



Varanasi – A Treasure of Rich Cultural Heritage of India

Benaras, name given by Britishers was formally known as Varanasi, Kashi, Avimukta, Mahashmashana. About the history of Benaras Mark Twain, Who visited around the world wrote, “Benaras is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together.” Besides Jerusalem, Athens, Peking and Mecca, Varanasi is the only city living for last four thousand years. This can be witnessed through every tourist eyes. As Jerusalem and Athens are having western and modern touch moreover. They changed their lifestyle, traditions, behaviour and culture which, can be marked in churches. But in Kashi even thousand years back as god was worshipped, till today it is followed with the same tradition, values and even with similar dressing sense. Vedas, Upanishads in Sanskrit are still taught in Varanasi henceforth the numbers of students are increasing for it. It is also the center for learning yoga, palmistry, astrology, Sanskrit, Hinduism and history of 36 crore gods and goddesses. Varanasi is situated between the river Varuna in north and Assi in the south hence it is named as Varanasi. It represents India on account of its prestigious traditions, Temples, Shrines, Asrams, Muths, Holy Ganges River and respected Hindu religion. Varanasi has captivating charm and spiritual challenge, which can be seen in its exaggerated rituals, festive, cultural activities performed in the city. If the boon of life starts at Dashashwamedh Ghat than it ends at Manikarnika; a unique combination of life and death in the desire of salvation attracts the pilgrims. Paradoxically, it is the only city on earth which is famous for death and liberation. “Even after thousand cycles of life and death, one is not sure if he gets liberation or not.” It is attainable in a single birth in Kashi. This is the great saying for Kashi.

Varanasi is not only known for Hindu religion but also it was the city chosen by the Lord Buddha, who delivered his first sermon at Sarnath after being enlightened at Gaya about 650 BC. From 300 BC to 300 AD the city was ruled by Buddhist dynasties like Ashoka the Great who paid attention to Sarnath. It is the city of Kabir, Tulsi and Jain religion also where, the 23rd Tirthankar Bhagwan Parshwanath was born. This city has given leadership of Late Lal Bahadur Sastri, Sampurnanand and Pt. Kamalapati Tripathi to the country besides internationally famed musicians like Bharat Ratna Ustad Bismillah Khan, Padamvibhushan Pt. Kishan Maharaj, Padambhushan Girija Devi, Pt. Rajan & Sajan Mishra and Sitara Devi as well as great novelist Premchand and litterateur Jai Shanker Prasad adorned the Varanasi by their great contribution to the art and literature. The Paradox of Varanasi is highlighted as it is a lively city, with something or the other happening somewhere or the other at all hours. There is also a deep sense of peace, serenity and spirituality all around.

Some of the worthseeing places in Varanasi are :

The Ghats

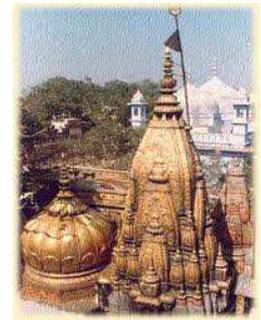
The Ghats of Varanasi are the most beautiful and ornamental in the country. Total of 52 Ghats along Ganga embody the life and identity of Varanasi. Stretching from the southern Assi Ghat to the northern Adi Keshava Ghat, close to the Malviya Bridge are lined with temples and



shrines. Important ones are Dasashwamedh, Harishchandra, Manikarnika, Panchganga and Assi Ghat. Dasashwamedh is the most important and is one of the 5 holy bathing ghats and was constructed by Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao. On Dev Deepawali all the Ghats are illuminated with earthen lamps and stairs of the Ghats shine with the golden light as well as the view of Ganga Arti have now become major attraction for tourist. Varanasi Ghats reverberate with the endless cycle of Hindu religious practice - from daily rituals to profound rites of passage.

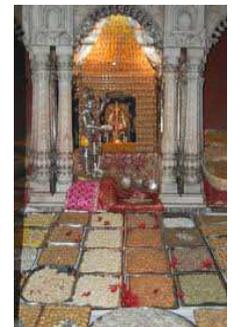
Kashi Vishwanath Temple

It is said that Kashi is sitting atop the trident of Lord Shiva and in Kashi his abode is Vishwanath temple. This temple dedicated to Lord Shiva has a Shivalinga situated below ground level. Located not far from the Ghats, the temple is topped by 750 Kg. of gold donated by Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab in 1839 while the temple was built in 1777 by Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore. It is also referred to as the golden temple of the city. The Shivlinga in the temple is amongst the twelve Jyotirlingas.



Annapurna Temple

Situated close to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, the sanctuary of Goddess Annapurna is very popular amongst devotees. The temple has a bronze idol of the Goddess, seated on a silver platform. The Golden idol of the deity is opened only once a year for “darshan” for the general public.



