CHAPTER II

THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
Recent archaeological excavations and explorations conducted in the Narmada Valley have left little room for doubt that the Valley has a long and continuous history of human habitation. Rock shelter paintings discovered at some sites date back to several millennia before recorded history. It appears reasonable to think that the Valley had a number of settlements separated by stretches of forests. However, since no social organisation can be assumed at such an early stage of development, it would be unwarranted to talk about towns. Urbanization is a process necessarily bound up with freedom from the need to hunt, gather food and even produce it through agricultural operations. By definition, majority of town-people are engaged in trade and commerce, some kind of industry and services. This stage of human development is reached several millennia after the food-gathering, pastoral and primitive agricultural stages.

It would not be possible to say with any degree of certainty when the stage of urbanization was reached in the Narmada Valley.

The two processes of civilisation and urbanization have always gone on concomitantly, almost as two aspects of the same picture. The reason is apparent. With the birth of towns and a section of society not dependent on
and/or totally occupied with activities necessary to preserve life — defence against nature's vagaries, wild beasts, diseases and hunger — man could devote himself to higher cultural and proto-scientific activities. Towns have remained in the vanguard of civilisation ever since their coming into being.

It will be interesting to speculate on the factors which lead to and promote the growth of towns. While there must have been numerous points of population concentration, only some developed into towns. These later must have had something which was lacking in the former. Clemency of climate, scope for lateral expansion, availability of occupations for the people other than agriculture, potentiality for contacts with other settlements — all these seem to matter. In short, a myriad of social, economic and geographical conditions relating to a segment of society make for the birth and growth of towns. That such conditions were present in a number of centres even in ancient times is beyond doubt.

Unchanged continuity is a peculiar feature of India not found anywhere else with the exception of China. It has been surmised that due to its survival needs the Indian psyche acquired a kind of resilience and flexibility which saw to it that what could break
others merely bent it. Ancient cities like Pataliputra, Sravasti, Vaishali and Varanasi have a continuous history of almost three thousand years. This makes it imperative for us to pay attention to the historical perspective of the towns of the Narmada Valley also. Knowledge of past, as has been well said, helps chart the course of future. The factors which decided the locations of the towns in early days are relevant today.

The Ancient Period

Not much can be said about the very ancient days as far as the Narmada Valley is concerned. It does not seem to figure in the early written records, whether classical, Buddhist or Jaina. Perhaps it can be deduced that, though the region had become part of the firmament, it did not play any significant part politically or culturally. Only the Mahishmati of Puranic legend can be supposed to have come into existence circa 1,000 BC in this region. Even about this town not much can be said with any degree of certainty.

One starts treading on firmer ground with the beginning of 6th century B.C. Buddhist and Jaina records claiming their origin in and around this period came to reinforce the Vedic and other classical literature. A number
of towns were supposed to have been in existence during the Buddha's times and these are described in considerable details in the early Buddhist texts. The picture becomes clearer when one gleans through the Jaina texts. There must have been several reasons for this growth of urban centres, establishment of Buddhist and Jaina monasteries as foci of cultural life being one of them. The process of urbanization went on unhindered for a long time. The imperial Mauryas brought almost the entire land-mass of the Indian sub-continent under one flag. Towns like Vidisha, where Ashok ruled as viceroy before becoming the emperor in 275 B.C., and Ujjayini were flourishing in regions close to the Narmada Valley in this period. However, the conditions of the Valley did not yet encourage the growth of urban centres. The situation remained more or less unchanged in the first few centuries of the Christian era covering the rise and fall of the mighty Guptas. There is evidence to show that new towns developed in northern region during this period also owing to cultural and political reasons, but this cannot be said about the Narmada Valley.

