

## Chapter 1 : Central Hindu School - Wikipedia

*Varanasi has at least 84 ghats, most of which are used for bathing by pilgrims and spiritually significant Hindu puja ceremony, while a few are used exclusively as Hindu cremation sites. [ ] [ ] [ ] Steps in the ghats lead to the banks of Ganges, including the Dashashwamedh Ghat, the Manikarnika Ghat, the Panchganga Ghat, and the.*

December 6, Shumon Sengupta 0 Comments The study of religion and the study of art reveal a strong relationship between the two and in Hinduism this relationship is as strong as it is comprehensive, rich and enduring. Art has always been an integral part of Hinduism in terms of a profusion of sacred architecture, symbols, objects and images painting and sculpture ; the practice of music and dance; Hindu mythology and literature, and a profoundly rich tradition of storytelling. All these elements combine to represent an aesthetic complex which has been used by Hindus as a means of devotion " as aids to worship. Hinduism is a religion of intricate and highly symbolic rituals. Visually, these rituals include a dynamic play of light lamps , colors, textures, hand gestures, and body postures and movements. These rituals include a strong element of aesthetic pursuit. Rhythmic patterns, pitch, intensity, tone and tempo of sounds combined with silence produced by various idiophones form an integral part of Hindu ritual worship. In terms of the olfactory sense, the smell of incense, flowers, fragrances, camphor, raisins, oils, clarified butter, vermilion, and fragrant herbal products sandal, turmeric etc. And then, there is the tactile experience in terms of physical handling of ritual objects, materials, textures, and elaborate rituals of ablutions, anointment and adornment which involve an intimate use of hands and the sense of touching and feeling. And finally, the sense of taste finds extensive expression in terms of a wide range of ritual food that is prepared, offered to the Gods and then shared by devotees. The visual, auditory, olfactory, taste and tactile experiences of Hindu ritual worship hold significant artistic merit. I mean it primarily as a state in which our spirits are lifted, when the mind momentarily forgets the realities of our physical existence and transcends into a realm of unadulterated bliss or ecstasy. Yet, seen from a different perspective, Hindu Art and Culture can be a phenomena on its own right, potentially distinct from Hindu theology. I believe Hindu culture can be appreciated and enjoyed independently and universally, whether one is an adherent of the religion or not. A very good example of this is the instance of a devout Indonesian Muslim appreciating and enjoying, independent of his personal faith, a performance of a traditional Indonesian ballet depicting a story from the Hindu epic of Ramayana or the Mahabharata. It is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and to give you a sense of its antiquity " it was already an ancient city during the time of the Buddha, born more than years before Christ was born. Archaeological evidence suggests that a settlement existed as early as the 12th century BCE. Since ancient times, Varanasi has remained the most important center of Hindu spirituality and culture and has been an important seat of Hindu intellectuals. River Ganges is considered of divine origin and hence held as deeply sacred by Hindus. While being the spiritual and cultural capital of Hindus Varanasi is also holy to Jainism and also played an important role in the development of Buddhism. This Hindu ritual worship traces its origins back to the Vedic time circa BCE and holds deep symbolic value for Hindus. The various ingredients of an Aarti ritual includes water, flowers, lamps, incense, bells and various other ritual objects. Along with this, the worshipper is also expected to surrendering the ego. Flowers used in the ritual are a symbol of earth. Water, sprinkled from a small conch shell represents the liquid state in nature. Lamps represent fire and heat. The synchronized waving of the fan made of peacock-feather represents the element of air. The movement and the white yak-tail fan represents space or sky. Incense and fragrant fumes are meant as lustration " a means of dispelling negative energies, while at the same time, representing the purified state of mind. And finally, a piece of ritual cloth orange, red or white symbolizes material culture and civilization. The latter dedication stems from a fundamental Hindu belief that divinity lies within each and every human being that everyone has a part of God, within. Given that the ritual celebrates both material and spiritual aspects of Hindu life, it is essentially celebratory, joyous and life affirming in nature. It gives expression to the very joy of living. We woke up around 4 in the morning to observe the Aarti held at the Assi Ghat, on the steps right below our hotel Hotel Ganges View. The Aarti began at 4. The ceremonial lamps were set ablaze while it was still dark and coupled with the burning incense,

