

World Water Day and significance of celebrating *Namami Devi Narmade Seva Yatra*

■ By Shivraj Singh Chouhan

WORLD Water Day is celebrated worldwide on March 22 and this couldn't have come at a better time since we, the people of Madhya Pradesh, have embarked on Narmada Seva Yatra, the largest river conservation campaign in the world. In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly declared the day as 'World Day for Water' to increase awareness among people about the importance of water conservation. A lot of importance has been given to water in Indian culture and the world needs to learn from us. In Hindu tradition, we believe our entire life is based on water: from birth to death, we also use water for all our ceremonies.

*"Gange cha Yamune chaiva
Godavari Saraswati,
Narmade Sindho Kaveri,
Jalesmin Samnidhim Kuru."*
- Ahnika Sutravai, Verse
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Water is our lifeline and a key

for our survival. Most of the civilizations have developed and flourished on the banks of mighty rivers. The Rig Veda has the famous Nadi Sukta (River Hymn RV 10-75). The seers regarded rivers as life bestowing, life nurturing and life protecting Divine Mothers.

Madhya Pradesh is lucky to have been blessed by five river basins with more than 3900 kms of rivers flowing in the state. However, our responsibility lies in making this blessing remain with us forever.

As I write to you on the World Water Day, you know my friends that water is increasingly becoming a very scarce resource. In India, the per capita availability of water has decreased sharply from 3000 cubic meters to 1123 cubic meters, compared to global average of 6000 cubic meters, which is worrisome. Apart from increase in population, the sheer wastage by people with access to water is one of the major reasons for the same. We know the demand for water is going to go

up in the years to come. To meet the growing demand, we need to use our water resources judiciously.

Hence, the importance of water conservation has gained significance. Fully aware of the

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importance of preserving our rivers for future generations, my government embarked upon 'Narmada Seva Yatra' on December 11, 2016.

It is not unknown that Narmada River is the lifeline of Madhya Pradesh. It is the fifth largest river of Indian subcontinent and one of the seven holy rivers of India.

The objective of the yatra is to increase awareness about conservation of the largest river in the state.

Today, I feel overwhelmed that the yatra has become a grand public movement. People are coming forward to take pledge about protecting and nurturing Ma Narmada and her ecosystem.

The Yatra has touched hearts of millions across the globe.

People from all walks of life, irrespective of their caste, colour, class and creed are wholeheartedly participating in the campaign.

People have taken pledge of planting trees and protecting them, protecting the banks of Narmada from encroachments, avoiding water pollution and keeping the river clean. We are planning to plant 10 million trees on July 2 along Narmada's coast.

We are also constructing 'kunds' on the banks of Narmada, which can be used to immerse idols and dispose worship goods. Similarly, mukti dhams (cremation ground) are being constructed on the river banks to check pollution.

Historically, people who drown corpses of their relatives into the river have pledged not to repeat it, and individuals involved in open defecation alongside the river are now using toilets. A massive transformation is taking

place on the banks of Narmada and the world is taking notice of the same.

The movement has received active support and participation of many celebrities including Amitabh Bachchan, Baba Ramdev, Sri Sri Ravishankar, Anoop Jalota, Anuradha Paudwal and Kailash Satyarthi, to name a few. 'Narmada Seva Yatra' also received the blessing of His Holiness Dalai Lama through his participation on March 19, 2017.

He lauded efforts of our government to protect the environment and called out to people for participating in the movement to make it a success.

The theme of World Water Day 2017 is waste water. Incidentally, Narmada Seva Yatra is also about reducing and reusing wastewater. Across the world, over 80% of the wastewater generated flows back into the ecosystem without being treated, which is very harmful to the environment.

We are making sustainable efforts to avoid this situation. We have decided that sewage water

of cities and villages will not be allowed to flow into Narmada. Treatment plants will be established to purify water in villages and cities located on the banks of river Narmada. Sewage water will be treated and clean water will be utilized by the farmers for irrigation. So far 18 cities have been identified for the rapid development of sewage treatment plants and the budget of Rs. 1500 crores have been allocated for the same.

As Dalai Lama emphasized during his visit, public participation is a key to achievement of the objectives set for Narmada Seva Yatra. Government alone cannot do it. We have received tremendous support from citizens of Madhya Pradesh for this yatra. On 'World Water Day' let us take a pledge to continuously strive to conserve water sources around us for a better future and make the yatra a grand success. I look forward to your support.

*Blogger is Chief Minister,
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