The post-Gupta era is a period of turmoil and decentralisation of political power till the coming to power of Harsha in 606 AD. There is evidence to show
that during 5th or 6th century the town of Tripuri came into prominence as the capital of the kingdom of Chedi, covering the region corresponding to modern Jabalpur. Mahishmati (modern Maheshwar), situated a few hundred miles south-west of Tripuri, was on the decline in this period. The Haihaya dynasty ruling over the Avanti region came to be supplanted by other dynasties like the Pradyotases. Tripuri was the capital of one of the principalities which came into being during this period and led to the establishment of some local centres of power. This was the position when Harsha established his empire, as reported in contemporaneous sources. After the death of Harsha another period of obscurity ensued and lasted till 9th century. From the 9th to the 12th century the Parmaras were the chief political power in the Valley with their capital at Dhar.

The rate of urbanization remained rather slow till the 7th century. The number of towns, big and small, could not have exceeded four or five, most of these having their origin in pre-Christian era. The number did not increase for as many as eight centuries. Khandwa remained the largest town during these centuries.

The factors responsible for this slow rate of urban growth may be summed up as follows. Total population
must have been very small those days. Land being fairly productive, most people must have found agriculture sufficient for their subsistence. This seems to explain why few migrated from the predominantly agricultural villages to towns. Paucity and inefficiency of the means of transport must have acted as a further obstruction to rural-urban migration. Almost all through this period the Narmada Valley remained the backwoods of the empires whose capitals were away from the Valley. Added to this was the fact that there was little incentive for the poor farmers—no better than beasts of burden—to experiment or innovate. The Valley, for all these reasons, remained static and without an urban revolution.

The Parmars of Dhar

The period of Parmar ascendancy appears to be significant from the viewpoint of the Narmada Valley’s urban history. Though their capital Dhar was located away from the Valley, at least two towns came to be established during their rule. Tripuri also kept flourishing during this period, being the capital of the Chedi principality.

The Sultanate Period

Raja Bhoj of Dhar came to be vanquished by a confederacy of Gujarat and Chedi rulers in the period following 1053 A.D. This defeat reduced Dhar to a local and small kingdom.
The Tomars and the Chauhans finally supplanted the Farnars in the 13th century.

The Chauhans founded the town of Chhota Waipur in the foothills of the Vindhyanas. However, owing to its insecure location, the town did not flourish much.

Muhammad Ghori drove the Chauhans away in 1401. Alphkan Sultan Shah, better known as Hoshanga Shah, the founder of modern Hoshangabad, was the son and successor of Muhammad Ghori. During his reign, the capital was shifted to Mandu. Mandu has been stated to have been a magnificent city spread on an area of 20 sq. miles with a circumference of 37 miles. Hoshanga Shah's dynasty came to a sudden end when his minor son, who succeeded him at his death, was assassinated by his own guardian. Mandu's importance as a town fell in the wake of this event.

The Kalchuris and the Gonds

The eastern part of the Valley was under the Kalchuri rule since the 6th or 7th century. The Kalchuris were described as the 'Lords of Chedi'. The town of Tripuri flourished during their reign, being their capital. It reached its zenith of development during the 11th century. Wedged between the northern and southern regions, this small principality, roughly comprising the Central Provinces of the
British times, flourished in peace under the rule of the Kalchuris or Haihayas. Krishnaraja was the historical founder of this kingdom. He established himself in the valley during the second quarter of the 6th century A.D. after conquering and annexing the Dhabla-Mandala and some other regions of central India. The dynasty had an uninterrupted sway for long six centuries.

Nothing is known of this dynasty after the 12th century. Most probably the Baghels of Rawa destroyed this kingdom. Later, the region came to be ruled by a Gond who was supposed to have been a servant earlier. Renamed Garha Mandal, it remained a petty chiefship until the accession of Sangram Sa in 1480. In 1564 Asaf Khan invaded the kingdom and defeated Rani Durgavati, the then ruler. During the reign of Akbar this whole tract appears to have been nominally included in the Malwa subah. Garha, near Jabalpur, finds mention in the Ain-i-Akbar as one of the parghanas of the Kanauj sircar of the Malwa subah.

