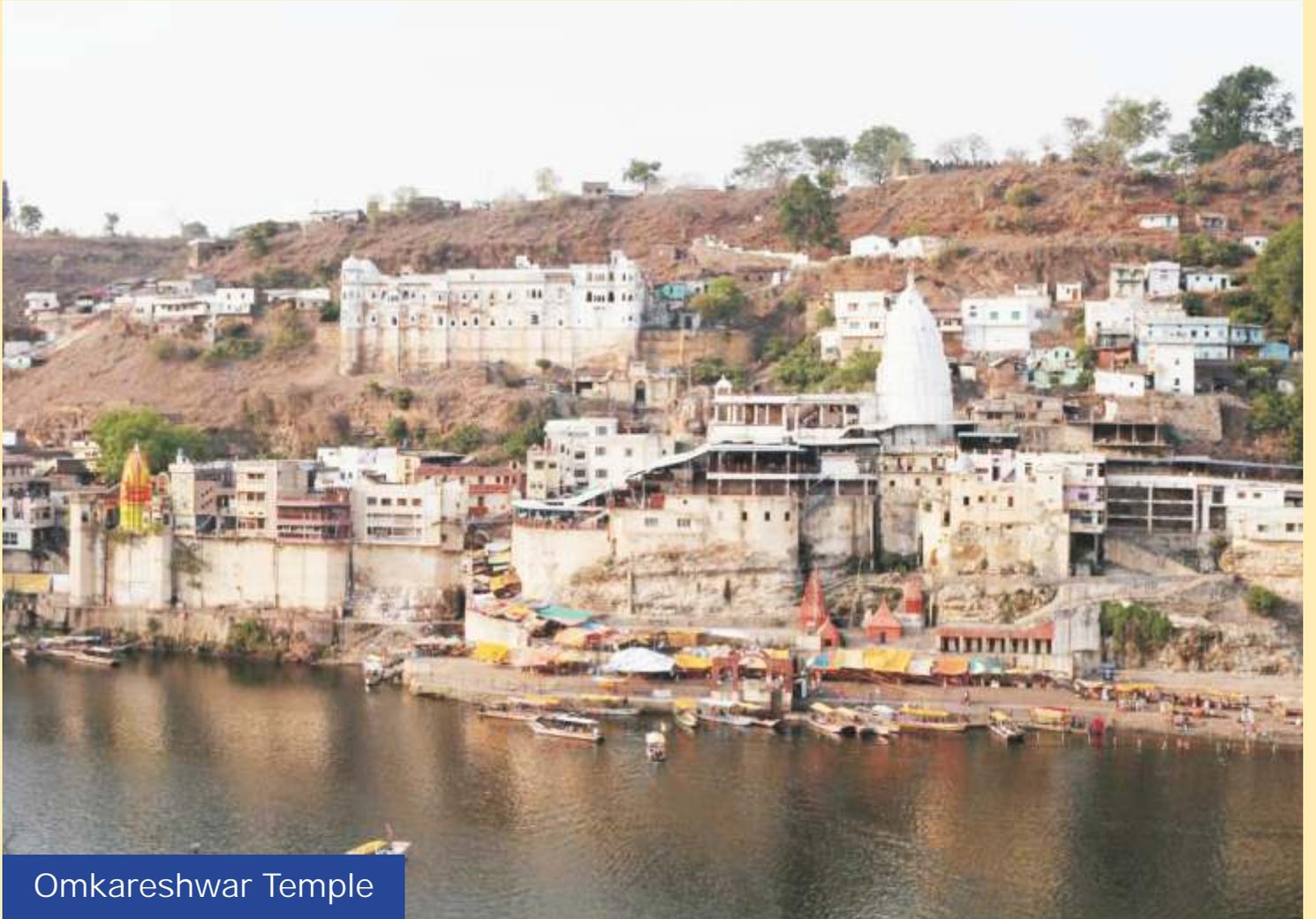




The twelve jyotirlinga are Somnath in Gujarat, Mallikarjuna at Srisailem in Andhra Pradesh, Mahakaleswar at Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh, Omkareshwar in Madhya Pradesh, Kedarnath in Himalayas, Bhimashankar in Maharashtra, Viswanath at Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, Triambakeshwar in Maharashtra, Vaidyanath at Deogarh in Jharkand, Nageswar at Dwarka in Gujarat, Rameshwar at Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu and Grishneshwar at Aurangabad in Maharashtra.



