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MEMOIR OF GEOGRAPHY

**OMKARESHVARA, A HOLY CITY OF THE NARMADA
IN THE COURSE OF TRANSFORMATION.**



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Poem of Shankaracharya to the Narmada

The wise ones said:
That which sings your praises
At dawn, at twilight, at night,
In its human form
Acquired in the suffering of
So many births,
To approach in honor
The feet of Shiva himself.

Therefore hears my praises;
O Sacred Narmada.
Your presence is
A grace for the Earth.
The faithful ones name you Kripa,
Thanks even.
You purify the Earth
Of its impurities.
The faithful ones name you Surasa,
The sacred soul.
You cross ground by leaping
Like a dancing stag.
The faithful ones name you Rava,
The leaping.
But Shiva named you Delightful
and, in his laughter,
He gave you the name of Narmada.¹...

Shankaracharya.

¹ Shankaracharya was a great reformer of Hinduism in the 8th century. Poem translated from Hindi by Gita Mehta in 1993. Continuation in appendix.

Mata Narmada



Fig. 1: Illustration representing the divinity of the Narmada river. Source: Image on sale in the local markets along its banks, 2005.

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- List of acronyms :

CSE	Center for the Sciences and the Environment, Delhi
CWINC	Central Waterways, Irrigation, and Navigation Commission
CW & PC	Central Water & Power Commission
FRL	Full Reservoir Level
GOI	Government of India
INTACH	Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage
ISP	Indira Sagar Project
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
km	Kilometer
MARG	(1987) Multiple Action Research Group
MEF	(1980) Minister of Environment and Forest
MP	Madhya Pradesh
MRL	Maximum Reservoir Level
MW	Mega Watt
NBA	(1986) Narmada Bachao Andolan (Movement to Save the Narmada)
NCA	(1985) Narmada Control Authority
NHDC	(2000) Narmada Hydroelectric Development Corporation
NHPC	(1975) National Hydroelectric Power Corporation
NVDA	(1985) Narmada Valley Development Authority.
NVDP	Narmada Valley Development Plan
NWDT	(1969) Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal
NWRDC	(1964) Narmada Water Resource Development Committee
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
PAP	Populations Affected by the Project
SSP	Sardar Sarovar Project
WWF	World Wildlife Foundation, India

Introduction

The West often represents India as fixed in time. However, contrary to this generally accepted idea, it nowadays takes up the challenge of development. The entire country today engages, before our eyes, in economic, political, and profound cultural upheaval. In 50 years of independence, India has undoubtedly changed as much as in two centuries of colonialism.

This large, rich country of more than one billion inhabitants, characterized by great cultural diversity, is the cradle of great Hindu and Buddhist civilizations. Whereas Buddhism spread in the entire Eastern Asian continent, Hinduism remains an Indian characteristic, practiced by 80% of its population.

India, called “Bhârat,” is in its entirety a sacred territory in the collective representations of Hindu communities. The people who live on its soil are particularly attached, marking out across the landscape, multiple markers symbolizing their identities. The Hindu temples, the mosques, the Jâin temples, the Gurdwaras (Sikh temples), the churches, and sometimes the synagogues constitute so many signs of religiosity and community, forming a landscape organized by a mosaic of people each one supporting a different philosophy of existence. The independent Indian Union is defined as “the largest democracy in the world” allowing the cohesion of its various communities. French and English colonization have barely touched the foundations of Hindu civilization, the transported values being added to the diversity of the world of the ideas. The proposals introduced for territorial development under the British administration, such as the construction of the network of railways, were accepted by the whole of the population. Indeed, these infrastructures were necessary to modernize the country and to make it progress in the international context.

Since Indian independence in 1947, a new form of influence comes from the West, the “development” which we can regard as a new vehicle of cultural diffusion. The middle class population of the cities already fluently uses the technological goods imported from Western countries or produced on Indian Territory. The campaigns have not remained with isolated. Since 1964, the “Green revolution” there has also introduced

of new techniques: new technologies of irrigation and the introduction of industrial inputs (fertilizer and insecticides) intended to increase the productivity considerably. These land reforms do not, however, concern the whole territory, and the economic liberalism does not benefit the entire Indian population.

The construction of great dams was an idea supported with the central government of India since colonial times. The actual work of the projects started only after independence. These hydraulic projects are, nevertheless, largely dependent on the financial and technical assistance of the Western countries. They are thus the means of economic and technical developments, vehicles of the materialist culture of developed countries, built on rivers sacralized by the spiritual culture of Hindu society.

The Puranic and Védic texts, at the foundation of Hindu culture, frequently praise the elements of nature. The mountains and the hills are often the homes of the gods, while the lakes, rivers, and streams are the same incarnation of divinity on Earth. Hinduism and ecology are thus in close relation since antiquity. The cities are traditionally built according to the characteristics of the environment. The most exceptional natural sites often become holy places where the gods reside. They sometimes evolve in places around which urban centers develop.

The Narmada, one of the seven sacred rivers of India, is considered a divinity in the Hindu collective representations. Thousands of faithful glorify it and deeply devote themselves to her (Bhakti*). An atmosphere of peace emanates from this devotion in which time flows like the flow of the water. However, now, a great governmental development project is underway in the Narmada valley, attempting to exploit its natural resources, to produce hydroelectricity, and to build large irrigation systems. These installations will make it possible to increase agricultural production, and to increase the water and electricity supplies of the cities and industrial parks.

The holy city of Omkareshwar is one of the many holy cities of India and is located on the banks of the Narmada. It acts as an important religious center of the valley whose sacrality is registered in its territory by many signs of divine nature. The city has developed to with it for several millennia, gradually changing forms according to the socio-cultural and historical context. Religious infrastructures have always constituted the principal elements of the organization of its urban space. Within the framework of the

development project, a large dam is currently in construction just a few hundred meters away from the spiritual center of the city. From now on, it will have to integrate this building and all that is attached to it in the installation of its sacred space, while adapting to the increasingly massive multitude of pilgrims and tourists.

The principal problems of the subject are those of **knowing how Hindu religious life, structuring the space of the holy city of Omkareshvara on Narmada, coexists with the industrialist and economic developments which occur there. The question thus concerns itself with the concepts of sacred space and development. Does a process exist for adjusting sacred space to development? Of these two elements--sacred space and technological development--which will dominate the direction of geographical space in the minds of the people?**

The purpose of this study is composed of three parts: In the first, we will explain **how the sacredness of the Narmada River is expressed by the Hindu population as well as its artificialization by the valley development project. We will also discuss the impact of this project.**

In our second part, we will study the **holy city of Omkareshvara, located on the Narmada.**

Lastly, we will analyze the **development of the holy city and its integration in a worldly space.**

- Epistemological foundations of research.

This study of human geography falls under an approach to cultural and social geography. An interdisciplinary approach in the social sciences is necessary to take into account all the complexity and all the aspects of the spatial stakes in question, which are of cultural, environmental, economic and political order.

Ethnology, religious sociology, spatial anthropology, psychology, theology, philosophy (Western or Indian), or the history of the religions and other mythical texts, are combined in this step for the study of the phenomena taking place in this religious space in the process of transformation. In addition, the economy, policy, development, and the environment are also fields to be explored within the framework of this subject connecting two spaces which seem at first glance to be opposed: “sacred” religious space,

and “secular” industrial space. It is a question of studying the social and economic phenomena which are translated in the organization of space, to understand which set of influences guides the direction of this territory. **Man as an individual or as an individual in society is a spatial actor; by his feelings, his decisions, his acts, he moulds these places permanently.**

A social space seems like an organization, which adapts and evolves unceasingly under the effect of the modifications of the economic, social, and physical environments.

Paul Claval represents culture as the whole of “the know-how, the practice, the knowledge, the attitudes, and the ideas that the individual receives, internalizes, modifies or develops over the course of his existence. From one generation to another...the contents change, **culture is not a total reality: it is a unit infinitely diversified and in constant evolution**” (Claval, 1999). The principal pitfall to be avoided would be thus to consider culture and religion as inevitably immutable values, which condition the social subject. In fact, they are these **processes of adjustment and change rendered in space** which we must try to grasp and which spark our interest in the topic.

The study of the religious marks in the territory, the material signs which are offered to the spectator in the landscape, is a necessary approach to bring spatial legibility to the religious phenomenon. But this geographical analysis taking into account a concrete reality is not enough to understand the whole of the phenomena. Culture and religion are **undeniable producers of space and territory**. Religion organizes society, which itself structures the space in which it exists.

However, today, the site of Omkareshvara is subjected to a development project. The “development” can be defined as the whole of the social processes induced by voluntarist operations of transformation of a social environment, undertaken under the biases of institutions or actors external to this environment (Bonte-Izard, 1991).

How is this development integrated in the representation of this space by the residents of the holy city?

- Field research methods.

During our field research in India, from December 21, 2004 to April 9, 2005, we tried to **collect** as much **information, data and documents**, as possible from the city of

Omkareshvara and the dam construction site, then in the resource centers of various institutions and NGO. We consulted documents produced by the INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) the University of Delhi, the HSC (Center of Social sciences of the Embassy of France in India) and the Department of Archaeology of the Indian Government. In addition we examined documents from NGO WWF (World Wild Foundation) and the CSE (Center for Science and Environment).

At the center of the town of Omkareshvara, we tried to grasp the cultural and religious phenomena occurring in this place. Our method of investigation was “participatory observation,” which made it possible to be introduced into the social life and to study the intercommunity relations which exist there. This method also allowed us to take part in the daily religious ceremonies and the great festivals where we could grasp all the spiritual atmosphere of the events. Many discussions with various actors enabled us to get to know all the diversity of the individuals present in this place. We analyzed the speeches of the director “general manager” of the Omkareshvara dam as well as engineers employed on the project, of representatives of religious life, pilgrims, and members of the various communities of the holy city and certain surrounding villages.

We collected environmental evaluation reports at the NHDC (Narmada Hydroelectric Development Corporation) which held statistical data on the rural people affected by the project, charts of the site, and the plans of the dam. On the internet network we found many charts of installations of the Narmada catchment area available on the websites of the authorities responsible for the valley development project, as well as satellite images.

We also prepared a documentary video and illustrated reports. The video and photography represent excellent tools for data acquisition and made it possible to bring sounds and images to life, a great part of this geographical study.

In the text, the words of original Sanskrit are noted in italics and are marked by an asterisk () at the point of their first appearance.*

Part 1: Narmada, a sacred river in the course of artificialization.

India is one of the most populous countries on our planet today. Its demographic growth, accelerating since its independence, requires the government of the Indian Union to increase agricultural production to allow its self-sufficiency in food production and to export the surpluses if possible. In parallel, its integration within the world economy is made possible by industrial and technological development, which is increasingly competitive, supporting the economic growth of the country. To support this growth the Indian Union needs to become energy independent. The construction of dams on its large rivers thus seems to be a solution to produce great quantities of hydroelectricity and to allow the distribution of water, addressing domestic, agricultural, and industrial needs.

Since the night of times [?], Narmada is one of the seven sacred rivers of India evoked in the oldest texts. Its banks whose pilgrims of all countered traverse the paths [its banks, whose paths pilgrims of all types have traveled?], are marked by many symbols of religious devotion.

During these last decades, the power of progress, of India's development and economic growth, pushed the government towards the exploitation of this river's waters. However, the implementation of the plan of development, aimed at transforming and controlling its natural course, was long, hard, and encountered many difficulties. This interregional geopolitical issue confronted the States of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, with the question of the division of this resource. In addition, it was vehemently discussed on all levels of public opinion, from local to global. The environmental impacts and the displacement of the local people often adivasi * and low castes, awoke both humanistic and ecological protest movements. These movements were organized in NGO with the aim of defending and preserving the natural environments and cultures of the affected communities. Lastly, this great project calls into question the policies of the successive governments, their relationships to international organizations, and the very problem of "development." So, will this great Narmada valley development

project not lead to an artificialization and a radical transformation of the life of this large Indian River? Don't the ambitions of modernization carrying new paradigms and transforming those of the societies go against thousand-year-old cultures which constitute the heart, even of the identity of this great nation?

In order to tackle these questions we will first study the natural, ecological, and environmental characteristics of the catchment area of the Narmada River.

Secondly, we will analyze how the sacrality of the river expresses itself.

And finally, we will examine how the governments planned its transformation and how this will to exploit the waters of Narmada became an inter-regional geopolitical conflict, and a project disputed on an international scale.

1. Hydrology and ecology of the Narmada River.

The Narmada valley is situated at the center of India. However, it remained insulated for a long time, regarded as a wild zone of the Indian peninsula densely covered with forests, not very navigable and not allowing a human development as massive as in the Ganges valley.

1.1 The catchment area of Narmada: localization and situation.

Narmada forms part of the 7 largest rivers of India. It is the largest river running out towards the west of the Indian peninsula. This river is most important of the State of Madhya Pradesh, and runs out in the South of this State.

a distance of 161 km. The Narmada opens into the Gulf of Cambay with an estuary of 20 km. The whole of the catchment area's **drainage surface** extends for approximately 100,000 km² (98,796.80 km²), 87% of which is in Madhya Pradesh (85,859 km²), 11% in Gujarat (11,399 km²) and 2% in Maharashtra (1,538 km²). Narmada is regarded as “the lifeline” of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, because it offers in these states great quantities of water and vast arable lands necessary to meet the basic needs of their people. It was estimated that 15 million inhabitants lived in the Narmada basin in 2001; today there would be nearly 20 million (NHDC, 2003).

1.2 Climatic conditions and hydrological characteristics of the catchment area.

1.2.1 Climatic conditions of the catchment area.

The catchment area of Narmada, in the center of India, is in the **intertropical “monsoon” climatic field** in alternate seasons. It is generally characterized by a **humid, tropical climate**.

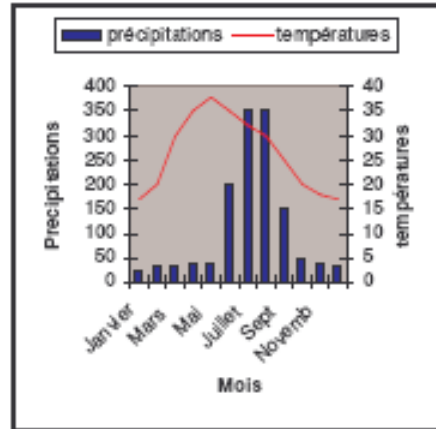


Fig. 03: Ombro-thermic graph of the average precipitation and temperature in the Narmada Valley.

Throughout the year, although this area is characterized by alternating between the dry season and wet (monsoon) season, one observes four distinct seasons: a **cold and dry climate** from November to February with temperatures of 17°50 C to 20° C, a **hot and dry climate** from mid-February to mid-June of 30 to 35°C, a monsoon climate in the

southwest from mid-June to the end of August of 27°50 to 30°C, and a post-monsoon climate from September to November of 25° C to 27°50C (NHDC, 2003).

- Precipitation:

The **average annual precipitation** for the whole of the basin is **1,178 mm**. Nearly 90% of precipitation is received during 5 months of monsoon from June to October, including nearly 60% during the 2 months of August and July. The remainder of precipitation (i.e. 10%) falls sporadically from November to May during the dry season.

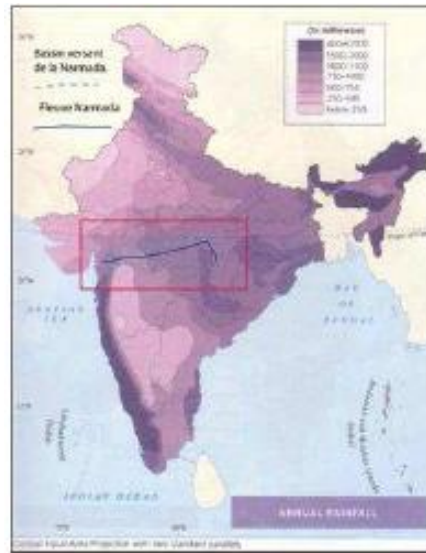


Fig. 04: Map of India's precipitation, position of the Narmada within the whole.

The precipitation is unequally distributed in the basin. One can distinguish several climatic zones, **organized by overall gradient, growing in precipitation and decreasing in temperature from west to east**. In certain places, extreme micro climates meet, varying according to their geographical positions in the basin (slopes, altitudes, continentality, or oceanity).

1.2.2 Hydrogeology and hydrology of Narmada.

a) Hydrographic network.

The Narmada River receives 41 major tributaries: Tawa, Kaveri... (Fig. 5, p. 25). They run out mainly of the southern slope of its catchment area.

b) The hydrological mode of the Narmada River:

The hydrological system of the Narmada River is fed by **rainy conditions in a tropical environment**, because there is only one maximum each year and one mode of diet [?] (rain). The high waters and the rising water levels are concentrated during the monsoon period, the 4 summer months from June to September, receiving nearly 80% of annual precipitation. The low waters, specific to the dry season, extend from October to May, the river then living on its reserves is fed only by 20% of the annual precipitation during this period.

c) Flow of the river.

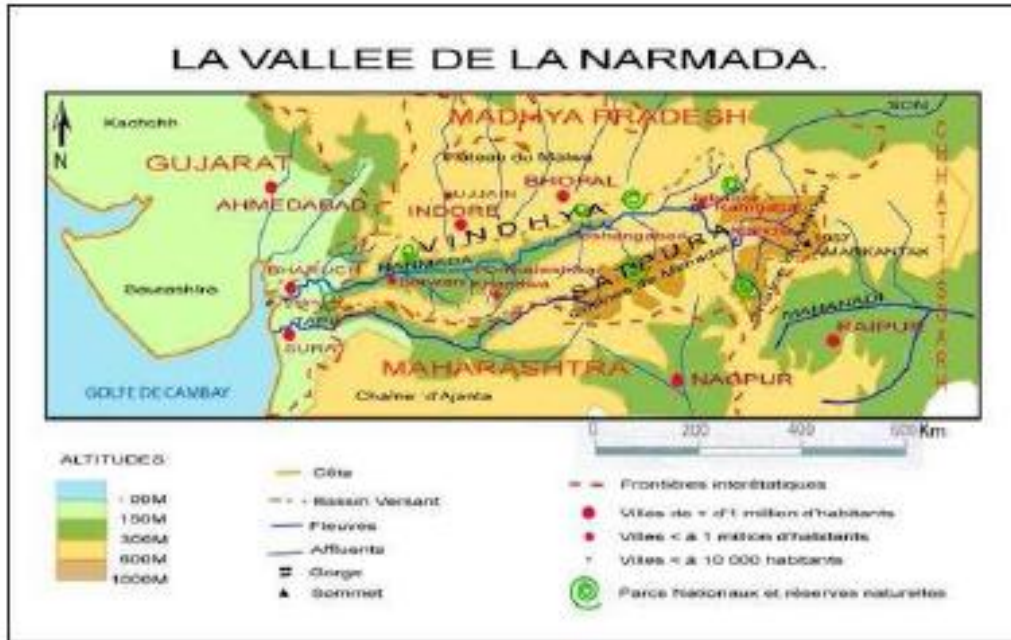
The only sources of information we obtained concerning the total volume of river water refer to data the communicated from 1979 to 1992 within the context of the work of the court of water and the analyses of governmental and nongovernmental Indian organizations. In 1979, the study of the statements of its output, by the court, concluded that the **total annual volume of water in the Narmada was 27 million acre feet (i.e. 32,400 million m³)²**. In 1992, studies of flow of the river, reliable since the figures were then available for 45 years, proved that the outputs were only 22.69MAF, which is **27,228 million m³**, in other words **18% lower than the first estimate.**³

1. 3 Geology and geomorphological structure of the Narmada catchment area.

1.3.1. Parts of the hydrological network along the river:

² Figure evaluated and determined by the National Water Dispute Tribunal (NWDT) from the river output statements at the border between Gujarat and Madyha Pradesh from 1945 to 1979.

³ Figure evaluated between 1945 and 1992. Written submission on behalf of the Union of India, February 99.



*Fig. 05: Physical Map of the Narmada catchment areas and neighboring regions.
Source: Oxford Atlas and CREMIN Emilie, 2005.*

The sources of the Son, Mahanadi, and Narmada are found in the high plateau of Maikal, forming the origin of three different catchment areas (Fig. 5). From its source to Amarkantak, Narmada runs out in an East-West axis, through the forest in a torrential way containing many waterfalls on steep slopes. Leaving Ramnagar (an old palace now in ruins in the Mandla district) it becomes a deep and placid current. Downstream of the town of Mandla, it changes direction to a North-South axis. During this curve on the level of Jabalpur [?], the majestic falls of Dhuandhara, “the fountain of fog,” forms at the top of a marble block 10m in height. Then the river cuts into the deep white marble mouth “Marble Rocks.” Downstream of Jabalpur, the river again takes its East-West axis and peacefully continues its course in a narrow central valley between the Vindhya and Satpura mountain ranges for 320 km. Below Hoshangabad, it enters its first alluvial plain, where it forms rapids, islands, and deep basins. Between Punasa and Omkareshvara at 115 km, the valley narrows again, the wooded hills follow one after another. Then, downstream of Omkareshvara, the river enters its second alluvial plain, the Nimar plain. The valley becomes narrow again in the district of Jhabhua, between the wooded hills of Bagh and Barwani where the course of the river flows over several cataracts. Lastly,

downstream of these last hills, the Narmada enters its last coastal alluvial plain where it makes up a large winding path. Below Bharuch, it widens to an estuary of 28 km to enter the Gulf of Cambay. The alluvia accumulate at the mouth and form large islands of which the largest is Aliabet, a surface of 40,000 ha covered by mangroves and tides.

1.3.2. Structural characteristics of the catchment area.

a) The Narmada-Sound lineament.

Located between the Vindhya and Satpura mountain ranges, which form two parts of the Deccan Traps, the Narmada valley corresponds to an interior graben (or a rift valley) extending from the Madhya Pradesh heights to the low plains of Gujarat. This graben, in which the river runs out, would be in the beginning, a directed fault line ENE-WSW from the approximately 1,200 km called the “Narmada-Sound lineament.”

This fault line, regarded as likely to have been active since the Precambrian, had a fundamental influence on the geological composition and the geomorphological structuring of the area during subsequent geological periods (Chaudery, 1995). At the beginning of the Cretaceous, the valley was flooded by a marine incursion. The late Cretaceous succeeded, culminating with the volcanicity of the **Deccan Traps** which covered a vast surface of the Indian peninsula. The graben separates the sedimentary formations of Gondwana in the south and those of Vindhya in north, which have differentiated geological histories. Two parallel faults forming the graben of the Narmada-Sound lineament structure the platforms and orient their ridges in a ENE-WSW direction where the Narmada River runs out of Jabalpur into the Gulf of Cambay. Other faults come perpendicularly to cut them in a second graben called “Gondwana-Godavari Graben” in a NW-SE direction. Taking into account the many earthquakes recorded in the Narmada-Sound axis, this valley was recognized as a zone of weakness by researchers.⁴ In 1997, an earthquake occurred in Jabalpur at an intensity of 6.5 on the Richter scale.

b) Two Mountain Ranges: The Vindhya and Satpura Mountains.

⁴ Geological Survey of India.

The **Vindhya mountain range**, where the Vindhya Mountains extend to the north from the Narmada valley, is a large structure which separates the north from the south in India. Some regard it as a horst rising to the north of the Narmada-Son fault line. It acts as a series of plateaus oriented from east to west. Its rise generally lies between 450 and 610 m, with some climaxes above 1,000 m (Fig. 5, p.25 and 6). The majority of this chain is made up of sandstone and quartzites of the vindhyen system [?] (Precambrian), partially covered by the Deccan Traps. These hills have generally largely eroded for millions of years and are now only remnants of mountains. They form the border and the septentrional line of division of water between the Narmada valley and the Ganges basin.



Fig. 06: The south side of the Vindhya plateau. Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.

The **Satpura mountain chain** is located at the south of the Narmada valley: “Satpura” means “7 folds,” or according to regional beliefs “the 7 sons of the Vindhya Mount.” This chain separates the Narmada basin in north, of the Tapti basin in the south. It is a complex system of mountain chains and plateaus 966 km in length and approximately 161 km wide. It starts in the west, at Gujarat in the hills of Rajpipila, and

includes the Panchmarhi hills and the Maikāl mountain chain in the east. This chain has a general orientation WSW/ENE. The Amarkantak peak in the high plateau of Maikāl rises to 1,063 m. In its eastern part, the Satpura chain is made up of gneiss from Gondwana and the Archaean. The ranges of hills, which compose this vast Satpura mount, have been forcefully dissected by the erosive action of the rivers and the brooks which run roughly in the same East-West direction.

Together, the Satpura and Vindhya mountains form the lines dividing the waters of the center of India from which the Narmada, the Chambal, the Betwa, the Son and other rivers run out, of which some run towards the Ganges and others towards the Godavari and the Mahanadi.

Between these two large chains, the valley takes various different forms in which the river flows. They are sometimes hills and sometimes vast flood plains (Fig.7) limited by the abrupt slopes of the chains.



*Fig. 07: The Nimar Plaine beneath the mist, seen from the Vindhya plateau.
Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.*

1. 4 Biogeography and settlement of the Valley.

1.4.1 Zoology and biogeography:

The fauna and the flora of the Narmada valley are rich and varied. Since the 19th century, this wooded region of India was known throughout the world by the famous Kipling novel “The Jungle Book.” The writer, inspired by the forests of Betul and Séoni in the higher part of the valley, set the area as the backdrop for a part of the action of his book. At the same time, Captain J. Forsyth, a great English naturalist under British India, author of the great classic “Highlands of Central India,” described the hills of Mahadeo near Panchmarhi with great precision. Other novels tell the magic of this ecosystem mixed with the spiritual. These areas have changed quickly since the colonial era. The pressure on the natural environment greatly increased, and one can from now observe many signs of the degradation of the wooded region and of all its biodiversity.

a) Animal diversity:

In the 19th century, the Captain J. Forsyth would have met many animals in the forests of the Narmada valley: elephants, wild buffalo, or marsh deer [?]. The chitals (spotted deer) met in great number close to clearings that have brooks running nearby. Close to the cultivated plains, there were large herds of *black buck* antelope (*Antelope cervicapra*) which have 60 cm horns. These days their numbers have considerably diminished. Leopards are numerous, but, dramatically, tigers have almost disappeared. Two hundred of the 4,000 tigers of India were in the east of the Narmada valley in 1990. This is a meaningful fact, because the tigers can live only where they can drive out stags in diversity and in sufficient numbers. The presence of a great number of tigers is an indicator of the health of a forest, a forest rich in the biodiversity necessary to the entire ecosystem. However, today we know well that this species will have disappeared soon. Bears and other animals meet close to river rapids. These zones are poor in species of water birds, but rich in a variety of ornithological species of the plains and hills. The *Pavo cristallus* and the *Gallus sonnerati* are very common bird species. Bison (*Bosgaurus*), packs of wolves, and wild dogs can always be observed.

b) The forest settlement of the Narmada basin:

Different types of forests exist in the basin:

In the east, in the upstream basin, the forests are of wet tropical type, while in the central area and in the west, in the central and lower basin, the forests are generally of dry tropical type and decidedly so [?].

In Madhya Pradesh, the density of the uncultivated “natural” vegetation increases towards the east. The districts of Chindawada, Betul, and Sahadol, are populated to this day with a very great diversity of vegetation. In the district of Sahadol, the Narmada flows out over rock ledges and overhangs formed by cascades and waterfalls. All around the broad bamboo forests, forests of teaks and sals (*Shorea robusta*) tower.

Several national parks and “wildlife sanctuaries”⁵ were established in the Narmada valley by the Indian government (Fig.5 p. 25 and Annexe 2). They are now under the responsibility of the management of the State of Madhya Pradesh, which must preserve its exceptional natural inheritance according to “Wildlife Protection Act” of 1972. The first national park instituted was that of Kanha in the Mandla district, in the past a hunting preserve for the viceroys of England during British colonization. It was founded by the Indian government in 1974. Near the Kanha National Park, that of Fen [?] is located at the sources of Narmada. Further away, downstream are: Fossil National Park between Amarkantak and Jabalpur, Noradehi National Park to the west of Jabalpur, the park at Satpura and Panchmarhi and Bori Wildlife Sanctuaries to the south of Hoshangabad, the wild sanctuaries of Ratapani, of Singhori and of Kheoni south of Bhopal, that of Sardarpur near Dhar and Shoolpaneshwar [Shūlapāṇīshvara] in Gujarat (website of the Forest Department of Madhya Pradesh).

In the highest hills of Panchmarhi, preserved and protected within the framework of the Satpura National Park and Panchmarhi Wildlife Sanctuary, the vegetation is characterized by an important population of sal in the higher parts of the hills, the bottoms of the slopes being populated by anjan (*Hardwickia binita*) and teak. As for the bottoms of the valleys, they are populated bamboo plantations. Lastly, the thickets of kanji (*Pongamia glabra*) grow wildly near the brooks.

In the central part of the basin one finds large forests of the **dry tropical type and decidedly [?]** made up of teak, bamboo, saj (*Terminalia tomentosa*), of bija (*Pterocarpus*

⁵ The biosphere reserve.

marsupium), of arjun, selai (*Boswellia serrata*), anjan, mahwa, hirda (*Terminalia chebula*), etc. This great number of species adapted to the teak forests indicate that they are highly developed and naturally advanced forests, now having an immense value. The other trees, most common in Madhya Pradesh and the valley, are the pipal, the mango tree, the neem, and the bargad that one encounters close to the villages. The upper and middle basins of the Narmada were densely populated forests at the beginning of the 20th century. The overexploitation and the lack of care strongly degraded the forests during these last years.

Near the borders of Gujarat, the Rajpipla forest was completely devastated by the tractors of the loggers, with the implicit and sometimes explicit support of the local members of the Legislative Assembly of Gujarat, during the last three decades. The politicians of Gujarat systematically encouraged the clearing of the forest belts in the Jhabua province, under the pretext that these zones would be submerged by the Narmada dam reservoirs. But the destruction of the forest went well beyond the immersion zone! The tribal people, the Bhils, who are narrowly dependent on them, were pushed back towards the area of Dangs or the area of Alirajpur on the other side of the Madhya Pradesh border (Paranjpye, 1990). The forests are not likely to again repopulate the hills which will remain stripped.

1.4.2 Characteristics of the human settlement.

The Narmada valley is inhabited by many religious and ethnic communities. The caste system and class divisions are exerted in a traditional way throughout the entire valley. The central Narmada basin, the Nimar plain, has historically had a great diversity of people. According to the 1961 census⁶, 30.5% of the population of the plain speak Hindi; 10% Urdu; 23.5% the regional dialect Nimari; 16% the Korku tribal language; and 6% Bhil, Banjara, and Gondi. The current immigrants are mainly represented by the Gujaratis, the Sindhis (3%) and the Marathas (16%) (Russel, 1997).

The Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim communities are concentrated in the urban centers and occupy themselves with trade. In Hoshangabad, 94% of the people speak Hindi. The remainder of the population profess to use [?] the Urdu, Marathi, and Korku languages.

⁶ 1961 Census (Russel, 1997).

The Muslims, the people speaking Urdu, result from Muslim colonies installed here in the 17th and 18th century (Russell, 1997). Hindus, the people of high castes speaking Hindi, hold the greatest properties in the rural areas.

