the field or to the river was a way for women to be away from their households, to be away from their responsibilities, however briefly. It was a legitimate way for them to get away from the patriarchal set-up which had sent them out in the first place.

Accounts of women and men pointed towards the experience of women's mobility (access to open spaces and a freedom of movement across the town) as an important lens to view their new lives and the experience of a place. This included the idea of 'female safety' which was embodied. It was linked to moving in a geography which was familiar (*pahar*) and moving amongst people who were known (caste groups).

A group of women in New Tehri had once pointed at me to indicate that I lived in the plains (Delhi) before pointing at the gold earrings, necklaces, or bangles they were wearing. 'If you wear all this in the plains, somebody will come on a bike and snatch it away. Here, we still roam about, even at night, without worry.'

A member of staff at the district hospital, hailing from Udham Singh Nagar (a plains district in Uttarakhand), told me that her family had agreed to send her to New Tehri only because it was in the mountains. She had preferred working in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, after completing her studies there. But her family was more comfortable and relaxed about her posting to the mountains. 'They felt the crime rate is much less, it is more serene and peaceful, and there is less pollution.' The safety or the feeling of being safe or unsafe was usually compared to the plains. The fracturing of the *pahari* from the plains had as one of its major components the construction and use of women's bodies (Channa 2013: 182).

How does one belong?

For the people living closest to the dam, the present that forms the basis of any future, appeared unpredictable. Apprehensions about dams turning the *pahar* into sites of catastrophes and *vikas*, which excluded the *pahari* from its intended benefits, were interspersed with elements that create our daily lives: livelihood, water, food, neighbours, medical facilities, sounds and views of the places we dwell in (Joshi 2018: 238). Belonging was being cre-

ated, through choices. The location of schools, medical facilities and caste, became some of the reasons to stay or move. When you think about the future, you start thinking about places of action in the present, rather than just going back and forth between the past and the present (Smith, 2015).

Meanings given to the Tehri Dam, the people's own positioning as *visthapit*, and the ecological risk they found in inhabiting their new place, have formed the basis of how people chose to reconstruct their lives before the displacement and how they talked about Tehri. And through these conversations – on climate, on the river, on wearing jackets during summer afternoons, on joints paining and stomach aching due to water, people showed me how they were creating ways of belonging to Tehri which no longer existed.

Conversations in the new town would often lead to differences between the 'here' and the 'there', the 'now' and the 'then'. A four-hour long power cut would make people speak. Wearing jackets in summer could take a person back in time. The absence of the perennial sound of the river could lead to discussions. Panting while climbing several steep stairs in the new town could cause complaints about respiratory problems and joint pains. The sight of shopkeepers playing cards in a deserted market would lead to reflections on the old Tehri bazaar. The sectors in place of neighbourhoods or living in a 'tin shed' could take people back. Thus, belonging to Tehri after it submerged, after there was no physical place called Tehri, became a way to talk about the *pahar*, *vikas* and *visthapit*.

By immersing themselves in conversations about Tehri, they were also guiding me to what mattered to them, what made them feel secure, what gave them a sense of familiarity, what made them feel a part of something, or what made them feel excluded. It was through conversations and material evidence of the past that people built new forms of shared sentiments. If the present was lacking, it lacked because the past made particular things, specific intangibles, available. Glorifying the past by overlooking, avoiding, or omitting the more unpleasant aspects can serve as an adhesive for people to live together in their present. While for some this can be a fuel for change, for others they can be what 'ought to be' or what 'not ought to be'.²⁷

27 I wish to thank the editors of this special issue and the reviewer for their thorough reading of the manuscript and the feedback. None of this bears fruit without my utmost thanks to all the people I know and keep meeting across Uttarakhand.

