

Bhedaghat.

Wisps of mist rise over the thundering roar melting in the evening skies. The sharp wind, changes directions, caresses me with a cheery water spray; my cameras too party in the holy unsparing. The wide expanse of the Narmada having luxuriated and nourished about 240 kms cascades here through an oxbow cliff rightly called *Dhuandhar*, the smoky falls, tumbling in dizzy whirlpools, visions of which ebb no sooner than the count of the *chakris* (tiny whirlpools) begins.

Beyond, what the River Narmada, the sensuous myth-maiden has done, over plenty thousand years would certainly put any master sculptor to shame, or if not, hold him in a breath taking awe. From *Dhuandhar*, she constricts into the narrow orifice between tall dolomite cliffs and leads into the most celebrated section along her length-The Marble Rocks.

The winter morning begins with tendrils of mist dancing on the pliant surface. A steep flight of 100 something steps lined both sides with curio shops lead down to *Panchvati Ghat* where I hire a row boat decked in most garish stern. The ticket would relieve me off a sizeable green bulk, for there is not a tourist in sight at this cold hour, but in exchange I have been promised a heaven. So I comply, with five notes of hundreds for the royal luxury. Soon, I am in the abandoned glory of nature, blessedly marooned between rising cliffs, the oarsman resigned to monotony as a mannequin, pulling upstream at his oars. Another dummy, a so called guide across the other end of the dinghy, bides his time till silence would erupt; his job, for which he would share one of the seven notes later, is to fill the customer with audio trailers of bollywood films.

The morning sun paints the limestone tips in saturated hues. The waters are dark and calm; the sun yet to sneak over the cliff. As the stern cuts through, the floating mists sway in blurry waltz. I double-over over the edge of the boat, my outstretched fingers brushing the gentle vapors. Some elude, others run between my fingers. We row into an arena of fifty feet high buff cliffs, silently and unexpectedly now around us. Where did we come in from, how do we get out? It's a maze, I surely have a quizzical face, for the dummy reads the expressions with experience, and snaps out.

`This is the *bhulbhulaiya*' His customary monologues are near recorded drones. A labyrinth of overstated whites and pink marble, and then pointing to a natural ledge `That's where the fight sequence of *Pran Jaye Par Vachan Na Jaaye* was shot.... Have you seen Ashoka?' Before my gray cell pulls up! Aaah.Yes.Shahrukh. `The song *Raat Ka Nashaa Abhi...* was shot there'. The marble perches are perfect settings for bollywood stunts. I can frame an idolized hero jumping down the cliff in pursuit of a villain, right here.

Assortment of formations accompanies trivia information. The raw rocks form islands, their shapes the dummy helps me visualize, if I can squeeze my eyes narrow. An elephant lying sideways in the placidity; three peering faces; and Hanuman's monkey with a tail off course. These I discern amusingly, there are more which my eyes can't so I dismiss. One small island roughly a round of three meters, is crowned by an ovoid of a white marble Shiv-Linga, with a long-lost story of a solitary hermit in penance here.

We pedal further into an extra precarious zone, more money agreed for more marble to see. Two more notes that makes it seven. The canyon gets narrower here and I can almost stretch out to the sparkling white marble precipice. The name Bhedaghat

comes precisely from here. The opposite high cliffs are so close that *bhedas* (sheep) can jump across the river.

The calm surface mirrors the myriad forms of serenity. Buffs merging into pinks, then greens then dew hugging whites. The cool sunlight reflects as gleaming tiaras. The Narmada has cut her way into this soft bedrock over years, revealing one of nature's best kept secrets. The waters are gentle on the surface, but lurking beneath are swift currents. Perhaps, over many more years she will sink deeper into the ravine and unravel further mysteries of her depths. We will leave that for the generations to follow, but for now I can rate it as one of the hundred places to see before you die.

The sheer silence fades into a constant drone across a turn, as the eight o'clock sun shines through near vertical rock faces. Numerous bubbly cascades break on the distant surface. The frothy whites gush in strength towards us, the boat can't inch further; we berth on a small overhang between emerald waters. In the breather the dummies light their poisons, while I daze at the *Swarg Dwar*- Doorway to Heaven. Beyond, about eighty meters but not visible from this end are Dhuandhar falls, where all this magic is scripted.

The scene is a show stopper, a heaven I was promised. I pull in a deep breath and hold. My eyes shut, my mind paints the divine frames. Buddha would have looked down with certain envy, for I just attained my nirvana.