# Narmada Parikrama

## An Unfolding Within



Haresh Patel

# Preface

There was no prior plan to write this book. During the *Narmada Parikrama*, I used to keep brief notes of my daily experiences. In the beginning, they were simply for memory—where I had stayed, whom I had met, what had happened along the way. But as the journey progressed, I began to realize that a *Parikrama* is not walked only with the feet; it also slowly transforms one's mind, perception, and understanding.

This book is a record of that transformation.

Much has been written about the *Narmada Parikrama*. Some works describe its religious significance. Some provide information about the route. Others recount extraordinary experiences. This book does not attempt to be any of those.

This is not a guidebook.
This is not a spiritual treatise.
Nor is it an account of achievements in *Sadhana*.
It is simply the journey of an ordinary householder undertaking the *Parikrama*.

During this journey, I saw remarkable temples, crossed dense forests, walked along desolate paths, experienced the affection of countless people, and at times faced hunger, fatigue, cold, and uncertainty. Yet when I look back today, I realize that those were not the most important moments.

The most important were—

the people I met along the way,
their selfless service,
their faith,
and those moments that gradually loosened some of the prejudices, expectations, and ego I carried within.

The *Parikrama* did not teach me any new principles. But it taught me to live some old truths once again—

acceptance,
gratitude,
equanimity,
companionship on the journey,
and the spirit of being an instrument.

I have tried to present the incidents in this book as they were experienced. Wherever possible, I have given greater importance to the feeling behind an event than to the event itself. Memories may fade with time, but experiences often remain alive much longer.

If this book inspires a reader to undertake the *Narmada Parikrama*, I will be happy. But it is equally enough if, for a few moments, the reader pauses, looks within, and is able to see a little more clearly the grace that is already present in life.
In the end, this book is less a story of the *Narmada Parikrama* and more a record of an inner journey.

Narmade Har!

**— Haresh Patel**



See what I saw on YouTube

# Contents

Dedication ..... iii
Preface ..... iv
Personal Reflection ..... vi
Narmada — A Living Presence ..... viii
Part I — The Call ..... 1
The Seed ..... 1
1 — The Stirring ..... 2
2 — *Sankalp* ..... 5
Part 2 — First Phase: Omkareshwar to Revasagar ..... 7
From Sankalp to Realization ..... 7
3 — On the Threshold of Beginning ..... 8
4 — The First Step ..... 11
5 — First Touch of Experiences ..... 14
6 — The Conflict of Doubt and Faith ..... 21
7 — Shoolpani: The Crucible of Faith ..... 25
8 — The Path of Faith: Farewell to Doubt ..... 31
9 — Entering Gujarat: A Sense of Home ..... 39
10 — A Quiet Mind Before the Sea ..... 44
Part 3 — Second Stage: Revasagar to Nemawar ..... 53
A New State of Being ..... 53
11 — A Familiar Road, A New Perspective ..... 54
12 — An Ordinary Evening, An Unusual Understanding ..... 58
13 — One Road, Two Rhythms ..... 61
14 — From Hunger to Abundance ..... 64
15 — Mandavgad: A Turn With Its Own Meaning ..... 73
16 — Not Every Invitation Needs to Be Accepted ..... 77
17 — A Journey Turning Inward ..... 81
Part 4 — Third Phase: From Nemavar to Amarkantak ..... 88
Turning Inward ..... 88

18 — The Taste of Equanimity ..... 89
19 — Letting Go — In the Flow of Goodness ..... 94
20 — The Role of Small Decisions in a Long Journey ..... 98
21 — Grace That Walks With Us ..... 104
22 — The Taste of Offering Service ..... 109
Chapter 23 — Worldly Life and Sadhana: Distinct in Appearance, One in Essence ..... 112
24 — Reading People ..... 116
25 — Reva's Innocence and the Final Ascent ..... 121
26 — Amarkantak: Farewell and New Beginning ..... 126
Part 5 — Fourth Phase: Amarkantak to Omkareshwar ..... 131
The Unfolding Within ..... 131
27 — Gomti's Bank... The Inner Reflection ..... 132
28 — "Reading Vacation": A Time to Assimilate ..... 137
29 — Bhakti, Bhav and the Dissolution of "I" ..... 141
30 — The Horizon of Faith ..... 145
31 — *Purnahuti*: When Words Fell Silent ..... 148
Final Chapter: An Ending or a Beginning? ..... 153
Appendix 1 — Why Undertake the Parikrama? ..... 156
Appendix 2 — Stages of Silence ..... 163
Appendix 3 — Daily Route and Halts ..... 167
Appendix 4 — Fellow Travellers ..... 169
About the Author ..... 171

# 1 — The Stirring

For nearly fourteen years, I had been reading Indian scriptures. Particularly the *Shruti* texts and the Upanishads. Questions attracted me more than stories.
What is Brahman?
What is the Self?
Who am I?
This reading was not driven by devotion. It was an intellectual and rational spiritual inquiry. The *Mahavakyas* fascinated me. Discussions continued. Notes were written. At times, I felt I had understood. Yet nothing in life was changing. It remained a thought, not an experience.

Over the previous three or four years, I had travelled extensively across India. Training programs, meetings, long highways road trips, solo trips, and solitude in hotel rooms.

Sometimes, late at night, a question would suddenly arise—
Was I searching for something?
There was no answer. But there was a quiet restlessness within. As though the distance between the pages of a book and real life had not yet been bridged.

A few years earlier, I had watched the Gujarati film *Reva*. A man walking along the banks of the Narmada. He was walking, yet he was not restless. He was not searching. He was flowing. Long after the film ended, a silence remained.