it created a sublime mood as the night gave way to the stillness of the early morning. There was a gentle river breeze and the soft pre-dawn light appeared from the horizon and spread all over, as the sun rose from across the river. We could sense world around us slowly came alive. It was almost as if the poignant mystery of our existence were being slowly revealed to us. The morning Aarti was an awakening of the body, mind and spirit; it left us with a sense of hope, of eager anticipation. It was a great way to herald the rest of the day. Going past numerous other Ghats, each with unique architecture, feel and character, we in front of the Dasashwamedh Ghat just as the ritual was about to begin. This evening, we saw the Aarti from the river, facing it head on, from our boats. On the second evening, we went a bit early, got off our boat at the Dasashwamedh Ghat and took our position on the Ghat, next to rows of platforms from where the ritual was to be conducted. The evening Aarti started at 7 pm and lasted for 45 minutes. The young priests conducted the ritual to perfection – blowing of the conch, singing of devotional hymns and chants, and the pulsating sound of ceremonial bells, gongs and drums reverberated in the air, to the circular sway of large multi-tiered blazing oil lamps and a big brass camphor lamp, with a dramatic snake hood. The Lamps were so large that they had to be often held with both hands and the flames flared several feet high. The alchemy of color, lamps blazing against the darkness, sound, smell and a sense of harmony and proportion in movement left us mesmerized. We sat silent on the Ghat by the Ganges, watching the spectacle. It was a unique aesthetic experience which dispelled the sense of uncertainty and anxiety that generally comes with the darkness. It left us feeling a sense of peace, joy and reassurance. Hindu rituals involve a conscious pursuit of beauty and is essentially a creative process, translated into the practice of art. In Varanasi, watching the Ganga Aarti, we realized that if Hinduism had engendered a profusion of art, art had found a potent and dynamic space for expression through this religion.

### Chapter 2 : To be a Hindu without vengeance and apology - The Hindu

*Varanasi, one of the world's oldest living cities, is rightly called the religious capital of India. Also known as Banaras or Benaras, this holy city is located in the southeastern part of the state of Uttar Pradesh in northern India. It rests on the left bank of the holy river Ganga (Ganges) and is.*

Bay of Bengal Largest river in the world with respect to the discharge History behind Ganges River In BC, the Harappa settlement started to flourish along the western side of the river. By 2 AD, the River Ganges become an important point for settlement and culture. Later, River Ganges became a holy river with many literatures personifying the river as Goddesses. She is also an important character in the epic, Mahabharata. Tourist attractions on and near River Ganges in Varanasi Yoga is an important recreational and spiritual activity that is common along the banks of the river. You can find many classes happening along the river banks. There are schools that provide diploma courses in Yoga in Varanasi. Ashrams are common along the river banks. These ashrams are famous for low cost accommodation, meditation, yoga and other spiritual activities. Shopping along the riverside for perfumes, incense sticks and sculptures is an interesting form of souvenir shopping. Ganga Aarti of Varanasi is the most important tourist attraction that pulls thousands of tourists to Varanasi. You can spot Hindu styled cremation and rituals along the riverside. Boating in Varanasi is an important activity. Boating during sunrise and sunset will be aesthetically pleasing. Ganges dolphins are becoming rare and endangered. You can find small groups of dolphins during cruising. It would take a considerable amount of time to spot the mammal but it is worth your time. There are numerous temples along the side of the river. There is a Shiva temple, which is partially submerged into the river. It is an important attraction to row past the temple in a boat. Apart from these, numerous attractions are linked with River Ganges. Due to the rituals and human activities, the pollution level of the river is increasing year after year. Measures are being taken to increase the purity of the water. Importance of Ganges River Ganga is one of the major rivers of India that flows in to the land of Bangladesh through the Gangetic plains of North India. The river is considered sacred and holds religious significance. So, it is worshipped by the Hindus. The Ganges is originated from the Gangotri and has many temples settled along its banks. Varanasi, being situated on the banks of River Ganges is regarded as the most holy city of India. There are two more famous cities of India- Haridwar and Allahabad or Prayag situated on the banks of River Ganges, hosting the famous Kumbh Mela festival. This festival is the largest human gathering in the world, visited by travelers from all across the world. People come to get the ashes of their relatives immersed in the holy waters of the Ganga as it is believed to connect the departed soul with heaven. According to Hinduism, one can attain salvation if he will drink the holy water of Ganges being on his deathbed. As a whole, River Ganges is the reason behind travelers taking Varanasi tour.

