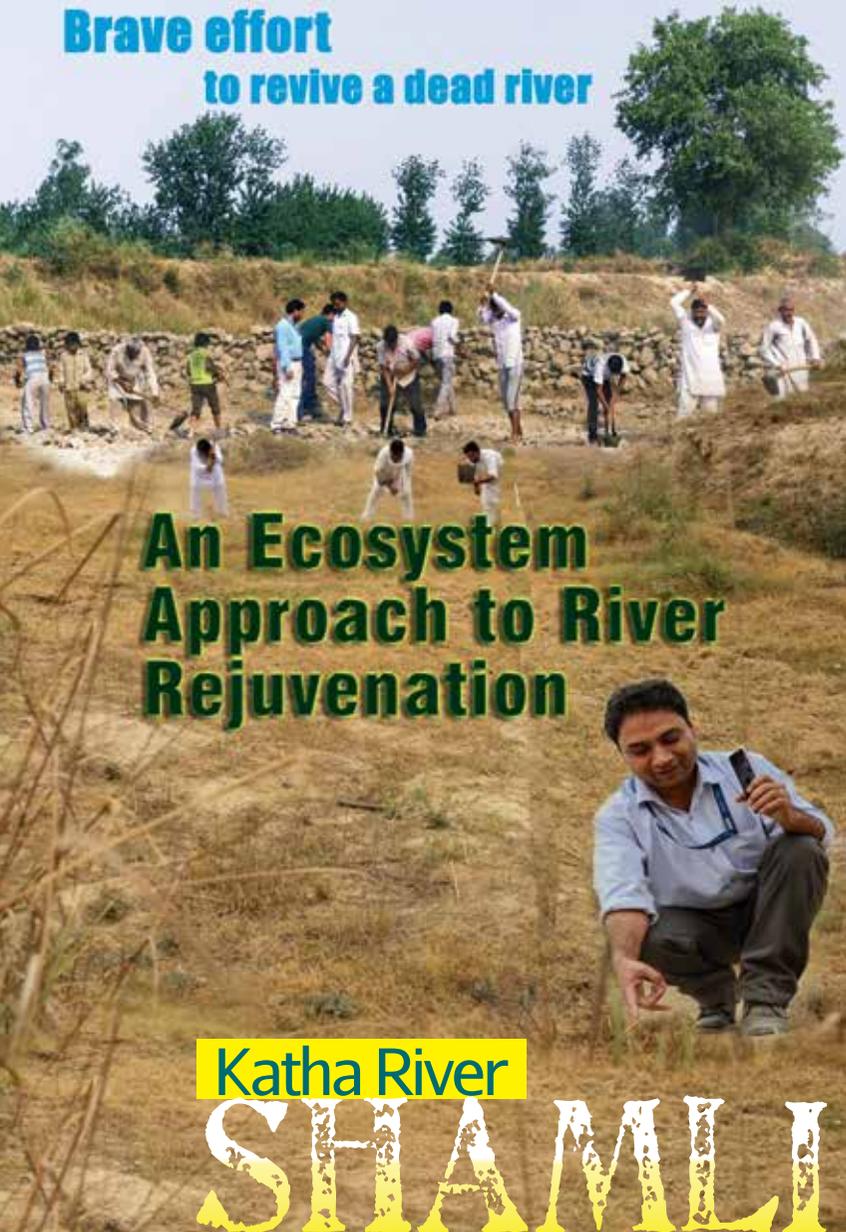


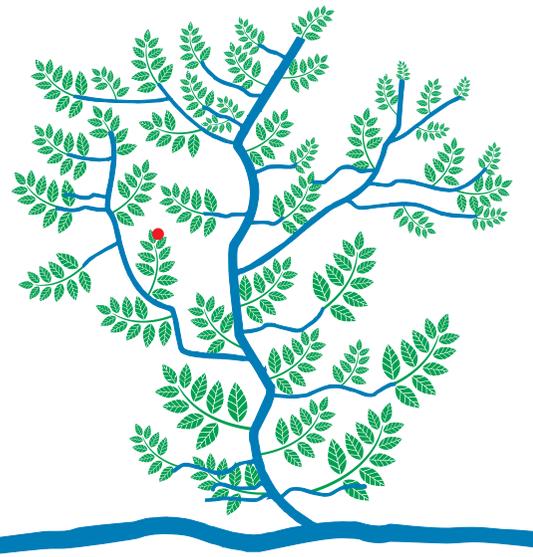
**Brave effort
to revive a dead river**



An Ecosystem Approach to River Rejuvenation

Katha River

SHAMLI



*A community funds **revival** of the Katha River with a “**One house, One pot**” **water donation** movement and a commitment to build **check dams**, dig **ponds** as well as **reviving** the adjoining **ecosystem**.*

The Katha River, a tributary of the Yamuna that originates in Saharanpur district and merges with the Yamuna near Ramra village has remained a dry channel for a long period of time. Communities living around the dry river bed were resigned to not seeing it come alive till a simple non-violent and collaborative effort under a wildlife scientist’s leadership made them active participants in a 5-year project that will conclude with ecosystem restoration. The Katha River Eco Restoration Programme (2016-21) will revive a 100 km stretch of the river

by undertaking rain water harvesting thereby recharging both surface and ground water, biodiversity restoration, lotus lake ecosystem development along with village tourism.

A plan that brings community into action

When Professor Mohd Umar Saif, a Shamli based wildlife scientist and head of the Natural History Research and Conservation Centre (HIFEED campus) asked residents of Malakpur village, Shamli district to participate in the revival of Katha river by bringing a pail of water and pouring it in the dry river bowl; this became a symbol of collective action to drive home the message of



being part of a movement that would bring together people from adjoining villages to undertake rejuvenation of the river, its flora and fauna. The launch of the restoration programme on 12th February, 2016 witnessed participation from district administration and civic authorities. Moreover, this would not be a one-off event but a 5-year dedicated project.

Once mobilisation of community and department officials were completed, Prof. Saif's team began mapping the course of the river using Geographical Information System (GIS) together with field surveys. Following discussions on solutions and strategies that could be adopted, it was decided to divide the river into 100 sections instead of starting

work on the entire length. A small 1 km stretch which ran through Malakpur village was taken up with a plan to build check dams and ponds along the bank of the river to harvest monsoon water. At present, in the absence of check dams, the rain water flows into the Yamuna. According to Prof. Saif, "Katha presently functions as the drainage pipe of the Yamuna. Every monsoon, the water flows and drains that into that river. To prevent this, the team decided to first work with a 1 km stretch of the riverbed and revive it, before moving ahead." He explains that creating a model example would encourage and motivate people living further downstream. As of date, the first check dam is



"Biggest challenge has been the lack of awareness and the fact that no one realized they have a chance to revive the river. The success of the initiative is built upon being completely driven and owned by the community with full support of multiple stakeholders including government, in a way that has been peaceful as well as non-confrontational."

*Prof. Mohd Umar Saif
Wildlife Scientist, Shamli*





REFLECTIONS & WAY FORWARD

ready and the second is nearing completion. A schedule has been drawn up and monitored by the village to ensure timely completion of the work ahead of the monsoon.

Breathing life in and around the river with flora and fauna

The Katha River Eco Restoration programme has a broader objective and goes beyond just bringing water in the river. As part of the “Green UP Clean UP” programme, the U.P. Forest Department is planning a large-scale plantation drive in July 2016 throughout the state. This event will be used by villagers to sow about 20,000 plants on both sides of the Katha River. The programme also envisages an Eco-Diversity park which will host a

butterfly conservatory in partnership with the local Eco clubs.

This model of revival of the river has generated a lot of interest. The voluntary spade-work carried out by the village folk may soon be brought under MNREGA. Meanwhile, the Katha River Rejuvenation foundation has gained traction through the increasing support from a growing number of organisations such as Himalayan Community College, Jadeed Foundation Trust, Kartavya Shikhsan & Sewa Samiti and Navchetan Satyabhash Group as well as government bodies namely Village Panchayat Malakpur, Zila Panchayat Shamli, Irrigation Department and Central Zoo Authority of India amongst others.

This laudable community supported initiative is worthy of replication since Indian rivers, with the exception of Himalayan rivers, do not have a perennial source and face similar problems due to excessive anthropogenic pressures.

Identification of the factors that caused Katha River to disappear and survey of geo-hydrology of the river basin would be useful exercises to undertake so that the entire rejuvenation effort could be based on an integrated watershed approach that takes important water quality concerns also into account.

*V. Rajagopalan, Former Secretary,
Ministry of Environment, Forest and
Climate Change, Government of India*