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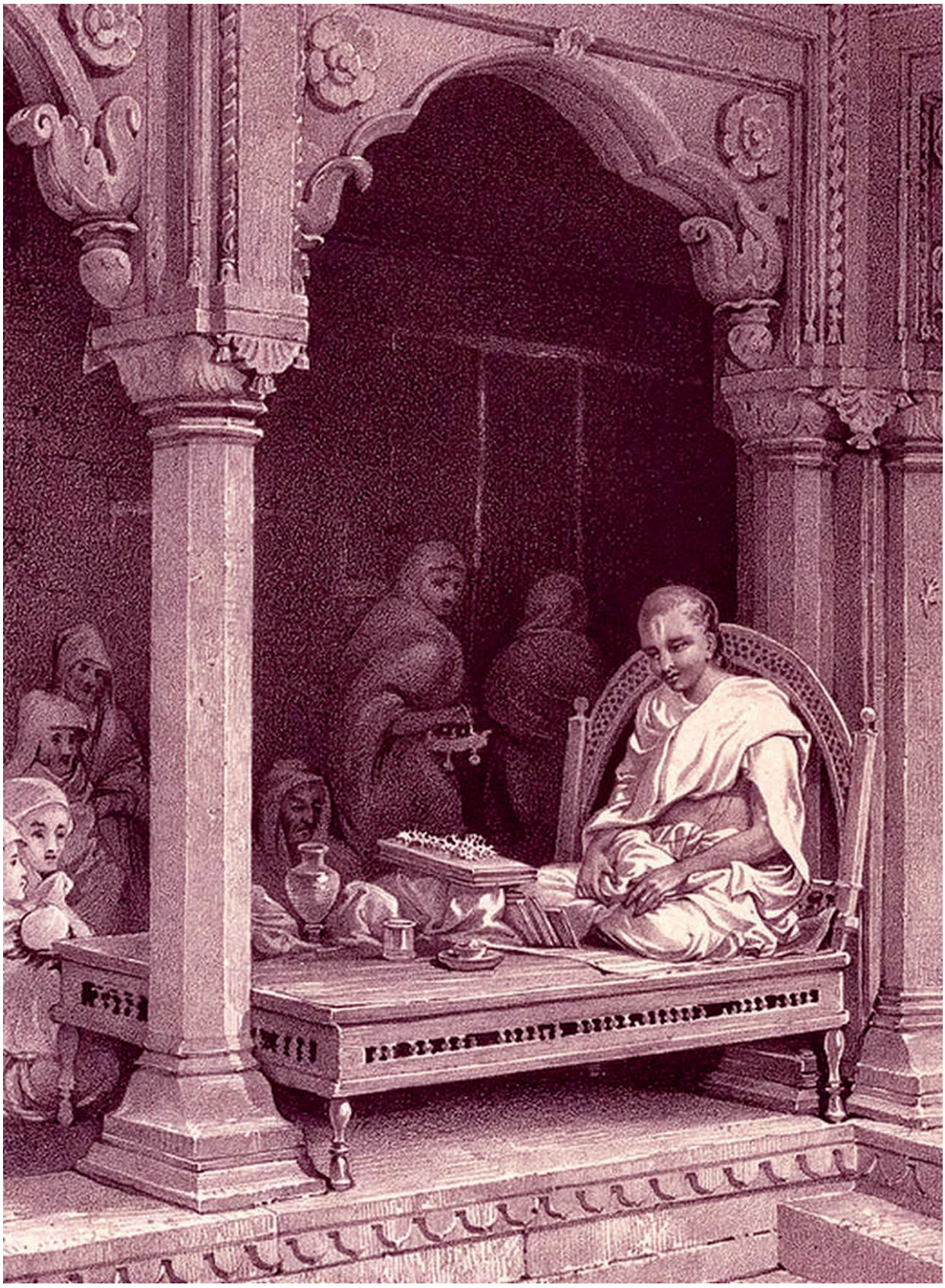

Banāras, Pañchagaṅgā Ghāṭ: a Brahmin priest telling stories from the *Purāṇas* (source: Prinsep 1833).

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KĀSHĪ (BANĀRAS) — SCENARIO OF CULTURE-NATURE RECIPROCITY IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY: PERCEPTIONS OF MARK TWAIN & HIS CONTEMPORARIES

RANA P.B. SINGH

President (Asia) RWYC- Reconnecting With Your Culture; HQ: Varanasi, BHARAT-India;
Ex-Professor of Cultural Landscapes & Heritage Studies, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, BHARAT-India, &

Email: ranapbs@gmail.com

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Abstract

Banāras (Vārāṇasī/Kāshī, in an Anglicised way called Benares) is commonly perceived as a city of 'vigour and rigour' where traditional culture, people, and society are deeply interconnected; however, the religious landscapes and their associated dramas make the city unique and a model of Indian culture as perceived and exposed by Mark Twain [1835-1910], of course primarily under the guidance of Arthur Parker. As a humorist and keen observer of landscapes and lifeworlds, Twain has narrated his perceptions of the late 19th-century Banāras. His primary ambition was to view colonial Banāras through the lens of Rudyard Kipling, but he failed to achieve success. At the end of his journey, Twain engaged in spiritual discussions with a Swami. Twain's perception and images are compared with those of his contemporary icon of literary genius from Banaras. Bhartendu Harishachandra's [1850-1885] literary works, composed within his very short span of life, are significant in terms of quantity as well as in their ambition to awaken socio-cultural consciousness. His play *Premajoginī* (1875) is an outcome of the 'critique for all manner of autocracy in social matters'; in fact, it is a document representing the historical reconstruction of the social reality. In his following play, *Satya Harishchandra* (1876), the glory of Kashi was also narrated in contextual descriptions. His power of imagination, his reflection on colonialism, and his aim of a renaissance were of outstanding merit and remain valid in different contexts. Using the literary skill of contextual differentiation, he presents his words, symbols, and metaphors within the cultural context of his time, thereby illuminating the cultural landscape of the late 19th century. Here, an attempt has been made to critically appraise Twain's perceptions and narration, comparing contemporary literature and insiders' images in relation to the clarification and extension of his condensed exposition, illustrated with maps and photographs.

Keywords: Arthur Parker, Banāras, the Gaṅgā, Mark Twain, perception, riverfrontscapes, sacredness, Shiva, spatiality, Bhartendu, *tīrthas*.

Mark Twain and his visit to Banāras vis-à-vis guidance by Arthur Parker

Mark Twain, the pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens (b. 30 November 1835 – d. 21 April 1910; in this paper referred to as **MT**), was an American writer, humourist, and essayist, and praised as the "greatest humourist the United States has produced." Twain grew up in a modest family, working from a young age. He started as a printer's apprentice, became a riverboat pilot, tried his luck at silver mining (and failed spectacularly), before finally finding his true calling as a writer. His sharp wit and storytelling brilliance made him famous across America. Born during a visit by Halley's Comet, he died on its return. At the age of 35, Mark Twain married Olivia Langdon in February 1870, who died in 1904. Olivia became his first editor and harshest critic—so much so that Twain respectfully depended on her. Twain made every effort to please her deeply religious wife. He achieved great success as a writer and public speaker. His wit and satire earned praise from critics and peers, and he was a friend to presidents, artists, industrialists, and European royalty. However, he lacked financial acumen. On Saturday, 18th of January 1896, Twain arrived in Bombay (now Mumbai) and suffered from a bronchial cough and fever for four days. He was in India for around three months (January to April). Before starting his sail from Victoria, British Columbia, in August 1895, Twain wrote to Rudyard Kipling [1865-1936], whose enlightened poem (first published in 1889 as *The Ballad of East and West*, cf. Kipling 1940, pp. 233-236) that attempts to make a bridge between the East and the West, inspired Twain to have a tour of English-dominated parts of the world. The famous poem reads (Kipling 1940, p. 233):

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face,
Though they come from the ends of the earth!

Despite "unpredictable delays, due to carbuncles on land and accidents at sea, Mark Twain kept pretty much to schedule, but he did not find his friends in India" (Parsons 1963, p. 76). Nevertheless, at the close of his tour in Banāras/Vārāṇasī/Kāshī (India), he succeeded in meeting Swami Bhaskarananda Saraswati [1833-1899, cf. Figs. 15, & 16] and had a revealing exchange of spiritual thoughts. These latter interpersonal expositions are discussed at the end.

While travelling through India in 1896 (January to April), in his 60s, Mark Twain visited Banāras (Benares, now Vārāṇasī), which had long been the spiritual capital of India, drawing Hindu pilgrims to bathe and perform funeral rites in the sacred waters of the Gaṅgā [anglicised as *Ganges*] River. After spending a week in the city, he was guided by Rev. Arthur Parker (c. 1855 – 9th December 1930, hereinafter referred to as **PR**) and extensively used his first authentic guidebook, *A Handbook of Benares* (1895). Both Twain and Parker passed away at the age of seventy-five.

Fig. 1a. Mark Twain, 1867.

