



The Identity of Banaras's Iconic Image through the Medium of Art and Culture

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Abstract

This study describes the excellence of folk arts, music, and culture of Banaras. Banaras is popular for its deep cultural heritage and timeless morals. It is a city of temples, arts, ghats and lanes, which is adorned with every colours of the natural scenery, which is beyond imagination. This city is an ancient city and a great blending pot of cultures from India and all over the world.

Banaras city is famous for various Hindu temples and these temples are built by nawabs, kings, monasteries and empires. This city has a huge collection of historical Hindu temples and it reflects great ancient architectural structure. Banaras is a city of temples. It is naturally adorned with natural beauty of every colour of the nature and beauty, which is beyond imagination. When we think of Banaras we imagine of place of temples embodied with its supernatural powers, customs and traditions according to the Hindu philosophy.

Banaras is very popular among the Spiritual seekers, searching to find their dignity of life in form of the deities present in the temples. The names of the temples are the identity of the streets, and the particular streets are named after that particular temple.

Through this paper I attempt to analyze the fascinating composition of arts, music and tradition of the Banaras.

Keywords: Banaras, arts, music, Ghats, Temples, Ganga Aarti, Culture, Baba Vishwanath

Introduction:

Sortha

‘‘मुक्ति जन्म महि जानि ग्यान खान अघ हानि
कर।

जहँ बस संभु भवानि सो कासी सेइअ कस न ॥ (१)’’

"mukti janm mahi jaani gyaan khaan agh haani
kar.

jahan bas sambhu bhavaani so kaasee sei kas
na ."

Meaning: Why not meditate on Kashi, the birthplace of salvation, the mine of knowledge and the destroyer of all sins? Where Lord *Shankar* always resides with Goddess *Parvati*. This slokha is written by *Tulsidas* in his book *Ramcharitmanas*.

Banaras is one of the most ancient still existing cities of the world. Banaras is also known as Varanasi and Kashi. Banaras is considered as one of the main holy place in Hinduism since ancient times. Hindus have the conviction that one who would die on the land of Banaras would attain salvation and would get freedom from the cycle of birth. The land of Banaras has been the heart of worship for Hindus for ages. The place where Buddha preached his first sermon ‘*Sarnath*’ is also in Varanasi.

Banaras is a popular place for the study of vedas, Indian creative arts and classical and traditional music. Many prominent Indian Artists, musicians, poets have lived in this city. In Hindusthani Classical Music “Banaras

Gharana” is popular worldwide. The renowned classical artist Ravi Shankar and Ustad Bismillah Khan have lived in Banaras. The famous writer Tulsidas wrote Awadhi language epic and *Ramcharitmanas* in Banaras. Famous poet saint Kabir, Prem Chand and Ravidas were born here. Maharshi Patanjali, the founder of Ayurveda and yoga, was also affiliated with Banaras. It is a cultural mixing pot since ancient time. The English author Mark Twain once wrote “Banaras is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together”.

Aesthetics of Banaras:

The beauty of Banaras is dependent on Shankar Mahadev. Without him no one can experience the beauty of Banaras. The name of Banaras is an embellishment of its beauty. Kashi is also marked with the name of Mahadev. Everything belonging to the people of Banaras is enclosed in peace, in their mannerism one gets to see a different kind of beauty, for example if we describe the day of a resident of Banaras it begins early morning from Brahmanuhurta which begins with the Mangala Aarti of Lord Baba Vishwanath and the day end after putting Lord Baba Vishwanath to sleep.

The beauty and culture of Banaras is known all over the world, the aspect of culture according to the inhabitants Kashi which starts in the morning with Ganga puja, for example the

chanting of Mahadev's name while bathing in water, discourses about Mahadev, worshipping Mahadev while eating, acknowledging Mahadev in people. If you ask someone who is a devotee of Mahadev where they live? The answer will be Behind Mahadev's temple. If you ask them what they had to eat? The answer will be they had Mahadev's prasad i.e. Bhang. The identity of Banaras in itself reflects the beauty of Banaras.



Banaras

Festivals of Banaras

Banaras has been spiritual centre with many festivals and fairs. A popular expression on Banaras festivals is "Every day is a great festival in Banaras." We can observe in Banaras that every day people are celebrating with joy and happiness. "Banaras is considered to be a veritable jungle of fairs and festivals with respect to variety, distinction, time, sacred sites, performers, overseers and side-shows. The popular saying that there 13 festivals happen in the 7-days of a week express that richness. "Every day is a great festival in Banaras"— so says the tradition. The yearly cycle is divided into six seasons

(ritu), and for each season a specific holy city is mythologized as the sacred abode (puri) where religious functions are to be performed. Banaras is the city where all the six puris are spatially manifested (re-established), which is how Banaras becomes a city of all seasons "

In Banaras people celebrates almost all religious festivals with pomp and joy. Here I will give brief descriptions of few prominent festivals of Banaras. This shows that the Banaras is hub of Hindu culture and traditions.

