Chapter - IV

On the Ganga and the Narmada: English and Gujarati Travelogues
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Travel has a way of stretching the mind. The stretch comes not from travel’s immediate rewards, the inevitable myriad new sights, smells and sounds, but with experiencing firsthand how others do differently what we believed to be the right and only way. (Andras 159)

Travel has been an essential part of existence for both the human and non-human entities for various reasons. Human travellers have earnestly felt the need of recording and narrating these different travel experiences. Attempts have been made to convert such experiences into written documents, and though such accounts are available now in abundance, the genre of travel writing has been considered as marginalized in the gamut of literary studies/academia. But at the same time, the genre of travel writing has always been a very accommodating in its themes, narrations and techniques, it is earning acceptance in the modern era as a form of literature. Travel narrators extend the same experience of delight and knowledge to their readers which they had enjoyed and made them relish variety of different cultures. There is an intersection of different cultures for a traveller at a different and foreign land. This vantage point generates dialogue between two diverse cultures.

Travel writing is an interaction of the human subject with the world and that is how travelling provides opportunity to participate in acts of (inter)cultural perception and cultural construction. Inter-cultural communication makes aware of the commonalities and diversities of lives in one’s own and the other land. In this way, travel writing provides the readers not only with an impression of the travelled world, but the travelling subject is always also laid bare as accounts of travel are never objective; they reveal the culture-specific and individual patterns of perception and knowledge which each traveller brings to the travel led world.
Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs rightly state that the real power of travel is to enrich our knowledge of human societies (Hulme & Youngs 4). Accounts of travel satisfy a reader’s curiosity about foreign countries and ‘strange’ experiences; depending on the type of journey and the place involved, they may also fulfill a need for adventure. A traveller tries to capture lives on a different and foreign land and develop communication between two or more different cultures. Travel writing implies decoding an unknown, unfamiliar culture and recording it in terms of another known and familiar culture; it is an act of translating a culture, it provides a space in-between. Travel is a cultural comparison, an intercultural perception, a dynamic act of cultural translation and cultural construction, which is entangled in time and space. The resulting travel literature is, therefore, an interface of two cultures, one editing the other. In this process, the traveller’s own country may equally be the object of his or her investigation.

The traveller begins to read the culture of foreign lands, in a manner similar to the process of reading a text, and tries to decipher the conventions of such a culture/text; thereafter he begins to translate it into a familiar language for his/her own people and also makes unknown readers from the world the stakeholders of his experiences of journey. During this act of translation, the traveller juxtaposes two cultures. Repeatedly, the traveller moves back and forth from his own consciousness and culture to that of the ‘Other’. Consequently, he judges between various dissimilar phenomena in two locations which is an important recognition that forms knowledge and judgment as differentiation between two things is the core of judgment. This judgment will be authentic provided that the traveller represents the ‘Other’ without diminishing its normalness. Pfister’s argues:

[The] other cultures do, of course, exist in their own right; only in their otherness are they constructions of external observations. For
them, they function as projection screens for their own anxieties and desires. The Other […] helps both the individual and a culture to establish and maintain identity by serving as a screen onto which the self projects in unfulfilled longings, its repressed desires and its darker sides which it wishes and sees itself constrained to exorcise…. In a word: the Other is fascinating. One feels drawn towards and into it and at the same time shies away from it; it is alluring and repellent at the same time. (Travel, Travel Writer and Travel Writing p.21)

The literature of travel, at its best, functions as an effective medium for the global circulation of (trans) cultural information. It creates a communication between ‘others’ and ‘us’. It is a discourse designed to describe the culture and society of particular people for readers of all kinds. The mind of the traveller is a site for communication. Yet one’s experiences of travel – mostly recollected in tranquillity while writing – will be stained with one’s own impressions and perceptions like the selection of the site for travelling according to individual’s interest. This chapter is an attempt to read such socio, cultural and environmental issues in the select English and Gujarati riverine travelogues on the two major rivers of India – the Ganga and the Narmada.

Natural scapes have been the obvious choice for travellers. Out of which, rivers are frequently explored sites for travel with different purposes and out of needs. Since ancient times, rivers have been the cradles of civilizations and routes for communication between varied groups of people. Their fertile lands and waters have nurtured the lives. These rich civilizations are the important sites of travel. Rivers like the Nile, the Indus, the Yangtze, and the Ganga have myths, beliefs and tales attached to them and these various threads make them important sites to gain knowledge about the cultures they have nourished. In case of travels in India around the banks of the rivers especially the Ganga, travellers from all around the world have come with the
thought of visiting a site which has nourished, retained and extended the values of a
great civilization to the world. Similarly the ancient tradition of the Narmada
*parikrama* pulls in the people from different corners of the world. Travellers might
not be well versed with the local languages of the land they travel but they try to
convert their experiences into the language which can reach to the wider group of
readers. They try to edit their experiences and this convenient translation may cause a
loss of culture when they are converted into writing but not presented properly.

Travellers witness and compare the traditions, customs, and value systems of
two cultures. In a country like India, which is a multi faceted land, a traveller will be
witnessing more than one culture i.e., sub-cultures. India continues to fascinate
travellers who are, as Dom Moraes said, “startled, annoyed, and attracted by its
colossal, inexplicable diversities” (Mandal 1). While journeying on different rivers,
one can find diverse customs, traditions and ways of life but some essential values are
pan-Indian which are bound in a common thread of value system. Like Dennison
Berwick and Julian Crandall Hollick rightly say that they are amazed by the
unanimous belief prevailing across India about the rivers especially the Ganga is both
spiritual and real – it has a functional utility in a routine – which has ritual to be
performed daily. On the contrary, they have learned so well in the West to separate
sacred from secular that the very notion of their being indivisible, like the Ganga,
seems absurd.

Cultures are differently observed and narrated by the travellers who have
travelled two different rivers within the country. Life on the ghats of the Ganga is
very chaotic, ritualistic and becoming urbanized but peaceful for those who have
detached themselves from worldly affairs whereas life on the Narmada is serene and
more in the lap of nature where only the river and the tradition of *parikrama* matter.
However, a common fact is that journeys on these rivers are undertaken with deep faith and reverence for these natural entities which also play important part in making ancient civilization of India more outstanding.

There are different reasons why people have travelled Indian rivers. A few travellers who visit the river banks with the idea of search and research. Travellers on the Ganga mostly visit with the curiosity of the ‘Mysterious Factor X’ as Crandall Hollick says i.e., the purifying quality of the river water and to die on its ghats because it is considered to be the journey towards liberation of the soul whereas the Narmada is being journeyed because of the parikrama and in present time it is also being visited to find the archaeological assets of fossils from its valley.

Apart from the spiritual importance of the river, rituals and myths become the connect with the river, otherwise for the local inhabitants, the water is flowing by and they keep using it for their daily chores. But the belief and faith keep the rivers alive with greater reverence. Different travellers have taken up the various means of travel on both the rivers. As the Ganga is a place where people come to die or purify themselves, they take travel on boats mainly. Four major travellers considered on the Ganga have taken their journeys on boat, cart, train, bus or on foot to reach the spots of importance on the banks of the Ganga whereas the travellers on the Narmada popularly known as Narmada parikramavasi have to take their journey on foot as it is a circumambulation of the entire river.