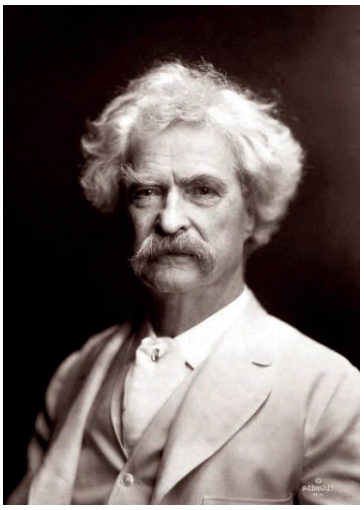

Fig. 1b. Mark Twain, 1907.

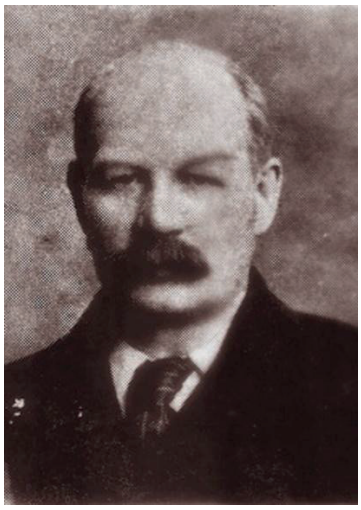

Fig. 2. Arthur Parker, 1900.

Based on his journey around the world, Twain spent three months (January to April 1896) in India; he eloquently describes this in his classic, *Following the Equator* (1897), which consists of four chapters on Banāras/Benares (50 to 53; pp. 475-516), primarily based on the guidance of Rev. Arthur Parker [ca.1855-1935], who came to India in 1887 as a member of LMS (London Missionary Society) to Benares (Varanasi), which commenced work in Benares in 1820 (cf. Lovett 1899; also, Parker 1895, p. 65). But even after ten years of preaching the gospel, he had less than ten converts in Banāras; thus, in 1900, he left for Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram). Like every holy-heritage city of India, Varanasi was the perfect place to spread the missionary zeal of Christianity; however, it was also the most challenging for Sherring (Smith 2014, p. 321). He noted, "In appearance, Christianity has been more successful in many places in India than in Benares" (Sherring 1868, p. 357). Unsurprisingly, "he saw the Christian gospel as the harbinger of all things good: modern civilisation, rationalism, independent thought, material uplift and the elevation of character; in short, 'progress.' Both the 'ancient' Varanasi, which Sherring attempted to reconstruct in his scholarly endeavours, and the 'modern' Varanasi that he administered in the 19th century fell short of these ideals"; the reality of this was highly distressing for him (Smith 2014, p. 31). Sherring mentioned (1868, p. 342) "[t]here is no sentiment more depressing than that which is produced by the study of a people that have declined from bad to worse; from one abomination to another; from one system of evil to others more and more opposed to truth, to reason, and to God". In spite of his despair over the past and present of the city, he remained ever hopeful for the future of Varanasi, and that of India; he wrote, "While I look with profound regret on much of the past history of India, I look forward to its coming history with strong hope and confidence. The sacred principles of progress, which have raised the western nations of the world to that high position of civilisation and greatness which they at present occupy, have already reached this land, and begun to operate on its inhabitants" (Sherring 1868, pp. 343-344).

During the first part of his eight-year sojourn, Parker published his classic tour guide, *A Handbook of Benares* (1895), the first and most authentic work (cf. Parker 1931). Although much of it is satirical, Twain's *Following the Equator* (sometimes titled *More Tramps Abroad*) is a travelogue of non-fiction social commentary (cf. Howe 2020). He has missed visiting Sarnath and Rāmanagar, despite their lucid description in Parker's *Guidebook* (1895). Some of his descriptions are sketchy and narrow in the sense of cultural reverence and metaphysical meanings. The two most authentic publications of the period, by James Prinsep (1831) and Matthew Sherring (1868), were not consulted, and

as a result, his descriptions are parochial. Moreover, one should remember that Twain was in Banāras for only about ten days! Books by Havell (1905) and Greaves (1909) are exhaustive and focused on the subsequent years.

Founded in 1936 by Cyril Clemens (Editor, 1936-82), the *Mark Twain Journal* is one of the oldest journals devoted to a single author, Mark Twain. In 2012, the journal became affiliated with the Centre for Mark Twain Studies at Elmira College (Elmira, NY, USA) and has a formal affiliation with the Mark Twain Circle of America (Collins, 2018).

Banāras in the CE 19th Century and links to the Historical Past

Well-known as the cultural capital of India, Vārāṇasī occupies a central position on the crescent-shaped left bank of the river Gaṅgā (82° 56′E - 83° 03′E and 25° 14′N - 25° 23.5′N, covering an area of 144.94 sq. km, since 1 July 2018) in the alluvial fertile land of the Middle Ganga Valley. The city enjoys an isolated and fort-like position, surrounded by rivers—the Gaṅgā in the east, the Varaṇā in the north, and the Asi (small stream) in the south. The compact map of the city available is dated 1900 (Fig. 3).

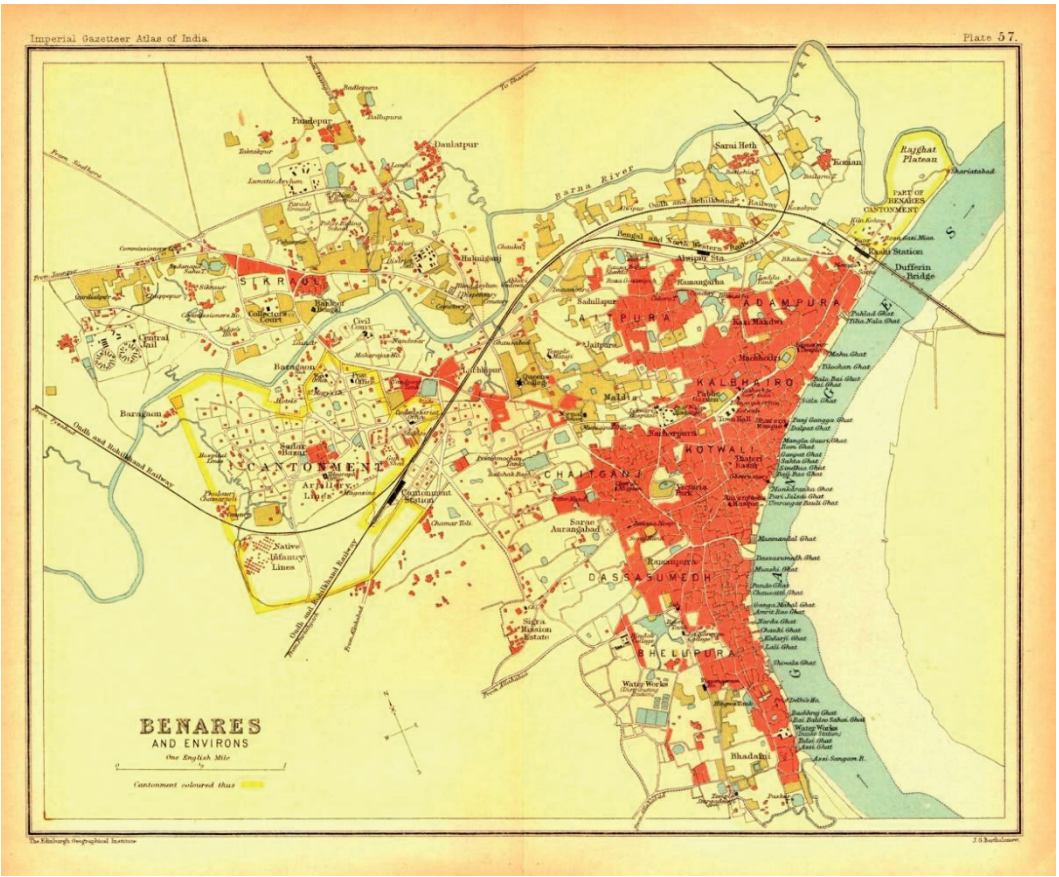

Fig. 3. Benares and Environs, 1900 (source: *Imperial Gazetteer Atlas of India*, plate 57).

Varanasi is the soul of Hindu India, renowned as one of the seven sacred *purīs*, i.e., Kāshī (Banāras), Kanchi, Kamachha, Ayodhya, Dvaraka, Mathura, and Avantika (Ujjain), the holy-heritage cities that bestow salvation (*Skanda Purāṇa - Kāshī Khaṇḍa*, 6.68). Twain describes the links between lingam and the central point (*axis mundi*), "It was merely an upright 'lingam', at first, no larger than a stove-pipe, and stood in the midst of a shoreless ocean. This was the work of the God Vishnu. Later, he spread the lingam out till its surface was ten miles across. Still, it was not large enough for the business; therefore, he presently built the globe around it. Benares is thus the centre of the earth. This is considered an advantage" (MT, p. 480). This perceived image he derived from his guide, who mentioned in his *Guidebook*: "The whole city is regarded as the special and peculiar domain of Shiva, whose ensign, a gilt trident or a perforated disc, flashes from the pinnacles of a thousand temples, and his emblem, the stone lingam, and vehicle, the stone bull (Nandī, Fig. 4), surpass in number the inhabitants themselves" (Parker 1895, p. 17).