1. Dev Dipawali:

“ब्रह्मा मुरारी त्रिपुरांतकारी भानुः शशि

भूमि सुतो बुधश्च।

गुरुश्च शुक्र शनि राहु केतव सर्वे ग्रहा शांति

करा भवन्तु॥”

“Brahma Murari Tripuraantkari

Bhanu: Shashi Bhoomi Suto

Budhashcha.

Gurushch shukra Shani Rahu Ketav

Survey Graha Shanti Kara Bhavantu.”

Dev Dipawali is considered one of the main festivals of Banaras, we recite a shloka in the beginning which glorifies Lord Shiva by the name Tripuraantkari, because according to the story it goes there were three demons, Lord Shiva had killed the three sons of the demon Tripurasura - Tarakaksha, Kamalaksha and Vidyumali, who had created terror in the three

worlds after receiving boons from Lord Brahma.

It is believed that after the victory of Lord Shiva on the day of Dev Dipawali all the gods took bath in Ganga, from here the tradition of Tripura bathing started. A unique festival of Dev Dipawali is seen among the people of Banaras, which is celebrated with great pomp from Barhama Muhurta during the early hours of the day. On this day people after taking bath in the Ganga, decorate their houses with lamps, celebrate and worship the festival of Lord Shiva, and on the banks of Banaras, people perform Ganga aarti by lighting lamps along with the worship, they offer their devotion to the gods, they remember all the gods and goddesses along with Lord Shiva, this is how Dev Diwali festival is celebrated on this day.



Dev Dipawali

2. Maha Shivratri:

Mahashivratri is a festival that is celebrated in the entire country with a lot of enthusiasm; you will find that this is a time when millions of devotees gather in

temples to worship the supreme Lord Shiva as it is one of the greatest festival of Banaras. This festival celebrates the wedding of Lord Shiva to Goddess Parvati. This is the festival when people from various places visit Varanasi. This festival is celebrated every year on the 14th day of the month of Phalgun, this is also the day which marks the end of the winter season. It is said that during this time, Lord Shiva fulfills every wish that is made with sincerity. During the festival a procession begins late in the evening and continues throughout the entire night and finishes early the next morning.‘’ Maha Shivaratri (Phalguna, February-March). On the 14th of the dark fortnight of Phalguna falls the marriage day of Lord Shiva. Varanasi is Shiva’s abode, which is how this especially charming festival comes to be celebrated here. In all the Shiva temples, grand decorations (shringara) and celebrations are held, but the Vishvanatha (Golden), Vishvanatha in B.H.U., Adi Vishveshvara (Bansphatak), Mritunjaya (Dara Nagar), Trilochana and Kedareshvara temples are the most popular. Vishvanatha and Mrityunjaya temples are obviously attended by a million devout Hindus to have a glimpse of the special shringara. During the festival a procession is taken out from Mrityunjaya to Vishvanatha temple. On the following 11th day of the

light fortnight the yearly decoration of Vishvanatha temple takes place, called Amalaki or Rangabhari Ekadashi. Pilgrims also sprinkle coloured red powder on the Shiva linga. This is the starting point and initiation of the Holi festival. On the occasion of Maha Shivaratri a musical assembly at Tulasi Ghat, called Dhrupada Mela, is organised.’’

3. Ram Lila:

Ram Lila is a unique and ancient tradition of Banaras. The Ram Lila is celebrated in Ram Nagar. This is a festival celebrated over many days. During this festival performances are held every evening. This celebration lasts for thirty-one days. The Ram Lila is based on the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*, which narrates the life of Lord Rama. This festival has been performed in Banaras for around 200 years. During Dussehra (September-October) this festival is celebrated. The main theme of this festival is the victory of Lord Ram over the demon Ravana. ‘‘Varanasi is an ancient city and is full of mythological tales. Being there during Ram Leela will definitely be an experience of a lifetime, a memory that will stay in your heart forever. With soothing hymns, eye-pleasing grand Ganga aarti, a

spiritually rejuvenating boat ride in the holy Ganga and some soul-stirring theatrical performances, Ramnagar ki Ram Leela will stay with you for a long time.’



Ram Nagar Ram Lila

Art and Aesthetics of Ghats and Temples of Banaras:

Banaras always has been a hub for its rich artistic and aesthetics traditions, mainly artists are motivated by the scenes of the ghats and temples. The crafts of Banaras is famous all over the world, Particularly silk weaving (Banarasi sarees), metal work, ivory work, folk art. The city has been always a attraction point among numerous artists, writers and creative peoples, who have come for seeking inspiration. The most renowned craft of Banaras is Banarasi saree, which made by the local craftsman.



