



## Investigating Role of Intangible Cultural Heritage in constructing the phenomenon of Narmada River Parikrama

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### Abstract

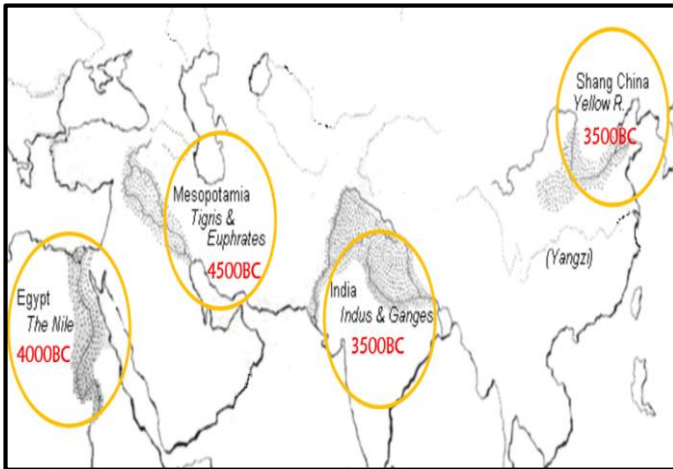
The traces of earliest human settlements are found on the bank of rivers which are one the natural forms of drinking water which are considered as a lifeline of the settlements. Since ancient time, Indian Culture assigned motherly values to rivers because of their significance in respective regional settings. Through-out the Indian Subcontinent, traditions and rituals evolved from ages around the rivers have shaped up some commonly followed cultural aspects along with some specific rituals to the rivers. Circumambulation of River Narmada, Shri Krishna Poojan on Yamuna River Banks at Vrindavan are examples of some of these specific cultural aspects. Out of the most sacred seven rivers (Ganga, Yamuna, Godawari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu, and Kaweri); River Narmada has special cultural significance with its strategic geographical location dividing Indian subcontinent in Northern and Southern parts. This research is aimed to investigate the role of intangible Heritage in constructing the phenomenon of Narmada River Parikrama based on the parameters like historical importance, poetic references, mentions in Puraans, folk culture, religious importance, TapoBhumi Narmada (रेवा तीरे तपः कुर्यात्!) with the very unique cultural aspect of Parikrama (Circumambulation) of a river as a deity. Parameters to understand cultural footprints were delineated to these aspects with the focus of completing one stage of research in stipulated time schedule. The religious aspect includes Tirthsthana (Sacredscapes) on the Parikrama Path on North and South banks, rituals, and activities followed by the devotees, and the connectivity of Lord Shiva with River Narmada. A famous verse says नर्मदा का हर कंकर है शंकर! (Means, each gravel of River Narmada depicts Lord Shiva.) Hence the religious thread in cultural heritage studies is very strong and needs to be established with the Parikrama perspective. The analytical methodology for conducting research included study of various literature references about River Narmada written by historians, poets, Saints, and ancient scriptures like Puraan, Mahatmya etc. available in the form of books, doctoral research thesis, research papers and scholarly articles. These literature sources refer River Narmada focusing on various perspectives. They are critically analysed and inferences regarding role of intangible cultural footprints around Narmada River banks in forming the Phenomenon of Parikrama are summarized in this paper. Next stage of the research or a way-forwards of this research study can be continued further to establish manifestation of Parikrama Concept in the tangible cultural heritage with respect to spatial planning and built forms.

**Keywords:** Intangible Cultural Heritage; River Narmada; Narmada Parikrama; Religious values

### 1. Introduction

All the major civilizations are found on the river banks from ancient time. The examples of Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Chinese, and Indus valley civilizations are well to all. From the intention of

getting potable water for survival and fertile land for cultivation, these civilizations are flourished with cultural evolutions in the river basin areas. [8-11] Figure 1 shows the Ancient Valley Civilization



**Figure 1 Ancient Valley Civilization (Source: - Google Images)**

In the Indian subcontinent, blending of nature-culture has given birth to the cultural aspects those are very specific to the region and shaped up with the influential factors from the surrounding as the climate, topography, natural elements, and flora-fauna, etc. Indian ancient culture has given motherly place to the rivers being lifeline to the society. Rivers are worshipped as a personified female deity which is reflected in the acclamations with river names like Maa-Ganga, Yamuna Maiyya, Ma-Kaweri, and Narmada-Maiyya etc. [12] there are certain cultural reflections with respect to the rivers. For example – historical references, literature, narratives and folklores, folksongs, festivals, birth to death rituals, etc. Out of the most sacred seven rivers (Ganga, Yamuna, Godawari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu, and Kaweri); River Narmada has special cultural significance with its strategic geographical location dividing Indian subcontinent in Northern and Southern parts. River Narmada is one of the most sacred rivers among these seven rivers due to its strategic geographical location, number of Tirthsthana a separate Puraan devoted to the river with other scriptures, textual references like Narmada Panchang, Narmada Mahatmya, etc. [14] Another important aspect associated to the river is Parikrama of the River i.e. circumambulation of a whole river as a source of positive energy. This research is conducted with the perspective of investigate role of Intangible Cultural Heritage in constructing phenomenon of Narmada River Parikrama. This aim