Traditionally interpreted, 'Vārāṇasī first existed on the bank of the holy river Gaṅgā, and the rest of the world formed around it. Probably one of the oldest Aryan settlements in the Middle Ganga Valley, Varanasi was first occupied by pre-Aryan settlers who worshipped Shiva, the city's patron deity. In due course, social, religious, and political changes took place, but there remained a certain underlying uniformity of life and a synthetic social structure representing India as a whole' (Singh 1980, p. 41).

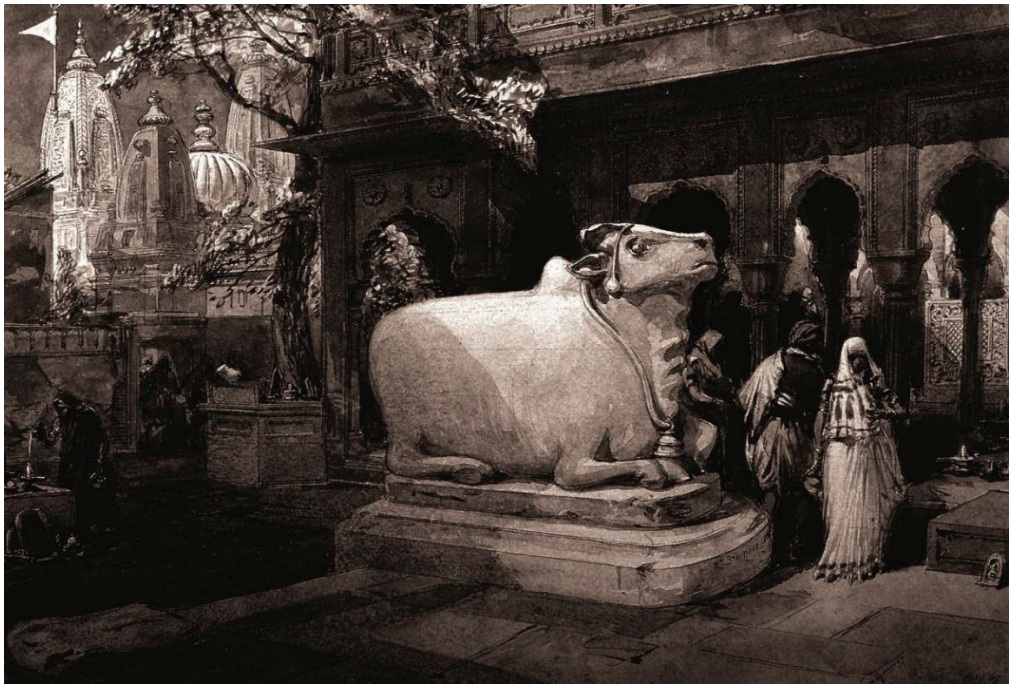

Fig. 4. The great Bull of Shiva, Nandī, in the Jñānavāpī compound, a view in the late 19th century.

"It has had a tumultuous history, both materially and spiritually. It started Brahminically, many ages ago; then, by and by, the Buddha came in recent times 2,500 years ago, and after that, it was Buddhist during many centuries — twelve, perhaps — but the Brahmins got the upper hand again, then, and have held it ever since. It is unspeakably sacred in Hindoo eyes, and is as unsanitary as it is sacred, and smells like the rind of the dorian [*durian*]" (MT, p. 480). Parker (1895, p. 17) notes, "Benares is holy ground to the pilgrim, and the spiritually enlightened see glories upon glories in her narrow streets, where the uninitiated suffer from foul sights and fouler smells." He goes on, "To bathe in that filthy water [in *Manikarnika Kund*] means to the Hindú to obtain deliverance from all penalties, even for sins of the deepest dye. The liar, the thief, the murderer and the adulterer, may here wash and be clean, in a spot which the foot of the purest Christian man or woman would instantly defile" (PR, p. 47). Bhartendu Harishchandra [1850-1885, cf. Fig. 5], in 1871, had already lamented about the poor civic conditions of the city under British rule: "Lanes are never cleaned. … Lanes became muddy due to waterlogging, and fermented mangoes produced an intolerable smell. … Anglo-Indians dry their clothes on the bind strings in the streets. …Those constructing or repairing their houses throw the waste materials in the street. … By providing shelter to cows and buffaloes, people obstruct the way" (Sharma 1979, p. 338, cf. Singh 2004, p. 156).

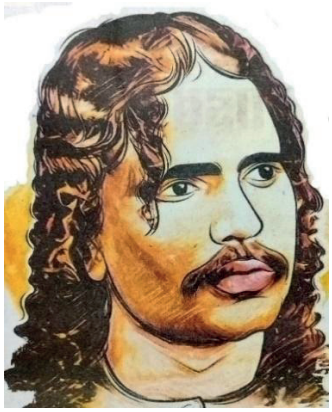

Fig. 5. Bhartendu Harishchandra [1850-1885].

Banāras is one of the oldest continuously settled cities in the world. Despite three brutal devastations by the Mughals (ca. CE 12th to 17th centuries), it resurrected and imposed upon the earlier landscape, replicating the ancient scenario (cf. Eck 1982, p. 4). Its antiquity has been narrated effusively by Sherring (1868, p. 7): "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".

Similarly, 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. From a Hindoo [Hindu] statement quoted in Rev. Mr. Arthur Parker's compact and lucid *Guide to Benares*, I find that the site of the town was the beginning-place of the Creation" (MT, p. 480). This statement may be compared to his tour guide, Parker (1895, p. 1), "It is the centre of the earth and the first created spot on it, and in proof of this origin its ancient boundary, the Pánch Kosí [*Pañcakrośī*] Road [Fig. 4] may still be seen. Less credulous moderns can hardly be expected to rest content with such an explanation of the origin of this famous city, and yet research has not been able to pierce the veil of the past and give a clear view of how and when the city arose." He further adds, "It is probable, however, that Benares is the site of a considerable city founded or conquered by the early Aryan settlers, and the legends of battle and conquest with which Puránic [*Purāṇic*] literature abounds may be only fantastic records of the conflicts between the ancient inhabitants and the comers" (Parker 1895, p. 2).

It would be interesting to know the perception of the city's dwellers. Banāras is not the story of bricks and stones; it is a living history in itself. After passing about ninety years, a son of the soil and an experiential writer (Gupt 1986, p. 79, also Singh 2024, p. viii) describes the city metaphorically in terms of capturing space, cyclic time, and continuing of the traditions, "Banāras either of the past, or of the present, and would be of the future, was a historically significant city of the ancient past, and is of the existent present, and would be of the visionary future. Banāras is not only a city but a cultural mosaic in itself. … Looking at this city is easy, but recognition is difficult. Touching it is easy, but capturing it is difficult. Creating a portrait is easy, but transforming it onto the mental canvas is difficult. In this way, despite its ease in outlook, in appearance, it is a city of infinity."

In metaphysical and archetypal contexts, the outer limit of the city (Banāras/Vārāṇasī) is demarcated with the pilgrimage route of Pañchakroshī Yātrā [Pánch Krosí Road, Fig. 6], which in extended form exists as Caurāshīkroshī Mārg, and symbolises the cosmic circuit of Kāshī (Singh 2002, pp. 26-28). Havell (1905, p. 2) mentions the historicity of the city: "The first definite historical event known about Benares is that the Kâśis, one of the Aryan tribes which were then occupying northern India, established themselves in the Ganges valley, near Benares, at a date supposed to be between 1400 and 1000 BCE." Presently, the earliest settlements in the area are estimated to be around 2400 BCE.

Fig. 6. Kāśī Maṇḍala: Caurāshīkrośī, Pañchakrośī, and Nagar Pradakṣiṇā circuits (source: © Singh 2002, p. 27).

After 134 years of Twain's journey, Yarborough (2020) visited Varanasi in his visionary exposition and noted that "It has hardly changed at all since Twain was here [1896]. Change is not what Varanasi is about. It is all about enlightenment. It is for soul-searching and self-finding. Varanasi is considered the oldest living city in the world. It is as if a prehistoric creature were found still living in our modern world. There is nothing at all modern about Varanasi."

The Caurāshīkroshī Mārg is also known as the Brihada Pañchakroshī route (Fig. 6). This form of sacred topography in Banāras promotes its character towards "wholeness" (Singh and Rana 2022, pp. 17-18). Shiva's body is represented as a cosmic skull in the Tantric tradition, which, like a sky (spherical ending), covers the cosmic territory of Kāshī (Banāras), demarcated by the Caurāshīkroshī pilgrimage route that consists of 296 km (168 miles) circular path and spotted by 96 [12 x 8] temples of Shiva and his family members, who control this city as a Supreme God dancing on the rhythm of interfacing time (12 months) and space or directions (8).

