



Narmada: River of Joy

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Amritlal Vegad

Translated from the original in Hindi by
Marietta Maddrell

BANYAN TREE

NARMADA: RIVER OF JOY

Amritlal Vegad

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Author



Amritlal Vegad is an artist and an award-winning author in Hindi and Gujarati. Hailing from the village of Madhapur in Kutch in the state of Gujarat, he went on to study at the prestigious Visva Bharati University at Shantiniketan under the famous artist from the Bengal School, Nandlal Bose. He lives in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, not far from the banks of the Narmada River. A teacher by profession, he taught at the Institute of Fine Arts in Jabalpur.

Amritlal Vegad's deep attachment to the Narmada resulted in his parikrama (pilgrimage) of the 1,312 kilometre-long river, which he began in 1977. He was then 49 years old. He undertook the parikrama, which requires walking the full circuit on both banks of the river, in sections over a period of 22 years. He was 71 when he completed his epic walk in 1999. If one includes his walks along the tributaries of the Narmada, he has actually done a total of 4,000 kilometres on foot. His wife Kanta gave him full support in his mission and even accompanied him on occasion.

Amritlal Vegad drew on his consummate skills as an artist and a writer to record the sights, sounds, characters and experiences he encountered during his Narmada walks. He wrote a trilogy, originally in Hindi and Gujarati. These were *Soundarya ki Nadi Narmada* ('Narmada: River of Beauty'), *Amrutsya Narmada* ('Amrit's Narmada', which has been translated into this book and renamed 'Narmada: River of Joy') and *Teere Teere Narmada* ('On the Banks of the Narmada'). His books have also been translated into Marathi, Bengali and English.

With his keen artist's eye, his sensitive understanding, his perceptive power and his creative pen which often lifts his prose into poetry, Amritlal Vegad has brought the Narmada and the scenes along the river banks to vivid life. He has also preserved for posterity the natural splendour of the river, and all the colourful aspects of life on the banks, some of which are disappearing due to developmental activity.

Working pen-and-ink sketches, Amritlal Vegad's art works focus on the Narmada and include a unique collection of paper collages. Some of

his delicately-drawn yet evocative sketches have illustrated his books on the Narmada.

Amritlal Vegad was honoured with the Sahitya Academy Award for Gujarati literature and the Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityayan Award for Hindi literature for his *Soundarya ki Nadi Narmada*. He is also the recipient of the Madhya Pradesh Rajya Sahitya Award and the Rashtrapati Award for his other works.

Today, as an environmental activist, Amritlal Vegad continues his lifelong commitment to the Narmada and other rivers of Madhya Pradesh. He is the President of Narmada Samagra, an organisation working against pollution in the rivers, and improving the sanitation and the facilities on the waterfronts and the banks.



Translator

Marietta Maddrell left England in 1982 and travelled widely in Asia. She taught English at Lhasa in Tibet and in Hong Kong. Arriving in India, she decided to make it her home and adopted the Indian way of life, renaming herself 'Mira'. While on her own parikrama of the Narmada, she met the author Amritlal Vegad, and was therefore uniquely suited to understand the subject matter of his books on the Narmada. Not surprisingly, she has infused the translation in English with the same spirit as the author did in the original in Hindi. The author has in fact written about her in a section of this book.