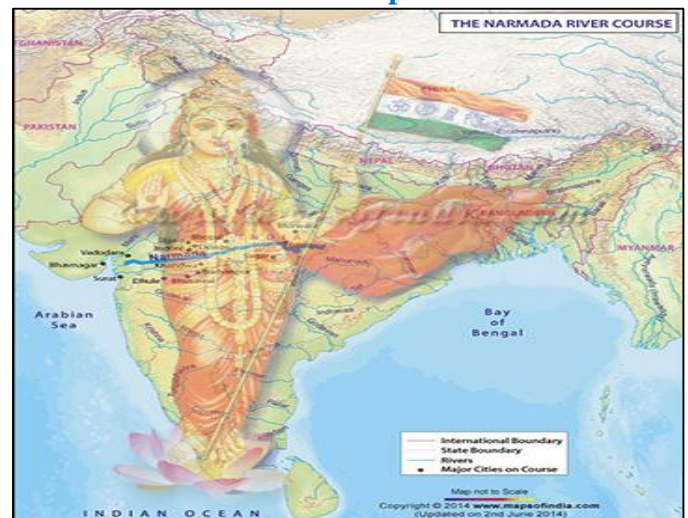
is achieved through studying the objectives as intangible cultural aspects related to rivers and river Narmada; listing and documenting rituals related to Narmada Parikrama; holistic study of connection between Narmada River Parikrama and these cultural aspects.

## 2. Methodology

The analytical methodology for conducting research included study of various literature references about River Narmada written by historians, poets, Saints, and ancient scriptures like Puraan, Mahatmya etc. available in the form of books, doctoral research thesis, research papers and scholarly articles. These literature sources refer River Narmada focusing on various perspectives. [17] They are critically analyzed and inferences regarding role of intangible cultural footprints around Narmada River banks in forming the Phenomenon of Parikrama are summarized in this paper. Next stage of the research or a way-forwards of this research study can be continued further to establish manifestation of Parikrama Concept in the tangible cultural heritage with respect to spatial planning and built forms.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Primary Information of River Narmada and its Cultural Importance



**Figure 2 Map of Personified India Visualized with River Narmada as a Waistband**

[Source: India map from “mapofindia.com” website overlapped by author to cross-check Kati-Mekhala position] Figure 2 shows the Map of Personified India



Visualized with River Narmada as a Waistband.

- **Narmada Puran:** Puran literature is one of the important ancient scripture in Hindu Culture. There are 18 main Puranas. Among all the sacred rivers, only Purana written on river is Narmada Puran which is the part of Skand Puran (Reva Khand) and has its independence existence as separate Puran also.
- **Location of River Namada in India:** River Narmada flows from East to West in the Central India. Approximately 75% of Narmada flows through Madhya Pradesh and 25% through Gujarat. Very small part of the southern bank of River Narmada touches North Maharashtra boarder i.e. 72 km out of 1312 km of total length. Due to River Narmada, Indian subcontinent is divided into Northern and Southern parts. That's why Narmada is visualized as 'Kati-Mekhala' of Bharat-Mata (personification of India).
- **Mythological Story about the birth of River Narmada:** It is said as per the Purana that Narmada is born from the sweat of Lord Shankar during the Tandav (furious dance of Lord Shankar during destruction) or during the Tap (tenacity) after losing Goddess Sati at the Yadnyakund of Prajapati Daksh. Few folklores depict that Narmada is daughter of Ayurvedic medicines' trader 'Reva Nayak'. As Narmada is born from the sweat of Lord Shankar, Lord Ganesh is considered as her brother. [18]
- **Udgam of River Narmada:** Fountainhead of River Narmada is on Mountain Mekal in Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh.
- **Flow Direction:** River Narmada is flowing towards West. It flows from East to West mostly in straight direction. Narmada is the longest river merging into Arabian Sea.
- **NabhiSthan (Naval Place):** Nemawar in Madhya Pradesh is considered as Maa Narmada's (personification of River Narmada) naval place. It is one of the auspicious places on the course of Parikrama. The place has a Kund built in the river flow and is worshipped with specific rituals for the NabhiSthan.
- **Estuary of River Narmada with Arabian Sea:**

The part of the sea where River Narmada merges Arabian Sea is called Reva Sagar. The place on Northern bank of the river is Mithi-Talai and on the Southern bank is Kathpor in Bharuch district.