According to earlier estimates, by CE 1300, the population of Banāras had already crossed 100,000. The first census was made in 1828-29 by James Prinsep, recording 200,450 persons (Singh 1993, p. 282, cf. Bhattacharya & Bhattacharya 1965, p. 278, see Prinsep 1832). However, the first reliable census was taken in 1881, recording 218,573 persons; by 1891, the number had fallen to 215,223, representing a decline of 1.51 per cent. During the following decades (1891-1921), the city's population declined by 11.2 per cent, mainly due to unfavourable natural conditions. Presently, its population is estimated to be close to 2.50 million. This was the period when Mark Twain visited the city and mentioned, "It is the headquarters of the Brahmin faith, and one-eighth of the population are priests of that church. But it is not an overstock, for they have all India as a prey" (MT, p. 480). His observation is based on his guide, who wrote that "They [Brahmins] constitute nearly one-eighth of the city population [i.e., 12.5%]. They line the river banks and infest the temples, where they sit like spiders watching for their prey" (Parker 1895, p. 18). This may be authenticated by preceding notes by Prinsep (1832), which mentioned the predominance of the Hindu population in the central city (67.5%), consisting of three main communities, viz. Shudra (33.2%), Brahmins (17.8%), and Kshatriyas & Bhumihars (7.9%). Owing to the different immigrants, "who came to this city for solace, peace, and sacred merit, as a consequence of various invasions, Vārāṇasī developed a diversified community structure while preserving its regional characteristics. In this manner, Vārāṇasī has evolved into a mosaic of social-cultural space representing the whole of India" (Singh 1980, p. 41).

Banāras: Its Lifeworld and Sacredness

Banāras, where "always ready" (*Banā*) is the "juice of life" (*ras*)! This "Life-juice" flows in abundance in different colours, tones, multiple textures and layers, diverse situations, contrasting conditions, both sides – dark and light, etc. It is the blending or "complex mixing" of these, which makes up the mosaic of the cultural whole known as Banāras (or Kāshī, or Vārāṇasī), the City of Lord Shiva, where Shiva's liquid energy flows in the form of the Gaṅgā River; He is represented in the iconographic form of the Lingam. The residents of Banāras believe that Lord Shiva and his associates reside invisibly within the city's rhythm, and that only the enlightened can experience and reveal this. "The name it is known by throughout India, and which is uttered reverently by the thousands of pilgrims who yearly throng its narrow, unsavoury streets, is Káshí, or, with fond reverence, Káshí-jí, the splendid, the soul illuminating. An older name than Káshí is Váráṇasí, the antecedent of the modern Banáras" (Parker 1895, p. 2).

Banāras is equally famous for "its sanctimony as its inverse sanctimony: dirt, *guṅḍas*, burning ghats and death, and the 'saucy' self-identifying behaviours of Banārasīs, which is locally known as '*Banārasīpan*'—an integral unity of *mauj* (delight), *mastī* (joie de vivre), *phakkaḍpan* (carefreeness), and *akhkhaḍpan* (headstrongness). This local duality, which paradoxically unifies the realities of the ups and downs and the purity and profanity of life, also finds its way within the Banāras-based literature—to the delight of 'Banārasia' addicts who particularly enjoy this Banārasia *rasa* (taste). Glimpses of such scenarios are scattered in this book. The dualistic "characteristics of life and landscape can easily be projected through varying appellations and names of Banāras" (Singh 2004, p. 6, also Singh 2024, p. xi).

The most deeply set religious notion of Banāras is that it is the holiest city in India. Says Twain, "Benares is the sacredest of sacred cities. The moment you step across the sharply defined line, which separates it from the rest of the globe, you stand upon ineffably and unspeakably holy ground. Mr. Parker [1895, p. 16] says: "It is impossible to convey any adequate idea of the intense feelings of veneration and affection with which the pious Hindoo regards 'Holy Káshí' (Benares)." And then he gives you this vivid and moving picture:

"Let a Hindoo regiment be marched through the district, and as soon as they cross the line [*Pánchakrosí Road*] and enter the limits of the holy place they rend the air with cries of '*Káshí jí kí – jai – jai*! (Holy Káshí! Hail to thee! Hail! Hail! Hail!)'. The weary pilgrim, scarcely able to stand, with age and weakness, blinded by the dust and heat, and almost dead with fatigue, crawls out of the oven-like railway carriage and as soon as his feet touch the ground, he lifts up his withered hands and utters the same pious exclamation. Let a European in some distant city in casual talk in the bazar, mention the fact that he has lived at Benares, and at once voices will be raised to call down blessings on his head, for a dweller in Benares is of all men most blessed. It is this peculiar sanctity of Benares which gives it the pre-eminence in the eyes of Hindús over every other city in India" (Parker, p. 16). It makes our own "religious enthusiasm seem pale and cold. In as much as the life of religion is in the heart, not the head, Mr. Parker's touching picture seems to promise a sort of indefinite postponement of that funeral" (MT, pp. 282-483).

Being ignorant, or at least uninterested, in the philosophy, metaphysics, iconography, and roots of religious traditions, Twain was confused about the numbers and identities of the Hindu pantheon gods. He mentions, "There is a trinity —Brahmā, Shiva, and Vishnu —independent powers, apparently, though one cannot feel quite sure of that, because in one of the temples there is an image where an attempt has been made to concentrate the three in one person. The three have other names and plenty of them, and this makes confusion in one's mind. The three have wives, and the wives have several names, and this increases the confusion. There are children, the children have many names, and thus the confusion goes on and on. It is not worthwhile to try to get any grip upon the cloud of minor gods, there are too many of them" (MT, p. 482). The Gaṅgā is the divine river that represents the integration of the trinity. She was born in the sacred pot of Brahmā (the Creator), found shelter in the toe of Vishnu (the Preserver), and roamed in the matted hair of Shiva (the Destroyer); and from Shiva, one of the streams flowed onto the earth. It is evident from Twain's confusion that his cultural conditioning limits his understanding of the plurality of Gods that comprise the Hindu pantheon of deities.

The framework of cosmic reality, according to ancient Hindu thought, consists of the three fundamental states: evolution (*sṛṣṭi*), existence (*sthiti*), and involution (*saṁhāra*), which act in a cyclical process of infinity. Each one of the

forms is controlled by a god named Brahmā (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Shiva (the destroyer); these three gods form a kind of Trinity. Shiva, the last to complete the cycle from which a new cycle starts, is known as *Mahādeva*, the Supreme Divinity. The iconographic form of Shiva, the *Liṅgam*, represents the unity of these three states of the cosmos. The *Agni Purāṇa* (53.3-5), an early 6th-century text, mentions that "the *Liṅgam* should extend progressively in the Brahmā and Vishnu portions. That for Brahmā should be four-sided, that for Vishnu eight, sixteen, thirty-two, or sixty-four-sided, and that for Shiva should be round". The *Liṅgam* consists of three parts (see Fig. 7).

The first is a square base of three layers at the bottom, which shows the three mythical realms (*lokas*), symbolising evolution — the place of Brahmā. The second is an octagonal round form in the middle showing the eight directions, epitomising existence or perseverance —the place of Vishnu; and the third is a cylinder at the top with a spherical end, emblematising involution or completion of the cosmic cycle — the place of Shiva (Fig. 7). The *Agni Purāṇa* has further elaborated on the vertical position of the *Liṅgam*; it says: "… from the foot up to the knees should be Brahmā's portion; from the knees up to the navel, it should be Vishnu's portion, and from the navel up to the top of the head should be Shiva's portion. The portion assigned to Brahmā is buried in the ground, which, for Vishnu, is within the *Pīthikā*, and Shiva's is above the *Pīthikā* (cf. Singh 2024, p. xvi-xvii)

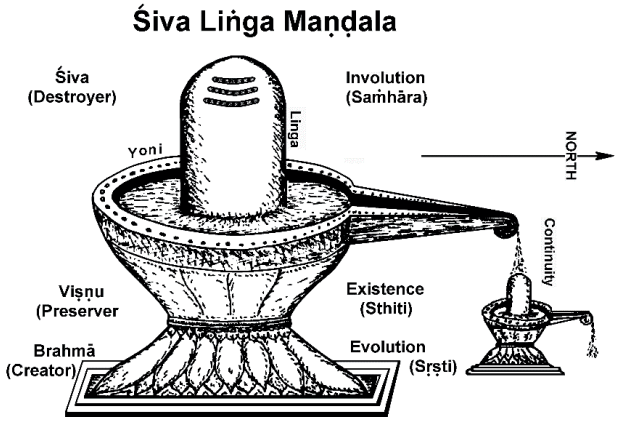

Fig. 7. Shiva Liṅgam Maṇḍala (source: © Singh & Rana 2002, p. 61).

Describing Shiva's symbolic form, "lingam," Twain mentions, "with which Vishnu began the Creation—is worshipped by everybody, apparently. It is the commonest object in Benares. It is on view everywhere, it is garlanded with flowers, offerings are made to it, it suffers no neglect. Commonly, it is an upright stone, shaped like a thimble—sometimes like an elongated thimble. This Priapus worship, then, is older than history. Mr. Parker says that the lingams in Benares '*outnumber the inhabitants*'" (MT, p. 482). He has again misconceived the meaning and practice of lingam worship; he compared lingam to a Priapus, a Greek and Roman fertility god who represented male generative power and gardens and was known for his large and permanent erection. Like most of the observations and perceptions, Twain reinitiates the narration by his guide Parker, who narrates, "In honour of him [Shiva], naked devotees, adorned by horizontal lines on forehead arms and breast made from the grey ashes of cow-dung, crowd the river bank and infest the narrow streets and are regarded by the common people almost as reincarnations of the great god and venerated as such" (PR, p. 17).