Banarasi Sarees

This Banarasi sarees is the finest sarees in India and more popular for their gold and silver brocades. “Their special characteristics are Mughal inspired designs such as intricate intertwining floral and foliate motifs, kalga and bel, a string of upright leaves called jhallar at the outer, edge of border is a characteristic of these sarees. Other features are gold work, compact weaving, figures with small details, metallic visual effects, pallus, jal (a net like pattern), and mina work.”¹

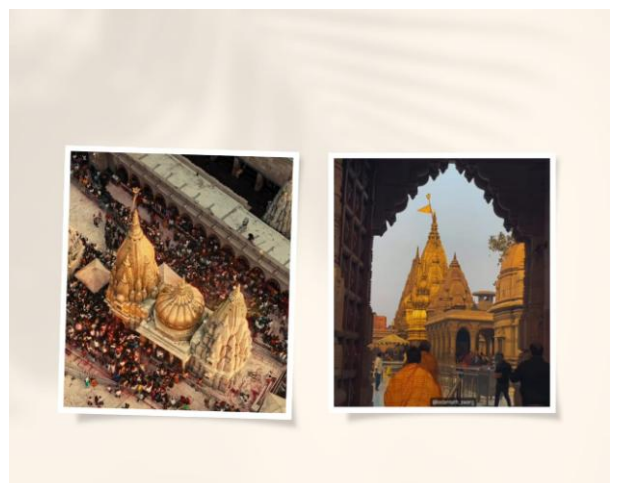
The Banaras city is vibrant with colours, specially the street art of the lanes. Most of the lanes are beautifully painted with vibrant colours, mostly with religious subject having figures of Gods abstract artworks. The essence of Banaras, one can feel through those paintings.

Here are the few photographs of those lanes:



Vibrant streets of Banaras

Banaras is also popular for ghats on the Ganges and many temples. Every ghats has a unique history and mythological stories. They have been the site of rituals and beliefs. The city has 100 ghats. Most of the ghats were rebuilt in 18th century under the Maratha period. There are five most popular ghats in Banaras, those are Assi Ghat, Dashashwamedh Ghat, Manikarnika Ghat, Rajendra Ghat, Harischandra Ghat. Kashi Viswanath temple is one of famous temple of Banaras.



Baba Vishwanath Temple

Conclusion:

Banaras is very popular among the Spiritual seekers, searching to find their dignity of life in form of the deities present in the temples. The names of the temples are the identity of the streets, and the particular streets are named after that particular temple.

For example, Dashaswamedh Ghat, this is not only the name of the Ghat but also the identification of surrounding area up to the range of 2 to 3 Km. Vishwanath Gali also got its identity from Baba Vishwanath Temple. These streets have a variety of shops ranging from worship necessities to wedding clothes and a variety of sweets shops, the street is known for a variety of commodities. In the same way the area surrounding the Durga Temple is named Durga Kund and the area around Sankat Mochan temple is popularly known as Sankat Mochan. We can see a pattern that particular areas are named after the particular temple present in that local area all over Banaras.

There is no specific knowledge of how many thousands of years the city of Banaras has been dedicated to Lord Shiva. The people, who are inhabitants of the bank of River Ganga, are known as Banarasi or Kaashi-Vaasi. Banaras does not need any introduction because we worshiped Lord Shiva who resides in the jungles of Banaras. Banaras is a city in which the quality of life is enough to make one

happy. If you want to spend the whole day by the banks of the river or visit the temples, you will attain complete connection with your Ishta-Devata. This is the city of celebrations, this is the city of innocence, we can also say that this is the city of adabhangiyo and saints. Along with this, it is also known as the place of inspiration, centre for education and culture, which is called Banaras.

If the mathematical measurement of the Stairs of the Ghats of Banaras is looked into then it is possible to understand the graphs of life as is on this earth, which is only understood by a Banarasi. There are many verses are found in the seeds of Banaras, that the value of life is displayed through the medium of the architecture from ancient times. If only we follow the stairs, we can consider how many aspects of life we have seen since ancient times. It is said that Lord Shiva, the healer from the beginning of life and all the gods and goddesses, have lived in these stairs and have become human beings. Amidst the beauty and charm, there are number of temples on the stairs with the presence of many Gods and Goddesses and in the middle of the stairs, crowds come in the form of a ritual, in the form of a small business, in the form of a small earth's upheaval, settling on the stairs. The stairs are the path that meets the Goddess Ganga, it is also called the house of monks, who spend their entire lives on these stairs. Stairs are not just stairs they are like the lines

of life which give a sense particular beauty of Banaras in a perfect way.

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