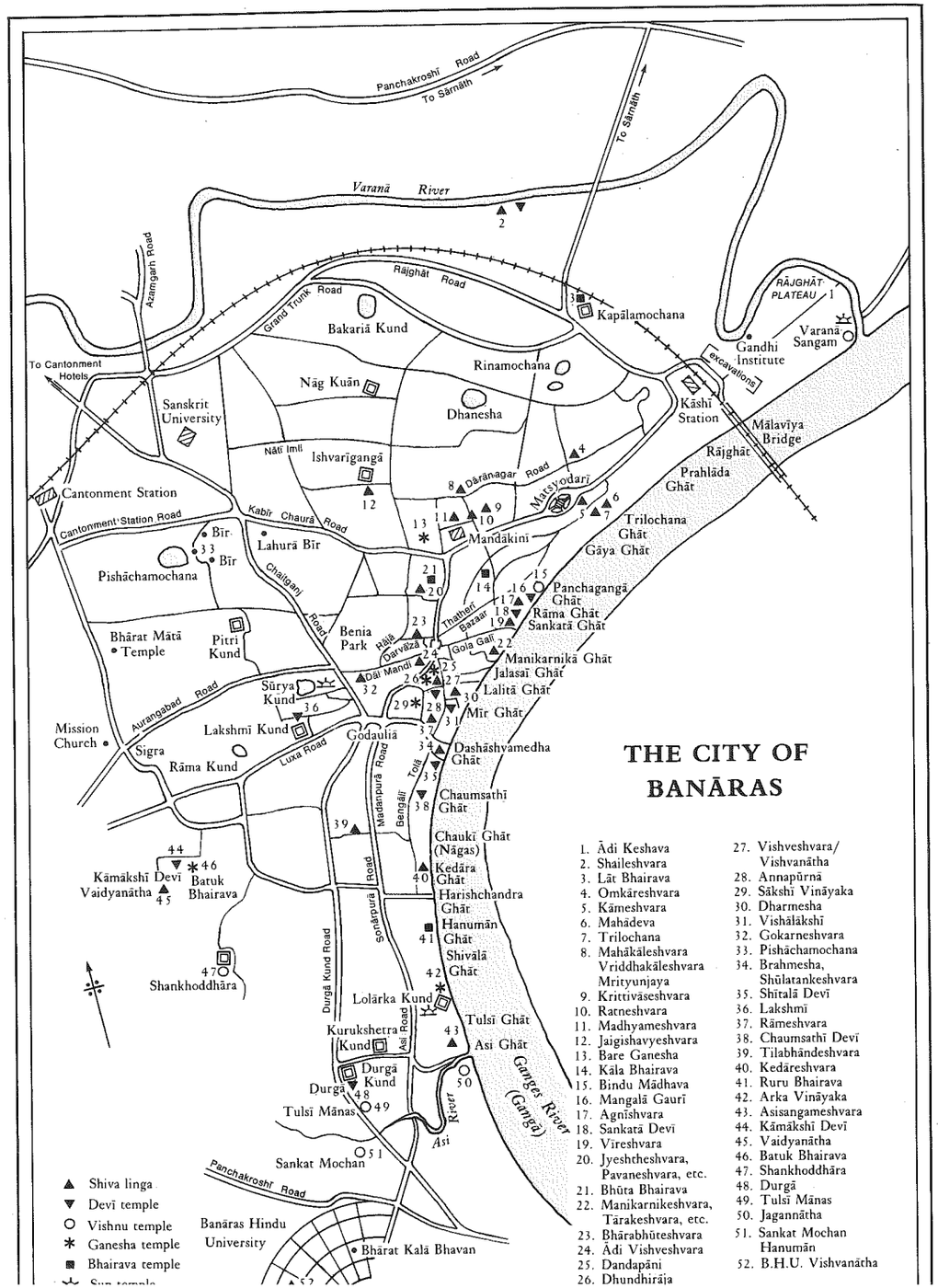


I

BANARAS: AN INTRODUCTION

BANĀRAS is a magnificent city, rising from the western bank of the River Ganges, where the river takes a broad crescent sweep toward the north. There is little in the world to compare with the splendor of Banāras, seen from the river at dawn. The rays of the early-morning sun spread across the river and strike the high-banked face of this city, which Hindus call Kāshī—the Luminous, the City of Light. The temples and shrines, ashrams and pavilions that stretch along the river for over three miles are golden in the early morning. They rise majestic on the high riverbank and cast deep reflections into the waters of the Ganges. Long flights of stone steps called *ghāts,* reaching like roots into the river, bring thousands of worshippers down to the river to bathe at dawn. In the narrow lanes at the top of these steps moves the unceasing earthly drama of life and death, which Hindus call *samsāra.* But here, from the perspective of the river, there is a vision of transcendence and liberation, which Hindus call *moksha.*

The riverfront reveals the sources of Kāshī's ancient reputation as the sacred city of the Hindus. Along the river there are over seventy bathing *ghāts,* literally "landings" or "banks," reaching from Asi Ghāt in the south to Ādi Keshava in the north, beyond the bridge. Some are quiet neighborhood *ghāts,* while others are crowded with pilgrims from all over India. Bathing in the Ganges, a river said to have fallen from heaven to earth, is the first act of Banāras pilgrims and a daily rite for Banāras residents. Also along the river are dozens of temples with

high spires, most of them dedicated to Lord Shiva, who according to tradition makes this city his permanent earthly home. Great temples, like Kedāreshvara, sit atop their own *ghāts,* while innumerable small shrines along the river are barely large enough for a single *linga,* the simple stone shaft that is the symbol of Shiva. Along with the temples are the ashrams, such as the Ānandamayī ashram, built at the top of the *ghāt* steps. They continue a tradition of spiritual education for which Kāshī has long been famous. At dawn, students of all ages practice yogic exercises, breath control, or meditational disciplines on the steps by the river. Finally, there are the riverside cremation grounds at Harishchandra Ghāt and Manikarnikā Ghāt, recognizable by the smoke that rises from the pyres of the dead. Elsewhere in traditional India, the cremation ground is outside of town, for it is polluted ground. Here, however, the cremation grounds are in the midst of a busy city, adjacent to the bathing *ghāts,* and are holy ground, for death in Kāshī is acclaimed by the tradition as a great blessing. Dying here, one gains liberation from the earthly round of *samsāra.*

For over 2,500 years this city, also called Vārānasī, has attracted pilgrims and seekers from all over India. Sages, such as the Buddha, Mahāvīra, and Shankara, have come here to teach. Young men have come to study the Vedas with the city's great pandits. Householders have come on pilgrimages, some to bring the ashes of a deceased parent to commit to the River Ganges. *Sannyāsins,* "renouncers" who have left the householder stage of life behind, have come to gather in the monasteries *(mathas)* and ashrams of Kāshī, especially during the rainy season when they are unable to continue their lives as homeless wayfarers. Widows too have come to Banāras, out of piety or out of misery, to take refuge in its temples and to live on the alms of the faithful. And the very old or very ill have come to Kāshī to live out their final days until they die.

Banāras is one of the oldest living cities in the world, as old as Jerusalem, Athens, and Peking. It occupied its high bank overlooking the Ganges in the cradle days of Western civilization. Its antiquity has caught the imagination of many, such as the Reverend M. A. Sherring, a mid-nineteenth-century missionary in Banāras, who wrote effusively:

> Twenty-five centuries ago, at the least, it was famous. When Babylon was struggling with Nineveh for supremacy, when Tyre was planting her colonies, when Athens was growing in strength, before Rome had become known, or Greece had contended with Persia, or Cyrus had added lustre to the Persian monarchy, or Nebuchadnezzar had captured Jerusalem, and the inhabitants of Judaea had been carried into captivity, she had already risen to greatness, if not to glory.[1]

On the antiquity of Banāras, which he visited in his journey around the world, Mark Twain quipped, "Benares is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together!"[2]

Unlike these other ancient cities, however, Banāras is a city whose political history is little known. It has rarely been an important political center, and the rise and fall of kings through its long history have no role in the tale of the city's sanctity told by its own people. Kāshī is said to be the city of Shiva, founded at the dawn of creation. It is not the events of its long history that make it significant to Hindus; rather, it has such a long history, and it has survived and flourished through the changing fortunes of the centuries *because* it is significant to Hindus.

There is another important difference between Banāras and its contemporaries: its present life reaches back to the sixth century B.C. in a continuous tradition. If we could imagine the silent Acropolis and the Agora of Athens still alive with the intellectual, cultural, and ritual traditions of classical Greece, we might glimpse the remarkable tenacity of the life of Kāshī. Today Peking, Athens, and Jerusalem are moved by a very different ethos from that which moved them in ancient times, but Kāshī is not.

Lewis Mumford, in *The City in History,* wrote that a city is "energy converted into culture."[3] There are a few great cities in the world which have converted the energy of an entire civilization into culture, and have come to symbolize and embody that whole civilization in microcosm. Again, we think of Peking, Mecca, Athens, Jerusalem, and Rome. It is no wonder that such cities have become places of pilgrimage for the cultures they have produced, and that pilgrims speak of the whole world as radiating from and being present in the great "world-city," the cosmopolis.

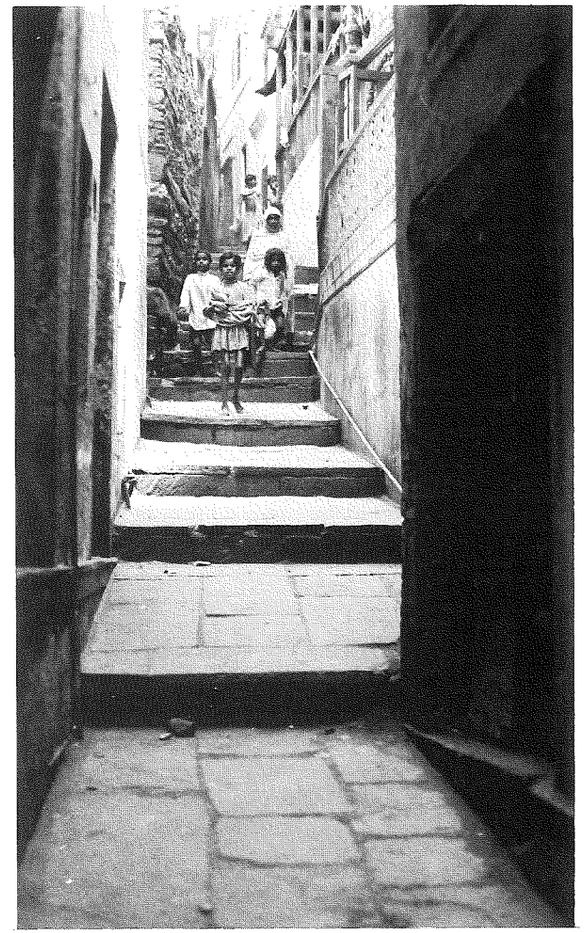
In launching the Crusades, Pope Urban II cried, "Jerusalem is the center of the earth!"[4] Indeed, medieval maps sometimes depict Jerusalem at the center of the world, with whole continents spreading out

from it like petals. Similarly, Mecca was said to be the first place of creation, situated on the axis of the universe directly below the throne of God.[5] For Chinese culture, Peking was the city at the center of the world, the "Pivot of the Four Quarters."[6] And so Hindus say of Banāras that it stands at the center of the earth as the place of creation, and gathers together the whole of the sacred universe in a single symbolic circle, a *mandala*. Yet it is not an earthly city. Kāshī is said to sit above the earth as a "crossing place" *(tīrtha)* between this world and the "far shore" of the transcendent Brahman.

There are few cities in India as traditionally Hindu and as symbolic of the whole of Hindu culture as the city of Banāras. And there are few cities in India, or in the world for that matter, as challenging and bewildering to Western visitors as Banāras. It is a city as rich as all India. But it is not an easy city to comprehend for those of us who stand outside the Hindu tradition. As we survey the riverfront at dawn, we are challenged to comprehend the whole of India in one sweeping glance.

The India we see here reflects the elaborate and ancient ritual tradition of Hinduism. It is a tradition of pilgrimage to sacred places, bathing in sacred waters, and honoring divine images. It is a tradition in which all of the senses are employed in the apprehension of the divine. Its shrines are heaped with fresh flowers and filled with the smell of incense, the chanting of prayers, and the ringing of bells. It is a tradition that has imagined and imaged God in a thousand ways, that has been adept in discovering the presence of the divine everywhere and in bringing every aspect of human life into the religious arena. It is a religious tradition that understands life and death as an integrated whole. Here the smoke of the cremation pyres rises heavenward with the spires of a hundred temples and the ashes of the dead swirl through the waters of the Ganges, the river of life.

At the outset, we cannot even *see* the scope and dimensions of this religious tradition. We do not know the myths, the symbols, and the images that are the language of access to Hinduism. In an important sense, we do not see the same city Hindus see. We see the waters of the River Ganges, we see stone images adorned with flowers, and we see cows browsing with leisurely sovereignty through the streets. So do the Hindus. We see a city of narrow lanes surging with life, streets noisy with the jangling of rickshaw bells, buildings crumbling about the edges and sagging in the balconies. So do the Hindus. But it is as if



The narrow lanes and lofty houses of Banāras.

we see these things in one dimension, while Hindus see them in many dimensions. What Hindus "see" in Kāshī only begins with the city that meets the eye. To know what else they see we must know what Kāshī means and has meant in the Hindu tradition. What is its symbolic significance? What stories do Hindus tell of it? What mighty events do they ascribe to this place? What hopes and expectations do they bring when they come here? What vision do they see of the City of Light?

It is our purpose here to try to see the city Hindus see. We will explore the Sanskrit texts that praise this city. We will hear the popular Hindi tales and listen to the voices of priests and pilgrims. We will walk the ancient streets of Banāras, visit its temples, ponder its ruins,

and learn of its gods. And all the while we will attempt to see, in and through the facts we have gathered, a vision of the city Hindus have seen.

Seeing Banāras Through Western Eyes

TO VISITORS from the West, the great commercial cities of India—Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, and Delhi—seem far more familiar than Banāras. These are the modern cities of India, and they were all built by foreigners: Delhi by the early Muslim dynasties in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Bombay by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, and Madras and Calcutta by the British in the seventeenth century. Banāras is older than all of them, by over two thousand years. Although parts of Banāras were destroyed repeatedly between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries by the armies of the various Muslim kings who ruled North India, they were rebuilt, right on top of the ruins and rubble. Despite the fact that few of its buildings are ancient, the city looks very old.

The heart of urban Banāras has few streets wide enough for a two-seat bicycle rickshaw, and even fewer wide enough for automobile traffic. It is a maze of lanes, barely wider than a footpath. The last two centuries of "modernization" have left this part of the city little changed, at least on the surface. Of course, there is electricity and running water where once there were oil lamps and wells. There are high-fashion *sārīs* and stainless-steel utensils for sale in the same celebrated shops that for centuries have carried only silk and brass. There are bicycles, taxis, and, more recently, motorcycle rickshaws, which vie with the horse-drawn tongas, the camels, and the pedestrians in the traffic of the main streets. And through the arched doorways of two- and three-story houses in the narrow lanes, there are kitchens equipped with refrigerators and blenders. But the dense structure of the old city has not changed. And in these years, while Calcutta has grown from a small trading fort to one of the largest and most complex cities in the world, the splendid riverfront face of Banāras has retained its old and ageless character.

To linger in Banāras is to linger in another era, an era which one cannot quite date by century. It is very old, and yet it has continued to gather the cumulative Hindu tradition, right to the present. While the loudspeaker on the *ghāts* blares the chanting of devotional hymns—the latest notion of a public charity!—people bathe in the river and splash an ancient tree trunk with Ganges water on their way home, as they may have done for three thousand years. The city displays the layering of the Hindu tradition like a palimpsest, an old parchment that has been written upon and imperfectly erased again and again, leaving the old layers partially visible.

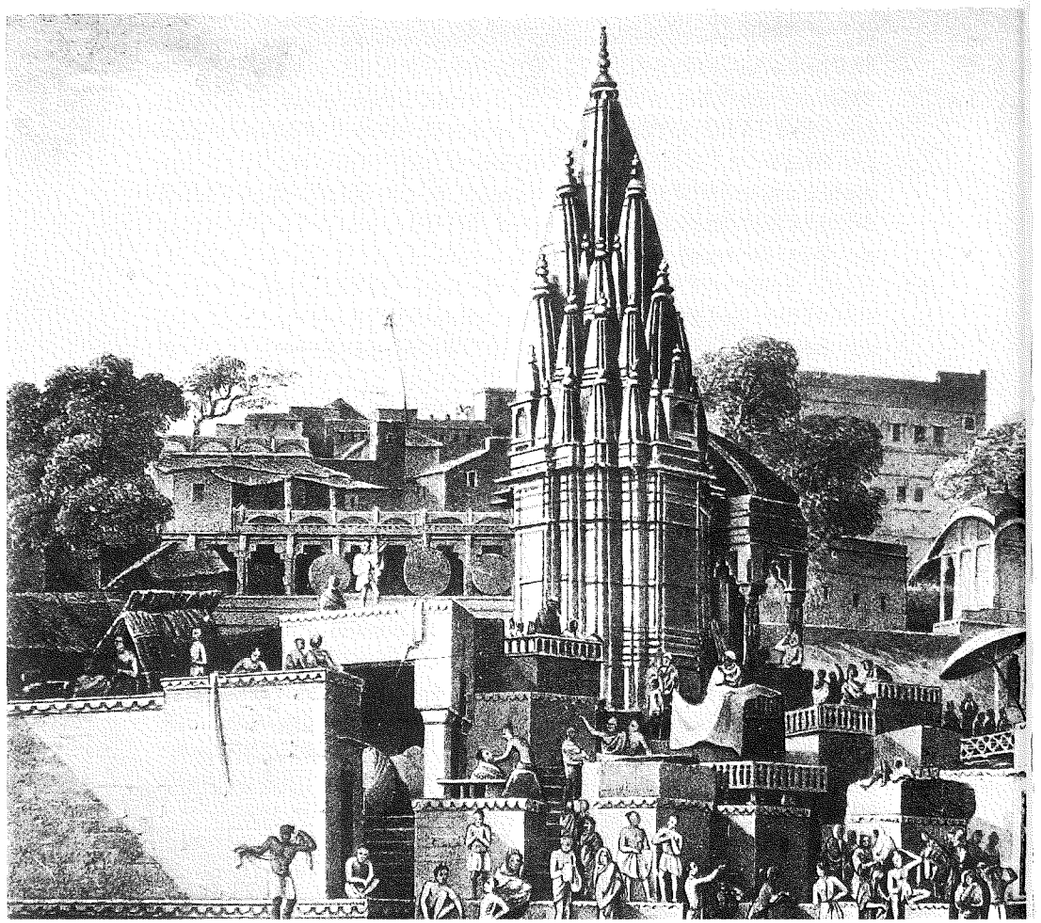
It is precisely because Banāras has become a symbol of traditional Hindu India that Western visitors have often found this city the most strikingly "foreign" of India's cities. The city is a living text of Hinduism. Men and women descend the *ghāts* to bathe in the Ganges and they crowd into temples along the river with their hands full of flowers and sweets destined for the lap of a multi-armed image. They sip the waters of the Ganges and they carry these waters home in polished brass pots. In the market, bronze-cast or clay images of different gods are bought and sold. In the wayside shrines, worn old stones are daubed and smeared with vermilion paste. In a thousand temples, stone *lingas* of Shiva are touched, sprinkled, and strewn with flowers. Along the river, the burning of the dead is a common sight. As we read this visible, living text, we ask some of the same questions that Western visitors have posed in their minds for centuries: Who is Shiva and who are these multi-armed gods? Why do Hindus bathe in the Ganges? Why do they come here to die?

For over four hundred years Banāras has both astonished and bewildered visitors from the West. Merchants and missionaries, civil servants and travelers have written extensively of this city in letters, journals, and books. Although they rarely understood what it all meant, they described what they saw with energy and with vivid visual detail. Their writings are interesting and important, in part because they provide the only descriptive accounts of Banāras in the past centuries. Because of their very different sense of the "individual," Hindus have no tradition of keeping journals or personal reflections of their travels. However, these foreign diaries give us more than a description of Banāras. They allow us to see how our Western predecessors, with little knowledge of India, saw and understood a culture that was so markedly different from their own.

In 1584, Ralph Fitch was the first English visitor to record his im-

pressions of "Bannaras." Fitch was traveling with a small party of merchants carrying letters of introduction from Queen Elizabeth to the great monarchs of India and China. They arrived in Banāras by boat, having come down the Ganges from Allahabad. Fitch wrote,

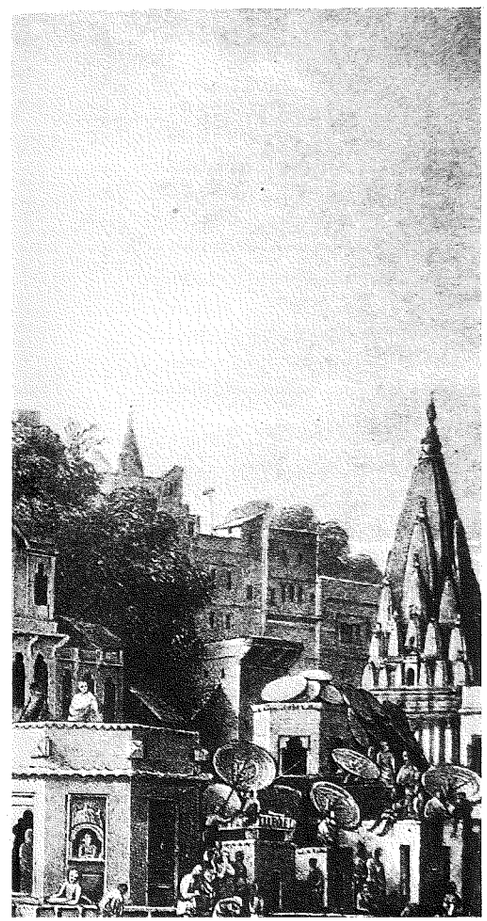
In this place they be all Gentiles, and be the greatest idolaters that ever I sawe. To this towne come the Gentiles on pilgrimage out of farre countreyes. Here alongst the waters side bee many faire houses, and in all of them . . . they have their images standing, which be evill favoured, made of stone and wood, some like lions, leopards, and monkeis; some like men and women, and pecocks; and some like the devil with foure armes and 4 hands.[7]



Fitch went on to describe the rites he saw people performing along the riverbank:

And by breake of day and before, there are men and women which come out of the towne and wash themselves in Ganges. And there are divers old men which upon places of earth made for the purpose, sit praying, and they give the people three or foure straws, which they take and hold them betweene their fingers when they wash themselves; and some sit to marke them in the forheads, and they have in a cloth a litle rice, barlie, or money, which, when they have washed themselves, they give to the old men which sit there praying. Afterwards they go to divers of their images, and give them of their sacrifices. And when they give, the old men say certaine prayers, and then all is holy.[8]

The "divers old men," of course, were the brahmin *ghātiās* or *pan-*



"Munikurnika Ghat" as drawn by James Prinsep, Benares Illustrated, *1831, showing bathers at the water's edge and brahmin* ghātias *on their stone platforms. The temple at the center is Tārakeshvara, the "Lord of the Crossing." The temple at the right has since fallen into the river. Prinsep writes, "In the rains the temples are submerged to the cornice; many Hindoos, notwithstanding, are bold enough to swim through an impetuous current, and to dive under the porch and door-way, for the honor of continuing their customary worship in despite of perils and personal inconvenience."*

dās who tend to the needs of pilgrims and bathers even today. They receive the token offerings of grain in exchange for their services. The straws are of the sacred *kusha* grass, held in the hand during the performance of many Hindu rites.