The city of "Benares is in effect just a big church, a religious hive, whose every cell is a temple, a shrine or a mosque, and whose every conceivable earthly and heavenly good is procurable under one roof, so to speak— a sort of Army and Navy Stores, theologically stocked" (MT, p. 484). There are "Hindoo temples without number— these quaintly shaped and elaborately sculptured little stone jugs crowd all the lanes. The Ganges itself and every individual drop of water in it are temples. Religion, then, is the business of Benares, just as gold-production is the business of Johannesburg. Other industries count for nothing as compared with the vast and all-absorbing rush and drive and boom of the town's speciality" (MT, p. 482). The number of Hindu temples at that period may be compared with Prinsep's (1832) speculations that referred to around 1000 (Shivālās and temples; cf. Singh 1993, p. 281); however, at present [2025], the numbers are estimated to be around 3300 (temples and shrines). This indicates that the above speculation was underestimated.

Regarding the Muslim population and their mosques, Twain was not acquainted with them and only had a sarcastic remark: "In Benares, there are many Mohammedan mosques" (MT, p. 482). According to Prinsep's estimates, Muslims comprise around 17 per cent of the total population, and they already have 33 prominent mosques (cf. Singh 1993, p. 281). This indicates that Parker had not shown him Muslims' sacred places or explained their role in shaping the city's personality; of course, in his Guidebook, he provides a brief description. He mentions that Aurungzeb "not only destroyed numerous temples but on the site and out of the materials of the chief of them, erected some of the chief mosques which now exist. To this time (1658—1707), we must attribute the imposing mosque, which crowns the river bank at the head of Pánch Gangá Ghát [Fig. 7], and also that erected near the Golden Temple and which has been a source of deep annoyance to the Hindus ever since it was built out of the ruins of the magnificent temple of Kirtti

Bisheswar [*Krittivishveshvara*] which formerly stood there, and the remnants of which may still be seen at the back of the mosque" (PR, p. 4). Parker has further justifiably narrated the resurrection of Hindu temples after Aurangzeb's death: "The rise of the Maráthá sacred power saw the recommencement of Hindú building architecture in Benares and many of the chief temples and ghâts in Benares such as the Annpúrná Temple, the colonnade at the Gyán Bápí [*Jñānavāpī*], the Golden Temple [*Vishvanātha Maṅdir*], the Bhaironáth and Trilochan Temples, Munshí Ghát, Ahalyá Bái Ghát and that magnificent ruin, Scindia Ghát, and many more are lasting memorials of the munificence and devotion of the Maráthá *rájás* and *ránís*" (PR, pp. 4-5).

Context and Spatiality: Riverfrontscapes

From its source in the Himalayas to its mouth in the Bay of Bengal, only in Varanasi does the Gaṅgā River flow in a crescent shape from south to north (Fig. 8). The 6.5km (4 miles) long riverfront of the Gaṅgā River, forming the eastern edge of the city, possesses a unique history and presents a specific vision of a magnificent architectural row of lofty buildings and holy sites.

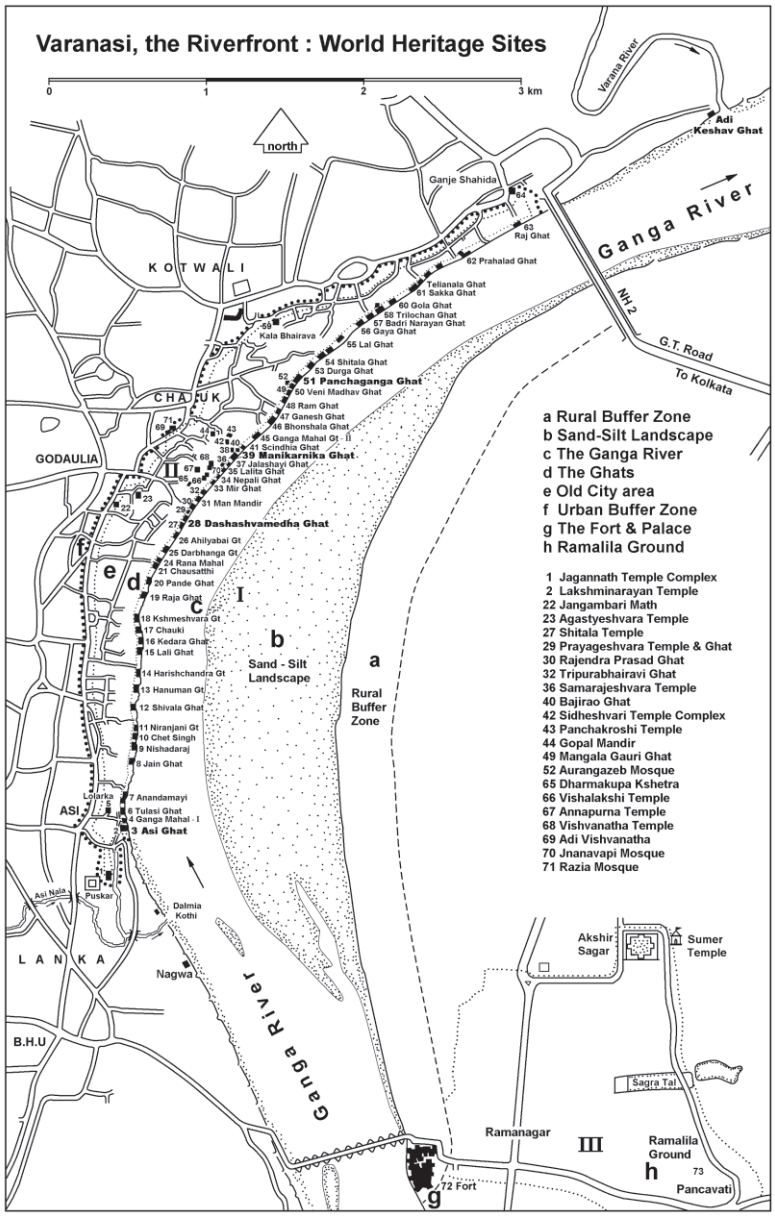

Fig. 8. The Gaṅgā Riverfront Ghāṭs of Varanasi and World Heritage Sites (source: © Singh 2008, p. 147).

The history of Ghāṭs (stairways to the waterfront) dates to the 8th-9th century; however, stone stairs were built in the 14th century, and as late as 2014, a few of the ghats were finally built with stone (cf. Singh 2009a, pp. 230-231). The *Kāshī Khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa* (*KKh*), dated to approximately the 13th century, does not directly mention the ghāṭs; instead, it describes the Jala-tīrthas (waterfront sacred spots), numbering 96, attached to the ghats. Of course, during the Gahadavala period (CE 10th-11th century), there were only twelve ghats; however, over time, through

cultural assimilation, the number of ghāṭs evolved to 84 (Table 1). All these ghats have their mystical, mythological and puranic stories—eulogising their glories and religious merits to be received after performing rituals there. Most of these ghats also record their history of religious performances and festivities.

Table 1. Banāras/Vārāṇasī/ Kāshī: The 84 Ghāṭs (**Gt**) along the Riverfront Gaṅgā (from S to N); see Fig. 8, cf. Singh 1993, p. 68; Singh 2009b, p. 231; Singh & Rana 2023, pp. 247-248).

– Samne Ghat (facing Ramānagar)	46. Mīra (earlier Jarasandheshvara); called *Vishalakshi*)
– Nagwa Ghat	47. Yajneshvara/ Naya
1. Asi (*Assi*) Ghat (old & new)	48. Nepali (Rajarajeshvari Gt)
2. Gaṅgā Mahala-I	49. Lalita (part of Nepali Ghat)
3. Rivan (Riwan)	50. Bauli / Umraogiri (Amroha)
4. Tulasi (earlier Lolarka)	51. Khiraki*
5. Bhadaini (part of old Lolarka)	52. Jalashayi (Jalasen Ghat)*
6. Janaki (earlier Hayagriva)	– Cremation Ghat (Manikarnika)
7. Anandamayi (Akrura, Imaliya)	53. Manikarnika
8. Vachchharaja	54. Baji Rao (also as Dattatreya Gt)
9. Jain (earlier Suparshvanatha)	55. Scindhia (also Vireshvara Ghat)
10. Nishadaraja (rel. boatmen)	56. Sankatha (earlier Yameshvara)
11. Panchakota (part of Shivala Gt)	57. Gaṅgā Mahala (II); part of 56.
12. Prabhu	58. Bhonshala (earlier Nageshvara)
13. Chet Singh	59. Naya (earlier Agnishvara Gt)
14. Niranjani (earlier Karttikeya)	60. Ganesha (earlier Vighneshvara)
15. Mahanirvani (Buddha took a bath!)	61. Mehta (part of Rama Gt)
16. Shivala (earlier Svapaneshvara)	62. Rama (Vira Rameshvara)
17. Gularia (part of Shivala Ghat)	63. Jatara (earlier Chor/Jadau)
18. Dandi (extension of Gularia Gt)	64. Rāja Gwaliar, part of 63.
19. Hanuman (earlier Rameshvara)	65. Mangala Gauri (Balaji Gt)
20. (Old) Hanuman (rel. Ballabha)	– Balaji (Raghoba Balaji)
21. Karnataka (Mysore)	66. Venimadhava (Bindumadhava)
22. Harishchandra (Cremation Gt)	67. Panchagaṅgā
23. Lali (earlier Vinayaka)	68. Durgā
24. Vijayanagaram (part of Kedar Gt)	69. Brahmā
25. Kedar (earlier Svapnavara Gt)	70. Bundi Parkota
26. Chauki (rel. Bharashiva Naga)	71. (Adi) Shitala, part of 70.
27. Kshemeshvara (Kshemaka)	72. Lal (Gopi Govinda Ghat)
28. Manasarovara	73. Hanumangarhi, part of 74.
29. Narada (earlier Kuvai Ghat)	74. Gāiya / Gāi (Gopreksha)
30. Rāja (earlier Amritarao Ghat)	75. Badri Narayana/ Matha
31. Khori (earlier Ganga Mahal Gt)	76. Trilochana (Pilpippala)
32. Pande (part of Sarveshvara)	77. Gola (Pishegila Tirtha)
33. Sarveshvara (Ganga Keshava)	78. Nandeshvara/ Nandu
34. Digpatia (part of Chausatthi)	79. Sakka (Pranava Tirtha)
35. Chausatthi (earlier Yogini)	80. Teliya Nala
36. Rana Mahala	81. Naya/ Phuta (Gopratara)