As both the rivers are being visited by number of pilgrims and travellers throughout the year, these water forces have numerous and different issues. The Ganga has always flared the imagination of the West, travellers like Eric Newby and Ilija Trojonaw have taken up their journey to visit the river as it is and how the life is lived on its banks but Dennison Berwick and Julian Crandall Hollick have come to
India with the specific curiosity that how a river can be venerated and if the people revere it so much how they can pollute her without giving it a thought. Whereas the travellers on the Narmada, Swami Narmadanand and Amritlal Vegad have covered the entire length of the river on foot as a parikramavasi and have witnessed the culture of the river and changing scenario of its life with the material advancement. Apart from the physical travel, unanimously all the travellers had a mental journey regarding the health of the rivers looking at their situation. Their travel writings have tried to bring these concerns in the discussion.

Life on the Rivers

I) Social Aspect

In India, social structure has a great importance. Caste and class both highly matter when it comes to the survival. On the ghats of the Ganga, each caste has a particular place. They are different from the other. However, today, the need of the time has erased such boundaries in professional world at least. People have moved out of the traditional family business by choice or by force because of the difficulty in maintaining the economic standards of the family. Dennison Berwick in Author’s Note in his Along the Ganga notes that he wanted to travel at the pace of rural India, where four out of five Indians live, and to walk in the footsteps of the peasants (Berwick 5). He dresses himself in the local attire and avoids keeping watch and taking cigarettes considering them to be the symbols of modernity. Rather he joins villagers in rounds of milky tea and bidis at tea stalls while discussing about his experiences of journey. Even after all these efforts of becoming one of them, at every point, he encounters the question of his caste and observes a great wonder on the faces of the villagers when he informs them that his country does not have a caste system. Looking at the strict boundaries of caste people follow in routine life, he gets
surprised to see people tightly packed into the buses and trams in Calcutta who do not mind the rigours of Hinduism for untouchability during rush hours. Dennison has assumed India to be rural predominantly where to his surprise he finds youngsters in western trousers and T-shirts which has almost become the uniform of the Modern India. He gets pleasantly shocked especially when he visits India for the second time where he sees villages have got vehicles and repair store, kiosk and overall he sees that the old ‘cannot’ approach has turned into ‘why not’ which has led to the development but has spoilt the pristine nature around the river.

It is the Narmada *parikrama* which keeps the life on the banks of the river throbbing. There is a strong social bonding amidst people of nearby villages and with the *parikramavasis* who continuously pass by. Local people consider *parikramavasis* as their family members and count their share in the *parikrama* they are making. Each person of the village takes pain to take a good care of the pilgrims. Even if the financial situation of their families is not very good, they share their food, houses and services without expecting anything in return from the *parikramavasis*. Just the oral message decides the stay for a *parikramavasi* in the next village and the *parikramavasi* carries messages of their well being to their relatives from one village to the other. It is difficult to sustain this ancient tradition of *parikrama* without the local support.

Different types of services are offered in nearby areas on both the rivers. Mother Theresa had started the service to the poor, leapers and needy in Calcutta since 1948. They serve as clinic, soup kitchen and children’s home where orphan and sick are nursed and cared till they are able to rejoin their families. In response to the question how many children they can take, a sister responses that as many as need to come. They believe in what Mother Theresa has said about numbers, ‘We ourselves
feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But if that drop was not in the ocean, I think the ocean would be less because of the missing drop’ (Berwick 70).

Apart from the favours from the houses of the local people, number of temples and ashramas are being run on the banks of the Narmada to facilitate the travellers for their stay, food and other requirements. Even people arrange an extended stay for chaturmaas – four months of rains when a parikramavasi cannot travel with the fear of crossing the river. Crossing the river is forbidden for a parikramavasi during the parikrama – without charging even a penny from these travellers. Amritlal Vegad meets people one of whom is running a sadavrat (where the food is offered free to the needy) for parikramavasis as a practice which his father had started, another person offers the same kind of food service to the parikramavasis because he feels that while he was making parikrama, and he has eaten food from different people. By feeding the pilgrims he can return his debt. A man near Sholpaneshwar takes care of the belongings of the parikramavasis and reaches them safely to the other village while parikramavasis are crossing the Sholpaneshwar Zadi with the possibility of being robbed by the tribal folk. He also confesses that during his parikrama, he had faced this trouble of keeping the belongings safe which are necessary for him for the journey so he felt that if someone starts such kind of service, it may help pilgrims to cross the Zadi without much worries of their belongings. Many such services are going on without any announcement of their selfless work on the river banks.

Encounter with the government officials have been the mixed experiences for the travellers. The irresponsible attitude of the officials shocks the travellers from outside. The foreign travellers met government officials for getting the boat for their journey. Different engineers from various departments of the system had some or the other excuse in delaying their meeting and if they meet and offer their boat, it was not
for the free. They sell their boat to these travellers. Even meeting with them regarding the environment related issues or pollution on the river banks, no officer is ready to take any responsibility. Rather they excuse themselves saying that they lack in funds and amenities so it is the concern of the people who should be taking care of their surroundings on their own without waiting for the help from the other or authorities.

But there are a few officials who are willing to offer their kind service to the foreigners. It is commonly observed that foreign travellers receive a special treatment from these officers. Newby and his company get much concern and warm hospitality by the station master who took much pain for their comfort at the station and made arrangements for their travel. Contrary to that, Newby wonders what an official of British Railways would have done with a party of Indians under similar circumstances. Because of his Military background, Newby was also able to get the letter of recommendation from the then Prime Minister of India Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru which was to serve assistance of any kind if needed on his journey.

Even Dennison notes during his visit to Bata factory with two young local boys, that the reverence for the West was peculiar to the industrial cities. He was adorned because of being Foreigner and the other two local boys were ignored. He saw that ability to speak English marks one as a social superior in India. People willingly get ready to join the activities where such foreigner is connected. Trojanow and Crandall Hollick were invited to witness the foul situation of the Ganga near different industries by different NGOs and people who are already in the action but they willingly provide information to such foreigners with the hope that their involvement might help in hastening and strengthening their Ganga clean up movement.
A foreign traveller taking a stay at a local affluent family becomes a status symbol for which is unlike travellers on the Narmada who have to stay with basic facilities in the house of local people. These foreign travellers get to stay in Circuit Houses; Church and government officials make arrangements for them. But at times, there are chances that these people might be cheated or charged more for the simple service by the local people. For example, the boat ride on the banks of the Ganga has different charges for the Indian and foreigners.

On the other hand, banks of the Narmada treat everybody in a similar fashion. Miraben, a British lady had taken the parikrama alone but she very firmly puts that even if she being a foreigner and a lone lady traveller on the Narmada, living in the ashrams and houses of the people, she has not faced any such harsh experience form the local people. Rather she has enjoyed her stay with villagers and even today she is visiting ashrams and those people with whom she had stayed. Both the rivers thus have quite vibrant social life which has different colours of life but with common belief system.

II) Religious Element

In India, religion and superstitions are dovetailed. People have some or the other occasion for performance of rituals or stories to tell. People have deep faith in the purity of the waters but no one is ready to agree upon the fact that the physical form of the river is not virgin. Even the geography of the country is explained through mythology to people in other parts of India where the rivers like Ganga does not flow. Mythology is omnipresent as a daily reality. Travellers have been amazed by the observance of rituals performed for the penances and austerities. Different travellers when they witness these religious ceremonies, they have taken a detailed note of that like the ghats of the Ganga are always full of people. Few of these like Manikarnika
and Dashashwamedha ghats are ever burning because of the cremation of the dead. Local people take daily dip into the holy river and for any auspicious occasion they mix drops of the Ganga water into the simple water to make it holy and pure. There are also the spots on the Ganga where people offer the food and ceremonies to their dead ancestors on which a whole community called Pandas run their household.

