



# Himalayan Rivers Series -1 Ganga

## 2009



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विश्वस्य मातरः सर्व सर्वश्चेव महाफलाः ।  
इत्येता सरितः राजन् समाख्याता यथास्मृति ॥

“O king! Rivers are mothers of the world;  
all of them bestow great rewards.  
I have enumerated as many as my  
memory enables me to.”

– Mahabharat, Bhishma Parva, Ch 9, verses 37/38

In the Indian tradition rivers have been worshipped as goddesses or mothers since times immemorial. Poets have extolled their life-supporting roles over millennia.

Rivers are among the largest landscape features on Earth. Several natural functions are inherent to their existence. These include transporting water from their catchments to the sea, shaping the landscape and their own channels and supporting riverine biota. Rivers are also characterized by their physical power that transports immense amounts of matter and a tremendous self-cleansing capacity. The latter makes them resilient ecosystems – most rivers have remained clean until recent times despite human settlements existing along their banks for millennia.

The social and economic values of rivers as human life support systems are easily recognized. So are their cultural, aesthetic and recreational values. But their inherent natural values as ecosystems – with biologically diverse habitats, their land-forming processes and their water and nutrient cycling or energy transport functions are not so obvious. Their paramount importance as global life support systems is hardly appreciated.

Traditionally in India, the origin of a river was considered sacred and a temple was built there to signify its sanctity. The temple priests ensured the protection of the source. While in principle, rulers were responsible for maintaining the well-being of rivers in their realms, in practice they entrusted this task to local communities living along the riverbanks. The rulers would get involved with river management either to resolve conflicts or to undertake major construction like dams, irrigation canals or bridges.

Once the English began to rule in India, they quickly asserted sovereign rights over rivers. River management was handed over to engineers, primarily civil engineers in charge of irrigation. This practice continues till today. But engineers are usually ill-trained to understand the myriad functions and values of rivers.

At People’s Science Institute (PSI) we have been engaged in rehabilitating watersheds, harvesting rainwater for irrigation as an alternative to big dams and monitoring river water quality for two decades. More recently we have focused on water sanctuaries to recharge local streams and on studying flow requirements of rivers. In 2008 we began campaigning for the conservation of rivers and their catchments.

With this calendar we begin a new series to inform and educate people about Himalayan rivers. Most of these rivers have dazzling pristine stretches. The origins of glacial rivers can be awe-inspiring whereas the gentle flow of springs-fed rivers soothes weary eyes. But many of these vistas will permanently disappear or be destroyed as the Himalayan states implement ambitious but ill-conceived programmes of hydropower development.

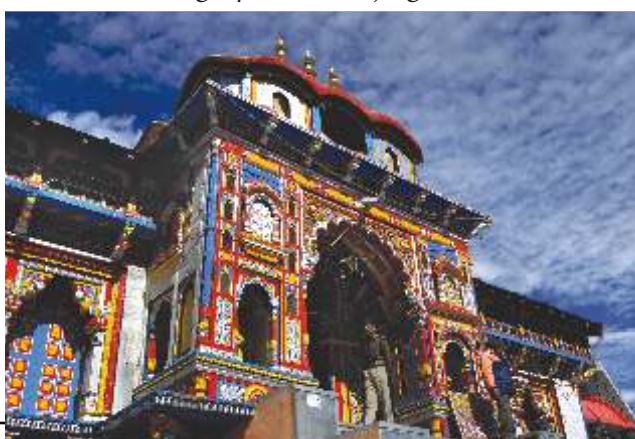
In Uttarakhand alone, 200 new projects are planned or are under construction. Every major or important river like the Tons, Yamuna, Bhagirathi, Bhilangana, Mandakini, Alakananda, Ganga, Saryu, Gori Ganga will have a series of dams – in most cases there will be a dam after every 20 or 25 km starting near the origin. In 173 projects, the river water will be put into long tunnels, leaving vast dry stretches downstream. While we recognize the nation’s need for hydropower, we oppose many of these projects because they do not follow good river management practices.

We begin the Himalayan Rivers series with India’s most revered river, Ganga Mayya or Mother Ganga. Hundreds of million Indians believe that the Ganga is सुरसरि (Sur-Sari) or the divine flow of energy. Hindu devotees believe that a dip in the river will wash away their sins. The Ganga has a thousand names which identify such characteristics – पतितपावनी, मोक्षदायिनी, पापहरणी, जीवनदायिनी, त्रिपथगामिनी, to name a few. Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister, called it India’s civilizational identity. The pictures in this calendar highlight the Ganga’s cultural, aesthetic, ecological and recreational values along with depicting the river performing its natural functions.