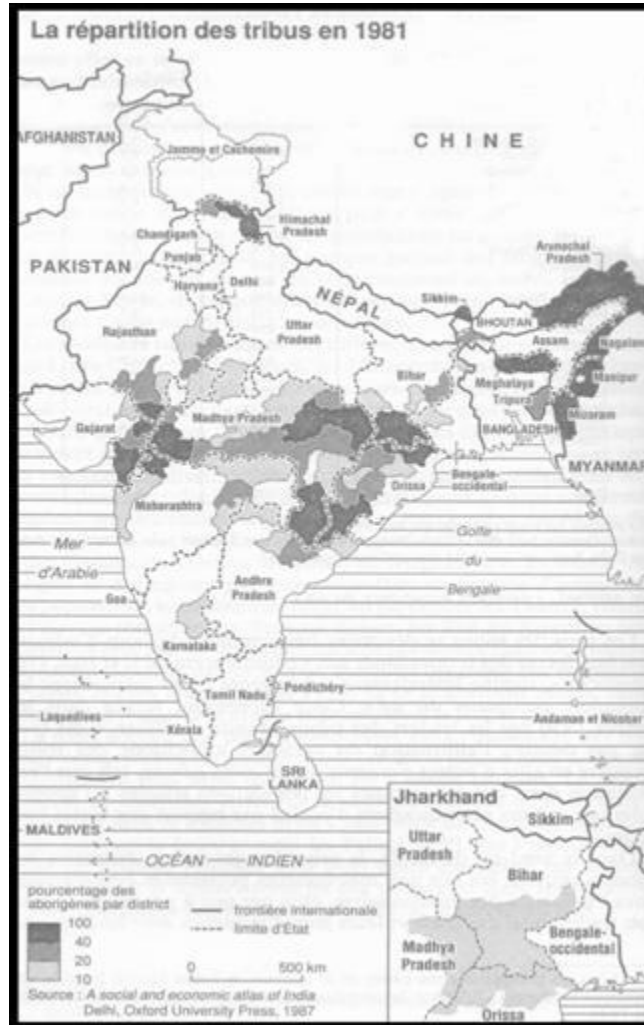


Fig. 8: Pattern of tribal settlements in India. Source *A Social and Economic Atlas of India, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1987* (Jaffrelot, 1996).

The 1981 chart of the distribution of the tribes in India clearly states that the tribal people, Bhilala, Bhils, Korkus, Gond, Pardhan, Bharia-Bhumia, and Khôl, are strongly concentrated in the hilly areas of the Narmada valley. The majority of the Bhils and Bhilalas populations are concentrated in the hilly area [?] to the east of Gujarat and the west of the Narmada basin, in the West-Nimar (Dhar and Jhabua). While in the center

and the east of the basin, one finds a strong concentration of the Gondi and Korkus people and minorities of Pardhans, Bharia, Bhumia, and Kols. The tribal people are thus confined to the least fertile and the most difficult to exploit lands in the areas of dense and undulating forests.

1.4.3 Farming Practices.

a) Agriculture in the whole of the valley.

Sixty percent of the surface of the ground in the Narmada catchment area is cultivable. However because of certain limiting factors, like the availability of water, poor economic conditions, etc., only 45% of the grounds are currently used for agricultural activities.

Two types of space are used for cultivation: the alluvial plains, such those of Nimar, generally in the form of large parcels which the high Hindu castes own, and the hills occupied by the people of low castes and ethnic groups which cultivate small parcels and remain narrowly dependent on the wooded areas. Rice is the most common grain particularly in the higher part of the basin, where precipitation is more important and the infiltration of the soil is weak. In the districts of Balaghat, Mandla, Betul, Rajnandgaon, and Jabalpur, rice represents more than 50% of all grain. The cultivation of corn is more important in the central and lower areas of the basin. Barley, corn, millet, etc. constitute the major part of the grain cultivated in certain districts such those of Dhar, Jhabua, and Khargaon. After grains, leguminous plants (pulsate) such as beans, etc. are the most widespread cultures of the basin (approximately 26%). Oleaginous plants, such as soybeans account for 5%.

b) Agriculture in the tribal villages of banks of the Narmada: example of some villages upstream of the holy city of Omkareshvara.

Upstream of the small holy city of Omkareshvara, many villages populated by the adivasi people and low castes practice agriculture on the undulating banks of the Narmada. Two villages, Gunjari and Kelwar Khund, representative of those of the Omkareshvara dam flood zone, were studied and sampled in 1992 by the environmental report of "Wildlife Institute of India" of Dehra Dun. Gunjari extends on a surface of

337.68 ha, of which 118.96 ha will be submerged, while Kelwar Khund extends on a surface of 840.26 ha, of which 38.63 ha will be submerged. The farmers of these villages come mainly from the Thakurs, Bhilalas, and Gaolis tribes. Some Maheshwaris also farm. The major products of this area are cotton, corn and sorghum. In these villages, the average income from agriculture represents nearly 70% of the total household income. Other products, such as rice or soybeans, are intended mainly for consumption and for the self-sufficiency of families; the surpluses are resold on the market of Omkareshvara or are exchanged for other products such as clothing, agricultural tools, oils, and spices. The profits are used for religious or cultural ritual celebrations.



Fig. 9: Village of Bakhatgar, located in the flood zone of the Omkareshvara dam reservoir. Source: CREMIN Emilie, January 2005.

- Livestock farming and livestock by-products.

With an average of 14 livestock per household, the sale of cattle and their by-products raises household incomes. The average income coming from livestock by-products is 16% (of 70%) of total family income.



Fig. 10: Child takes his herd of goats to graze in the forests and on the country roads around Bakhatgar, a village located in the Omkareshvara dam flood zone. Source: CREMIN Emilie, January 2005.



Fig. 11: Fisherman on his flat-bottomed boat near the village of Bakhatgar upstream of Omkareshvara. Source: CREMIN Emilie, January 2005.

- Dependence on the forest resources.

Within the framework of the agro-sylvo-pastoral system, the villagers depend on the forests for the supply of wood for heating, for fodder and for other products. Fire wood is an essential product for the lives of the peasants who use it for their own heat and especially to cook. Certain families collect it then resell it thus ensuring themselves a complementary source of income. A household consumes on average 12.8 kg of wood per day in summer and 25 kg of wood in winter.

The supply for fodder is essential to feed the bovine or caprine herds. The herds are often taken along in forest to graze, as the leaves of anjan are collected there for fodder.

Other complementary products are also collected in the forest such as the tightened leaves [?] (serving to make *bidis**) or the flowers of mahua (serving to make alcohol highly appreciated by the adivasis). These resources contribute to the total of 3.6% of household incomes.

The leaves of certain plants are used for the wicker working and the manufacture of baskets. However they are not all collected now, because they are no longer available in sufficient quantities.

The sale of wood, cow manure in the form of round patties, milk, and other products derived by the people living around the temple of Omkareshvara contribute up to 9.2% of the peasants' incomes.

- Fishing.

Fishing communities (of the Kahars caste) exist in certain forest villages located on the banks of the Narmada. Fishing accounts for on average 75% of their total income (Fig. 11, p. 35). The Narmada River, cutting into the Deccan plateau, is thus characterized by a particular river morphology. This valley, saved for a long time by the great concentration of the revealed people [?], is nowadays, an environment rich in diversity. It thus offers a large variety of landscapes: arable lands occupying the alluvial plains with the forests covering the hills. The Hindu communities and adivasis, cohabiting there, adapted this natural framework. They developed their specific ways of life with it and today are strongly attached to this territory. The elements of nature are deified there, creating in their culture close relations between man and his environment.

2. A sacrilized river: the goddess Mata Narmada.

Many river basins such as the Mesopotamian, the Nile, or the Indus were the seats of origin of great civilizations. These rivers remained in close connection with the men living on their banks for a long time. Their roles, as fundamental natural elements, supporting life and fertility, appear in the myths and the beliefs of many cultures. This phenomenon is obvious in the Indian sub-continent, where the Ganges, the Indus, the Narmada, and other large rivers have a cultural identity, transmitted over time, by the sacred literature of Védas* and Puranas*, as well as through myths and popular legends. The rivers are regarded as “Mothers,” often associated with goddesses. In all the holy places which line the banks of the river, the Narmada is familiarly called “Mata Narmada,” which is to say “Mother Narmada.”

Water has a major role in the performance of religious rituals: to take a bath in sacred water makes it possible to purify the heart and the body and get rid of all its sins. Those located in the areas around some tirthas*⁷, holy places in relation to particular water points, would be likely to hold the divine presence. There would be 400 billion sacred places on the banks of the river according to certain Puranic texts. Actually, each rock located on the banks of Narmada symbolizes in the Hindu collective representation a Shiva-linga*⁸.

2.1 The myths founders and the cultural importance of the Narmada for the inhabitants of the valley.

Knowledge of myths is necessary for the comprehension of the religious appropriation of space. Indeed, the visible and invisible world is considered and organized by religions according to cosmogonies and of cosmologies which establish what a “mythological geography” seeks to understand, being interested in the established relationship between religion and environment according to a dialectical between the

⁷ The tirthas are points of passage for crossing the river. They represent for Hindus the passage between terrestrial and celestial space.

⁸ Linga of Shiva: aniconic representation of Shiva.

material world and spiritual worlds. Mountains, hills, lakes, and rivers form the sacred elements of space and allow a religious reading of the landscape.

Thus, concerning Narmada, one finds many legends and many myths in the books of traditional India, Védas and Puranas, explaining the mysteries of nature. The *Narmada Mahatmya* is a mythical text praising the river and its sacred territory, *kshetra**. This source is invaluable because it informs us about local worship, making it possible to understand the system of the Hindu belief and more generally the world of Indian representation (Porcher, 1985). This text divided into several chapters, reports the mythical history of the foundation of the Narmada, and those of the principal holy places (sanctuaries, tirthas) of its banks.

2.1.1 The Myths founders of Narmada.

The “Narmada” did not always bear this name. It had several dependent on those which paid attention to it. The first literary reference relating to it is in *Raghuvamsa*, where it is called “Réva” (flood). It is also associated with Shiva, one of the three principal gods of the Hindu Pantheon, by taking the name of “Jata Shankari” and by its origin coming from the moon “Somodbhava.” Sometimes, it is confused with the goddess Ganga (the god of the Ganges) in several of her names “Mahesvari Ganga” or “Daksina Ganga,” the Ganga of the south (Deegan, 2000).

In *Matsya Purana* we can read that “*all sins are purified by bathing seven times in the Yamuna river, once in the Ganges, but the simple sight of the Narmada is sufficient to exonerate its sins once and for all!*.” This river is regarded as the most sacred in India, because it is enough to look at it, to have a “vision” of it (to take its *darshan**) to be purified. According to local legends, the goddess Ganga comes each year in the disguise of a black cow to bathe in the Narmada. Then, she returns to her home, in her valley in the shape of a white cow, cleaned of all her sins. A Hindu proverb says: “*As wood is cut with an axe, in the same way, to the sight of the sacred Narmada removes all sins from a man*” (Bhattacharya, 1999).

“*The Ganges is regarded as sacred in Khankal, Saraswati in Kurukshetra, but the Narmada is sacred everywhere it flows, as much in a forest in a village.*” The Narmada is literally, “*the giver of bliss*” (Khanna, 2003).

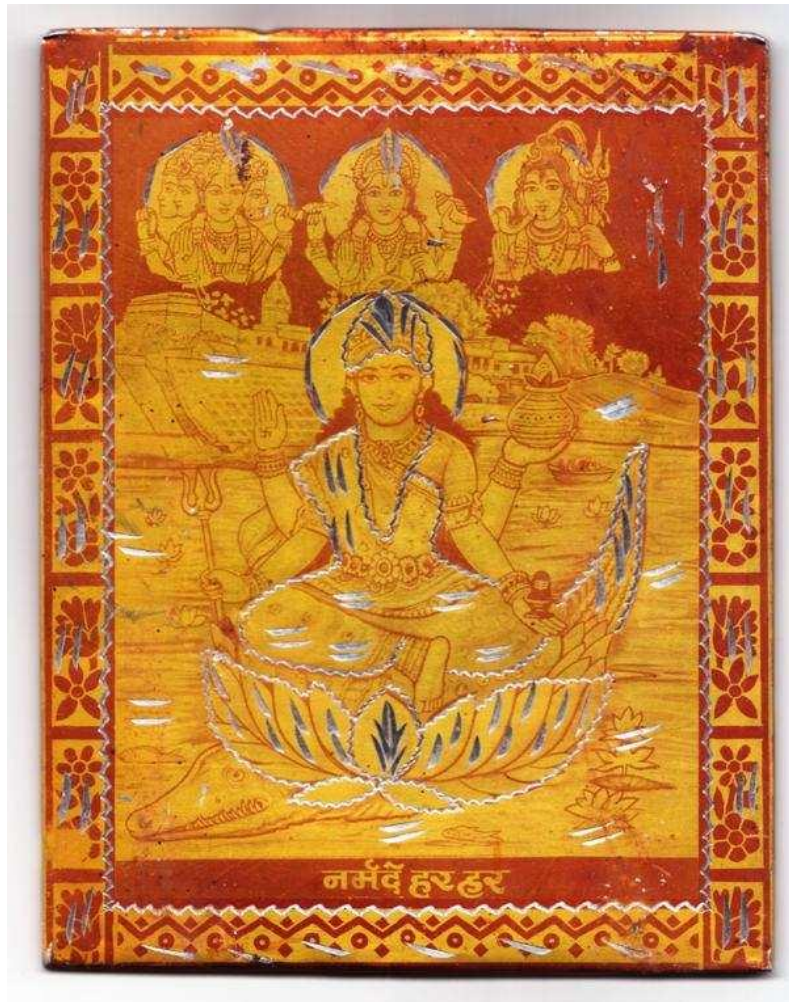


Fig. 12: Ancient metal tablet representing the icon of the Mata Narmada Ji sitting on her vehicle the caiman, swimming in the waters of the river, one of the 400 billion tirthas in the background. She is protected by the Brahma trinity, Vishnu and Shiva drawn above. Below it is written “NARMADA HARE HARE” the sacred mantra which frees the devout from all their suffering.

Source: On sale at the local market, 2005.

In the *Rewa khand* of the *Skanda Purana*, often called *Narmada Purana*, the history of the creation of the Narmada started with the devastating flood, which occurred at the end of the period of *Satya Yug*⁹ *. In this text, Shankar¹⁰ was alone and practiced profound asceticism “*tapasyā*”¹¹ on the heights of the Amarkantak plateau to call all the

⁹ The Yugs are the great Hindu chronological eras marking the 4 cosmic phases: the period of creation and truth “Satya Yug” of order “Tretha Yug” of disorder “Dwapar Yug” and of destruction “Kali Yug.” These period repeat themselves eternally.

¹⁰ Another name of Shiva.

¹¹ Asceticism or austerity supporting meditation and communication with the gods.

gods to return to earth. Through his sweat, the Narmada was born from the body of Shiva and returned to the world. From return to the earth, she accepted gifts (*bardana**) for her thousands of years of tapasyā. These rewards allowed her:

“To be eternal (*amara*),

To be sacred,

Washing the sins of those who bathe in her waters,

To be the Ganga of the South,

Offering all the rewards brought by other rivers,

Allowing those making tapasyās on its banks to find a place with Shankar,

Allowing those who have offered death to reach Shankar[?],

Always being known as a purifier of sins.

Allowing those living and dying on its Northern bank to go to Amarpuri

(where the gods are).

Allowing those living and dying on its Southern bank to go to Pitrloka

(where are the ancestors)

(Rewa Khand, transl. in Deegan, 2000)

The Narmada appears in these verses as a being eternal associated with Shiva. It is for men a space of passage, establishing the bond between humanity and the energy of Shiva, holding all the Universe. Each stone of its bed is regarded as a miniature of Shivalinga; the pilgrims collect some, and the tradesmen sell some on the markets of the small holy cities. They are placed in altars from the most modest to the most important. “In the stones sharp of Narmada, you will find God.”

In the novel *A River Sutra*, Gita Mehta reports this legend, inspired by the old texts: “*It is said that creative and destroying Shiva worlds entered an ascetic fright so intense that perspiration started to stream of its body and to descend the hills. The brook took the shape of a woman, more dangerous species: a splendid virgin incentive innocently to continue it to the ascetics of which it ignited covetousness while appearing sometimes under the features of a girl dancing with lightness... The inventiveness of its metamorphosis amused Shiva as well as it named it Narmada, the delicious one, blesses it its words: “you will be sacred forever, forever inexhaustible.” Then, it gave it in*

marriage to the most famous lord of the rivers of its sighing, the ocean .” [must be taken from the English translation]

The Narmada’s source is in Amarkantak in the high plateau of Maïkal. From this high plateau, it is also born from other sources, of which those of the Son and Johilla flow out in different directions (Fig. 5, p.25). Johilla is a tributary of the Narmada and rejoins it a few kilometers further downstream. In the legends of *Karma* and *Shiva Puranas*, these three rivers are dependent. These ancient texts recount the history of the marriage arranged between the Son and the Narmada.

The Narmada, a future traditional Indian wife had never seen her betrothed. Curious, she sent her friend, Johilla, daughter of the barber, so that she submitted a report to her on what he could resemble. When Johilla saw Son, she fell under his charm. Son, seeing the pretty young woman approaching, supposed that she was his betrothed. Consequently, he gave the order to begin the marriage ceremony. When Narmada discovered that, she was deeply offended. Turning her back on Son, she sprang through rocks and chasms, forming of the rapids and waterfalls which always resound of her disappointment. She finished her escape towards the west by drowning her misery in the Gulf of Cambay. The rejected Son flowed down to the top of a high hill, and ran out towards the east then towards north to join the Ganges on its way towards the Bay of Bengal (Paranjpye, 1990).

Another legend tells that modest Narmada, informed of the amorous intentions with her lover, slipped from his hands in a few thousand brooks, remaining thus eternally a virgin (Paranjpye, 1990).

Other old texts describe Narmada as “the giver of rejoicing,” “full of flavor,” “of a gracious attitude,” “radiant attitude of joy.” The Narmada is thus presented as a young woman who was incarnated in the form of this river. She is adored and deified, thus forming part of the Hindu Pantheon. These legends remain references for the inhabitants of the valley who continue to diffuse them orally. We can note through all **these legends that the Narmada has a real capacity to heighten imagination and the representations which Hindus have of a natural space.**

2.1.2 Cultural importance of the river.

The Narmada was renowned in the ancient world. Ptolémée, Greek astronomer and geographer, wrote regarding this river in the 2nd century AD. “*Even the Greeks and the Egyptians of Alexandria had heard tell of the sacred river and the religious suicides of Amarkantak: people who fasted until death, who sacrificed themselves on the banks of the Narmada, or who drowned in its water to free themselves from the cycle of the reincarnation*” (Gita, 1993). These accounts reveal the religious importance of this space in the local collective representations and those of certain scholars of remote civilizations.

Many religions, the different Hindu sects (shivaites or vishnouites), jainism, Sufist Islam, animistic tribal beliefs (adivasis), and even Western civilizations, recognized at various times the importance of the Narmada. The valley was a territory of conquest for the Aryans, extending their capacities over the whole of India several millenia BC. Certain epic battles of the Mahabharatha*, making the Aryans clash with the native tribes, would have proceeded in the valley, marking since ancient times the cohabitation between tribal and Hindu beliefs. Later, during the last millennium, the Muslims passed there in the road towards the south of India. These various religious communities have coexisted in the valley without apparent conflicts, for several centuries.

The religious use of banks of Narmada was marked by this variety of religions. Many jain, Hindus, or Sufist hermits live on its banks in caves, under its waterfalls, and in its forests.

The representations of this river are nevertheless different between Hindus, Muslims and the tribal populations of the valley (adivasis):

- In the Hindu religious construction, the Narmada is a goddess in close relation with Shiva. Hindus of banks of the Narmada worked out a ritual calendar of devotion to the river, singing prayers on its behalf, taking purifying baths in its waters.

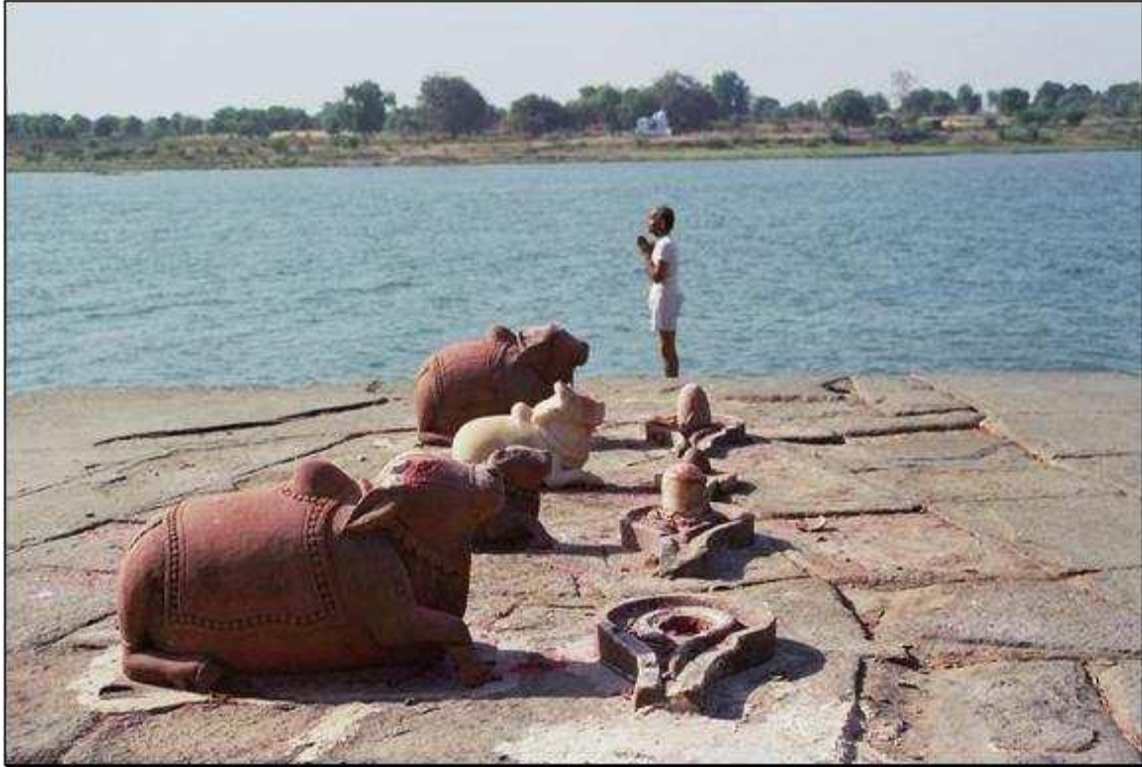


Fig. 13: *Ghâts* * of the Narmada at Maheshwar in the Nimar plain, one of its “400 billion” tirthas. Some Shiva-lingas are laid out there, accompanied by the vehicle of Shiva, the Nandi bull. On the opposite bank one can make out another temple.
Source: CREMIN Emilie, March 2005.

- On banks of Narmada, one also finds Muslim holy places. Great Sufist wise men found their hermitages on its banks, around which Muslim communities settled. Maheshwar, city where the fort of the Hindu queen Ahilya Bai de Holkar is located, is populated by 50 % Muslims. Many mosques gather the Muslim community of the small city each evening.

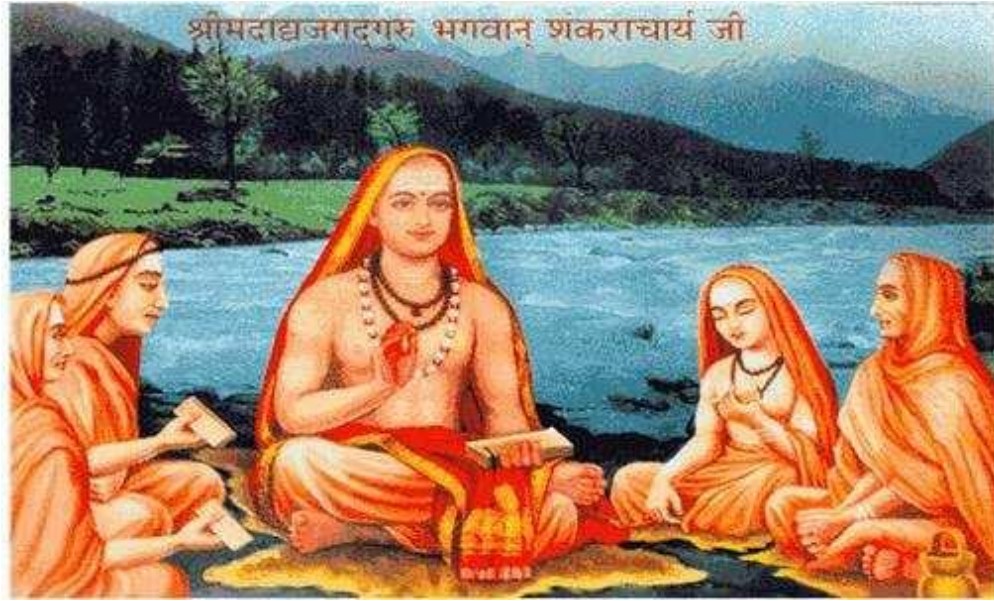
- At the home of the adivasi populations (Bhils, Bhilalas...) the worship granted to the Narmada river is less intense than among Hindus. The communities adivasis, living in the villages on the hills of the Narmada, perform in a very occasional way the rites devoted to the divinity of the river. Only the “*Gayana*” songs, of the bhilala culture, express its deification in a way which resembles that done by Hindus. The adivasis refer to the river only as Mata Narmada, whereas they have rituals for almost all natural phenomena. According to their beliefs, all the natural elements emanate from a spiritual energy (Baviskar, 1995). “Their philosophy rests on a deep respect of nature and of living

beings, and on the interdependence of all forms of life” (Gita, 1993). The forests, the rocks, the brooks, and the river are punctually marked as holy places celebrating the elements of nature and their environment. Other sanctuaries stigmatize [?] the worship of their ancestors. These tribal communities are narrowly dependent on the ecological foundations of their environment. They collect there all the food and material products necessary to their daily consumption and the exchanges with external products [?]. The expression of their recognition of the benefits that nature brings them, is celebrated by rituals. **The economic and spiritual lives of these societies are thus inseparable. The religious symbols, marking the landscape, thus express the strength of the attachment of these people to their territories** (Baviskar, 1993). Their cultural identity is based on this relationship particular to their environment. Their religious beliefs are at their origins animistic, however, many adivasi communities assimilate to Hinduism when they are integrated in the dominantly Hindu urban centers, while keeping some of their practices. This assimilation remains very difficult because these tribes are badly considered in the traditional caste system (field research, 2005).

2.1.3 Some saints who have had spiritual awakenings on the banks of the river.

Some great saints established their places of spiritual research on the banks of the Narmada. The *Rishi** Markandeya, one of the greatest saints having lived in the valley, was a highly pious devotee of Shiva. He received at his birth only 16 years of life from the gods. When the day arrived, his devotion to Vishnu*¹² was so strong that he killed the demon of dead (*Yama*). He committed this act in a temple of the town of Omkareshvara. He is the author of the *Markandeya Purana*, a particularly important Puranic work. In the 8th century, another saint, Shankaracharya, came to the banks of the Narmada River. He received the teaching of his *guru** there and remained a few years there before leaving for other Indian holy places to diffuse his wisdom. He was a great reformer of Hinduism. Thus, other wise men followed one another or met in the various places of pilgrimage on the river.

¹² Vishnu: one of three gods of the Hindu pantheon. He is the keeper of the cosmic order. To save the world from destruction, he has incarnated himself in 24 avatars.



*Fig. 14: Shankaracharya giving lessons to his disciples on the banks of the Narmada.
Source: Omkareshvara website.*

2.2 Le Narmada Parikrama*

2.2.1 A pilgrimage along the river.

The “parikrama of the Narmada” is a Hindu ritual, a circumambulatory pilgrimage along the banks of the sacred river, from its source at Amarkantak, its estuary in the Sea of Oman (Gulf of Cambay). The devout people of the Narmada, commit themselves to traversing in three years, three months, and thirteen days a walk, twice the length of the river (1,300 km X 2), by keeping it to their right-hand side¹³. They start from one of the many holy places and return there after this time. Rishi Markandeya, strong long ago, when he was still on earth, was the first to initiate this extraordinary pilgrimage. Markandeya, it is said, was not satisfied by the simple circumambulation of the river; he also wandered the length of the banks of all its tributaries (Waring Maw, 1995).

¹³ In Hindu practices it is necessary to always keep sacred objects on the right. In effect, the right hand is considered to be pure, not being used for sanitary actions while the left is impure because it should be used only for cleaning. The left side is thus disrespectful.

The pilgrim can start starting from any point of the river but he will have to always go on northern bank, to go up towards the source, and on southern bank, to go down again towards the ocean. According to the old tradition of the parikrama, the pilgrims who begin in Omkareshvara, bathe on northern bank of the Narmada converted by the *ghâts** of Koti Tirth. This place of purifying baths, borders the Omkareshvara temple containing one of the 12 *Jyotirlingas**¹⁴, where they will then practice their worship of Shiva. Then, they move upstream to the northern bank, in the direction of Amarkantak, to the source of the Narmada. From Amarkantak, they go down again by the southern bank to cross the river on the level of its estuary and go up in Omkareshvara to finish to their parikrama. During his pilgrimage, the pilgrim will have neither to hurry, nor to stroll; he must have as his objective to make this voyage in the same time as that of the great Holy Markandeya. He will have to stop walking during the *chāturmāsya** which is to say the 4 months of monsoon.

The path of pilgrimage from is now well traced along banks of the river. Those who carry out the pilgrimage are called the “*parikrama-basis**” – the inhabitants of the tour. This Hindu pilgrimage leads the pilgrim to cross hostile environments and to go back where human activity is erased by the benefit of the forest’s luxuriance, thus nourishing collective representations of the pilgrimage where the landscape, the mountain and the forest, the roughness of the terrain and the route, take part in the motivation to continue this search in order to transform its way of being in this world and beyond. One notices that this geography of the collective representations must be considered as taking into account of the role of the landscape in perception and sacred life, where the environmental infrastructure would be a vehicle to cross the pilgrimage experience, of a passage between two modes of being in the world: from the secular to the sacred (Trouillet, 2004).

¹⁴ There exist in India 12 lingas illuminated by Shiva.



Fig. 15: Pilgrims of Narmada met at the time of the festival of the Narmada at Omkareshvara. They transport only objects necessary to the realization of the prayers (chain, lota...). They go barefoot and are dressed in white, color symbolizing purity, while the sâdhus wear orange colors (saffron), symbolizing their devotion to Shiva. Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.

2.2.2 A pilgrimage towards spiritual knowledge.

According to Wise Palstya, answering the questions of King Yudishtira, the pilgrimage is recommended for the ordinary and humble human beings so that they can reach the same spiritual knowledge as the great saints of old times (Mahabaratha, 1985).