About a century after the time of Fitch came the French traveler Jean Baptiste Tavernier, a dealer in jewels who made six voyages to India between 1636 and 1668. Tavernier visited Banāras on his last trip and saw the great riverside temple, which he called a "pagoda," of Bindu Mādhava. His account is especially interesting because the temple was demolished shortly afterwards by the armies of the Mughal Aurangzeb and it has never been rebuilt on its old foundations. Tavernier arrived during the morning *āratī,* a service of worship which takes its name from the offering of camphor lamps to the deity. People had gathered for the *darshana,* the "sacred sight" of the image. Tavernier did not know it was an image of Vishnu, nor did he know anything about Hindu ritual, but he described the rite with care:

As soon as the door of the pagoda was opened, and after a large curtain had been drawn, and the people present had seen the idol, all threw themselves upon the ground, placing their hands upon their heads and prostrating themselves three times; then having risen they threw a quantity of bouquets and chains in the form of chaplets, which the Brahmins placed in contact with the idol, and then returned to the people. An old Brahmin who was in the front of the altar, held in his hand a lamp with nine lighted wicks, upon which, from time to time, he threw a kind of incense when approaching the lamp toward the idol.[9]

Tavernier saw one of the most common rites of Hindu worship, called *pūjā* or *āratī,* which includes the offering of flowers, the presentation of oil lights, the burning of fragrant camphor, and the libations of Ganges water. The flowers, water, and even food offerings placed in contact with the image are considered to have been consecrated and are received by the worshippers as what is called *prasāda,* the "grace" of the Lord.

In 1823 and 1824, Bishop Reginald Heber, Anglican Bishop of Calcutta, made a circuit trip across North India and stopped in Banāras. He stayed in the British cantonment to the west of Banāras, but ventured into the city and, like Tavernier, into its temples. As is still the case today, the priests would present such a guest with a consecrated garland of flowers as a courtesy. Heber wrote,

During my progress through the holy places I had received garlands of flowers in considerable numbers, which I was told it was uncivil to throw away, particularly those which were hung around my neck. I now, in consequence, looked more like a sacrifice than a Priest, and on getting again into the gig was glad to rid myself of my ornaments![10]

Heber found Banāras "a remarkable city, more entirely and characteristically Eastern than any which I have yet seen."[11] Like other travelers, he was impressed with the tight web of city lanes. He wrote, after his first trip into the center of the city,

No Europeans live in the town, nor are the streets wide enough for a wheel-carriage. Mr. Frazer's gig was stopped short almost at its entrance, and the rest of the way was passed in tonjons,* through alleys so crowded, so narrow, and so winding, that even a tonjon sometimes passed with difficulty. The houses are mostly lofty, none I think less than two stories, most of three, and several of five or six, a sight which I now for the first time saw in India. The streets, like those of Chester, are considerably lower than the ground-floors of the houses, which have mostly arched rows in front, with little shops behind them. Above these, the houses are richly embellished with verandahs, galleries, projecting oriel windows, and very broad overhanging eaves, supported by carved brackets. The number of temples is very great, mostly small and stuck like shrines in the angles of the streets, and under the shadow of lofty houses.[12]

Shortly after the visit of Bishop Heber, Miss Emma Roberts, who wrote a series of sketches on India for the *Asiatic Journal* and collected them in *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan,* gave her account of the temples of the city. Unlike Tavernier and Heber, she was not inclined to linger for the rites of worship:

As soon as it is broad day, the priests repair to the temples, and devotees are seen conveying the sacred water from the Ganges to the several shrines. At the doors of the pagodas, persons are stationed with baskets of flowers for sale. Long rosaries of scarlet, white, or yellow blossoms, seem to be in the greatest request, and are purchased by the pious as offerings to their gods: the pavements of the temples are strewed with these floral treasures, the only

* A *tonjon* is described by one author as "a sort of open sedan chair which is carried by poles resting on the shoulders of the bearers." (Norman Macleod, *Days in North India,* p. 116.)

pleasing ceremonial connected with Hindoo worship. The too-abundant supply of water, the dirty throng of religious beggars, and the incessant vociferations of "Ram! Ram!" compel all save determined antiquaries to make a speedy exit from the noise and crowd of these places.[13]

Above all, these early visitors were struck by the "spectacle," the "panorama" of the Banāras riverfront. Especially as the nineteenth century drew to a close and the "exotic" India had caught the imagination of the West, a great many writers and adventurers set their hand to the description of this scene. In his around-the-world adventures, *Following the Equator,* Mark Twain wrote:

The Ganges front is the supreme showplace of Benares. Its tall bluffs are solidly caked from water to summit, along a stretch of three miles, with a splendid jumble of massive and picturesque masonry, a bewildering and beautiful confusion of stone platforms, temples, stairflights, rich and stately palaces—nowhere a break, nowhere a glimpse of the bluff itself; all the long face of it is compactly walled from sight by this crammed perspective of platforms, soaring stairways, sculptured temples, majestic palaces, softening away into the distances; and there is movement, motion, human life everywhere, and brilliantly costumed—streaming in rainbows up and down the lofty stairways, and massed in metaphorical gardens on the miles of great platforms at the river's edge.[14]

About the same time, W. S. Caine described the people "streaming in rainbows" in more detail:

Up and down the *ghats,* all day long, but especially in the early morning, stream the endless course of pilgrims, ragged tramps, aged crones, horrible beggars, hawkers, Brahmin priests, sacred bulls and cows, Hindu preachers, wealthy *rajas* or bankers in gay palanquins, Fakirs, pariah dogs, and scoffing globetrotters from Europe and America.[15]

James Prinsep's view of "Dusaswumedh Ghat" from Benares Illustrated, *1831.*

Edwin Arnold, already well known for the *Light of Asia,* wrote in *India Revisited* of the rite of bathing in the Ganges, and he described with emotion the people he observed at their prayers:

Some are old and feeble, weary with long journeys of life, emaciated by maladies, saddened from losses and troubles; and the morning air blows sharp, the river wave runs chilly. Yet there they stand, breast-deep in the cold

Bathing in the Ganges.

river, with dripping cotton garments clinging to their thin or aged limbs, visibly shuddering under the shock of the water, and their lips blue and quivering, while they eagerly mutter their invocations. None of them hesitates; into the Gunga they plunge on arrival, ill or well, robust or sickly; and ladle the holy liquid up with small, dark, trembling hands, repeating the sacred names, and softly mentioning the sins they would expiate and the beloved souls they would plead for.[16]

These descriptive accounts, vivid and impassioned as they are, raise continually the question of meaning. This may be awesome, poignant, spectacular, but what is going on? How are we to understand this place, these religious acts, these people? Since most of these early visitors, Arnold being an exception, knew little of Hinduism but what presented itself to the eye, they were unable to broach these questions. Banāras was somehow too much for the mind to comprehend, and their writings are replete with expressions of speechless amazement. They had few interpretive resources with which to make sense of what they saw.

Some tried to understand Banāras by comparison with something "comparable" in the West. François Bernier called it the "Athens of India," and Edwin Arnold called it "the Oxford and Canterbury of

India in one," referring to its pre-eminence as a seat of learning and religious authority.[17] Lieutenant-Colonel Davidson, in his 1843 *Diary of Travels and Adventures in Upper India,* wrote, "It is the Hindoo Jerusalem, to which their dying thoughts are directed by pious Hindoos, expire where they may."[18] Another traveler, Norman Macleod, wrote, "Benares is to the Hindoos what Mecca is to the Mohammedans, and what Jerusalem was to the Jews of old. It is the 'holy' city of Hindostan."[19]

There was considerable disagreement on just how "holy" this city was. Here the question of interpretation is raised with special clarity. Some of these writers were utterly appalled, like James Kennedy, who lived in Banāras as an employee of the London Missionary Society. Of the Hindu tradition, so visibly embodied here, he wrote, "Everything you see is wild, grotesque, unnatural, forbidding, utterly wanting in versimilitude and refinement, with nothing to purify and raise the people, with everything fitted to pervert their taste and lower their character. . . ."[20] There were others who, at least from a distance, could sense and appreciate the holiness of Banāras, which Norman Macleod described as the "visible embodiment of religion."[21] A few, however, were completely captivated by Banāras. Count Hermann Keyserling, who left Europe shortly before World War I to journey around the world, wrote an account of the city that could hardly present a sharper contrast to Kennedy's:

Benares is holy. Europe, grown superficial, hardly understands such truths anymore. . . . I feel nearer here than I have ever done to the heart of the world; here I feel every day as if soon, perhaps even to-day, I would receive the grace of supreme revelation. . . . The atmosphere of devotion which hangs above the river is improbable in its strength: stronger than in any church that I have ever visited. Every would-be Christian priest would do well to sacrifice a year of his theological studies in order to spend this time on the Ganges: here he would discover what piety means.[22]

Most of the accounts and journals, however, reveal neither revulsion nor intoxication alone, but rather a curious mixture of the two. Although there is some genuine attempt to understand and to appreciate the significance of the city, there is clearly a point at which appreciation or fascination yields to condemnation. The city might be awesome, but in the world view of nineteenth-century civil servants and

missionaries, it could not be "holy." The most striking examples of this complex attraction-repulsion response are in the writings of the Christian missionaries. M. A. Sherring, for example, spent many years in Banāras in the mid-nineteenth century and was clearly fascinated by the city. He took great interest and care in his research into its history and its sacred sites, and he described what he learned and saw with thoroughness and zeal. At the same time, as a Christian he could not include the city in his religious imagination. The poignant ambivalence of a man who had come to love Banāras and yet felt he must finally condemn it is expressed in Sherring's *The Sacred City of the Hindus.* Note both voices in his portrayal of the aging pilgrim making his way to Banāras:

> . . . [He comes] as of old, from the remotest corners of India, as the sands of time are slowly ebbing away, and, fearful lest the last golden grains should escape before his long journey is ended, makes desperate efforts to hold on his course, till, at length, arriving at the sacred city and touching its hallowed soil, his anxious spirit becomes suddenly calm, a strange sense of relief comes over him, and he is at once cheered and comforted with the treacherous lie, that his sins are forgiven and his soul is saved.[23]

While the general sense of a "sacred city" and the triumph of reaching sacred ground were things Sherring and others could understand by comparison with the sacred cities of the West, there were many aspects of Kāshī that remained inaccessible to them. Their writings are filled with the language of the "treacherous lie" and "idolatrous worship." They saw a city about which Hindus had "superstition," not faith. They saw sacred waters which were "stagnant," "unsufferably foul," and "loathsome," not cleansing. And they saw Hindus who were "deeply perverted," not religious.

More than anything else, it was the multitude of divine images or "idols," as they called them, that elicited the strongest response of Westerners in their encounter with Banāras and with Hinduism generally. Virtually everyone who visited the city, from Ralph Fitch in the 1500s through those who went there in subsequent centuries, expressed astonishment and even repugnance at the panoply of images. Fitch wrote, "Their chiefe idols bee blacke and evill favoured, their mouths monstrous, their eares gilded and full of jewels, their teeth and eyes of gold, silver, and glasse, some having one thing in their handes and some another."[24] Three hundred years later, the English assessment of these images had changed little. In the 1800s, Norman Macleod, in the midst of his exuberance for the vistas of Banāras, referred to "that ugly looking monster called God," [25] and Sherring wrote of "the worship of uncouth idols, of monsters, of the *linga* and other indecent figures, and of a multitude of grotesque, ill-shapen, and hideous objects."[26] Mark Twain had a certain imaginative humor about it all, but he too added his voice to the chorus: "And what a swarm of them there is! The town is a vast museum of idols—and all of them crude, misshapen, and ugly. They flock through ones dreams at night, a wild mob of nightmares."[27]

These divine images bring into sharp focus the issue of what Western visitors thought they saw in the temples and along the riverfront of Kāshī, and they raise the question of what it is that Hindus see—both in the images of the temples and in the larger divine image of the city itself.

Seeing Kāshī Through Hindu Eyes

A MULTITUDE of Hindu deities is visible everywhere in Banāras. Over the doorways of temples and houses sits the plump, orange, elephant-headed Ganesha. On the walls of tea stalls and tailor shops hang gaudy polychrome icons of Lakshmī or Krishna. And on the whitewashed walls of houses and public buildings the episodes of Shiva's marriage to Pārvatī, or Rāma's battle with the ten-headed Rāvana, are painted afresh after the season of rains by local folk artists.

In temples one sees the *linga* of Shiva, or the four-armed image of Vishnu, or the silver mask of the goddess Durgā. Such images are crafted according to carefully prescribed rules of iconography and iconometry. When they are finished, the "breath" or "life" of the deity is invited to be present in the image. In some Hindu sectarian movements, the sense of God's presence here is so powerful that they see it as an image-incarnation of the Supreme Lord.[28] The last act of the elaborate consecration rites is opening the eyes of the image, which is done symbolically with a golden needle or by placing large enameled eyes upon the image. Contact between God and the worshipper is exchanged most powerfully, they say, through the eyes.

The Hindu tradition has entrusted the senses, especially the eyes,

with the apprehension of the holy. When Hindus go to the temple, they do not say, "I am going to worship," but rather, "I am going for *darshana.*" The word *darshana* means "seeing." In the religious sense, it means beholding the divine image and standing in the presence of God. Hindus go for *darshana* especially at those times of day when the image is beautifully adorned with flowers, and when offerings of incense, water, food, and camphor lamps are presented to the deity. The central acts of Hindu worship are having the *darshana* of the Lord and receiving the *prasāda,* the consecrated food offerings, which are the Lord's special "grace" or "blessing." For Hindus, therefore, the image is not an object at which one's vision halts, but rather a lens through which one's vision is directed. Even the nineteenth-century missionary James Kennedy, who found the images of the gods "wild" and "grotesque," acknowledged that he had "never met a Hindu who would allow he worshipped the material objects before which he bowed down."[29]

Of course, it is not only the divine image, but the fact that there are so many different images that invites our understanding. It is fundamental to the Hindu tradition and to the Hindu way of thinking that the Divine, the Supreme Lord, can be seen in a great variety of ways and from many different perspectives. From one perspective it is perceived that there are more gods, or faces of God, than we can count—330 million, they say. And yet, from another perspective, it is obvious that there is One. The fact that there may be many gods does not diminish their power or significance. Each one of the great gods may serve as a lens through which the whole may be clearly seen.

When Hindus travel on a pilgrimage to a holy place such as Banāras, it is also for *darshana*—not sight-seeing but "sacred sight-seeing." They want to have the *darshana* of the place itself as well as that of its presiding deity, who in Kāshī is Shiva Vishvanātha, the "Lord of All." Their vision is sharpened and refined by the rigors of the pilgrim journey. Some travel long distances by train or bus. Some come on foot, as the many generations before them have done, walking the dusty roads of rural India, balancing a bundle of provisions on their heads.

Those who travel as pilgrims follow the path of the "holy men" *(sādhus)* or "renouncers" *(sannyāsins),* those perpetual seekers and pilgrims who have given up the settled life of home to live out the spiritual truth that all people, finally, are travelers and pilgrims on

earth. Very few people become *sannyāsins* or *sādhus,* but in going on a pilgrimage, ordinary householders become, for a short time, renouncers of sorts. Leaving home, they take only those few things they can carry, and their life is the simple life of the road. Their destinations are spiritual ones, and they are often difficult to reach. Going on foot to a distant place becomes for these pilgrims a kind of asceticism in which the journey itself is as purifying as the sacred destination. In the *Aitareya Brāhmana,* the god Indra, protector of travelers, urges the life of the road upon a young man named Rohita:

> There is no happiness for him who does not travel, Rohita! Thus we have heard. Living in the society of men, the best man becomes a sinner. . . . Therefore, wander!
>
> The feet of the wanderer are like the flower, his soul is growing and reaping the fruit; and all his sins are destroyed by his fatigues in wandering. Therefore, wander!
>
> The fortune of him who is sitting, sits; it rises when he rises; it sleeps when he sleeps; it moves when he moves. Therefore, wander![30]

Hindus have taken up with great zeal the injunction to wander, and pilgrimage has long been the major reason for Hindus to travel. Modern bus and train service has brought a new dimension to Indian pilgrimage, enabling Hindus to take to the road by the millions each year for the *darshana* of the far-flung sacred places of India. The organization of this new style of pilgrimage is a thriving business.

In a city like Banāras, pilgrimage is a thriving priestly business as well. There are priests and sacred specialists to assist in every aspect of pilgrimage. There are the *pandās,* who meet the pilgrims at the train station, arrange their rest houses, and oversee the entire pilgrimage. For many pilgrims, the *pandā* will be the same man or of the same family who has cared for their ancestors. There are the *karmakāndīs,* priests who assist in particular rites; the *ghātiās,* priests of a somewhat lower class who have proprietary rites along the *ghāts* and who tend to the needs of the bathers; the *pūjārīs,* who officiate in the temples; and the *mahāpātras,* who specialize in death rites.[31]

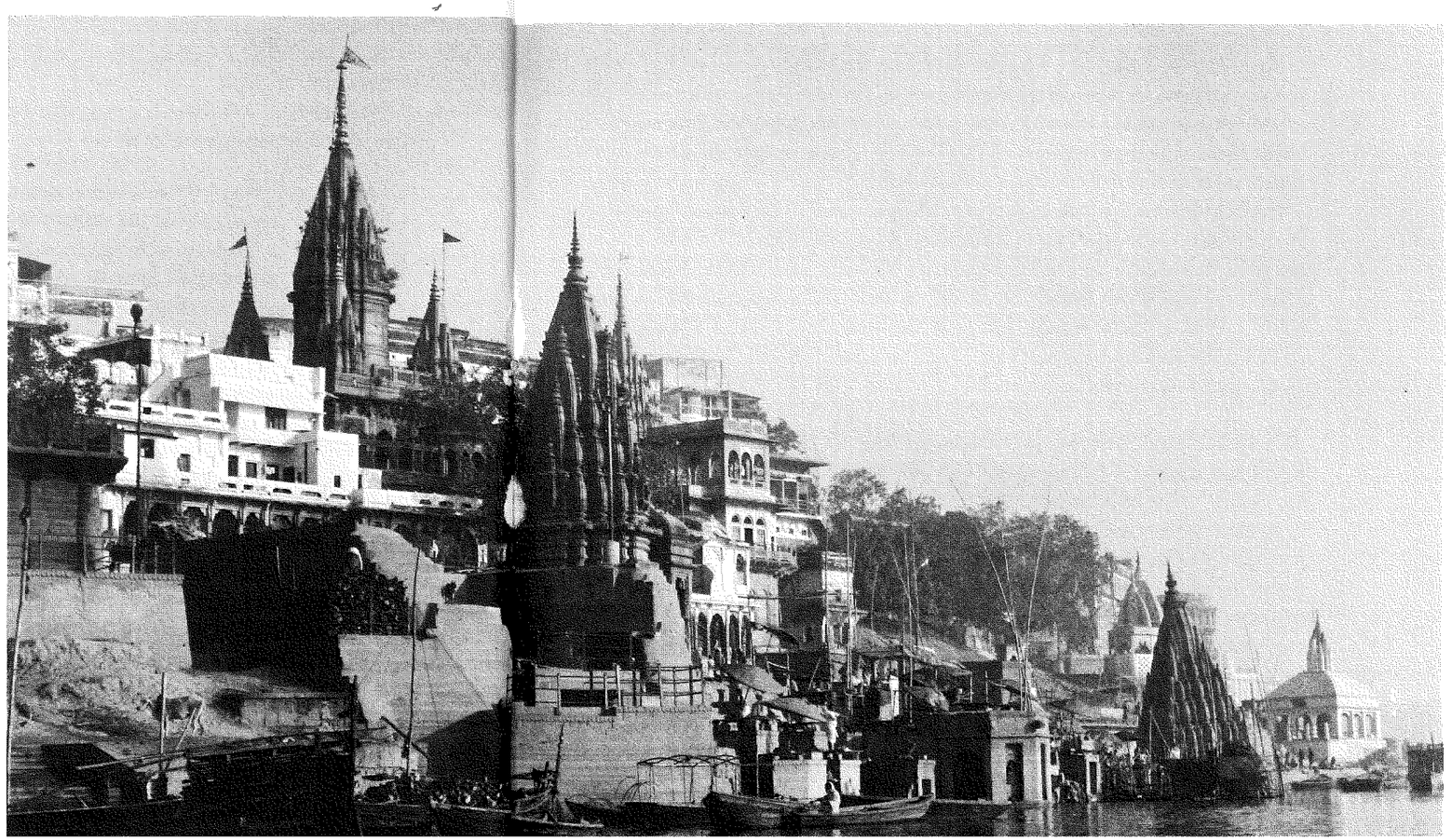
As pilgrims arrive in Kāshī and travel by bicycle rickshaw from the train station to their rest house, the city that meets the eye is not so different from the city described by its Western visitors—the narrow streets, the cows, the temples, the *ghāts,* the river. For Hindus, however, the city they see is not only the city that meets the eye; it is also

the city that engages the religious imagination. For hundreds of generations, Kāshī has received pilgrims like themselves, who have seen this city through the eyes of the collective imagination and the power of religious vision.

From childhood, these pilgrims have known of Kāshī, not through the diaries of travelers, but through a type of traditional literature called *māhātmya*. A *māhātmya* is a laud, a hymn of praise, a glorification. These praises, of particular places or of particular gods, form a part of the many Purānas, the "ancient stories" of the gods, kings, and saints. Kāshī *māhātmyas* are found in many of the Purānas, the most famous and extensive being the *Kāshī Khanda* of the *Skanda Purāna* and

the *Kāshī Rahasya* of the *Brahmavaivarta Purāna*.[32] These *māhātmyas* are not descriptive statements of fact about an ordinary city, but statements of faith about a sacred city.