Somewhere in a corner of my mind, a thought arose—
"One day, I should do the *Parikrama*."
And immediately, I laughed.
3500 to 4000 kilometres?
Months away from home?
Householder responsibilities?
Uncertainty?

The walls of logic imprisoned the thought within moments. But today I understand—that was the day the seed was planted. At that time, I did not have a complete picture of what the *Parikrama* really was. I only knew that one walked along the banks of the Narmada, reached the sea, and returned.

Months on foot. Limited belongings. Limited comforts. Yet an unbroken flow.
All of it felt like a distant horizon—
someone else's story.
Its time had not yet come.

## Drive to Mahakumbh

The thought first sprouted into reality on 22 January 2025. I was driving to the Maha Kumbh at Prayagraj. My wife and two friends, Rasikbhai and Sangeetaben, were travelling with me. We were on the road from Bhopal to Jabalpur.
Around midday, Rasikbhai suddenly said,
"Our relative is doing the *Narmada Parikrama*. They may be somewhere nearby."

A phone call confirmed that they were at Barwati Ghat.
We turned off the main road and headed in that direction.
On the way, we stopped at a roadside hotel and packed dal and roti.
It was decided that we would take lunch for them that day.
It was a small gesture—freeing them from cooking for a day.
Yet somewhere within, I felt that I had not come merely as a visitor.

In the middle of the forest stood a simple house where service to pilgrims was being offered.
There I met Toralben.
Though she came from a prosperous family, here she was simply a pilgrim.

A backpack on her shoulders.
*Dand*, a staff in her hand.
A kamandal.

And despite the fatigue on her face, an extraordinary steadiness.
"We started on 15 November. There is still a long way to walk."
She said it casually.

I looked at her bag.
Just this much luggage?
Could life really become this light?

I asked,
"Don't you feel afraid?"
She smiled.

"Of course fear comes. But place everything at the feet of the Narmada. Then the road opens on its own."

Then she asked directly, "Have you ever thought about it?"
I paused.
"I have thought about it, but..."
The sentence remained unfinished. All my arguments and excuses—responsibilities, work, time—
began to feel small before her quiet steadiness.
She was my age.
Yet she was here, walking the path.

I asked about *Dand* she carried.
The answer came,
"This is my third leg."
In that brief sentence, it felt as though the essence of the entire journey was contained.

When our car returned to the main road, there was movement outside, but silence within. I understood that this journey would not be made only with the feet, but with the inner self. The questions I had spent years reading about in books would now stand before me on the road itself.

On that January afternoon, a quiet *Sankalp* was made—
to begin in November 2025, after Dev Uthi Ekadashi.
No fanfare.
No announcement.
The seed had now broken through the soil and begun to sprout.

---

परिक्ष्य लोकान् कर्मचितान् ब्राह्मणो निर्वेदमायात्...
*(Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.12)*

Having examined all that can be gained through action, a person comes to see that lasting fulfilment does not lie there.

And then, the search turns toward true knowledge.

# 2 — *Sankalp*

As the car moved towards the Maha Kumbh, the road stretched ahead, and a thought that had long been taking shape within me suddenly found its voice.
"I am going to do the *Narmada Parikrama* this year."
For a moment, silence filled the car.
After a while, Rasikbhai said,
"If you go, I will come with you."
I smiled.

But a question lingered within.
Was this merely a declaration, or had a genuine resolve been born?
My wife did not react strongly. Perhaps she thought this was another passing enthusiasm. Yet as the months went by, the thought did not fade. It deepened. I began watching videos about the *Parikrama*. I read about ashrams and saints.

The Narmada was no longer merely a river. In my mind, she was gradually taking shape as a living civilization flowing through time. This was no longer a passing fancy or a moment of excitement. One evening, I sat down with my wife and spoke seriously.

I explained everything—the four months away, the uncertainty, and the physical challenges.
She listened quietly and said with complete simplicity,
"You should go. I won't be able to come with you. But don't worry. I will take care of everything here."

*When permission comes not through words but through trust, the responsibility becomes greater.*

Seeing my conviction, my sons also responded positively. The picture was different within the larger family. An injury to my knee during the Amarnath Yatra eighteen years earlier still lived in everyone's memory.
"If you walk for four months, aggravated knee problems will be an issue for the rest of your life."
Such loving warnings came from many directions. My mother's concern was of a different kind. It was the pain of separation.

Sometimes opposition does not arise from difficulty. It arises from affection.

It was easy to face resistance from outside.
But one doubt still remained alive within.
Would my body support me?
I had made no public announcement about the journey.
It was not failure that I feared.
It was looking like a failure in the eyes of others.
Doubt often arises from the fear of public embarrassment.

Amid these doubts, people would ask,
"What preparations have you made?"
And my answer was always the same.
Nothing special.
No additional exercise.
No fitness coach.
No trial walks.
Life continued exactly as before.

We often assume that a great journey requires great preparation. But here, acceptance seemed more important than preparation. Occasionally, my knees would remind me of their presence while going down a flight of stairs.

Yet I began to understand that pain and incapacity are not the same thing. Fear is often greater than the pain itself.
For years, I had listened to reports about my body. This time, I wanted to listen to the body itself. I decided that I was not going to experiment with exercise routines or training programmes.

I was setting out in trust, supported by faith. This was not a *Sankalp* to conquer anything. It was a surrender to walking, one step at a time. The decision had now been made in words. All that remained was the moment of stepping onto the path of the *Parikrama*.

---

व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिर् एकेह कुरुनन्दन...
*(Bhagavad Gita 2.41)*

A steady and resolute mind remains centred in a single direction.