In course of time this principality regained its freedom from the Moghuls. Hirde Sah, a descendant of Rani Duryavati, came to the throne. Convinced of the vulnerability of his capital Garha, he decided to shift his seat to a place not easily accessible to an invader. Accordingly, he moved to Ram Nagar and built a palace on the bank of Narmada near
presentday Nandla. The palace was completed in 1724. With this, Nandla, which was so far an outlying district of the Gond Kingdom became the pivotal point of the Garha-Nandla kingdom and remained so until 1781 when it came to be subjugated by the Marathas.

The Moghul Period

A systematic territorial reorganisation of the country was one of the main contributions of the Moghul rule in India. This is particularly notable from the point of view of urban history and geography. The country was first divided into 'subahs' (provinces). The subahs were subdivided into 'sircars' (districts) which, in turn, were further subdivided into 'parghanas' (subdivisions). Except for the inaccessible Satpuras and other forest regions, this administrative pattern obtained all over the terrain. Each parghana was expected to contribute a certain number of men to the infantry and the cavalry. Some of these men were stationed at the parghana headquarters itself. In this way the parghana headquarters gradually developed into garrison towns. Towns from the parghana headquarters to the provincial capitals were arranged in a hierarchical order, their importance depending on the size of the administrative division, strength of the garrison and the agricultural income of the area.
Khargone and Handia were two of the garrison towns developed in this way. Khargone came into being mainly to facilitate collection of revenue and for administration. It was a town of a 'mahal' under the Bijagarh sircar of the Malwa subah. Similarly, Kukshi gained importance due to his situation on the main trade route connecting Gujarat and Malwa passing through the sub-Vindhyayan region. The decline of the Moghul empire promoted the establishment of some small principalities. This also made for the emergence of new small towns. Thus, Makrai town gained prominence when the Raja of Makrat proclaimed his independence. Ramchandra Singh founded the town of Barwani in 1650 while Rana Surajmal is credited with the establishment of the town of Barwaha in 1678.

Though founded in the 15th century, Hoshangabad could not gain importance until the conquest of Bhopal in 1720, when the fort was either built or extended and a trading population began to collect round it.

In sum, there were six or seven towns in the 13th century. Two more were founded in the 15th century and, after a full century, four or five towns came to be established in the 17th century. Finally, four more towns emerged in the 18th century.
The Maratha Period

The Marathas became all-powerful after the decline of the Moghuls. They soon became the masters of the Narmada Valley also. After subjugating the Gonds they annexed their kingdom of Garha-Mandal. Their contribution to the emergence and growth of towns in the Valley was considerable. The town of Jabalpur came into its own on being selected by the Marathas to be their principle military headquarters. Marsimhapur, an insignificant village in the beginning of the 19th century known as Chhota-Gadarwara, became an important town when the Marathas made it the headquarters of the force they maintained in the Valley. Harda became a town of some consequence only after being elevated to the status of capital of the Harda-Handia tract in preference to the Muslim town of Handia. The Maratha 'amil' took residence in this town. Seoni-Nalwa gained the position of an important trading town only after Raghojee Bhonsle of Nagpur conquered the surrounding region in 1750 A.D. In this way, as many as four major towns of the Narmada Valley owe their being to the Maratha rule. A fifth town, Barwaha, though already in existence at the time of Maratha conquest of the region, became important only after Shivajirao Holkar built there a palace overlooking the Choral Valley.
The British Rule