**Chapter 3 : The Holy City of Varanasi | Travel | Smithsonian**

*Being Indian goes deeper inside Banaras's cultural and spiritual havens to find out who really is a Banarasi Hindu and the true meaning of 'Hinduism' Don't forget to Like & Share for more awesome.*

We were justifiably slightly apprehensive but we were excited too to see for ourselves just how true the stories were and how a sacred city such as this could gain such a reputation. It lies on the banks of the Ganges River and is a very sacred place for the massive Hindu population of India. Locals and visitors come down to the ghats, where concrete steps lead down to the edge of the Ganga, for many different reasons. Varanasi had the highest concentration of babas and sadhus Hindu holy men we had seen so far, the men sported massive dreadlocks, long beards and orange robes and some painted their faces in white and yellow or carried a trident, a symbol of the trio of Hindu gods; Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma. Between that and the motorbikes that insisted in trying to get through the compact streets, it was a challenge at times just getting around. Snarling monkeys hung out in trees and on rooftops and dogs skulked around every dark corner looking up at us pitifully. Dawn prayers, Varanasi Just as everybody does, we took a dawn boat ride to see the ghats from a different perspective. Arriving down at the river just as dawn was breaking there was an amazing red-purple mist hanging over the river. Sunrise over the Ganges, Varanasi Huge yellow signs with black text painted in both English and Sanskrit, detailed the name of each ghat. While every ghat had a different name they also had different distinguishing features. Jain temples highlight the Bachraj Ghat, a Shiva temple marks the Shivala Ghat, a mosque looks over Panchganga Ghat and Meer Ghat is even home to a Nepali temple complete with erotic carvings. Our boatman put his feet up for a while as the strong currents carried us upstream. But as the sun just began to pierce the horizon, break time was over and he dug the oars in hard, bringing us back down the river towards our guesthouse at Meer Ghat. The city was waking up now and as we floated by we watched as people began their day bathing and praying in the river. We saw the smoke before we saw the fire and as we rounded the corner, right there in front of us was the cremation area. Three bodies were being cremated as we stood there and it felt strange to be around death, which is considered such an intimate thing and yet the whole process seemed so impersonal. Bodies were brought here twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year to be cremated and the entire operation was run by a group of men known as doms, dressed in white robes with shaved heads. The body is first wrapped in cloth and carried down to the ghat on a bamboo stretcher by six or eight men. When they reach the ghat the body is dipped in the Ganges before cremation begins. The body is then placed on top of a large pile of firewood and a few more logs are criss-crossed over the top. Prayers are said, incense is passed over the body and then the cremation begins. It takes three hours for a body to be fully cremated and when the process is complete the remains are put directly into the river where we saw a sadhu brushing his teeth in the river water earlier that morning! We watched on as the custom was performed but what was strange to us was the lack of grief around the place. Not one person was crying and people were standing around drinking chai and chatting away like they were waiting for the bus. Everything was run with great efficiency and in a business-like manner. The truth is, of course, that this is a business and the giant scales which stood next to a tarp covered table was proof of this. Each piece of firewood used to cremate the body is carefully weighed to calculate the cost of the cremation. Sadhu on the Ghats, Varanasi Different wood can be chosen, each at different prices, sandalwood being the most expensive. Two different cremation areas are also available, although this is based more on the Hindu caste system than on wealth, the Charanpaduka, bearing the footprint of Vishnu is where the higher castes are cremated, above the other cremation area. Another business also goes on here too, which is extremely unpleasant in all kinds of ways. In front of where the cremations were taking place was a number of men standing knee-deep in the water with what looked like large metal trays. We were both appalled by this and thought that the man was having us on but unfortunately he was not and it was on this note that we decided it was time to go. As we left the burning ghat we were stopped by another man seeking to enlighten us on all things cremation. Sick people must first be anointed before they can be cremated, children and pregnant women are considered pure and therefore they are not cremated, babas Hindu holy men are not cremated as they too are pure but instead after

death are rowed out to the centre of the river and with a rock tied to their leg are dropped in to sink to the bottom of the Ganges. Brahmin people the highest caste carry out the elaborate rituals each evening and it is amazing to watch. Twice, we went to see the spectacle, once from the water and once from shore and each time, with a different perspective it was fascinating. Seven small, gold coloured platforms face the river each with candles, a large, white fan and a gold multi-headed serpent candle holder. Before the ceremony begins each of the Brahmin men walk solemnly down to the water and cupping their hands pour the water over their head and mouth. Next, they approach their alter-like platform, sit cross-legged and calmly stare out towards the river as if meditating. For the next hour the men perform various rituals including lighting candles and incense as they move in synch to the live music and the clapping of the huge crowd of gathered devotees. Preparing for the Ganga Aarti celebration, Varanasi Moving the candles around themselves, slowly and deliberately, kneeling and bowing they pay homage to the River Goddess, Ganga.