37. Darbhanga	82. Prahalada
38. Munshi	– Nishada
39. Ahilyabai (earlier Kevalagiri Gt)	– Rani
40. Shitala	– Tikeshvara
41 a. Dashashvamedha	– Ravidas/ Bhainsasur
42. Prayaga (earlier Prayaga Tirtha)	83. Raj (old Vedeshvara Gt)
41 b. Dashashvamedha	– Lakshmana
43. Rajendra Prasad (earlier *Ghoda*)	84. Adi Keshava
44. Māna Mandir (Someshvara Gt)	– Varana Sangama
45. Tripura Bhairavi (Varahi Ghat)	– NaMo Ghat (*Khidikiya*)*

Note: * The Ghāṭs numbers 51 and 52 are now [2022] entirely converted into one Ghāṭ named Gaṅgādvār Ghāṭ (passage to Kāshī Vishvanātha temple); additionally, a new Ghāṭ -- NaMo [Na – Narendra, Mo –Modi Ghāṭ, metaphorically denoting Hon'ble Prime Minister's name – Narendra Modi] was added as the last ghat, close by the Varaṇā-Gaṅgā confluence. These two new ghāṭs were opened on the auspicious day of the Hindu festival of Mahāshivarātri, Shiva's marriage day, i.e., 1st of March 2022, Phalguna Krishna 14th Vikrama Samvata 2078 (cf. Singh & Rana 2022).

The Gaṅgā Riverfront aligns with the historically developed socio-religious ideals, values, and place consciousness of pilgrims and their faith, thereby contributing to the formation of a unique *faithscape.* This provides hope for belonging, a firm belief among residents, pilgrims, and visitors, and helps them realise Hinduism's cultural milieu. The Gaṅgā has a deep sense of place because it has a history of divine attachment dating back to ancient times, as eulogised in ancient *purāṇic* literature. In Varanasi, the riverfront Gaṅgā provides a site series of 84 ghats (stairways to the bank) as the unique chain of sacred places (Fig. 8). The first rays of sunrise touching the water current of the Gaṅgā and their reflection on the magnificent buildings along the ghats compel to remind the Hymn to the Dawn of the *Rig Veda* (1.113): "Arise; the breath of life hath back to us, the darkness is gone, the light approacheth." "The Ganges itself and every individual drop of water in it are temples" (MT, p. 482).

Both at sunrise and sunset, one can see ravishing reflections of light in the Ganga. In the morning, the reflection of the sun's light on the Ganga water along the ghats, and in the evening, the shadow of the ghats on the surface of the Ganga make a spectacular view. This is a unique scene in this city. This feeling is only possible after "seeing, thinking and describing" (cf. Relph 1984, p. 212); since understanding all the features of the world encountered visually is only possible with the closed sensible reality (*ibid*: p. 213). The peculiar shape of the Gaṅgā River, "crescent-shaped like a half-moon," evolved due to the fluvial process through which the coarser sediments were deposited on its western bank between Raj Ghat in the north and Samne Ghat in the south, also representing 'natural heritage'. The portion between these two points, a hillock-like geologic feature called natural levée, consists of a nearly 60m bed of clay with coarse-grained sand, limestone concretions (*kaṅkar*) and gravel. Says Twain (1897, p. 479): "It is on high ground, and overhangs a grand curve of the Ganges. It is a vast mass of buildings, compactly crusting a hill, and is cloven in all directions by an intricate confusion of cracks which stand for streets. Tall, slim minarets and beflagged temple spires rise out of it and give it picturesqueness, viewed from the river", and illustrated with Panchaganga Ghat in his book (Fig. 9). He further adds (MT, p. 496):

> "The Ganges front is the supreme show-place 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, stair-flights, 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 cramped 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 flower-gardens on the miles of great platforms at the river's edge".

He continued, "For ages and ages, the Hindoos have had absolute faith that the water of the Ganges was absolutely pure, could not be defiled by any contact whatsoever, and infallibly made pure and clean whatsoever thing touched it. They still believe it, and that is why they bathe in it and drink it, caring nothing for its seeming filthiness and the floating corpses" (MT, p. 500). For the morning rituals, he suggests, "At sunrise, you must go down to the Ganges and bathe, pray, and drink some of the water. This is for your general purification" (MT, p. 484). Further, "You pour Ganges water over him [Shiva], and in return for this homage you get the promised benefits" (MT, p. 485). In his play *Satya Harishchandra* (1876), Bhartendu has described the glory and grandeur of the Ganga, referring to the metaphor and religious context (Singh 2004, p. 141):

Fig. 9. The Gaṅgā Riverfront Ghāṭs: Mangala, Vindumadhava, and Panchaganga, ca. 1895, cf. MT, p. 495).

Fresh whitish water's current like
the glory of a diamond's garland
Running and coming up bubbles,
look like pearls in the garland.
Murmuring currents with wind
come one after one slowly down.
Beautiful abode of mystical paradise,
everyone feels as if they are there.
Glancing, bathing and drinking it
together destroy all the doubts.
This abode of Shiva is like the moon's coolness
and provides the nectar of immortality.
Coming from Brahmā's pot and
destroying worldly feelings,
it has the power of the Supreme divinity.
From her place at Shiva's forehead
with the blessing of Bhagirath, she came to earth.
The divine elephant, along with the Himalaya,
the snow, and the snakes, are her necklaces.
It is natural reverence to touch her water,
which gives relief from all sins.
With countless ways of currents
She marches to meet the great ocean.
Feeling Kashi as the most affectionate.
She touches this site with great love.
Even in a dream, she never left Kāshī;
In fact, she always wrapped it with her flow.
Along the bank somewhere, the *ghats* remind
the beauty of the lofty peaks of the Himalaya.
And, somewhere, decorated canopies
at the *ghats* provide peace to the mind.
Sacred abodes of different sites,

identified with their unique flags.
Musical sounds of sacred bells
naturally attract the heart and mind.
Melodious musicians and auspicious festivities,
and singing groups are found everywhere on her bank.
Somewhere, Brahmins are learning the *Vedas*
and somewhere, Yogis practising meditation.
Somewhere, charming girls take a bath
and play with their friends in the water.
Comparable to pearls meeting lotuses —
one after one, and coming out of the water.
These beauties, while rubbing their faces in the water,
present an excellent scene of attraction.
The cloudy spots on the moon are
comparable to the flourishing lotus flowers.
The reflection of the beauty in the river
reminds one of the moon's shadows in the water.
The reflection of faces as lotus and flourishing lily,
attracts the mind and the soul forever.
Wherever the sight reaches here and there,
it also rests at a point to see the fantasy.
It is beyond the scope of description —
the glory and beauty of the Gaṅgā, says Harishchandra.

Says Havell (1905, p. 94): "It seems, at first, as if the whole amphitheatre, about two miles (in fact, *four miles*/ 6.4 km) in a circuit, glittering in the sunlight, were one vast sun-temple: the priests, the Brahmins who are muttering the holiest of their *mantras*, the mysterious sun-invocations from the *Rig Veda* — the famous Gāyatrī – the priestesses, the women whose *saris* repeat the colours of the dawn, fast fading now in the white light of day; the votive-offerings, the golden marigolds and rose-petals which are piled in baskets on the ghat steps, and float on the surface of the water". Says Greaves (1909, p. 32): "All and many features contribute to making the complete view, one which stands quite alone, and possibly could not be surpassed in the whole world for genuine picturesqueness." Narrates Sherring (1868, p. 9): "For picturesqueness and grandeur, no sight in all the world can well surpass that of Benares [Banāras] as seen from the river Ganges [Gaṅgā]." Over time, these glories faded, and this trend continued.

Fig. 10. Rāmanagar, Varanasi: The Fort along the Gaṅgā Riverfront.

Fig. 11. Rāmanagar: The Durgā Temple.