People on the Narmada believe that their prosperity and life is because of the water of the river. So they respect her as the mother. And everything connected to the river is revered. Natural resources around the river are maintained with great care by the tribal and the villagers as they have been brought up with this idea. Amritlal shares one such experience where he and his friends were passing from a farm, when the farmer’s wife said that they should remove their shoes as the farm and granary are holy for them. People on the Narmada have formed their rituals around the river. Anything which is of good or bad omen, they put their faith in the river and complete that task. They take religious vow to offer a special service to the river at times in the form of parikrama and this is how they express their gratitude towards the river for taking care of their lives.

But many imposters take the benefit of this religious belief of poor local people. Such people when take the journey on the rivers, have the idea in the mind of being respected on the name of being ascetic. Many such imposters are found on the Narmada because to visit the char dham of the Ganga is an expensive affair but to take up Narmada parikrama does not require any financial management. People on the banks are available to take care of such pilgrims. Such people who have taken the journey to run their livelihood on the name of a pilgrim, for religious vow or those who do not observe the rules of the parikrama are known as khadiya paltan. Amritlal Vegad mentions such an event where an ascetic claimed to know some use of
medicines but never was found once people fulfil his demands of food and stay. Such cheats spoil the image of the river and life on its banks to the world.

Pilgrimages are taken to move away from the worldly affairs and to enter into the vanprasthashram where one tries to assess one’s self and tries to meditate for the liberation of the soul. Those who are not interested in the salvation just visit the religious places to be taken care of by people or few pilgrims start making money from the religious ceremonies. But Amritlal met an ascetic on the banks of the Narmada who was the epitome of renunciation. He was looking after the aashram being built with the expense of the lakhs of rupees but once the construction is done, he was to leave that place. He does not have any belonging except a loin cloth.

The foreign travellers come to India to visit a sacred land. But during their visit to the holy river Ganga, they are tempted to enjoy forbidden ‘sins’ on the river banks. Newby and Trojanow both mention that they were cautioned against consumption of alcoholic drinks and non-vegetarian food in Haridwar and Baneras. Even if they knew about the ban, both of them tried to have some fun with their companions on their birthdays. During War years when Newby was posted in India had taken an adventure to visit brothel.

Gathering of the people for the mela (religious fair) on both the rivers is a separate identity of these rivers. Nobody advertises the mela. Everybody knows it and come together travelling to have a holy dip in the river. They eat, meet, enjoy and pray. Participating in this fair is a kind of religious and cultural act. People get to know each other and strike chords during this meeting. But unanimously all travellers note that at different meeting places, people have lost concern for the rivers. They just come to wash away their sins and enjoy this outing. They litter the place and damage the serenity of the banks. Many cheats take benefit of such pilgrims by making them
fools – involving them in religious rituals or selling fake articles, herbs or material. So the *mela* which used to be a religious and cultural phenomenon is now no longer serving the purpose of religiosity, rather the huge number of people creates more issues of pollution of the rivers and safety of people. At times, travellers thus do not respect the sanctity of the place.

**III) Minority Communities and their Subsistence on the Rivers**

Culture of any place is quite varied, especially the nation like India where there are many sub-cultures live. As Homi Bhabha contextually opines that it would be highly erroneous to say that there is a homogenous way of life and what riverine societies prove is the co-existence of many communities who are in the categories in the minority. As Bhabha puts in his *The Location of Culture*, “The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation” (Bhabha 2). The river also plays a role as an economic resource. In fact, that is why her environment is under such threat. It also disturbs the social structure. There are different professions which are based on the flow of the river but now losing their professional specifications because of the pollution, development on the river and increasing demands of the society. Small professionals have a greater role to play in introducing the river and cities to the travellers. Even if these people have significant part to play in continuing the charm of the river and places, their livelihood is in poor condition because of the lack of the concern from the government and local support.

Conventionally, the boatmen community around the Ganga belongs to ‘Mallah’ caste group, but they have lost their hold on their profession because few other communities have started rowing the boats. The boatmen are the ‘cultural
brokers’ as they introduce the places and narrate the significance of the place which fits it into the entire history of the nation. But different dimension decide their capability to bring income like firstly a boatman has to convince a tourist for the boat ride which is becoming difficult for the modern tourist to take a leisure ride in fast pacing age. Few boatmen also take up some other works like tourist guide. In present time, structural change is seen in the social structure of this community as it no longer belongs to any one community. In the rainy season and at times in the peak season also boatmen do not get any passengers. Motor boats also have their impact on the business of small boat owners and drivers. These conditions lead the life of this community to misery. And probably that is why they are ready to take up any short distance ride and get ready to prolong their joune y with the same troop if some more money is offered.

Similar is the condition of the fishermen. Because of the strict rules on fishing and its trade, and dams and barrages, the fisheries have been decimated. Tanneries and sewage of industries have ruined the stock of fish in the river bends. A fisherman said to Newby that now they have to pay the government for the fishing rights. During the time of British Raj, they had to pay nothing. Such issues have driven them to leave fishing altogether and have become labourers, rickshaw-wallahs, even vegetable sellers. Even if the prices have increased and they have started making use of the fine-mesh mosquito nets, fishermen are not happy with the business and also the youth in their community do not know how to tie a simple knot which is a basic skill that a fisherman must know which ultimately lead them to opt for some other work than fishing. Also now there is an involvement of mafia in fishing which threatens the poor fishermen or takes away the larger chunk of their labour. Traditional fishermen cannot protest them else they would be manhandled by the goons of these rich entrepreneurs.
Pandas are Brahmans Pandits, but other Brahmans consider them to be of law status. Many of them are almost illiterate. Apart from the religious rituals for the dead, they take care of the belongings of the bathers and they also supply miscellaneous items which are used in religious ceremonies. Basically they maintain the genealogical record of the Hindu visitors who visit the Ganga ghat. They would also offer non-stop travel commentary to the tourists retelling the myths and legends of the various shrines. Even tour operators are modern form of panda as Crandall Hollcik exclaims.

The Ganga has provided income through tourism. Every year, millions of people – both from India and abroad – travel to the Ganga. This influx of tourists and pilgrims has provided a new source of income to local people living on the banks. Stout porters who work in the hills are also people who have taken up this profession as an alternate job. The small villages from where they belong do not have enough opportunities and money to offer. Because of the poor situation of the family, they even do not have chance for the further studies. So to share the family responsibility, they migrate to tourist spots and find themselves trapped in the boring activity. Children are made to sell plastic bottles for the tourists to take the Ganga water back to their home for the relatives. Young kids also fish out coins from the fast running current of the Ganga which pilgrims have thrown which gives the feel of adventure to the tourists and earns a small amount of livelihood for poor household.

Small scale industries are full of villagers who do not think of their health or wages they are getting but what is important for them is a little earning at the end of the day. Tanneries of Kanpur are like hell with a courtyard, a roof for the vat, an open space for the drum and a shed for the stretching and polishing the skin. In the vats, in a lye of ground bark, water and other components, the skin is marinated over three
months. Then it is put into the drum together with special oil and a few chemicals. When the door of the drum is opened, a stinking lye flows onto the ground; the workers wade in it without any protection. As these workers do not have any other option, they participate in this profession where old men and even children toil in unnatural twilight to make the skin fine for sell.