Omkareshwar Temple

Omkareshwar is considered to be one of the holiest Hindu sites in the nation. This is due to the presence of the Jyotirlingam, one of the twelve in India. Lingam is the symbol of Lord Shiva but the Jyotirlingam is special. Jyotirlingam is called the lingam of light. It is said to derive currents of power from within itself while, an ordinary lingam is ritually invested with mantra shakti (power invested by chants) by the priests.

This article along with captions and box items is based/adapted/excerpted from the book Banaras: City of Light by Diana Eck, religious scholar and Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at Harvard University.

The Omkareshwar temple is one of the 12 revered Jyotirlinga shrines of Shiva. It is located on a huge island called Mandhata or Shivapuri along the banks of the Narmada river; the river Narmada, is here called "Rewa". The shape of the island is said to be like the Hindu ? symbol. The pebbles found here in this river are called "Bana Lingams"

Kaverika Narmadayo pavitre ,
SamAgame sajjana taranaya |
Sadaiva mandhatripure vasantam,
Omkarameesham Shivameka meede ||

I meditate only upon Shiva, with the form of "OM", Who lives in the city of Mandhatripura , that lies in the holy confluence of Kaveri and Narmada rivers

For helping good people to cross the ocean of misery in life.

- Adi Shankaracharya



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There are two temples here, one to Omkareshwar (whose name means "Lord of Omkaara or the Lord of the Om Sound") and one to Amareshwar (whose name means "Immortal lord" or "lord of the Immortals or Devas"). The temple is closely linked with Mammalleshwar Temple (Amareshwar, situated on the south of river Narmada) as both the forms of Shiva have been counted as one.

On Mondays. The golden Panchmukh idol of Omkareshwar is taken along the river by boat. The holy town is situated at a distance of 77 km from Indore. The place is a pilgrimage site, as there are a number of Hindu temples and Jain temples located here. It is basically an island, in the shape of Om, on the confluence of the rivers Narmada and Kaveri. The island is divided into north and south by a deep gully and is linked by a bridge.

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Also known as the Temple of Shri Omkar Mandhata, it is made up of locally available soft stone. As a result, there is detailed carving in the front chamber and mesmerizing wall paintings on the upper parts of the structure. Omkareshwar draws hundreds of pilgrims every year from various parts of the nation. The devotees kneel before the Jyotirlinga to be blessed by it.

The Temple

Legend & history of Omkareshwar

According to legend once upon a time Narada (son of Lord Brahma), known for his

Banalingas



"Narmada Ke Kanker utte Sankar"

(Popular saying in the Hindi belt of India meaning, 'Pebble stones of Narmada get a personified form of Shiva')

The Banalinga, is a smooth ellipsoid stone found in nature, in the bed of the Narmada river in Madhya Pradesh. It is an iconic symbol of worship, based on either the scriptures or cultural traditions among the Hindus, particularly of the Shaivaites and Smartha Brahmins. These stones are ancient and connote divinity. The Banalinga is also called the Svayambhu Linga: (Sanskrit) "Self-existent mark or sign of God", as it is discovered in nature and not carved or crafted by human hands.

The Narmada River where the Banalinga stones are found, has been mentioned by Ptolemy and the author of the Periplus. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata and Puranas refer to it frequently. The Rewa Khand of Vayu Purana and the Rewa Khand of Skanda Purana are entirely devoted to the story of the birth and the importance of the Narmada River. It is said to have sprung from the body of Lord Shiva. It was created in the form of a lovely girl who enamoured gods and hence was named by the Lord as Narmada - delight giving. The river is, therefore, often called Shankari (Parvati), i.e., daughter of Lord Shankar (Shiva).

non-stop cosmic travel, visited the Vindhya Parvat (mountain.) In his spicy way Narad told Vindhya Parvat about the greatness of Mount Meru. This made Vindhya jealous of Meru and he decided to be bigger than Meru. Vindhya started worship of Lord Shiva to become greater than Meru. Vindhya Parvat practiced severe penance and worshipped parthivlinga (A linga made from physical material) along with Lord Omkareshwar for nearly six months. As a result Lord Shiva was pleased and blessed him with his desired boon.