Kāshī is the whole world, they say. Everything on earth that is powerful and auspicious is here, in this microcosm. All of the sacred places of India and all of her sacred waters are here. All of the gods reside here, attracted by the brilliance of the City of Light. All of the eight directions of the compass originated here, receiving jurisdiction over the sectors of the universe. And all of time is here, they say, for the lords of the heavenly bodies which govern time are grounded in Kāshī and have received their jurisdiction over the days and months



The riverfront near Manikarnikā.

right here. Thus, all the organizing forces of space and time begin here, and are present here, within the sacred boundaries of Kāshī.

And yet Kāshī is not of this earth, they say. While it is in the world and at the very center of the world, it is not attached to the earth. It sits high above the earth on the top of the trident of its lord and protector, Shiva. Kāshī is not subject to the relentless movement of the great cycles of time, the eras of universal creation and dissolution. It is the still center which anchors the perpetual movement of time and space, without participating in the ever-turning world of *samsāra.*

Kāshī is the permanent home of Shiva, they say. Here he dwells in order to bestow the enlightening wisdom of liberation. Although Shiva is omnipresent, there are a few places that are especially transparent to his luminous presence. And of these few, the City of Light is the most brilliant of all.

Kāshī is Light, they say. The city illumines truth and reveals reality. It does not bring new wonders into the scope of vision, but enables one to see what is already there. People have called this Light the Eternal Shiva (Sadā Shiva) or Brahman. Where this Light intersects the earth, it is known as Kāshī.

Kāshī is famous for Death, they say. People come to this place from all over India to die here, for "Death in Kāshī is Liberation."[33] Kāshī is the final destination of a long pilgrimage through many lives. From Kāshī one makes the great "crossing" to the "far shore." Death in Kāshī is not a death feared, for here the ordinary God of Death, frightful Yama, has no jurisdiction. Death in Kāshī is death known and faced, transformed and transcended.

As pilgrims stand at the top of the *ghāts* and see the famed riverfront of Kāshī and the great sweep of the Ganges for the first time, what do they know of the *māhātmyas* that glorify this city? There are thousands of hymns and stories of Kāshī's pilgrims and temples in the *māhātmya* literature and in the oral traditions of different regions and even different families. Pilgrims may know very little, and perhaps no two pilgrims know quite the same stories. During the two or three days they spend here, they will learn a little more, from the *pandās,* storytellers, and charlatans, or from the penny-paperback *māhātmyas* for sale in the bazaars. But even as they arrive, they bring with them the wealth of tradition which has drawn their ancestors here for as long as

the mind can imagine, since "the days before the Ganges came from heaven to earth," they might say. And the city they see, they see in the light of a long tradition of faith.

The Names of the Sacred City

LIKE a loved one, the sacred city is called by many names. The names express the various powers and attributes of the city and reveal the dimensions of its sacred authority. All the names occur frequently in the Sanskrit *māhātmyas* which praise the city. Sometimes they are used to refer to progressively smaller units of the sacred city.* More often, however, they are used interchangeably, as we will use them here.

KĀSHĪ: THE CITY OF LIGHT

This name is the most ancient. It was used nearly three thousand years ago to refer to the kingdom of which this city became the capital. In time, the name came to refer to the capital city as well. It was to the outskirts of Kāshī that the Buddha came to preach his first sermon in the sixth century B.C. The somewhat later Jātaka tales of the Buddhist tradition speak of the "town of Kāshī."[34]

As for its etymology, it has been suggested that the name Kāshī comes from Kāsha, the name of an ancient king, whose dynasty later produced the famous legendary King Divodāsa of Kāshī, or that it comes from *kāsha,* the name of the tall silver-flowering grass which

* Kāshī is the largest unit—a symbolic circle with a radius of five *kroshas* or about ten miles. This sacred zone extends far beyond the city itself into the countryside to the west and is circumambulated on the famous Panchakroshī Road. Vārānasī is, roughly, the urban city today, from the Varanā to the Asi Rivers. Avimukta is a still smaller unit, and the Antargriha or "Inner Sanctum" is smaller still, including only the dense center of the city surrounding the Vishvanātha Temple. Thus, the structure of the sacred city, in this view, is a series of concentric sacred zones like the symbolic structure of a *mandala.* (*See* Appendix II for a more detailed description of these boundaries and Map 5 for an approximation of these zones.)

grows wild along the riverbank. Most commonly, however, it is said to derive from the Sanskrit root *kāsh,* "to shine, to look brilliant or beautiful."

Kāshī, sometimes called Kāshikā, is the shining one, the luminous one, the illumining one. Its most famous *māhātmya,* the *Kāshī Khanda* explains: "Because that light, which is the unspeakable Shiva, shines [*kāshate*] here, let its other name be called Kāshī."[35] The wordplay of Sanskrit continually underlines the relation of the City of Light to the light of enlightenment. For example, the city is called "City of Light, which illumines liberation"—*moksha-prakāshikā Kāshī.*

VĀRĀNASĪ: BETWEEN THE VARANĀ AND THE ASI

Vārānasī is also an ancient name, found in both the Buddhist Jātaka tales and in the Hindu epic, the *Mahābhārata.* From the Pali version of this name—Bārānasi—comes the corrupted name Banāras, by which the city is most widely known today. In both Muslim and British India, the city was "Benares," but in independent India, Vārānasī has been revived as the official name of the city.

Any resident of the city will readily explain that Vārānasī sits between the Varanā River, which flows into the Ganges on the north, and the Asi River, which joins the Ganges on the south. Vārānasī stretches along the river between the two. According to the *Padma Purāna,* "The Varanā and the Asi are two rivers, set there by gods. Between them is a holy land [*kshetra*] and there is none more excellent on earth." And in the *Kūrma Purāna,* we find it simply put: "Vārānasī is the city between the Varanā and the Asi."[36]

It is likely, however, that the city did not receive its name from these two rivers, but rather from the single river that bordered it on the north, known to early literature as the Varānasī River, not the Varanā.[37] As we shall see in the next chapter, it is clear from archeological excavations and from old descriptions of the city that ancient Vārānasī was situated primarily in the north, on the high Rājghāt Plateau where the Varānasī River met the Ganges. The city may have been built on both sides of the Varānasī River; it certainly did

not stretch along the Ganges to the south as it does today. It might be added that the Asi, the alleged southern boundary, hardly merits the status of a river except during the rainy season. It is little more than a rivulet, and one Purāna rightly calls it the "Dried-Up River."[38]

While the popular derivation of Vārānasī is probably a false etymology, it is nonetheless extremely important for our discussion. What interests us in the name is not only that from which it really derives, but rather that toward which it points in helping us understand what Hindus have commonly understood by the name Vārānasī. The rivers are the boundaries of this sacred zone; they define and protect the city. According to the myth, the two rivers were created by the gods and placed in position to guard against the entrance of evil. One river was named "The Sword" *(asi)* and the other was named "The Averter" *(varanā).*[39]

In the *Vāmana Purāna,* the two rivers are said to originate from the body of the primordial person, Purusha, at the beginning of time. The Varanā issued from the right foot of the cosmic giant and the Asi issued from its left foot. "The tract of land lying between them is the best place of pilgrimage in the three worlds and is potent enough to destroy all sins. Its peer does not exist in heaven, earth, and the netherworld."[40]

In the *Jābāla Upanishad,* the two rivers are described not as geographical rivers, but interior rivers, the mystical veins of the body's subtle physiology: "It is called Varanā because it obstructs [*vārayati*] all sins of the senses. It is called Nāsī because it destroys [*nāshayati*] all sins of the senses."[41] When the seeker asks where this place between the Varanā and the Nāsī is located, the sage replies: "It is the place where the nose and the eyebrows meet. That is the meeting place of heaven and the world beyond." Here Vārānasī is given an esoteric interpretation. It is the highest of the six *chakras,* the "circles" of power in the yogic anatomy. It is the place of the eye of wisdom.

AVIMUKTA: THE NEVER-FORSAKEN

In one Purānic *māhātmya,* Shiva says, "Because I never forsake it, nor do I let it go, this great place is therefore known as Avimukta."[42] Avimukta means "not let loose,"* and in this context it means the city "Never Forsaken" by Lord Shiva. According to the city's mythology, this was the place where the *linga* of Shiva was first established and worshipped on earth as the symbol of the Lord's perpetual presence. It is said that even in the *pralaya,* the periodic universal destruction, Shiva never lets go of Kāshī, but holds the city up above the flood-waters on his trident. "Oh silent sages, even in the time of the *pralaya* that land is never let loose by Shiva and Pārvatī. Therefore it is called 'Avimukta.' "[43]

The name Avimukta is often used to emphasize the fact that people should never leave this place. Visitors say of many a place of pilgrimage or retreat that it is so lovely or peaceful one should settle and stay forever. In Avimukta this is taken quite seriously, making this city unique among places of pilgrimage. The "Never Forsaken" is not a place the true pilgrim should merely visit, although many pilgrims do just that. Rather, it is a place one should come to live. Those pilgrims who come to live are called Kāshīvāsīs, the "dwellers in Kāshī," who have come to live out their lives here until they die.

Every Banāras householder knows a tale or two of some unfortunate friend or relation who lived for years in Vārānasī, only to die on a chance trip to Calcutta or on family business in Allahabad. The most conservative say it is best not to leave at all, even to go to the Banāras Hindu University hospital, less than one hundred feet beyond the limit of sacred Kāshī to the south. Some take a vow never to leave, a vow called *kshetra sannyāsa.* Dozens of injunctions in the Purānic *māhātmyas* urge the pilgrim to think twice before leaving Avimukta. With Death holding out the ultimate spiritual promise of liberation, who of sane mind would leave? Who but a fool would cast away a priceless ruby to snatch up a piece of glass?[44] Indeed, it is said, having gained this holy ground one should smash one's feet with a stone to make certain that the priceless treasure of Kāshī is not negligently lost![45]

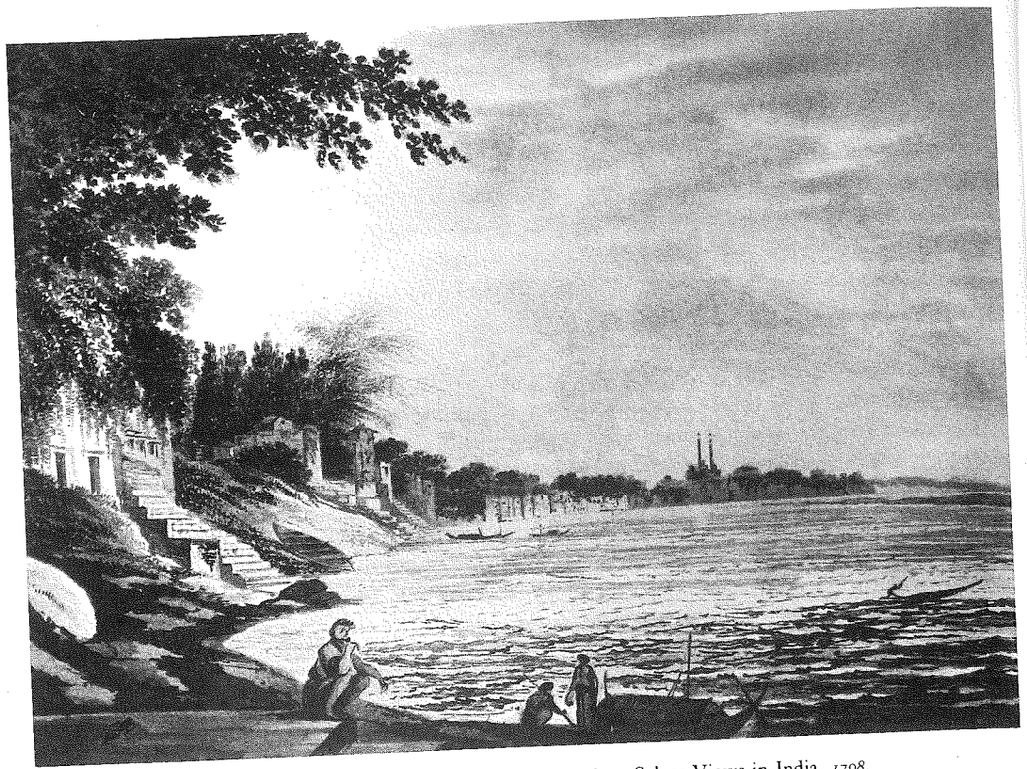
* *Mukti* is another word for *moksha,* "liberation," literally to be "loosed" from the bonds of this world, to be set free. There is much wordplay on the notion that this city which makes people *mukta,* "set free," is never set free by the Lord who makes his home here.

ĀNANDAVANA: THE FOREST OF BLISS

In one *māhātmya,* Shiva explains, "My *lingas* are everywhere there, like little sprouts arisen out of sheer bliss. Thus it is called the Forest of Bliss."[46] A forest with Shiva *lingas* as thick as the fresh sprouts of spring: this is the vision of the sacred city as the Forest of Bliss, the Ānandavana or Ānandakānana. The name refers to this place in the idyllic times of its mythical beginnings. It was not the urban Vārānasī that sat on the Rājghāt Plateau, but the forest paradise that spread out to the south. Its groves, streams, and pools provided a beautiful setting for temples and ashrams. Here teachers could gather their students, yogis could practice their yoga, and ascetics and hermits could find a place for their disciplines.

The city today is so dense that it is difficult to imagine it as a garden paradise. But the extensive settling of Vārānasī is relatively recent. In the twelfth century, the city still had its center in the north, around the confluence of the Ganges and the Varanā. Even in the late eighteenth century, when William Hodges and William Daniell sketched the riverfront of Banāras, it was a long spectacular bluff crowned with trees and a few prominent temples. By that time, however, the urban center of the city had already shifted southward and the dense area around Chaukhambā and Thatherī Bazaar called the *pakka muhalla,* the "well-built quarter," was completed. Even so, the people in that neighborhood still refer to their quarter as the Ban Kati, the "Cut-Down Forest," for the memory of the time when this was indeed a forest is not many generations past. Farther south and west, the Forest of Bliss remained a forest until still more recently. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, there are maps which show much of the southern part of the city in gardens and fields, and people in their old age today remember when areas around Lahurā Bīr and Durgā Kund were jungles.

The Forest of Bliss is a vivid part of Vārānasī's sense of its own history. Today when priests or partisans of some particular temple



"View of the City of Benares" by William Hodges, Select Views in India, *1798. Hodges's sketch is made looking north along the Ganges from about Kedāra Ghāt. The minarets of Aurangzeb's Mosque at Panchagangā are in the distance, and the Ganges bank is still, for the most part, a high, tree-covered bluff.*

insist, as they commonly do, that it existed when Kāshī was the Ānandavana, they are making a claim to venerable antiquity. One priest at the temple of Madhyameshvara, the "Lord of the Center," right at the center of Kāshī, attempted to persuade me that his temple was among the oldest in Kāshī. It had been standing on its present site, he said, since the very beginning, when Kāshī was the Ānandavana, even before the Ganges fell from heaven to earth. This temple was so very old, he said, that pilgrims used to make their way through the Forest of Bliss on a footpath when they came to Madhyameshvara from Kāshī Station! Somewhat surprised, I asked if Kāshī Station had indeed been there, in that time when Kāshī was the Ānandavana, even before the Ganges had fallen to earth. He did not get my point, but seemed to conclude that I was assailing the authenticity of the Kāshī Station. He replied, in typical *māhātmya* style, "Of course. It's the oldest train

station in Kāshī!" In India the mythic imagination is still flourishing, and for this man, as for many Hindus, the ancient time when Kāshī was a forest paradise or when the Ganges fell to earth is part of a far more vivid, meaningful, and important history than the kind of record-keeping that concerns itself with the advent of train service. While he was certain there was a time when the wise King Bhagīratha petitioned the Ganges to come down from heaven and led the river from the mountains, through the plains of North India, past Banāras, and on to the sea, it had never occurred to him that there was a time when the railroad first arrived in Banāras.

The Purānic *māhātmyas* describe the Forest of Bliss as a garden paradise, sprinkled with the waters of the heavenly Ganges, abundant with flowers and blossoms, filled with the songs of birds, the buzzing of bees, and the tinkling of the anklets of lovely women. In its blessed groves even animals who are natural enemies dwell in peace with one another. The mouse nibbles the ear of the cat, the cat sleeps peacefully in the tail feathers of the peacock, the crane leaves the fish alone, the hawk pays no attention to the quail, and the jackal befriends the antelope.[47] Its peace and beauty are attractive even to the gods, who begin to feel dissatisfied with heaven once they have seen the Forest of Bliss.

In the Hindu philosophical traditions there are very few words used to describe the supreme and attributeless *(nirguna)* Brahman. *Ānanda* is one of these words. Brahman is *sat* (being), *chit* (consciousness), and *ānanda* (bliss). The bliss of the knowledge of Brahman is likened to the unitive bliss of lovers in close embrace. The word *ānanda* certainly carries the weight of its association with Brahman when it is used to describe the essential nature of Kāshī, which the *Kāshī Rahasya* calls the "Forest of the Bliss of Brahman."[48]

RUDRAVĀSA: THE CITY OF SHIVA

This is the dwelling place of Shiva, who is known also by his ancient name, Rudra. Here the Supreme God has taken up permanent residence. In Banāras there is a popular saying, *"Kāshī ke kankar Shiva Shankar haim,"*—"The very stones of Kāshī are Shiva." Shiva dwells not only in the city's great temples, but in the very ground and substance of the place itself.

Not only are the stones saturated with Shiva, but, according to the

māhātmyas, so is everything else in Kāshī: the trees, animals, and people of the city. "Whatever touches Kāshī, that thing becomes her, just as a stream of wine poured into the River Ganges becomes like the Ganges. Just as iron touching the philosopher's stone becomes gold, so does one obtain the very form of Brahman, which is the form of Shiva, in Kāshī."[49] Kāshī transforms what is ordinary into what is called *Rudramaya*—"made of the substance of Rudra himself."[50] Kāshī is called Rudravāsa not only because Rudra lives here, but because everyone who lives here *is* Rudra. In the *Kāshī Khanda* Shiva explains that those who dwell in Kāshī take on the form, the attributes, and the ornaments of Rudra, and they should be honored as one would honor Rudra, and at death they are absorbed into Rudra-Shiva himself.[51]

Although Shiva dwells everywhere and in everyone, he is said to dwell with special intensity here, where the membrane between this world and the transcendent reality is so thin as to be virtually transparent. Because dying in Kāshī brings liberation, living here is an anticipatory participation in that liberation. Those who dwell in Kāshī, intending to die here, are called *jīvan muktas,* "liberated while yet alive." In this sense they are thought of as Shiva incarnate. They are to be honored, even worshipped, for it is said that they are the recipients of the sidelong glances of the alluring goddess Mukti, who is only as far away as the moment of death.[52]

MAHĀSHMASHĀNA: THE GREAT CREMATION GROUND

"Kāshī is the Mahāshmashāna. You can burn the dead anywhere here," volunteered a very old brahmin. The discussion took place in the home of one of Kāshī's most eminent priests and had turned to the subject of cremation in Kāshī. "The whole of Kāshī is a cremation ground," he said. Lest the brahmin's point be missed, let us remember that in India the cremation ground, called the *shmashāna,* is specifically marked off outside of town, often to the south, the direction of Yama, the Lord of Death. The cremation ground is the most inauspicious of places because of the ritual pollution imparted to it by the bodies of the dead. When members of the funeral party return to their homes from the cremation ground they must undergo rites of purification. Yet in

Kāshī, the cremation ground, particularly at Manikarnikā Ghāt, is considered the most auspicious of places.

In an episode in the *Shiva Purāna,* the pretentious demigod Daksha sponsors a great Vedic sacrificial rite to which he invites everyone in the universe, except the renegade god Shiva. As the rite opens, the sage Dadhīchi stands up and rails against Daksha for not inviting Shiva, calling his sacrificial arena, without the presence of Shiva, a cremation ground. It was intended and taken as the greatest of insults.[53] On a scale of sanctity, the sacrificial ground is supposed to be the most sacred and the cremation ground the most polluted of places. It is of some importance, then, that the holy city of Kāshī has as one of its most famous epithets the "Great Cremation Ground."

As we learn more about Shiva, it will become clearer why his earthly capital city should take the name and, indeed, the nature of the most inauspicious of places. Shiva is the holy One who challenges ordinary distinctions of pure and impure, auspicious and inauspicious. He is the deity who may be beautiful or terrifying, who may anoint his body with the fragrant oil of sandalwood or with the gray ashes of the dead. It is fitting that his city be called the Great Cremation Ground as well as the Forest of Bliss.

The cremation grounds of prominence in the city today are at Manikarnikā Ghāt and Harishchandra Ghāt, although there is evidence to substantiate the old brahmin's claim that cremations once took place everywhere. There are *satī* stones, carved with the relief images of a man and a woman, which mark the places where a "good woman" *(satī)* was burned upon the funeral pyre of her husband. Such stones may be found in the area called Brahma Nāla, which was formerly a stream bed, extending up and into the city from Manikarnikā Ghāt. They are also found at a number of prominent *ghāts* along the river.[54]

The city is more than a place of mortal cremations, however. As the Great Cremation Ground, it is said to be the final resting place of the corpse of the entire universe at the end of its vast cycle of life. The *Kāshī Khanda* explains the "etymology" of the word *shmashāna:*

> *Shma* means *shava,* a corpse. *Shāna* means *shayana,* a "bed." Thus do those who are skilled in the meaning of words say about the meaning of *shmashāna.*
>
> When the general dissolution comes, even great beings sleep here, having become corpses. Thus the *shmashāna* is called "great."[55]

Banāras and the Sacred "Crossings" of India

BANĀRAS does not stand alone as India's sacred city. It is part of an extensive and intricate pattern of sacred places in India. For Hindus, the landscape of India is holy, from the Himālayas, the home of the gods, in the North, to Cape Comorin or Kanyā Kumārī, where the Goddess dwells at the southernmost tip of the subcontinent. The land that stretches out between is a land of sacred hills, rivers, and cities, webbed with pilgrimage routes. Going on a pilgrimage for the *darshana* of such places has long been an important and vibrant aspect of the Hindu religious tradition.

Hindus call the sacred places to which they travel *tīrthas,* "fords" or "crossing places." Some of India's great *tīrthas* were indeed fords, where the rivers could be safely crossed. Banāras itself is located at that ford where the old trade route through North India crossed the River Ganges. As a place of pilgrimage, however, the *tīrtha* is a spiritual ford, where earth and heaven meet, or where one "crosses over" the river of *samsāra*—this round of repeated birth and death—to reach the "far shore" of liberation. The *tīrtha,* like the river ford, is a place where that "crossing" might be easily and safely made.

A *tīrtha* is an earthly place, charged with power and purity. We call it a "sacred" place, but it is important for us to realize that there is not a Hindu term which means quite what we mean by "sacred." The term "pure" *(shuchi, pavitra)* is used, as is "good" *(punya)* and "auspicious" *(shubha, mangala)*. As for sacred, in the sense of bearing the essence of the Divine, we might say that in the Hindu view the whole earth is sacred, for it is all the embodiment of the Divine. In Hindu creation myths, the earth and all the plenitude of life spring from the very body of God.[56] Like the body, the creation is differentiated in power and in function. Some earthly places reveal the Divine more readily than others. As the *Mahābhārata* puts it, "Just as certain parts of the body are called pure, so are certain parts of the earth and certain waters called holy."[57] The right ear, for example, which receives the *mantra* of the guru at the time of initiation, is especially pure, while the feet, which touch the dust, are not. So it is with the land itself. Those

places most luminous, most powerful, and most transparent to the heavens are called *tīrthas.*

As a place of power, the *tīrtha* is a doorway between heaven and earth, or between "this shore" and the "far shore." There, according to Hindus, one's prayers are more quickly heard, one's petitions more readily fulfilled, and one's rituals more likely to bring manifold blessings. In the praises of a place such as Kāshī, this amplification of power is described at length:

> There whatever is sacrificed, chanted, given in charity, or suffered in penance, even in the smallest amount, yields endless fruit because of the power of that place. Whatever fruit is said to accrue from many thousands of lifetimes of asceticism, even more than that is obtainable from but three nights of fasting in this place.[58]

The *tīrthas* are primarily associated with the great acts and appearances of the gods and the heroes of Indian myth and legend. As a threshold between heaven and earth, the *tīrtha* is not only a place for the "upward" crossings of people's prayers and rites, it is also a place for the "downward" crossings of the gods. These divine "descents" are the well-known *avatāras* of the Hindu tradition. Indeed, the words *tīrtha* and *avatāra* come from related verbal roots: *tṝ,* "to cross over," and *avatṝ,* "to cross down." One might say that the *avatāras* descend, opening the doors of the *tīrthas* so that men and women may ascend in their rites and prayers. The appearance of the Divine in this world is what Mircea Eliade has called hierophany, the "showing forth" of the gods.[59] In India it is clear that the gods have shown forth in thousands of places, some known and famous throughout India and some visited only by people from the immediately surrounding districts.

The stories of India's *tīrthas* are told in the popular praise literature, the *māhātmyas,* sometimes called *sthala purānas,* the "ancient stories of the place." This literature contains a thousand variations on the themes of divine hierophany. Considering this vast corpus of Indian mythology, which recounts the deeds of the gods and heroes, it is not difficult to imagine that the whole of India's geography is engraved with traces of mythic events. It is a living sacred geography. In Mathurā, Lord Krishna was born. In the groves of nearby Brindāvan, he danced at night with the milkmaids. In a high Himālayan cave at Amarnāth in Kashmīr, Lord Shiva appeared as a *linga* of ice. In a dozen places from

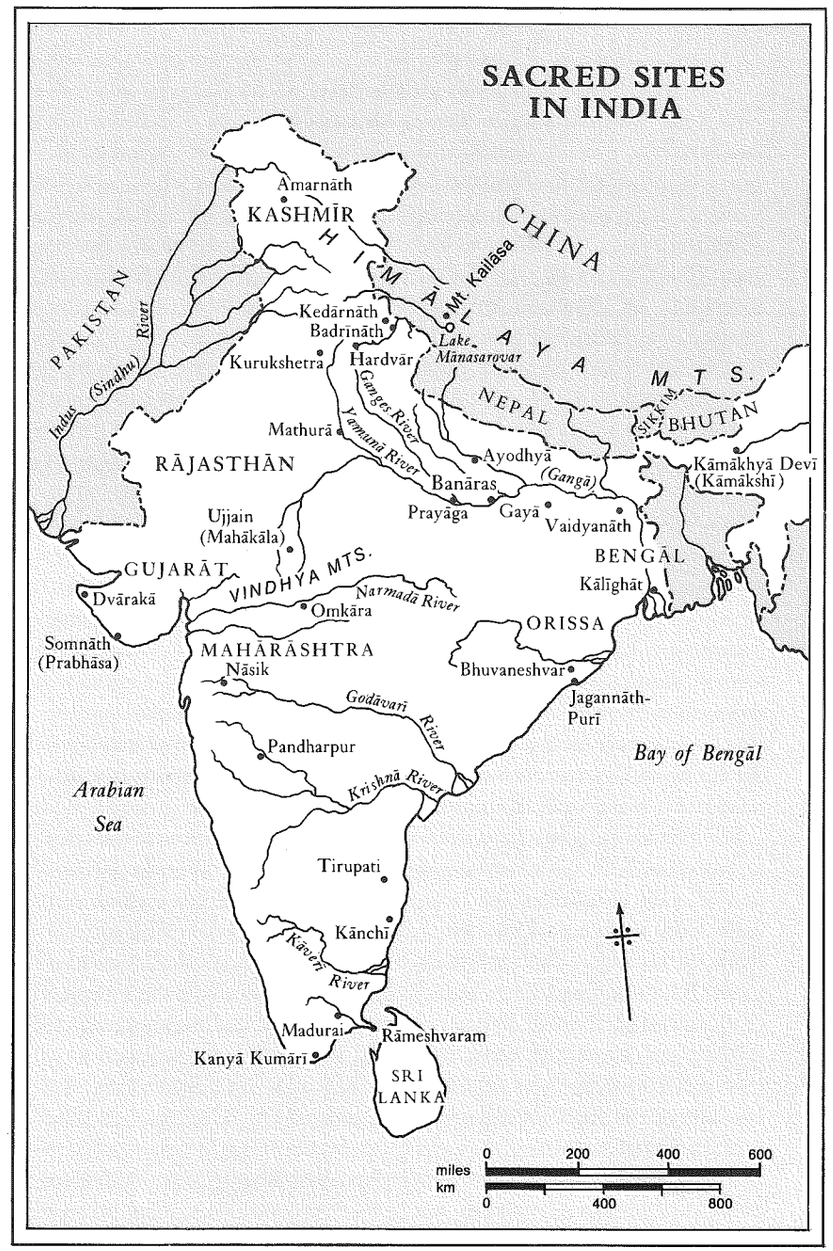
the Himālayas to the tip of Southern India, Shiva split the earth as a *linga* of fire. A number of places claim the glorious victory of the goddess Durgā over the demon Mahisha. And thousands of places claim to have been visited by Rāma, Sītā, and Lakshmana in their journey described in the *Rāmāyana,* or by the Pāndava brothers in their forest exile recounted in the *Mahābhārata.*

A great *tīrtha* such as Kāshī collects a vast array of such mythic events. In the eyes of those who love this city, everything of significance happened here—the *linga* of fiery light pierced the earth, the goddess Durgā defeated her foes, the heroes and heroines came here on a pilgrimage, and the saints came here to teach.

It is not only the legends and myths that communicate the power of a place, however. The world's great *tīrthas,* in India and elsewhere, match Mark Twain's description of Banāras as "older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend." Whether it is Kāshī, Jerusalem, or Guadalupe, the place itself has traditions of pilgrimage and a reputation for sanctity and power that are far more ancient than the particular traditions now associated with it.

In India, the wide-ranging popular cults of vegetative divinities *(yakshas),* aquatic divinities *(nāgas),* and goddesses *(devīs)* set their seal upon groves, pools, and hillocks long before the Purānic tales were compiled. *Tīrthas* such as Kāshī and the River Ganges are symbols shaped by geography, and because geography is slow to change, these symbols have had a tenacious hold upon the religious imagination. The particular myths and stories may come and go; the narrative may change or be forgotten; but the hilltop, the pool, and the grove remain. Today Ganesha may sit under the great tree where the *yaksha* was worshipped three thousand years ago. Shiva may stand in a small shrine next to the ancient pool of the *nāgas.* The great Durgā may lend her name to some local hilltop *devī.* But while the story and the names have changed, the place attracts its worshippers much as before.

Of India's thousands of *tīrthas,* a few places and cycles of pilgrimage have risen to pre-eminence through the centuries. First, there are the seven sacred cities *(sapta purī)* which are said to bestow the highest spiritual goal, liberation. The seven are famous, and known to practically every literate brahmin in the verse:



Ayodhyā, Mathurā, Māyā,*
Kāshī, Kānchī, Avantikā,
And the city of Dvārakā,
These seven are mokshada.

Mokshada means "bestower of liberation," and these seven are said to grant liberation to all who die within their boundaries. In Kāshī it is commonly said, however, that those who die in the other six cities are liberated indirectly, by being reborn for a final lifetime in the City of Light, from which they make their final journey to the "far shore." We shall have more to say of these seven in discussing Kāshī's own sacred geography in Chapter 7.

In addition to the seven cities, there are the four "divine abodes" *(dhāmas)* at the four compass points of India, marking with sanctity the furthest limits of the land: Badrīnāth in the Himālayan North, Purī in the East, Rāmeshvaram in the South, and Dvārakā in the West. There are 108 "benches" or "seats" *(pīthas)* of the Goddess, associated with the various parts of the body of the Goddess, each a manifestation of the divine female "power" called Shakti. Other cycles of *tīrthas* include the twelve places where the *linga,* Shiva's emblem, shone forth in a fiery column of light; the sixty-eight places where Shiva's *lingas* are said to have emerged "self-born" *(svayambhū)* from the earth; and the seven sacred rivers. Some *tīrthas* are primarily important for the people of a particular region or sectarian group.[60]

For Hindus, pilgrimage to the *tīrthas* has been an important unifying force, not only for sects and regions, but for the wider Hindu perception of what constitutes the land of India. Everyone knows how diverse India is, in race, language, religion, and sect. In its long history there have been few centuries of political unity until modern times. But one thing Hindu India has held in common is a shared sense of its sacred geography. What is India, or Bhārat, as Hindus call it? It is that land stretching from Badrīnāth in the North to Rāmeshvaram and Kanyā Kumārī in the South. It is that land rimmed by the Himālayas, the abode of the gods, and watered by the Ganges and the other rivers of heaven.

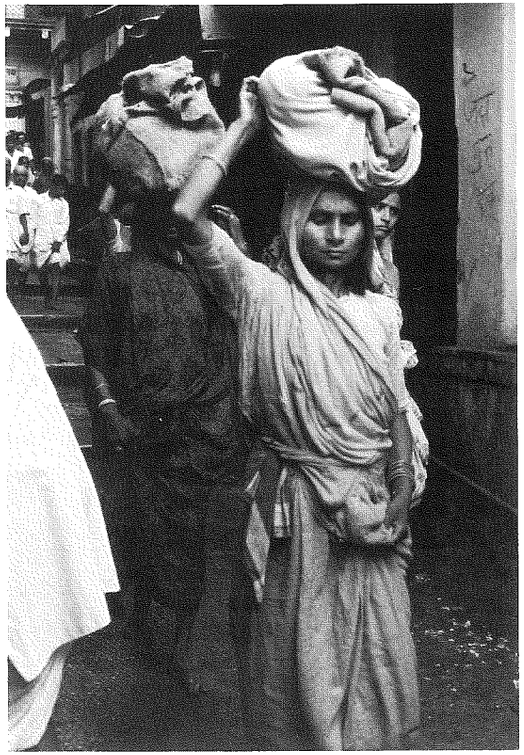
In Banāras there is a modern temple called Bhārat Mātā, "Mother India," containing no ordinary image in its sanctum, but rather a large

* Māyā is better known today as Hardvār, and Avantikā as Ujjain.

relief map of India, with its mountains, rivers, and sacred *tīrthas* carefully marked. It is a popular temple with today's pilgrims, who circumambulate the whole map and then climb to the second-floor balcony for the *darshana* of the whole. Looking down at this map, they can see at a glance the great distances many of their ancestors traveled on foot. Most of these pilgrims will know of someone, even today, who has made the trip to the four divine "abodes" at India's compass points, a pilgrimage called the "Great Circumambulation" *(Mahāparikramā)* of India. It is said that such pilgrims would carry a pot of Ganges water from the Himālayas in the North all the way to Rāmeshvaram at India's southern tip in order to pour that water on the Shiva *linga* there. And from Rāmeshvaram, they would carry the sands of the seashore back to deposit in the Ganges on their return north.

Among India's *tīrthas,* Kāshī is the most widely acclaimed. Pilgrims come from all over India to bathe in the Ganges at Kāshī and to visit her temples, and they come from all sectarian groups—Shaiva, Vaishnava, and Shākta alike. From one perspective, Kāshī is a single *tīrtha* among others—one of the seven cities, one of the *lingas* of light, one of the benches of the Goddess. At the same time, Kāshī is said to embody all the *tīrthas.* One may visit the far-off temple of Shiva, high in the Himālayas at Kedāra—right here in Kāshī. And one may travel to the far South to Rāmeshvaram on the island that stretches toward Shrī Lankā—right here in Kāshī. And even if one does not visit the sites of these transposed *tīrthas* in Kāshī, the power of all these places has been assimilated into the power of this one place, and the pilgrims who visit Kāshī stand in a place empowered by the whole of India's sacred geography.

One will hear that Kāshī is supreme among India's *tīrthas,* but in the Hindu world view this does not mean what the Westerner might imagine. It does not mean that Kāshī is unique, *the* most holy of *tīrthas.* Singularity is not especially prized as a cultural value in India. Fitting in is more important in this interdependent world than standing out. It is sometimes said, for example, that in India the "individual" as we think of it in the West does not exist. A person thinks of himself or herself not as a singular entity, but rather as part of a larger interdependent whole, in which the parts mirror one another in an infinite, intricate pattern. This is useful for our understanding of Hindu notions of the gods and the *tīrthas.* A place such as Kāshī is important, even supreme, without being unique. Such is the nature of truly



Kāshī Pilgrims.

pluralistic, polytheistic, consciousness. The German Indologist Max Müller coined a term to describe the religious consciousness of the Vedas: kathenotheism—the worship of many gods, one at a time. The supremacy of the god one worships now and in this place is taken for granted, but not that god's uniqueness. It is assumed that the Supreme Reality can be approached and apprehended in many ways. To celebrate one god or one *tīrtha* need not mean to celebrate only one.

Far from standing alone, Kāshī, like a crystal, gathers and refracts the light of other pilgrimage places. Not only are other *tīrthas* said to be present in Kāshī, but Kāshī is present elsewhere. In the Himālayas, for example, on the way to the headwaters of the Ganges, the pilgrim will come to a place called the "Northern Kāshī" (Uttara Kāshī). Just like its prototype on the plains below, this Kāshī has its own Vishvanātha Temple and its circumambulatory pilgrim circuit called the Panchakroshī Road. This kind of "transposition of place" is a common phenomenon in Indian sacred topography. One can readily apprehend that the Divine dwells with equal potency in many places. Here, however, the affirmation is that the place itself, with its sacred power, is present in more than one place. In addition to the northern Kāshī, there is a southern Kāshī and a Shiva Kāshī in the Tamil South. There are hundreds of temples, large and small, called Kāshī Vishvanātha, and many of them have local *māhātmyas* claiming for that temple the very benefits that one might receive from going to distant Kāshī. In a similar way, the River Ganges is a prototype for other sacred waters, and her presence is seen in countless rivers and invoked into ritual

waters all over India. To some extent all of India's great *tīrthas* are duplicated and multiplied elsewhere in India, but none as widely as Kāshī. What is "unique" about Kāshī is that this city has most powerfully collected and refracted the light of India's *tīrthas* to become the City of All India.

The symbol that condenses the whole into the part is common in the Hindu world. The whole of the sacred Vedas, they say, may be packed in a single powerful *mantra.* Or the whole of the complexity of the Divine may be visualized in a single multi-armed deity. Or the whole of the universe may be depicted in the "sacred circle" of a cosmic map called a *mandala.* Kāshī is this kind of symbol, which condenses the whole of India into a great "sacred circle," a geographical *mandala.*

The great Panchakroshī Road circles the whole of Kāshī. The sacred

Pilgrims leaving Kapiladhārā, the last stop on the Panchakroshī Pilgrimage, to return to Kāshī.

circle of the city has its center at Madhyameshvara, the "Lord of the Center." To follow the Panchakroshī Road around Kāshī is, they say, to circle the world. The pilgrims who circumambulate Kāshī on this sacred way take five days for the trip and visit 108 shrines along the way. And, of course, it is fitting that if one cannot make the long trip around the Panchakroshī Road, there is a single temple in the heart of the city—the Panchakroshī Temple—which one can visit. By circumambulating the sanctum of this temple, with 108 wall reliefs of the stations of the sacred way, one honors the whole of Kāshī and, in turn, the whole world.

2

BANARAS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

FROM its commanding position on the River Ganges, Banāras has witnessed the entire history of Indian civilization as it evolved in North India. From the ancient Aryan kingdoms and their rivalries, through the golden Mauryan and Gupta empires, to the thousand years of Muslim and then British domination, the historical currents of the times have passed through Banāras. Here the great sages have propounded their philosophies and here reformers have come with new ways of seeing. Yogis and ascetics have made their retreats and hermitages here, orthodox brahmins have articulated and elaborated their rituals, poets and saints have sung their songs. And here all the Hindu gods have emerged from the shadows into bold relief, as people have come to understand them, have seen their faces, and have created their multi-form images. As we attempt to see what Banāras has seen through the ages, we will see some of the great movements in the history of Indian civilization.

The Rājghāt Plateau and the Ancient City

AT THE northern end of present-day Banāras the great Mālavīya bridge spans the Ganges at the same place where, for three thousand

stories of the Buddha *avatāra,* Vishnu takes the Buddhist form as a ruse to bring about the downfall of a kingdom or a demon and to restore the proper position of the gods. In the Divodāsa story, Vishnu takes the form of a Buddhist so that he can retrieve the city from the pious, but godless, King and deliver it over to Shiva and the gods.

The *pūjārī* at Ādi Keshava has a point: it was really Vishnu who won Kāshī back. And even though the *Kāshī Khanda* tends to see Vishnu as a mere servant of Shiva, there are other Purānic *māhātmyas* that emphasize Vishnu's priority, or at least equality, in Kāshī. In the *Nārada Purāna,* for example, we hear of the "Vaishnava city of Kāshī." And it is said that, although Shiva lives in Kāshī, he originally begged his dwelling place from Vishnu.[92] After all, even when Shiva was wandering with the skull, Vishnu was the one who told him to go to Vārānasī. The intimate connection of Vishnu and Kāshī is most clearly stated in those passages where Kāshī is called the very embodiment *(svarūpa)* of Vishnu: "Vishnu dwells partially in other cities, but he dwells fully in Kāshī. Kāshī is the very embodiment of Vishnu, where he himself shines forth."[93]

Most often, however, it is the balanced equality of Vishnu and Shiva in Kāshī that late Purānic authors are eager to stress. The trans-sectarian and eclectic spirit that pervades some of the later *māhātmyas* has certainly shaped the image of Kāshī as a pilgrimage place. Of course, pilgrims readily identify Kāshī as the City of Shiva Vishvanātha. But they do not come to Kāshī as sectarian Shaivas. Both Vaishnavas and Shaivas come to Kāshī, and Shāktas as well. They come to Kāshī because it is Kāshī, and it is famous in its own right. There is no room for narrow sectarianism in such a *tīrtha.* It is a place which Shiva shares not only with Vishnu, but with the entire *mandala* of the gods.

5

THE RIVER GANGES AND THE GREAT GHATS

I am Vishvanātha, the Lord.
Kāshī is the light of liberation.
The waves of the River of Heaven are the wine of immortality.
What can these three not provide?[1]

THE GANGES is called the River of Heaven, flowing across the sky, white as the Milky Way. Long ago, she agreed to flow upon the earth as well. In her great mercy, she came to the aid of a king named Bhagīratha, who appealed to Lord Brahmā to let the Ganges fall from heaven.[2] Bhagīratha's ancestors, sixty thousand of them, had been burned to ash by the fierce glance of an angry ascetic, and only the funerary waters of the Ganges would raise them up again to dwell in peace in heaven. Having won from Brahmā the boon of her descent, Bhagīratha persuaded Shiva to catch the Ganges in his hair as she fell, so that the earth would not be shattered by her torrential force. And so she plummeted down from heaven to the Himālayas, where she meandered in the tangled ascetic locks of Shiva before flowing out upon the plains of India. The Ganges followed Bhagīratha from the Himālayas to the sea where, at the place called Gangā Sāgara, she entered the netherworld and restored the dead ancestors of Bhagīratha. Thus she is called the Triple-Pathed River, flowing in the three worlds—in heaven, on the earth, and in the netherworld.

Kāshī's mythological tradition remembers the time before the Ganges came and tells the story of Bhagīratha's arrival. He came across the plains, they say, leading the Ganges behind him. And when the great *tīrthas* of Kāshī, such as Dashāshvamedha and Manikarnikā, were skirted by the River of Heaven, they became infinitely more powerful and lustrous than before.[3] Even today, a Banārsī, speaking of

ancient Kāshī, will refer to the time before the Ganges came, or in discussing the antiquity of a temple or pool, a priest will say, "It was here even before Bhagīratha brought the Ganges to earth."

The multiplication of *tīrthas* in a single place, adding power to power, is well known in Hindu sacred geography. If one river is excellent for bathing, then better still is the confluence of two rivers as at Ādi Keshava, or five rivers as at Panchagangā. So it is with this great triumvirate of holiness: the city of Kāshī, the Lord Shiva Vishveshvara, and the River Ganges. The three together are the triple blessing found nowhere else on earth:

> *This we know for certain: Where the River of Heaven*
> *Flows in the Forest of Bliss of Shiva,*
> *There is* moksha *guaranteed!*[4]

Archetype of Sacred Waters

ALONG her entire course the Ganges is sacred: from her source at Gangotrī, high in the Himālayas; to Hardvār, also known as Gangādvāra, "Gate of the Ganges," where she breaks out of the mountains and into the plains; to Prayāga, where she joins the Yamunā River and the mythical Sarasvatī River; to Kāshī, where she makes a long sweep to the north as if pointing toward her Himālayan source; and, finally, to Gangā Sāgara, where the river meets the sea in the Bay of Bengāl.

