

[River Engulfs Ancient Temples](#)

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The Narmada Dam project-like its sister the 987- ft. Tehri Dam being built in the Himalayan foothills-is swollen with controversy. But though environmentalists bitterly oppose it, the project proceeds. As waters rise, state governments scurry to relocate area residents, rebuild the oldest sacred shrines and curry greater popular support.

In Gujarat, the Kalhanseshwar Mahadev Mandir is expected to be submerged in the 1996 rains. To compensate, a majestic new temple will be constructed by the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) at the cost of US\$90,000. The head priest of the temple, Mahant Shri Mohandasji, has expressed great satisfaction at the government's efforts, though some other priests opposed the government's offer to shift the temple brick by brick for fear of inauspicious ill-effects from moving the idols. Nevertheless, on April 25th, a giant gathering of tribals, villagers, social workers, priests and Gujarat government and department of forestry officials attended the Bhoomipooja of the new temple at Hafeshwar. Nearly 15,000 affected families from Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh participated. State Chief Minister Shri Chimanbhai Patel conducted the ceremony. In July/August, the 5,000 year-old Shoolpaneshwar Mandir went under in the annual rains. After consulting with four shankaracharyas, a site at Gora on the left bank of the Narmada was selected for the new temple as well as for a mela to be held each Chaitra. The bhoomi pravesh and foundation stone were laid in December, 1991, and the pran-pratishta ceremony was performed in June. Costing US\$100,000, it will sit on a 100' by 150' marble platform with 70' high walls made of the famous Dhangadhra sandstone. Small adjoining temples, guest houses and gardens are also being

added.

In the basin below the new temple, trees have been clear-cut and wildlife relocated to higher plains. Re-forestation efforts have been undertaken, replanting 100 trees for each felled. The Indian press has given voice to many dissenting opinions from human rights activists on the submergence of the temples, but in the wake of recent temple relocations, there is more positive media coverage and a new mood of confidence among SSP officials.