Markandeya advised men to carry out this long journey to sensitize them to the great mysteries of the universe, so that they can perceive the evolution of all living creatures, so that they become aware, and that they respect, incredible capacity and the beauty of nature. Through this parikrama, the pilgrim recalls the material and spiritual progression of humanity. Throughout his path, difficult and solitary, crossing dense forests, populated by savage animals, the pilgrim discovers all kinds of holy places, from the humble ritual rocks to the splendid carved temples. Along the course of this river, sacred in all its moods, he will progress until he reaches a weak gleam of comprehension

concerning the unicity and the absolute (monoism) of creation. He will thus understand his own place in this universe. This parikrama thus makes it possible for the pilgrims to perceive the universe in its physical and spiritual forms (Paranjpye, 1990).

2.2.3 Many rules to follow to achieve this pilgrimage.

Many rules must be followed by the pilgrim to carry out this tour through tirthas and the sacred space of the river. The pilgrim must preserve his purity interior and external throughout the length of the path.

Internally, he must ensure his self-control (especially concerning his violent passions or his sexual instincts), to remain sincere, faithful, humble and satisfied with himself, to show compassion and forgiveness, to render service to the poor, old, and weak and to show respect for all living beings. He must observe chastity.

Before starting, a ceremony is celebrated. He must cut his hair and nails, which will be offered to Narmada. In the course of the parikrama, his hair cannot be cut anymore, nor his beard shaven. A container, often a copper vase called loṭā, is filled with Jala (holy water) from the Narmada at the beginning. At the source of the Narmada as at its mouth, the container must be emptied by half which will be replaced by the water of the site.

The pilgrim must rise before dawn, to eat only once per day before sunset, to sleep the same as the sun. Each morning and each evening, he will have to take his darshan (devotional observance) and to take a purifying ritual bath in the water of the Narmada. The pilgrim should transport neither provisions, nor clothing, nor money. He will have to nourish himself by what the ground offers him, which he will cook by himself or to accept offerings, alms brought by the local populations met along the way. To make the parikrama brings great merit to the pilgrim. Hindus of the valley offer an instinctive hospitality to him when he crosses their villages (Deegan, 2000).

If he moves away from the banks to circumvent certain areas difficult to cross (hills, forests), he will transport in his lota the water of the Narmada. He cannot cross the river or visit its small islands; he must cross tributaries only once and never turn back once the journey is started.

Thus, the pilgrim will have to worship the gods (Narmada, Shiva or Vishnu) in holy places “tirthas” lining the banks. He will meet many wise men who will teach him love, the bhakti (devotion) to the “Lord” Shiva and the Mata Narmadait, in which he will have to repeat names or mantras (magic phrases) throughout the length of the path by using a chain.



*Fig. 16: Pilgrims of the Narmada going up the northern bank towards Amarkantak.
Source: CREMIN Emilie, January 2005.*

At the end of his circumambulation, the pilgrim will have to go to Omkareshvara-Mandhata to the center of the Narmada. There, he will have to give half of the contents of his water vase from the Narmada in offering to Jyotirlinga and to fill the remainder with the ghâts. On returning to his home, he will be able to distribute the sacred water around his house to protect all those who live there (Waring Maw, 1995).

Omkareshvara is thus a particularly important site for the pilgrimage. From this point of view, the construction of a dam poses a real problem.

For truly devout people who cannot make this long journey, there are however alternatives: it is sufficient to read the “*Narmadā Purāṇa*,” to bathe in its sacred water, or to have a simple “vision of it” (darshan) each day so that sins erase themselves.

Thus, since early times, this pilgrimage has been practiced by millions of individuals in search of spiritual awakening. This tour is very difficult and requires an investment and complete devotion on the part of its participants. This pilgrimage remains exceptional in India.

2.3 Pilgrims of the Narmada on encountering the holy places.

2.3.1 Pilgrims of Narmada.

The pilgrims of the Narmada are motivated by the desire of liberation and atonement for their sins, called *Moksha**. By carrying out this circumambulation they will be purified and will finish full of bliss. They carry out this act guided by their deep devotion for the goddess Narmada (Coquet, 2002).

One can meet many “parikramas-basis” all along the river. They wander in groups of five to ten individuals, or even two fellow travelers. Sometimes, they are alone. Once they begin, they have no more news of their families or friends for several months.

According to my investigation carried out in Omkareshvara by interviews, by observation, and by checking our information with that of Geoffrey Waring Maw, who came to the Narmada in 1944, the individuals who decided to undertake this long voyage are of very diverse origins. One meets on the paths of the parikrama:

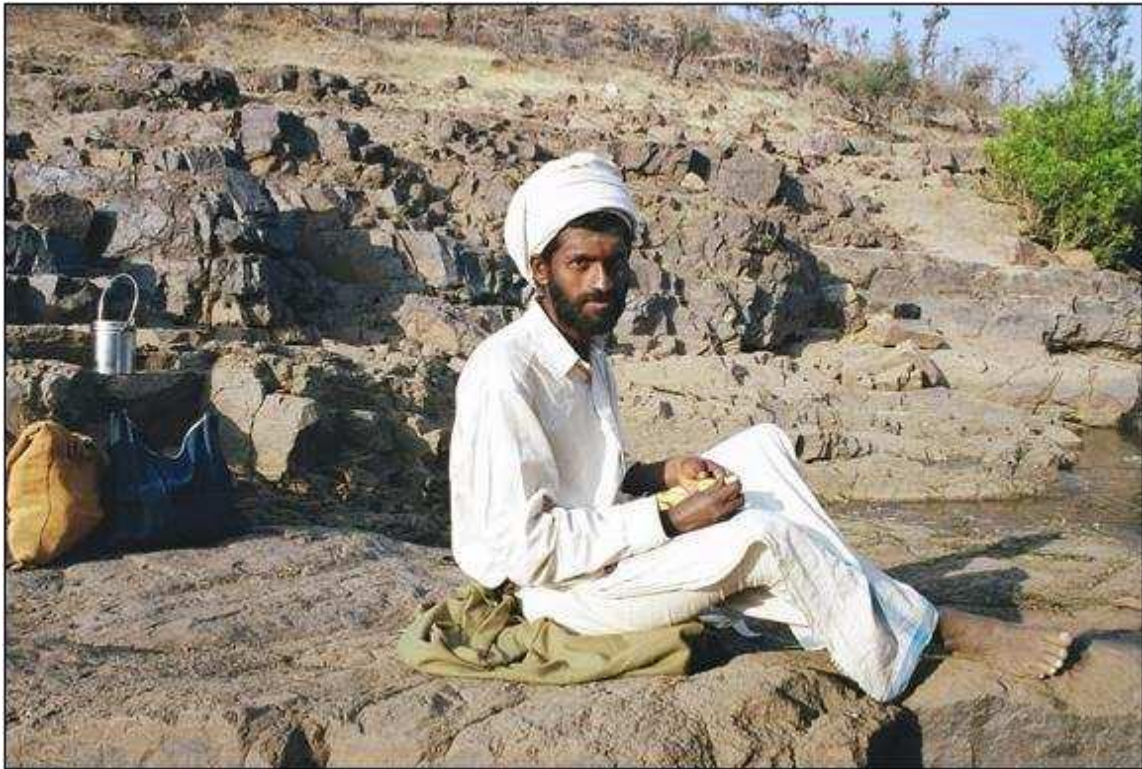
- Members of the same community coming from a village of the valley or another area of India. Ideally, pilgrims traveling in groups must have equal wisdom (Deegan, 2000).
- Whole country families of low castes, father, mother;
- Retired men or women having relegated their family responsibilities to younger generations. They can be of any caste or social class. We thus met carpenters, farmers, professors, doctors...;
- Many widows;
- Young men in search of existential truths;

- *Samnyasis** (ascetics [?]) at various stages of their detachment from social life and their spiritual progression;

- Sâdhus of different Vishnuite or Shivaite sects;

The Shivaite sâdhus coat themselves in ashes, carry a brass vase (loṭā), fire tongs [?], a rosary in the hand repeating the name of the god whom he adores by touching each bead.

- Some Westerners (Germans, Italians, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Japanese) of average age renounce the Western social system for a few months.



*Fig. 17: Solitary pilgrim strikes a pose on the banks of the Narmada.
Source: CREMIN Emilie, January 2005.*

The most ambitious pilgrims generally follow the instructions dictated in the sacred texts with as much precision as possible. The realization of this pilgrimage can be regarded as a **rite of passage in the various stages of their life**, called “*ashramas**.” This rite can be carried out at the time of the transition from childhood to adolescence: passage to the stage of *brahmacharis**; at the transition from adulthood to retirement: passage to the stage of *vānaprastha** during which the old person retires to a forest; or finally at the time of crossing towards the ultimate renunciation: the stage of the

samnyasis. In addition, certain individuals in economic difficulty (widowed women and poor peasants living as beggars) there find a means to provide for their vital needs because they can profit from the system of traditional giving while achieving a ritual promising them a better rebirth. The sedentary peasants and the landowners prepare meals each evening for the visitors who would pass by their village. Many shelters were also installed along the river by Hindus.

2.3.2 A network of holy places.

Various texts make it possible to approach and carry out the pilgrimage: the *Matsya Purana*, a sacred text composed during old times, contains an enumeration and a precise description of the tirthas of the Narmada. This text is *Māhātmya*, which is to say a panegyric, a praise, a song glorifying the river and its holy places. It enumerates and recounts the history of the places and gives instructions to the pilgrims concerning the rites that should be carried out there. It informs them of the auspicious signs and symbols (Feldhaus, 2003).

The “*Parikramasahita Narmada pancang*,” a book in Hindi published in 1919, is a complete work concerning the Narmada Parikrama. This book is a kind of “guide for the voyage of the pilgrim.” It includes short descriptions of 236 holy places on the southern bank and 237 on the northern bank. It contains: descriptions of landscapes met on the way; advice for crossing the tributaries; information on the distances between each site in which lodging is available; police stations and posts; moreover, it gives instructions for the realization of the rituals (Feldhaus, 2003).

A very great number of holy places and religious infrastructures line the banks of the river, forming a network of inter-connected places. The tirthas are river crossing points; they represent for Hindus, a passage between terrestrial space and celestial space. These holy places were often arranged and developed, by *ghāts**, which is to say quays forming broad staircases making it possible to take purificatory ritual baths in the river, near the temples representing the home of the gods. The sacred places can also be spaces that remain little arranged like *kunds** which is to say ponds within the bosom of the river

or sacred groves. One finds these types of sites all along the river, marking in these areas the presence of the past of the gods.

An astronomical number of tirthas seem to be placed on the banks and especially at its source, Amarkantak. Many of these tirthas are associated in the texts with parts of the human body. For example, Omkareshvara would be the navel of Narmada. It thus acts as a symbolic view of the river, representing a *purusa**, image of supernatural man.

Certain holy places are secluded and difficult to access. Before the arrival of Hindus, the Narmada was occupied by tribes which had already chosen the exceptional natural sites to practice their worship. Afterwards, these places were taken again by Hindus. For example, Amarkantak, the source of the Narmada, would be the home of Shiva. This place is recognized as a great *siddhi-kshetra**: “At the source and on the banks of the Narmada, gods, *gandharvas**, wise men, and ascetics would have practiced penitent acts and affected high *siddhis**¹⁵. If a person who follows the rules, mastering their directions, takes a purifying bath here, and observes a one-night fast, it is said that he will free 100 of his ancestors from the cycle of *samsāra**¹⁶. The lord Shankara (Shiva) resides there” (Khanna, 2003).

Not far away, the pilgrim can visit the Kapildhara falls where one can see the footprints of Bhim of the *Pandavas** family, protagonist of the Mahabharatha. The presence of the worship of Shiva is omnipresent all along the Narmada. At Trishul ghât, Shiva would have struck a blow in the rock to let water spout out of the mountains and let it flow. In Anandeshwar, one celebrates his victory over the demons. In the Lokeshwar holy place, the Lord of the Universe is himself driven out by the Bhasmasura demon, and hides in the waters of the Narmada. Other tirthas evoke many gods. In one of these places, the goose of Brahma would have come to make its *tapasyā* (asceticism) to become its *vāhana** (vehicles on which the gods move).

Jyotismatipuri is found on southern bank, the place where *Ram** and *Laxman** (protagonists of the *Ramayana**) stopped to carry out their *tapasyās*, and Yojaneshwar, where they took their purifying baths before going to kill King Raman having removed

¹⁵ Siddhi: State of mystical trance.

¹⁶ Samsara: Cycle of reincarnation.

Sita to Sri Lanka¹⁷. The holy places of Ramnagar, Brahman Ghât, Omkareshvara, Mandleshwar, Maheshwar, Dharmapuri, Mandu each have another myth concerning their foundation. Narmada is frequently represented in iconic form in the holy places. The expression of these images spans the range of all human emotions, from violence to indifference, from meditation to benevolence, and much nearer to the pilgrims than the insubstantial representation of Jyotirlinga [?].

2.3.3 Danger zones

According to our field research, the parikrama-basis [?] are generally in agreement with regard to the dangerous passages of the route. Hilly areas like those around Barwani (Fig. 5, p. 25), where the adivasi tribes remain, have been well known for a long time for the problems which the pilgrims must face there. Many between them testified to the bad reception of these non-Hindu populations. They do not take part in the system of giving, do not have shelters adapted for accommodation and are known to steal the modest goods which they have. The ritual of circumambulation is devoid of value and direction for them (Baviskar, 1993).

But robbers are not necessarily adivasis. Certain hilly areas covered by forest are also famous for being the refuge for “outlaws,” as one sees in films of Bollywood¹⁸ or novels. The novel *A River Sutra* by Gita Mehta tells some of these legends where great bandits searched throughout India would have taken girls washing their linen on the ghâts, and hide in the forests!

In addition, certain areas are really difficult to cross because no path is marked there. The dense forest is populated by insects and savage animals, and by rock escarpments which require good physical capabilities. Pilgrims are thus often constrained in their attempts to get around them.

This fear of wooded spaces is supported by many real facts, but it also acts as a **collective representation** nourished since antiquity. These spaces would shelter ascetics as well as demons.

¹⁷ Mythical history of the Ramayana cf. Bibliography

¹⁸ Indian cinema produced in Bombay, very popular across India and beyond the sub-continent.

Means of transport are consequently used more and more today to avoid these spaces not controlled by man, gradually transforming the pilgrimage into a tourist trip that can be completed in a few days. Pilgrims sometimes choose to start their *tirtha-yatra** (voyage across the river) in Omkareshvara because this city easily accessible and is connected to the national transport network since 1870.

CONCLUSION:

The different religious and tribal communities living in the valley have made this territory completely sacred. The ecosystem of the river inspired many saints and penitents, allowing them to live in close and vibrant harmony with nature.

The population living in the valley has increased over the centuries, exerting pressure on the environment and causing the ecological transformation of the basin. Economic, political, and demographic interests are now the principal factors determining the relations between man and natural landscapes. Whereas the Narmada is now dedicated to the exploitation of its natural resources, pilgrims continue to carry out the parikrama. On part of the course, the path has not been modified by the construction of the dams, but many paths of ancestral pilgrimage have been flooded by the water of the reservoirs. Pilgrims are now obliged to make vast detours to circumvent them.

The sacred space of the Narmada valley, its parikrama path as well as its holy places, such as the town of Omkareshwar, are thus subjected to pragmatic realities of the management of natural resources. However, this space forms a whole, preserving its symbolic spiritual identity.

So it only remains to say: “NARMADE HARE,” the sacred mantra honoring the Narmada and freeing its devotees.

3. A river in the course of artificialization: the Narmada valley development project.

Whereas the Narmada River has been deified and adored by millions of people of various faiths for several millennia, the Indian government chooses to exploit its natural resource: water, in the interest of the common good of the Indian nation.¹⁹

The development of the hydraulic installations on large rivers started industrially in the world at the very start of the 20th century. In its turn, India, to meet the needs of the nation, following progress, modernization and development of the international model, built dams on the tributaries of the Ganges and the Yamuna in the valleys of the Himalayas, Godavari, Mahanadi, Krishna, and Kavéri. In this context, the Indian government and the States of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh (MP) and of Maharashtra planned an artificialization and complete control of the Narmada River. This pharaonic project represents considerable environmental, social, and ideological stakes in the Narmada valley.

This transformation of the river, to productivist ends, thanks to Western technologies, is it not contrary to the spiritual relationship which the people of its banks maintained until today?

3. 1 A great project in the common interest of a whole nation: history of a great project.

3.1.1 The Narmada valley development project.

The Narmada development plan (NVDP: Narmada Valley Development Plan) is a gigantic project. It has as principal objectives the development of irrigation and the production of hydroelectricity. It relates to the whole of the hydrographic network of the river (Fig.19, p. 58).

It plans to set up:

¹⁹ Since the arrival of Nehru, the Indian State, with an aim of consolidating its independence and achieving food and energy self-sufficiency vis-à-vis other large developed countries, set up five-year plans to increase agricultural and industrial productivity in order to allow the economic growth of the country (NHDC, 2003). This economic plan would have made it possible to close the gap vis-à-vis the West, to reduce social and economic inequalities, and to make India pass from an agrarian society to an industrial power.

- **30 major dam projects** (including 11 on the principal river and 19 on its tributaries) of which 6 are general purpose, 5 are intended to produce hydroelectricity, and 19 deal with irrigation.

- **Between 125 and 135 average dam projects.**

- **And around 3,000 small irrigation projects.**

This whole of hydraulic installations infrastructure covering and managing the whole of the basin in the long term, will artificialize the natural dynamic of the river.

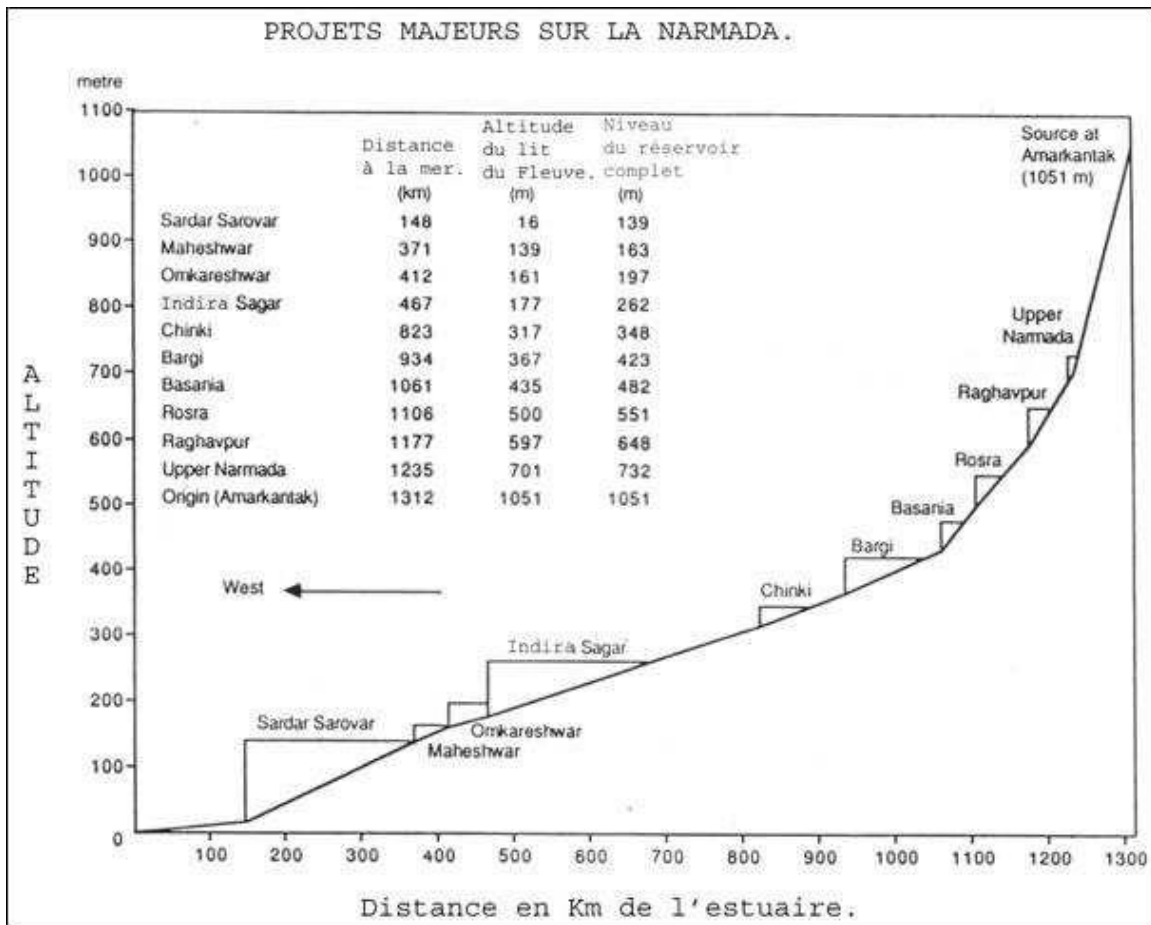


Fig. 18: Cross-section of the Narmada with its major reservoirs. Source: Paranjpye, 1990.

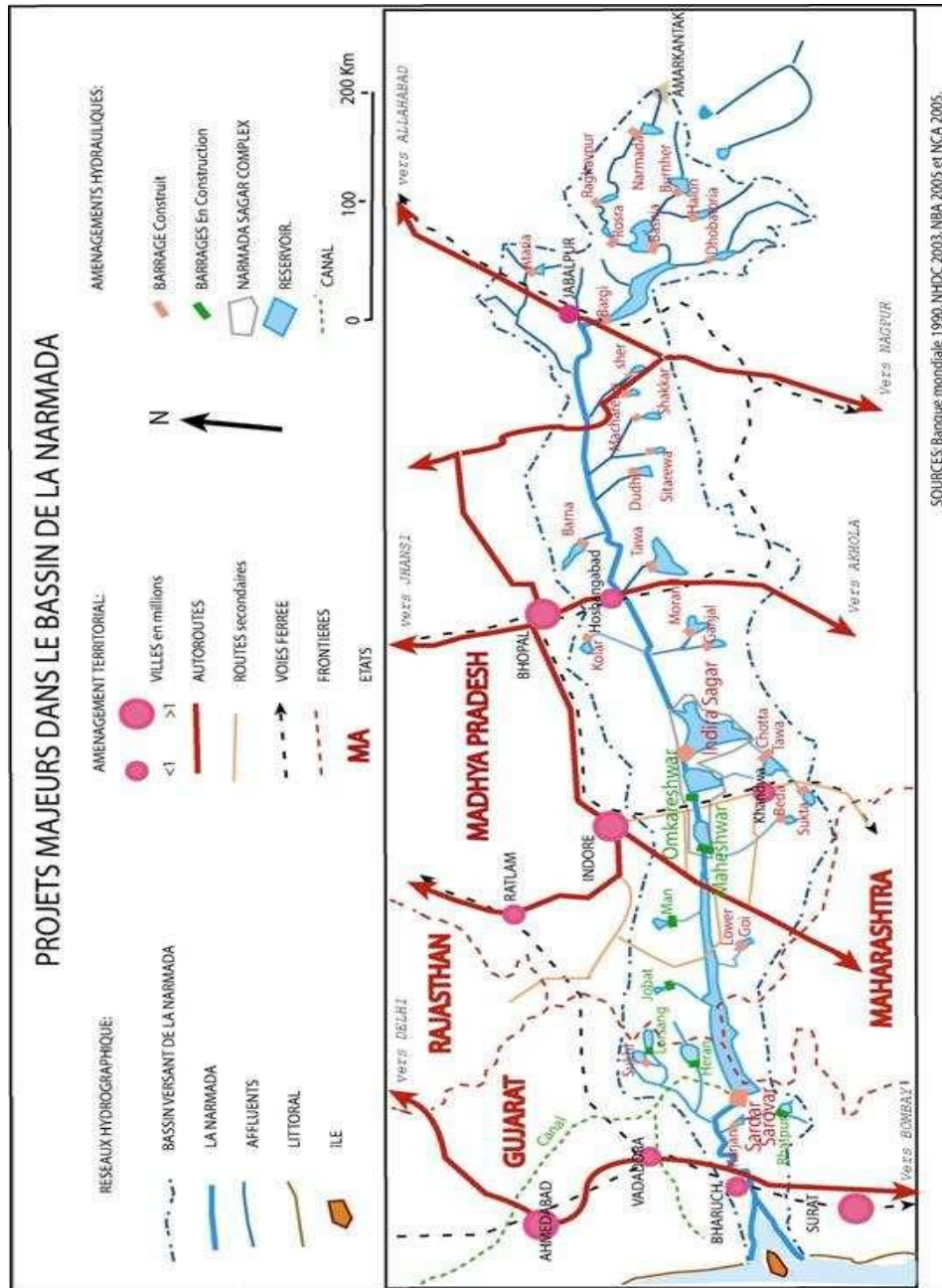


Fig. 19: Chart of the valley development project.

The principal objectives relate to irrigation, distribution of water, and the production of hydroelectricity:

-Objective of the irrigation and the distribution of water.

These dams will have to irrigate 15,000 km² of ground in Madhya Pradesh.

The only dam in Sardar Sarovar should irrigate a surface of 21,000 km² in Gujarat and 75,000 ha in Rajasthan. Moreover, it will bring drinking water to 8,215 villages, 136 cities of Gujarat and to 131 villages of Rajasthan. An irrigation network of 75,000 km will be arranged and will occupy 80,000 ha of ground (Narmada Hydroelectric Development Corporation NHDC, 2003).

-The quality of water.

According to the NHDC, the planning for the use of the water resources should ensure its availability in great quantities, and of a suitable quality for consumption, and agricultural and industrial activities (NHDC, 2003).

-Objective of hydroelectric production.

The hydroelectric development projects became priorities in Narmada valley development.

The State of MP (Madhya Pradesh) has a hydroelectric potential of 4,000 MW of which only 850 MW are currently exploited. The installations within the Narmada basin were designed to provide 3,400 MW, including 2,000 MW in MP, and 1,400 MW in Gujarat from the Sardar Sarovar dam (SSP) (from which Madhya Pradesh will primarily profit (57%), Maharashtra (27%), and secondarily Gujarat (16%) according to Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Ltd.).

3.1.2 Scenario of development and planning of the project after independence: the initial step

The idea to build dams on the Narmada started at the end of the 19th century under British occupation. The first Indian irrigation commission, mentions, in its 1901 report, the will to build a dam close to Baruch at Gujarat. However, the alluvial black earth of the area was not regarded as adapted to irrigation. The project was then abandoned.

From the beginning of the 1950s, planning and development of the electric and water resources in the Narmada basin began again, under the **development policy, progress and modernity nehruvienne** [?]. The dams were then celebrated as the

“Temples of modern India.” These great ambitions of growth and economic prosperity by the use of water resources remained anchored within the governments of Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh, throughout these last decades.

3.1.3 History of the great valley development project of Narmada.

a) Interstate Agreements.

In 1946, the government of the Central Provinces²⁰ and the government of Bombay²¹ asked the CWINC (Central Waterways, Irrigation, & Navigation Commission), to proceed with research on the hydrological system of the Narmada for the development of the whole of the basin, the irrigation, the hydroelectricity, the control of the floods and navigation. The investigations started in 1947 and revealed that from the point of view of geology and engineering, there were very interesting sites.

In September 1957, important decisions were made in Delhi between the state of MP and that of Bombay under the presidency of the CW&PC (Central Water & Power Commission). The two states agreed to share the research expenditures for three sites between Punasa and Bharuch. In 1959, one attended the birth of the **Sardar Sarovar** project in the Navagam site in Gujarat, envisaging a dam measuring 97.5 m in height. The experts of the CW&PC recommended building a channel attached to the dam which could extend irrigation capacity through Saurashtra and Kutchh, very arid areas of Gujarat. This dam would also be designed to produce great quantities of hydroelectricity.

The ground was broken on the dam by Prime Minister Jawarahal Nehru, April 5, 1961. The first work, such as construction of access roads, bridges, colonies of homes, as well as the latest research on the dam sites was put at once in motion.

In November 1963, the president of the CW&PC organized in Bhopal as the result of negotiations between the prime minister of Gujarat and that of MP. The discussions related to the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam, the assumption of responsibility of the

²⁰ The government of the central provinces became Madhya Pradesh in 1950.

²¹ The Bombay government became the state of Maharashtra in 1950.

construction expenses, and the distribution of benefit between the states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra. The **Bhopal Accords** gave a base of compromise between the interested states by fixing the height of the SSP²² dam at 130 m. Finally, this treaty was not signed by the prime minister for MP who maintained that “the dam should not be built with a height higher than the level of the Narmada bed at the border between the territories of MP and Gujarat, which is to say 50 m.” On the other hand, the State of Gujarat ratified the treaty and, without holding the coastal state to account, prepared the project, planning to raise the dam as envisaged.

To solve these disagreements concerning the height of the dams throughout the valley and their full tanks levels (FRL = Full Tank Level), a high committee chaired by Dr. Khoshla and composed highly qualified engineers, was established by the central government in Delhi in September 1964. The Narmada Water Resource Development Committee (NWRDC) was to set up the **directing diagram of development for the optimization and the integrated development of water** and the determination of the optimum level of the tanks. **The committee presented its report in September 1965 to the central government. It recommended 13 major projects: Rosra, Basanta, Bhurner, Bargi, Chinki, Sitarewa, Barna, Hoshangabad, Tawa, Kolar, Narmada Sagar, Omkareshvara (Barwaha) at MP, and Sardar Sarovar in Gujarat** (Fig. 19, p. 58).

The Khoshla committee recommended with regard to the Sardar Sarovar dam, that the optimal height should reach 152.5 m with a hydroelectric power station having 1,400 MW of total capacity, while the channel of the Sardar Sarovar Project should extend to Rajasthan, Rajasthan not being however a coastal state (NHDC, 2003). This committee firstly held Indian Union interests to account before considering the problem of the official borders (Paranjpye, 1990).

The 1960s saw feverish activity within the central government to solve the interstate disagreements. The meetings between the chiefs of the three States and those of Rajasthan with the central government in Delhi appeared not to be very profitable. Following the request of the State of Gujarat, the Indira Gandhi government, on October 6, 1969 set up a **litigation court on the waters of the Narmada**, the NWDT

²² Sardar Sarovar Project.

(Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal) having like objectives to treat the questions related to **the sharing, the distribution, the control of water usage, and the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam.**

Ten years later, after many meetings, without solutions between the states concerned with the valley development project, the court ruled in 1978 on the division of the waters of the Narmada between Gujarat, MP, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan. Thus, of 32,400 million m³ of water per year (27 million acre feet) estimated to run out of the Narmada at Garudeshwar close to the Sardar Sarovar dam: 600 million m³ would be allotted to Maharashtra, 300 million m³ to Rajasthan, 21,900 million m³ to MP, and 10,800 million m³ to Gujarat (GOI *Government Of India*, 1978, 1979). The figure of 33,600 million m³, was the **basic reference of all work of the Narmada valley** development. Even today, we live with this heritage. It is this which determines the total configuration of the projects: height, localization, and number of dams. By way of deduction, it is also this that the costs on construction, the zones to be submerged, the number of people to be moved, and the anticipated profits depend on (Roy, 1999). In 1992, studies made on the flow of the river, reliable since the figures were available for the 45 last years, proved that the output was not more than **27,228 million m³** is, in other words **18% lower than the first estimate.**

The Central Water Commission²³ itself recognizes that the quantity of water in the Narmada had been over-estimated. The Indian government was satisfied to declare: “*It will be noticed that clause II (of the decision of the court) referring itself to the estimate fixing the flow available to 33,600 million m³ is not revisable!*”²⁴.