The Ganges is revered as goddess and mother.* All along the river, and especially at the great *tīrthas,* Hindus bathe in the Ganges. They take up her water cupped in their hands and pour it back into the river as an offering to ancestors and the gods.[5] They present to the river, as to a deity, offerings of flowers and small clay oilwick lamps. On great festival occasions Hindus ford the river in boats, shouting "Gangā Mātā ki Jai!" ("Victory to Mother Gangā!") and trailing garlands of flowers hundreds of feet long to adorn this goddess river. They return to their homes, perhaps many miles away, carrying brass vessels of her water. And they will come that distance again to bring the ashes of their dead to her care.

* The proper name for the Ganges is the Gangā, a name used for both the river and the goddess. Here we will occasionally retain this name in speaking of the goddess.

Offering the waters of the Ganges to the ancestors.

It is said that when the Ganges fell from heaven, she split into several streams. One account speaks of four streams, watering the four quarters of the earth.[6] Another speaks of seven streams, three flowing to the east, three to the west, and the Bhāgīrathī, India's Ganges named for the king who brought her to earth, to the south.[7] In short, the Ganges waters the entire earth with the springs of heaven.

As early as the *Rig Veda,* India's seven divine mother-rivers, flowing with nectar from heaven, are mentioned: the Sindhu (Indus), the Sarasvatī, and the "Five-Rivers" of the Punjab. Later on, as the Aryans moved farther south, the Ganges is mentioned among the great rivers.[8] By the time of the Purānas, the seven sacred rivers are no longer concentrated in the northwest, but extend throughout India: the ancient Sindhu and Sarasvatī, the Ganges and the Yamunā in the North, the Narmadā and Godāvarī in Central India, and the Kāverī farther south. Sometimes the seven are called the Seven Gangās.

Just as Kāshī is the archetype of the *tīrtha,* to which others are

compared in sanctity, so is the Ganges the archetype of sacred waters. Other rivers are said to be like the Ganges. Others are said even to *be* the Ganges. The Kāverī River in Tamilnādu is known as the Ganges of the South, and the Godāvarī River is said to be the Ganges diverted into Central India by the sage Gautama.

The land where the Ganges does not flow is likened in one hymn to the sky without the sun, a home without a lamp, a brahmin without the Vedas.[9] Significantly, the Ganges is seen to flow in many lands, not only through the plains of North India, but symbolically in the sacred waters of all India. For example, a Tamil woman, unable to go to the Ganges, might go to the Kāverī River. If even that is too far, she might go to a nearby stream or temple tank. In her home, the Ganges is regularly called to be present in all the waters used in ritual, either by mixing those waters with a few drops of Ganges water or by uttering the name and prayers of the Ganges to invoke her presence. The Ganges is the essence and the source of all sacred waters. So widely is her presence perceived that an Indian visiting professor, having arrived in Boston, is said to have exclaimed on first sight of the Charles, "Ah! So the Ganges is here in Cambridge too!"

Not only is the Ganges said to be present in other rivers, but other rivers are present in her. A modern Hindu author writes, "When a pilgrim dives into the sacred waters of the Ganges, he feels the thrill of plunging into the waters of all the rivers of India."[10] This one river concentrates the sanctity of all India's sacred rivers. Each wave of the Ganges, they say, is a *tīrtha.*

The Ganges is important in both its particular and symbolic existence. However, its symbolic significance as a prototype of all sacred waters does not at all diffuse the significance of bathing in the Ganges itself. For Hindu pilgrims nothing can compare with bathing in the Ganges, especially at a great *tīrtha* such as Kāshī. There are few things on which Hindu India, diverse as it is, might agree. But of the Ganges, India speaks with one voice. The Ganges carries an immense cultural and religious meaning for Hindus of every region and every sectarian persuasion. Even Jawaharlal Nehru, as Westernized and avowedly secular as he was, expressed the deep desire to have a handful of his ashes thrown into the Ganges when he died. He said, "The Gangā, especially, is the river of India, beloved of her people, round which are intertwined her racial memories, her hopes and fears, her songs of triumph, her victories and her defeats. She has been a symbol of India's age-long culture and civilization, ever-changing, ever-flowing, and yet ever the same Gangā."[11]

The Salvation of the Dead

THE ANCESTORS of Bhagīratha, burned to ashes, needed the waters of the Ganges for their *shrāddha* funeral rites, which would enable them to reach Pitriloka, the World of the Ancestors, and then make a smooth transition to another life. Without such rites the dead would not only continue to exist in a limbo of suffering, but would be troublesome spirits to those living still on earth. The waters of the Ganges are called *amrita,* the "nectar of immortality," and as they brought life to the ancestors of Bhagīratha, so will they bring life to all the dead.

Those who die in Kāshī, assured of liberation, will be cremated on the banks of the River of Heaven at this most sacred of *tīrthas.* If one cannot die in Kāshī, then cremation by the Ganges anywhere along her banks is desirable. If even this is impossible, then relatives might later bring the ashes of the deceased to the Ganges at Kāshī, or even send them to Kāshī parcel post. And if the ashes have been dispersed elsewhere, a relative might come to Kāshī to perform the yearly *shrāddha* rites, preferably during the "fortnight of the ancestors" *(pitripaksha)* set aside during the autumn month of Āshvina (September–October) for remembering the dead.

Pilgrimage to Kāshī, whether in this special fortnight or at some other time, will invariably include rites for the dead. This may be either the *shrāddha* rites, performed immediately after the death and on particular occasions during the year, or the *pinda pradāna,* a more abbreviated rite that may be performed at any time. In both rites, balls of rice or other grains, called *pindas,* are offered to the ancestors while the litany of their names is recited. In addition, of course, the ordinary rite of bathing in the Ganges will usually include simple water libations with which this nectar of immortality is offered to the departed ancestors. The *Kāshī Khanda*'s *māhātmya* of the Ganges lists the many great benefits that accrue to the dead when a descendant bathes in the

Ganges and makes proper offerings on their behalf. The ancestors attain the bliss of heaven by virtue of these rites and, it is said, they dwell in heaven for a thousand years for every single sesame seed in the traditional *pinda* offerings.[12] Indeed, the ancestors are said to sing for joy when they see someone in their family bathing in the Ganges and offering *pindas* on her bank.[13]

An often-quoted verse of the *Mahābhārata* promises, "If only the bone of a person should touch the water of the Ganges, that person shall dwell, honored, in heaven."[14] The dramatic story of Vāhīka in the *Kāshī Khanda* bears this out.[15] Vāhīka, they say, was an utterly unrefined and despicable character. He was addicted to gambling; he had killed a cow; he had even kicked his own mother. One day Vāhīka was killed by a tiger in the forest and his soul was brought promptly before the Lord of Death, Yama, for judgment. His sins were read off by Chitragupta, Yama's scribe, and not a single virtue was found to balance them. He was condemned to hell. In the meantime, Vāhīka's body was torn up by vultures, and one vulture flew off with his footbone. In flight, it fought with another vulture over the morsel and the footbone was dropped. It fell, by chance, into the Ganges below, and just as Vāhīka was being sent off to hell, a divine chariot arrived to take him, fortunate and blessed, to heaven. As Mother Ganges, the river is ever the dispenser of grace. No child is too dirty, they say, to be embraced by its mother.

The Purification of the Living

ACCORDING TO Hindus, the waters of the Ganges are pure and cleansing waters. Indian skeptics and Western visitors alike have been astounded by this claim. Surveying the river at Banāras, brown and muddy in the rainy season and the receptacle of the pollution of the city, the ashes of the dead, and the diseases of its million bathers, they see a very dirty river indeed.

At question here, of course, is not really the purity of the Ganges, but the cultural understanding of what it means for something to be pure or impure, clean or dirty. In *Purity and Danger,* the British anthropologist Mary Douglas has exposed the many ways in which these terms are cultural constructs.[16] "Dirt" is disorder, "matter out of

place," and what is considered out of place depends upon one's notion of order. The bacterial understanding of "purity" which is part of the scientific view of order, may contrast markedly with social and religious understandings of "purity," even in the modern cultures of the West. Quite apart from the issue of whether the Ganges is bacterially pure (and there are countless studies supporting both sides on this matter!) is the issue of its ritual purity and its symbolic purity. Hindus have affirmed for centuries that there is nothing quite as cleansing as the living waters of the River of Heaven.

Ritual purification by water is one of the great themes running through the history of Indian religious life. Even the pre-Aryan Indus civilization was a river culture, and the large ceremonial tank excavated in the ruins of Mohenjo Dāro suggests the significance of cleansing waters in the ritual life of its people. Later on, the Vedic hymns of the Aryan people praise the great rivers of Northwest India as purifying goddesses.

Running water especially is an agent of purification, for it both absorbs pollution and carries it away. The traditional etymology of the word "Gangā" is from the root *gam,* "to go." The Ganges is the "Swift-Goer," and her hymns constantly emphasize the running, flowing, energetic movement of her waters, which are living waters. So great is the power of the Ganges to destroy sins that, it is said, even a droplet of Ganges water carried one's way by the breeze will erase the sins of many lifetimes in an instant.[17]

One of the most powerful and beloved eulogies of the River Ganges is the *Gangā Laharī,* "The Waves of the Ganges." Its author, the seventeenth-century poet Jagannātha, was patronized by the Mughal Emperor Shāh Jahān and his son the scholarly prince, Dārā Shikoh. According to legend, the poet was expelled from his brahmin caste for a love affair with a Muslim woman at court. Jagannātha went to Banāras to try to restore his status by proving himself acceptable to the brahmins there. Unsuccessful, he called upon the Ganges herself to purify and claim him. As the story goes, the poet sat with his beloved atop the fifty-two steps of the great Panchagangā Ghāt and, with each of the fifty-two verses of the hymn he composed there, the river rose one step. Finally, the waters touched the very feet of the lovers, purified them, and carried them away.[18]

In his hymn, the poet addresses the river as mother, comforter, and supporter:

I come to you as a child to his mother.
I come as an orphan to you, moist with love.
I come without refuge to you, giver of sacred rest.
I come a fallen man to you, uplifter of all.
I come undone by disease to you, the perfect physician.
I come, my heart dry with thirst, to you, ocean of sweet wine.
Do with me whatever you will.[19]

The poet portrays himself as the worst of sinners, rejected even by outcastes, even by madmen, and he challenges the Ganges to purify the likes of him. There are plenty of gods who will care for the good, he tells her. But who will care for the wicked, if not the Ganges. The goddess will take on the emblems of Shiva and fight for the salvation of the sinner:

Now bind on your strong and lovely girdle of battle,
And anchor the new moon in your crown with ropes of snakes.
Do not take me lightly, thinking me an ordinary sinner.
Behold, O River of Heaven,
This is the hour of Jagannātha's salvation![20]

Liquid Shakti

SHAKTI means "power" or "energy." As the female life-energy of Shiva, Shakti is his consort and his enabling power in the world. Here that power runs as a river.

The energy of the Ganges is tremendous as the river rushes out of the mountains at Hardvār, the current so swift that pilgrims must hold on to chains fastened in the concrete embankment when they bathe. The creative power of the river is vast, fertilizing and bringing to life the entire Ganges basin, which today supports some 300 million people. Although the river restlessly changes course and frequently floods in the rainy season, she is invariably thought of as a mother, "Gangā Mātā," and her hymns contain not the slightest suggestion of her destructive power. Even those who have lived along her banks and experienced the river's ravages as well as her blessings have not ascribed to the Ganges the wrathful aspect that so frequently attends India's other goddesses. While she may arm herself for battle, she

takes up weapons only to defend and protect her children. It is sometimes said that even the floods of the Ganges are counted as blessings by those whose fields and homes are inundated.

As a goddess, Gangā is perhaps the only deity claimed as consort by all three of the great gods of Hinduism. She travels as Brahmā's companion in his brass water pot. She is also said to flow originally from the foot of Vishnu in the highest heaven and is associated with both Lakshmī and Sarasvatī as one of Vishnu's wives. It is Shiva, however, whose relationship with Gangā is most intimate. Having caught the river as she fell to earth, he tamed her in the tangles of his hair before releasing her to flow out smoothly upon the earth. She is referred to as the co-wife of Pārvatī, and Pārvatī is often jealous of the goddess Gangā's close contact with Shiva.[21]

The Ganges is seen as the active energy through which the lofty and indescribable Supreme Shiva is present and moving in the world. While the supreme face of the Transcendent cannot be seen and described, Shakti can indeed be seen, and praised, and loved. She can even be touched and sipped in this, her liquid form. Skanda explains it to Agastya in the "Gangā Māhātmya" of the *Kāshī Khanda:*

O Agastya, One should not be amazed at the notion that this Ganges is really Power, for is she not the Supreme Shakti of the Eternal Shiva, taken the form of water?

This Ganges, filled with the sweet wine of compassion, was sent out for the salvation of the world by Shiva, the Lord of Lords.

Good people should not think this Triple-Pathed River to be like the thousand other earthly rivers, filled with water.[22]

The Ganges is the liquid essence of the scriptures, the gods, and the wisdom of the Hindu tradition. She is the liquid essence, in sum, of Shakti—the energy and power of the Supreme, flowing in the life of the world. Because she is already overflowing with the sacred, there is no need for the usual rites of invitation *(āvāhana)* and dismissal *(visarjana)* which invite the gods to be present at the beginning of worship and give them their leave to go at the end.[23] The Ganges is every drop a goddess, just as she is.

The wakefulness and saving energy of the Ganges are especially important, they say, in this Kali Age, the Age of Strife. Now the gods

are distant from the earth, and the Ganges alone is here to provide relief from sins and hope for liberation. It is said, for example, that in the Perfect Age, the Krita Yuga, meditation was the way to liberation. In the Third Age, Tretā Yuga, austerity was the way to liberation. In the Second Age, Dvāpara Yuga, meditation, austerity, and sacrifice were viable paths. But now, in this Kali Yuga, only the Ganges can bring the blessing of liberation.[24]

The Panchatīrthī Pilgrimage

There, O Prince, is the very excellent "Five Tīrthas," the Panchatīrthī, having bathed in which a person shall never again be born.

First is the Asi confluence, the foremost and supreme of *tīrthas.* Then there is Dashāshvamedha, honored by all the *tīrthas.* Next comes the "Foot Water" *tīrtha* at Ādi Keshava. Then there is the holy "Five Rivers" of Panchanada, which destroys one's sins by simply bathing there. Beyond these four *tīrthas* is the fifth, O excellent one. It is called Manikarnikā, which bestows purity on the mind and senses.

Having bathed in the five *tīrthas* a person never again receives a body of five-elements. Rather, he becomes the five-faced Shiva in Kāshī.[25]

The Panchatīrthī pilgrimage to the "Five *Tīrthas"* along the riverfront is one of the most popular in Kāshī. Along this route, pilgrims travel the entire length of the city by the banks of the Ganges. Some pilgrims make the journey by boat, but as is the case with all pilgrimages, it is better to practice the *tapas* of walking. Beginning at the southern end of the city where the Asi River meets the Ganges, the Panchatīrthī pilgrims walk to Dashāshvamedha Ghāt, and from there all the way to the northern end of the city where the Varanā River flows into the Ganges. Then, retracing their steps, they stop at Panchagangā Ghāt and, finally, at the pre-eminently sacred Manikarnikā Ghāt. At each stop, they bathe in the Ganges and have the *darshana* of the most prominent deities. Having taken a final ritual bath at Manikarnikā, they proceed to the heart of the city for the *darshana* of Vishvanātha, Annapūrnā, and the "Witnessing Ganesha," Sākshī Vināyaka, who vouches for the completion of their pilgrimage.

At each stage of the journey, the pilgrims make a statement of intention called *sankalpa,* the explicit profession of intent to worship

that accompanies every important ritual act. Learned brahmin pilgrims may recite the *sankalpa* for themselves, but ordinary pilgrims hear the words of their *sankalpa* from the *pandā,* the pilgrim-priest whom they employ. Cupping the right hand over the left and holding some grains of rice, perhaps some betel nut, some Ganges water, and a few coins, they listen to the words as they are recited: "I, of this family and this village, am here in Kāshī in this year, in this month, on this day, in this place, making the pilgrimage to the Five *Tīrthas.*" If the pilgrim is journeying in fulfillment of some vow or in the hope of some particular end, that end will be stated. This is a *sakāma* pilgrimage, made "with desires" in mind: to bear a son, to live a long time, to recover from disease. Often, however, pilgrimage is made "without desires," *nishkāma,* without any specific personal goal in mind. It is done, in the traditional words of the *sankalpa,* "to please Shiva Vishvanātha." As a devout housewife explained, "Rewards are in accordance with our good deeds and actions. We should just do these things, like the Panchatīrthī pilgrimage, and good will naturally result."

This grouping of five *tīrthas* is mentioned in the "Avimukta Māhātmya" of the *Matsya Purāna,* one of the earliest *māhātmyas* of Kāshī and one which does not mention many specific sites. In its closing verses, the five places are listed: Dashāshvamedha, Lolārka, Keshava, Bindu Mādhava, and Manikarnikā.[26] Lolārka is the oldest of the Asi Ghāt *tīrthas,* Keshava is the temple Ādi Keshava at the Varanā confluence, and Bindu Mādhava is the temple at Panchagangā.

Sometimes only two or three great river *tīrthas* are mentioned as the most prominent in Kāshī. In the *Kāshī Khanda,* for example, the city is compared to a woman "whose two eyes are Lolārka and Keshava, whose two arms are the Varanā and the Asi."[27] The *Vāmana Purāna* describes Shiva's own pilgrimage to Vārānasī to expunge the sin of killing a brahmin, and says that he visited three places—Lolārka, Dashāshvamedha, and Keshava—before coming to the tank "Where the Skull Fell."[28] Whether two, three, or five, the same point is made: the holy territory is stretched out along the Ganges from Asi to Varanā, or from Lolārka to Keshava, and it includes all the *tīrthas* in between.

Each of the great *tīrthas* of the Panchatīrthī also marks a confluence of some stream or rivulet with the Ganges, although at Dashāshvamedha, Manikarnikā, and Panchagangā the stream beds are no longer water bearing.

Asi

THE PANCHATĪRTHĪ pilgrimage begins at Asi Ghāt, where the pilgrims bathe in the confluence of the Asi and the Ganges Rivers. Asi is the only one of the major bathing *ghāts* of the city that is still a clay bank *(kachcha)* without the great concrete steps that descend into the river at the finished *(pakka) ghāts* along most of the riverfront.* The slippery clay bank of Asi Ghāt reminds us that the great stone and concrete *ghāts* of the Banāras riverfront are an innovation of the last three centuries, built primarily by Marāthā patronage in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Throughout most of its history, the entire riverfront was similar to what we see at Asi.

Despite its slippery bank, Asi is one of the busiest of *ghāts,* attracting morning bathers from the entire southern end of the city. Asi is significant as the southernmost bathing *ghāt* in the sacred zone. Fields stretch out beyond it to the south. After bathing in the Ganges here, the Panchatīrthī pilgrims are directed to visit the Shiva *linga* at Asi *sangam,* Asisangameshvara, the "Lord of the Confluence at Asi." Located a few steps into the lane at the head of the *ghāt,* this is a small, well-kept temple, marked with a marble plaque establishing the Purānic heritage of the site with some verses from the *Kāshī Khanda.* There the pilgrims might read: "All the other *tīrthas* that girdle the earth are not equal to a sixteenth part of the *tīrtha* at Asi *sangam.*"[29]

The *linga* most revered at Asi, however, is the big open-air *linga* located under a *pīpal* tree right on the muddy bank of the *ghāt* itself. This *linga,* with its ranks of smaller *lingas* nearby, is the focal point of worship at Asi, receiving the flower and water offerings of a constant procession of morning bathers. This is, in the popular eye, the real "Lord of the Confluence at Asi."

According to the traditional guidebooks, the pilgrims' worship at Asi should also include a visit to nearby Lolārka Kund. This is located above Tulsī Ghāt, formerly Lolārka Ghāt, just north of Asi and now

* The words *kachcha* and *pakka* are opposites, *kachcha* meaning "raw, unripe, crude, unfinished, etc.," and *pakka* meaning "cooked, ripe, well-made, finished, etc."

named for the poet-saint Tulsī Dās, whose house and temple still stand at the head of the *ghāt* steps. Lolārka, as we have seen in discussing the Suns of Kāshī, is the "Trembling Sun," and is one of the most ancient sacred sites in Kāshī. Some listings of the great river *tīrthas* even give Lolārka the place now occupied by Asi as the primary sacred center of southern Vārānasī.[30] Indeed, the verses that praise Asi in the *Kāshī Khanda* seem to confirm this, for they are set in the context of the larger Lolārka *māhātmya.* While they are in the Lolārka area, the pilgrims are also advised to visit Arka Vināyaka, one of the fifty-six Ganeshas, who sits overlooking the Ganges here.