Carpet looms in Mirzapur largely rely on the poor children as their workers. The owners of the carpet looms take pride in employing these children saying that supple and nimble fingers are supposed to be a professional advantage. Children are cheap and powerless. The owners look after them, teach them, give them food and a room to stay because these children do not know anything else and their parents cannot afford to send them to the school. Anti child-labour laws are unenforceable because many families need the income their children earn and if children are employed, they can labour in the fields. Moreover, there are no other industries around Mirzapur to earn money. So weaving must therefore be fitted in around harvest and planting time and work slows during the hot season.

The silk weaving and brocade making are the small scale workshops in the Banaras which provide daily wages to many people around. These industries are run in small workshops or in the people’s homes. Daily sales of silk saris are estimated at more than Rs.10 million, as millions of pilgrims combine religious observance with bargain hunting in the abundant silk shops. The men who run these shops control silk industry, as no silk yarn is produced in Benaraes, and these middlemen supply yarns and patterns to the weavers who bid to make each length of cloth which is then woven by themselves, their wives and children. The profits of the transactions go to the middlemen, while the weavers work in a labyrinth of backstreet workshops where conditions are awful. Overcrowding and dirt are exacerbated in the ferocious heat of
the summer because fans cannot be used as the silk threads would tangle. But because this drudgery fulfils the daily need, people keep suffering providing their silent services.

The daily life for these people is so hard without penny that they cannot afford to be selective of work. Dennison Berwick notes that in the beginning of the rice harvest, he saw men and women working hard in the fields. Wages were low below the legal minimum wages but without land to grow their own food, families were grateful for the opportunity to even earn at the time of harvest and planting. Brickwork and stone quarries have a reputation as being amongst the most brutal and exploitative business in the country, where men, women and children are treated as slaves. But the government cannot take care of all in the mass population and to earn for the day, these people happily work in brick work places as they offer a little more amount than the other work places.

Calcutta is the hub for earning small amounts for the people coming from nearby villages from Bihar and other states, and as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh because there is at least hope of work and survival. People who work as rikshaw-wallahs mostly come from villages of Bihar. People like Dennison think of not to participate in the appalling exploitation. But he realizes that denying a man the means of survival merely to avoid corruption of one’s moral principles is the selfishness.

Life on the Narmada is not much complicated. Mostly the tribal folk lives on the banks of the river. They indulge in agriculture, animal husbandry, or hunting. A few of them go to the nearby cities to earn. Fishermen provide ferry service to the parikramavasis to complete their parikrama at Sagarsangam. Other than this service, they row boats for daily chores or fishing on the nearby banks. As such the dams and
barrages are the epitomes of the hazards for the environment but these constructions offer some amount to the village folk who do not have any other means except earning through such miscellaneous tasks.

Thus, there are minority cultures that are living with quite difficulty across the Ganga region with the principle of the survival of the fittest and continuing the family economy through the means of the river. And the people on the Narmada try to find their way by doing sundry chores and help to the parikramavasis for which they are generally not paid but if payment takes place, it is certainly not a handsome amount.

IV) Relationship with and Reception of the River

The rivers are life-giving at the same time life-destroying and human attitude is an amalgam of reverence and terror. People living on the river banks have a very deep attachment with the river. Padman Singh, a shopkeeper in Along the Ganga reports that the river washed away half of his goods, worth at least Rs. 25,000. Similarly Crandall Hollick notes that people in the north are most concerned with the river of mythology, but up in the mountains everyone has got respect but down in the plains people pretend. Beyond Varanasi everything changes. Reality in Bihar and West Bengal means dealing with the sheer physicality of the Ganga, not her spiritual generosity. Industrial cities have mere functional relations with the river Ganga. Howsoever people worship the rivers devotedly, they usually pray with one eye open for the fury of floods and storms.

Narmada swipes away mud houses of the villagers but they simply shift to the other area and erect a new structure. Flood certainly results in the destruction but people believe that the silt that this flood brings is quite fertile for the farming of the winter crops. People on the Narmada believe that whatever activity is possible is because of the presence and divine boon from the river. On this river, people do not
have paid customer service. Everybody chips in the others’ activity as all the activities are more or less related to nature and full of hardship. This approach of barter enriches the bonding with the people and with the river too. Thus rivers bring income to the local lives and strengthen social life so they are their true lifeline. Apart from the functional relation with the river, Narmada parikrama is another factor where only because of the faith in the river and the tradition people take the entire journey of the river on foot. The parikrama is bound by the strict rules, even if they are not written in the ancient scriptures. The reverence and commitment towards the river and the dedication of the local people for this tradition are keeping parikrama alive even in the 21st century.

Narmada Parikrama

Narmada parikrama comprises a full circumambulation of the river on both the banks, amounting more than 2600km ideally which should be completed in three years, three months and thirteen days. Oral tradition says that rsi Markandeya was the first to complete a Narmada parikrama. Markandeya’s parikrama is mentioned in the Skandpurana which states:

“In that very Purana it is well-known, that the long-living maharsi Markandeya has completed a Narmadaparikrama. As he considered the tributaries as equally worthy of veneration, he started at the source {of the Narmada} and in a huge amount of time, duly completed the parikrama of the Narmada river {including tributaries}. [...] According to his memory Markandeya described to them {the Pandava brothers} the tirthas, the places on the Narmada who were famous for {the presence of} the foremost of the gods, Mahadev” (Neus 79).

One has to observe Narmada parikrama in a very humble manner. The pilgrim should walk barefoot and carry only the most essential articles with him i.e., clothes, a
water pot and a blanket. He should beg for food and be content with whatever is offered by the people living on the banks of the river. He may eat only what is cooked by himself or his hosts. He must always walk his right shoulder pointing to the Narmada, the obligatory manner for any kind of circumambulation in Hindu ritual, which must follow a clockwise course. He may never cross the Narmada except at the confluence with the sea, where this is unavoidable. If he has crossed a tributary once, he may never turn back and cross it in the opposite direction. Narmada parikrama is considered to be extremely fruitful for the pilgrim as he touches upon countless tirthas during the pilgrimage which bestow all kinds of boons on him. There are two types of parikrama which are known as rund and jalhari parikrama. In rund parikrama one must travel in a boat over the sea while those who take jalhari parikrama never sit in boat and has to travel two times as it commences from Amarkantak to Reva Sagar Sangam and back from Reva Sagar Sangam to Amarkantak. Two early pilgrim’s manual on the parikrama, Narmadapancanga (1919) and Srinarmada Pradaksina (1987) give the idea what is proper performance of the parikrama. According to Srinarmada Pradaksina, few rules should be followed by a pilgrim on the journey.

1. Every day one has to bathe in the Narmada. After the very first bath, one should have one’s head shaved. One should only drink water from the Narmada.

2. One should never accept gifts while on the parikrama. However, the parikramavasi must accept the hospitality and food offered by anyone.

3. One should neither quarrel with nor rebuke anyone, nor complain about past events. One should always talk decently and speak truth.
4. One should always strictly control and restrain one’s physical desires. One should daily recite from the Gita, the Ramayana etc.

5. Before setting off on the parikrama, the pilgrim should take a vow in the water of the Narmada. Then he should perform the mai ki karhai i.e., he should prepare halva as prasad in a large frying pan and then he should invite sadhus, brahmanas and virgin maidens, and feed them according to his economic means.

6. He must never deviate more than five miles from the south bank and never more than seven and a half miles from the north bank of the Narmada.

7. He must never cross the Narmada. He must not even go to the island in the Narmada. He may, however, cross the tributaries of the Narmada at their respective confluences, but only once each.

8. He must not walk in the period of chaturmas. During this time, he must live for eight fortights like a religious mendicant. On the last day of chaturmas, i.e., dusahra he should once again perform the mai ki karhai according to his economic means.

