

The Disappearing Ganga: Is there any hope for this HOLY River?

In the map on next page, we have shown the path of the Bhagirathi River, considered to be the origin of the Holy Ganga River. We have also shown the available information about the existing, under construction and proposed dams and hydropower projects on this river.

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Many of these hydropower projects are so called run of the river projects. What it means is that large stretches of river will be flowing through underground tunnels for these projects and we have shown such stretches of river going underground by dashed lines. These stretches of rivers would disappear as far

as the people on the banks and others interested in seeing rivers are concerned.

We can also see that the backwater of the Tehri reservoir goes quite far upstream of the Maneri Bhali-2 tail race tunnel. Similarly the back waters of the Koteswar touches the upstream Tehri Dam and back waters of the Kotli Bhel 1A touches the Koteswar and so on. On Bhilangana side too the backwater of the Tehri reservoir would go upstream of the tail race tunnel of the Bhilangana-1 hydropower project.

What this diagram tells us, among many other things, is that between Gangotri and Haridwar, there will be no flowing river as we know it, if all these projects come up. This is true because even in tiny stretches where there is no reservoir or tunnels, the flow in the river would be dependent on the upstream hydropower projects, almost all of them have some storage to store the water during off peak hours and use it during peak hours.

This situation is not unique of Bhagirathi, it is also not the only or necessarily the most important of the issues concerning the dams, hydropower and the rivers. A number of other rivers like the Sutlej, Ravi, Teesta, Alaknanda, Pabbar, Tons, etc are going to have the same fate.

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But considering the cultural and religious significance of Ganga and Bhagirathi, it may be worth noting the fate of this river that our rulers have decided. It is not entirely a coincidence that BJP rules in Uttarakhand and the Congress lead UPA at centre (with outside support of Left, the left too have not shown in any interest in such issues). There seems to be a political consensus about what is to be done to the rivers, Holy or otherwise.

SANDRP (See the Bhagirathi map on page 2)

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