Beyond the questions of the allocation of the Narmada’s water resources between the states, the decision of the court related for the first time on the management of the treatment of the Populations Affected by the Projects (PAPs). Let us specify that the populations living in the territories which will have to be submerged by the construction of the dams, hitherto were only partially informed, but generally neither consulted, nor heard (Roy, 1999).

²³ cf Monthly observed flows of the Narmada at Garudeshwar, Hydrology Studies Organization, Central Water Commission, New Dehli 92.

²⁴ Written submission on behalf of the Union of India, Feb. 99.

b) The financing of the project.

In November 1978, Gujarat accommodated the first mission of the World Bank to evaluate and finance the project. With reference to the expert reports of the *Narmada planning group*, the World Bank took action on its conclusion in the form of an evaluation report of the environmental conditions (Staff Appraisal Report) of the SSP (Sardar Sarovar Project) in 1985 and ISP (Indira Sagar Project)²⁵ in 1986. The loan agreement between the World Bank and the governments of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and MP was signed in May 1985. It made 450 million dollars available thereafter. The agreement envisaged a specific and particular loan for compensation and the rehabilitation program for the Populations Affected by the Projects. A conditional clause gave to the Bank the right to refuse or retain certain parts of the loan, if the evaluation of the environmental impacts or the preconditions of rehabilitation were not accomplished in agreement with predetermined plan. The loan was operational as of January 1986.

c) The management of the project.

On July 16, 1985, the central government created the NVDA *Narmada Valley Development Authority* to control work in Madhya Pradesh and the NCA *Narmada Control Authority* to coordinate the projects in the whole valley. These institutions are today in charge of the organization of the projects and must:

- *Undertake research, prepare reports of projects for the exploitation and resource management of the river and its tributaries;*
- *Carry out environmental and social impact studies.*
- *Set up the job of engineering the distribution of water, irrigation, industry, domestic use and other needs;*
- *Manage the distribution and the sale of produced electricity;*
- *Acquire and manage the grounds of the Narmada valley to complete engineering work, for irrigation needs, management of floods, navigation, and for the rehabilitation of PAPs;*

²⁵ Indira Sagar Project, see Fig. 20, p. 68.

- Rehabilitate PAPs in cohesion with the Narmada valley projects, to establish cities and villages and to take all measurements necessary to ensure their replacement and their reinstallation;

- Give council for the conservation and the development of the forests, wildlife, and fishing in the Narmada valley;

- Coordinate the operations and the maintenance of the projects (NHDC, 2003 and NCA.org).

d) Questioning of the project.

In 1980, the central government set up the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MEF). The research reports submitted by the MEF concluded that the evaluation of the impacts of the projects was not sufficient. It was necessary to undertake more thorough studies. Following these additional studies, the MEF concluded that **the projects were not viable from an environmental point of view** and in 1994 put out a notification under the Environmental Protection Act, making the EIA (Evaluation of Environmental Impact) obligatory for each dam.

In addition, the ministry reproached the states of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh for having incorrectly carried out the terrain studies allotted for the rehabilitation of the affected populations. Of the territorial surface necessary, less than 1/3 was identified. To solve this difficulty of requisition of the land, it advised to reduce the height of the ISP (Indira Sagar Project). Indeed, a small reduction height of the dam could have considerably reduced the zone of immersion and thus the number of affected people, whereas the irrigation capacity of the ISP would change very little.

The MEF thus strongly disapproved 2 projects, SSP and ISP, in the form they took at the time.

For many Governmental Organizations, such as the NHPC (National Hydroelectric Project Corporation) the project was continuing to progress quickly in spite of the many roadblocks it had to face. The Minister for Water Resources emphasized “urgency of the decision” (NHDC, 2003). The World Bank strongly reacted to that, and

in July 1987 it sent a letter to the central government outlining its requirements relating to rehabilitation and replacement, criticizing the gaps in the governmental plan.

In 1991, the World Bank delegated a team of experts to revise the social and environmental aspects of the projects. Bradford Morse was named responsible for the commission. The report of this independent revision, called “the Morse report,” was presented in the spring of 1992. It acts as a severe criticism on the SSP. The discussion thread of this report is the inadequate planning of the project: *“the World Bank and the Indian Union, have not known how to carry out adequate evaluations relating to the human impact of the Sardar Sarovar project. (...) The measurements necessary to anticipate and to mitigate the environmental impact were not correctly considered in the design of the projects because of a lack of source data and lack of consultation of the affected populations”* (Morse, 1992). The World Bank and Indian authorities were thus both highly criticized. **The report shows in detail how the World Bank violated its own guidelines, those of international law of the environment and human displacement. According to the commission “the Sardar Sarovar project is defective”** and progress cannot take place as long as construction continues. The principal recommendation of the commission of the World Bank was to withdraw the project and to require it to cease building until an integral revision of it can be drawn up.

In 1992, the Indian government withdrew its request for the loan, whereas a sum of 280 million dollars of 450 million had already been paid.

In 1995, the World Bank recognized its errors and the over-estimate by the court of the flow of the river.

The Narmada River installation knew 20 years of interstate confrontations through the High the Court of Justice and the tribunal which very significantly slowed the evolution of the projects. These 20 long years were followed by 15 years of social fighting.

3.1.4 The project progress report in 2005.

Example: The dams of the Narmada Sagar complex.

“The concept of the planning of the catchment area was traditionally limited to irrigation development. Uses of water for industry or cities were secondary. The growth of the use of electricity in the agricultural and industrial sectors during last three decades increased demand and thus, changed the planning of the development of the rivers. The use of renewable energy such as hydroelectricity is ecologically respectful and economically profitable” (NHDC, 2003).

The development of the exploitation of the hydraulic resources of the Narmada was quickly accelerated in the 1980s. The Bargi, Tawa, Kolar, and Sukta projects were then supplemented. During the 1990s, the work of the Sardar Sarovar and Indira Sagar projects, the two most colossal and most publicized dams continued to rise. The work of preconstruction also started for the hydroelectric projects of Maheshwar and the general-purpose project of Omkareshvara.

a) The Narmada Sagar hydraulic complex.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the hydroelectric development projects and the management of the waters of the Narmada started to materialize throughout the basin. **The “Narmada Hydroelectric Development Corporation” NHDC was formed on August 1st, 2000, marking the association the government of Madhya Pradesh, the “National Hydroelectric Power Corporation” NHPC, for the financing, the construction, and the operation of the Indira Sagar project (1000MW) and the project of Omkareshvara (520MW).** The State of Madhya Pradesh holds 49% of the shares of the project whereas the NHPC holds 51% of them.

Indira Sagar is in an already advanced state of construction which is almost completed in 2005. It will be brought into service very soon. The Omkareshvara project as for it, is in the progress after 2 seasons of work started in August 2003.

The Indira Sagar, Omkareshvara, and Maheshwar dams form the **Narmada Sagar Complex** located in the central part of the basin (Fig. 19, p. 58, and Appendix 3). This complex of multifunctional dams will make it possible to exploit in the greatest possible way the resources of the river allowing increased development of the Khargone,

Khandwa, and Dhar districts. It will also satisfy the municipal and industrial needs of the large town of Indore.

These dams in the center of the Narmada in Madhya Pradesh are closely connected with all the other dams up and downstream, amongst which is the Sardar Sarovar dam in Gujarat. These projects are thus planned to work in co-operation with the others. Pursuant to the decision of the Narmada Water Disputes Court, the relations between these projects are under the direction of the NCA.²⁶ The three large construction sites with the multiple functions, Indira Sagar, Omkareshvara, and Sardar Sarovar will produce 2,346 MW with a potential for irrigation of 2,070,000ha (NHDC, 2003).

b) The Indira Sagar dam.

In October 1984, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi laid the cornerstone of the dam named in her honor by the Government of MP “Indira Sagar Project” (ISP).

This dam is the most colossal of the “Narmada Sagar Complex,” and is 40 km upstream of the Omkareshvara site, close to the small town of Punasa in MP. Its tank has a holding capacity of 12.22 billion m³. In order not to harm the hydroelectric potential of the dams located downstream, it will have to release water, controlled and regulated. Its height is 92 m and its length 653 m. Its hydroelectric power station contains 8 Francis turbines of 125 MW each, having the potential to generate 1,000 MW. A deviation channel (being 75 m wide and 530 m length) was built to evacuate the water of the power station, joining the natural bed of the Narmada a little further down. A principal channel of 248 km leaving the southern bank will make it possible to irrigate 98,475 ha of land in the Khandwa and Khargone districts of MP. Other channels are also envisaged expanding irrigation capacity.

²⁶ NCA: Narmada Control Authority.

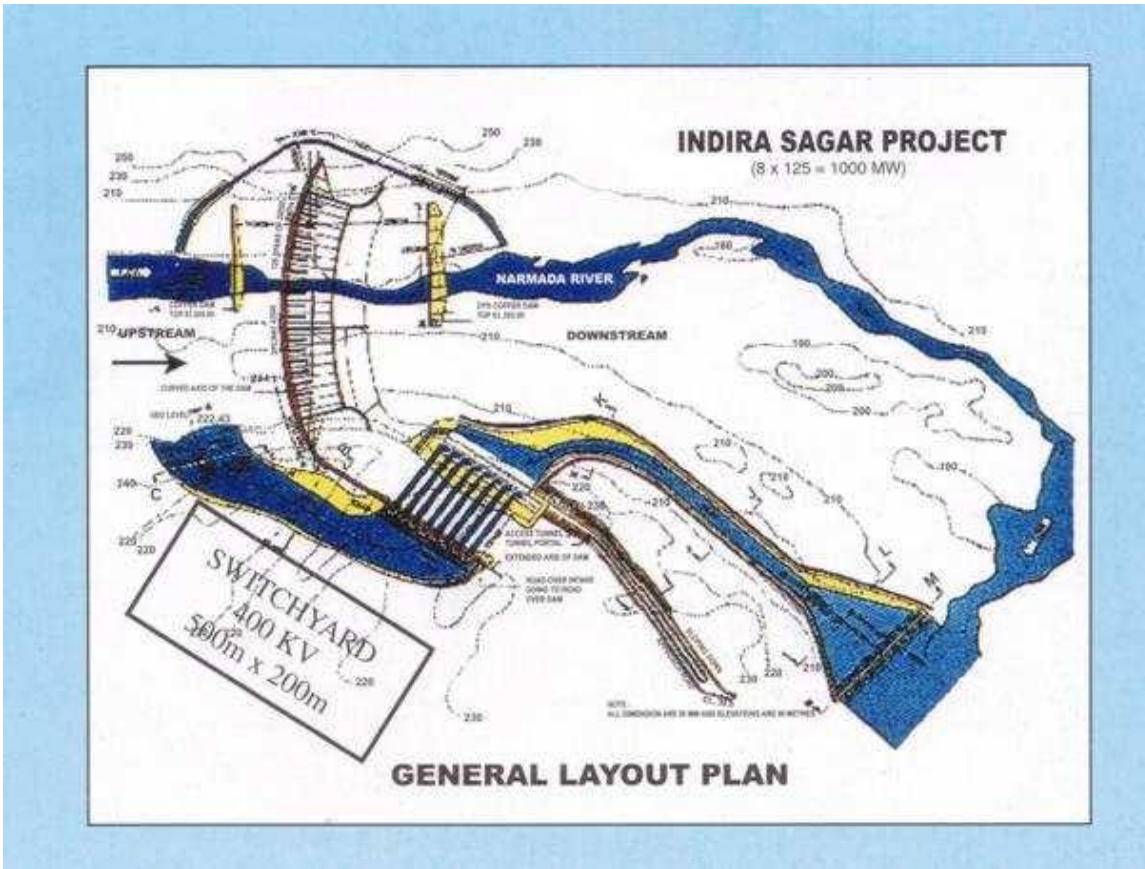


Fig. 20: General plan of the Indira Sagar dam in Punasa. Source: NHDC, 2004.

Altitude of the top of the dam = 267 m

Maximum height of water = 263.35 m

Level of the complete tank = 262.13 m



Fig. 21: The Indira Sagar dam seen from downstream, completed soon. Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.

- c) The Omkareshvara dam, an installation integrated in the development project of the whole of the valley.

The project of the general-purpose Omkareshvara dam forms part of the Narmada Valley Development Project (NVDP). It also forms part of the “Narmada Sagar Complex” project. The dam site is 1 km upstream of the holy city and the island of Omkareshvara-Mandhata.

- The Omkareshvara dam project.

The preliminary Omkareshvara project was conceived in 1965. A detailed report of this project was proposed in 1983. But following many problems to be solved, its construction was unceasingly pushed back. The building work finally started only in 2003; its completion is envisaged now in 2008.

The Omkareshvara site was selected because various favorable conditions meet there for the construction of a hydroelectric dam:

- Adapted foundations: hard and impermeable bed rock to support the weight of the dam and the pressure due to the tank;
- A narrow valley is found at this place, so the length of the dam can be minimal;
- A correct site to install a hydroelectric power station and its high voltage relay;
- A suitable space to store water upstream;
- A facility accessible by the road and the railway;
- Availability of building materials in the vicinity (sands, gneiss...). (Information collected on the stratum near the engineers of the dam).

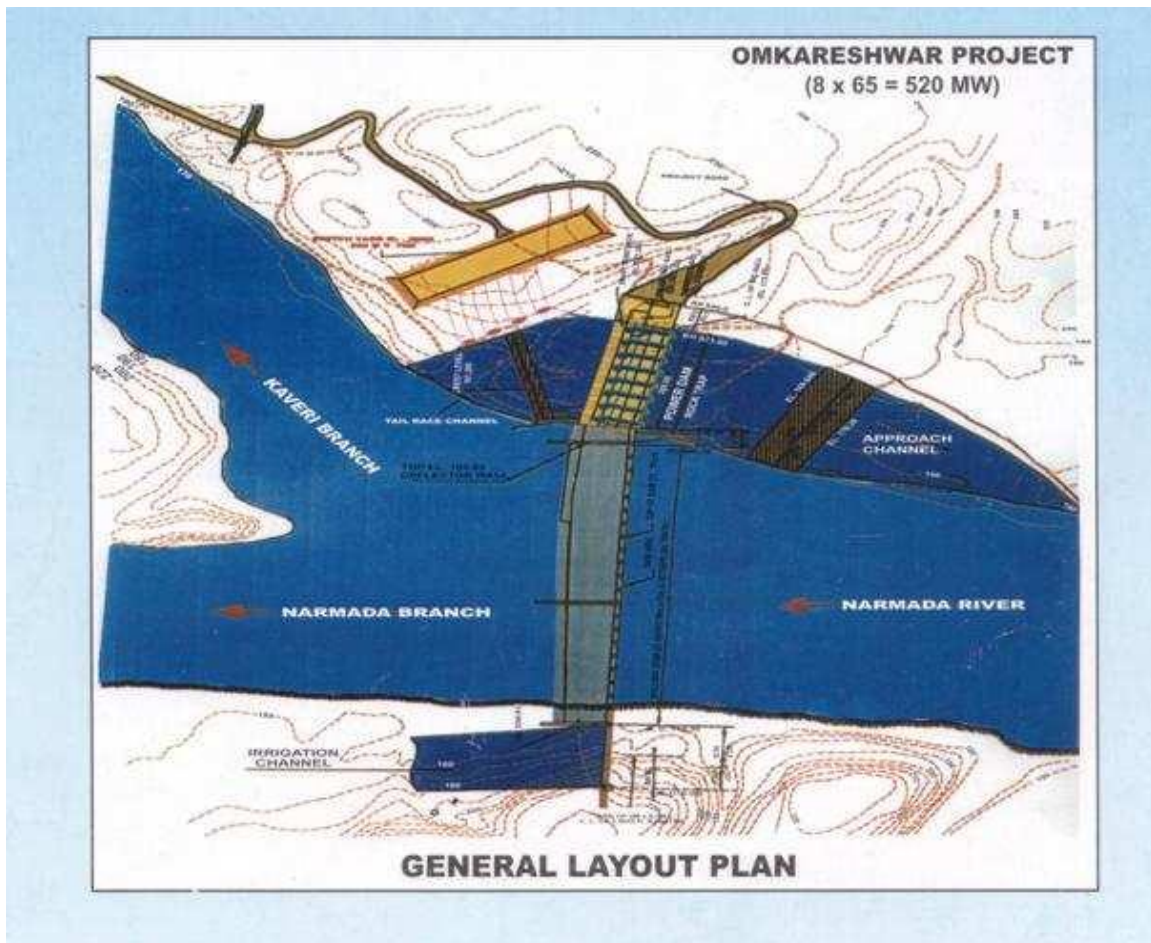


Fig. 22: General plan of the Omkareshvara dam project. Source: NHDC, 2004.

Altitude of the top of the dam = 202 m

Maximum height of water = 199.62 m

Level of the complete tank = 196.6 m

- Characteristics of the dam.

The project envisages the construction of a dam in concrete architecture 73.12 m in height and 949 m in length. This infrastructure will make it possible to irrigate 283,324 ha per annum, thanks to three channels, including two on the northern bank, one 142 km long, the other 83 km, as that on southern bank is 53.5 km length (NHDC, 2004). However, currently, the construction of these irrigation infrastructures did not start yet; the manufacturers give priority to the construction of the hydroelectric dam, planning to work on irrigation later on.

The hydroelectric power station located on northern bank will have a capacity of 520 MW with 8 turbines of 65 MW.

In order to complete work, the NHDC uses the know how of large Indian and multinational companies, building great hydraulic infrastructures in India and throughout the world. The Jayprakash company is charged to build the body of the reinforced concrete building, while ROTEC (USA) provides, installs, and maneuver the cranes as well as other hi tech machines needed to move and transport materials.



Fig. 23 : The Omkareshvara dam in the process of construction. The ROTEC cranes deposit cement manufactured by Jayprakash. Source: CREMIN Emilie, March 2005.

SIEMENS (Germany) is charged to provide the turbines and to set up the electric installations in the power station.



Fig. 24: The Omkareshvara dam in the course of construction (southern part); on the opposite bank, the power station. Source: CREMIN Emilie, March 2005.



Fig. 25: Progress report of the power station (northern bank) on March 20, 2005. The SIEMENS Francis turbines will be placed in these concrete structures. Source: CREMIN Emilie, March 2005.

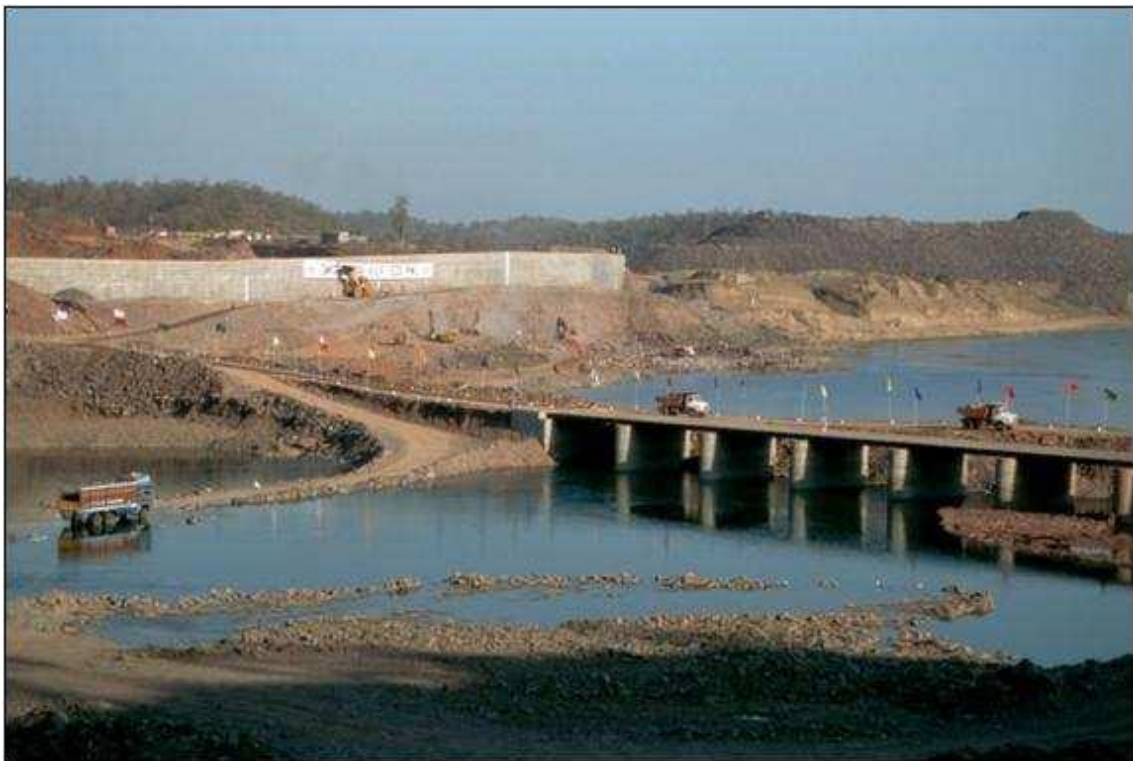


Fig. 26: Junction between the Narmada and the Kavéri. On left, a dam protects the flood power station (northern bank). In the center, the sinkable bridge suitable for motor vehicles is in the process of completion. The construction is decorated with flags for the arrival of the Chief Minister for Madhya Pradesh. State of work progress on January 15, 2005. Source: CREMIN Emilie, January 2005.

- Sources of financing for the Omkareshwar dam:

The project is financed mainly by the NHPC (*National Hydroelectric Power Corporation*) and under the responsibility of the NHDC (*Narmada Hydroelectric Development Corporation*). The NHPC was created in 1975. Whereas this organization installed only 2,200 MW during the last 30 years, it aims today at installing 32,269 MW from here through the next thirteen. Since 2002, the NHPC sought sources of financing and appropriations in India and internationally to finance the Omkareshwar dam project, as well as for other projects elsewhere in India (JACSES & Urgewald, 2004). This organization is highly criticized by international NGOs such as JACSES (Japan Center for Sustainable Environment and Society), and Urgewald (German NGO defending human rights and of the environment) which denounce the lack of responsibility for the investors in the Chamera I project in Himachal Pradesh. Many villages of the valley were flooded there without warning. The displacement of the affected populations was done in a violent and authoritative way. The NHPC does not apply its social policy, while its environmental policy is not very convincing.

The Omkareshwar dam will flood a surface of 93.36 km² when the level of the tank is full, including 5,800 ha of forests and more than 30 villages in the Dewas and Khandwa districts. The territory which will be flooded extends upstream in the Narmada river bed and that of its tributary Kavéri, which rejoins its southern bank (JACSES & Urgewald, 2004; NHDC, 2004; discussion with Mr. Ojha, engineer in charge of the environment for the NHDC in Omkareshwar, February 2005).

The Narmada Valley Development Plan was set up gradually. In spite of many controversies, the Sardar Sarovar and Indira Sagar dams will be completed soon, whereas

others such as that of Omkareshvara continue to rise. The great projects of the Indian Union central government, those of the governments of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat are concretized. The Narmada, so long divinized, that some represent like a female body symbolizing the universe in reduction, seems to undergo plastic surgery, blocking the circulation of its water. The dynamics of this river are gradually artificialized, transforming its hydrosystem, its ecosystem, and the life of the communities living in its valley.

3.2 Environmental, social and cultural impacts of the Narmada development project: a massive opposition.

The Indian Union central government and the governments of the states of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat maintain that the dams will bring to the Indian population electricity, irrigation, and drinking water necessary for the development of the nation. This project has however been highly criticized by the affected people of the valley, supported by many ecological and humanitarian NGOs for more than 20 years. The artificialization of the river's hydrosystem will transform its ecosystem, the flooding by the reservoirs of vast spaces submerge the territories where many people lived for several millennia. This transformation would thus be an ecological, human, and cultural catastrophe.

The representation of the river in the Hindu and adivasi cultures as "Mata," the mother, is central in the fight of the protest movements. However, the authorities look at the lands like tangible properties, having economic potential, without thinking of the attachment the people have to their territories.

3.2.1 The environmental impacts of the great project: the transformation of the hydrosystem and the ecosystem of the catchment area.

Many studies and evaluations were carried out in India concerning the effects of the dams on the environment and the ecosystems of the artificialized valleys. The Department of Environment and Forest requires a full report for each project, thus various teams were charged with research by the Indian government. Moreover, the

NGO, World Commission on dams, or other research organizations carried out their surveys independently. The Narmada valley will thus undergo a great upheaval supposed to be similar to those met in other valleys. Certain ecological aspects however remain specific to the Narmada valley because its environment is different.

- Modification of the natural hydrosystem of the river:

“Nothing can deteriorate a river as completely as a dam. A tank is the antithesis of a river. The essence of a river is its flow, the essence of a tank is to be calm and quiet. The nature of a river is to be dynamic, eternally changing...” (McCully, 1996). The presence of dams will generate transformations in river morphology (beds, banks, and estuary) because of the retention of sediments in the tanks and the modification of its liquid flows.

- Modification of the aquatic ecosystem:

The dams induce the loss of aquatic biodiversity upstream and downstream of the hydrographic network, in the flood plains, the estuary, and the adjacent marine ecosystems (World Commission on Dam, 2000).

The fish of the Narmada, of its source in the high hills of Amarkantak to its estuary in the Gulf of Cambay, will see their environments changing. These running water fish will be condemned to the stagnant water of the tanks supporting the lake species. New species adapted to this environment will settle while others will disappear. This modification will also have an impact on the populations of fishermen who will have in turn to change their techniques of fishing and their food.

The fish of the estuary which the *hilsa* will be condemned to disappear because of the fall of fresh water and the rise of marine water preventing their seasonal migrations. Nearly 10,000 families of fishermen are likely to lose their principal source of income (Roy, 1999).

- Ecological problems related to the tank.

The easily flooded banks and plains are areas of strong biodiversity when they are not fertile grounds for agriculture. Deforestation in hilly areas accelerates the erosion of

the ground, increasing sedimentary displacement and creates serious technical problems in the hydroelectric installations. The erosion materials fill the reserves of the dams, reducing their storage capacity and thus irrigation and production of hydroelectricity. It is thus necessary to preserve and maintain a drainage space below the forests to avoid the ground erosion.

The deforestation related to the treatment of tank surfaces for immersion and its drainage surface reduces genetic biodiversity and produces an imbalance of ecosystems. Fauna is reduced in a manner parallel to the destruction forests (World Commission on Dam, 2000). The ecological balance is put out of order, making it possible for certain species to seize power over others. In the whole of the valley 350,000 hectares of forests of various qualities will be submerged. MP posts a rate of deforestation currently highest in the country.

- The loss of vast fertile grounds.

A great part of the grounds which will be flooded are fertile alluvial plains. The black ground of cotton [?] is a rich and fertile ground for agriculture. It is several meters thick near the river.

- Irrigation: risk of degrading the soil.

Many problems occur following bad management of the irrigation of the grounds: the salinisation of the grounds is a phenomenon noted regularly in the areas of Gujarat and the Narmada valley. The ground of Saurashtra (Fig. 5, p.25) would not be adapted to irrigation (Paranjpye, 1990). The black ground of the Narmada valley is rich and fertile, but it cannot support strong irrigation.

The saturation of the grounds requires to install a system of drainage at the same time as that of the system of irrigation, and to prepare the grounds with the arrival of the irrigation requiring an additional work of the farmers.

- The deterioration of water quality and public health problems.

The temperature of the river water will increase on the surface with the effect of its stagnation inducing a stronger evaporation and thus a reduction in the average flow.

The storage of water will also cause a strong dissolved gas concentration, mineral matter, and heavy metals in the tanks (Discussion with the environmental engineer, Mr. Ojha, of the NHDC in Omkareshvara, January 2005).

The anaerobe, created by the stagnation of water in the tanks, supports the fermentation of the organic matter developing bacterial fauna.

Malaria is present in the Narmada valley and also in the locality of Omkareshvara (observation in the dispensaries of Omkareshvara where several patients were sick as of March as it acts in the dry season[?]). The tanks, allowing water stagnation, offer an environment favorable to the development of anophele mosquitoes. According to the engineer in charge of the environment at the Omkareshvara dam, it is possible to address this problem thanks to various techniques such as the application of a layer of oil above water for drowning and poisoning the anophele larvae.

The water of the Narmada is polluted little in comparison with those of the other rivers of India because there are few industrial parks along its banks, however the residents who consume its water directly are frequently affected by bacterial or viral diseases (Observation within the Omkareshvara dispensary, with Dr. Rohit Harvey in January-February, 2005).

- Increases in the risk of seismic movements.

The tanks induce seismicity as was observed with many dams throughout the world. Moreover, the Narmada is located on a zone of weakness due to the fault line of the Narmada-Son. Many earthquakes were noted in the valley during the most recent centuries. The pressure exerted by the whole of the dams could thus cause seismic activities in the valley (Alvares & Billorey, 1999).

- The exploitation of a dam: a short life expectancy.

The hydroelectric dams produce a renewable energy much less prone to polluting than thermal nuclear power stations, whose waste is difficult to treat, or power stations, whose combustion materials release great quantities of carbon and pollutant gases. Nevertheless, the body of the dam and its technological components have restricted functional lives. The life expectancy of the Narmada dam is planned for around fifty

years, after which, their vestiges will be very polluting. This type of development cannot thus be regarded as a “durable development.”

- The unprofitability of the project.

Following economic calculations of production costs vis-à-vis the benefits of distribution, many economists, such as Vijay Paranjpye of the University of Pune or Claude Alvares and Ramesh Billorey, showed the unprofitability of the project. Indeed, the cost of constructions, the requisitions of grounds, replacement of the affected people, etc. will certainly generate more expenses for the Indian nation than the benefit hoped for with the dams.

Many natural problems show the inviability of the whole of the Narmada valley development project. In addition, the impact of human displacements also represents a fundamental stake.

3.2.2 A massive displacement of the population throughout the basin.

a) The people affected by the project:

- Numbers of families moved by the Sardar Sarovar project:

The Sardar Sarovar dam is most colossal of the valley and that which held the most attention. The water of the Sardar Sarovar dam will be collected in a reservoir forming a narrow lake upstream, a length of 200 km. When its tank is full with 138 m of water, it will submerge a surface of 37,500 ha including 13,400 ha of forest, the remainder being arable lands, villages, cities and industries (Appendix 4).

In 2005, the government recognized that 40,000 to 41,500 families will be moved in 247 villages, which is to say 250,000 people. According to NBA²⁷, the number of families would be 85,000, forming a total of approximately 500,000 people (Roy, 1999/ Mc Cully, 1996/ booklet of the NBA, 2004).

²⁷ Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) is an important movement in defense of the Narmada and its residents.

- A number of villages and people affected by the project as a whole in the valley:

Fig. 27 : Numbers of villages and families affected by the dams. Source : NVDA²⁸ and NCA²⁹, 2005 (Appendix 4).

