

# Some details of the damage caused in the Mahakali basin by the heavy rain and floods between 15th and 17th June, 2013.\*

E. Theophilus

10th July 2013

Himal Prakriti - A Trust for Nature<sup>†</sup>

Downstream of Dharchula upto Askot, all human habitations along the Mahakali river are located on erstwhile or current flood-plains called bagad, mostly flat banks of sand and cobble. The human habitations here are almost all large and extremely densely settled. This is because the Rajwar of Askot, who 'owned' this territory in the past, allowed the settlement of transhumant communities from Darma and Byans here during their winter down-migration, but only allowed them to occupy small plots enough for homesteads, and not for agriculture. The largest of these are Jauljibi, Baluakot (which literally means fortress-on-sand) Kalika, Nayabasti, Gothi, and Dharchula. Each and every one of these settlements have been affected by the floods of 15th to 18th June. The road sections on all these banks of sand have also been seriously damaged. These settlements are frequently at threat during the monsoon.

The suspension bridge linking Nepal and India at Jauljibi is gone. The abutment on the India side was eroded from under and just toppled. The river has taken away all evidence of the SSB check-post and living quarters right next to the bridge, as well as the large field where the annual Jauljibi mela is held every year. The road and some shops, homes and establishments along the road at Baluakot have been damaged. Further upstream, there has been some damage to roads, homes and some agriculture fields at Kalika, Nayabasti, Gothi and Dharchula. The more spectacular damage visible is to the large establishments of paramilitary organizations such as the ITBP, the GREF and the SSB who had built extensively on flood-plain sand-banks right near the river. Fortunately, the military seems to have exercised better sense, has built at much safer locations, and not suffered any damage.

Even further upstream on the Mahakali, there has been the most severe damage to Khalanga bazaar in Darchula, Nepal. 77 homes and shops are reported to have been lost entirely to the river, displacing around 2,500 people. The damage on the Indian side at Dharchula has been minimal, but the section of the bagad that takes the first brunt is coming undone. Some of the multi-storeyed staff quarters of the NHPC complex at Dobat/Tapovan have also been taken away by the river. There are informal reports of employees looting furniture and fixtures from buildings in imminent threat. The 280 MW NHPC Dhauliganga HEP apart, we see that each and every other hydro-electric power project along the upper reaches of the Mahakali basin on the Indian territory have been either badly damaged or else completely swept away. News from Nepal has not come through yet but the damage on the India side is as under:

- The 2 X 4 MW Sobla Phase I on Thari gad. This was being reconstructed after getting washed away in the 1995 flood. Completely washed away again.

---

\*All Pictures by E. Theophilus

<sup>†</sup>Himal Prakriti, located in the Himalyan state of Uttarakhand, India was set up to promote nature conservation and sustainable livelihoods. More details are available on this Website



Figure 1: Khalanga Bazaar severely affected by the flooding Mahakali, Darchula Nepal, (6 July 2013)

- 2 X 1 MW Kanchoti HEP. Fully washed away. Two employees seen by eye-witnesses being washed away. Two bodies found three weeks later, half-buried downstream in the empty Dhauliganga reservoir, partially eaten by village dogs, believed to be the employees.
- 1 X 1 MW + 1 X 5 MW Chirkila HEP, badly damaged.
- 2 X 1.5 MW + 2 X 600 Ellagad HEP, intake pipes washed away, land on which power-house stands eroded by the river.
- 2 MW Kullagad already damaged by a flood 5 years ago, completely washed away.
- 5 MW Himalaya Hydro Tanga Ph I. Damsite completely smashed and damaged by bed-load boulders.
- 5 MW Himalaya Hydro Ph II. Portion of the powerhouse under construction with generator has collapsed into the river. Pipeline from HH Ph I to HH Phase II damaged and sections washed away.
- 500 kw Motigad Microhydel by UREDA. Completely broken through by the river and damaged.
- 400 x 2 KW Suring gad microhydel powerhouse. Completelt washed away by the Gori river.

The damage along the Gori river has been described in detail in two previous reports, but is summarized below: Starting from the alpine villages and proceeding downstream. Other than the bridge over the Goenkha near Milam, all the steel bridges have been washed away. These are the ones at Burfu, Martoli, Laspagadi and Bugdiar. The suspension bridge at Rargari is intact. The very tall suspension bridge at Jimighat is damaged and at the verge of collapse. The bridal path is completely washed away in sections, the most damage being reported between Bugdiar and Laspagari. The Gori flipped from flowing along the true left bank at Nahardevi to hugging



Figure 2: The confluence of the Dhauli and the Mahakali at Tawaghat, a bridge connecting the upper Byans valley has been washed away and now a temporary and dangerous ropeway trolley has been setup (7th July 2013 )

the stupendous cliff on the true right, taking away the path on the slim bagar. Since no alpine villages were located very close to the river, they are safe.

Loss of life reported at the alpine villages in the Gori basin. Three people, of which two are missing and one is found. Thought to be an accident enroute to collecting Cordyceps near Suraj Kund, on the Milam glacier. Below Munsiri there is a large swathe of road taken away soon after Bhadeli enroute to Madkot. At Madkot, the old market road and a few shops have collapsed into the river. A school building and some homes are at the edge of the mud-cliff, some hanging over the river. The road after Madkot at Phagua bagad is badly damaged. The river has licked clean the bedrock on which the road had been made. The road and some shops are damaged at Lumti.

There is very major damage to the road at Ghingrani under Shiling village. This has been an active landslide for many years. There are numerous smaller sections of road gone to the river enroute and at Umargada, just before Bangapani and just before the Muwani bridge as well. Some homes washed away at Umargada. The Muwani bridge has miraculously survived, despite abutments on both sides being lapped at by the river. Very major sections of road and agriculture fields have gone at Choribagad and at Ghatabagad (the village of the talc mines). Then somewhat smaller sections of the road upto Chipaltara as well. Mankot and Gharuri villages situated on somewhat high sand-banks right near the river have lost large sections of their agriculture fields to the river. The cable-trolley linking Mankot to the motor road (and their children to their school) was also lost following the collapse of the abutment on the true-left bank.

This year again, there are reports of dead fish, which people collected by the quintal. Such reports of come in from the East Ramganga, and from Jauljibi. They were all snow-trout in the Mahakali, and included Mahseer in the Ramganga. This was also reported during the spate of 1995, and Mahseer were not seen in the Gori till about 3 years later. The already depleted fish populations, due to greatly reduced and degraded habitats due to hydro-power construction, would have taken a big hit.

In the Ralam valley, the already difficult access-path has been washed away in many sections,





Figure 3: Completely destroyed homes at Tawaghat (7th July 2013 )

and become very treacherous in others. All bridges enroute have also been washed away. The people of Ralam, you should know, are the quintessential mountain-people. It is they, and people like them, who 'escort' the army through difficult terrain. Not the kind of people to wait for government to do anything for them, they have already replaced the bridge at Lingurani over the Ralamgad four times this monsoon. Normally traveling in groups of twos and threes on this trail, the path is so dangerous that they now travel down in groups of as many as twenty people at a time. The damage is so extensive, that it may not be possible for this community to make the path passable for their livestock on their own, before winter sets in, and they are in peril.



Figure 4: Section of the motor road below Tawaghat(7th July 2013 )