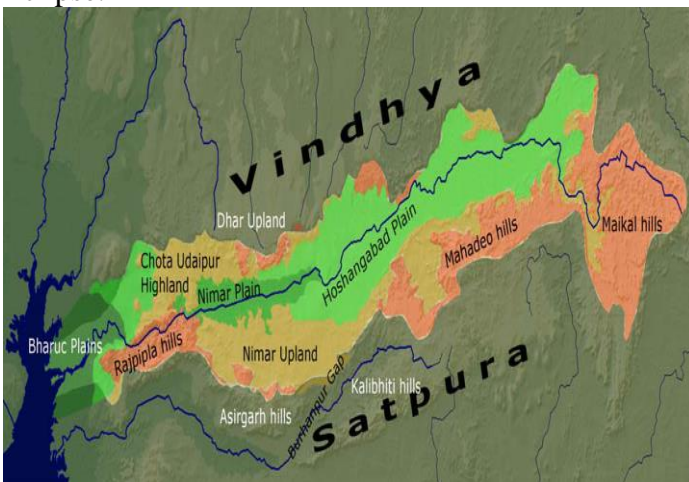
- **Narmada Jayanti:** As per the Narmada Puran, Maagh Shuddh Saptami (Rath-Saptami) in Hindu calendar is celebrated as Narmada Jayanti on both the banks. This day is considered as very auspicious, important and people celebrate it with full devotion to Maa Naramda by praying, special worship with lights and offering Diyas into the river. Food is bestowed and Narmada River is worshipped in the form of Vestal.
- **Length of the River Narmada:** Total length of the river is approx. 1312 Km.
- Total Tributaries of Narmada River:
- **Vaahan (Vehicle) Of Narmada River:** Crocodile
- Way of worshipping River Narmada during the Parikrama, on festivals, occasions, and special auspicious days (Parvani Kaal): These are the intangible Cultural aspects related to river Narmada.
  - Lighting Diyas and offering them into the river. This is always a very spectacular event especially in the evenings/night.
  - Worshipping Vestals (Kumarika- Poojan)
  - Food bestowal (Anna-Daan)
  - Kadhai: Making sweet Prasaad from wheat flour, Ghee & Jaggery in pan which is known as Kadhai in the local language hence the Prasaad is also known as Kadhai.
  - Offering Coconut and Cloth piece (Otee - Khan-Naral)
  - Saari Chadhana: On the very special auspicious occasions like Narmada Jayanti, the river is worshipped with a unique ritual of Saari Chadhana. Devotees tie multiple Saaris lengthwise and make a roll on a big pulley. Then the pulley is kept on one side of the river bank and the whole tied Saaris are pull through water up to another bank using a boat. Then these Saaris are separated and donated to the needy and poor Adiwasi women.



**Figure 3 Saari Chadhana, Oti Bharana, Deep Daan, Worshipping during Eclipse,**

Source: Author - during primary data collection

Mountains around Narmada River: River Narmada is bounded by Mountain Vindhya on North and Mountain Satpuda on South almost till Gujarat State. After that it flows quiet calmly. Its fountainhead place Mount Mekal is the part of Vindhya mountain range. Figure 3 shows the Saari Chadhana, Oti Bharana, Deep Daan, and Worshipping during Eclipse.



**Figure 4 Plains, Uplands and Hills of the Narmada Valley**

[Source: Dissertation (Dr. Phil.), Jurgen Neua, At the

Institute for the Languages and Cultures of South Asia. In the Faculty of History and Cultural Studies. The Freie Universität Berlin, Map 7, and Page 21] Figure 4 shows the Plains, Uplands and Hills of the Narmada Valley.