**Chapter 4 : 5 Days In Varanasi: Staying In The Old City On The Banks Of The Ganges**

*The Banaras Hindu University Act of states that the university will be open to people cutting across gender, race, creed, caste, and class, something which makes this early-twentieth-century.*

Varanasi vs Haridwar Hinduism is perhaps the most complex of all the religions. With million deities Hinduism sure can be difficult for any non-Hindu to comprehend. Although it is limited to only a handful of countries, the mere fact that it is the main religion in the second most populous country in the world, India, means that there are millions of followers of Hinduism. Varanasi and Haridwar two of the most important seats of Hinduism and both of them are part of the Sapta Puri, the seven sacred cities of Hinduism. If you have heard somewhere or from someone that Varanasi and Haridwar are one and all then you are misinformed. These two are completely different places. If someone wants to know Hinduism in depth, a visit to both these cities is a must for them. It is also known as Kashi or Banaras. It is not just the oldest city in India but is also one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities worldwide. Varanasi first found mention in the Rigveda where it was called the city of Lord Shiva, one of the three primary deities in Hinduism, the other two being Brahma and Vishnu. For the Hindus, death in this holy city brings salvation. This is the reason why so many Hindus have their last rites conducted in Varanasi. Also called the religious capital of India and the city of temples, Varanasi is also famous for being one of the most important seats of learning. The Banaras Hindu University is located here and it is one of the prominent academic institutions in the country. Apart from being an important city for Hindus, Varanasi is also important for two other religions – Buddhism and Jainism. Sarnath is a place close to Varanasi and this is where Lord Gautam Buddha gave his first sermon. Haridwar Haridwar is one of the most ancient cities of India and it is situated on the banks of the River Ganges in the Indian state of Uttarakhand. This is the city where the River Ganges enters the great Indian plains. Haridwar is, thus, also known as Gangadwara. Along with Allahabad, Nashik and Ujjain, Haridwar is believed to be the place where Amrit drops or drops of immortality were spilled. The exact spot where the drops fell is known as Har ki Pauri, the most sacred ghat in Haridwar. A ghat is a series of steps that lead to water, the River Ganges in this case. Haridwar is the location for the most important Hindu congregation of all, the Kumbh Mela. This event is held every 12 years and attracts millions of devotees not only from India but outside too. During the Kumbh Mela the devotees take holy dips in the River Ganges to wash off their sins. Foundation Varanasi is said to be founded by Lord Shiva. The earliest settlement, as per the archeological remains, is believed to be in the 11th or 12th Century BC. The foundation of Haridwar is sometimes attributed to King Bhagirath. King Bhagirath, to remove the curse of Kapila Muni on his 60, ancestors, is said to have brought the Ganges from the heavens and this is when Haridwar was formed. Locations of Varanasi and Haridwar Varanasi is located to the miles south-east of Lucknow, the state capital. Haridwar is located miles from the source of the River Ganges. The distance between these two cities is about miles. Areas of interest Both Varanasi and Haridwar are known for their temples. A visit to these temples is a must for a tourist not only to know about Hinduism, but also from the cultural and historical points of view. Varanasi and Haridwar are the two most important cities for Hindus. The former is in Uttar Pradesh and the latter is in Uttarakhand. Varanasi is situated in the Indian plains and Haridwar is where the River Ganges enters the Indian plains. Apart from the Hindus, Varanasi is also important for Buddhists and Jains while Haridwar is one of the holiest cities for Hindus. The areas of interest in both these cities are important from religious and historical aspects. If you like this article or our site. Please spread the word.