Another similar ridge-like formation exists on the other side, at Rāmanagar, where the fort is located (Fig. 10). This peculiar geological formation alters the flow of the Gaṅgā River into a half-circular shape. This sharp-bend meander is perhaps the only one observed in Varanasi throughout its course. Of course, Twain has not mentioned it—maybe he was unable to visit the place; however, Park (1895, p. 74) has eloquently described the serene landscape of the area:

> "About a mile from Rámnagar Fort is a famous tank, and a very beautiful [Durgā] temple (Fig. 11), both well worthy of a visit, and as they are both contiguous to a very pleasant garden and garden-house, they form a suitable place for an afternoon picnic. The tank is a very fine one and was constructed by Rájá Cheit Singh, and has been rendered peculiarly sacred by its associations with Vedavyás. Usually, to die on the right bank of the Ganges involves transmigration into the body of an ass, but whoever, at the special festival in which Vedavyás is honoured, bathes in this tank is sure to escape that terrible transformation. The temple near the tank is one of the

most beautiful and certainly the most elaborate in these parts. It was begun by Cheit Singh and completed by his successors."

Fig. 12. The Cremation Ghāṭ (Manikarnika Ghāṭ), ca 1902, cf. MT, p. 501).

Among the 84 ghāṭs, the five described as the most merit-giving and sacred that bestowing special manifested merits, called *Pañchatīrthīs*, are Asi, Dashashvamedha, Manikarnika, Panchagaṅgā, and Adi Keshava (from the south [sky] to the north [the earth], number 1, 41, 53, 66 and 84 in Table 1; see Figs. 8, 9, and 12). Respectively, they symbolise the five gross elements (*Pañchamahābhūtas*) and their main characteristics, i.e., ether/sky (space and container), air (motion, nourishment, and ethereal breath), fire (light, heat, and transformation), water (flow and liquidity), and the earth (solidity and stability). The *KKh* (84.107-10, 114) refers to "Having bathed in the five *tīrthas,* a person never again receives a body of five-gross elements; rather, he becomes the Five-faced Shiva [*Pañchabhūteśvara*] in Kāshī". Therefore, taking a sacred bath at these five ghāṭs provides the same merit as bathing at all the ghāṭs. Moreover, these five ghats symbolise the microcosmic body of Vishnu, respectively, as the head, chest, navel, thighs, and feet (cf. Eck 1982, p. 233). That's how the area along the ghat is eulogised as Vishnu's body.

Most of the ghats are made of stone and concrete slabs (*puccā*), and ghāṭs in the outer sacred territory are *kutchā* (clay-banked). Twain described the ghats sketchily while mentioning only a few, e.g., Kedar, Manikarnika (creation ghat), and the main ghat (central one, MT, p. 486). Similarly, he mentioned, "At the Kedar Ghat, you will find a long flight of stone steps leading down to the river. Half way down is a tank filled with sewage. Drink as much of it as you want. It is for fever" (MT, p. 485; see also p. 493). Twain elaborated his observation about the cremation ghat and associated functionaries, and illustrated it with a photograph (Fig. 8; MT, p. 500):

"We lay off the cremation-ghat [*Manikarnika Ghāṭ*, Fig. 8] for half an hour and saw nine corpses burned. I should not wish to see any more of it, unless I might select the parties. The mourners follow the bier through the town and down to the ghat; then the bier-bearers deliver the body to some low-caste natives – Doms – and the mourners turn about and go back home. I heard no crying and saw no tears; there was no ceremony of parting. Apparently, these expressions of grief and affection are reserved for the privacy of the home. The dead women came draped in red, the men in white. They are laid in the water at the river's edge while the pyre is being prepared". The Dom community is considered one of the lowest in the social hierarchy in India, closely involved in Hindu cremation rituals in Banaras; as such, they are also segregated from the mainstream Hindu society with the notion of impurity. The Doms are one essential part of the business of death in Banaras. They primarily work at the riverfront *ghāṭs* and serve as functionaries in their ancestral occupation, which involves funeral activities. The religious tradition decrees that the funeral can only be performed successfully if the pyre is lit with a fire produced by a Dom.

Twain's narration can further be understood in the words of his guide, Parker: "The corpse, swathed in a white cloth if a male, in a red one if a female, is, at the ghát, deposited with its feet in the holy Ganges while the pyre is being prepared. Here, the relatives leave it to be taken charge of by the low caste men, the Doms, who have charge of the ghát and who make a considerable profit by their "gruesome trade. The Doms then remove the corpse from the bier and, after thoroughly bathing it in the sacred river, place it on the pyre and heap over it sufficient wood to consume it. When all is ready, the son of the deceased, if he be fortunate enough to possess one, comes forward and receives in his right hand a torch" (Parker 1895, p. 76).

In archetypal connotation, the 84 Gaṅgā ghāṭs (Fig. 8) symbolise 8,400,000 organic species according to Hindu mythology; thus, each ghāṭ has the merit of becoming purified in 100,000 life species (*yonis*). Therefore, by taking holy dips in the Gaṅgā at all the ghāṭs, the individual soul can get purified in all the 8,400,000 species. Furthermore, 12 months/zodiacs x 7 layers of the atmosphere equals 84; thus, the annual cycle of the cosmic journey is completed by taking sacred baths at the 84 ghats (cf. Table 1). All the ghats are points on the divine-cosmic path (12 zodiacs x 7 chakras of body/ sheaths; thus 84), and several water-*tīrthas* lying along (12 divisions of time x 8 directions, points on the space circuit; therefore 96) represent its manifested-transcendental dimension. This frame illustrates a cosmic order and harmonic relationship between the macrocosmos (divine order) and the microcosmos (human order) through the intermediary link of the mesocosmos (the physical order of ghats). Unfortunately, neither Twin nor Parker has mentioned the metaphysical and archetypal aspects of the city and the Gaṅgā River.

According to Hindu theology, "the spirit of place exists everywhere, imbuing the earth and the heaven with its unique and ineradicable sense of rhythm, mood, and character; different experiences of this result in a variety of local forms of faith and traditions, but the fundamental ethic of reverence is everywhere. Disturbing the spirit and misusing the Gaṅgā's holy water, as well as damaging its associated cultural landscapes, brings calamity to society. If harmony is disturbed, the spirit of place begins to lose its power to sanctify life" (Singh & Rana 2023, p. 267). The meaning of understanding and action is determined by the deeper principle of intrinsic value that is to be continued and cherished. After all, inherent value requires a new moral thought rooted in place and tradition. American cultural geographer Tuan (1984, p. 9) says, "We need to be rooted in place, for without roots, we cannot develop those habits and routines that are an essential component of sanity. We need to have a sense of place because without it, we shall have failed to use our unique capacity for appreciation."

Pilgrimage vis-à-vis Spirituality and Rituals: the 12 Steps

The comprehensiveness and complexity of pilgrimage systems have captured Twain's mind. He opined that the ritual processes involved in pilgrimage were convenient, accessible, valuable, and easy for the pilgrims. Twain recounts some of the procedures and **12 steps** (phases) in procuring spiritual benefit: "If you go to Benares with a serious desire to benefit yourself spiritually, you will find it valuable. I got some of the facts from conversations with the Rev. Mr. Arthur Parker and the others from his *Guide to Benares* (1895); they are therefore trustworthy" (MT, p. 484). Those sites and steps are summarised below (cf. MT, pp. 484-492).

The initiation starts with purification by holy bathing in the Ganga at the main ghat – (**1**) Dashasvamedha, (**2**) followed by worshipping Ganesh, Shiva's son and distributing alms to the beggars and the cows wandering in the surroundings, (**3**) visiting and prayer to Dalabheshvara Shiva [at Man Mandir Ghat], who grants boon for material prosperity, (**4**) going further down to Kedar Ghat, where lies a so-called holy tank filled with sewage but the devout Hindus use its water, (**5**) returning to the central ghat and pay visit to Shitala Devi, the goddess of smallpox, (**6**) walking to the shrine of Dandapani, the territory protection deity, *kshetrapāla*, in the Vishvanātha temple complex, and continued walk to Maha Kala, Mahakaleshvara, in the Mahamritunjaya temple complex, the 'One Who Has Conquered Death', is a manifestation of Ujjain's Mahakala, (**7**) in the same complex meet Vriddhakala Shiva, considered to be one of the oldest lingams and assumed to provide the blessing of long life; moreover, in this ruined courtyard, there is a colossal image of Hanuman and a shallow pool of stagnant sewage and filth that smells like the best limburger cheese. The walk moves ahead.

(8) Continuing journey to Kameshvara [in Macchodari Mohalla], the Lord of Desires, where one meets "idols among the pack and jam of temples—enough to stock a museum," where you "will begin to commit sins now with a fresh, new vivacity" (MT, p. 489), (**9**) carry on the walk to the holy tank of Chakrapushakarni at Manikarnika Ghat, as the people perceive it "the most sacred place in Benares, the very Holy of Holies". He continued, "The liar, the thief, the murderer, and the adulterer may here wash and be clean," says the Rev. Mr. Parker in his book [PR, p. 48]. Very well, I know Mr. Parker, and I believe it, but if anybody else had said it, I should consider him a person who had better go down in the tank and take another wash. The god Vishnu dug this tank. He had nothing to dig with but his "discus." I do not know what a discus is, but I know it is a poor thing to dig tanks with, because, by the time this one was finished, it was full of sweat—Vishnu's sweat" (*ibid.*). Parker (PR, p. 48), further elaborated the scenario of the area, "Between the well [i.e., Jñānavāpi Kūpa, cf. Fig. 13] and the ghát on a raised platform is a small marble representation of two-minute feet. This is the Charaṇa Páduká [Fig.14], the monument of Vishnu's foot, for here, it is said, the god alighted and marked for ever the spot by the sign of his own footprints". Twain explains, "but I think it difficult not to believe that a god who could build a world around Benares would not be intelligent enough to build it around the tank too, and not have to dig it. Youth, long life, temporary purification from sin, salvation through the propitiation of the Great Fate – these are all good. But you must do something more" (MT, p. 490).