Sarnath

One of the most frequented Buddhist spots in India, Sarnath has wealth of religious traditions and archaeological remains, where Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon after gaining enlightenment. Sarnath attracts thousands of pilgrims, archaeologist, historians and students from India and abroad. Buddhists attraction in Sarnath are Mulgandha Kutti Vihara, Dhemmekh Stupa,



Chaukhandi Stupa, Tibetan, Korean, Japanese, Thai, Buddhist temples and an Archaeological Museum, housing a precious collection of Buddhist artifacts including an Ashoka lion capital (India's national emblem) in polished sandstone. Besides a large complex of ruined monasteries having Ashoka pillar, which is the evident of his visit to Sarnath, can be seen.

Benaras Hindu University

BHU, is one of the biggest universities in Asia with an area of approximately 2,000 acres, founded by Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, is a rare centre with three institutes, fourteen faculties and 124 dipartments. The BHU owns the most prestigious Indian Institute of Technology, Institute of Medical Sciences and Institute of Agriculture Sciences. Its faculties are



well known for research works. The varsity which has become a part of culture of the city is also known as Sarva Vidya ki Rajdhani.

Vishwanath Temple (BHU)

It was planned by the founder of Benaras Hindu University, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and executed by the Birla family. The temple was built for the propagation of Hindu culture but used it for the revival of ancient Hindism free from the prejudices of caste, creed and religion.



Bharat Kala Bhawan

Bharat Kala Bhawan Museum is also situated in BHU campus having one of the India's best collections of Indian paintings. The Indian sculpture section of the Museum is very impressive, which is also a centre of great attraction for Indian and foreign visitors.



Bharat Mata Temple

A novel temple dedicated to Mother India, houses one of the most perfect maps of India carved out of marble. The temple was gifted by the nationalist Babu Shiv Prasad Gupta and Shri Durga Prasad Khatri, a leading numismatist and antiquarian. It was inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi.



Gyanvapi Mosque

It was constructed by Aurangzeb in the 17th century over the ruins of Vishveswara temple which he destroyed. The foundation and the rear of the mosque still reveal rare specimens of the ancient temple art of India.



Alamgir Mosque

Popularly known as Beni Madhav Ka Darera. It was originally a Vishnu temple, constructed by a Maratha Chieftain Beni Madhav rao Scindia in early 17th century. The temple was destroyed by emperor Aurangzeb and a mosque raised on the site. It is an odd mixture of Hindu and Moughal styles of architecture.



Durga Temple

Built during the 18th century in Nagara style of north India, the temple is dedicated to Goddess Durga, the epitome of power in the Hindu mythology. The shikhara or spire is formed of many small shikhara, one atop the other. Starting with five at the base, they converge into one at the top, symbolizing that this world of five elements has ultimately to merge with the Supreme (the Brahma).



Tulsi Manas Mandir

Constructed by a Philanthropist family of Kolkata, this temple is dedicated to Lord Ram. It is said that the great seer Tulsidas lived and composed the Ramcharitmanas here. The entire marble structure is inscribed with quartets and couplets from the Ramcharitmanas.



Sankat Mochan

The temple dedicated to Lord Hanuman has the idols of Ram, Sita and Lukshman on one side and Lord Hanuman on the other side. The sprawling campus is also popular for religious discourses and annual music festival.



Kalbhairav Temple

This is a temple of Lord Kalbhairav, who is believed to be the Kotwal (protector) of the city. It is only with his permission that anyone can enter or leave the city. Sunday is considered as auspicious day for worshipping the Lord Kalbhairav.



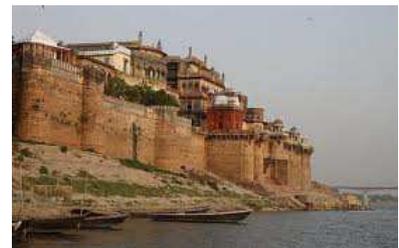
Tridev Mandir

This is a newly built temple, symbolizes modern style of temple architecture. The temple houses the attractive idols of Tridev Lord Brahma, Bishnu and Mahesh, besides beautiful idols of other Gods and Goddess are also established in the temple.



Ramnagar Fort

Symbol of a bygone era, the Ramnagar Fort still stands proudly on the banks of the river Ganga. The magnificent fort has been the abode of Maharajas of Varanasi for over 400 years. It still retains glimpses of its past splendour. Of particular interest is its Durbar Hall, besides a museum where historic exhibits like brocade palanquins, elephant howdahs (saddles) made of silver apart from guns and ammunition are also on display.



Varanasi has fascinated visitors like Fa-Hien and Huen-Tsang also from time immemorial, who were entranced by the city. Some call it the “Spiritual Heart of India”, some the ultimate guide on metaphysics, some the Holy City, some the city of Ghats and Temples and some the City of Light. Varanasi has many a synonyms reflecting the myriad hues of culture and tradition, which it embodies. But, above all these aspects it will be more worthy to say that Varanasi is the city full of life.

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