Dam	Etat	District	Villages	Families	% ST *	%SC*
Sardar Sarovar	Gujarat	Bharuch	19	4728	51%	
	Maharashtra MP	Dulia	33	3698		9%
		Dhar	80	33014		
		Jhabua	26	N/A*		
		West Nimar	76	N/A		
TOTAL			234	41 440		
Indira Sagar	MP	Khandwa	167	N/A	20%	14%
		Dewas	39	N/A		
		Hoshangabad	48	N/A		
TOTAL			254	30739		
Omkareshvara	MP	East Nimar	30	3024		
Maheshwar	MP		58	4000		
TOTAL			576	79 203	37%	11,5%

* SC: Scheduled Caste *. (Low castes indexed by the government)

* ST: Scheduled Tribes *. (Tribes indexed by the government)

* N/A: data not available.

There are not really precise data concerning the exact number of affected people, but the official estimates of the persons in charge for the project estimate that there are 1 million individuals moved by the projects throughout the valley and the associated projects (irrigation canals).

²⁸ The Narmada Valley Development Authority (NVDA) is an institution created by the court of water affairs of the Narmada. It controls the building work and applies the decisions of the court to Madhya Pradesh.

²⁹ The Narmada Control Authority (NCA) is an institution created by the court of water affairs of the Narmada in 1985. It controls the building work and applies the decisions of the court throughout the valley.

The large reservoirs will flood vast territories occupied by tribal or adivasi people known as “scheduled tribes*” and the people of low castes known as “scheduled castes *.” The adivasi communities, forming 8.1% of the Indian population of which 23% of the population of MP before the creation of the State of Chhattisgarh (Jaffrelot, 1996) constitute 37% of the affected population here (NVDA website, 2005).

These autochtone populations, living in community, are narrowly dependent on the resources of their environment. By their displacement, they will be necessarily uprooted their ancestral places of life. The programs of reimplantation followed on the various dams under the responsibility of the NCA do not propose until now a compensation equivalent to the generated material losses. Moreover, the cultural losses, of a qualitative nature, are riches difficult to evaluate. Integration in a foreign environment is not always obvious. The manufacturers of the dams maintain that with their displacement and the development of the Narmada valley, the tribal people and those of low indexed castes will profit from modernization, development, and progress. Assimilation, would thus allow these long isolated people to be integrated in the economy and to benefit from it socially and culturally (Discussion with the people in charge of the group sub-contracted by the NHDC in Omkareshvara, February 2005). As it pertains to this emanating argument by the government, NGOs, such as the NBA, defend that this more or less successful integration will only cause impoverishment, their political marginalization, and the complete loss of their cultural autonomy (Root, 2000).

The people of the Narmada valley never agreed to voluntarily leave their villages in spite of the persuasions exerted by the governments. The Bhil and Bhilala people populating the hills of the Narmada valley, affected by the majority of the dams, are known as groups which knew to resist historically the various attempts at external takeover on their territories (Baviskar, 1997). The successive governments in India nationalized the forests and thus imposed restrictions on the access of these tribal people to the natural resources from which they drew a part of their food and everyday products. The trauma of displacement is exacerbated in these communities because of the attachment and the spiritual bond which they have for their land, forming their social

reference marks. And because many of their cultural practices and community bonds which help to define their societies are destroyed by displacement and the loss of their common resources on which their economy is based (McCully, 1996).

The adivasi communities partnered in sanghat* (collective, associative community not recorded by the government) and in andolan* (federation of the different sanghats) to defend their identity and their economic and political autonomy. They hope to better be able to take part in the changes which affect their life and estimate that the current system of development will not bring to them any interest (Baviskar, 1997).

b) Impact on the rural people of the valley upstream of the Omkareshvara dam.

Because of the construction of the Omkareshvara dam, 30 villages will be affected partially or completely in the districts of Khandwa and Dewas. In 1993, the population of these villages was estimated at 10,236 inhabitants, including 1,903 families according to censuses of Narmada Valley Development Authority (NVDA). In 2000, the organization gives the figure of 3,024 families or 15,120 people in the 30 villages. According to investigations' of the NGOs JACSES and Ugerwald, these estimates of the affected people are low. They estimate, following their field research and their census in 18 villages, that a minimum of 50,000 people will be affected partially or completely by the reserve of the Omkareshvara dam.

Of the total affected population, 44% will be because of the immersion. Within this population, 18% are “scheduled tribes” and 5% are “scheduled castes.” The most important communities among the tribal groups are Bhils, Bhilalas, Korkus, while among the castes, the caste most represented is that of Balaïs (Harijan*) (NVDA, 1993). The possibility of using natural resources formerly available will be reduced; the life of the inhabitants and their socio-economic conditions will be sharply diminished.

The census process and the results of the NVDA were strongly criticized by the people of each village visited by the NGO. In many villages, the peasants testified that the NVDA and its subcontractors charged to carry out the report did not list the

properties, houses, and land of the “untouchable” harijan* people and sometimes did not want to count certain properties as long as the peasants did not give them wine pots [?]. Lastly, the local population testified that the censuses did not classify a part of the lowlands of the villages as zones flooded on the basis of FRL, which is to say full reservoir level, but, the MRL, or the maximum reservoir level, was not taken into account. This level could however have flooded vast surfaces in the event of sudden rising (JACSES & Urgewald, 2004).

In agreement with the *Narmada Water Disputes Court*, the people touched by these occasional floods must also be moved. The censuses of the authorities are thus largely underestimated, reimplantation and rehousing thus not being planned for the areas and the villages supposedly unaffected by the flood.

It is thus difficult to give a really exact estimate of the affected the people which will lose their grounds and their dwellings for this project because of the difficulties encountered by the authorities in collecting the data necessary to the census. In addition, it is also necessary to define the number of people who will be moved by the construction of the irrigation canals. The people affected by the latter have the same rights as the people flooded according to the policy of rehabilitation of the state of Madhya Pradesh.

c) The governmental policy of displacement and replacement.

The law of land acquisition of 1894, established under British India, constitutes a legal base of obtaining lands deprived by the government for reasons of public interest (right of pre-emption) (*Report of the independent people's commission*, 2004). Compensation for the acquisition of land according to this act is calculated according to the price of the nonflooded ground market, which is to say without reduction in value resulting from the flood. The compensation in liquid posed many problems. Following the judgment of *Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal* ordering the people in charge of the Narmada valley development project to ensure at least a year before the end of building work, compensation, and reimplantation of the affected the people, **the governments of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat adopted the laws defining the administrative methods**

of expropriation. In 1989, the government of Madhya Pradesh issued “a policy of reimplantation for the people expelled by the project”:

- Any person whose land is acquired because of the project is regarded as an affected person;
- Any property losing more than 25% of its surface is considered under compensation “land against land,” with a minimum of 10 and one maximum of 40 ha (20 acres) of land provided;
- If a dispossessed family wishes to receive monetary compensation instead of land, it must submit a request to the officer of land acquisition. The *Collector District** will have to make sure that this choice will not be harmful for the family;
- The project authorities are responsible for the displacement of families and all their goods from the zone of immersion to the relocalization site;
- Public infrastructures and equipment (electricity, schools, temples, dispensaries) must be available at the new site;
- Villages will have to be relocated as whole communities;
- They will have to be located in the installation profit zone or the periphery of the zone of immersion. (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1989).

d) The reality of displacement.

Currently, the governments of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have not acquired the territories necessary to reimplant all the population affected by the dams. Many villages are on standby for land and promised houses and are likely to be drowned at the time of next monsoon (JACSE & Urgewald, 2004).

According to the NBA (the movement “Let’s Save Narmada”) and the NGOs (JACSE, Urgewald, *Third world network*, SAMYA, *National Campaign for People's Right to Information...* etc.) the government of Madhya Pradesh, (in the same way as that of Gujarat) did not respect until now the requirements of its policy of displacement and rehabilitation. These organizations consider that it does not offer compensation equivalent to the losses for the villagers for the valley in its program for replacement.

Because of the forecast of the flood, the land loses value. How can one thus make an equitable compensation?

The communities and the families are divided. For example: 19 villages moved in Gujarat by the SSP were divided into 175 different sites to build the Colony of Kevadia project (Roy, 1999).

Panthiaji, a village located in the hills just above the Omkareshvara dam site, composed of approximately 70 families of which many were adivasi, was the first village affected by the Omkareshvara dam. In August 2003, the families of the village were expelled to prepare to break ground.

In classic interviews, one said of the NGO: *“They took the arable lands on which held my harvests and paid me 16,000 RS per ha. The land here costs approximately 100,000 RS by 1/2ha. How can I seek new land with this compensation? .”*

The parameters of the policy of reimplantation were not respected at the time of the displacement of the Panthiaji village. The 70 families are reinstalled in different sites. They had to finance the transport charges by themselves. And the methods of evacuation were violent. Many wished to remain in the surroundings of their old village and sought places around Omkareshvara. Some were placed on a site which resembled a refugee camp, where there was neither electricity nor public facilities. Each family received a plot of 18 X 27.5 m, which is not of course sufficient to provide for their needs. Moreover, there are no arable lands, nor employment available in the vicinity (JACSE & Urgewald, 2004). When the project is completed, other families will probably face the same situation.

The assessment of the Indian government concerning the compensation and reintegration of the moved the people is insufficient (NBA website, 2005). The question of displacement and replacement remains in the center of the polemic concerning the construction of dam.

3.2.3 Massive disputes against the construction of dam on the Narmada: a strong opposition from global to local.

For the Indian government, “in the interest of the common good of the Indian nation,” the construction of the dams is the only solution to solve the problems of dryness in Gujarat, to develop irrigation, distribution of water in the urban environment, and the production of electricity in the valley; the opposition movements denounce its lack of consideration for the ecological and social problems generated (Roy, 1999).

The installation projects thus have been much discussed and disputed for a decade on a local, national, and international scale. To defend the ecosystems and the communities living in the Narmada valley, many ecologist movements and collectives of social protection organized themselves. The people concerned with this development project gathered, reacting to a larger public on an international scale. Their fight was very largely publicized.

a) A gap in the communication and information on the part of the government vis-à-vis the affected populations.

In September 1987, the *Multiple Action Research Group* (MARG) based in Delhi, began field research in many villages of the Narmada valley. It published a series of reports called: *Sardar Sarovar oustees in Madhya Pradesh, what do they know?* The objective of their reports was to evaluate the range of information communicated to the inhabitants of these villages concerning their fate, by the responsible authorities, then to evaluate to what degree information was right and precise. Their principal conclusions were that the authorities of the project had clearly failed to inform in a complete and continual way the affected people, and that the villagers remained largely ignorant of the implications of the dams on their way of life and their existence. The populations were not informed of their simple rights under the terms of *Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal*. **This lack of consultation and participation of the populations of the valley in the project** reveals a fundamental violation of human rights according to many collectives and NGOs. A national campaign for the rights of the people to be informed was founded in 1996 and now distributes several reports on these problems (Independent people’s Commission, 2004).

b) A large-scale protest movement, very largely publicized.

During this last decade, the movement “Let’s Save Narmada,” the NBA, knew how to organize large popular gatherings in the valley relayed throughout the world to dispute this great development project. This very dynamic movement was carried out by the sociologist turned activist Medha Patkar, a much respected wise man Baba Amte, and other national or international personalities engaged in the fight. Thus, many gatherings of thousands of those expelled from the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh organized marches in the valley, to ask for detailed information connected to the zone of immersion, rehabilitation plans, and sources of funding for the project from the administrators and manufacturers of the dams. Many legal actions were undertaken, filing suit with the Supreme Court, against the central government, the governments of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and the foreign banks, requiring them to stop and revalue the projects, or at least to compensate and reinstall the affected populations before the flooding of their lands. Many actions followed in the valley: gatherings in the form of marches, meetings, sitting-ins, and hunger strikes. One “suicide sect” even hid at the bottom of the valley, ready to drown in the first floods. These nonviolent actions specific to ghandian methods of protest were highly repressed by the government, depositor [?] of official prohibitions of assembly. The news concerning these popular resistance groups quickly became known throughout the world (Paranjpye, 1990; NBA website).

All these events were largely publicized by the Indian and international press, television stations, independent documentarians (see bibliography/documentaries), journalists, and writers went to the site and occupied themselves with the business disseminating information throughout the world. In 1993, following the exacerbated tension and pressure exerted by the protest movements, as well as the demonstration of the inviability of the project by their own scientific teams directed by Bradford Morse, the World Bank ceased issuing its loan. The government of Gujarat despite everything ordered the permanent closure of the locks of the SSP dam.

Currently, the movements continue to organize actions of civil disobedience in the valley. **These battles**, frequently repressed by the governments, **raise great questions about democracy and development.**

c) Disputes supported by cultural principles.

“In the country where 33 million gods and goddesses live, there is nobody to protect the temples” (Dharma Kranti, January-February 2005. Newspaper of the Hindu Party Rastriya Hindu Sanghathan, which is opposed to the Omkareshvara dam).

The Hindu religious practices which are centered on the river are highly affected by the valley development project. A great part of the pilgrimage path of the Narmada, and a great number of tirthas will be submerged by the water of the reservoirs. For some of the devout of the Narmada, who see the river as a divine force, the dams represent a human interference which can deteriorate the cosmic order (Basu and Silliman, 2000).

The Omkareshvara dam was built 1 km upstream of the center of the town of Omkareshvara, where one of the 12 Jyotirlingas de Shiva is located, a symbol which makes incarnate the presence of Shiva in this holy city of Narmada. The Omkareshvara dam has already destroyed several temples of great importance for Hindus, which were at the current building site. Certain temples were moved. The Hindu party *Rastriya Hindu Sanghathan*, led by its leader Ramesh Sahul, tried to organize demonstrations to ask the NHDC and the Jayprakash company (in charge of construction) to cease the construction of the Omkareshvara dam, February 8, 2005 (Fig. 28 p. 88) but the demonstrators were stopped by the authorities before they do not join the small holy city [?]. In the newspaper in which it published the “*Dharma kranti*” (transl.: “revolution of the cosmic order” or “religious revolution”), the party affirms that “*the holy city of Omkareshvara and the Mata Narmada are in danger. In the name of development, this sacred space is destroyed slowly. Jayprakash obtained licenses from the government to destroy many temples.*” “*At the heart of a religious center, the NHDC builds a great dam. In fact, they play with the feelings of Hindus, they did not destroy a temple, they destroyed more than 14 and others will be submerged, pertaining to various gods and goddesses where the*

devout locate the center of their religion!.” This small party based in Indore wishes to defend the religious and archaeological inheritance pertaining to Hindu culture.



Fig. 28: Political posters of the Hindu party Rastriya Hindu Sanghathan at the entrance to the Omkareshvara bridge, inviting the demonstration on February 8, 2005 to protest the destruction of temples by the manufacturers of the Omkareshvara dam. Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.

Religion and political ideologies carry values defended in this conflict denouncing the “crimes of development.”

Hinduism is thus present in this fight since the Narmada symbolically represents a mother goddess for this thousand-year-old [?] religion. The religious Hindus maintain a relationship of adaptation and coexistence with nature, quite far away from the Western practice of command and control, in which man feels separate from nature (July, 2005). Gandhi understood it well: *“I bow before our ancestors for their direction of the beautiful in nature and for their perspicacity to allot religious significance to the splendid manifestations of nature.”* The strategies of the NBA are largely inspired by Gandhi,

denouncing “destroying development” and industrial modernization, working for the respect of the rights of displaced people. This movement thinks “green and red” but not “saffron³⁰” which is to say it is not Hindu fundamentalist (Basu and Silliman, 2000). The alternatives suggested by Amte Baba and the NGO are based on local development projects supported by the participation of the bordering communities. Development transforms worldly space and ways of life, but also the cultural capital containing the values and inherited wisdom of ancient civilizations. *“How long will we passively look at the destruction and loss of our common heritage in the name of development”? Today I became a part of the battle to save the Narmada, one of the most sacred rivers of India, from its transformation by massive dams which will destroy whole ways of life which depend on the river and its life-giving waters. The battle is not for the Narmada only; it has a much broader scope. The battle is for the whole earth, to stop the destructive immorality of “development” and to replace it with a new vision, a new way of living for mankind”* Baba Amte (Waring Maw, 1995).

d) The stakes of this controversy now exceed the borders of India and feed international debate.

The stakes of this controversy overflow from now on borders of India and feed the international debate. Internet networks have supported this world exchange. Many conferences and international forums also supported the debate in many countries throughout the world. A World Commission on Large Dams was created in 1998 sponsored by the World Bank and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). The NBA, symbol of “altermondialist” ideas and one of the large organizations is now represented at the time of the world social forum which occurred in Bombay in January 2004. The exchange is also very active through a great number of publications coming from literary figures like Arundhati Roy, many NGOs, and researchers.

³⁰ Saffron is a spice of orange color; this color is carried by devotees of Shiva and represents the color of the Hindu religion. In this political context where green denotes ecologists and red, parties of left, saffron indicates Hindu nationalist ideologies.

This battle is a vehicle for general criticism of the world system carried out by active movements in Europe, the United States, and Japan. It acts of a defense of the human and cultural inheritance of our planet during transformation and standardization by a globalized culture based on the values of Western culture which after decolonization did not cease playing its part through its economic capacity. The junction between the movements takes place on the field of environmental protection, the defense of the autochtone companies, of social justice, criticism of biotechnology, heavy technology and that of the financial and economic international system (Root, 2000). It acts as a handing-over on a fundamental question the benefits of progress and economic and social development. The announced benefits have a reverse effect: that of the “intrinsic injustice of this model of development towards the weak, the poor, the marginalized, the ill-equipped, microcultures, the old, and women” (Santhi, 2000).

“The dams are much more than simple machines to generate electricity and to store water. They are the concrete expression in rock and earth of the dominant ideology of the technological sphere: icons of the economic development and progress “(Mc Cully, 1996).

In short, the “temples of modern India” prove to be the resources for the government of controlling the territories and their people. As Jean-Luc Racine (2000) says, it acts as a postmodern criticism of the dominating state, the developer state, hustling the small autochtone communities in the name of the principle of centralized planning and the interests of the dominant majority.

These disputes show the crimes of development and proposed alternatives, such as the construction of small local hydraulic infrastructures, in order to respect social justice and to create projects in a durable development perspective.


CONCLUSION.

The Narmada is a river in fragile environmental conditions. The forests and the people populating the valley are highly threatened by the enterprise of the valley development project. The hydrosystem and ecosystems of the river will quickly be transformed by the artificialization of the hydrographic network. This great project of hydraulic installation is thus a great challenge of development and modernization of India. The negotiations

and the development of the projects were long and tormented, but the states now maintain the status quo allowing the continuation of construction of hydraulic infrastructures. The protest movements remain active, and the governments considered their petitions, without really continuing their commitments. Thus, the government must still provide some effort so that a participative democracy can really exist. The people of the valley should be consulted and contribute to the development of each project concerning their future. Thus, the people of the valley continue to be mobilized politically to obtain the right to intervene in a process which affects their lives. In these economic clashes of interests, the symbolic and spiritual value of this sacred river has long been forgotten.

Part 2: Omkareshvara, a high place of the Narmada.

The Narmada has been a river divinized for several millennia. It is regarded as the manifestation of the Mother-Goddess. Its banks are marked by many symbols expressing the worship of Mata Narmada and the gods of the Hindu pantheon, with whom it has a close relation. The succession of religious symbols present in the landscape of the valley and throughout the Parikramā path testifies to the great enthusiasm of the people and the important spiritual dimension of these places.

Omkareshvara is one of the many holy cities of the Narmada River. It is all the more holy as Shiva posed as one of his twelve transcendent lingas there [?]. The island of Omkareshvara-Mandhata³¹ would form one ³² which would constitute a second linga in the center of the river. Thus, for millions of Hindus, Omkareshvara is one of the holiest cities of India. Long wedged on undulating banks of the Narmada, this city has opened itself for more than a decade and now invites the pilgrims more and more to go there. In parallel, the Indian government found there a favorable space there to build one of its “temples of modern India,” a dam a few hundred meters upstream of the sacred center.

³¹ See part 2: 2.1.1 p.103.

³² See part 2: 1.1.2 a).

Then, how does the sacrality in the landscape of the town of Omkareshvara appear? We will study initially the particular environmental framework in which it is established, and then the myths of foundations, the elements pertaining to worship which are deeply rooted there and the historical context in which they are developed.

1. The environment of the city of Omkareshvara.

Omkareshvara-Mandhata is an old Hindu holy city, attracting thousands of pilgrims each year from all over India. Its site and its situation surely contributed to its sacrality as is the case with many other Hindu places of pilgrimage.

1.1 An exceptional situation and a site: A sacred geographic environment

1.1.1 Situation of Omkareshvara.

a) Situation and access starting from the national grid system.

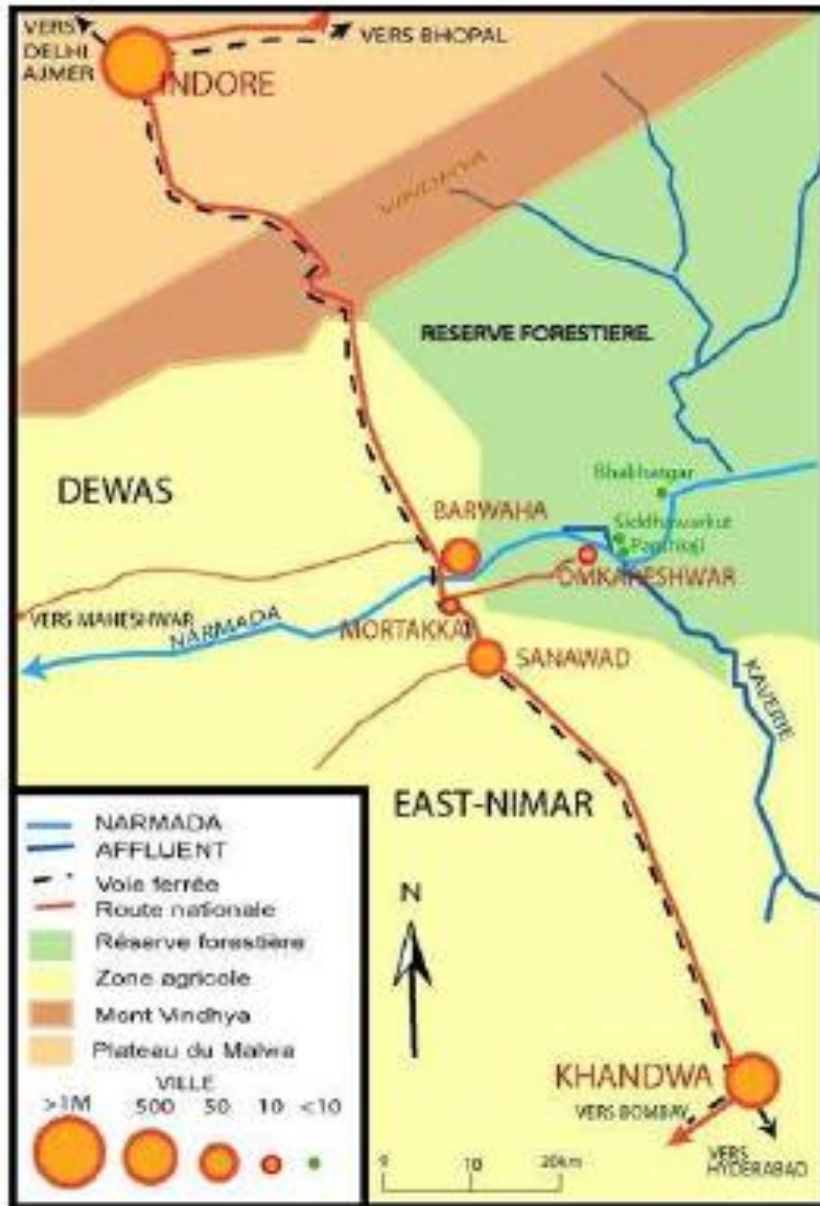


Fig. 29: Localization and situation of Omkareshvara. CREMIN Emilie, 2005.

In the south of the state of Madhya Pradesh, this small town of approximately 6,700 inhabitants (according to the *panchayat** in 2005), is located within the district of East-Nimar in the *tehsil**³³ of Khandwa. It is 16 km from the Omkareshvara –Mortakka train station, on the line connecting Khandwa to Ajmer in Rajasthan. The railway station and the national road connect the closest two large cities, Khandwa and Indore.

³³ Administrative district.

The first prefecture of East–Nimar, is 72 km to the south of the holy city; the second, economic capital of Madhya Pradesh is 100 km to the north. From Indore, railway and road commuting is easy to all the large cities of the Indian territory. Bhopal, the administrative capital of MP, is located 200 km to the east, Delhi in the north and Allahabad in the North-East, approximately 700 km. In the same way, Khandwa is located 450 km from Bombay, the economic capital of the Indian Union. Thus, the town of Omkareshvara, long insulated, has integrated gradually in the national communication network with the improvement of transport infrastructure. Regional buses pass in great number on the road between Khandwa and Indore allowing easy access to the city by taking the local bus.

b) Situation within the Narmada valley.

Omkareshvara is halfway between the source and the estuary of the Narmada River. The pilgrims deciding to make the Narmada Parikrama often begin and finish their pilgrimage in this city. Each time, they can immerse themselves in a darshan (vision) of Jyotirlinga. This city is the central pole of the river, in permanent connection in Hindu representation with the source of the Narmada at Amarkantak. It acts as a religious and cultural city. Indeed, the agricultural life of the surrounding area is modest, because the depths of this undulating area are covered with teak forests, limiting the agricultural space available. Commercial activities are directed mainly towards the sale of devotional objects, secondarily of food, **expressing in its landscape the primacy of its religious direction**. Another city, such as Maheshwar, located 40 km downstream on the banks of the Narmada, in the Nimar plain, while having kept its religious aspect, is primarily directed towards agricultural pursuits. The life of this city is marked by a mixture of trade, culture, and religion.

1.1.2 The site of Omkareshvara: a sacrilized “territory.”


The Omkareshvara site can be regarded as a “territory” in charge of spiritual direction. Bonnemaïson, a theorist of cultural geography, suggests in his analyses that the “territory” appeals: “with all that in man which is concealed with scientific speech and

passes very close to the irrational: lives affectivity, subjectivity, and certainly the heart of the religiosity of the land, either pagan or theist[?]"(Bonnemaison, 1981). One can thus conceive the territory in a way that is subjective, phenomenological, real, everyday space...[?]

The Hindu territory is marked by thousands of holy places, which can be natural elements: mountains, rivers, lakes (assertion of the holiness of the territory itself) or of the temples and the holy cities (the hearts of the network of the Hindu territory) (Claveyrolas, 2003). Many holy places, such as Omkareshvara, are associated with exceptional natural sites such as the banks of the rivers or the hills. The singular geophysical characteristics of a site form the first foundations of a sacred space, defined by the term kshetra in Sanskrit. They give a symbolic sense to the place. In a holy place, the adored god is designed as appearing there himself in his natural environment. Certain Indian researchers suggest that the mystery and the wonder of the remote natural sites would be at the origin of their sacred nature (Bhardwaj, 1997). The places of attractive beauty, by offering a peaceful and comforting atmosphere, are favorable to meditation and become holy places. Thus the particular geography of Omkareshvara contributes to its sacrality.

a) An island in form of "OM."

The island of Omkareshvara is made of a small triangular plateau, in the center of the Narmada, of which the length is 4 km and breadth 2 km (8 km² of surface). The plateau rises 150 m above the river. Its slopes are very steep. From the top of these hills, the pilgrims for a long time could admire a panoramic sight of the sunrise on the Narmada. This landscape, preserved well for such a long time, is now animated by the industrial infrastructures of the dam being constructed. The plateau is cut by a deep valley dividing it into two parts. Its slope softens towards the west and joins the level of the river at its western point.

According to Hindu representations of the universe, this island is perceived as a sacred space, which would form, as seen in the plan, the mystical syllable: 

(transcribed “OM”). The “OM” is the most important mantra³⁴ of the Vedic texts. **In Hindu philosophy, the matter was built starting from the sound. The “OM” is the most sacred of all the sounds, the fundamental syllable which preceded the universe and generated the gods. The eternal vibration, “OM” contains the entire universe, it is the vital breath. It is the support (*pratishthâ**) of existence (Game preserve, 2002).**

One finds the explanation of this most magic mantra in the Vedic lesson: “At the beginning was Brahman*. With him was *Vâk** (word). And the word is Brahman” (Coquet, 2002). The “OM” is thus Brahman. In the *Upanishads*^{35*}, we find other explanations: “In truth *pranava*^{36*} ‘OM’ is the beginning, the middle, and the end of all.” The diphthong “o” is composed of “a” and of “u,” if one adds nasal resonance to it (transcribed *m*), one obtains a triad which corresponds, one says, with the three constituent parts of the universe: sky, earth, and intermediate space. This triad also evokes the *trimurti**: Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu.

The pranava “OM” is the vehicle of the Brahman. To call upon this sacred syllable is to call upon the essence of the solar system. It is the “root” syllable, the vibration which maintains the atomic structure of the world and the heavens. Thus, all solid objects are only manifestations of the paramount sound. Since the “OM” precedes all things, it is used like an invocation introducing and punctuating any prayer, hymn, or meditation. The “OM” is the most venerated of all the mantras, which gave the popular toponym of **OMkareshvara** to the locality.

³⁴ Magical phrase.

³⁵ Classical Hindu texts.

³⁶ Technical name of OM as a liturgical formula (mantra) and vital breath.



Fig. 30: Representation of the island of Omkareshvara in the form of the “OM” in the center of the Narmada. It is inscribed to the bottom on the right “Omkareshvara darshan,” “blessed vision of Omkareshvara.” The photograph represents Jyotirlinga. The pilgrims often add this icon of the divinized landscape of the holy city to their family altar. Source: Image sold in the local market, 2005.

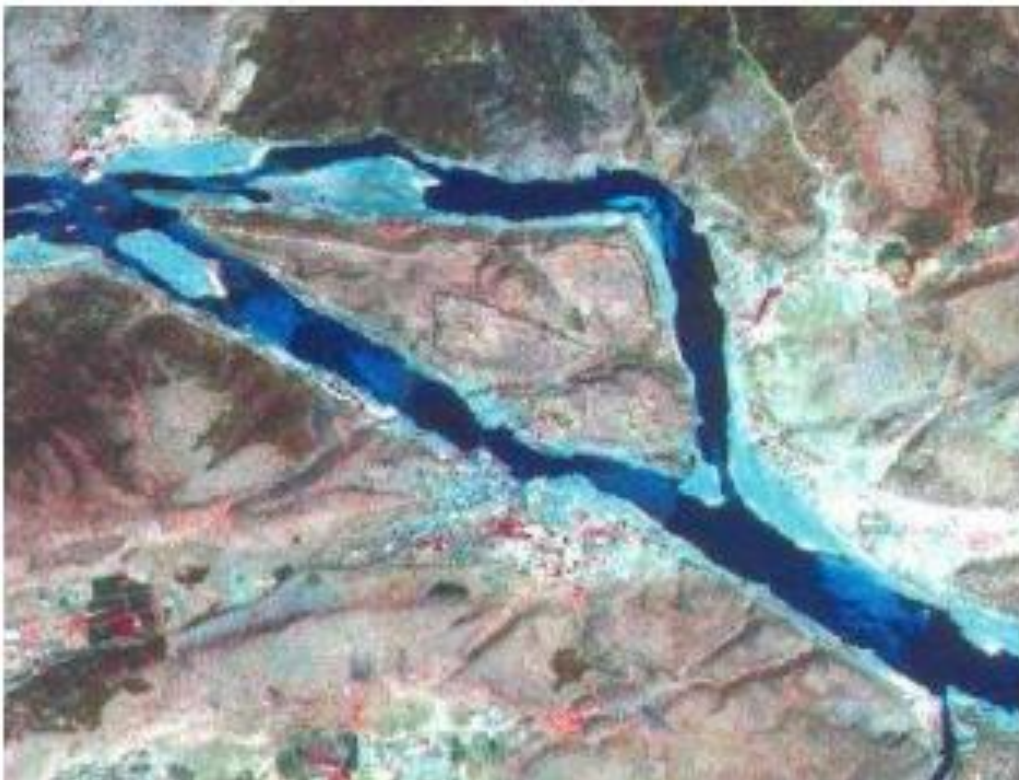


Fig. 31: Is the local belief that the island would have the form of an “OM” confirmed on the satellite images? Source: spaceimaging.com, 2005.

b) At the junction of Narmada and Kavéri.