### 3.2. Intangible Cultural Aspects about Narmada Parikrama [6]

River Narmada is among the most sacred seven rivers as per Hindu Culture (Ganga, Yamuna, Godawari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu, and Kaweri). गंगेच यमुनेचैव गोदावरी सरस्वती | नर्मदे सिंधु कावेरी | जलेस्मिन् संनिधम् कुरु॥ (Narag Puraan, Adhyay 27) [Meaning: One should always stay closer to the water of Rivers Ganga, Yamuna, Godawari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu, and Kaweri. This is the common shloka chanted during bathing in Indian tradition imagining the bath with these holly rivers' sacred water.] There are many more rivers in the world which are worshipped as a deity. But Parikrama is done only of Narmada River. It opens the path to Salvation as per the Hindu Mythology. Narmada Parikrama gives piece of mind, spiritual happiness and salvation. While doing the Parikrama, one needs to take care about not crossing the river flow in any case. But this rule will not be followed in Parikrama type of Hanumant- Parikrama. As per the ancient text, Markandey Rishi did the first Parikrama in Somsutri way. Myth tells that at the time of holocaust of the world, only Markandey Rishi and River Narmada survived due to Lord Shankar's blessings. Hence after the peaceful settlement of the world, Rishi did the Parikrama to show his gratitude towards Maa Narmada. As per the Narmada Purana, Vidhee (the Process) of Narmada Parikrama: What is Parikrama Uchalane / Uthana? (Starting circumambulation) It means, the place where Parikrama starts, resolution (Sankalpa-Poojan) is done for Maa-Narmada's continuous accompany while doing Parikrama. For Her daily worship, sacred Narmada water is carried in small container (Kupi) and Parikrama is commenced. This is useful in some places where going forward along the banks is not possible. For example, if Parikrama is started at Omkareshwar – M.P., then it is said that Parikrama is lifted from Omkareshwar. Written certificate as an official



Parikramavasi (the one who is doing Parikrama) from Municipality or Head person of the starting place. From time to time this certificate should be stamped from the in between places and should be produced if asked to verify.

### **Which are all places from where Parikrama is lifted?**

It is assumed that Parikrama will be complete after reaching the same starting place. It can be started from any Tirthsthan along the bank of river Narmada. But usual preferred places in present for lifting Parikrama are – Omkareshwar, Amarkantak, Nemavar, Reva-Sagar, and Maheshwar.

**Common Rituals while doing Parikrama** - All these poojan are done by Brahmin Priests on Narmada Ghat.

- Narmada Snan (the holly bath), Sankalp Poojan (resolution) of Parikrama.
- Worshipping 5 vestals as Narmada Maiyya by giving food, Dakshina and gifts.
- Kadhai – Prasad
- At the completion of Parikrama, SankalpPoorti Poojan. (Completion of revolution)
- Prayashchitt Vidhee (Ritual for Atonement) - To overcome some mistakes done during Parikrama knowingly or unknowingly.

Types of Narmada Parikrama are Somsutri, Jalhari, Rudra, Hanumant, Khandit Parikrama, PanchKrosi Parikrama, and Uttaravahini Parikrama. [1]

#### **3.2.1. Historical Reference [13]**

Narmada river references are found from the mythological period of Ramayana and Mahabharat. With the strategic geographical location of Narmada Valley, different rules tried to conquer and control this region in historical time as well. The cultural footprints of these dynasties are found on both the banks at various sacred scapes. The plinths and GarudStmabh of Vishnu Temple built during Shunga period (150 CE) by Ynani Ambassador in Besnagar, Amarkantak temple complex from Kaalchuri dynasty (7th to 10th CE), Maheshwar Ghats and Temple complex by Ahilyadevi Holkar from late 18th CE are few of these examples. The places are known and important TirthSthana on Parikrama Path.

#### **3.2.2. Poetic and Literary references, Mentions in Puraans [15, 16, 19, 20]**

Narmada valley and Parikrama Path has been always an inspiration to the poets and writers with its spiritual importance and scenic beauty. References about River Narmada are found in 18 Puraanas and other ancient texts like SamaranganSutraDhara (11th CE), BruhatSanhita by VarahMihir (7th CE), etc. The famous Poet Mahakavi Kalidas describes in his creation MeghaDoot about the Naramda River banks and Tirthksashtra located on both the banks which are actually lying on the Parikrama Path. The River basin area and Parikrama Path on both the banks has given birth too many literary works from ancient time up to contemporary period. Amrutlal Wegad's Teere Narmada, Saundaryakhani Narmada, Bharati Thakur's Narmada Parikrama: Ek Antaryatra, Shri Jagannath Kunte's Narmade Har, and there are many more examples. The references reflect the influence of River Narmada and concept of Parikrama on the society. Author studied short and selected summary books based on ancient scripts of 18 Puraan written by D.G.Kulkarni. This secondary data has proved the mentions and references of Narmada River Basin area and path in the Puraan texts.