The British were responsible not only for the emergence and development of several towns in the Narmada Valley but they also ushered in the era of modernity in this regard. Politico-social conditions had undergone a sea-change in the period separating the British rule from the Maratha rule. Many new factors emerged which were significant from the point of view of urban growth. In addition to this, the British imparted a modicum of Western character to the towns. Introduction of railways and construction of a system of roads, among other factors, promoted the founding of new towns. The British were the first in modern times to recognise the need of municipal autonomy. Hansot municipality came into being in 1899, Godarwara in 1869, Hoshangabad in 1876, Seoni-Malwa in 1867, Sidhore in 1867, Anklewai in 1876 and Pachmarhi in 1886. Some altogether new types of towns made their appearance during this period. Thus, the town of Pachmarhi was developed specifically as a holiday resort and Itarsi came into existence to serve as a communication and transport centre. Whereas contiguity with a river was earlier one of the deciding factors in the selection of sites for locating new towns, propinquity with railways and roads became the chief consideration since the beginning of the British rule. This, however, cut both ways. Towns like Nukshi declined after losing their situation on the trade routes when the railway system skirted them from
a distance. Narsinhapur, which lies on the Howrah-Bombay main line, was chosen to be the new district headquarters, and it grew during the British period. Industrial units like the Khamaria Ordnance Factory were established in the region clearly in view of the available transport facility.

**Impact of Railways and Roads on Urban Growth**

Roads were always a relevant parameter in the location and development of towns, in this valley as elsewhere. The 1857 rising pinpointed the attention of the British alien rulers to the need of developing a worthwhile system of roads at a fast pace. As soon as a responsible government came into office a programme of constructing metalled roads was taken into hands. This totally changed the trade routes, robbing the rivers of their significance for town planning.

Owing to an acutely felt need to connect Bombay with Calcutta the Narmada Valley captured the attention of the railway planners fairly early. Later, the western parts of the Valley also came on the railway map when the western chord connecting Delhi and Bombay passed through Khandwa. Once they became a regular feature of life, the railways provided sustenance to towns like Jabalpur and Khandwa and converted small villages like Itarsi and Timarni into sizable
towns. Towns cut off from the net-work languished and even declined. Railways and roads have exerted a decisive influence on the destiny of towns, new and old.

Towards the end of the last century and the beginning of the present security was one of the main considerations governing urban development. Earlier, towns grew when the principality of which they were the hubs enjoyed spells of prosperity and tranquility. Many of these towns, however, came to be partly or wholly destroyed during external aggressions. This remained a usual feature all along the pre-British history. The later half of the last century saw unprecedented conditions of political stability, ending once for all the need to search remote and inaccessible sites for locating towns. The whole country became firmly united under a strong Central authority for the first time, and the basic nature of state security changed. Faster troop movement and facility for their billeting became the prime considerations.

One notable consequence of this newly emerging situation was the decline of Broach as a Narmada Valley town. Jabalpur over-took it in every respect and a town which enjoyed primacy for almost 2,000 years was reduced to the second place. The reason was twofold. On one hand, thanks to its central position on the Howrah-Bombay main line and to its being an important junction of the central region of the country
connecting its eastern and western parts. Jabalpur prospered. On the other, Broach lost a great deal when its cotton industry suffered in competition with the cheap imported cloth from Britain and Bombay became the chief port on the western seaboard of the country.

The growth of towns of the Narmada Valley during the last three decades of the last century (for which data are available) has been shown in Table 2.1. It demonstrates that, of the ten major towns, as many as seven registered noticeable increase of population while data for one is not available for 1872. The loss suffered by the remaining two towns, Seoni-Malwa and Sohagpur, was apparently due to the factors already discussed. The largest growth achieved was by Itarsi (239.2%), obviously due to the railways. Jabalpur grew by 67.7% during the same period.