In Omkareshvara, the course of the river is divided into two arms, according to two fault lines, surrounding the island of Mandhata. The Kavéri River, a tributary of the Narmada arrives at its junction 500 m upstream of the island. It is one of the sacred rivers of the area, crossing diagonal to the tehsil [?] of Khandwa. The local beliefs affirm that water of the Kavéri and that of the Narmada do not mix at their real junction. The current of the Kavéri would cut the Narmada being on the northern slope of the island, whereas the Narmada would run out along its southern slope, then the two sacred rivers considered to be sisters, meet and mix their water at the level of the western point of the island called “Sangam” which is a particularly sacred tirtha. The toponym “Sangam” means in Hindi: “reunion.” The site is covered with thousands of small burial mounds representing lingas of Shiva constructed by the faithful with stones and pebbles deposited by the river.

c) A gorge, steep ledges, and the Kapila valley.

The topography of Omkareshvara is very broken and undulated. The city concentrates on the southern bank of the Narmada and on the island around a gorge. The part of the city located on southern bank, was established on a steep promontory, with vertical slopes, 60 m at the top of the level of the river. This steep slope is sheared by a narrow and deep valley, called “Go Mukh” (meaning: “cow’s mouth”) from where a small sacred brook called Kapila runs out (Fig. 40 p. 119). Ghâts are built along the bank where the valley opens as it is surrounded by piedmonts of the promontory. Steps make it possible to go down from the higher part to the lower part of the southern bank. This group of hills and rocks was regarded for a long time as being a land of liberation (*Moksha Bhumi*), the stratified sandstone ledges appear to be made of steps leading to paradise. Undulating reliefs encircle the city which extends towards the south in a broader valley.

The toponyms thus associate each element of the natural site to a sacred concept or being such as the “OM,” the “Sangam” or “Go Mukh.” They thus confirm the sacrality of this territory.

1.2 Characteristics of the local environment.

1.2.1 The ecological framework of origin.

a) Local natural landscape.

The climate of this locality is full of contrast: it is dry for 8 months of the year and very wet in the monsoon season from mid-June to mid-September. The average annual precipitation is 1,267 mm with a maximum of 1,485 mm and a minimum of 730 mm.

The hills forming the banks of the Narmada around Omkareshvara are teak forests. These forests, of tropical type dry and desolate [?], are completely stripped during more than 6 months, from November to May, leaving a landscape of arid vegetation in a monochrome of ochre that ranges from yellow to brown. The waters of the Narmada are then transparent, letting a bluish watery veil flow out in the bottom of the valley. During the rainy season, the dominant colors of the landscape change. The forest, revived by the monsoon rains finds its foliage, the ochre then becomes green. Charged by the silt and materials transported by the river, the blue of the floods changes to chestnut. The high waters flood the ghâts and often go up to certain temples in the Go Mukh gorge.

The forests of the island belong to the Omkareshvara commune. In its western part, the teak forests are strongly degraded. In its northern part, the forest becomes denser and mixed. The Eastern part of the plateau is not very wooded. It is 75% covered by bushes called “Nirguan”³⁷, as well as some ligneous family vegetation, such as the Tendu. Large cacti push on the ledges, between the cracks of the sandy rock.

The north and south banks, at the undulating slopes are also teak forests, classified as forest reserves. They are managed by the Department of Forests of MP. The forest belt in the east of the city, formerly dominant, was destroyed at the beginning of dam construction.

³⁷ Residents usually use the nirguan leaves in the treatment of gastric problems.

b) A landscape transformed by the construction of the dam.

The construction site transformed the banks of the Narmada, of the point that is the island [?] and the east side of the city. The cleared forests were replaced with provisional buildings of the construction site, cement factories, storage hangars for the building machinery, and camps made up of offices and temporary dwellings. A sinkable bridge crosses the river in the bed from which a great dam gradually rises with reinforced concrete surrounded by tall cranes. This long peaceful landscape, bathed by the current of the Narmada and the Kavéri is now surrendered to the explosion of the manufacture and concrete industries. The materials used for the composition of the concrete are extracted near the site, in the bed of the Kavéri, on the northern slope of the island. They are conveyed to the building site by a road specially built for this purpose. The trucks collect materials deposited by the river: sand and rocks. These rocks however represent in the Hindu mind the very incarnation of Shiva!

1.2.2 Cultural landscape of Omkareshvara.

At the town of Omkareshvara, one can see the Narmada everywhere. The silence which reigned for a long time there, the charm of the fresh and pure Narmada, combined with the beauty of its environmental framework, for a long time made it an ideal place for spiritual retirement. The banks of the island and the southern bank are skirted with ghâts where each morning and at dawn, many of the devout come to take their baths thus hoping to purify their bodies and their hearts. Seen from the opposite bank, the southern slope of the island is made up of a mosaic of temples, *dharmashalas**, houses, aligning themselves in front of the sanctuary of Omkareshvara (Fig. 33 p. 102). Its large white Shikara³⁸, located to the east of the large palace of Maharaja³⁹, dominates the valley.

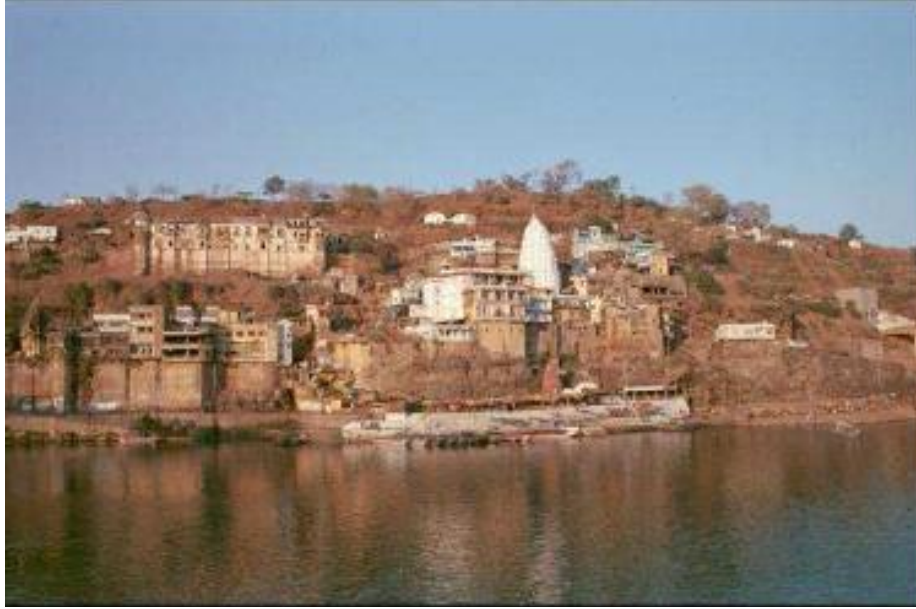
³⁸ Shikara: pinnacle of a temple.

³⁹ King of the locality.



*Fig. 32: Omkareshvara, a holy city of the Narmada. Popular image bought in the stalls of devotional objects. The Narmada goddess is represented on the waters of the river, Shiva above the island between two photographs of his lingas. The part of the city located on the island is flanked by the two bridges: that of right-hand side dating back to 1979, while that of left, suspended, was built in 2003.
Source: Image on sale in the local market, 2005.*

This medieval style city is made up of a confusion of ruined walls, turns, narrow roads, steps going from the top of the plateau up to the ghâts. The commercial roads, where small shops mainly sell devotional objects, are animated by the social diversity of the inhabitants. Many sacred cows and goats wander; monkeys perched on the entry of the bridge mischievously watch for the passersby carrying the offerings for the Jyotirlinga temple. The bridge, built in 1979, essential to the landscape, connects the southern bank of the river to the sacred island. In 2003, a second suspension bridge was built by the NHDC, the manufacturers of the dam, a few hundred meters away from the first, in order to facilitate the mobility and the movement of the pilgrims at the time of the great festivities. **The NHDC integrated its mark in a symbolic and systematic manner and registered the prospect of further progress in the sacred landscape of Omkareshvara.**



*Fig. 33: The island of Mandhata seen of Southern bank. The White Shikara of the Omkareshvara temple marks the landscape of sacrality. Above on the left, is the Raj Mahal (Palace of the king), below, the Koti Tirth ghâts.
Source: CREMIN Emilie, January 2005.*

This space is strongly marked by the territorial identity of the Hindu community, which makes up the prevalent sociocultural group. The Sikh and Jain adivasi communities leave a more discrete imprint in this panorama, but are nevertheless present. **This tumult of religious signs and the diversity of their expressions charge the Omkareshvara landscape with an important sacrality.** Western culture introduced into this space is assimilated by the people and transforms this landscape noticeably.

2. A holy city on the banks of the Narmada River: a doubly sacred place.

2.1 Myths and legends of the holy place.

The originators of the myths bear a relation to the origins. They speak about days past, those of civilizing heroes, a time when relations between the forces which create the world, and the gods who preside over destiny, and men were closer than they are today:

the structure of the cosmos, nature, men, and civilization did not have secrets from the beings which lived then. Thanks to the memories which were transmitted by individuals understand the direction of their presence on earth today (Claval, 2003).

The myths nourish the popular imagination, inscribe themselves on the collective memory, and create sacred places.

The “chaotic and unorganized” space that was at first amorphous and without significance, becomes thanks to the myths an “organized space, cosmicized, which is to say equipped with a center” (Eliade, 1965). Space is ordered then by the places charged with direction which structures the territory (and its cosmicisation) while enchanting it by the magic of the myths. Thus, they make it possible for people to better understand the direction of a territory, a landscape or a place [?].

2.1.1 The myth founders of Omkareshvara-Mandhata:

The origin of *Omka* (Omkareshvara) is given in Chapter 7 of *Skanda (or Shiva) Purana*:

“Suta said: Listen to the origin of Omkara. Once upon a time, the great wise man Narada who was accustomed to offering his devotion to Shiva, in the form of Shiva-linga in the Gokarna Mahabalesvara temple (a holy city close to Goa). From there he visited the Vindhyachala Mountain⁴⁰. He met Vindhya⁴¹ who received him with all the necessary honors.

The wise Narada observed that Vindhya seemed very proud of himself, having regarded himself as perfect in every consideration. Consequently Narada, exasperated by this pride, took a deep breath. When Vindhya noticed it, he asked: “What defects did you see in me to take such a long breath?” Narada answered: “You have everything in you, but Mount Meru⁴² is higher than Vindhyâchala, and he has his place among the gods; that is not true in your case!” Having said these words, the wise Narada disappeared and returned to Gokarna.

⁴⁰ Mountain to the north of the Narmada.

⁴¹ God of the Vindhyachala Mountain.

⁴² Mount Meru is also called Mount Kailash: mountain where Shiva resides.

Vindhya took the measure of the observations of the wise one; he understood his shortcomings as weaknesses and imperfections, and decided to put an end to it. He then started to devote himself to austerity (tapasya) in order to be blessed by Shiva. He was given up to the will of his lord and adored him. As the turbulent Narmada River produced the sacred sound of “OM” while passing through the rocks, Vindhya installed on the banks where Omkara is now located a Shiva-linga which he manufactured out of earth. There he remained motionless and was lost in deep meditation, venerating the lord for six months.

Satisfied with his pure and sincere devotion, Shiva appeared to him revealing his blazing form and asked him to express a wish. Filled with joy, Vindhya prostrated at his feet and said to him: “You are for your faithful always full with grace and kindness. My lord, I beg you to grant your divine directive and your wisdom to me, in order to carry out all my desires. I would be forever grateful to you for your blessing. (He asked among other things to grow to the height of a mountain.). Shiva was somewhat disturbed by this egoistic request. He thought that his blessing could be misused. He answered, “Ô! Vindhya, you are the Master among all the mountains. Now your desires are accomplished! But take care that your thoughts and your actions do not bring any misery to others.”

*The devas^{*43} and rishis⁴⁴ then requested Shiva to remain forever on the Vindhya-chala. Shiva agreed and created two lingas. The first one who appeared in person is known as Omkareshvara. The sound of the Pranava “OM” is present there in its subtle form. The second linga called Amalleshvar is in the form of Sadā Shiva, the eternal lord” (Khanna, 2003). This popular myth enables us to know and explain the origin of Omkareshvara. Shiva would have marked the territory of his presence by giving to the island the form of an “OM” and by depositing a linga there in charge of his presence. The etymology of the toponym “Omkareshvara” is made up of several sacred terms: On one hand that of the Pranava “OM,” then that of “OMkara” which is one of the thousands of names of Shiva. “Eshwar” means “to live inside.” The whole of this toponym would mean “residence of Shiva.”*

⁴³ Gods.

⁴⁴ Rishi: demi-gods.

The vast area which surrounds the island of Mandhata is known as Tapobhûmi which means the land of austerity. One still finds there temples, caves, and ashrams*, wise men, and renunciants (Coquet, 2002).

Another version of the legend tells us that Narada, a great saint, devotee of Shiva, walked one day in the era of Satya Yug on the banks of the Narmada. King Mandhata, a devotee of the gods, then had power over the Earth. The wise Narada saw the island of Omkareshvara shining intensely. Surprised, he went to meet Shiva and Parvati sitting at the top of Mount Meru to ask them how that was possible. He arrived up there while repeating “*Mahesh, Mahesh*” (another name of Shiva). Shiva heard it and asked him why he called and was thus found in Shiva Lok⁴⁵ on Mount Meru. [?] He answered: “*Oh my god, you who know all and you who are everywhere, what is the real miracle of Omkara located in the hills of Mrityu Lok⁴⁶?*” Shiva answered: “*Narad’ Ji, what you saw in Mrityu Lok is my second part. The Narmada River flows around the island. The island of Omkara will remain in various forms and in various materials for four Yugs. The island will be precious stone (manik) in the era of “Satya Yug” (the era of creation and truth), gold during “Treta Yug,” copper during “Dvapara Yug,” and rock during “Kali Yug” (the era of destruction and falsehood).*”

Shri Devarshi Narada saw King Mandhata after having heard Shiva. He advised him to pray to Lord Shiva and to make tapasya (a penance) in his honor, so that the living beings would obtain moksha, knowledge and memory, which will enable him to remain famous during every era. The king was charmed by this idea and learned all the ritual methods (*pûja**) and austerities. Then he manufactured clay lingas and sand OMs (*mandala** and *yantra**) on the southern bank and meditated for long years. Shiva was satisfied with the king’s asceticism and appeared in the clay and sand lingas in the form of the luminous OM to give him its blessing. Shiva asked king Mandhata: “*Why did you call upon me?*” The king opened his eyes and requested of the Lord that all the men could easily obtain his darshan (his vision), to have wisdom and to come close to him, so that the troubles of *Yama*, the god of death, do not make them evil. He asked Shiva to forgive men of all their sins when they take his darshan. Shiva gave his approval and

⁴⁵ Shiva lok: domain of Shiva on Mount Kailash.

⁴⁶ Mitrayu lok: The Earth.

promised to remain in microscopic form in various places on the island, and the physical linga would become the Jyotirlinga which the pilgrims would be able to then adore to flourish and to be fulfilled (Legend received from Mr. Udaya Raj Thada, Omkareshvara historian, in the course of our land [?], from January to March 2005).

This popular legend accounts for the divine presence of Omkareshvara in the land. It also explains the role that King Mandhata played in this process of sanctification.

Another legend better explains the history and origin of the great King Mandhata who reigned, according to local beliefs, over the territory of Omkareshvara. The *rishi* Markandeya⁴⁷ told this legend to King Raja Yudhishtira⁴⁸ during the Mahabharata⁴⁹: *“There was once a powerful king named Yauvanashwa of the family of Ikshwaku⁵⁰*. He performed his royal duty with dignity and also became a mahatma* of great spiritual force. After a long reign, he put his kingdom in the hands of his ministers and wished to take his retirement in the forest, having no son to succeed him. The shattered ministers performed a sacrifice to Varuna⁵¹ and prepared holy water sanctified to the Queen, so that she could drink it and bring a worthy son into the world. One day, the king was seized by a severe thirst and seeking to satisfy it he went to the place where the enchanted water had been kept, put the dish to his lips and drank. Then he returned to his meditation. A hundred years passed, then, by the grace of god, the king gave birth to a son from his right side. The child illuminated himself like the rising sun, and all the gods saw him. “Who will nurse this child?” they asked. Then Indra⁵² plunged her index finger in the nectar of immortality, put it in the mouth of the child and they gave him the name of “Mandhata” (Waring Maw, 1995).*

This legend tells the divine origin of King Mandhata who reigned over Omkareshvara. The Raja Mandhata of the Ikshwaku family, ancestor of Lord Ram*, came to Omkareshvara in order to practice a rigorous *sâdhanâ**.

⁴⁷ Markandeya was a great devotee of Shiva. He wrote the Markandeya Purana and lived on banks of Narmada and in Omkareshwar.

⁴⁸ Great King of the Mahabharatha, father of the five Pandavas.

⁴⁹ Mahabharatha epic founder of Aryan India. Fratricidal battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas.

⁵⁰ Ikshwaku: Royal dynasty descended from the line of the sun and the moon. Ishwaka had 100 sons of which King Mandhata who reigned during the era of satya Yug in Omkareshwar. Other descendants of this sacred lineage are as famous as Ram or Krishna.

⁵¹ God of air, of destiny...

⁵² Goddess of water.

“Mandhata grew, became virile and experimented in all the fields of wisdom and knowledge. He ruled his kingdom justly, thus, no one ever lacked food or clothes. The rain fell and the earth gave abundant fruits. Mandhata came to the banks of the Narmada, in the sacred region of Omkareshvara in the hilly regions of Vaidurya (Vindhya). There he performed meditation, prayers, and sacrifices in the name of the mystical syllable “OM,” in which all the gods reside. Omkara (Shiva) appeared in person and offered a blessing to him. Then Mandhata answered: “Oh Mahadeva^{53*} grant that this Vaidurya hill in the future be called “Mandhata,” a place where the gods and the 12 Jyotirlingas would remain. And Shiva answered: “It will be so” (Waring Maw, 1995). [Read this work***] This is how Shiva remained in various lingas of the island of Mandhata in the form of microscopic particles. Nowadays, this king is deified, and several temples are devoted to him.

The locality and especially the island are sometimes called “Mandhata.” This toponymy thus refers to the foundation myths. The name “Omkareshvara-Mandhata” is also employed to qualify it, expressing the relation between Shiva and the king. **The toponymy of this holy city thus indicates its sacrality.**

Several eras later, during the last Kali Yug, about the 12th century of our era, the island was taken over and devastated by a terrible god Kala Bhairava⁵⁴, and his wife Kali Devi⁵⁵. These terrifying gods nourish themselves with human flesh. They then frightened the pilgrims who deserted the places. Only one person remained on the island of Mandhata, the ascetic Daryao Nath. Following his difficult practices of austerity (tapasya) and his meditations, he was able to lock up Kali Devi, thanks to his spiritual powers, in a cave, the mouth wired shut. One can still see this cave in the escarpment under the Omkareshvara Mandhata temple. Daryao Nath refused to release the malicious goddess until she did promised to abstain from eating human flesh and that she would agree in exchange to worship at the Omkareshvara temple. During this time, her husband, Kala Bhairava, was engaged in human sacrifices. Daryao Nath also succeeded in negotiating with Kala Bhairava that he would receive future human sacrifices at precise

⁵³ Mahadev: the great god, another name for Shiva.

⁵⁴ Destructive avatar of Shiva.

⁵⁵ Parvati, wife of Shiva, in her night goddess form.

times, and that he would stop terrorizing the pilgrims coming to visit the island. Since that time, devotees of Bhairava honored the promise of the saint (Russel, 1997).

2.1.2 Judgments related to the human sacrifices.

To appease Kala Bhairava, the furious incarnation of Shiva, human sacrifices were practiced each year on the day of full moon at the great festival of Kartika (November). Devotees of Kala Bhairava jumped to offer themselves in sacrifice to the temple of the rock of Bir Khila, located at the eastern end of the island off a hill almost 150 m high. At the foot of this hill, near the river bed, another flattened rock was kept carrying the image of the god. At the time of King Mandhata, during Satya Yug, those suspected of crime were judged at this place. The king would have detained criminals there. They were judged there “naturally.” Indeed, if the men were really guilty they fell from this cornice to die on the rock below. On the other hand, the innocent ones survived on the mound and were released after a certain time.

During the era of Kali Yug, Bir Khila came to be regarded as the rock of heroes. It was a high place where the veneration of Shiva was carried out at the cost of human sacrifices. The victims, often young adivasi men, voluntarily condemned themselves even passionately, persuaded that they would be reborn as a Raja (prince of royal blood). These individuals were prepared for this sacrifice as youths. A large crowd looked at them climbing to the top of the mound, drugged and ecstatic, dashing from the back of the temple, falling down and landing, being killed instantaneously on the sacrifice rock. The last sacrifice took place in 1824 [1822], under the watch of an English officer unable to prevent it. The power of Kala Bhairava was higher than the human will. Under British India, human sacrifice was prohibited (Russel, 1997).

A great festival is thus always celebrated in November. From then on, human sacrifices were no longer practiced and were replaced by animal sacrifices. Thus, a proverb that became familiar in the popular speech spoke of a very old horse “that it would be good enough to pass to Mandhata!”. During our study in the locality, other crime stories were told to us. The people of Omkareshvara have a great fear concerning

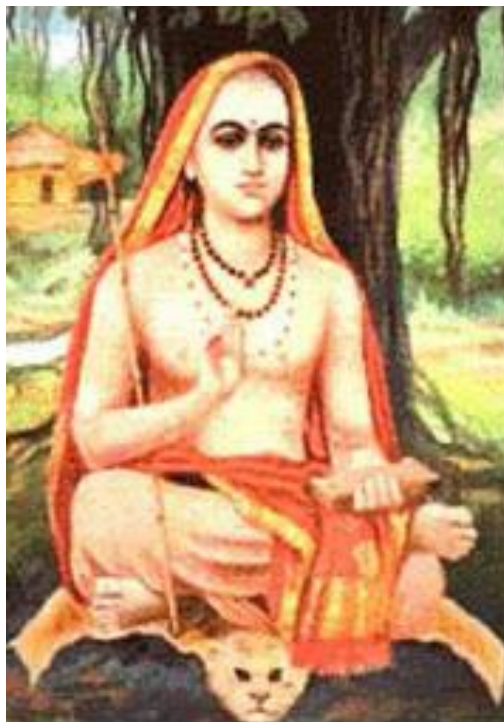
this place and the isolated parts of the island which seem to have been balefully inhabited during the era of Kali Yug, the era of lies and destruction.

The practice of human sacrifice, officially stopped in 1910, shows that the legends are not absurd in the collective conscience of Hindus and the people living around Omkareshvara. All its legends are taken seriously. They gave a direction to the place, a sacred character to the territory.

It is strange to observe that this place of past sacrifice is today just opposite the dam, and may be representative of certain new sacrifices ordered by the gods...

2.1.3. A place of connection between men and gods : the experience of some great saints.

As we explained earlier, the foundation of this sacred place comes from the spiritual experience of the Vindhya Mount and the great King Mandhata. By their deep meditation, Shiva appeared there and founded his Jyotirlinga. The great reforming philosopher of Hinduism, Adi Shankaracharya, also spent some time in Omkareshvara. He met there his guru, Govinda Bhagawatpada, whose ashram was located on the island, in a cave, always present under the Omkareshvara temple now called “Govindeshwar Gufa.”



*Fig. 34: Popular image of Shankaracharya teaching under a sacred banyan.
Source: On sale at the local market, 2005.*

On his arrival, Shankaracharya discovered his master in deep meditation. He turned three times around the cave located under the Omkareshvara temple, and recited a poem of ten verses full of devotion that starts as follows: *“Neither mother, nor father, nor children, nor any other relations are necessary to reach bliss. The feet of my divine guru placed on my head are the highest of the refuges to achieve this goal.”* Moved and admiring, the guru agreed to take him as disciple, grateful to him as the incarnation of Shiva. With the assistance of this great sage, expert in nondualistic philosophy, Shankaracharya, in a period of some months, mastered all the subtleties of the six systems of Hindu philosophy, as well as the most important texts of the doctrine of Védanta.

During an exceptionally strong monsoon, water started to flood the ashram and to penetrate Govindabhadrapada cave, immersed in the bliss of the *samâdhi**. Immediately, Shankaracharya placed a stoneware pitcher at the entry and, miraculously, the uncontrolled river changed its direction (Fig. 35). When the master learned what had occurred, he blessed his disciple in these terms: *“My son, your fame will be imperishable. Just as you could contain tumultuous water in a jug, you will be able to write a book of commentaries containing the essence of all the Védas.”* Then he initiated his disciple; the name Shankaracharya was given to him. He advised him, when he would judge it proper, to spread the wisdom which he had acquired in Kashî, which is now Bénarès. He had arrived there at the age of twelve (Coquet, 2002).



Fig. 35: Low relief cut in the wall of “Govindeshwar Gufa,” illustrating the mythical scene where Shankaracharya saved his guru from sudden mounting waters of the Narmada. Source: University of Missouri-Columbia, February 2005.

The place where Shankaracharya received his education was dedicated to the construction of a temple called Govindeshwar. The two places were renovated by His Holiness Jagadguru Jayendra Saraswati in 1988 to preserve the low reliefs which they contained. [Not right]

Many saints experimented with the presence of Bhagwan (name of the supreme god) in this place at the time of their asceticism, and some entered the state of samâdhi. Ashrams were built on their behalf on the banks of the Narmada, in order to allow other devotees and ascetics (samnyasis) to enrich their spiritual formation thanks to the lessons given by the gurus and to retreat within a framework favorable to meditation.

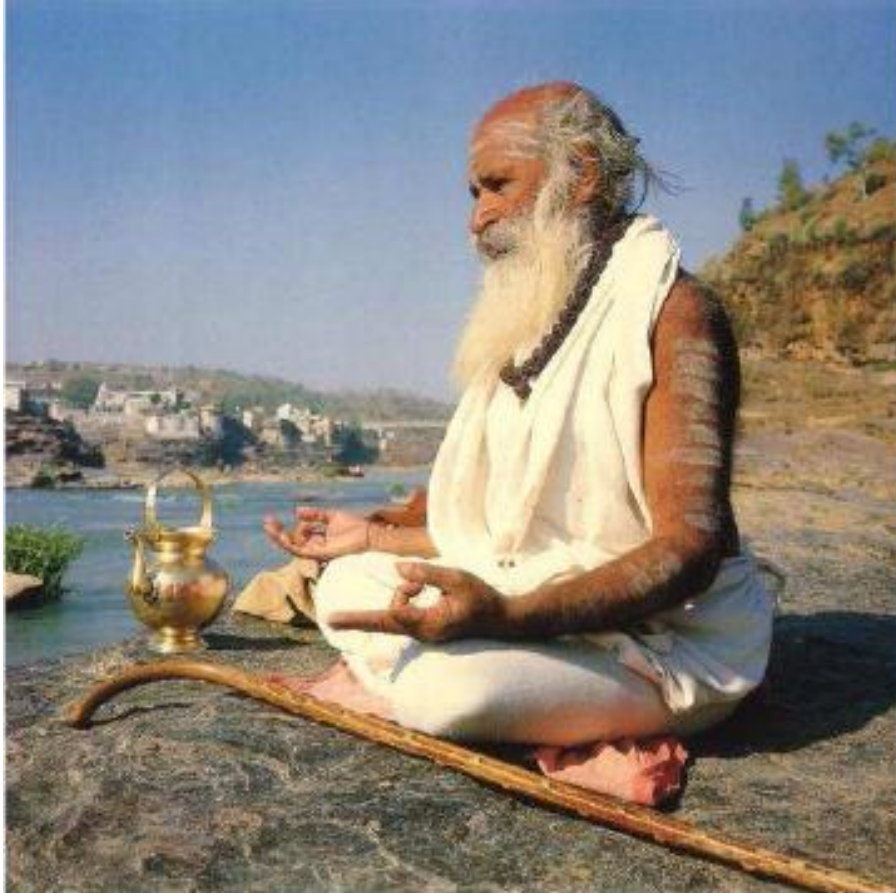


Fig. 36: Baba Rajgunath [!] meditating on the banks of the Narmada at Omkareshvara. Source: Hartsuiker, 1993.

As many of us have emphasized it: **“Omkareshvara is a place of connection between men and gods.”**

2. 2 Omkareshvara, a tirtha of the Narmada.

The landscape of Omkareshvara is punctuated by geosymbols: the Narmada and the temples constitute these markers registering Hindu culture in the landscape and giving direction to this space and the city. It charges this place with memory and identity. The cultural universe is registered in the landscape of these places. The geosymbols express not only the cultural richness of the territories, but also **combine social spaces** (Claval, 2000).

2.2.1 Relation between Narmada and Jyotirlinga (Mata Narmada and Shiva).

Many symbols of the sacredness of Narmada mark the landscape of Omkareshvara. The banks of the river are filled with many ghâts where the pilgrims carry out ritual activities. The bath generally precedes the morning prayers which proceed in the vishnouites or shivaïtes temples above the river, as in that of Omkareshvara, where they receive the darshan of Jyotirlinga and take part in the experience of the divine. **The devout go up to the water of the river to carry out an *abhishekas** (sacred bath) of the linga.**

In addition, many lingas of Shiva, integrated in the installation of the ghâts, are regularly used for the pûjas.

Narmada is also represented in iconographic shapes (paintings or sculptures) of its divinity on the ghâts.

Each Monday evening, the boats alongside the ghâts deposit a *deep dan** net [dīpadāna] (offering of the lamps--butter candle) in the water of the river. The candles float placidly, as the music and hymns (*bhajana**) rise through the loudspeakers of the temples dedicated to Shiva throughout the city. **There is thus a deep interrelationship between Narmada and the linga of Shiva, and a strong complementarity between the two elements, water and earth, one female and the other masculine.**

2.2.2 Jyotirlinga within the Omkareshvara temple.

The temple of Shri Omkareshvara Mahadeva, sheltering one of the 12 Jyotirlingas of India, is located on the southern slope of the island, in the Shiva Puri district, in the center of the town of Omkareshvara (Fig. 40 p. 119).

a) The Shiva Jyotirlinga.