We invite you to join our efforts to protect Himalayan rivers. After receiving our earlier calendars – on traditional water harvesting in the Himalayas, a few people contributed generously to our Jal Sanskriti programme to help preserve such structures. We request your support for our newly-launched Rivers Conservation programme. We will use your gifts to encourage mountain communities to develop sanctuaries to protect springs and to harvest rainwater and increase the low flows in rainfed rivers.

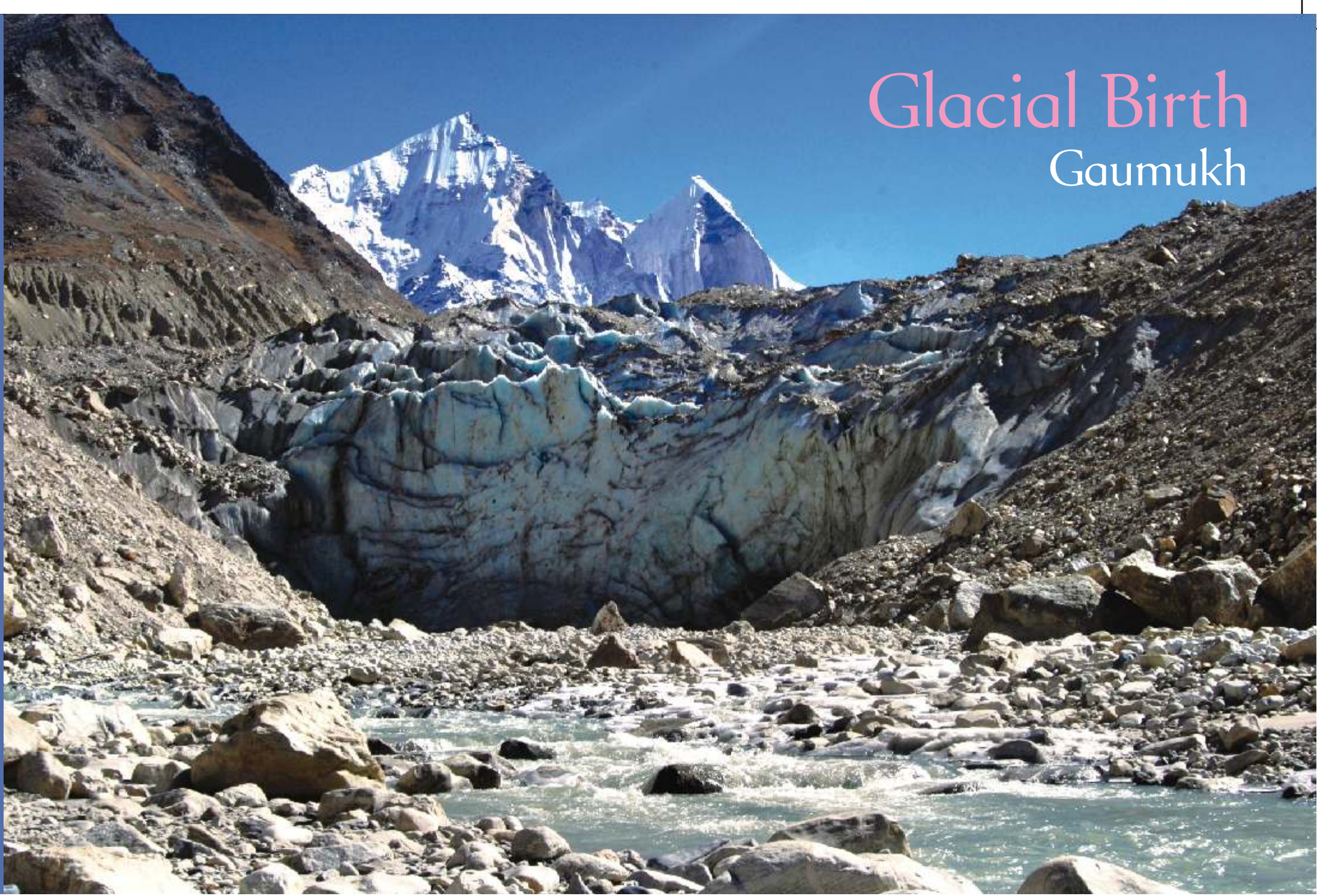
Without the active involvement of caring people in river management, rivers can only be exploited and ruined. And the ruin of rivers ultimately ruins us all.

