The story of the river Narmada

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Story and trivia

The holiest among the holy
Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Cauvery, and Narmada are the five holy rivers of India. Narmada is the holiest. She is also called Reva and Purvaganga. It is said that a view of the river cleanses our sins. Interestingly, legend goes that when Ganga feels polluted thanks to her worshippers who take a dip, she comes in the form of a black cow to have a purifying bath in the Narmada!

In mythological times, Shiva the lord of destruction sat meditating. His intense concentration made him break into a sweat. As it rolled down, it got collected in a tank. Eventually, this overflowed as the Narmada or Shankari, Shankar’s daughter. Every pebble on the riverbed is supposed to take the shape of a Shivalinga.

Think of Narmada and you are safe from snake venom
According to a Puranic story, the 60 million Gandharvas, defeated the Nagas and took over their kingdom and treasures. The Nagas went to Vishnu for help. He asked them to get Purukutsa’s help. They sent Narmada their sister, to ask for Purukutsa’s help. He agreed and she led him into the nether world of the Nagas. Empowered by Vishnu, Purukutsa fought against the Gandharvas, ultimately defeating them.

The Nagas then declared that whoever remembers this story of Narmada leading Purukutsa, would not be affected by the venom of snakes. Narmada went on to marry Purukutsa.

A Bhil creation song
The Bhils are tribals who have lived on the banks of the Narmada for centuries. The song they sing starts off with God’s sudden idea to create a world. The woodsman, Relu Kabadi is sent to fetch wood from the jungle. Slowly and lovingly every creature of the forest, plant, tree, and other things we see in the World, were carved out of wood. Lastly, the Narmada and Tapti were created. They started the flow to meet the ocean Dudu Hamad. This was to be a marriage and so on this wonderful journey, the villages, valleys and hills were created.

Emperor Sahasrarjun

Maheshwar on the banks of the Narmada was King Sahasrarjun’s capital. One day, the King and his 500 wives went to the river for a picnic. When the wives wanted a vast play area, the King stopped the mighty river Narmada with his 1000 arms!

While they were all enjoying themselves, Ravana flew by in his Pushpak Vimana. Downstream, when he saw the dry riverbed, he thought it was an ideal place to pray to Lord Shiva. He made a shivalinga out of sand and started his prayers.

When Sahasrarjuna’s wives were done and they stepped out of the riverbed, he let the waters flow. The voluminous river flowed down sweeping Ravana’s shivalinga along, messing up his prayers. Furious, Ravana tracked Sahasrarjuna and challenged him. Armed to the hilt, the mighty Ravana was in for a huge surprise. The mighty Sahasrarjuna with his 1000 arms pinned Ravana to the ground. Then he placed 10 lamps on his heads and one on his hand.

After tying up Ravana, Sahasrarjuna dragged him home and tied him up to his son’s cradle pole. A humiliated Ravana stayed prisoner until his release was secured.

Even today, the Sahasrarjun temple at Maheshwar lights 11 lamps in memory of the event.

Narmada’s flow to the West
It is said that the Narmada and Son were born as two teardrops of Brahma. Others say an official proposal of marriage from Son was made to Mekala, Narmada’s father. Yet others say, the Son wooed the mighty Narmada and she agreed to marry him.

When the Son was coming towards his bride’s place in a slow procession (baraat in Hindi), the curious and impatient Narmada sent her hairdresser Johilla to check out the groom. Son got chatting with Johilla and found her rather enchanting,
When Narmada realized that her groom-to-be was enjoying Johilla's company, she stormed out of the house and flowed westwards. The rejected Son too flew off Amarkantak to go in an easterly direction. Eventually, the Johilla stream, formed of her tears, flows eastwards to join the Son.

The Son is an important tributary of Ganga.


Trivia

1. This river forms an important connection between the Arabian Sea and the Ganges river.
2. It was called Namade by Ptolemy the Greek geographer.
3. The Narmada is considered the mother and giver of peace.
4. It flows through central India as the fifth largest river on the Indian subcontinent.
5. The source of the river is the Amarkantak hill range.
6. It is believed that a dip in this river washes away all sins. It is one of the five holy rivers of India.
7. The Narmada river basin is the home to India's best teak and hardwood forests. Also, popular in this region are Maheshwari saris.
8. A great number of irrigation projects have been completed with regard to the Narmada river, supplying water to hundreds of farmers all over central India.
9. Dams and hydroelectric powerhouses have been built to fully utilize the flow of this river.
10. The distribution of the waters of this river were disputed for a long time before an agreement was finally reached that the water be allocated depending on necessity.