

For the duration of our trip, we became part of the life that thrives because of the existence of the river and forests. The animals, the mountains, the temples, the river, the rock forms – all are a living, dynamic, enthralling part of the Valley. Each one of these is a person, so characteristic and distinct.

Through history and civilizations, the people of the Narmada Valley have always tried to maintain their distinct identity and they continue to do so even today.

What really is the essence of this valley? The Narmada valley is held high in regard by everyone – from a scholar to a lay person. It is the belief that the people have towards the river that binds them together. This force of nature has created harmony, possessiveness and pride among the people of Madhya Pradesh like no other force of authority or communism or terror can ever hope to do. The people we came across were genuine, humble, willing, dedicated, simple – and they all linked themselves and their success or their hope to the river. These people may not know theory or facts about the river, they might fumble with the length, the end point, the number of dams, the flora and fauna or the geology. But all these people, definitely have an incident to share about themselves and the river, about their personal experience of the river. It is this that moved us, this faith that overwhelmed our hearts and minds.

The Valley has businessmen, politicians, people in service, housewives, saints, priests, professionals, and tribal people. In front of the river, all these are equal.

The following is the first impression, the first glimpse about the places we visited and the kind of people we met at each place:

At Bhopal, the people were modern, there was English speaking crowd, hotels, public transport, restaurants, malls, big office buildings... it had the hustle bustle of a city, a growing one.

Hoshangabad, was a town, where we could walk through the streets and reach the farthest distance, without causing too much pain to our limbs. The people were friendly, all willing to talk about the river, enthused by our project. Their shops, little eateries, *tapri's*, *paanwaalas*, *chaat s* *talls*, all in some or the other way had a representation of the river. Some were named 'Narmada' and others by different names of the River, some had the name of her characteristics, some names were related to Lord Shiva, some to the famous ghaats in Hoshangabad. There were scores of people at the ghaat in the evening, especially when the Sun went down. People were walking, laughing, praying, worshipping, talking, catching up or earning their bread. It was a spectrum of colours – with the diya's in the pitch dark abyss formed by the water – as if floating on nothingness or with the noise that the people created and the river so humbly drowned... the Narmada temple at Sethani ghaat had activity all along, hardly any that came to the ghaat went back failing to do this *darshan*.

Khamda, the village on the way to Itarsi, near village Saptawa, on the banks of the Tawa river, was quiet, lonely and empty. Mainly inhabited by the Gond tribe, our visit here was the first close contact with the tribal people. As we went in the middle of the day, most of the men and women had gone to the field to work.

Interestingly, it was also 'market day' at Saptawa. The way from Khamda to Saptawa can be crossed only by boat. After the boat ride of 30 minutes, there is a stretch of road for about 3 kms. These Gond's, the ones who often sold their vegetation at the nearby market (as it was bigger and comprising of mixed population) either covered this distance by foot or some of them were lucky enough to have cycles.

The observations and details about the Gond tribe can be sought through clicking [HERE](#) .

The city of Jabalpur espoused development, progress, growth, industrialization. The people here were smarter with respect to awareness about worldly things. The city had a Narmada temple but the main attraction lay a few kilometers away. The Marble rocks and the Dhuandhar waterfalls are the epitome of natural beauty. The people we met here included tourists like us, craftsmen who made marble artifacts, boatmen who were also tour guides, divers who jumped in the river for money, shop vendors selling fruit and other items, locals who lived around there, families that came for blessings after marriage... the place was thriving with energy.

Mandla is the town that sits in the lap of the river Narmada! Mandla had hotels and guest

houses as it is very close to Kanha. The people here were helpful but they seemed to be in a cocoon of their own. The Arati at the ghaatwas spectacular, probably the only time of the day, when there was noise and signs of cheerfulness. People here were busy with their work, not really enthusiastic about answering questions. It had a remarkable amount of cycle rikshaws.

Panchgaon - the village of the Biagas – overwhelmed all of us. Click [HERE](#) for details about this tribe.

Amarkantak – The source of the river... This place has given birth to thousands of people who depend on the river. This place has given birth to the culture, the belief and faith that so many people attach to the river. The people here, all peace loving, very humble, applauded our effort and encouraged us. They were all spiritually and religiously charged. They were helpful and very serving.