Photographs : Devraj Agrawal, Salil Das, Ravi Chopra    Design : Shalini Sinha    Concept and Details : Ravi Chopra, Salil Das, Anil Gautam and Dinesh Sharma



# Glacial Birth

## Gaumukh



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New Year's Day

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Muharram

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Republic Day

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Basant Panchmi

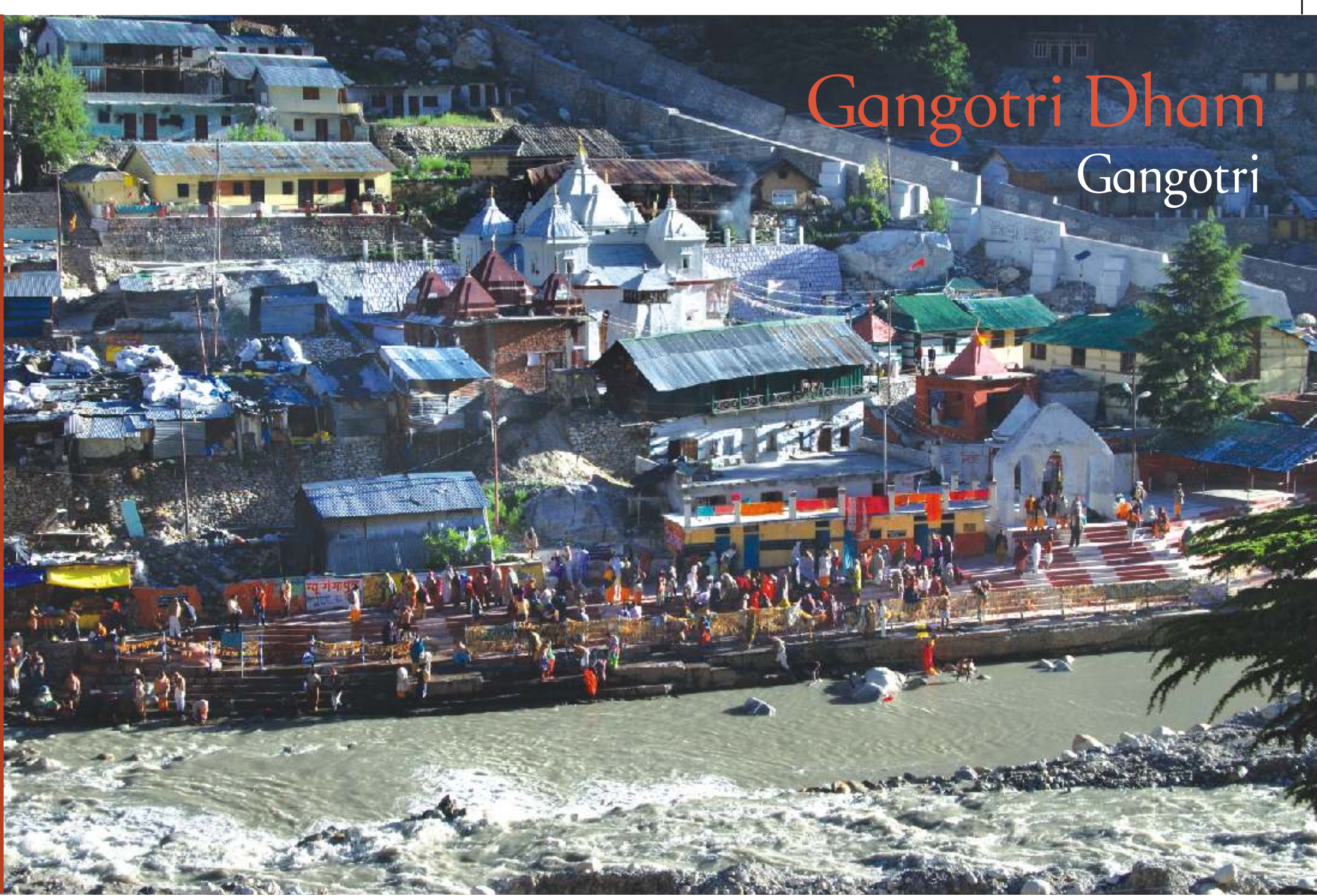
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# Gangotri Dham