Fig. 13. Jñānavāpī Kūpa, in the compound of Vishvanātha temple (source: Prinsep 1834).

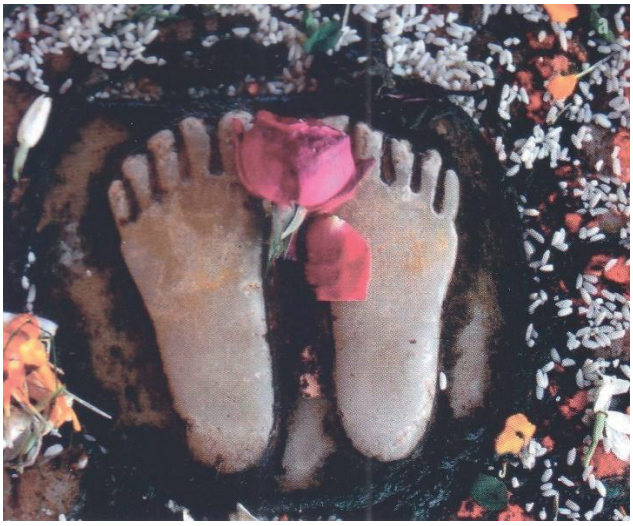

Fig. 14. Charaṇa Pādukā, Manikarnikā Ghāṭ.

For making salvation sure, (**10**) "The best one of all is the Pilgrimage Around the City [Pañchakroshī Yātrā, cf. Fig. 4]. You must walk; also, you must go barefoot. The tramp is forty-four miles [*in fact, this covers 55.2 miles/88.8 km,* cf. Singh 2002, p. 47], for the road winds out into the country a piece, and you will be marching five or six days. But you will have plenty of company. You will move with throngs and hosts of happy pilgrims whose radiant costumes will make the spectacle beautiful and whose glad songs and holy pans of triumph will banish your fatigues and cheer your spirit; and at intervals there will be temples where you may sleep and be refreshed with food" (MT, p. 490). In Christian's pre-conceived image, he remarks: "The pilgrimage completed, you have purchased salvation, and paid for it. But you may not get it unless you go to Sakshi Vinayaka" (*ibid.*, i.e., the next one, **11**). Neither Twain nor Parker has referred to Sherring's (1868) work, which gives a substantive description of this pilgrimage route. This pilgrimage circuit comprises 108 temples and shrines, all based on *Purāṇic* sources (Singh 2002, pp. 71-131).

Describing the Pañchakroshī Yātrā in the late 19th century, Sherring (1868, p. 176) mentioned, "It is necessary that every good Hindu residing in the city of Benares (Varanasi) should twice a year accomplish this pilgrimage, in order that the impurity which the soul and body have contracted during the year may be obliterated." Havell (1905, pp. 186-198) has also described this pilgrimage, but has not provided any commentary on the historical and logical presumptions; instead, he narrates the five halting stations, important shrines, and the way pilgrims perform the sacred journey in a systematic order.

(**11**) Before completion of the Pañchakroshī Yātrā, one has to go to Sakshi Binayak Temple [*Vishvanātha Gali*, lane] to get recorded your journey in the register of Shiva's son, Ganesh—Sakshi means "witness"; "it is best to do it, for otherwise you might not be able to prove that you had made the pilgrimage in case the matter should some day come to be disputed. That temple is in a lane back of the Cow ['*Bull*'] Temple [*Nandīshvara* in the compound of Vishvanātha temple]. Over the door is a red image of Ganesh of the elephant-headed son and heir of Shiva, and Prince of Wales to the Theological Monarchy, so to speak. Within is a god whose office is to record your pilgrimage and be responsible for you. You will not see him, but you will see a Brahmin who will attend to the matter and take the money. He knows that your salvation is now secure, but of course, you would like to know it yourself." (MT, pp. 190-191). This journey will be finally completed at the Gyānavāpí, the "Well of Knowledge".

(**12**) Gyānavāpí [*Jñānavāpī*], adjacent to the Golden Temple [*Vishvanātha Mañdir*], is the final destination to complete the pilgrimage route of the outer circuit by performing the ritual of 'thanksgiving' or '*saṅkalpa chhoḍānā*', 'getting release from the binding of performing the pilgrimage'. Adds Twain (p. 491), "There you will see, sculptured out of a single piece of black marble, a bull which is much larger than any living bull you have ever seen, and yet is not a good likeness after all". "The well is covered by a fine canopy of stone supported by forty pillars," and around it, you will find what you have already seen at almost every shrine you have visited in Benares: a mob of devout and eager pilgrims. The sacred water is being ladled out to them; with it comes to them the knowledge, clear, thrilling, absolute, that they are saved, and you can see by their faces that there is one happiness in this world which is supreme, and to which no other joy is comparable" (*ibid*.). This is well expressed by Parker (p. 55): "The well is covered by a fine canopy of stone supported by forty pillars. The canopy was erected by a Maráthá princess, Sri Maut Baijá Bái of Gwalior, in 1828. Near the well is an immense Nandī, or Bull of Shiva. It is a monolith, seven feet in height, the gift of the Rájá of Nepál [*in the same year*]. Close to it is a small shrine, somewhat elevated, containing an image of Shiva" (PR, p. 55).

The Final Revelation: Meeting the Swami

While in Banāras, Twain met a "living god" who kindled his spiritual spark: "It was in Benares that I saw another living god. That makes two. I believe I have seen most of the greater and lesser wonders of the world, but I do not remember that any of them interested me so overwhelmingly as did that pair of gods" (MT, p. 507). A marble monument erected in 1910 now stands at the *samādhi* [cenotaph] of a Hindu saint, Shri 108 Swami Bhaskarananda Saraswati (Shri 108 S.B.S., 1833–1899; see Figs. 15, & 16). He was a renowned 19th-century Sanskrit and Vedic scholar turned ascetic of the Dashanami Dandi sannyasi order, who wandered across India for thirteen years before settling in Anandabagh Park near the Durgā Mandir (Banāras) in 1868. He was renowned for his miracles and his dedication to serving those in need. "In reaching perfection, Shri 108 S.B.S. has escaped all that [*cycle of transmigration*]. He is no longer a part of a feature of this world; his substance has changed, all earthiness has departed out of it; he is utterly holy, utterly pure; nothing can desecrate this holiness or stain this purity; he is no longer of the earth, its concerns are matters foreign to him, its pains and griefs and troubles cannot reach him. When he dies, Nirvana is his; he will be absorbed into the substance of the Supreme Deity and be at peace forever," Twain (p. 509) wrote. He could not have had any foreboding of this day: a policeman enjoys his afternoon nap on the steps of the guru's resting place, and women squabble about everyday inanities (cf. Shobha 2008).

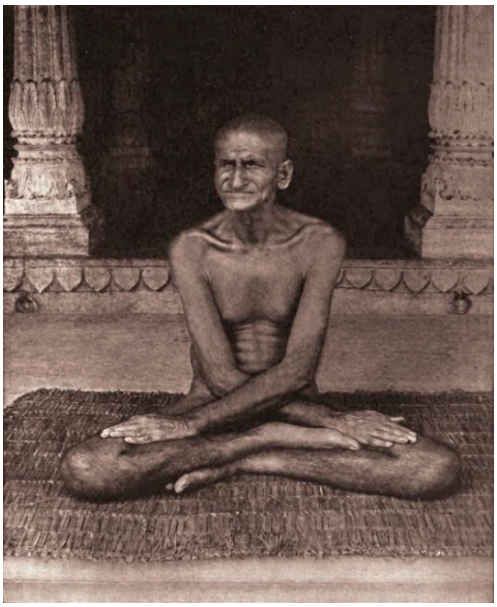

Fig. 15. Bhaskarananda Saraswati, 1886 (Shri 108 S.B.S.)

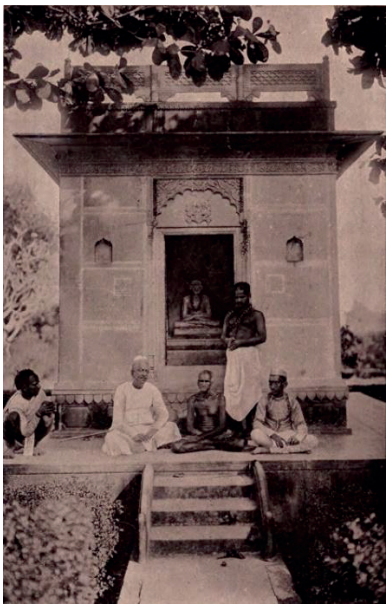

Fig. 16. Bhaskarananda Saraswati: Samadhi shrine.