References

- Alley, Kelly D. (2002) *On the Banks of the Gangā: When Wastewater Meets a Sacred River*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Azad, J. (2012) Tehri ke naam ek patr [A letter to Tehri]. In: H. Khanduri, Reena Panwar, S. Kuriyal, and Mahindra Singh Negi (eds.) *Tehri ki kahani: Geet-kavitaon ki zubani*. Uttarakhand: Mahila Samakhya Tehri: pp. 23-24.
- Basso, Keith H. (1996) *Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape*. In: Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (eds.) *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press: pp. 53-90.
- Cederlöf, Gunnel, and Kalyanakrishnan Sivaramakrishnan (eds.) (2012) *Ecological Nationalisms: Nature, Livelihoods, and Identities in South Asia*. Uttarakhand: Permanent Black.
- Census of India (2011) *District Census handbook Tehri Garhwal*. http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/dchb/0504_PART_B_DCHB_TEHRI%20GARHWAL.pdf [accessed: 27 April 2019].
- Central Water Commission (2014) *National Register of Large Dams*. <http://www.cwc.nic.in/main/downloads/New%20NRLD.pdf> [accessed: 16 May 2015].
- Channa, Subhadra Mitra (2018) *Indigenous Social Movements in Mountain Regions*. In: Ann Kingsolver and Sasikumar Balasundaram (eds.) *Global Mountain Regions: Conversations Towards the Future*. Indiana: Indiana University Press pp. 85-88.
- Channa, Subhadra Mitra (2013) *The Inner and Outer Selves: Cosmology, Gender, and Ecology at the Himalayan Borders*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- De Wet, Charles (2009) *Does Development Displace Ethics? The Challenge of Forced Resettlement*. In: Anthony Oliver-Smith (ed.) *Development and Dispossession: The Crisis of Forced Displacement and Resettlement*. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press: pp. 77-96.
- Dharmadhikary, Shripad (2008) *Mountains of Concrete: Dam Building in the Himalayas*. Berkeley: International Rivers.
- Dobhal, Rajendra, Arun Kumar and Seema Rawat (2011) *Conservation and Management of Bioresources in Uttarakhand, India*. In: Yogesh Gokhale and Ajeet K. Negi (eds.) *Community-based Biodiversity Conservation in the Himalayas*. New Delhi: TERI Press: pp. 1-15.
- Drew, Georgina (2013) *Why Wouldn't We Cry? Love and Loss along a River in Decline*. *Emotion, Space, and Society* 6 (1): pp. 25-32.
- Escobar, Arturo (2001) *Culture Sits in Places: Reflections on Globalism and Subaltern Strategies of Localization*. *Political Geography* 20 (2): pp. 139-174.
- Faruqi, Iqbal (2012) *Trihari*. In: H. Khanduri, Reena Panwar, S. Kuriyal and Mahipal Singh Negi (eds.) *Tehri ki kahani: Geet-kavitaon ki zubani*. Uttarakhand: Mahila Samakhya Tehri: p. 30.

- Geertz, Clifford (1996) Afterword. In: Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (eds.) *Senses of Place*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press: pp. 259-262.
- Gururani, Shubhra (2014) 'Geographies that Make Resistance': Remapping the Politics of Gender and Place in Uttarakhand, India. *Himalaya: The Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies* 34 (1): pp. 68-79.
- Hirsch, Eric and Charles Stewart (2005) Introduction: Ethnographies of Historicity. *History and Anthropology* 16 (3): pp. 261-274.
- Hirsch, Marianne and Leo Spitzer (2010) *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Huber, Amelie and Deepa Joshi (2015) Hydropower, Anti-politics, and the Opening of New Political Spaces in the Eastern Himalayas. *World Development* 76: pp.13-25.
- Joshi, Saakshi (2012) Nahin pachhtaegi nadi [The River Won't Repent]. In: H. Khanduri, R. Panwar, S. Kuriyal, & M. Singh Negi (eds.) *Tehri ki kahani: Geet-kavitaon ki zubani*. Tehri: Mahila Samakhya Tehri: p. 29.
- Joshi, Saakshi (2015). A Town Without a Market. *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory* 24 (1): pp. 75-80.
- Joshi, Saakshi (2017) We are *Visthapit*: Forced Re-settlement as a Long Term Identity. In: J. Guenther and K. Eswarappa (eds.) *Emergence of Subjectivity Formations: Social-Anthropological Discourses from India*. Navi Mumbai: Peoples Literature Publication pp. 108-127.
- Joshi, Saakshi (2018) Artifacts of Home: The Landscape Speaks. In: Ann Kingsolver and Sasikumar Balasundaram (eds.) *Global Mountain Regions: Conversations Towards the Future*. Indiana: Indiana University Press: pp. 237-243.
- Joshi, Saakshi (2019) How We Source Water for Cities: Lessons Tehri Taught. Down To Earth. <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/water/how-we-source-water-for-cities-lessons-tehri-taught-64189> [accessed: 17 May 2019].
- Kedia, Satish (2009) Health Consequences of Dam Construction and Involuntary Resettlement. In: Anthony Oliver-Smith (ed.) *Development and Dispossession: The Crisis of Forced Displacement and Resettlement*. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press: pp. 97-118.
- Kingsolver, Ann (2011) *Tobacco Town Futures: Global Encounters in Rural Kentucky*. Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc.
- Linkenbach, Antje (2007) *Forest Futures: Global Representations and Ground Realities in the Himalayas*. Ranikhet: Permanent Black.
- Linkenbach, Antje (2012) Nature and Politics: The Case of Uttarakhand, India. In: Gunnel Cederlöf and K. Sivaramakrishnan (eds.) *Ecological Nationalisms: Nature, Livelihoods, and Identities in South Asia*. Uttarakhand: Permanent Black: pp. 116-151.
- Lovell, Nadia (1998) *Locality and Belonging*. London: Routledge.