Asi to Dashāshvamedha

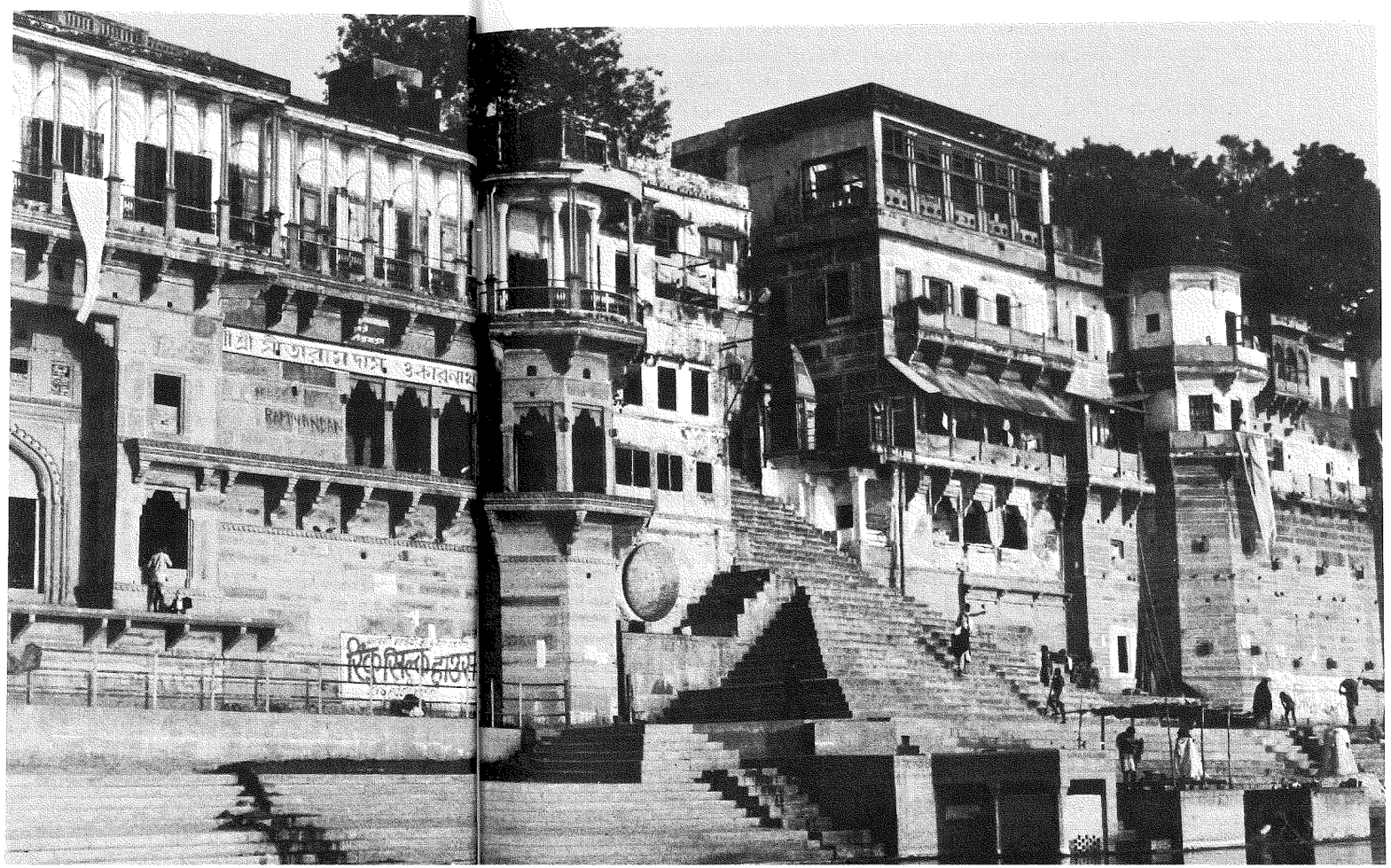
AS THE pilgrims walk down the river from Asi and Tulsī Ghāts, they pass the ashram of the contemporary woman saint, Ānandamayī Mā, and then the seventeenth-century palace of the Mahārāja Chet Singh, which occupies the riverfront *ghāt* known as Shivālā. Next is Hanumān Ghāt, known to these pilgrims as the birthplace of the great devotional teacher Vallabha, who lived in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and laid the philosophical foundations for a great resurgence of Krishna *bhakti.* As for its temples, this *ghāt* is known not only for its namesake, Rāma's monkey servant, Hanumān, but also for its image of Rūrū "The Dog" Bhairava, one of the eight Banāras Bhairavas who assist Kāla Bhairava. In this Hanumān Ghāt area today lives a substantial South India community, which has constructed an elaborate new temple in the South Indian style.

The next *ghāt* is Harishchandra Ghāt, named for a legendary king, the truthful Harishchandra, who once worked the cremation grounds in Kāshī. Every one of the pilgrims on the Panchatīrthī pilgrimage knows the story of how the brahmin Vishvāmitra asked King Harishchandra for a ritual fee called the *rājasūya dakshinā.* Harishchandra, in his generosity, gave Vishvāmitra his entire kingdom and all he owned. Having accepted, Vishvāmitra still pressed the King for the token *rājasūya dakshinā,* but Harishchandra had nothing left to give. Rather than break his promise, the King came destitute to Kāshī, where he sold his wife and son into slavery and sold himself into bondage to

work the cremation grounds in order to pay the fee. He did not see his loved ones again until the day his wife, worn with hardship, came to the cremation ground carrying her son's body. He had died of snake bite, and she had not even a blanket to cover his corpse. The testing of Harishchandra, like that of the biblical Job, proved the strength of his character, even in the worst of times. In the end, the gods rewarded him and restored his throne and his son to him.[31]

Harishchandra Ghāt is one of the two burning *ghāts* of Banāras, the other being Manikarnikā. People in this part of the city believe that Harishchandra is the oldest Kāshī cremation ground, surpassing even Manikarnikā in its sanctity. It is sometimes referred to as Ādi Manikarnikā, the "Original Manikarnikā."[32] The brahmins of Tulsī Ghāt and the pandits of Asi will definitely choose to be cremated here.

The next major *ghāt* is Kedāra, the anchor of Kedāra Khanda and the home of the Kedāreshvara *linga*. Like Asi, this is a busy *ghāt,* but the Panchatīrthī pilgrims do not stop here to bathe. Continuing down



The great steps of Chaumsathī Ghāt, above which sits the temple of the Sixty-Four Yoginīs.

the river, they pass Chaukī Ghāt, famous for the huge tree at the top of the steps which shelters a great array of stone *nāgas,* the aquatic serpent deities for which ancient Kāshī, with its streams and pools, must have been famous (page 265). Along with Nāga Kūpa, today called Nāg Kuan, in northern Kāshī, this is a place where the *nāgas* are still honored, especially on the festival day of Nāga Panchamī in the rainy season month of Shrāvana (July/August).

Next the pilgrims walk a quiet section of the riverfront, given over to the laundry work of the *dhobīs,* rhythmically slapping wet clothes on their stone wash slabs. The part of the city they are skirting now is called Bengālī Tolā, settled by Bengālīs, many of whom have come here for Kāshīvāsa, living out one's days in Kāshī until death. Along the riverfront here are Mānasarovara Ghāt, named after the holy lake Mānasa in the Himālayas; Nārada Ghāt, named for the divine sage; Amareshvara Temple, named for Lord Amarnāth in the Kashmīr Himālayas; and, finally, Chaumsathī Ghāt, named for the Sixty-Four Goddesses whose temple is in the city above the *ghāt.*

Dashāshvamedha Ghāt

THE PILGRIMS now reach the second of the five *tīrthas,* Dashāshvamedha, the most popular *ghāt* along the Ganges, drawing large crowds of bathers each morning at dawn. It is the bustling hub of the pilgrim business along the riverfront. Rows of pilgrim-priests, variously called *pandās, ghātiās,* or *tīrtha purohitas,* sit on their low wooden *chaukīs* under bamboo umbrellas, eager to minister to the priestly and practical needs of pilgrims. They tend the clothing and effects of the bathers, utter the words of the *sankalpa,* accept the ritual gifts *(dāna)* of the pilgrims, as well as the traditional fee *(dakshinā)* for their sanctioning services as brahmins. Pilgrims still offer the traditional "gift of a cow" *(godāna)* to brahmins, but today the cow has become a reasonable two or three rupees. When all is completed, these pilgrim-priests daub the bather's forehead with a bright spot of *tilaka.* Here at Dashāshvamedha the Panchatīrthī pilgrims will bathe in the Ganges for a second time.

We have discussed Dashāshvamedha in the context of the Divodāsa myth cycle, for it was here that Lord Brahmā performed the "ten

ashvamedha" sacrifices, the requisites for which were flawlessly supplied by King Divodāsa. The historian Jayaswal suggests, however, that the name Dashāshvamedha refers, rather, to the "ten *ashvamedha*" sacrifices said to have been performed here by the revivalist Hindu dynasty of the second century, the Bhāra Shiva Nāgas.[33] Whatever the source of its name, the *ghāt* has long been said to confer the lavish benefits of ten *ashvamedhas* upon all who bathe here.

There are two adjacent *ghāts* that today bear the name Dashāshvamedha. The main road leading from Godauliā crossing to the river forks to either side of the Dashāshvamedha market, one of the city's largest produce markets. The two forks reach the river a short distance apart and turn into long stairways, broadening out as the steps descend into the river.

The road that approaches the river from Godauliā is a recent improvement, little more than a century old. The easy access it affords to Dashāshvamedha Ghāt is unquestionably an important reason for the *ghāt*'s popularity today. The pilgrimage buses, which have become a common way for pilgrims to travel, may park with ease near the Dashāshvamedha market. Pilgrims may conveniently walk the short distance to the river and then make a circuit into the city for the *darshana* of Vishvanātha before returning to their buses. The prestige of Dashāshvamedha has grown accordingly.

Before the road was built, however, its course from Godauliā crossing and around the south side of the Dashāshvamedha market was actually the course of a stream, which provided the drainage for one of Vārānasī's inland lakes, the Beniā Tālāb. The stream existed all year round, but it was in full flood during the rainy season. Its former course is still very vulnerable to floods, and during a flood year one may still see boats plying the street along the old stream bed. It was called the Godauliā Nala, and it appears as such on Prinsep's map of 1822. According to the learned traditions of the city, however, Godauliā was simply the scrambled corruption of the stream's real name: the Godāvarī, named after the sacred river of Central India. Thus, Dashāshvamedha was at one time the confluence of the Ganges and the Godāvarī Rivers, an auspicious place indeed!

Approaching the Dashāshvamedha area along the river from the south, the pilgrims come first to the southern branch of the *ghāt,* the old Dashāshvamedha, known once by the ancient names Rudrasāra, "Nectar of Rudra," or Rudrasārovara, "Lake of Rudra." The words

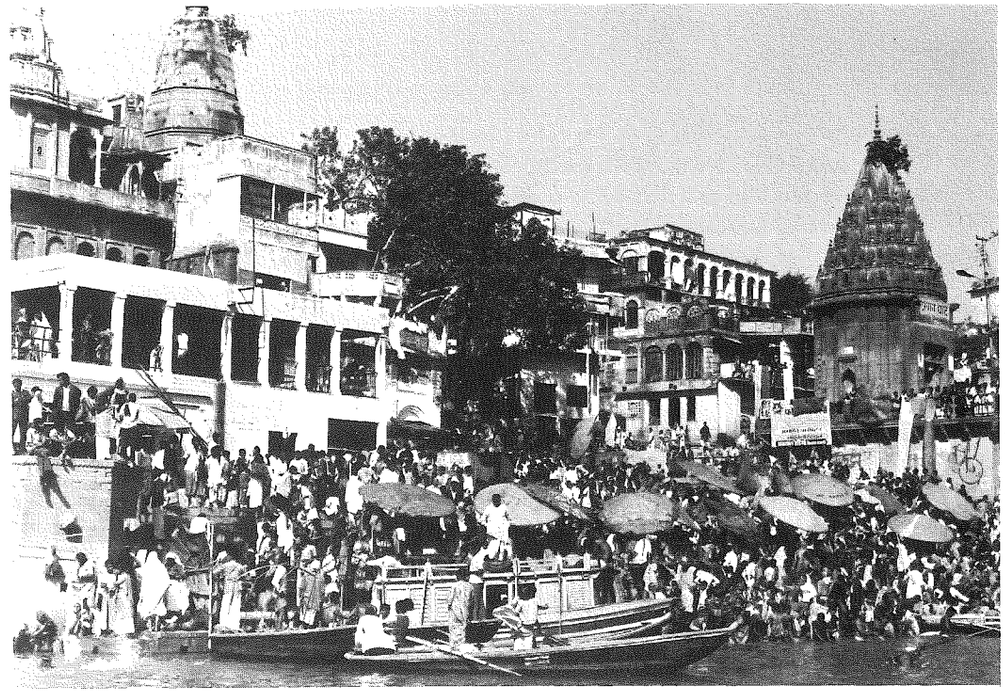
"Dashāshvamedha Ghāt: Old Rudrasārovara" are painted even today on the building rising above the *ghāt.* The most prominent temple on this sector of the *ghāt* is the flat-roofed building that houses the popular shrine of the goddess Shītalā, whom we have met before.

The northern sector of Dashāshvamedha Ghāt, about two hundred feet north of Rudrasārovara, was formerly called Prayāga Ghāt, which the Purānic literature affirms to be north of Dashāshvamedha.[34] Prayāga is the proper name of the modern Allahabad at the confluence of the Ganges, Yamunā, and Sarasvatī Rivers. It is called Tīrtharāja, "King of *Tīrthas.*" This is Prayāga-in-Kāshī, and its powers and benefits are said to be exactly those of the great Prayāga some fifty miles away. Today, however, the name Prayāga Ghāt, while it is painted boldly on a temple that sits between the two branches of Dashāshvamedha, is not commonly used. And even the temple there is utterly defunct, used only by boatmen who store their gear in its sanctum.

At Dashāshvamedha there are three Purānic *lingas* that the Panchatīrthī pilgrims are advised to visit. First is that of Shūlatankeshvara, "Shiva of the Spear and Hatchet," which marks the southeastern boundary of the Antargriha and the northeastern boundary of Kedāra Khanda. (*See* Appendix II and Map 7.) Second is Brahmeshvara, said to have been established by Lord Brahmā during his sojourn here. Both of these are located in low-lying, unassuming buildings which are under water when the river rises each rainy season and must be reclaimed from a mountain of silt and mud each fall. The third is Dashāshvamedheshvara, located in the compound of the famous Shītalā Temple.

Dashāshvamedha to Ādi Keshava

WHILE daily bathers climb the steps of Dashāshvamedha and make their way into the city for the *darshana* of Vishvanātha, the Panchatīrthī pilgrims continue northward along the river. They immediately pass Mān Mandir Ghāt, known primarily for the magnificent building with exquisite, ornately carved window casings, towering above it, which housed the eighteenth-century observatory of the Rājput, Jai Singh. Nearby another old Purānic *linga* has its home: Someshvara, the Shiva *linga* established by the Moon, Soma, a recommended stop on this riverfront pilgrimage. Passing Tripurabhairavī



Bathers at Dashāshvamedha Ghāt, the "Old Rudrasārovara." The Shītalā Temple is the low-lying white building on the left. The temple to the right bears the name Prayāga Ghāt.

Ghāt, they come to Mīr Ghāt, above which and slightly into the city they find the famous goddess temple of the "Wide-Eyed" Vishālākshī, one of India's 108 benches of the Goddess. Nearby is the Dharma Kūpa, the "Well of Dharma," surrounded by shrines and shaded by tall banyan trees. There is the Shiva temple of Dharmesha, where the Lord of Death, called Yamarāja or Dharmarāja, received his jurisdiction over the fate of the dead, a power he wields everywhere on earth except in Kāshī.[35] Here also is the *linga* established by Divodāsa before he finally left Kāshī. Also at Mīr Ghāt is the New Vishvanātha Temple, established by some very conservative Banāras brahmins when the old Vishvanātha was polluted, so they said, by the entrance of untouchables, or Harijans, into the temple after Independence.

The next *ghāt,* Lalitā Ghāt, has long been famous for its Vishnu shrine called Gangā Keshava, and its shrine to the Ganges called Bhāgīrathī Devī. The *ghāt*'s namesake, Lalitā Devī, is an important goddess in both Kāshī and nearby Prayāga. The pilgrims would be well advised to have her *darshana,* for it is said that the *darshana* of

Lalitā Devī brings the same rewards as circumambulating the whole world! Also at Lalitā Ghāt is the Nepālī Temple, its style and wood carving typical of Nepāl. The temple, although not of Purānic antiquity, contains an image said to be that of Pashupateshvara, Nepāl's most famous manifestation of Shiva.

The pilgrims are now halfway down the river from Asi, but they will not stop at Manikarnikā Ghāt to bathe yet. A dip in these waters is reserved for the end of the journey.

Walking north from Manikarnikā along the river, the pilgrims now skirt a section of the city that stands particularly high above the water's edge, an area dense with very important temples. It is called Siddha Kshetra, the "Field of Fulfillment," and its temples house some of the most powerful and wakeful deities in Kāshī. Above Sindhiā Ghāt is the famous Vīreshvara, the "Hero's Lord," today called Ātmavīreshvara. It was here that the sage Vishvānara, they say, did *tapas* and received as a boon from Shiva the son for which he had yearned. The son—Vaishvānara—bore his father's name, and later became the Lord of Fire, Agni, by doing *tapas* nearby. Even today Vīreshvara is especially propitiated for the birth of a son.[36] Agnīshvara is slightly farther north, and has also given its name to one of the *ghāts*. Here, it is said, Shiva appeared to Vaishvānara and gave him the position of Agni, the fire.[37] Agni is both the sacrificial fire that mediates between heaven and earth and the lord of the southeastern direction. All the directional regents are established in Banāras, and interestingly the temple established by the lord of the southwest, Nirriti, is right next to the shrine of Agni. Next door to them is the popular and ancient temple of Upashānteshvara, the "Peace-Giving Lord," known for the pacifying of diseases.

In the Field of Fulfillment there are also some mighty goddesses. Sankatā Devī is there, above Sankatā Ghāt. Nearby are Kātyāyanī Devī, Siddheshvarī Devī, and a prominent new image of Santoshī Mātā. These temples, like all the temples of this area, are very well known to those who live in Kāshī, but they are seldom visited by pilgrims from the outside. They are hard to find, except by coming along the river as the Panchatīrthī pilgrims do. Especially the Panchatīrthī pilgrims from the districts surrounding Kāshī will make a point of climbing the steep bank for the *darshana* of Ātmavīreshvara and Sankatā Devī before proceeding north along the river.

North of Agnīshvara is Rāma Ghāt, another popular bathing *ghāt*,

although today the headland above the *ghāt* is dominated by the massive new Sangaveda Vidyālaya Hospital. Adjacent to it is Lakshmanbālā Ghāt, named for Lakshmana the brother of Rāma. The Lakshmanbālā Temple above the *ghāt* contains a pavilioned hall of beautifully carved heavy wooden pillars and commands a sweeping overlook of the entire riverfront. A short distance away from Lakshmanbālā is the Mangalā Gaurī Temple, another very popular goddess shrine. Her temple also contains one of Kāshī's twelve Suns, Mayūkhāditya, the "Sun of Intense Rays." Here, they say, the Sun did *tapas* and intensified his heat so much that he nearly burned up the whole world. In his great devotion, the Sun established a Shiva *linga* here, still worshipped today as Gabhastīshvara, the "Lord of the Rays."

The Panchatīrthī pilgrims may stop at these temples, although the climb up the *ghāt* steps is very steep here, but they will pass up the next great *ghāt,* Panchagangā, in order to visit its temples and bathe in its waters on the return journey.

There are fewer *ghāts* of modern significance as the pilgrims continue their course northward. Brahmā Ghāt and Durgā Ghāt, immediately north of Panchagangā, fall into the orbit of activity of Panchagangā. Very fine staircases lead from these *ghāts* into the city above. Prinsep's illustration of Brahmā Ghāt from the early 1800s shows a very busy *ghāt* for bathing and washing. Sārīs hang from the lofty turrets to dry, and wood is stacked high on the *ghāt,* suggesting that perhaps cremations took place on this section of the riverfront too.

The next *ghāt* of importance is Gāya Ghāt, some distance to the north. Here, as at a number of these great *ghāts,* the goddesses dominate, now in the form of Nāgeshvarī Devī, the "Snake Goddess" (whom many call Shītalā here), and Mukhanirmālikā Devī, the "Pure-Faced Goddess." Until about the twelfth century, Gāya Ghāt was on the southern fringes of the urban part of Kāshī. All of the *ghāts* we have discussed to this point were in a much more rural and forested part of the sacred city, the Forest of Bliss. The great Pātan Darvāzā, one of the city's southern gates, still stands in the Gāya Ghāt area.

Trilochana is the next notable *ghāt.* Hidden in the alleyways above the *ghāt* is Trilochana Temple, dedicated to the "Three-Eyed Shiva."[38] The pilgrims may make a detour from their riverside journey to have the *darshana* of Shiva here, for this is one of Kāshī's oldest and most famous *lingas,* said to be *svayambhū.* Near Trilochana is a temple

housing the *linga* of Mahādeva, the "Great God."[39] In the *Kāshī Khanda* this is said to be the "first *tīrtha*" in Kāshī, splitting the earth as a great *svayambhū linga.* Mahādeva is called the "establishing deity of Vārānasī," and in his temple was also located Vārānasī Devī, the female city-deity. Despite its impressive Purānic heritage, Mahādeva is a small and dilapidated shrine today, and the goddess Vārānasī Devī is now located within the precincts of the Trilochana Temple.

Beyond Trilochana, the procession of *ghāts* becomes much less elegant. Many of the *ghāts* are still clay-banked, *kachcha ghāts.* They front the river in an area of the city that is largely Muslim and lack the patronage that would produce finer *pakka ghāts.* As the pilgrims walk this section of the riverfront, Prahlāda Ghāt, named for the great devotee of Vishnu, is perhaps the only one of which they will take note.

A thousand years ago, however, this section of the river was surely one of the most popular. On the bank and in the lanes above it were some of the city's most important temples, which were destroyed with the invasion of 1194. Many of these same temples, such as Vīreshvara and Sankatā Devī, were then re-established farther south, where they are found today.

Approaching the northern end of the city, the pilgrims come to Rājghāt, where in ancient times the river was most easily forded and where ferries would carry cargo and passengers back and forth. Just beyond the *ghāt* itself, the embankment becomes much higher, rising to the lofty Rājghāt Plateau, where the ancient center of urban Vārānasī was located throughout most of its long history. On the far end of the Rājghāt Plateau, where the bank pitches sharply down to the River Ganges on the east and the River Varanā on the north, sits the Ādi Keshava Temple, at last, the farthest destination of the Panchatīrthī pilgrims and the third of the five *tīrthas.*

Ādi Keshava

ĀDI KESHAVA, the "Original Vishnu," has been discussed in connection with the role of Vishnu in Kāshī, for this was the place where Vishnu first came when he arrived in Kāshī as Shiva's emissary. The temple dedicated to Vishnu has a pleasant pastoral setting on the

bank above the confluence of the Varanā and the Ganges Rivers. Despite its high position on the plateau, the *ghāt* below the temple is completely flooded during the rainy season and the temple is unapproachable from the river side.

Ādi Keshava, like its southern counterpart Lolārka, is unquestionably an ancient site. It is mentioned in the oldest Purānic listings of Kāshī *tīrthas,* where it is simply called Keshava.[40] It retained its importance until at least the twelfth century, when it was clearly the favorite *tīrtha* of the Gāhadavāla kings of Kāshī. From their inscriptions it is evident that a great number of regal ritual occasions in Kāshī included the worship of Ādi Keshava or a dip in the Ganges at the Varanā *sangam.*[41] Since the ancient city was centered on this plateau, it is little wonder that Ādi Keshava had such prominence.

The elderly priest of the temple today describes the city of Kāshī, stretched out along the river, as having five bodily parts: Asi is the head; Dashāshvamedha is the chest; Manikarnikā is the navel; Panchagangā is the thighs; and Ādi Keshava is the feet. Here it was, he reminds us, that Vishnu first placed his holy feet in Kāshī.

Although the *tīrtha* of Ādi Keshava is visited by Panchatīrthī pilgrims, the *pūjārī* of the temple laments that other pilgrims do not often come. Local people from Rājghāt visit the temple regularly, but pilgrims from elsewhere are rare. As with other ancient temples of north Vārānasī, people do not know its greatness anymore.