A **Shiva-linga** symbolizes in an iconic way the ideal union between Shiva and his *Shakti** (energy). Linga means “sign,” “mark,” or “symbol.” The linga is a representation of the cylindrical phallus of Shiva, set up in a circular form corresponding to the

representation of a vulva (yoni). It is traditionally made up of three parts of which each represents one of the gods of the trimurti: Brahma, Vishnu, or Shiva. The Shiva-linga can thus appear as a symbol of the divine vital force, procreation, creative energy. The significance of the linga is given in the Mahabharata: “*Késhava (one of the names of Vishnu) always performed worship of Shiva considering his linga to be the origin of the universe.*” Another quotation of the Mahabharata adds: “Because it is large and old, and the source of life and of its maintenance and because the linga is eternal, for this reason it is called, Sthāṇu*.” Sthāṇu means “pillar.” It acts as the cosmic pillar which maintains life in the world. Today this linga is still at the heart of any sanctuary of Shiva (Loth, 2003).

The Shiva Jyotirlinga of the Omkareshvara temple has made the city famous through all India. Jyotirlingas are dazzling lingas born by themselves and immaculate by the presence of Shiva are often compared in the old literature of Skanda Purana to *Jyotikūtas*,* the eternal column of light symbolizing the impregnated god (Shiva). According to a myth, the Jyotirlinga comes from a long fight between Brahma and Vishnu, during which the earth opened, letting a column of incandescent light appear. To find the origin of this light, Vishnu transformed into wild boar and dug in the ground, while Brahma took the appearance of a wild goose and flew up in the air to find the end of it. They found neither the end of it nor the beginning and, approaching the pillar of fire, they glorified it. After one millennium of vain research, the linga of light left Shiva who was recognized as the greatest of all the gods. This linga sign of God is “*Svayambhu**,” which is to say it is self-generated, assimilable to an apparition whose demonstration is not caused by a terrestrial agent, but by the only capacities of the will of the gods (Coquet, 2002).



Fig. 37: Popular image of the Jyotirlinga. The black linga, marked by the sign of Shiva (red dot), is in the center of the representation of the yoni of Parvati, his shakti. A gilded cobra protects them. This illustration does not represent the real aspect of the Jyotirlinga of the Omkareshvara temple.

Source: University of Missouri-Columbia, 2005.

There are officially 12 Jyotirlingas, the “Dwadash Jyotirlingas,” distributed in various cities on the sacred land of India. According to local legend, the sanctified linga of Omkareshvara, expression of Shiva, arrived here following the long asceticism carried out by King Mandhata, during the era of Satya Yug, as described earlier.

An ancient polemic animates the city. Indeed, there is confusion [created by vested interests] concerning the origin of the lingas, one located in the Omkareshvara temple on the island, the other in the Mamleshwar temple facing the Omkareshvara temple on the southern bank. The religious authorities are in disagreement concerning the real Jyotirlinga. The *Jagatgurus*^{56*} of Dwarka, Badrinath, and Kanchi (three Indian holy cities) visited the place recently. They unanimously declared during a council that the Omkareshvara temple contains the true Jyotirlinga. The Omkareshvara temple is located in an auspicious site, at the junction of the Narmada and the Kavéri, in the Shiva Puri district located on the island. Shankaracharya acquired his education from Govindapada there (Omkareshvara Jyotirlinga Temple Trust, 2003).

⁵⁶ Supreme Guru.

A compromise exists, however: it is possible that the two temples are at the origin of two Jyotirlingas or one Jyotirlinga cut in two parts, separated by the Narmada. Certain faithful make the compromise by looking at Omkareshvara as the *Jyoti** (the light, the spirit of Shiva) and Mamleshwar as the *Parthiva** (the physical, the body of Shiva). Thus the pilgrim would have supplemented his darshan while in a return visit to the two temples.

b) The enclosure of the temple.

In spite of doubts concerning whether the temple contains the real Jyotirlinga, the greatest mass of pilgrims first come to visit the Omkareshvara temple on the island. **The Hindu temple holds a paramount sense of the symbolic; it is the divine residence. It represents the whole of the universe in reduction [?]. Its shikara corresponds to Mount Meru, the axis of the world, at the top of which Shiva resides, whereas below the Narmada represents the cosmic ocean (Daniélou, 1977).**

The enclosure of the Omkareshvara Mandhata temple is located at the top of a staircase coming from the ghâts. At the gate, a score of steps goes up to the entry of its *mandapa*⁵⁷*. The pilgrims pass in front of several altars occupied by various gods, Ganesha in a niche on the left side, Sita and Ram as well as other protagonists of Ramayana such as Hanuman. While going up, a niche located at the center, across from the mandapa sheltering the Nandi bull, vehicle of Shiva. The mandapa located at the ground floor of the building is a large hypostyle room, made up of many ancient columns carved and decorated in the low reliefs and corbels decorated with small dwarves. This stage forms the old part of the temple (field research, 2005).

Curiously, the *cella**, the most sacred room of the sanctuary, holding the **Jyotirlinga** is not, as is usually the case in a Hindu temple, directly across from the entry and below the “shikara” pinnacle, representing Mount Meru, but dissimulated on its right side. This original organization would be explained by the presence in the past of a narrow temple providing a home for the famous Jyotirlinga, which, being too close to the

⁵⁷ Hall of prayer.

escarpment remained placed on the side, during the enlargement and construction of a vaster temple which would be able to accommodate a greater number of pilgrims. The extension was thus done to the left of the Holy of Holies, thus the linga is not in the axis of shikara. The cella makes it possible for no more than 5 people to have the darshan of the Jyotirlinga simultaneously and to make him offerings. A circuit filled with water is dug around the linga, in the yoni. An increase of bubbles of air on the surface means, according to local belief, that the god is satisfied with the offerings (Omkareshvara Jyotirlinga Temple Trust, 2003). The Hindu ritual imposes on the faithful to anoint the top of the linga using offerings: melted butter (ghee), milk, flowers, water of the Narmada.



Fig. 38: Front of the Omkareshvara temple. We can distinguish the entry from the building covered by blue canvas, the mandapa located at the first stage (red columns) and the large white shikara. The temple is surrounded by many dwellings, belonging to Brahman families, built on the abrupt slope of the island.

Source: University of Missouri-Columbia, 2005.

The temple is comprised of 5 floors; on the first the second mandapa is held, called Sabha Mandap or the assembly hall (prayer room). It is very recent. Its columns

are round in shape and made of cement. This part, marked by simple and recent architecture, built in the 1980s, is not compatible with the mandapa on the ground floor (Shalini KUMAR, 1993). It holds in its cella the linga of Mahakaleshwar. The second floor has a vast terrace above the Sabha mandapa. It forms a square in front of the small door of entry to the shikara. One can go up there by a narrow stairwell and discover three others cellas, the ones above the others continuing to the top containing one representation of Shiva after another. In each cella, one meets a Brahman or two awaiting pilgrims to receive offerings or to make them a blessing. Thus, the third cella contains Siddheshwar Mahadeva, the fourth contains a temple for Mahadeva, the fifth cella contains Dhaveshwar Mahadeva. Finally, the top of the shikara contains a Dammaruj Dhoja [Dharmaraja dhvaja] trident (field research, 2005).

Three pūjas take place daily in the large hypostyle room of the temple: that of the morning is carried out by the *trust** of the temple⁵⁸, that of midday by the trust of the ancient kingdom of Sindhia⁵⁹, and that of the evening by the priests of the trust of the State of Holkar⁶⁰.

2.2.3 An city organized in a cosmogonic way.

Omkareshvara forms part of the many tirthas on the Narmada River. It also acts as a kshetra, a sacred territory. Just like the holy cities of Katmandu, Banaras, or Pushkar, Omkareshvara seems to have been a place conceptualized then built according to the precepts of **Vāstupuruṣamaṇḍalas, treatises of Vedic architecture and town planning of Hindus on the scale of the city resulting from texts going back to 2000 BC**. These texts define the rules of building a city in an ideal relation with the rest of the world, which is to say the environment, cosmology, and the gods (Hollé, 2001). We find moreover in Omkareshvara many Brahmans having the aptitude necessary to carry out

⁵⁸ Omkareshvara Jyotirlinga Temple Trust: foundation responsible for the maintenance of the temple, its events, and the management of the gifts given by pilgrims.

⁵⁹ The trust of Sindhia depends on the heirs to the ancient kingdom of the Sindhia which reigned at one time over MP.

⁶⁰ Trust of the Holkars: foundation belonging to the former royal family of the Holkars (1728-1948). The Holkar dynasty reigned at one time over this city; its descendants remain particularly attached there.

astrological investigation, which proves that this practice is always used for various needs for everyday life. **According to Hindus, there would exist geographical holy chakras* in the points of force of terrestrial space, particularly favourable to the establishment of a city** (Claveyrolas, 2003). The lands assigned to receive the temples are transformed into true mandalas and become sacred places. *“The human diagram of the temple, the Vastupurushamandala, is a magic diagram on the basis of which a qualified architect can build an effective temple”* (Daniélou, 1977). These treatises indicate that the presence of water is essential for the installation of men. According to Ulrike Muller: *“It is necessary that the city is built along a river...”* (Muller, 1981).

Any specific holy place, city or temple, claims to represent on one scale or another, the totality of the universe. Several sacred places may exist in a territory, but only one truly dominates it and can be regarded as the symbolic center (Eliade, 1965).

The temples thus represent the center of the world for Hindus, around which all human activities concentrate. These are points towards which all the spirits converge, from where emanate all artistic and intellectual activities. *“The temple is a universe in reduction, but an etheric universe, vitalized by the presence of some devas, of which the powerful vibrations are focused by statues, niches, yantra*, and the energies channeled by columns or geometrical figures. The whole of the temple is kept alive by the prayers and the recitations of mantras”* (Coque, 2002).

From the temple come all the blessings. **It is the vital center of the city.**

Thus, in Omkareshvara, the Jyotirlinga would be the spiritual center. This center was, however, not indicated by astrologers according to Vastu Purushas, since both the Jyotirlingas are self-generated lingas [?], whose sites would not have been chosen by human beings. Shiva himself having appeared in these places, he would have left his imprint there. The center of the city is more difficult to define with certainty considering the doubt concerning the “true” Jyotirlinga. Nevertheless, the Omkareshvara temple is the most venerated and can be regarded as the center. The particular nature of this city suggests that the center could also be bipolar: on the one hand there is the Omkareshvara temple Jyotirlinga and on the other hand the Mamleshwar Jyotirlinga. But, wouldn't the

center simply be the Narmada, around which all the temples, the ghâts and the whole city were built?



Fig. 39: The Yantra of Shiva represents cosmogonic space. Geographical division is at the base of all religious construction: in the scale of the temple just as in the city. North-eastern Direction: Ishana, the purifying god. Source: Web, 05.



Fig. 40: The sacred center of the city of Omkareshvara. Source: CREMIN Emilie, 2005.

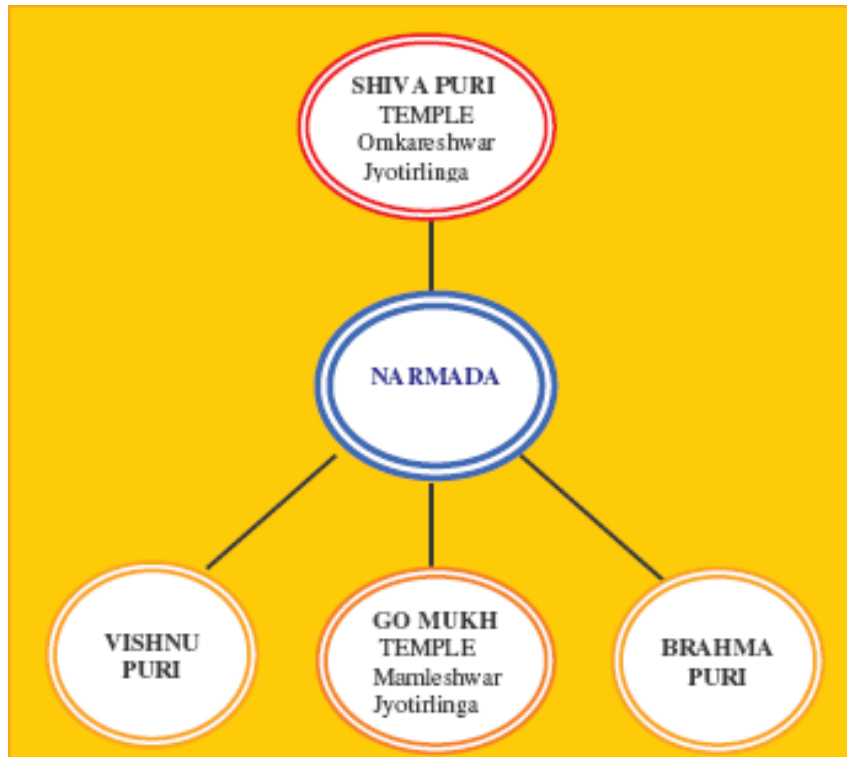


Fig. 41: Organization of the sacred space of the center of Omkareshvara.
Source: CREMIN Emilie, 2005.

The city is organized in several districts called “Puris” of which the three central *Puris* together form the “Tripuri”: Vishnu Puri, Brahma Puri, and Shiva Puri, composing the center of the sacred complex (Fig. 40). The part of the city located on the island is given the name of “Shiva Puri.” The parts located on southern bank are separated by a narrow valley in which the Mamleshwar temple is located. In this gorge, is a brook called Kapila, whose junction with the Narmada is named “Go Mukh” (cow’s mouth) (Fig. 40 p. 119 and 55 p. 143). To the west of this valley is Vishnu Puri, while in the east is Brahma Puri.

This spatial organization of districts shows the importance of town planning of cosmogony, corresponding to the precepts of Vastu Purushas, based on *Trimurti: Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, forming a triangle present in all mandala, the latter representing the entire universe.** We can also distinguish in the urban organization of the city that the two temples (doubtfully) containing Jyotirlingas are located on both sides of the Narmada. The space ranging between these two places is particularly in charged

with sacrality and especially that point equidistant between the two points. It is interesting to note that this point is that of the junction between the Kapila and the Narmada, a very important tirtha.[****] Moreover, this junction is halfway between the Vishnu mandir and the Brahmeshwar Mahadev temple (Appendix 5). The totality of these points forms a mandala (Fig. 40 p. 119) in which all places (temples, ghâts, akhada...) are located, giving a religious direction to the city.

The Jyotirlinga, the space of the Omkareshvara temple, of Shiva Puri, of Tripuri, of the Narmada, within that of India are considered sacred spaces on various scales. It acts as a setting in ruins of sacrilized spaces, accumulating spiritual energy in the multiple religious centers of India of which Omkareshvara is an example.

2.2.4 The Omkareshvara Parikramā.

The circumambulation of a holy place or a sacred territory symbolizes for Hindus a journey around all of India and beyond, around the entire universe. The sacred island in the form of OM is regarded as a linga surrounded by the waters of the Narmada evoking the yoni. Thus, by traversing the island, the pilgrim could be satisfied that he has traversed the whole world. The path of parikrama guiding the pilgrim in *Pradakshinā** (circumambulation) of the sacred island was for a long time only one small dirt path, hardly traced, where it was delicate for the pilgrims to go barefoot. In 1998, it was paved, and many small, makeshift sanctuaries appeared all along the path, signs of an opening to spiritual tourism (Coquet, 2002). Many ashrams and sâdhu or adivasi family dwellings were built around this path during the last decade. Shops held by adivasi families prepare *tchai** (tea with milk) for the pilgrims.

This 16 km path of pilgrimage (Appendix 9) makes it possible to tour the island and southern bank in a few hours. The pilgrim will always walk while keeping the heart of the island on his right. The 12 Jyotirlingas are represented in the circuit. [Very important to note.] While following the path of pilgrimage towards the west, the first sanctuary met is that of “Khedapati Hanuman” a sanctuary dedicated to Sita and Rama, holding temples containing the icons of the protagonists of the Ramayana, as well as other elements such as the *tulasi** shrub, one of the objects of devotion in vishnouite

worship. The following building, the Omkarnath ashram, is dedicated to the Bengali baba, Sitaram Das, who also came from the vishnouite sect. Then, the path follows the flow of the Narmada to the west for 2 km. It goes down below an abrupt cornice, on the southern slope of the island. The pilgrim can then admire nature, the Narmada surrounded by wooded hills. A site is dedicated to the devout who would like to plant a tree in the name of their ancestors on a stripped parcel of earth. The following temple, that of Kedareshwar, contains a linga; this temple calls back [?] that of Kedarnath located at the source of the Ganges in Uttaranchal, to the piedmont of the summit of the Himalayas. A little further, several recent ashrams follow one another, the ashram of the Rama Krishna Mission, the ashram of Ananda Mai [Mayi?], the Gayatri Mandir and his school of Yoga, the ashram of the guru Ramananda Shari [?], and many huts belonging to sâdhus. At the Western point of the island, the Rinamukhteshwar temple of vishnouite worship is dedicated to Sita and Rama, then at the end is Sangam, where it is particularly auspicious to take a purificatory bath. Turning towards the east, the path of pilgrimage goes up a small slope. The pilgrim passes a gate of entry, a vestige of the vast city which formerly existed on the plateau of the island. The next temple was inaugurated recently. Representations of colored plaster gods animate its square and its roof. Then, a path of one kilometer passes through huts of many babas, installed in the teak forest which covers the top of the island. The path goes up further, crossing a second gate, on the top of the island where the Gauri Somanatha temple and others are located, including one recently dedicated to Hanuman, and several ashrams. The path then passes from new ornamented doors of gods [?], then it descends, goes down a valley and passes again by two gates to arrive on the island's second butte where the principal temple is that of Siddhanatha. Then the path goes all the way down the hill again (Fig. 42), passing a last gate, going up towards the eastern end of the island where the temple is found from which the devout of Bhairava sacrificed themselves and finally returns towards the downtown area of Omkareshvara. In this final part, the pilgrim sees many caves inhabited by sâdhus in the hills. The circuit will be complete when the pilgrim arrives again at the Omkareshvara temple to attend the evening pûja (field research, 2005).



*Fig. 42: Path of the parikrama, driving towards the point is of the island of Mandhata.[?] On the second level, one sees the ruins of the temple of sacrifice, on the third level, the dam in the process of construction and its factories.
Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.*

Thus we see, in Omkareshvara there are many temples and holy places to be visited, which requires pilgrims coming to visit the city for a few days to prepare their program well. In each temple they make offerings and pray. The *pandits** (Brahmans) advise that one take three days to make the round of the temples and to carry out rituals there. The pilgrims buy their offerings in the market: coconut, flowers, spices, leaves, fruits (coming from a tree called “bel” and particularly sacred for Shiva), grains to feed sacred fish, colors [kunkuma and gulala] and many items necessary for the ritual. One should not, of course, forget to bring a lot of money. Indeed, the devout must pay the services of the priests (Brahmans/pandits) who officiate at their pûjas. There is no fixed price, but the Brahmans in general try to obtain as much money as they can.

Thus, on the first day, the pilgrims take a purifying bath, then they go to the Omkareshvara temple. The 2nd day, they make the pilgrimage around the island. The 3rd day, they go to the temple of Mamleshwar on the southern bank of Narmada. Thus, they would have achieved the circumambulation and the whole of the ritual.

During the days of great festival, thousands of people follow this program. The path, the ghâts, the temples are then teeming with people. On other days, all is calm, only some pilgrims stroll silently.

2.3 A forgotten sacred complex, a complex sanctified in antiquity.

The top of the plateau of the island to the east is covered with deserted ruins, vestiges of an old city. The massive walls made up of large blocks seem to be able to remain standing here forever. Several large, monumental gates have been present for several centuries, decorated with terrifying gods. This abandoned landscape strongly contrasts with the dynamics of the town of Omkareshvara now animated by the coming and going of pilgrims, tradesmen, Brahmans conjointly conducting religious ceremonies, babas, and tourists. Then what is the history of this abandoned city on the plateau of the island? How do human activities animate the town of Omkareshvara located on the banks of the river today?

2.3.1 Omkareshvara, a holy place marked by India's history.

a) Ancient history.

The history of Omkareshvara can be traced back to prehistoric times by the signs of human life, which go back to 5500 BC (Russel, 1997). A controversy among Indian historians relates to the identification of Omkareshvara or Maheshwar (city of the Narmada located a few kilometers downstream) with the famous ancient city of Mahishmati often mentioned in the Puranas. This city would have been an important political and cultural center of the area (Waring Maw, 1995).

b) Medieval history:

During the medieval period, the city of Omkareshvara was controlled by the vast kingdom of the dynasty of Hindu kings Paramaras of Malwa from 975 to 1295 A.D., known in the past by the name of kings of Avanti, Ujjain contemporary [?]. The dynasty reigned in the areas of Bhopal, Hoshangabad, Nimar, and Khandwa. Old inscriptions

engraved in stone slabs record the concessions and the subsidies given by the kings to the Brahmans of the village. These slabs, found in the Mamleshwar temple (southern bank), retained the names of Jayasimhadeva (reign from 1055 to 1060 A.D.) and of Devapaladeva (1218 to 1232 A.D.). Copper plateaus going back to 1274 are signed in the name of the King Jayavarman II (1255 to 1275 A.D.), forming part of the dynasty of Paramaras kings. These pieces were signed after the kings had taken a bath in the Narmada. These archaeological sources prove that the town of Omkareshvara is an old holy city populated at the origin of the Brahmans (priests). Paramara kings would have built the many of the city's temples (Russel, 1997).

In the year 1165, a Rajput of the Chauhan dynasty, Singh Prithviraj, came from Rajasthan to conquer Omkareshvara-Mandhata. It pushed back in parallel the conquests of the Muslim Muhammadan troops coming from the north. He captured the city, hitherto under the authority of its governor, Nathu Bhil, probably while marrying his daughter. The descendants of this marriage exogamy, between a Rajput prince (of the *kshatria** caste) and a Bhil princess (adivasi), formed the local caste of Bhilalas. The descendants of Nathu Bhil and Rajput Chauhan are now the heirs and the curators of the city-temple on the island of Mandhata. Today, they are always present and are called "Rajah" by custom, whereas their rank and their official title is that of "Bhilala Rao Sahib of Mandhata."

Since 1296, the Muslim conquerors tried to take the Rajput city of Omkareshvara and the other cities of East-Nimar on their way towards the south of India. But the Chauhan Rajputs of Rajasthan supported the local kingdoms and protected the area from Muslim influence. In other battles, the Rajput troops fought with the gond kings (ethnic group of the Gonds), populating the east of the valley (Russel, 1997).

Since the beginning of the 15th century, the area was mainly controlled from Khandwa by the Muslim dynasty of Khalifat Faruqi, descendants of the Tughluq sultans, vassals of the Sultanate of Delhi. These territories were then managed feudally by many barons, semi-independently (Russel, 1997). [All this is taken from the Gazetteer! Does not add to the value of Omkareshvara.] The Mandu fortress located 150 km from

Omkareshvara, on a promontory of Vindhya, was the seat of the Muslim troops controlling the fertile Nimar plain (field research, 2005).

c) Modern History: from Moghol India to the British Empire.

In the middle of the 16th century, the great Moghol Emperor Humayun, after conquering Gujarat, went up the Narmada towards Mandu and Khandwa with the aim of controlling Deccan, the center of India. The Emperor Akbar included this area in his empire from the very beginning of the 17th century. The territory was managed by *zamindars**. The Chauhan kings had, during all this time, kept possession of Omkareshvara-Mandhata. Inscriptions dating from 1654 by Rajah Gopal of Mandhata were found on a gate of a nearby city. Emperor Aurangzeb dominated the area in the second half of the 17th century (1656-1707), whereas the Maratha troops of Great Shivaji started to go up towards the north. Marathas controlled the area during the 18th century with the Peshwa governors. Then the area came in the dispute among the Sindhya Rajputs of Gwalior, the Holkars of Indore, and the Marathas (Russel, 1997). The Holkar dynasty controlled the territories of the Narmada valley from 1728 to 1948, from its capital, Indore. Queen Ahilya Bai of Holkar (1767-1795) carried out many works of restoration and installation at Omkareshvara (field research with Maheshwar, 2005).

Finally the English arrived at the beginning of the 19th century and took command of the region of the district of East-Nimar in 1818, which they controlled from Indore.

In reaction to the British colonialism, the Bhil and Korku communities of the valley gathered from 1878 to 1889 under the charismatic Tantiya Bhil known as “Robin of the Wood” of the area. The movement for independence was very active among the tribal people of the valley (Russel, 1997).

d) Contemporary history:

Since independence in 1947, and the formation of the state of Madhya Pradesh, the city has been managed by a panchayat.

Nowadays, three brothers descended from the Bhilala kings of Omkareshvara-Mandhata: Rao Shiv Charan Singh, Rao Shailendra Singh, and Rao Davendra Singh, perpetuate the tradition of the local kingdom. Each one of these princes also has his own

family. The second son, Rao Shailendra Singh, is currently the mayor, elected official of the panchayat of the city. His brother manages a guest-house where he provides accommodation to tourists. He is little appreciated by the inhabitants of the city because he often acts as a non-believer.

Omkareshvara, was in the center of a history tormented by the various waves of influences which dominated its area. This history marked its landscape because each period left its vestiges or its traces there.

2.3.2 Vestiges of the past forgotten in the landscape of Omkareshvara: the top of the island, an abandoned citadel.

It is certain that Mandhata was formerly a very important city. Omkareshvara has a great number of temples of medieval Brahmanic style more or less in ruin (Appendices 8 and 9). Dating the whole of the vestiges is presently very difficult. According to the research of art historians and government archaeologists, these buildings date from the reign of Paramara kings influenced by the Chalukyan art of the 11th to 14th centuries. According to the local population, these vestiges date from the time of King Mandhata of the Satya Yug era, some billion [?!] years earlier.

a) Ancient ramparts.

The upper portion of the island was formerly fortified. Ramparts of fortification, undoubtedly defensive, encircle the plateau where the ancient religious city was located. One understands the importance of their construction from the historical context of the area in the Middle Ages. Indeed, Muslim troops tried to dominate the area when they went down towards the south. It is to protect themselves from these conquests that the Hindu kings built such fortresses, protected by the natural moat which is the Narmada. Nevertheless, one also finds very old temples on the southern bank. All these walls measure about 30 km long. These last of these are sometimes double or triple; one is on the edge of the plateau whereas the other is a few meters down the slope, according to the

level of curve [?]. They are made up of large blocks of sandy rock, one cubic meter each, which gives them a massive shape. These ramparts belonging in the fort, formally enclosing the top of the plateau. A path and watch towers are still present. Some towers are isolated on the wall while others are associated with gates (field research, 2005).

Several monumental gates currently remain in place. They now invite us to enter the forgotten city of the sacred Omkareshvara complex. They are located at the end of the island, in the center, above the Omkareshvara temple. Other gates disappeared and were replaced by modern doors. These doors are decorated on the sides of great tall reliefs with gods varying according to their positions. According to the path of parikrama, the first gate, called “Dharma Raj” (reign of law), is at the western end of the island. It is still awkward and preserves its ancient character. Before arriving on top of the central plateau, the pilgrim passes a second gate called “the door of the Pandavas” (Pandavas are 5 brothers, protagonists of the Mahabharata). Just afterwards, we discover a representation of Vishnu laid down on its floating Naga snake on the cosmic ocean. The central plateau of the island is opened by four gates marking the cardinal points. The northern gate, dating from the 12th century (Department of archaeology), still supports two great representations of the gods Katyayani Devi and Mahishasura Mardini⁶¹ in a very good state of conservation but recently painted in orange (Fig. 43).

⁶¹ Mahisasur Mardini is a goddess who destroyed the demon buffalo. The myth is allegorical: The gods had fought for one century against the demons which won. The gods, angered, created the goddess and then gave her weapons that made the ground tremble, and after hard combat, it killed the demon.



Fig. 43: Representation of Mahishasura Mardini, the goddess destroying the demon buffalo, in the niche of the northern gate of the island. All around the wall extends from stone in ruin. Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.

The eastern gate is not complete any more, but on one of its sides are the temple of Sita and the vestiges of a sculpture of an ascetic god. The eastern part of the plateau, separated by a valley, is also fortified and contains several gates. The “Chanda Suraj dwar” (the gate of the sun and moon), is a large, monumental door, in ancient sedimentary rock and finely carved. At the eastern end of the island, one passes a large gate called “Bhima Arjun dwar” (Fig. 44) at the top of a high hill looking at the Narmada river towards the east. The low colossal reliefs on each side represent Kali Devi and Kala Bhraihav, incarnations of Parvati and Shiva in their terrible aspects.



Fig. 44: Representation of the destructive god, Bhairava, in a niche of the gate to Bhima and Arjuna, the eastern side of the island. Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.

Other gates located above the royal palace are difficult to reach, so they are abandoned, but they remain in the landscape as the vestiges of a mysterious city.

b) Many ruins of Hindu temples are organized on the island.

In this defensive enclosure, around fifty temples were built during the Middle Ages by the kings of the city. When the last of the “Great Moghols,” Aurangzeb (1658-1707), was engaged in a conquest for Deccan with his troops and leading a campaign towards the south of India, he knew to speak about the prosperity of the island of Mandhata. He could not resist the temptation of aiming his conquest at a city so rich in spoils. He vastly plundered the goods in the Hindu cities; his troops destroyed and devastated many temples and their iconographic representations (statues, low reliefs). Acts of mutilation were very frequent in all the areas which were conquered by the Muslims (Frederic, 1994). This history is still visible in the landscape of Omkareshvara.

With the end of the threats, the citadel was surely abandoned by its inhabitants who settled closer to the river, near the water on the bottom of the slopes. Many temples are in ruins there today, completely abandoned, leaving on the ground vestiges of architectural and decorative art of great quality. These places are now occupied the vegetation, where trees grew sometimes even in the center of the cella, became the favorite playgrounds for brawls between dogs and monkeys. The parts of the temples exposed in bulk are however carved with great finesse. One can still observe the gods who decorated the sanctuaries.