#### **3.2.3. Folklore, Narratives, Oral Traditions [6]**

One famous folklore about Narmada Parikrama: Goddess Ganga and Goddess Narmada were doing for tenacity. Lord Shankar was pleased with their dedication and asked for the reward. At that time Goddess Ganga asked for the permanent place within him. So she was given the place in Lord's clotted hair (Jataa). Goddess Narmada asked Lord to be inculcate within her. God accepted happily and hence it is said that each piece of stone in Narmada is the form of Lord Shiva i.e. Shiv-Linga नर्मदाका हर कंकर है शंकर। [Meaning: Each and every piece of stone in the River Narmada is worshipped as Lord Shankar / ShivLinga.] The reason of very famous slogan Narmade Har-Har lies in the same belief. Reference of River Narmada from Rugwediy Khil-Sookt: The first and the oldest Ved I.e. Rugwed clearly mentions about River Narmada in its Khil-Sookt (2nd Adhyay – chapter, 8th Shloka) that – नर्मदायै नमः प्रातर्नर्मदायै नमो निशि | नमोऽस्तु नर्मदे तुभ्यम् पाहि मां विषसर्पतः ॥ [Meaning: O Maa Narmade, I salute u in the morning



as well as night. Please save me from snake's poison.] It is believed that, who chants this shloka while bathing in the holy water of River Narmada, can prevent from most dangerous poisonous snake bite. This Shloka is included in the Puraan also but Rugwed and Khil-Sookt are more ancient hence those are given preference. [2-5] (Source: 'Vaidik Khil-Sookte – A Study') The Birth Story of river Narmada: There are more than one myths explained by different Puraan about the origin of river Narmada. Somewhere it is explained to be created from Shiva's sweat drops while doing Taandav (Furious dance of Bhagavan Shiva) or sometimes it is created from Shiva's immerse tenacity or sometimes from the juicy extract of Shiva's crescent. Though the stories are different, one thing is very common about that River Narmada is originated somehow from Bhagavan Shiva's head or body. This the reason for inseperable connection of River Narmada with Bhagavan Shiva. SkandPuraan: In the starting period of KritYuga, Bhagavan Shiva was involved in deep tenacity at Mountain Vindhyachal. While doing this intence tenacity, the sweat created from his body stated flowing in the form of water. This is nothing but River Narmada. The birth time believed to be Afternoon of Maagh Krushna Saptami – RathSaptami. River Narmada is said be 'KalpantSthayini' - the one who never get destroyed even in Kalpant – the end of the Kalp (as per Hindu beliefs, the whole process of life of the earth is counted into 4 yuga – Krit, Treta, Dwapaar, and Kali , each having few lakhs of years each. They all create one Kalp. It is said to be a day of Bhagavan Brahma.) She has seen 8 such Kalpant uptil now.

#### 3.2.4. Religious Importance [6]

From birth to death rituals are associated and are performed on the banks of River Narmada. There are many rituals performed considering the River Narmada as goddess and motherly caring deity. Many rituals are common throughout the path though few are specific to the place.

- Common rituals throughout the path are – (Source: Reva khand – 5th adhyay (5-4-45))
- Maagha Shu. Saptami – Narmada Jayanti – Food donation (Annadaan), floating down the lamps Dive soadane

- All Pournima, Amavasya, Grahan – holy bath
- Makar Sankranti – holy bath in confluences -
- Vaishakh Shu. Saptami – Ganga stays in Narmada – holy bath – Kapila gayi chya roopat n returns as white cow
- GangaDashami – Local experience says that water level increases by almost 6” – Jyeshth Shu. Pratipada to shu. Dashami – River is considered to be as
  - Ganga between 6-9 am
  - Yamuna between 9-12 am
  - Saraswati between 12-3 pm
  - Original Narmada between 3-6 pm

Bathing during these timings considered as auspicious and equally fruitful of bathing in the above mentioned rivers. Hence devotees bath in all 4 time periods during Jyeshth Shu. [7] Pratipada to shu. Dashami. Other rituals and traditions are mentioned in the introductory part like Oti/Godi Bharana,

#### Conclusion

River Narmada with concept of Parikrama, i.e. circumambulation of a river as a deity, is a very unique cultural aspect. This involves all the parameters like historical references, folk culture with folklore-narratives-traditions, poetic and literary references from ancient time till date. Hence a physical entity of River and Parikrama path are blended with these intangible cultural aspects. The intangible cultural resources are developed based on these factors. Hence they have developed and established the phenomenon of the Narmada River Parikrama. This research can be continued further for studying the tangible cultural aspects based on the blending of these intangible cultural resources and natural aspects. Manifestation of architectural heritage from these blending can be studied and established.

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