Ādi Keshava, however, is not the only goal of the Panchatīrthī pilgrims here. Bathing in the confluence is of great importance, as is the *darshana* of Shiva as the "Lord of the Confluence," Sangameshvara. The *Linga Purāna* takes special note of this place:

> . . . This river Varuna is holy. It liberates one from sins. It embellishes this holy centre and becomes united with the Ganges. An excellent *linga* has been installed by Brahmā at this confluence. It is known in the world as Sangameshvara. If a man shall become pure taking his bath at the confluence of the divine river and then worship Sangamesha, whence need he fear rebirth?[42]

The *linga* of Sangameshvara is located in a temple immediately adjacent to Ādi Keshava. From the pavilion of Ādi Keshava, one can look down into its courtyard. The sanctuary of this temple is occupied by the Sangameshvara *linga,* and in a side shrine is the other *linga* established by Brahmā, Brahmeshvara. It is a four-faced *linga.*

In the area of Ādi Keshava are located two of the fifty-six Ganeshas of Banāras: Kharva "The Dwarf" Vināyaka, and Rājaputra "The Prince" Vināyaka. The pilgrims will visit at least the nearest, Kharva Vināyaka, before retracing their steps up the riverbank again to Panchagangā Ghāt.

Panchagangā Ghāt

THIS is surely the most dramatic and magnificent of Kāshī's riverfront *ghāts*. Its broad stone staircases march straight up the high bank, becoming narrower, and finally disappearing into the dense city above. This steeply rising escarpment was formerly crowned with the great temple of Bindu Mādhava, which we have encountered in our discussion of Vishnu's great temples. Bindu Mādhava was probably destroyed several times between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries and was rebuilt for the last time by the Rājasthānī Mahārāja Mān Singh of Amber in the late sixteenth century.[43] It was this grand temple that Tavernier saw on his trip to Banāras shortly thereafter and described as the "great pagoda" of Banāras.[44] It must have been impressive, for it is the one temple in the entire city Tavernier described in some detail. It was built in a cross shape with great towers on each of the four arms and a lofty *shikhara* rising up over the central sanctum. According to this account the temple extended from Panchagangā Ghāt to what is now Rāma Ghāt, and it included within it the present temple of the goddess Mangalā Gaurī. It was an enormous and magnificent edifice.

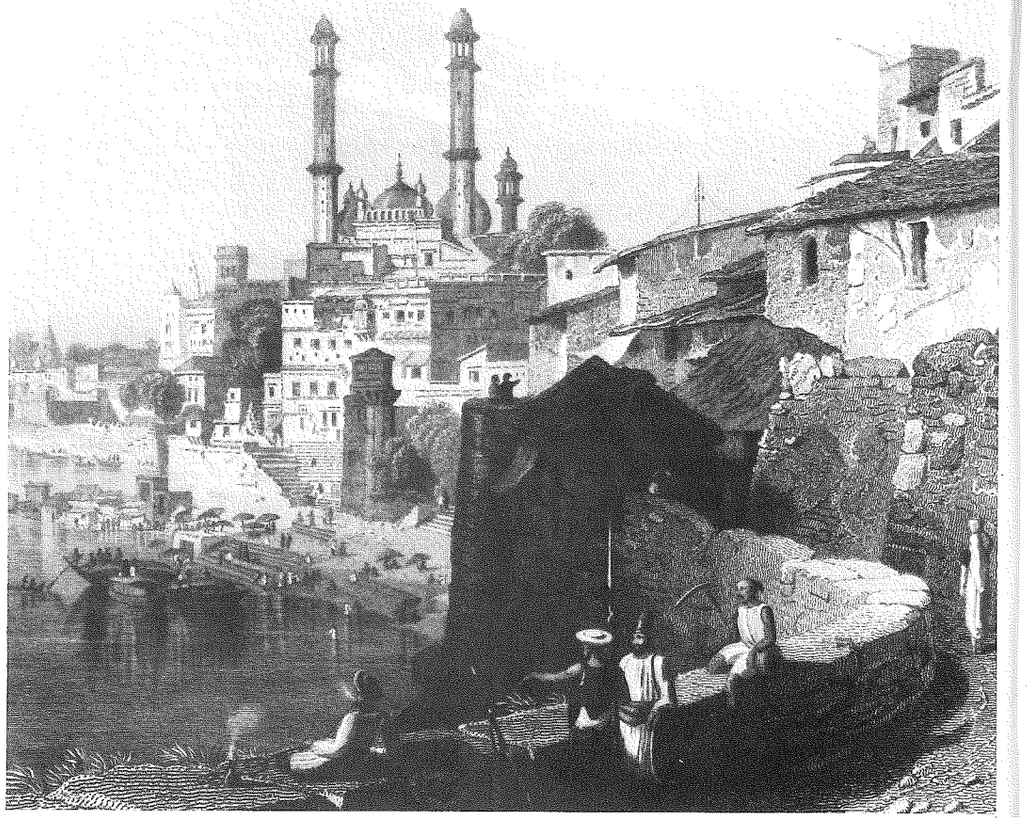
Tavernier describes the "idol" in this temple as five to six feet in height, garlanded with a chain of such riches as gold, rubies, pearls, and emeralds. "This idol has been made in honour and after the likeness of Bainmadou," he wrote, "who was formerly a great and holy personage among them, whose name they often have on their lips."[45] He did not know this to be an image of Vishnu, but he describes clearly the marking of the worshippers with the marks of Vishnu:

> Under the principal entrance of the pagoda one of the chief Brahmins is to be seen seated, close to whom is a large dish full of yellow pigment mixed with water. All the poor idolaters come one after the other to present themselves to him, and he anoints their foreheads with some of this colour, which is continued down between the eyes and on to the end of the nose, then on the arms and in front of the chest; and it is by these marks that those who have bathed in the Ganges are distinguished.[46]

There are many Banāras traditions associated with Bindu Mādhava and Panchagangā. Some of them the pilgrims will recall as they rest on the giant staircases of the *ghāt*. It was here, they say, that Kabīr received his initiatory *mantra* from the teacher Rāmānanda. Being unqualified for initiation by the guru on account of his low birth as a Muslim weaver's son, Kabīr is said to have extracted the sacred blessing from Rāmānanda by lying on the steps of Panchagangā Ghāt before dawn and waiting for the guru to trip over him when he came for a bath early in the morning. When Rāmānanda came down the steep steps and fell over Kabīr, he shouted, "Rām! Rām!" in surprise, and Kabīr considered himself blessed with the name of God spoken from the mouth of the guru. Nearly a century later, but still during the epoch of the grand Bindu Mādhava Temple, the poet Tulsī Dās wrote in praise of Bindu Mādhava. About this same time, in the first part of the seventeenth century, the outcasted brahmin poet Jagannātha is said to have sat with his Muslim lover atop the splendid *ghāt* of Panchagangā and composed the verses of the *Gangā Laharī*.

During the reign of Aurangzeb, the Bindu Mādhava Temple was pulled down and a mosque was built upon its site. The mosque was also constructed on a scale to match the grandeur of its high location on the river ridge. Originally, it had two very tall minarets, which can be seen in a sketch made by Captain Robert Elliott in the 1830s as well as in Prinsep's drawings. By the time Sherring wrote in 1868, the minarets had already been shortened some fifty feet because of their instability. Finally, one of these did fall, and the other was shortened still further, giving the building the somewhat truncated appearance it has today. Nonetheless, it was and remains such a fine building in such a commanding location that, since its construction three centuries ago, it has completely dominated the riverfront skyline, even in this Hindu city.

The riverfront at Panchagangā is notable for the dozens of three-sided cubicle shrine rooms that open out onto the river. Some contain a *linga* or an image, such as the lanky reclining image of Vishnu sleeping upon the serpent Shesha. Others are nearly bare and used primarily for yogic exercises and meditation. For much of the year, this row of cells



The great mosque at Panchagangā Ghāt, as drawn from the north near Trilochana Ghāt by Captain Robert Elliott, Views in India, *Vol. I, 1835.*

along the riverbank is under water. Not for three or four months after the rains cease in September does the river fall enough to reveal these shrines.

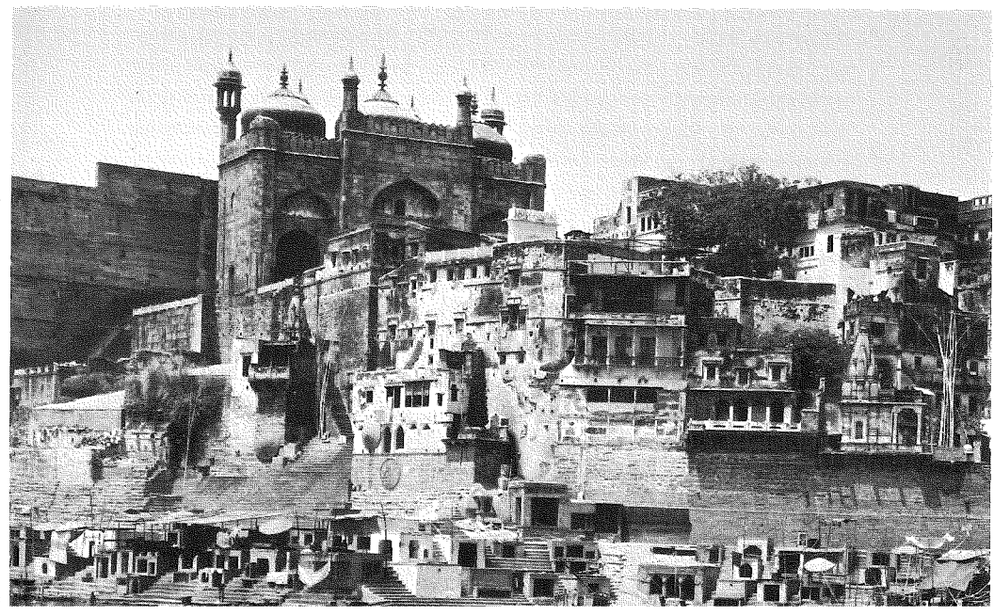
One such cubicle shrine honors the "Five Rivers" of Panchanada Tīrtha. The name stems from the old tradition that there are five rivers whose confluence is here. The first two are small rivulets, depicted here in bodily form in two side altars: the Dhūtapāpā ("Cleansed of Sin") and the Kiranā ("Sun's Ray"), whose waters are said to join in a stream called the Dharmanada ("River of Dharma"). The other three rivers are the Ganges, shown standing on her crocodile, the Yamunā, standing on her tortoise, and the Sarasvatī, riding her peacock. The

three joined together at Prayāga, one hundred miles upstream, and they arrived together in Kāshī long ago, when Bhagīratha led the Ganges across North India.[47]

It is not hard to imagine from the more forested nature of the riverfront glimpsed in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century drawings that these two small streams once flowed into the Ganges here. Today the Dhūtapāpā and the Kiranā are present symbolically on the great stone *ghāt.* Just to the north of the bathing area is a mere trickle of a stream, said to be the Dhūtapāpā. Slightly to the south on what is properly Lakshmanbālā Ghāt is a small rectangular pool about two feet deep, set inside one of the three-sided chambers opening out upon the river. This is affirmed to be the Kiranā River.

Bathing in these five rivers is said to be auspicious beyond measure, particularly during the month of Kārttika when all the gods, including Shiva Vishvanātha, are said to bathe here daily. In addition to bathing,

Panchagangā Ghāt, with its myriad riverfront shrines. Note the minarets of the mosque have been considerably shortened.



the Panchatīrthī pilgrims are instructed to have the *darshana* of Bindu Mādhava, now housed in a building next to the great mosque, and to visit the temple of the goddess Mangalā Gaurī, with its attendant Sun-shrines of Mayūkhāditya and Gabhastīshvara.

Manikarnikā

ARRIVING at their last stop, the Panchatīrthī pilgrims might see the bright blue-lettered inscription of a local poet, painted on the white-washed wall above the *ghāt:*

> *This is Manikarnikā, where death is auspicious,*
> *Where life is fruitful,*
> *Where one grazes the pastures of heaven.*
> *There is no* tīrtha *like Manikarnikā,*
> *There is no city like Kāshī,*
> *There is no* linga *like Vishveshvara,*
> *Not in the whole universe.*

At last, the pilgrims return to Manikarnikā Ghāt, at the center of the three-mile-long sweep of the city's riverfront. This is the most important of the river *ghāts* and the fifth of the five *tīrthas.* As with many groupings of five in Hindu symbolism, the fifth is the center, the supreme anchor of the quadrant of four; so it is with Manikarnikā. It is said to be the place of the earth's creation as well as its destruction, containing both the sacred well, dug out by Vishnu at the beginning of time, and the cremation ground, where the created order burns at the end of time. Both the waters of creation and the fires of destruction join in the aura of sanctity that pervades Manikarnikā.

Here the Panchatīrthī pilgrims are advised to bathe at Manikarnikā Ghāt as well as in the sacred tank Manikarnikā Kund. Bathing at Manikarnikā and having the *darshana* of Vishvanātha have long been the center of religious life in Kāshī, both for the daily worshipper and the pilgrim. The common saying is "Every day one should see Vishveshvara and bathe in Manikarnikā" *(Drishyo Vishveshvaro nityam, snātavyā Manikarnikā).* Many of the city's pilgrimages, such as the Panchakroshī pilgrimage around the city, include a ritual bath at

Manikarnikā and the *darshana* of Vishvanātha at both the beginning and the end.

MANIKARNIKĀ KUND

Although the name Manikarnikā is today most frequently associated with the cremation ground, its oldest and most important association is with the sacred well, called Manikarnikā or Chakrapushkarinī Kund, the "Discus Lotus-Pool." The pilgrims will surely hear of the antiquity of this site from the priests who make their living here. This well or tank, according to the *Kāshī Khanda,* is so ancient that it is said to have been present in Kāshī long before the River Ganges arrived at the heels of Bhagīratha: "For the benefit of the three worlds," they say, "King Bhagīratha brought the Ganges to the place where Manikarnikā is—to Shiva's Forest of Bliss, to Vishnu's Lotus Pool."[48]

The *kund* was originally a very large lake, said by tradition to have extended from a place called Harishchandra Mandapa near Sankatā Ghāt in the north, to Gangā Keshava at Lalitā Ghāt in the south, to Svargadvāra, the "Door of Heaven" located in the city on Brahma Nāla lane in the west, and to the middle of the Ganges in the east.[49] The lake of Manikarnikā was, by tradition, quite large and around its banks were the cremation grounds. On its northern bank, indeed, is one of the cremation grounds said to have been worked by the legendary King Harishchandra. When the Ganges arrived, it is said to have inundated this long lagoonlike lake, leaving only a part of it visible as a spring-fed *kund.*

Manikarnikā Kund is located today right in the middle of Manikarnikā Ghāt proper, to the north of the cremation grounds. Ascending the flight of steps from the river's edge, the pilgrims reach a broad, flat landing, from which the city again rises steeply and dramatically, penetrated by the narrowest of stair-step lanes. It is on this landing where the city meets the *ghāt* that the pilgrims find Manikarnikā Kund. The *kund,* surrounded by a cast-iron railing, is some sixty feet square at the top, narrowing to about twenty feet square at the water's edge. As the word *kund* implies, this is a tank with stairs—full-length, broad steps that descend to water level on all four sides. The well is said to spring from a source independent of the Ganges—an under-

Manikarnikā Ghāt. The Tārakeshvara temple is to the left. A goddess temple built by the Rāja of Ahmety dominates the center. To the right is the temple that caved in with the construction of Sindhiā Ghāt. Directly behind the shikhara *of that temple is the broad landing on which Manikarnikā Kund is located.*

ground river that flows directly from Gomukha, the "Cow's Mouth" in the Himālayas, the place where the River Ganges emerges from a mountain glacier.

VISHNU'S LOTUS POOL: THE ORIGIN OF MANIKARNIKĀ

At the north end of the *kund* at water level, the pilgrims will find a small shrine dedicated to Lord Vishnu, who carved out this lake with his discus and filled it with the perspiration of his austerities, back in the time of the beginnings. Vishnu has a central role in Manikarnikā's story, as it is told in the *Kāshī Khanda.*

During the great flood of dissolution, there was nothing at all, either moving or non-moving. It was dark everywhere. There was no sun. There were no planets, nor stars, nor moon. There was no day nor night. There was no sound, touch, smell, form, nor taste. There were no directions. There was only Pure Reality, Brahman, not graspable by mind or senses or speech, without form, without change.

Then that One desired to create a second, and it took on the pure form called Īshvara, the Lord. Shiva was the form of that Formless One, and with him was the goddess Shakti, called Prakriti ["Matter"] as well as Māyā ["Illusion"]. And the two of them, Shiva and Shakti, created this place.

That Shakti is Matter, and Shiva is Spirit. The two of them, Shiva and Shakti, both bliss incarnate, delight in this place, which is also bliss incarnate, this place measuring five kroshas, *created to be the very ground under their feet. O Agastya, they do not leave this place, even in the time of dissolution. Therefore it is called Avimukta, "Never-Forsaken."*

One day, Shiva and Shakti, living in the Forest of Bliss, began to think how fine it would be to have another being who would create the world, bear its burdens, and protect it. The two of them would not have to worry about such matters and could devote themselves to the granting of liberation. Thus, they created Vishnu, beautiful and worthy, the very epitome of all good qualities. They instructed him to create everything on earth, according to the plan of the sacred Vedas.

Receiving this command, Vishnu immediately set himself on the path of severe austerities. Digging there with his discus, called a chakra, *Hari made a beautiful lotus pond, called a* pushkarinī, *and he filled it up with water from the sweat of his own limbs. Like a stone, he sat there, on the banks of the Chakrapushkarinī Pool and performed fierce austerities for 500,000 years.*

*One day, Shiva and Shakti came that way and saw him there, aflame with the heat of his austerities. Shiva hailed him, and told him to choose a boon. Vishnu's only wish was to live forever in the presence of the Supreme Shiva. Shiva shook with sheer delight at the great devotion of Vishnu, and his "jeweled-earring"—*manikarnikā*—fell from his ear into the waters of the pool. Shiva granted Vishnu's request and added another boon of his own: This place, the Chakrapushkarinī, would now be known as Manikarnikā, the "Jeweled-Earring."*[50]

Manikarnikā was the world's first pool and first *tīrtha,* dug out and filled with water by Vishnu himself at a time when the only *terra firma* in the entire universe was Kāshī. Kāshī was the very ground under the feet of Shiva and Pārvatī. Nothing else had yet been created. Here the first laboring ascetic, Vishnu, encountered Lord Shiva.

A variation of this myth of the origin of Kāshī and Manikarnikā is found in the *Shiva Purāna:*

The unmanifest, attributeless One, Brahman, produced a second being, called Shiva and possessing attributes. Shiva then split into two, becoming male and female, Shiva and Shakti. They, in turn, created Purusha, who was Vishnu, and Prakriti, his consort. These two, Purusha and Prakriti, were commanded to perform austerities in order to create the universe. But where should they practice their disciplines? As yet there was no place in the void. The Supreme Shiva then created a beautiful city, radiant and auspicious, five kroshas *in extent. Vishnu, the Purusha, then sat in that place, laboring and heating himself in austerities. From his labor, water began to flow from his body and out over the face of the void. When Vishnu saw the water, he shook his head in wonder, and his earring fell into the water. Thus, it became known as the "Jeweled Earring," Manikarnikā. Finally, the water became so extensive that the city of the five* kroshas *began to float, supported by the trident of the attributeless Shiva. Vishnu slept there on the waters, and brought forth Brahmā and the Cosmic Egg from his navel in order to produce creation. Shiva then took Kāshī down from his trident and released it into the mortal world, but when that world dissolves again Shiva upholds the radiant Kāshī on his trident.*[51]

The myth of Manikarnikā's origin at the dawn of creation is well known in the city today, and is related by Hindus in much the same form as it is found in the Purānas. The pilgrims who bathe here at the end of the Panchatīrthī pilgrimage will know some version of this story and repeat the tale to one another.

The *pūjārī* of the Tārakeshvara Temple on Manikarnikā Ghāt tells it this way:

At Chakrapushkarinī, where Vishnu's footprints are seen today, Vishnu did tapas *for 7,000 years. Then one day Shiva and Pārvatī both bathed in the beautiful* kund *made by Vishnu's discus. Shiva's crest-jewel* [mani] *and Pārvatī's earring* [karnikā] *fell off into the* kund *while they were bathing, and so it is called Manikarnikā.*

The myth, a well-known part of Kāshī lore, is even painted in folk verse in a mixed Hindi and Braj dialect on the wall of the building adjacent to the *kund,* where the scene of Vishnu's *tapas* is also depicted in the brilliant blue-on-whitewash style of Banāras folk art. In hearing the various derivations of Manikarnikā, we should bear in mind, however, that a great many *nāgas* and *yakshas* have names beginning with the word *mani,* a jewel. Especially the *nāgas,* serpents, are known to be the guardians of the treasures that lie below the earth.[52] It is likely that Manikarnikā in its earliest days had some association with the *nāgas.*

In the *Kāshī Khanda,* the story of Manikarnikā continues with a very interesting boon-choosing episode. Pleased with Vishnu, Shiva asked him to choose one boon after another. The things Vishnu successively chose were the very things that made Kāshī famous. First, he asked Shiva to let Kāshī be a place of liberation:

> O Shiva, because your earring "let go" [*mukta*] of your ear and fell here, so may this supreme *tīrtha* of all *tīrthas* be a place where people are "let go."
>
> And because light "shines" [*kāshate*] here, that inexpressible light which is the Lord, may this place be known by its matchless name, Kāshī, O Shiva.
>
> May all creatures, from Lord Brahmā down to a clump of grass, in all the four ranks of living beings, be liberated in Kāshī.[53]

Having requested for Kāshī the power of liberation for which it is now so famous, Vishnu went on to ask for related boons.[54] He asked that this be a place where all the various kinds of worship, charity, and sacrifice yield *moksha* as their fruit. He asked that *moksha* be granted here freely without the difficult spiritual disciplines of the yogis and ascetics. He asked that even the lowest of creatures, such as rabbits and mosquitoes, be blessed with *moksha* here.