On a request of all the gods and the sages Lord Shiva made two parts of the lingas. One half is called Omkareshwara and the other Mammalleshwar or Amareshwar. Lord

Shiva gave the boon of growing, but took a promise that Vindhya Parvat will never be a problem to Shiva's devotees. Vindhya Parvat began to grow, but did not keep his promise. It even obstructed the sun and the moon. All deities approached sage Agastya for help. Agastya along with his wife came to Vindhya, and convinced him that he would not grow until the sage and his wife returned. They never returned and Vindhya Parvat is there as it was when they left. The sage and his wife stayed in Srisailam (in Andhra Pradesh) which is regarded as Dakshina Kashi and is one of the Dwadash Jyotirlinga. In the ancient times the Demons defeated the gods. Indra was worried.



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In order to empower the Devas once again, Lord Shiva assumed the form of Jyotirmaya Omkararoop. He came out of the nether world or Patala. Lord Shankar came out in the form of Linga on the banks of river Narmada. The gods or Devas worshipped the Linga and this made them powerful once again and they were able to destroy the demons and re-acquire their empire in the Heavens.

Brahma and Vishnu also lived in the same place as Omkar Amaleshwar. That is why we find today Brahmapuri, Vishnupuri and Rudrapuri on the banks of the river Narmada.

Originally there were believed to be 64 jyothirlingas but 12 of them are considered to be very auspicious and holy. Each of the twelve jyothirlinga sites takes the name of the presiding deity - each considered a different manifestation of Shiva. At all these sites, the primary image is lingam representing the beginningless and endless Stambha pillar, symbolizing the infinite nature of Shiva.



Mamleshwar Temple

Later on, in the mythological era or Purana Kala, Yavanaswa Putra Mandhata came into power here with the blessings of Indra. He served Lord Shankara with great devotion. Lord Shankara was pleased with him. The waters of Narmada emanated from the Arghya (holy water) or Jalahari of the Omkar JyotirLinga and flew through the mountains. Narmada joins the deep-water spring located near the Linga idol of Omkareshwar. It flows there eternally. When some bubbles appear at the bottom of this spring, it is said, that Lord Shankar is pleased.

King Mandhata made this holy place his capital. Therefore, this place is also known as Omkar Mandhata. The descendents of Mandhata live here even today. The Vindhya Mountain also performed a severe penance and pleased Omkar-Amareshwar. As a result of which, the whole place turned beautiful. Many hermits like Agastya have performed severe penances and japas at Omkar-Amaleshwaram JyotirLinga.

This place of pilgrimage became famous in the historical times too. In 1063 AD, Paramarking Udayaditya installed four



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stone inscriptions with four Sanskrit Stotras and dedicated them to the Amaleshwar Temple. Pushpadanta's "Shiva Mahima Stotra" can also be seen as a stone inscription.

Initially aboriginals used to live here on Omkareshwar island as a settlement. It belonged to Kalika devi. Devotees of this goddess were known as Bhairavgan and used to harass pilgrims. They used to sacrifice them. After sometime, a saint by the name Dariyayinath took charge of that place and stopped the atrocities of the Bhairavgan. Since then, pilgrims started moving there freely.

After that, Bhil reign began there. In 1195 AD, King Bharat Singh Cahuhan won over the Bhils and improved the grandeur of the Omkar Mandhata. Even today the palace ruins of Raja Bahrat Singh Chauhan can be seen. The heirs of Bharat Singh Chauhan call themselves the 'Kings' of Omkar island, and even now stake their right.

The temple was renovated by Peshwa Baji Rao, the second. After the Peshwa, Punyashlok Ahilya Devi Holkar, made several improvements in this ancient shrine.

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The Omkareshwar Lingam

She built strong, expansive and beautiful ghats. The important one among there is the KotirLingarchana schedule.

Traditional parirkrama

Besides being one of the 12 Jyotirlingas, the island of Omkareshwar is in itself a scared site. There is a traditional parirkrama (circumambulation) of the island that begins at the ghats below the temple and goes clockwise round the island. It is an 8 kilometer walk and takes about 3 to 4 hours to complete.

The Jyotirlingas

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Of these we have discussed the following Jyotirlingas

- Somnath in Gujarat - Sep 2012 issue
- Mallikarjuna at Srisailam in Andhra Pradesh - Oct 2012 issue
- Omkareshwar in Madhya Pradesh - Current issue
- Kedarnath in Himalayas - Aug 2012 issue
- Kashi Viswanath at Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh - May 2013 issue
- Triambakeshwar near Nashik in Maharashtra - Jan 2013 issue
- Rameshwar at Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu - Nov 2012 issue
- Next moth we shall discuss Mahakaleswar at Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh