



1. THE BEGINNING

Story of a river

Ganesh Pangare

Bushra Nishat

Xiawei Liao

Halla Maher Qaddumi



A river with many names...

ཡར་ལུང་ཙང་པོ་གཙང་པོ།
雅鲁藏布江
सिआंग
ব্রহ্মপুত্র
যমুনা

Yarlung Tsangpo *Siang* *Brahmaputra* *Jamuna*

RIVER BASINS have been the cradles of civilizations and people have flourished along riverbanks over the ages. Every river has its own unique ecosystem harboring within it a diverse flora and fauna and humans have adapted to live within this complex web of life.

THE BRAHMAPUTRA as it is commonly referred to, is actually known by this name only in about 40 percent of its length when it flows through Assam in India. Revered as the Yarlung Tsangpo where it originates in Tibet, known as the Siang, after it plunges down the Grand Tsangpo Canyon, celebrated as the Brahmaputra in the flat terrains of Assam, and flowing as the remarkable Jamuna as it crosses the floodplains of Bangladesh, where it meets the Padma (Ganges) and the Meghna to form the largest delta in the world. This is the



mighty river system of the Yarlung Tsangpo-Siang-Brahmaputra-Jamuna River, one of the biggest river systems in the world. On its way towards the sea many tributaries, each a unique river in its own right, merge into the main channel which flows through three countries, China, India and Bangladesh. The basin, however, also includes Bhutan, from where the largest number of tributaries originate. Hereafter we refer to this river system as the River.

One river, many names; representing a continuum of change, and diversity, from upstream to downstream, as the River flows through borders and geographical regions. Each name has a story, giving it an identity that is more than a physical entity, imbuing it with history, culture and religion. The cultural and historical thread flows through the river system as it interacts with the people and communities that live and survive on its banks. Civilisations and kingdoms have come and gone, yet the river flows on, changing course over time, ebbing and flooding each year. Recent estimates show that about 130 million people live in the basin, of which about 86 percent live in rural areas.

The River remains largely unharnessed and with a few areas still uncharted, the basin remains one of the most intriguing regions of the world. Only recently, as documented later in the book, the origin of the river has been recharted, and the basin delineated. Based on this recent discovery the length of the River has been estimated at 3,350 kilometers from the source until it meets the iconic Ganges in Bangladesh, and 3,848 kilometers till it reaches the sea. The basin of around 712,035 square kilometers, encompasses a huge network of water courses formed by the numerous tributaries of the River.

A River of many superlatives, the Yarlung Tsangpo section of the river flows through the highest of landscapes, plunges 4,000 meters before it is known as the Siang, rushes through flat lands as the Brahmaputra, while as the Jamuna, the elevation of riverbed level falls well below mean sea level.

The diversity and complexity in the physiology, ecology and even ethnology makes the basin unique and enchanting. Shrouded in mythology, the River and its tributaries have been of great interest to researchers, scholars, as well as writers, journalists, artists and photographers not only from the region but from around the world. The literature is abundant, covering various aspects including hydro-morphology, biodiversity, cultural history, social development, livelihoods, resource utilization and management of the basin. But the literature has focused on only one or the other segment of the River or basin, and usually from one perspective, and not of the entire River system.

This book is one of the first attempts at documenting the Yarlung Tsangpo-Siang-Brahmaputra-Jamuna as a one river system creating multi layered narratives of the basin. The book is divided into 8 chapters exploring the physical characteristics like geomorphology, climate and hydrology, biodiversity, as well as socio-economic and cultural aspects of the basin. The book compiles and collates 91 contributions from global, regional and national experts from the four riparian countries.

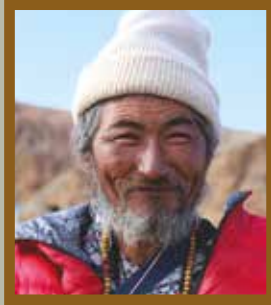
Giving the river its due place as one of the 20 longest rivers in the world

IF ONE LOOKS at any list of 20 or 25 longest rivers in the world there is sadly no mention of the Yarlung Tsangpo – Brahmaputra river. This needs to be corrected.

The length of the Yarlung Tsangpo- Brahmaputra river is **3,350 kilometers** from its source in Tibet till it meets the Ganges river in Bangladesh. After this the Ganges – Brahmaputra together meet the river Meghna and together they are known as the Lower Meghna which flows to the sea of Bay of Bengal. If one includes this length, from the confluence with Ganges till the sea, the total length of the river becomes **3,848 Kilometers**.

The Yarlung Tsangpo – Brahmaputra river should be ranked amongst the 20 longest rivers in the world. We hope that the River gets this recognition and China, India, Bangladesh and Bhutan can proudly say that one of the 20 longest rivers of the world flows through their lands.

We hope that this book is able to bring notice to one of the most fascinating river systems in the world and give the River its due recognition.



The Yarlung Tsangpo-Siang- Brahmaputra-Jamuna River

Deepest and longest canyon: The Yarlung Tsangpo Grand Canyon in Tibet, with depth upto 6,009 meters, is regarded as the deepest canyon in the world.

Highest navigable river: Originating at an altitude of 5,300 meters above sea level and flowing at an elevation of 3,500 meters above sea level through Tibet, China, the Yarlung Tsangpo is considered as the highest navigable river in the world.

One of the highest sediments carrying rivers: One of the most heavily sediment-laden large rivers of the world, exceeded only by the Amazon and Yellow River.

Joins the largest delta in the world: Over thousands of years, sediments carried by the Brahmaputra-Jamuna are being deposited in the Bengal Delta, the largest delta in the world. The Bengal delta slopes into the spectacular Bengal Deep Sea Fan, the largest submarine fan in the world.

Largest riverine island: Majuli, the largest riverine island in the world is located in the Brahmaputra in Assam.

Biodiversity Hotspots of the world: Listed as one of the 36 Biodiversity Hotspots in the world.

One of the oldest human migration routes: Major crossroad of movements of pre-historic ancestors from Africa to the Far East.

Largest riverine National Park in the world: With a total area of 340 square kilometers, Dibru Saikhowa National Park is the largest riverine island national park and one of the 19 biodiversity hotspots in the world.



*Pride of China, India,
Bangladesh and Bhutan*