- Manthan Adhyayan Kendra (2009) The First Development-caused Displacements in India: The Forgotten People of Bhakra Nangal. In: Renu Modi (ed.) *Beyond Relocation: The Imperative of Sustainable Resettlement*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications: pp. 133-153.
- Mawdsley, Emma (1999) A New Himalayan State in India: Popular Perceptions of Regionalism, Politics, and Development. *Mountain Research and Development* 19 (2): pp. 101-112.
- New Tehri Town (n.d.) <http://www.uttarakhand.ws/tehri/tehri-dam/new-tehri-town> [accessed: 17 September 2016].
- Office of the Registrar General (2012) Annual Health Survey 2011-2012 factsheet. http://www.censusindia.gov.in/vital_statistics/AHSBulletins/AHS_Factsheets_2011_12/Uttarakhand%20_Factsheet_2011-12.pdf [accessed: 11 February 2016].
- Oxford Dictionaries (2019) Oustee. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/oustee>. [accessed: 18 May 2019].
- Pfaff-Czarnecka, Joanna and Gerard Toffin (eds.) (2011) *The Politics of Belonging in the Himalayas: Local Attachments and Boundary Dynamic*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Rohilla, Suresh Kumar, Mahreen Matto, Mrityunjay Kumar and Saakshi Joshi (2017) *Urban Water Sustainability: A Template*. New Delhi: Centre for Science and Environment.
- Sachs, William (2011) Religion, Rituals, and Symbols of Belonging: The Case of Uttarakhand. In Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and Gerard Toffin (eds.) *The Politics of Belonging in the Himalayas: Local Attachments and Boundary Dynamic*. New Delhi: SAGE: pp. 167-181.
- Sharma, Aman (2018) Kedarnath Shrine Could See Highest Ever Pilgrims of 10 Lakh by October. *The Economic Times*. 29 August 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/kedarnath-shrine-could-see-10-lakh-pilgrims-by-october-highest-ever/articleshow/65564513.cms> [accessed: 17 June 2019].
- Smith, Ada (2015, March) Internal Colony – Are You Sure? Panel discussion at the Appalachian Studies Association Conference, Johnson City, Tennessee, United States of America.
- Stewart, Charles (2016) Historicity and Anthropology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45: pp. 79-94.
- Vidal, John (2013) China and India 'Water Grab' Dams Put Ecology of Himalayas in Danger. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/aug/10/china-india-water-grab-dams-himalayas-danger> [accessed: 07 October 2015].
- Werner, Hanna (2014) Rivers, Dams and Landscapes: Engaging with the Modern on Contested Grounds. In: Nüser Marcus (ed.) *Large Dams in Asia: Contested Environments between Technological Hydrosapes and Social Resistance*. London: Springer: pp. 125-148.

Saakshi Joshi is a Senior Research Associate with the Urban Water-Waste Management Unit at the New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment (CSE). A Fulbright alumna, she holds a doctorate in Social Anthropology from the University of Delhi, India. Her PhD explored altered landscapes, belonging and displacement caused by dam construction in the Himalayas, India and the mountain-top removal for coal mining in the Appalachian Mountains, U.S.A. Her work at CSE includes capacity building trainings and policy research for urban water and sanitation management. In all her works, the idea of social spaces and the meaning of belonging have a central role. Along with her current pursuits, she is interested in ways of communicating research to larger audiences – whether through written forms, storytelling, art, or other media.