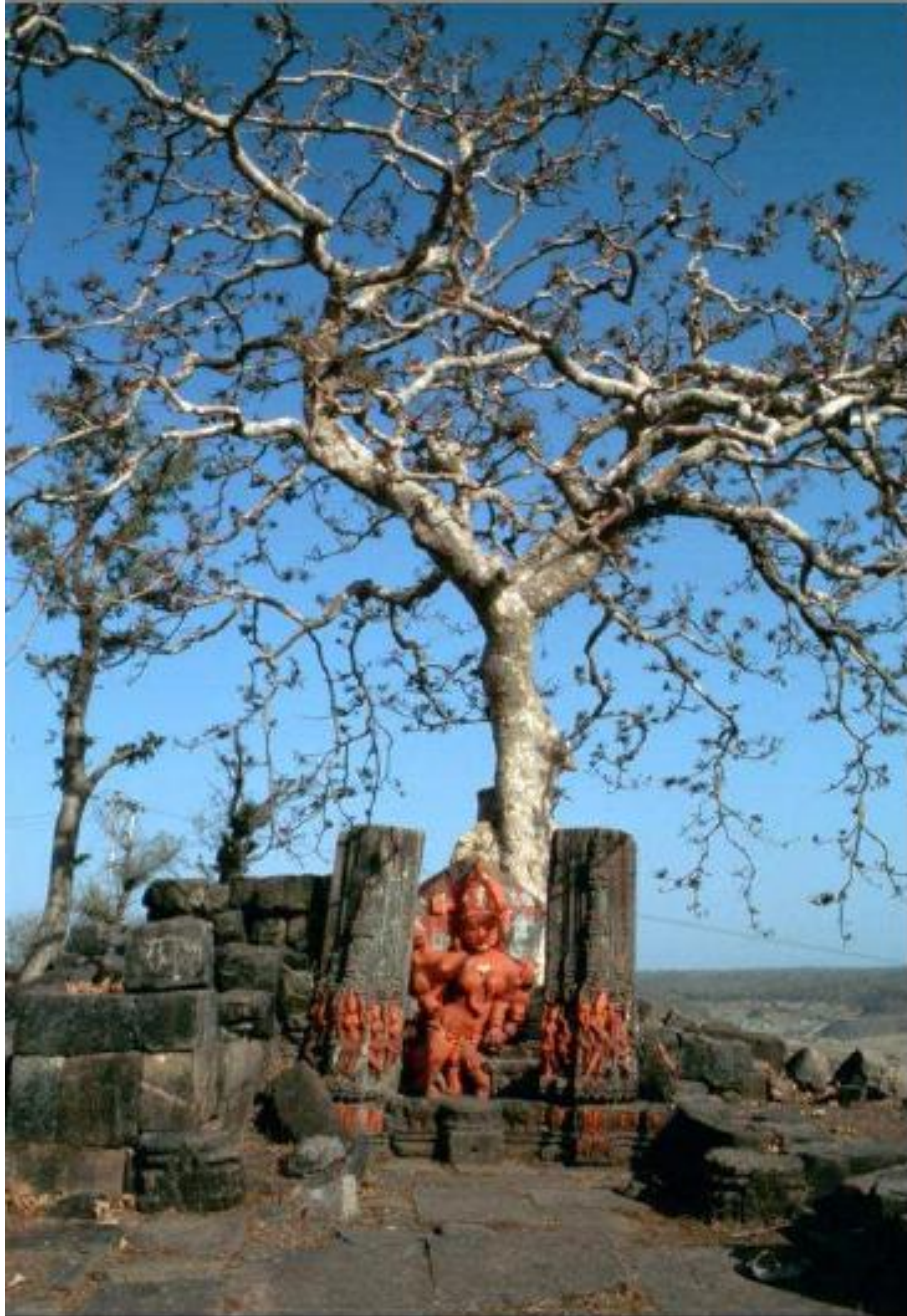


Fig. 45: Ruins of the Kunti Mata, at the eastern point of the island.

Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.

The temple of Kunti Mata, dating from the 13th century, at the eastern end of the island close to the Siddhanatha temple stands decorated near a large tree. The statue of the goddess remains in the cella, its arms were mutilated, but its silhouette remains admirable. This temple gives a supernatural appearance to the landscape (Fig. 45 p. 132).

The Sita Mata temple, on the other part of the plateau, contains no more sculptures. Its shikara is scattered on the ground, but its mandapa is still in place, although it is neither used nor maintained.

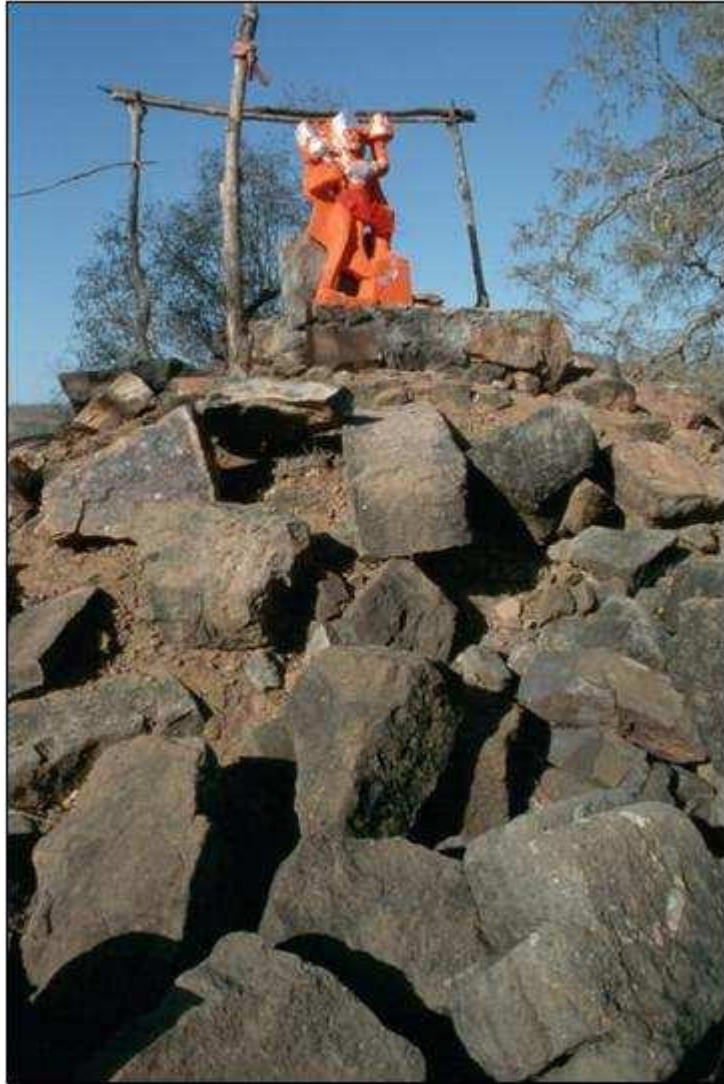


Fig. 46: Recent representation of Hanuman posed at the top of a mound of stones, belonging to an ancient temple. Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.

Other temples in ruin form stone mounds of which some are today used as bases to support the representation of gods, like that of Hanuman in the west of the island (Fig. 46). One thus finds dozens of vestiges of temples pointing out the prior richness of this Hindu city isolated on the island of Omkareshvara-Mandhata. Certain temples are better

preserved and remain under the responsibility of the Department of Archaeology of the Central Government or the state of Madhya Pradesh.

The temple of Siddhanatha, today in ruins, was formerly the most prestigious of all the temples of Omkareshvara-Mandhata. It is located on the plateau, in the eastern part of the island. Its architecture has a very original and complex style compared to the Brahmanic medieval architecture of the other temples of the city. This vestige of a shivaïte temple was protected and classified as a historic building by Lord Curzon (Viceroy of India) in 1902 under the British Empire. He was also responsible for the work of restoration completed in his time. Nowadays the temple is still used by some Brahmans and remains under the protection and the conservation of the Madhya Pradesh Department of Archaeology in Bhopal.



Fig. 47: The Temple of Siddhanatha. Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.

When it was intact, this temple was to have a highly gracious and imposing structure. The plan of the temple is remarkable. It corresponds to a definite mandala by the *Vastus shâstras**, representing the universe, occupied by the gods, projected on the earth. The cella (*garbha-griha**) (garbha = embryo) is placed in the center slightly down

from the threshold instead of being on the side, as is often the case. It is open on the four cardinal directions, and also comprises a fifth vertical axis connecting the sky to the ground. Its original roof, formed of 5 shikaras in a cuneiform organization, is now destroyed. A tall shikara (a representation of Mount Meru) was to be in the central part above the cella, surrounded by four other smaller porches [?] above. The porches [?] were supported by fifty 4.5 m high columns at the architrave. The ornamentation was carried out with much precision and great talent of expressivity. The columns are finely carved, and their corbels represent various dwarves [?]. The framing of the four entrance doors of the *cella*, located at the center is decorated with goddesses, *Yakshinis**. The base (*adhithâna*), is massive, decorated by a frieze of low reliefs made up of couples of elephants in various postures 1.5 m in height (Omkareshvara Jyotirlinga Temple Trust, 2003). Their heads were almost completely cut off probably at the time of the attack by the Muslim troops of the Moghol Emperor Aurangzeb. The unit was built starting from large blocks of sedimentary rock, assembled without mortar. This building in ruin remains a vestige expressing the size and the cultural richness of the kingdoms which resided in this place.

There is no specific data concerning the date of its construction. The stylistic characteristics of the sculptures which decorate it nevertheless make it possible to estimate that it was built in the 12th century, if we compare them with the medieval art of the center of India (Stierlin, 1998).

Two of the columns [!] are preserved at the Museum of Nagpur. The rest are mutilated. The building was covered by a Muhammadan-style dome, which was removed later by the government, not appreciating its esthetics, and is now covered by a roof of rock slabs seeming more compatible and adapted to the basic building (Russel, 1997).

On the top of the island, in its central part, is **the Gauri Somanatha temple**. Somanatha means “Lord of the moon,” one of the names of Shiva. It is a three floor temple. The architecture of the temple is much simpler than that of the Siddhanatha temple. Its plan is star shaped. The cella is on one of its sides and opens towards the east, the direction of the god Indra (the god of the sky). Its shikara is composed of two floors

consolidated by an internal brick structure. This temple dates from the 13th century, according to the Department of Archaeology.



Fig. 48: Temple of Gauri Somanatha, the Nandi bull is protected under the blue préhaut. [tent?] Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.

On the ground floor there is a large, black marble linga measuring 1.80 m tall. According to the local legend, this linga was formerly a pure, white marble cylinder having the capacity to reveal the kind of future birth of the one who would look at his own reflection in it.

When the Moghal Emperor Aurangzeb arrived at Omkareshvara he went to the Gauri Somanatha temple, and observed the linga to check this legend. He saw in it his own future image—that of a pig. He was furious. Burning with rage, he had the linga thrown in fire. The white marble linga became black (Omkareshvara Jyotirlinga Temple Trust, 2003). Certain residents add that the emperor broke the linga from which blood flowed. Thus the linga was not destroyed, but became the black and brilliant pillar of today.

This popular history expresses the resentment of the Hindu population vis-à-vis the Muslims who dominated this area for a certain time.

Facing the entry of the temple, an enormous effigy of the Nandi bull “the merry one” carved out of white marble represents the mounting [?] of Shiva. Around the temple, the Madhya Pradesh Department of Archaeology created a small open air museum, displaying a collection of works, sculptures, and low reliefs found in Omkareshvara in the temples in ruins. They are varied and represent various gods (field research, 2005).

The population of Omkareshvara is not interested obviously in its historical inheritance, since the majority of the temples is in crumbs, scattered on the ground. Perhaps this phenomenon would be explained by a superstition spread within the Hindu communities which says that a destroyed temple could contain demons. However, the government does not invest either in the restoration and the maintenance of the historic buildings (field research, 2005).

It is possible to reach Gauri Somanatha by strongly sloping steps composed of 247 steps on the southern slope of the butte. This staircase consists of solid blocks. At the top one finds a new gate inhabited by a god. This staircase marks the landscape of Omkareshvara because it is impressive and is emphasized by its white paint (Fig. 49). Just to the side, the inhabitants of Omkareshvara composed a large OM visible from the southern bank, on which each year they place cow dunge, which they ignite during the festival of the Narmada in the month of February⁶².

⁶² Cf. The festivals of Omkareshvara, the Narmada Jayanti p. 174.



Fig. 49: The steps which lead up to the temple of Gauri Somanatha and the great OM, ignited each year at the time of the Narmada Jayanti festival.

Source: University of Missouri-Columbia, 2005.

[The right part reading “Narmade Hara” is cut off!]

c) The scattered vestiges in the town of Omkareshvara.

The Shiva Puri district of the town of Omkareshvara is located on the southern slope of the island's plateau. The city is built in several levels connected by sloping steps. This district mixes the old vestiges with the recent infrastructure, forming a confusion of sections of wall. One also finds there parts of a rampart with richly carved gates, the vestige of an old royal palace and small abandoned temples.

The Pataleshwar temple, for example, is near the Omkareshvara temple, Shiva Puri. It is a small, 13th century Shivaïte temple, composed of a cella of 3.5m² with a small mandapa in front. It stands on a 1.5 m tall base with small steps making it possible to reach the temple. Its interior and exterior are elaborately carved, illustrating mythological scenes. This temple is abandoned. It is visited only at the time of major festivities. It belongs to the Trust of the Omkareshvara temple. Many other very old temples are integrated in the houses (Shalini KUMAR, 1993).

On the opposite bank, the same phenomenon prevails--the ancient collapsed palaces, the most insulated and the oldest temples are forgotten. As a whole, these old vestiges are little maintained; the vegetation takes over the cracks of the stones. The local people seem to be interested in building anew rather than taking care of the old structures. The modern temples are more attractive like the Omkareshvara temple to which a concrete stage was recently added and the shikara of white paint was recovered, modifying its original appearance, but expressing the intensity of the site. The temples with the highest attendance underwent the same treatment. The INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) drew up a precise list of these historic buildings in 1993, which concludes that these vestiges as a whole are badly maintained or are restored in an improper way.

Thus it appears that the dynamics of the town of Omkareshvara has advantages concentrated at the ghâts of the Narmada, the most popular temples (mainly those of Jyotirlingas) and on the recent buildings like the big ashrams built since 1970.

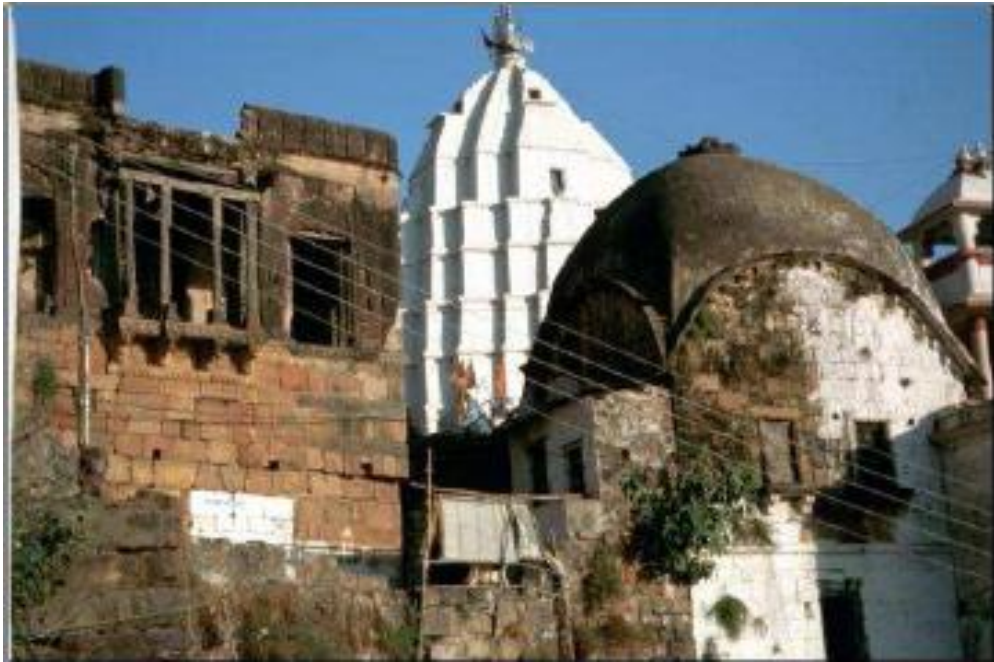


Fig. 50: A landscape made up of a mosaic of buildings of various styles and different ages. On left, vestiges of the old royal palace (16th century); on the right, the "laboratory" of Brahman astrology; behind, the shikara of the Omkareshvara temple Jyotirlinga. Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.



Fig. 51: Vestige of a 19th century palace built by the royal family of the Holkars at Vishnu Puri. Source: CREMIN Emilie, March 2005.

2.3.3 Banks of the river: a sacred complex in full activity.

Whereas certain parts of the sacred space of Omkareshvara are forsaken today, the Shiva Puri district on the island, the districts of the southern bank, and the banks of the river are very dynamic. The old bridge, connecting the two parts of the city, is always crowded by pedestrians crossing the river from one bank to another.

a) Shiva Puri and the path of parikrama.

The ghâts constructed on the Narmada and the Jyotirlinga temple which dominates them complement one another and form the principal centers of attraction for the town of Omkareshvara, since they attract all the pilgrims coming to visit the sacred city. There are more than eight different ghâts, built between ancient times and now in Omkareshvara. The ghâts of Koti tirtha, Chakratirtha, Go Mukh, and Kewal Ram are the oldest (Appendix 5). All these ghâts can accommodate nearly 6,500 people at the time of the great events such as that of Narmada Jayanti (birthday of Narmada) that are held mainly at the edge of water.



Fig. 52: The Chakratirtha ghâts. The bridge built in 1979 under the second five-year plan, has new temples at the bottom. Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.

The royal palace of Omkareshvara-Mandhata is located above the ghâts, clinging to the hill on the southern slope of the island (Appendix 5). It is still inhabited by the family of the royal descent. Its function is restricted to this family, since there is only one courtyard open to the public; the remainder is private. The presence of this building is, however, prominent in the landscape since it demonstrates the temporal order which controlled the city in the past and the spiritual order represented by the temple. The building is relatively well maintained. Built in the 17th century by the Bhilala kings, descendents of the Rajput kings of Rajasthan, it was constructed in a high and difficult to reach place, protected by the natural moat which was formed by the Narmada and fortified walls of the ancient city, which lies in ruin today. The architecture of the palace is strongly influenced by the Rajput style of Rajasthan. The interior is composed of three courtyards surrounded by galleries of the fine columns around which the apartments are built. The ceiling of the room where the throne of the king is located is richly ornamented. Pavilions and corbelled *chattris** arise on the angles of the massive architecture of the façade, giving it more character and smoothness. From his room's

chattri, the king has a direct view of the Omkareshvara temple courtyard. The whole of the building covers a surface of 450 m² (field research, 2005).

The Ashapuri temple is an old renovated temple connected culturally with the royal palace because it contains the family gods adored by the adivasi people and the Bhilala caste. It is located above the palace in the eastern part of the island. Among other things, we found a divinized representation of King Mandhata there. The pujas are frequently organized there. The building to the side is used for the residence of the devout (Omkareshvara Jyotirlinga Temple Trust, 2003).

The street which comes from the old bridge and meets the Omkareshvara temple is animated by the tradesmen selling devotional objects. Among these shops one finds a particular temple: that of Yashvant Vachanalay. This temple is dedicated to the memory of the ancestors of the Raja and of King Mandhata. The temple's mandapa is used as a room for public reading, a small library open on the street.



Fig. 53: Cella of the temple dedicated to King Mandhata and his court, along with other sovereigns who have reigned in Omkareshvara. Source: CREMIN Emilie, March 2005.

In Shiva Puri, a Sikh temple, *Gurudwara**, was built on the street of the Omkareshvara temple at the beginning of the 1980s in commemoration of the visit of Shri Guru Nanakdeo, representative of the Sikh religion, to the Omkareshvara temple during his vast travels around India (Omkareshvara Jyotirlinga Temple Trust, 2003). This building is now visited by Sikhs as well as by Hindus. It accommodates the Sikh community of Khandwa and Indore in its dharmashala at the time of the great festivities. All the Sikh festivals are celebrated there. This Gurdwara functions thanks to the collection of gifts like the Hindu dharmashalas and ashrams. Lodging and meals are free there. A second dharmashala is located on the principal street of Vishnu Puri, Jaypee *chowk**. The Sikh community remains however a small minority in the city since it is represented only by one family, that of Mr. Sunder Singh, who owns a general food store on the principal street (field research, 2005).

b) Southern bank: Vishnu and Brahma Puri.

The southern bank is also very animated. The city could develop on it because the land is easier to get there as compared to the hills of Shiva Puri. Moreover, this district is connected with principal access roads (Appendix 5 and 9).

Many ancient temples are located at the mouth of the Go Mukh and above the hills. Along the Narmada, many ghâts, temples, and ashrams were built recently to accommodate the mass of visitors at the time of the festivals.

Vishnu *mandir and the Brahmeshwara Mahadeva temple** (Appendix 5), two ancient stone temples of 13th century⁶³ are face to face on both sides of the mouth of the Kapila, where many other temples are located, the most important among them being that of Mamleshwar. These small temples are visited by many of the devout during the festival days.

⁶³ Indications of the Department of Archaeology on a panel beside the temples.



Fig. 54: Brahmeshwar Mahadeva temple in the Brahma Puri district. It was built by the Paramara kings in the 13th century. It can be found facing Vishnu mandir. On the island, on the other side of the Narmada, is the Omkareshvara Jyotirlinga temple. The three temples represent the trimurti: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, forming a triangle in the sacred space of the city. Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.

The confluence between the Kapila creek [?] and the Narmada is marked by a small holy place, where a Shiva linga is permanently sprinkled by spring water. This water is sacred and is supposed to bring many benefits to those who drink it. A small tank is located 1 km upstream, the Trishul Bahu kund. It is supposed to be a re-emergence that Shiva would have pierced with his trident. A temple and a basin for ablution are located in this place.

Ancient ghâts were constructed along the mouth of the Go Mukh. These central ghâts, facing the Jyotirlinga temple are often used to carry out funerary rites. Families come to make the ritual as directed by the Brahmans. This rite, performed on the ghâts of the Narmada, expresses the importance of the river for Hindus who come from all over India to offer to it the last ashes of their close relations (Fig. 55).



Fig. 55: Ghât of the Go Mukh. Source: JACSES & Urgewald, 2004.

The Mamleshwar temple is located in the narrow mouth of Kapila, facing the Omkareshvara temple. It is classified as a historic building and remains under the protection of the Madhya Pradesh Department of Archaeology. This linga would have been forgotten when the locality was under the terror of Kala Bhairava. The entire Go Mukh gorge was then covered by the dense forest. The temple was given up and the linga forgotten in its ruins. At the end of the 18th century, one of the Peshwas restored the Mamleshwar temple; the lost linga was then rediscovered. The Bénares pandits recognized it as authentic, as Daulat Singh, the king of Mandhata of the time. The temple's portico walls contain inscriptions going back to 1063 A.D., proving the presence of the true Jyotirlinga. [??? The writer here is merely copying some fairy tales. MLN]. This temple remains the second most visited temple in holy city, but it receives many fewer pilgrims than that of Omkareshvara Jyotirlinga. Its location, isolated in the gorge, makes it less valued than that of Omkareshvara. Private rituals are practiced by individuals there.

This temple, of traditional Brahmanic architecture, was restored several times. Other, smaller temples were built around by again employing materials coming from other ruins. Fragments of ancient temples remain scattered around (discussion with the person in charge for the Department of Archaeology—not properly recorded).

The temple of Vishnu located at Vishnu Puri, above the gorges of the Narmada and Kapila, is a Brahmanic-style temple from the 13th century. A high shikara rises at the top of the cella. At the front of the temple is a mandapa, open on three sides, looking towards the west contrary to the majority of the other temples. It is in a courtyard. This temple is inhabited; rooms available all around and in an ashram of which it forms a part. It is supported by the Nirvani *akhada** trust, which has its buildings in the vicinity.



Fig. 56: Vishnu Mandir at the time of Shivaratri festival. Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.

d) The northern bank of the Narmada: the village of Siddhavarakuta.

The village of Siddhavarakuta is situated on the northern bank of the Narmada (Appendix 9). [This statement raises a question!] Just at this side was located the village of Panthiaji until recently (Fig. 29 p.93). This village disappeared from the map of the

area, since the inauguration of the dam, giving its place to the cement factories and the storage hangars of the building site. One can consider that this bank formed part of the whole complex of the sacred space of Omkareshvara, because in this site there were several Hindu temples and a large Jain sanctuary. The villagers were evacuated and the temples destroyed [?] or moved according to the techniques of the calepinage⁶⁴ (Fig. 58). The village of Siddhawarkuta was saved, but its environment, however, was modified since it is located today in the middle of the building site. [The writer is terribly prejudiced—deadly opposed to the building of dam! She has just only one war-cry—Damn the dam!]

Before the construction of the dam, there was here a large 5 m high relief of Kali Devi, [still under construction and terribly mutilated] in a ravine [that was a kind of workshop] between two Hindu temples (located between the two villages of Panthiaji and Siddhavarakuta) where a brook called Ravananala ran. It was finely carved, having ten arms; among its ten hands it held many weapons, such as a club, a sword, and a skull. Her thin waist wore a tight belt; her emaciated stomach expressed its insatiable hunger for the human flesh. A scorpion was located above. The goddess carried a collar formed by a snake. [Captain James Smith has described it very well.] This appalling goddess does not reside there any more, but only in the collective memory of the inhabitants of Omkareshvara. [Prompted by the enemies of dam construction. His Master's voice!] We are unaware of the fate which was reserved for it since the beginning of the work (field research, conversation with the local people, 2005). Other sculptures are now located in the center of the building site (Fig. 87 p.191).

The vestiges of a Vaishnava temple of the 13th century, known by the name of "Chaubis Avatara," were also located on this bank. It contained sculptures illustrating 18 of the 24 incarnations of Vishnu (Russel, 1997). According to the MP Department of Archaeology, these vestiges were terribly damaged before their complete displacement by the manufacturers of the dam. Today this very famous temple was taken apart, calepined, and awaits its rebuilding 2 km further away, at the back of the new colony for the employees of the dam (field research, 2005) (Fig. 58).

⁶⁴ Calepinage: techniques of historic building conservation consisting of the classification of the stones of a building to rebuild it indentially in another site than that of origin.

[It has been restored, my dear writer!]

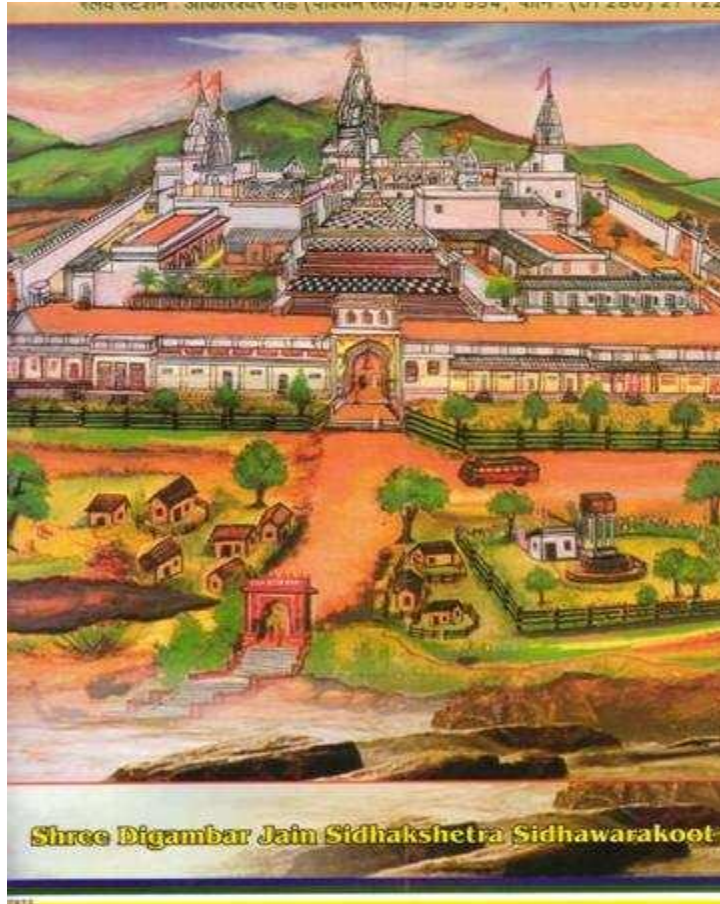


Fig. 57: Pashupatinath temple, built in the 13th century, destroyed by the bulldozers at the time of the requisition of the grounds of Panthiaji to vacate the site of construction of the dam. Source: JACSES & Urgewald, 2004.



Fig. 58: Temple of the 24 Avatars, "Chaubis Avatar," moved and currently on standby to be rebuilt. Source: CREMIN Emilie, February 2005.

The Jain sanctuary, “Shree Digambar Jain Sidhakshetra,” is located in the village of Siddharwarkut. There are several Jain temples in the enclosure of the sanctuary. The oldest dates from the 15th century. Others were built recently by the members of the community. Jain sages particularly appreciated this place for the beauty of its landscape and its environment, facing the junction between the Narmada and Kavéri. The sacrality of this place is registered in many ancient Jain texts and books. One of these works, the Nirvana Khanda, tells that two *Chakrawarti*^{65*} called Madhava Chakrawarti and Satan Kumar Chakrawarti reached spiritual awakening in this place. Other ascetics also found awakening there after having killed their bad internal energies with the weapon of thorough meditation. They were filled of knowledge and wisdom and were regarded as “*Siddhas*”^{66*} (Jain Trust, 2004).



⁶⁵ Chakrawarti: Jain ascetic.

⁶⁶ Siddhas: Magicians.

Fig. 59: Illustration of the Jain sanctuary of Siddhavarakuta. Source: Trust of the temple, 2005.

In 1935, Shree Mahindra Kirtiji, a devout Indore Jain came to visit the surrounding area. He found the Jain sanctuary in ruin, and, by visiting neighborhoods, he found sculptures dating from the 15th century. A few years later, other members of the Indore Jain community returned to this place to begin the restoration of the sanctuary. They again gave life to this ancient site, which again became an important place of pilgrimage. One of its principal temples is called “Bada mandir ji.” The Jain pilgrims visiting Siddhavarakut were impressed by this temple and filled with devotion, they decided to invest in the construction of others around them as well as dharmashalas to accommodate the visitors (Jain Trust, 2004).

Today the enclosure of the sanctuary is completely in order with steps going up towards the square, 15 temples, 2 dharmashalas, and a comfortable guest house. The available lodging can accommodate more than 350 people. All the medical infrastructure necessary is installed. The place has electricity and is connected to telephone lines. An administrative office, a canteen, and even a store make it possible for the sanctuary to operate autonomously. All this is managed by the temple committee. This sanctuary forms a complete unit, resembling a small village, now having a modern appearance.



*Fig. 60: Enclosure of the Siddhavarakuta Jain sanctuary. Several temples are organized around the square. On right-hand side, there are dharmashalas.
Source: CREMIN Emilie, March 2005.*

Before the beginning of the construction of the Omkareshvara dam, this place was calm. It profited from pleasant surroundings favorable to meditation. According to the Jain community, by visiting this place once in one's life one receives the blessing of God. Certain of the devout continue to offer donations to the sanctuary to expand the dharmashalas and to maintain them. The Jain community also built a dharmashala at Omkareshvara in the Vishnu Puri district. The Indore and Khandwa Jain communities participated politically in the development of the city when they were elected. They are also responsible for the sanctuary. Following their request, an asphalt road was built between Siddhavarakuta and Barwaha (Fig. 29, p. 93). Indeed, the devout complained about not having access to the temple during the rainy season. The Siddhavarakuta sanctuary was noted in 1951 as being under the protection of the "MP Public Trust [Trusts ?]Act," the public foundation of Madhya Pradesh (Jain Trust, 2004).

CONCLUSION:

The sacred territory of Omkareshvara supports many myths, which are manifested in the symbols of Jyotirlinga and the Narmada, having fundamental importance in the representations of its inhabitants and the pilgrims who come to visit it, since it acts as the goal of their pilgrimage. Not only many Hindu temples, but also a Sikh temple and a Jain sanctuary make it possible for the faithful to meet there. Certain Hindu temples are very active, whereas others, subjected to the destruction of time, remain in the landscape as vestiges of the past. **The holy city modified its organization of space during its history. We can note this by observing its landscape. It moved from top of the island to the banks of the Narmada. The citadel, located on the plateau, is now abandoned, whereas life is active on the southern slope of the island and the southern bank of the Narmada where a more functional city is built.**