Table 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Status of the town</th>
<th>1872</th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>Net variation (1872-1901)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total Pop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jabalpur Municipality</td>
<td>55,188</td>
<td>90,316</td>
<td>35,128</td>
<td>67.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khandwa</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14,119</td>
<td>19,401</td>
<td>5,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harda</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9,170</td>
<td>16,300</td>
<td>7,130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoshangabad</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11,613</td>
<td>14,940</td>
<td>4,549</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narsimhapur</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7,554</td>
<td>11,233</td>
<td>3,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seoni-Malwa</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>8,007</td>
<td>7,615</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sehagpur</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7,552</td>
<td>7,420</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itarsi</td>
<td>Town</td>
<td>1,701</td>
<td>5,769</td>
<td>4,068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sihora</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3,988</td>
<td>5,395</td>
<td>1,607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betul</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4,593</td>
<td>4,739</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pachmarhi</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3,020</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Census of India. The Central Provinces and Feudatories, 1891, 10-11

All this, however, should not lead one to regard the region as essentially urban. There were only 22 towns in the entire valley with only one with a population of over 10,000: Jabalpur. In fact, in the then Central Provinces and Berar, the urban population was only 7.5% of the total. The figure for the Jabalpur district was 16.2, for Nimar 16.1 and for Hoshangabad 12.2. It was much lower in the remaining districts. Table 2.2 shows the number of towns in the upper and middle Narmada Valley (data are available only this segment) and the percentage of urban population to the total population as in 1891.
# Table 2.2

Percentage of urban population to total population in 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>No. of towns</th>
<th>Urban Population</th>
<th>% of urban population to total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jabalpur</td>
<td>680,585</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>110,848</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narsinapur</td>
<td>313,951</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23,647</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoseangabad</td>
<td>449,165</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54,990</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nimar</td>
<td>327,035</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>52,831</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betul</td>
<td>285,363</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10,305</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, Central Provinces and Feudatories, 1891.

Jabalpur, according to this Table, was the only district in 1891 where a town's population exceeded 50,000. Similarly, Nimar alone among all the districts of the valley had a town whose population was upwards of 20,000 (but not exceeding 50,000). Towns with population figures ranging between 10,000 and 20,000 were four and those between 5,000 and 10,000 were eleven. 37 towns ranged between 2,000 and 5,000 while many more were even smaller. The reason for this state of affairs perhaps lay in the rural character, low income, low standard of living, etc. obtaining
in this region.

The pace of urbanization was faster in the later half of the nineteenth century than ever before owing, as noted earlier, largely to the building up of a road-rail network. However, it was really nothing as compared to the Western world in the corresponding period.

**Urbanization During the Twentieth Century**

The region was backward both agriculturally and industrially at the turn of the century, notwithstanding the fact that agriculture was the principal occupation of the inhabitants. Its geographical character, political insignificance and neglected economy seem to have been jointly responsible for this. Urban centres, which functioned as the service centres for the tributary areas, were poorly developed and many of them were little better than large villages.

The picture has undergone considerable modifications in the last few decades, particularly after Independence. Urban centres and urban populations have changed both qualitatively and quantitatively, new parameters having been added to the existing ones. The Narmada valley is now among the better urbanized areas of Madhya Pradesh.

Two distinct categories of towns have mostly developed in this century in the wake of changing socio-
political conditions. In addition to the railway townships like Piparia and Timarni, already noticed in the preceding paragraphs, a host of towns gained prominence as what can only be called 'rural service centres'. These towns are essentially 'mandis': small bargaining centres where the agricultural produce changes hands. Most of these are district or tahsil headquarters, adding a politico-administrative dimension also. State's entry into foodgrain and other trades has further accentuated their growth. Development of transport facility could not lag behind in these circumstances.

Trade and commerce have only recently become important enough in this region to act as catalysts of urbanization. These newly emerging towns are hastening the process of social change in the Narmada Valley, particularly in its rural parts. They can be the subject of a very meaningful sociological survey. The number of these towns is fairly large. Katangi, Patan, Panagarh, Dharampuri, Rajpur, Gagaon, Kareli, Khategaon, Kasrawad, Anjad, Alirajpur, Mukhi, Jobat, Bhikangaon and Mandleshwar are some of them. A few of these can be treated as subordinate towns of the bigger ones. Thus, Bhikangaon and Gagaon are attached to Khargone while Kareli serves Narsimhapur.
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