## Gangotri



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Maha Shivratri

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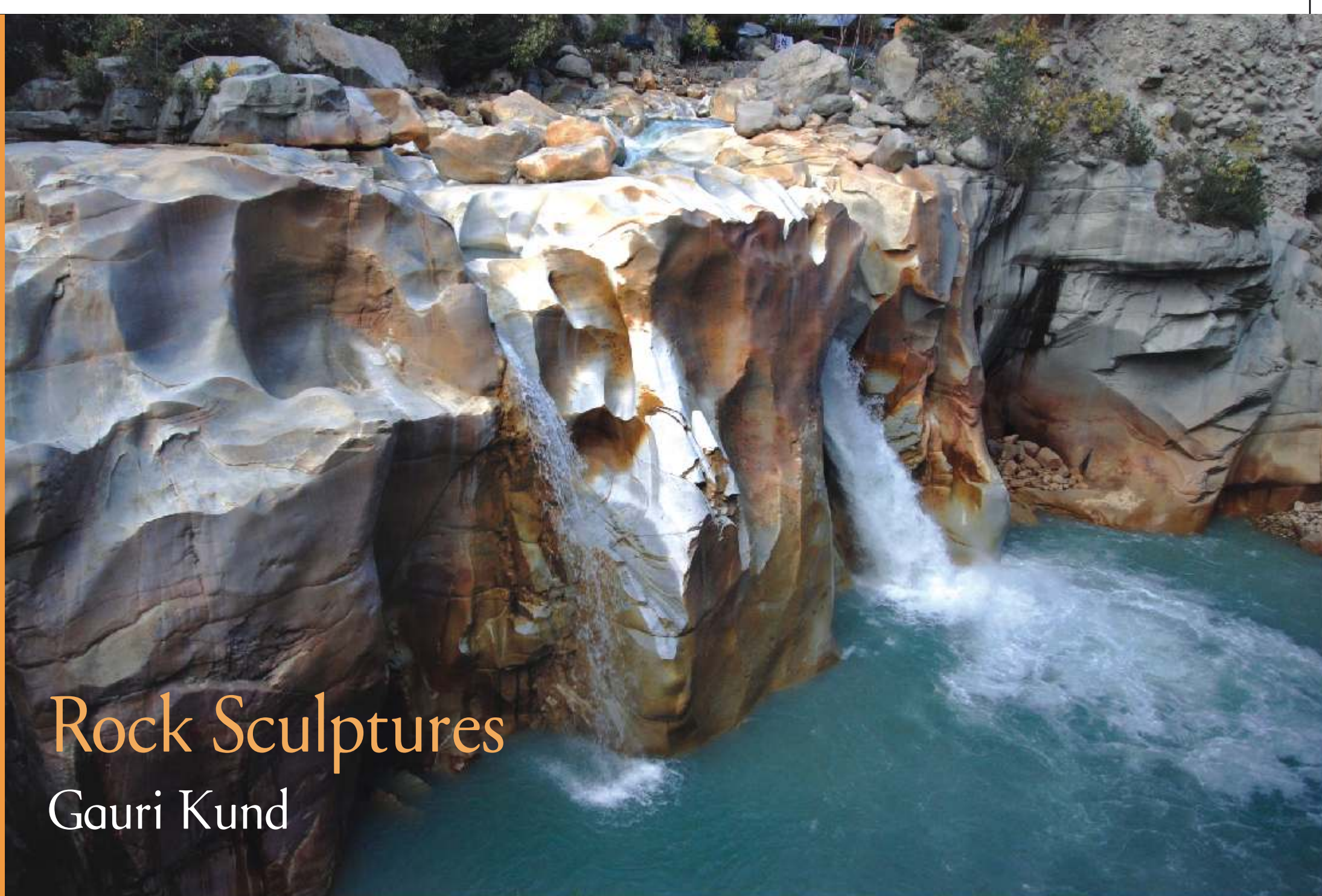
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# February

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# Rock Sculptures

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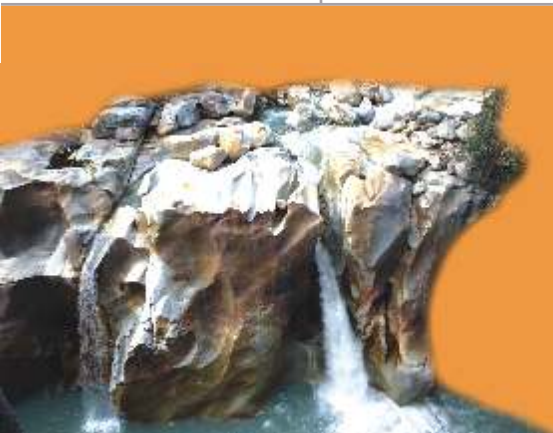
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# March