9. He should not keep too many belongings. Instead, he should carry a few light vessels, like an iron baking plate, a plate and a bowl. Normally, he should not keep food stuff, but for one or two occasions, where it may be unavoidable to do so.

10. He should not have his hair cut also should not cut his nails too often. He should live like a vanprasthi and should completely follow the rules of celibacy. He should never apply oil or scented oil to his body in order to enhance his attractiveness. He should also never use soap but pure sand instead.
11. When the *parikrama* is completed, he should go to Omkareshvar, sprinkle water on the Lord and perform an *abhisheka* (ritual of offering water to the holy entity, Shivlanga here). Then he should get his head shaved. Then he should perform *mai ki karhai* again and feed *sadhus*, *brahmanas* and virgin maidens, according to his economic means. Then he should receive blessings and terminate his original vow. Finally, he should pay homage to the Narmada.

Committed travellers of the Narmada *parikrama* like Swami Narmadananda provides the minute details of each place on the banks with their geographical and mythological importance saying that earlier this information was discussed in the *Puranas* after which many places and distances have changed. He wants to provide a kind of ready guide book to the future *parikramavasis*. His travelogue is a compilation of many such important details whereas Amritlal Vegad considers himself as a reporter of the Narmada. He has taken *padyatra* – journey on foot – and not the rule bound *parikrama*. His descriptions have brought the life on the Narmada and the tradition of *parikrama* in the knowledge of people who love Literature, Art, adventure and also to scholars for whom this tradition was merely a tradition limited to saints, ascetics, people who take religious vow or rural folk. Amritlal has turned his journey into a kind of cultural journey and not only a religious tour.

The river evokes the serenity in each traveller. The life and culture around add colours to their experiences. But the curiosity with which the travellers had resumed their journey, they give it a thought that in the course of their travel, what does this river mean to them. Newby feels that the only thing that was consistently agreeable was the river; life on it was sometimes hard, but it was always supportable, and in
some strange ways it produced feelings that were a combination of elation and contentment which neither of them experienced anywhere else.

After his journey of few miles, overlooking the calm and flowing Ganga, Dennison suddenly became aware of the existence of a Divine, an incomprehensible being. Those who believe in the bounty of the Mother Ganga will take this revelation as her blessing; other people will say the thought came from days of quietude beside the water. Nearing the end of his journey, he ruminates over the question what did the river mean to him after this long distance. He feels the river has become very special to him. His was a personal reverence for the river; he had gained her for himself as a symbol of something far greater than more human endeavour. But he could still not name the river as a goddess. Similar situation for other foreign travellers is observed. When they make attempts to make people aware about the threats to the life of the river, they find themselves attached to the river, having a different emotion for the river. Apart from their curiosity, the river becomes a very special entity to them. They might not be able to see divinity in it but they have sincere concerns for the great water force.

Travellers on the Narmada have deep faith in the river. Even as a part of the rule of the parikrama one cannot carry any belonging except unavoidable things on the journey. It suggests to have faith in the river which is silently taking care of each traveller. Swami Narmadanand and Amritlal Vegad both had such experiences of the benign presence of the river. Whenever they were in any difficulty, they observed that some help suddenly arrives from the unexpected source. Like Amritlal and his group were in need of money and no arrangement was possible on the banks but in this phase of worry, suddenly they met a relative of him who offered some money which facilitated their journey for a few more days. At another occasion, Amritlal was
pointed out by a villager on carrying many amenities along. The person remarked that Amtilal carries so much because he does not have faith in the Narmada Ma. At some or the other point, people believe that the river appears in front of the true devout in the form of a little girl. This belief cannot to be proven, but the travellers do feel the presence of this river.

V) Ecological Issues

As the environment predicts, looking at the current scenario, potable water is going to be a major problem between societies. That is why storing, preserving, and keeping potable water clean begs more concern and discussion. These natural resources - rivers are considered to be the life force. Even if human beings satisfy their livelihood from their water, they do not bother before abusing these rivers. Wherever human beings lay their hands, they tend to spoil it. In modern times, ecology and environment are suffering the most because of the ambitions of men. Men have created havoc on the name of development. People living on the Ganga ghat are facing end number of difficulties every day. The harsh reality is ‘the great river’ is in danger. It needs a proper attention from its devout rather than the perfect performance of the rituals. Even if the river has millions of devotees, nobody understands and communicates her problems to bring their solution. Julian Crandall Hollick rightly says, “Travel writers, novelists, even distinguished academics, have focused either on high culture or on the obvious tourist sites and their picturesque mythologies. None of them have attempted to make any real connections between mythology and geography” (Hollick 3).

The Narmada is still not facing such a serious problem of pollution on its banks but people living on its plains have encountered many life threatening problems because of construction of dams. The migration and rehabilitation of such people have
caused much uproar in the nation. And the dams will affect the *parikrama* of the river which is the most popular feature of the river for the world. Huysman’s condemnation of the Bievre in Paris is befitting thought for the condition of the rivers. He says, “that strong river, that dumping-ground for filth, that bilge which is the colour of slate and melted lead...starred with muddy spittle...The [river] is nothing but a moving dung-heap” (Baviskar xiii). Sacred rivers thus have been profaned in many ways. There is a dreadful pollution in the rivers.

i) **Biodegradable Waste/Rituals related Pollution**

The process of venerating the river is the foremost cause of its ill health. Various groups of people have tried to start with small scale movements to keep the health of the rivers intact but with little support and success. In *A Walk Along the Ganges*, Veer Bhadra Mishra, a professor in the Hydraulic Engineering Department of the Banaras Hindu University, priest at one of the riverside temples and the President of the Sankat Mochan Foundation in Varanasi which organizes the Clean Ganga Day, admits that despite the Ganga Action Plan launched by the government in 1986, “I still feel that we have not been able to achieve anything. Our aim is still what it was – to clean the Ganga,” said Dr. Mishra. NGOs have been fighting not only the ineptitude and apathy of the engineers, bureaucrats and politicians but also the religious dogma that maintains that Mother Ganga cannot be polluted because she is so pure. Rakesh Jaiswal caused a stir when he started salvaging rotting corpses from the Ganga, at a bend, where they were entangled in driftwood and other stranded objects. Along with his few fellow combatants, he had taken about fifty half-decomposed, half-eaten corpses out of the river. Because of this malice in the river, water-related illness like hepatitis touches epidemic proportions but local people, pilgrims and authority do not bother.
Dying on the Ganga ghat is one of the main reasons why people visit the river. But death and rituals after the death on the river are too expensive. So people simply float dead bodies into the river. The bodies would either get deformed or float away. Benares city authorities have been trying for a few years to install an electric crematorium, but there has been a strong opposition from the family that controls and profits from the main burning ghat. Even if electric crematoria are the government initiatives to promote eco-friendly cremation, people are not willing to go for this considering that they might break their traditional rituals of offering a proper cremation to their near one. As Head of the Police in Kanpur, complains it does not really make any economic sense to use the electric crematoria: ‘It costs us two thousand rupees to cremate a body we’ve fished out of the river and the government only gives us five hundred rupees.’ In such cases, they prefer to get rid of the dead body by floating it in the river. In a place like Allahabad, there is a serious shortage of wood for burning and many Hindus cannot afford to cremate their dead completely. Instead, a symbolic hot coal may be placed in the mouth of the corpse and after prayers the body is pushed into the Ganga. The corpses often get stranded on sandbanks in the dry weather and attract vultures and dogs.