When Vishnu had chosen, in essence, that Kāshī be Kāshī, Shiva gladly granted all he asked and added another boon of his own: he made Vishnu Vishnu, instructing him to bring forth the creation and to protect it. Shiva, thus freed from earthly tasks, would become the Lord of this city of liberation: "This place, bounded by the five *kroshas,* is dear to me. My command and none other shall hold sway here. No other, O Vishnu, shall govern these creatures who dwell in Avimukta, even if they are sinners. I myself will be their teacher."[55]

Manikarnikā, where Vishnu encountered Shiva and Pārvatī in the beginning, came to be seen as the *tīrtha*'s *tīrtha*—a place so powerful

that all the other *tīrthas* are said to come here at midday to bathe, to dump the loads of sins they have acquired from pilgrims, and to become pure again. It is also the *tīrtha* of the gods. Vishveshvara and Pārvatī are said to bathe here daily at midday. Vishnu and Lakshmī come all the way from the Vaikuntha heaven to do the same. Brahmā comes from his heaven, Satyaloka. Indra and the other directional lords come. All the divine sages and all the various classes of gods and goddesses come to bathe at Manikarnikā.

In the beginning, Manikarnikā Kund was dug out by Vishnu himself. But the digging out of the *kund* is repeated, quite literally, each year when the floodwaters of the Ganges recede, having dumped a mountain of alluvial silt into the well. In the rainy season, when the waters rise high up the steep *ghāts* of Kāshī, the *kund* is completely inundated and often disappears from view, except perhaps for the very tops of the iron fence posts that surround it. When the waters recede, the *kund* is left filled with mud and the entire *ghāt* appears to be a clay-banked *kachcha ghāt* like Asi Ghāt. The excavation and reclamation of the *kund* begins, and gradually the *kund* is emptied of its deposit of dirt and becomes accessible to bathers. The faded walls of the buildings that border the *kund* on three sides are repainted with whitewash and lavishly decorated with folk art. This dramatic change of the riverfront through the seasons reminds us that this Panchatīrthī pilgrimage along the riverbank can be done only in the winter, spring, and summer by foot.

THE DEITIES AND TEMPLES OF MANIKARNIKĀ

The three greatest deities of the living Hindu pantheon—Vishnu, Shiva, and Devī—are all part of the mythology of Manikarnikā and are especially honored here by the Panchatīrthī pilgrims. It is appropriate that these three seem to share equally in the traditions of sanctity and worship attached to this place, for those who know the city well claim it is the most sacred spot of all.

At Manikarnikā today, Vishnu's image is located in the small shrine inside the *kund* on its northern wall. As the Panchatīrthī pilgrims clamber down into the *kund* to bathe, they will stop to honor him

there. On the *ghāt* itself, a few yards away, are the revered footprints *(pādukā)* of Vishnu, set in a circular marble slab. No pilgrim will leave Manikarnikā without honoring Vishnu's feet here. These footprints are said to mark the place where Vishnu engaged in his years of *tapas.* A plate from Prinsep's 1831 collection of engravings shows these footprints, which the subtitle calls "The holiest Spot in the sacred City." This spot has been sprinkled and flowered and touched by millions of Hindus through the centuries, and it has also been a place reserved for the cremation of a select few. The Mahārājas of Kāshī, for example, who are considered the earthly representatives of Vishvanātha, are traditionally cremated here.

The most important Shiva temple on the *ghāt* itself is the one containing the Tārakeshvara *linga,* the form of Shiva that imparts the liberating *tāraka mantra,* the "prayer of the crossing," at the time of death. This *linga* was formerly located in the compound of Vishveshvara in the heart of the city.[56] The Tārakeshvara pavilion was one of the eight side-pavilions of the great sixteenth-century temple of Vishveshvara. It was destroyed along with the rest of the temple and is remembered at its old site today by a mere fragment of stone located underneath the small shrine of Gaurī Shankar by the Jnāna Vāpī pavilion. It is fitting, however, that Tārakeshvara is now here at Manikarnikā, for this is the place where the *tāraka mantra* is said to be whispered into the ears of the dead by Lord Shiva himself. The Panchatīrthī pilgrims will certainly have the *darshana* of the *linga* of Tārakeshvara after they bathe.

The temple of Manikarnikeshvara is also an important abode of Shiva in this area. It is located slightly into the city, and the Panchatīrthī pilgrims will approach it from the *ghāt* by taking a steeply ascending lane south of the *kund.* The *linga* of this temple—set dramatically underground at the bottom of a deep shaft—could at one time be reached by a tunnel originating on the *ghāt.* In the Purānas, this particular *linga* is mysteriously said to be in the middle of the *kund* itself.[57] On the west side of the *kund* today, Shiva's presence is evident in the row of more than a dozen small niches, each containing a Shiva *linga.*

At the northern end of Manikarnikā Ghāt, bordering Sindhiā Ghāt, is another Shiva temple which lost its footing nearly a century ago and slid into the river, coming to a precarious, tilting rest, half under water, where it remains today. It was probably with the construction

of Sindhiā Ghāt, which caused an enormous amount of erosion, that the temple began to tilt. There is a local legend that when the engineers were digging to determine the cause of the instability of the terrain here, they unearthed a yogi seated in an underground cavern. Awakened from his meditation, the yogi was shocked to discover that the golden era of King Rāma and Queen Sītā of Ayodhyā had long passed away, and that the Kali Age had arrived. He leaped up from his long-held seat, plunged into the Ganges, and disappeared.

Finally, the Goddess is worshipped at Manikarnikā. The importance of Pārvatī, the Shakti of Shiva, who bathed in these waters in the beginning, is attested to in the ancient myth. She sanctified these waters and left one of her ornaments behind here. Today, however, the goddess most closely associated with the *kund* goes by the name of Manikarnī Devī, who is probably its most ancient *devī* as well. Like many such ancient *devīs,* she is place-specific: this is her well. Pilgrims may see Manikarnī painted on the wall near the *kund.* In the standard depiction, Manikarnī Devī is seated cross-legged by the *kund,* flanked by Shiva and Pārvatī on one side and Vishnu on the other. Her reputation is well established, for she is mentioned by the old *Linga Purāna* as well as by the *Kāshī Khanda.*[58] At times, Manikarnikā is said to abandon her material form as a *kund* and take on the subtle form of a woman and goddess who visibly appears to those who meditate upon her. Her features are described in some detail, as are the *mantras* to be repeated in evoking her image. The calling forth and envisioning of the deity in this fashion suggest a medieval Tantric layer in the development of her cultus. One thing is clear: the goddess associated with this place and these waters has a very long and continually evolving history. Apparently unattached to any consort, she is one of the many local *devīs* included when the divine feminine is spoken of as "the Goddess."

At the Manikarnikā Kund today, an image of Manikarnī Devī is painted yearly on the freshly whitewashed wall after the rains have ceased. It is she who presides over the twice-yearly decoration *(shringāra)* of the *kund.*[59] On these decoration days, the waters here are especially celebrated by the devout, who sit around the steps of the *kund* waiting for the auspicious moment to bathe. A rectangular wooden frame is positioned over the water and adorned with garlands of marigolds and nosegays of juniper and flowers. The waters are thus decorated and a colorful, festival *pūjā* follows. Although the ritual

elements of the *āratī* are presented to the goddess waters, the offering is overseen by Manikarnī Devī herself, whose framed icon has been brought forth for the occasion. When the *pūjā* is over, the priest who has been in charge takes the first dip in the sacred waters, acting as a representative of Vishvanātha.[60] He is followed by a crowd of eager bathers, who now plunge into the *kund* in one of the most festive of all bathing celebrations.

MANIKARNIKĀ CREMATION GROUND

Strictly speaking, the name Manikarnikā applies to the *kund* and its adjoining *ghāt,* but in Banāras today the name also refers to the cremation ground immediately to the south. The Panchatīrthī pilgrims will probably pay little attention to the cremation ground, but it is undoubtedly present in their minds as they linger at this last stop on their river pilgrimage. This is the site of liberation, for which Kāshī is famous.

Manikarnikā is the famed "burning *ghāt*" the tourist sees from the safe distance of a boat, or from the turret of an old riverside temple now fallen into disuse. Manikarnikā combines the awesome with the beautiful. The spires of a cluster of temples pierce the sky. And the smoke of the low-lying cremation pyres curls about the temples and spreads an ethereal white veil over the entire *ghāt* as it rises. Manikarnikā is alive around the clock. By night one can see the flames of its pyres from far-off Asi Ghāt, and by day one can discern this *ghāt* along the crescent of the riverfront by its supernal haze.

From the river, the most prominent temple is a great, hulking, four-postered temple that looms over the cremation grounds. Built by Queen Ahalya Bāī Holkar of Indore at the same time she sponsored the construction of the Vishvanātha Temple in the eighteenth century, it is not in use today as a temple. It is dark, stained with years of smoke, and the spaces between its turrets are stacked with wood. Adjacent to this temple is a high bulkhead for flood-season cremations, when the lower part of the cremation ground is under water.

At any one time there may be half a dozen cremation pyres burning. Newly arrived corpses lie at the water's edge, bound in red or white cloth and strapped into the bamboo litters on which they are carried through the streets to this place. They are dipped in the Ganges for the last time before being hoisted on to the pyre. The eldest son, freshly

tonsured and dressed in a seamless white garment, circumambulates the deceased and lights the pyre. Mourning and wailing are said to be bad luck for the dead, and here there is an atmosphere of almost casual solemnity. The funeral party stands or sits nearby, and when the body has been burned, the eldest son, his back to the pyre, throws a clay pot of Ganges water over his shoulder, dousing the embers, and walks away without looking back.

The cremation ground is under the professional organization and exclusive supervision of the Doms, an untouchable caste whose dominance here is said to extend far back to that mythical time when King Harishchandra was purchased in slavery by a Dom to work the cremation grounds. Doms sell the wood, collect a tax for each corpse, and tend the ever-burning sacred fire from which all pyres are lit. They also tend the individual pyres and rake up the ashes. The ashes and embers will be sifted for valuables by the Dom workers before being consigned to the river, where they will float lazily for a time near the shore before being carried slowly downstream.

Kāshī's ancient reputation as a cremation ground is unquestionable. In the *Padma Purāna,* for example, it is said, "This well-known cremation ground is called Avimukta. Having become Time itself, I destroy the world here, O Goddess."[61] The sacred city is, after all, the "Great Cremation Ground." It is not clear, however, that Manikarnikā in particular was the famous cremation ground it is today. The only direct reference to Manikarnikā as a cremation ground is in the *Nārada Purāna,* which is a very late work.[62] For the rest, Manikarnikā is known as a sacred bathing *tīrtha* and, by extension, because of its sanctity, a good place to die. The relationship between death and Manikarnikā may be surmised, for example, in the *Matsya Purāna,* which says, "A man who leaves his body at Manikarnikā reaches the desired goal."[63] In the *Kāshī Khanda* as well, Manikarnikā is said to be a place where people surrender their earthly bodies to death and receive spiritual bodies like that of Shiva himself.[64] While Manikarnikā is not mentioned explicitly as a cremation ground, it is surely a place where one might wish to die.

The cremation ground here at Manikarnikā has traditionally gone by another name: Jalasāī Ghāt, the "Sleeper on the Waters." Appropriately, this is a name of Vishnu, who sleeps between eras upon the waters of the Sea of Milk and who slept here at the dawn of creation, before the golden egg containing the creator god Brahmā emerged

from his navel and began to generate the universe. In a touching, but inaccurate interpretive attempt, the Englishman Edwin Greaves, writing in 1901, speculated: "Is it just possible that the name is not here applied to Vishnu, but to the dead? that as we speak of the dead as 'sleeping in the graveyard,' so Hindus speak of theirs as sleeping in the Ganges? One would like to read such an idea into the name."[65] Whatever its proper origin, the name Jalasāī has been associated with the cremation ground for some time, and it is noted as such by both English and Hindi authors and mapmakers. On Prinsep's careful map of 1822, it is called "Jalsayn" Ghāt, with the notation "There Hindoo corpses are burnt."

There were a number of cremation grounds in ancient Banāras, and

A satī *stone, showing a married couple marking the site where a woman died on the funeral pyre of her husband. Many of these are today worshipped as images of Shiva and Pārvatī. The feet of the stone shown here have been washed and honored with water.*

even this one in the vicinity of Manikarnikā Kund was much larger than it is today. For example, the western boundary of the Manikarnikā Kund area as noted in the Purānas was Svargadvāra, the "Door of Heaven," which today is a temple set into the city several hundred yards uphill from the river along the lane called Brahma Nāla, which was itself formerly a rivulet.[66] The many *satī* stones found in that area, which are always a rough guide to the presence of an ancient cremation ground, confirm the supposition that this little rainy season rivulet was once part of the larger cremation ground. These *satī* stones mark the site on which a "faithful wife" *(satī)* was burned upon her husband's funeral pyre.[67]

In Banāras today, the name Manikarnikā bears with it the double-edged power of a living and transforming symbol. For the pilgrims, it calls to mind the sacred *kund* with its life-giving waters of creation, and at the same time it calls to mind the cremation ground with its burning fires of destruction and liberation. Here at the heart of the sacred city is the transformation of life and of death. While the very word Manikarnikā may bespeak death, it is death in Kāshī, which is liberation.

Finally, the Panchatīrthī pilgrims leave the River Ganges at Manikarnikā. They salute Siddhi "Fulfillment" Vināyaka, one of the most popular of the fifty-six Ganeshas, and hasten uphill, through the lanes into the city for a final round of worship at Vishvanātha, Annapūrnā, and the Jnāna Vāpī. Then they visit the "Witnessing Ganesha," Sākshī Vināyaka, to confirm the completion of their day-long pilgrimage.

Trilochana (Trilocana)	The "Three-Eyed" Shiva, whose third eye is of power and omniscient wisdom.
Tulsī Dās	Late sixteenth-, early seventeenth-century *bhakti* poet, author of the Hindi interpretation of the *Rāmāyana,* the beloved *Rāmcharitmānas.*
Upanishad (Upaniṣad)	One of the speculative sacred texts attached to the Vedas.
Vaishnava (Vaiṣṇava)	Pertaining to the cultus of Vishnu; a worshipper of Vishnu.
vaishya (vaiśya)	The third of the four classes, traditionally merchants and farmers.
Varaṇā	The river that borders Vārānasī on the north, entering the Ganges at Ādi Keshava or Varanā *sangam.*
Vārāṇasī	Banāras, the city between the Varanā and the Asi Rivers.
varṇa	The four classes of Hindu society: brahmin, *kshatriya, vaishya, shūdra.*
Veda	Wisdom, knowing. The sacred literature considered to be "heard" or "revealed" *(shruti).*
viraha	Love in separation. The longing love for an absent lover.
Vishnu (Viṣṇu)	The "Pervader," known for the three giant steps with which he claimed the whole universe. Along with Shiva and Devī, one of the three most widely worshipped deities in India.
Vishvanātha (Viśvanātha)	Shiva, the "Lord of All," as present in Banāras.
vrata	A vow; religious observances done in fulfillment of a vow.
yajña	Sacrifice, especially the Vedic sacrifice.
yaksha/yakshī (yakṣa/yakṣī)	Ancient male and female deities of the "life cult," of non-Aryan India; associated with trees, pools, and vegetative abundance.
yantra	A "device" for harnessing the mind in meditation or worship. A diagram, usually of geometric interlocking triangles and circles.
yoginī	Female divinities, "enchantresses."
yuga	The "ages" of the world, four in number: *krita, tretā, dvāpara,* and *kali;* the first being the perfect age of the beginnings, the last being this age of strife, the Kali Age.

NOTES

ABBREVIATIONS

KKh	*Kāshī Khanda*
KKM	*Kāshī Kedāra Māhātmya*
KR	*Kāshī Rahasya*
TS	*Tristhalīsetu*
TVK	*Tīrthavivechana Kānda*

CHAPTER 1

[1] M. A. Sherring, *The Sacred City of the Hindus,* p. 7.
[2] Mark Twain, *Following the Equator,* p. 480.
[3] Lewis Mumford, *The City in History,* p. 570.
[4] Norman Kotker, *The Earthly Jerusalem,* p. 169.
[5] Gustav von Grunebaum, *Muhammadan Festivals,* pp. 20–1.
[6] Paul Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters.*
[7] William Foster, ed., *Early Travels in India,* p. 20.
[8] *Ibid.,* pp. 20–1.
[9] Jean Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India,* vol. II, p. 236.
[10] Reginald Heber, *Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India,* p. 392.
[11] *Ibid.,* p. 371.
[12] *Ibid.,* pp. 371–2.
[13] Emma Roberts, *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan,* p. 177.
[14] Mark Twain, *Following the Equator,* p. 496.
[15] W. S. Caine, *Picturesque India,* p. 302.
[16] Edwin Arnold, *India Revisited,* pp. 218–19.
[17] François Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire,* p. 334; Arnold, *India Revisited,* p. 214.
[18] C. J. C. Davidson, *Diary of Travels and Adventures in Upper India,* vol. II, p. 11.

[19] Norman Macleod, *Days in North India,* p. 20.
[20] James Kennedy, *Life and Work in Benares and Kumaon,* p. 68.
[21] Macleod, *Days in North India,* p. 20.
[22] Count Hermann Keyserling, *India Travel Diary of a Philosopher,* pp. 118–22.
[23] Sherring, *Sacred City of the Hindus,* pp. 16–17.
[24] Foster, *Early Travels in India,* p. 23.
[25] Macleod, *Days in North India,* p. 23.
[26] Sherring, *Sacred City of the Hindus,* p. 37.
[27] Mark Twain, *Following the Equator,* p. 504.
[28] The Shrī Vaishnavas of South India have articulated the understanding of the *archa avatāra,* the "image incarnation" in which the Lord graciously takes the form of the image so that he may be worshipped by his devotees. While the Shrī Vaishnava theologians Rāmānuja and Pillai Lokāchārya state this understanding most dramatically, it is nonetheless true that all image worship in India is based on the faith that the Lord is present, either permanently or temporarily, in the image worshipped.
[29] Kennedy, *Life and Work in Benares and Kumaon,* p. 117.
[30] Martin Haug, trans., *The Aitareya Brāhmanam of the Rig Veda,* 7.15.
[31] The duties of these sacred specialists and the distinctions among them are described in L. P. Vidyarthi, *The Sacred Complex of Kāshī.*
[32] A list of the Kāshī *māhātmyas* is to be found in Appendix I.
[33] *Kāshyām maranam muktih.* This is the most important of Kāshī's praises.
[34] Jātaka Nos. 239 and 283 speak of *Kāshīgrāma.* (The Jātaka tales noted in this text will be numbered according to the accepted numeration of V. Fausbøll's edited Pali text of the Jātakas.) The *Mahābhārata* also mentions *Kāshīpurī* (VI.14.6; XIII.154.23, Critical Edition).
[35] KKh 26.67. Here Vishnu is speaking, choosing a boon granted by Lord Shiva. See the Manikarnikā myths in Chapter 5.
[36] Quoted in Nārāyana Bhatta, TS, p. 102.
[37] When the rivers of India are named in the *Mahābhārata* (VI.10.30), the Varānasī is among them. The *Matsya Purāna* also mentions the Varānasī River as having a confluence with the Ganges (183.73) and as constituting one of the boundaries of Vārānasī (183.61–2). See also Vāchaspati Mishra, *Tīrtha Chintāmani,* pp. 351–2, 367, for mention of the Varānasī River. It is also relevant that, according to rules of vowel combination, Varanā and Asi would combine to form Varanāsi, but, in fact, the name is never written with a long final a.
[38] Lakshmīdhara, TVK, p. 61, cites the *Matsya Purāna* verses, naming the "Dried-Up River."
[39] KKh 30.17–23.
[40] *The Vāmana Purāna* with English Translation, A. S. Gupta, ed., II.26–9.
[41] *Jābāla Upanishad* 2.
[42] *Matsya Purāna* 180.54.
[43] TS, p. 89. Here a number of etymologies are cited, including the unusual notion that Avimukta means "released" *(mukta)* from "sin" *(avi).*
[44] KKh 46.38; 60.55.
[45] *Kurma Purāna* I.29.35; *Matsya Purāna* 181.23–4.
[46] KR 14.39.

[47] KKh 3. The idyllic location of the sage Agastya's ashram is described. *Matsya Purāna* 180.24–44; *Linga Purāna* 92 Shiva shows Pārvatī the Forest of Bliss.
[48] KR 3.37–8.
[49] KR 14.40–1.
[50] KR 7.21.
[51] KKh 30.96–102. They are also called his "moving *lingas,*" KKh 55.34–7.
[52] KKh 53.96; 64.43.
[53] KKh 87.67. Chapters 87–9 tell the Daksha sacrifice story.
[54] *Satī* stones may be found at Gayā Ghāt, Sankatā Ghāt, Tripurabhairavī Ghāt, Dashāshvamedha Ghāt, and others.
[55] KKh 30. 103–4.
[56] See, for example, Rig Veda X.90; *Aitareya Upanishad* 1; and *Matsya Purāna* 167–71 for instances of the spinning forth of creation from the divine body.
[57] *Mahābhārata* XIII.111.16.
[58] TS, p. 131.
[59] See, for example, Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* and *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return.*
[60] For example, Pandharpur is a focus of pilgrimage in Mahārāshtra, Girnār in Gujarāt, and such Skanda sites as Pālnī and Tiruchendur in Tamilnādu.

CHAPTER 2

[1] The *Mahābhārata,* which in legend dates to perhaps the eighth or ninth century B.C., is a long, composite epic, more a library than a single work, dating from the fifth century B.C. to the fifth century A.D. (J. A. B. Van Buitenen, ed. and trans., vol. I, xxiv–xxv). The Jātaka tales, while they may contain popular stories and sayings from earlier centuries, were not composed in their present narratives until about the third century B.C. (Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature,* vol. II, pp. 121 ff.). The composition of the Purānas comes from a later era, ranging from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries A.D., but they too contain materials, especially genealogies, that are very old. See F. Ėden Pargiter, *The Ancient Indian Historical Tradition.*
[2] Jātaka No. 5. Bārānasi is the Pali spelling. See also Jātakas Nos. 483, 515, and 543.
[3] Jātaka No. 243.
[4] Jātaka No. 23.
[5] Jātaka No. 521.
[6] Jātakas Nos. 1, 2, 54, and others.
[7] Jātakas Nos. 239 and 283.
[8] *Ibid.* This rivalry between "Pasenadi" and "Ajātasattu" is recorded several places in Buddhist literature; *Samyutta Nikaya* I.84–5 and *Dhammapada Commentary,* vol. III, p. 259 (H. C. Norman, ed., Pali Text Society, London: Luzac and Co., 1970 reprint of 1906 edition).
[9] These excavations were begun in the 1940s under the direction of Dr. Krishna Deva and the work was resumed in the early 1960s under the direction of Dr. A. K. Narain. A summary of findings was published by Dr. T. C. Roy, "Archaeological Excavations at Vārānasī," in A. K. Narain and Lallanji Gopal, eds., *Introducing Vārānasī* on