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# A Pristine Watershed

## Bachelikhal

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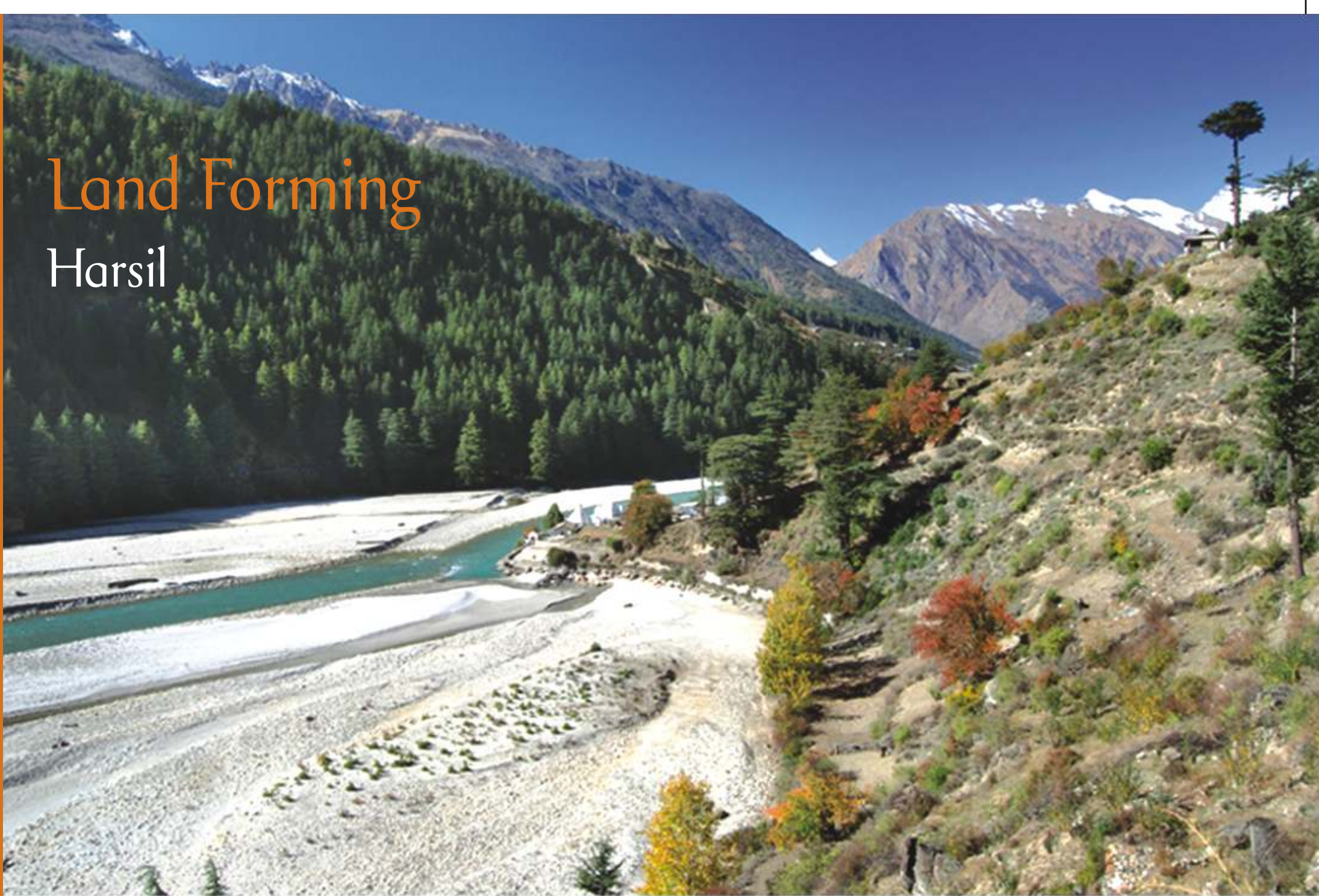
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# April

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# Land Forming

## Harsil



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May  
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