Mahant Mishra in Along the Ganga exclaims that enormous amounts were channelled into the monster project of Ganga Action Plan in 1986, but soon the interests of heavy industries took charge of all decisions. At one point, even around thirty thousand turtles were released into the Ganga, in the hope that they would eat up the corpses. Most of them were poached at once, and the remaining ones seem to have lost their appetite; and in current time, no turtle is seen in Varanasi. Even the electric crematorium, which has meanwhile gained social acceptance, is hardly used because of the power failure. So even if electric crematoria are there, because of the
expense it costs mostly they are not used and it is believed that they are used only by reformists like Aryasamajis. For others, managing economics of death is difficult. Adding to such acts, is actually committing a crime against humanity because all sorts of deformities develop due to contaminated water of the river which silently causes damage and death of the lives depending on the river water.

Narmadanand also expresses his disgust that people are using banks of the Narmada as a picnic spot. But the parikramavasis also do not bother about the cleanliness of the place that they have used as a stay or for cooking. They leave the place without cleaning the ashes of the stove or food leftovers. Even they do not pay attention to their own waste that they have disposed. Amritlal Vegad reports that even if there are not many rituals performed on the banks of the Narmada like it happens on the Ganga, people carelessly litter the place. He sees a person who sprinkles the ashes of the dead into the river and also throws the plastic bag which was a container of the ash. He sighs and wishes if the river can punish such careless beings.

ii) Industrial Pollution

Major cities on the river banks are mostly the cause of the ill health of the river. The river is polluted in Benares by the twenty million gallons of untreated sewage which flows daily into the river from outlets between the ghats where people bathe. The water in the Ganga at Benares is suitable only for wildlife, industrial cooling, irrigation and controlled waste disposal according to a report published in 1984 by the Central Board for the Prevention and Control of Water Pollution. Haridwar which has a face value as one of the most sacred and important spots on the entire length of the Ganga is also really a Blackpool-by-the-River. The river has been taken for granted and nobody is aware about the threat to the lives of both – the river and their own.
Kanpur is the second largest industrial city along the Ganga, all the sewage is poured into the river; the factories draw all the water they need from her and they drain the poisonous waste water back into her. Trojanow in his *Along the Ganga*, meets Imran Siddiqui, a trained chemical engineer who manages a largest tannery in Kanpur town who is also an Honourable Secretary of the Green Clean People Society. Siddiqui has kept pots and trees to keep his surrounding green but shows no concern regarding the danger that his profession spreads. Rakesh, one of the companions of Trojanow rightly said, “In Kanpur, everybody tells you how much he cherishes nature. And everybody messes it up without a second thought (Trojanow 74-75).” Kanpur has factories, money and pollution and a strictly functional relationship with the Ganga.

In the race of getting success in the business, industrialists do not pay attention to the end result of their business. Sunderlal, a tannery worker, while sharing his daily life helplessly says that the water here is not good. It’s yellow and brackish. But there is no alternative for washing or cooking. They are too poor to buy water so they have to travel to find a pump with clean drinking water. He had a rash that looks like prickly heat, and white blotches. His kids have worms. The condition of the river is now so foul that rituals themselves have to change. Another local person, RK Awasthi says that he will not take dip in the Ganga. But to maintain a tradition, he takes water either from hand pump or they bring the water from the house and that way they are giving bath to the dead body. Even if without the water of the Ganga performing the ritual is not the correct performance. They cannot protest against the pollution because it would create riots. The tanneries cause the pollution, but Muslims work and live in tanneries. Accusing tanneries of pollution is therefore code for a not so indirect attack on the so-called minority community. The main political parties
quickly jump in and the whole thing quickly becomes a public mess. The solid waste of the tanneries – the bluish coloured clay is chrome mixed in with the other waste – a toxic brick – is being used by the women to paint the walls of their houses without knowing about the dangers of the chemicals.

Jewellery manufacturing uses metals and chemicals which are not blameless for pollution in the river but jewellers do not see a connection between their profession and pollution of the Ganga. For millions of Hindus believe that physical pollution and spiritual pollution are two entirely different creatures.

During monsoons, no treatment plant works so the waste water is channelled directly into the river. Many of newly constructed plants can no longer function properly because of the lack of the fund. Tannery owners are not ready to take any responsibility even if cleaning plant is not functioning properly. They just shrug shoulders saying that we are paying government so it is their look out. We cannot stop our business. Jal Nigam throws up their hands and says they are starved for funds. End result is a smelly mix pouring directly into the river. The river is just too convenient a dumping ground. Besides, there is an entire economic subculture that lives from producing or recycling gossamer-thin plastic bags. Mithai Lal, a poor washer man is proud that his family has been washing clothes for a long and he believes that detergent kills all the germs and small insects. It bleaches water. The sewage kills the Ganga water whereas they try to clean the Ganga with the detergents, caustic soda and acids. Such an ignorant man does not know how all these are making the great water flow a feeble stream.

Even if the Narmada is not in a very poor condition like the Ganga, revered by millions, the lifeline of Madhya Pradesh, Narmada is polluting fast. Huge quantity of waste from cities and villages situated along the river and effluents discharged from
industries have already pushed the quality of water down to "B" category, according to Bureau of Indian Standard 2296 norms. Those who worship the river are also to be blamed for the rising level of pollution. The rampant deforestation in its catchment area and population pressure is wreaking havoc on the river.

Pollution starts from the place the river emerges out of the sacred Narmada kund – a pond in Amarkantak plateau at a height of about 1048 meters above sea level and cascades down from about 100 feet from Kapildha ra, a waterfall. The pollution level increases further alarmingly as it flows down the hills to the tribal-dominated district of Dindori starting its long journey to the Arabian Sea.

Dr N P Shukla, chairman, Pollution Control Board says, "Luckily, we don't have industrial pollution in Narmada—it is the municipal waste that is polluting the river." According to a study, the major sources of pollutants are local anthropogenic activities, agricultural runoff and industrial effluent.

For several years, more than 1,500 industrial units in Jhagadia, Ankleshwar, Panoli, Vilayat and Dahej of Bharuch district in Gujarat have been discharging effluents into the Amlakhadi. This river meets the Narmada near Bharuch. More than half of them are chemical units that manufacture dyes, paints, fertilizers, pharmaceuticals, industrial chemicals, paper and pesticides.

The much-touted Rs.131-crore Final Effluent Treatment Plant (FETP) — constructed with the State and the Central governments and the State-owned Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation contributing over Rs.109 crore and the defaulting industries a mere Rs.21 crore, and inaugurated by Chief Minister Narendra Modi in January 2007 for treatment of water wastes of Ankleshwar, Panoli and Jhagadia chemical industrial estates — was found to be equal ly in a pathetic condition.
Even if the government is trying to better the situation with different schemes like present Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has launched a plan of ‘Namami Gange’ – Ganga Revival Plan in 2014 to clean the ghats of Varanasi, with less success as opined by the local authorities and people but some change is seen on the various spots of the river. But it is important to note that such issues are the failure of mechanism and implementation but without waiting for the government action or funding, dealing with these life threatening issues, small initiatives must be promoted and supported by the local people and NGOs.

iii) Flora and Fauna

Human have not endangered the Ganga only but because of their intervention in the activities of nature, even the flora and fauna around the river is also in danger because of the pollution. An inhabitant who lives in the wilderness reports to Newby that there used to be many wild animals on the banks of the Ganga but now there are many poachers. Few of them are true hunters but he exclaimed that he cannot report it to anyone as officials themselves are the poachers. Even the fishermen have to pay to the government for the fishing rights. They are quite indignant about this as the situation was good in the times of Raj, they had to pay nothing but now things have changed. In 1976, there was an estimated total population of 4-5,000 Gangetic dolphins. The fishermen along the river regard them as bringing good fortune, and they do not net or kill them, but the chemicals and illegal poaching have reduced their numbers. Fish yields are declining in the Ganga, because of increasing chemical pollution from industry and agriculture and from the practice of some villagers who dynamite the river for fish, though they collect only a small portion of their carnage. The poaching of the gavial crocodile has been illegal since 1972 but enforcement of the law is impossible and gavial numbers have declined as the burgeoning population
has encroached further onto the marginal lands besides the river. The gavial is now an endangered species and only an estimated seven gavials along the entire length of the Ganga can be found.