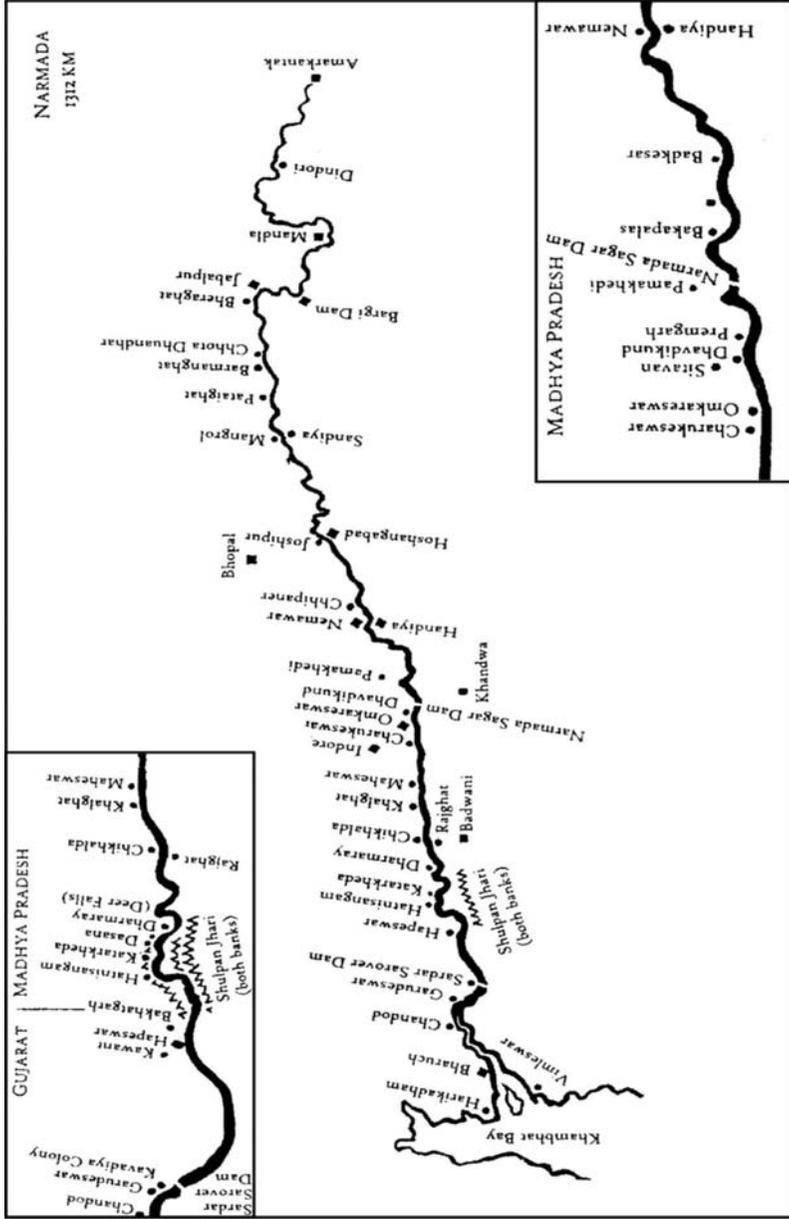




The Normal Sequence of the Narmada Parikrama

From Nareswar (Gujrat) to Gwaright, Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh) parikrama was not in order (succesive). Had they been in order (one after another) then they must have been like this:

1. Nareswar to Moriya
2. Moriya to Kolamba
3. Kolamba to Hatnisangam
4. Hatnisangam to Dharpuri
5. Dharpuri to Maheswar
6. Maheswar to Chaubis Avthar
7. Chaubis Avthar to Dhavrikund
8. Dhavrikund
9. Dhavrikund to Barkesar
10. Barkesar to Nilkanth
11. Nilkanth to Pathorha
12. Pathora to Joshipur
13. Joshipur to Sardarnagar
14. Sardarnagar to Mangrol
15. Mangrol to Mauni Mata's Ashram
16. Mauni Mata's Ashram to Karaundi
17. Karaundi to Barman Ghat
18. Barman Ghat to Kerpani
19. Kerpani to Hirapur
20. Hirapur to Jhansighat
21. Jhansighat to Bheraghat
22. Bheraghat: Marble Rocks and Dhuandhar
23. Bheraghat to Gwarighat (Jabalpur)



CONTENTS

- 1 Barman Ghat to Kerpani 1
 - 2 Kerpani to Hirapur 7
 - 3 Hirapur to Jhansighat 13
 - 4 Chaubis Avtar to Dhavrikund 19
 - 5 Dhavrikund 26
 - 6 Dhavrikund to Barkesar 33
 - 7 Barkesar to Nilkanth 42
 - 8 Nilkanth to Pathorha 52
 - 9 Pathora to Joshipur 59
 - 10 Joshipur to Sardarnagar 66
 - 11 Sardarnagar to Mangrol 74
 - 12 Mangrol to Mauni Mata's Ashram 81
 - 13 Mauni Mata's Ashram to Karaundi 89
 - 14 Karaundi to Barman Ghat 99
 - 15 Nareswar to Moriya 109
 - 16 Moriya to Kolamba 117
 - 17 Kolamba to Hatnisangam 123
 - 18 Hatnisangam to Dharpuri 132
 - 19 Dharpuri to Maheswar 140
 - 20 Maheswar to Chaubis Avtar 148
 - 21 Jhansighat to Bheraghat 156
 - 22 Bheraghat: Marble Rocks and Dhuandhar 166
 - 23 Bheraghat to Gwarighat (Jabalpur) 173
- Epilogue 181
- My Husband by Kanta Vegad 188
- Glossary 208



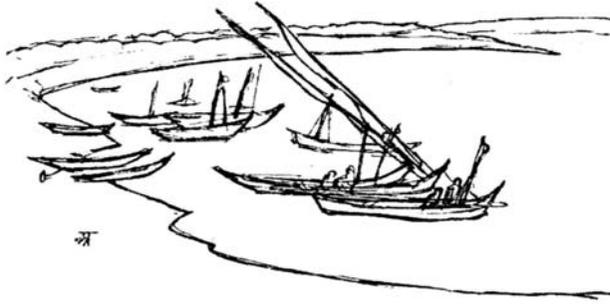


Narmada

The Narmada River is the traditional water boundary between the north and the south of the Indian sub-continent. The fifth-largest river in India, the Narmada flows 1,321 kilometres in the rift formed by the two mountain ranges that run across central India: the Vindhyas to the north, and the Satpuras to the south. Her journey begins in Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh; she then flows westwards via the state of Maharashtra to the coast of Gujarat, west of the city of Bharuch, emptying into the Gulf of Khambat. From a trickle at the source, the Narmada expands into a mighty 20-kilometre wide body of water at the estuary.

All along her course, the Narmada offers numerous fine vistas, some of them breathtaking in their unspoilt beauty. Her uniqueness lies in the fact that she is the only sacred river in India that is circumambulated (walked around in worship). Legend says that the Narmada never married, and being a virgin, is held to be more scared than even the Ganga, the most important of India's five holiest rivers. The prescribed period for the Narmada parikrama (pilgrimage) is three years, three months and 13 days. The full circuit, up and down the entire length of her banks, is 2,624 kilometres.

Hailed as the eternal Mother, the Narmada is always referred to in the feminine gender. The name 'Narmada' translates into 'Giver of Joy'.



Narmada! You are beautiful, most beautiful
Give me a little of your beauty
So that I may share it with others