Gangetic Dolphins – *Platanista gangetica*, Susu – which too are considered to be endangered species have to change their habitat because of reduced flow of water, pollution and illegal poaching. Dolphins are also slowly being made sick by all sorts of toxic compounds, principally organo-chlorines and carcinogens. They are being poisoned by effluents from the local dye industry. The dolphins are killed because half of their body consists of fat from which oil is extracted – for medical use, as bait and for massage. Today fishing is completely under the control of a mafia of rich entrepreneurs, who are connected with the authorities and the police. The traditional fishermen who protest against such practices are manhandled by their goons. Sometimes these entrepreneurs poison a part of the river and kill all marine life in a stretch of several kilometres or they use dynamite. On the whole, the number of animals has not reduced; however the quantity of economically utilizable fish stock has fallen drastically.

Many Himalayan plants are extremely valuable and used as herbal medicines. Imposters do not cheat only on the name of religion. Many of them make money out of selling fake things which are originally quite precious from the areas of the Ganga. Stephen Alter in his *Sacred Waters* observes that the poachers carry the herbs down to towns and villages along the motor road, where contractors buy the contraband and smuggle it out of the mountains to medicinal factories on the plains. Though the forestry department maintains checkpoints along the main roads, corruption is rampant and the contractors bribe their way through any barriers that are set up. In certain parts of Garhwal the government has made efforts to cultivate wild herbs, but
compared to the organized activities of the poachers, these projects generate only a small proportion of the plants that are turned into medicines. The poachers make no efforts to preserve or sustain the species they harvest.

Like the rare flowers and herbs that are dug up from the bugiyals and sold for medicines, tigers and leopards have become a commodity, their teeth, claws and bones ground up to provide cures for human frailties. In this way, their value is lessened and human lose touch with the elemental quality of nature.

Poaching is a serious problem in Garhwal and the musk deer is one of the most endangered species in the Himalayas. Scent glands from this timid creature can fetch thousands of rupees and are used for manufacturing perfume and medicine. Though synthetic equivalents are now readily available, there is still a thriving black market in musk, one of the most obscene trades in the world today. A rare and harmless creature is slaughtered for a tiny gland that weighs no more than six ounces. Illegal hunting for the musk deer is highly organized, with a network of poachers and middlemen stretching all the way from Nepal, through India and Pakistan. Though penalties for trading in musk are high, the forestry department is poorly equipped to deal with poachers and they are seldom arrested.

The flora and fauna in the Narmada valley are not discussed by the travellers on the Naramda. There might be a possibility that the traditional travellers i.e. *parikramavasis* are not to move away from their suggested routes and that is why less chances of coming in contact with them. But there are a number of National Sanctuaries and conservation areas developed to maintain the flora and fauna in the nearby areas of the Naramda. Tigers, leopards, and a few rare birds are the assets of the Narmada. There is a danger that the developments of the dams may cause threat to the wildlife of the ecoregion as the Narmada flows from many conservation areas which might be
have to dam. Thus if not directly, indirectly human entities is in the process of damaging the natural life of the river.

iv) Dams and Barrages

The Ganges Canal was the brain-child of Captain Pro by Cautely of the Bengal Engineers. He was convinced that it was possible to get water out of the Ganges and into the Doab, the land between the Jumna and the Ganges, an immense area which suffered from frequent and terrible famines. The completion of this canal marked the end of famine in the region.

Dams and barrages are planned for the betterment of the larger mass but the corruption in the System and the benefits out of such projects are so tempting, that the ‘earning’ makes them forget about the loss their constructions will cause. Once the projects start, nobody bothers about the gap that comes in the completion of the project because of the lack of funds, administrative or political issues. One of Dennison Berwick’s hosts, Prem Singh informed him that he was a part of the group who opposed the Tehri dam. The 832-foot dam was being built across the narrow Bhagirathi one mile downstream of Tehri and that would be the fifth-highest rock-filled dam in the world. The four tunnels were being dug to divert the river through the side of the mountain while the dam which was being built was four years behind the schedule. The lake behind the dam would flood Tehri and much of the valley. At least 24,000 people will have to resettle and already several thousand acres of forests have been cut down to make room for them in another valley. The weight of the water might cause seismic activity or structure to collapse. The opponents claim that the accumulation of silt washed down after deforestation upstream will reduce this by one-third. Also people from hills will have to lose their homes and land while benefits will flow to the people living on the plain. And it might be the case that the
contractors pay bribe to politicians and bureaucrats to approve the project and thus keep it funded, no matter how ill-chosen the site or ill-conceived the project.

“The Himalayas provide the rest of India with water and soil, Vimla, Sunderlal Bahuguna’s wife said in Alter’s Sacred Waters. She also opines that by damming the Ganga, it will not only be destruction of the lives and culture of the people who are displaced but people who live downstream and depend on the resources will be deprived of these benefits. Once the dam is built, their wells will dry up and their fields will not get the silt that makes them fertile. Only hope is that the height of the dam would be lowered. Once the Tehri dam is finished, the power of the Ganga will be drained away. It’s not only an environmental disaster but the destruction of spiritual and cultural heritage as well.

Local people in Along the Ganga exclaim with rage regarding their difficulties due to migration saying that thousands of people have to migrate to New Tehri because of the building of the Tehri dam. But the New Tehri does not function well. Daily life is difficult to manage because of the distance and everything is expensive. People shuttle between the Old and New Tehri. Many have even moved back into the valley, determined to abscond from the future of this satellite township for as long as possible.

Similarly, Farakka barrage is an example of man’s arrogance in assuming he can manipulate nature without paying the consequence. Because of the barrage, the river is cut off from its tributaries by huge stones and earth embankments. The weight of the boulders is more than the coarse sediment at the base of the river bank can hold. It rather accelerates erosion. The river swipes away land and habitation on its plain because of the embankment. Even Farakka has accelerated the death of the jute trade and fishing activity.
The Narmada is also being dammed which has made travellers, parikramavasis and local inhabitants probe on this issues. The river flows from the mountains and plains. It does not have big cities and thus industries on its banks. Even in the 21st century, this ancient river is managing to retain its purity. The Narmada is still considered as the river of beauty. It has dense forests on both the sides and mostly tribal folk residing on it. The Narmada banks and lives on it are still without much modern facilities and technology. The river is thus away from urban pollution unlike the Ganga which has been poured with all sorts of malice into it on the name of development on its banks.

But for the selfish motif of money making, men have chopped off the trees and deforested the land. Because of the change in natural surrounding and dams, the river will have to change its course. Narmadanand visits the dam site where the colonies are established for the workers and engineers but the work for the dam is stopped because of various issues on building the dams from different agencies. Amritlal expresses his anxiety that the tradition of parikrama will be in danger. Parikramavasis will not be able to identify if a rivulet they are crossing is the Narmada or some ordinary water stream and thus they may take the risk of violating the rule of parikrama of not crossing this river. The rules and the schedule for the parikrama will change due to the phenomena of the dam. Because of the gigantic dams on the river, parikramavaasis will have to modify their routes like in present time many people have started taking parikrama by vehicle rather on foot.

The constructions will damage the beauty of the river. Because of the dams, someday the river will just be a historical or an archaeological monument. It will remain just as a linking stream between two dams. But seeing the Sardar Sarovar Dam, Amritlal asserts that the grand dam has not affected the beauty of the river.
Rather it has increased its height and health. He also agrees on the fact that with relocation of residents, dams will cause a better to the larger mass. Very peculiarly he writes that dams are the Reserve Bank for the river. But deforestation will certainly damage the cycle of the nature and it will not allow the dams to function properly. Amritlal considers dams to be the necessary evil for the better future of the human kind of the four states. Contrary to this, another parikramavasi Miraben strongly believes that dams have only destructed the lives of the people living on the river banks. The benefit which are to be gained from the construction, are certainly not reaching to the people who have suffered due to displacement.

Evidently with the Narmada Valley Development Project, the Narmada has been subordinated to the needs of a modern market economy and now serves the growing demands of the industry which is, despite often-repeated official claims to the contrary, the main beneficiary of the dams. And in the same way, the rite of the Narmada parikrama has been subordinated and sacrificed for a doubtful concept of ‘development’. Years after the completion of the Omkareshvar dam, the pilgrimage town of Omkareshvar, even still suffers daily power cuts. The electricity produced by the dam is completely transmitted to far-away areas to satisfy the needs of industries, while the people living near the dams are literally “let in the dark” (Neus 16). And an old man rightly remarks in Saundraynee Nadi Narmada that if we extract the current from the water, what element of energy will be left out in the river. In a way, the concern of the man is quite apt as the ambitions and hunger for the material out of the water flows, have made the rivers feeble.

Most industries on the Narmada are water intensive - Vision 2010 envisages a high dependence on surface water, primarily from the controversial Sardar Sarovar multi-purpose project on the Narmada river, which has been challenged in India's
Supreme Court. The anti-dam people's movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA),
estimates that industry will claim some one million acre feet of water, although the
authorities say the dam is being built to slake the thirst of drought-prone Saurashtra
and Kutchch.

Water being the vital source for the life, it becomes a political agenda also for
the political parties. Political leaders drag different issues pertaining to the dams and
barrages and by bringing in the needs for the resource of daily need; they try to touch
the soft corner of the public. All nearby states of the water body try to get the most
benefit out of the resource. It creates the issues of sharing the water and electricity it
generates. On the name of the development, water remains just the election manifesto
but the solutions are prolonged on the name of administrative issues. West Bengal and
Bangladesh are not in good terms because both want to have more benefits of the
Farakka. Similarly, four states Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan
are trying to have the maximum advantage of the Narmada canals.

In case of the Ganga, it is difficult to distinguish between holiday and
holiness, pilgrim and tourist. They make the place and the water filthy. Well-to-do,
educated pilgrims throw plastic water bottles and food wrappers from the windows of
the buses into the river. On the name of rituals, overwhelming majority, pollute the
river without a thought and believe that a garland and a coconut settle the balance.
The holiness of the river relieves them of personal responsibility because they believe
that the Ganga, a goddess after all, should be strong enough to wash away all sins.
She needs no protection, no considerations. Dirt only sticks to mortals, the gods are
dirt resistant. Hence that dirt will be cleansed even when the Ganga is sewer. The
relationship with the river is one-sided. Human beings pollute the Ganga, because she
falls under the responsibility of the gods. Millions of Hindus still sincerely believe
Ganga Ma cannot be polluted, no matter how much filth is thrown in her face. Moreover, they strongly believe that the river is only dirty; it cannot be polluted because the solution of the danger to the river is the Ganga can always survive and purify herself, precisely because she is a goddess.

Thus, the Ganga is indeed a symbol in the debate of rape versus respect of nature. Sacred means giving importance to the natural life-giving substance, to the function. The Ganga should be worshipped as the goddess because it is sacred in the sense that life comes from the land. And anything that happens to nature affects living and therefore sacred. To make people understand the need of the time, new ways are to be found. Only religious tools do not work anymore. But if ecology and mythology are linked together, belief in a sacred Ganga would translate into respect for nature and therefore sustainable development. Julian Crandall Hollick rightly says in Ganga that the river as goddess always lives on. This is very much an argument from within Hindu culture. But if Indians really want to save their river they may have to find a way to de-couple the river from the goddess.

All these issues of nature and culture, illness of the river and hardships of people around are not articulated mostly. If they do, they are not considered under the guise of developmental politics for meagre benefits which are moves towards threats to the lives. Everybody finds a way to excuse one’s self from responsibility. When a foreigner visits India keeping in mind the greatness of ancient civilization, they get shocked seeing the actual situation of the river. But local people do not get much problematized as they get immune to their own ill health and condition of the national ill health. All three foreigners – Dennison Berwick, Ilija Trojanow and Julian Crandall Hollick – are taking pain to meet experts to know the reason for this neglect, try for their solutions and also meet local people to create awareness about the filth that they
are creating to their own life force. Through their journeys, it is observed and realized well that the river, Ganga is not only a natural asset but a channel bonding together the social, religious, political and economic facets of India. Such attempts are help in channelizing the communication that small NGOs or individuals try to make in their region.

The Narmada is also getting feeble. People on the river bank will have to take their responsibility. The wrathful destructions by the rivers are the results of our own deeds. Devotees will have to be cautious and careful for the Nature. For all these concerns, travel may be the tool towards solution. Close contact with the nature because of parikrama, may lead to the realization about the damage that we are causing to environment in modern times.

Greater reality of today at a global scale is that ecology and environment are facing problems of fossil-fuel, air quality, ozone depletion, deforestation and extinction of flora-fauna and that is why the travellers here are trying to sensitize people about the water, an important source for livelihood and thus preserving its purity is a major factor for a larger good.

Through the remarkable journeys of all the travellers, it is observed and realized well that these rivers, the Ganga and the Narmada are not only natural assets but they are channels bonding together the social, religious, political and economic facets of India. Such attempts by the travellers are help in channelizing the communication that small NGOs or individuals try to make in their region. Travel writings on the Ganga and the Narmada considered here thus become an important mode of communication to unravel the nature and culture related issues which as such are marginalized. Opening up of these discussions may create an opportunity to bring
these concerns in focus and become an attempt towards betterment of those lives that are immediately affected by being on and around the river.

And as Crandall Hollick rightly says that until and unless Indians learn to decouple the river from the divinity, the rivers will suffer from the illness. For the betterment of the larger good, this opinion should be discussed and positive action must be taken in different academic and non-academic fora. Even if much pain has been taken by such travellers and different groups of people, the government has been ineffective in taking any strong action. Various ruling parties do launch plans and schemes like the Ganga Action Plan and many such schemes but since time of the British Raj, no government has taken pain to resolve the issue of problem to the end.

Wilson S. Dakin writes in 1937 that England’s slowness to remedy such condition (of pollution in the rivers) is due to her general policy of non-interference with native customs. But even after 69 years of Independence and with highly advanced technology, no measurable change has been brought. It is also important to note that more active than material or technological change is the shift in the understanding of the relationships with the river can bring some positive shift.
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