**Chapter 5 : Varanasi - Wikipedia**

*Banaras Hindu University (Hindi: [kaɛ̃fi hind̪i̯a u viɛ̃fvÉ™vid̪i̯a]yalÉ™y), BHU), formerly Central Hindu College, is a public central university located in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. It was established in by Madan Mohan Malaviya. [2].*

One path just wide enough for two men to walk abreast leads past shops down to the holy river Ganges. Men jostle women, women jostle fat bullocks, bullocks narrowly avoid stepping on children. Everything is for sale – small bottles of holy Ganges water, larger bottles of branded mineral water, tiny figurines of the Lord Shiva, whose town this is. Tourists, almost invariably wearing colorful harem pants, brush shoulders with locals. The storeowners watch the activity with lax interest, slurping tooth-rottingly sweet chai out of thimble-sized cups. When asked for directions they come to life, putting away the tea and describing the path with energetic and firm gestures. This may be the city where Hindus come to find enlightenment, but it is easy to lose your way. Lines of Indian pilgrims walk barefoot through the alleys, drawn by occasional glimpses of the holy river. At last, the alleys fall away, and the sluggish green river appears, smooth as a sheet of glass. From here the view extends to the distant eastern bank, hazed with brown dust. This year, the monsoon rains have been below average, and the Ganges lies low and tame between the banks. Tens of narrow steps shine wetly. But the bathers are immune to all this. According to Hindu legend, Lord Shiva unleashed the Ganges from the knot of his hair. It is a city of temples, including the gold-plated Vishwanath sacred to Shiva; the Bharat Mata, or Mother India, temple that boasts a huge three-dimensional relief map of the Indian subcontinent carved out of marble; and the hundreds of small temples that dot the waterways and alleys. It is also a city of legends. Varanasi strains under its own myths, which are contradictory, obscure and impossible to prove. Here, archaeologists discovered pottery that went back to B. Singh, a history professor at Banaras Hindu University. Approximately 80 ghats lead down to the western edge of the Ganges River. Anika Gupta A group of men bathes in the Ganges River. Anika Gupta Boys swim in the Ganges River. When the monsoon is low, the river is narrow enough to cross. Locals often bathe on the opposite bank, where there is less of a crowd and no slipper steps. Anika Gupta Tourists charter boats to watch the morning rituals. Varansi is the seventh most popular destination for foreigners visiting India. Anika Gupta Pilgrims, bathers and tourists gather at the ghats in the morning. Anika Gupta Wooden rowboats take tourists from Desaswamedh to Harish Chandra ghat and back, a trip of about one hour. They also take bathers to the opposite shore. Anika Gupta Prakash rows a boat along past Harish Chandra ghat shortly after sunrise. Anika Gupta The steps that lead up to Kedar Ghat, where Shiva is said to have risen from the surface of the water. Anika Gupta Pilgrims wash their clothes in the sacred river and leave them to dry on the railings along the ghat. Anika Gupta Local cowherds bring their bullocks down the ghats to drink and bathe in the Ganges. The bull, nandi, is also sacred to Shiva. Anika Gupta Cycle rickshaws transport people within Old Varanasi. They are the only vehicles that can navigate the narrow alleys beside the ghats. Anika Gupta Merchants spread out glass beads and necklaces on the ghats. Anika Gupta Seven priests perform the Ganga aarti. They begin by lighting incense and ringing bells, saluting the sacred river. Anika Gupta The tools the priests use during the Ganga aarti include fresh flowers and a lamp in the shape of a serpent. Shiva is often depicted reclining on a serpent. Anika Gupta A man sells flowers and candles for pilgrims to use in the Ganga aarti, a nightly prayer saluting the Ganges. Hundreds of people come to watch and participate in the prayer, which starts at 7 pm and runs for about an hour. They say Varanasi is the city of Lord Shiva, who walked here with his wife Parvati at the beginning of time. It could also be the battlefield where the god Krishna set fire to a duplicate but imposter Krishna, or the place where the Lord Rama came to do penance after slaying the demon Ravana. In a country where most cities have at least two names, Varanasi has over a hundred. The locals still call it Banaras, perhaps after the mythological king Benar. The Jataka Tales, a collection of ancient Buddhist folk stories, refer to the city as Jitwari, the place where business is good, or as Pushwavati, the flower garden city, or as Molini, the lotus garden city. Under the name Kasi, the city was one of 16 great Indian kingdoms mentioned by ancient Buddhist texts from the first millennium B. Iron arrowheads and fortified cities discovered by archaeologists suggest violent encounters between the kingdoms, but it was also an age of nonviolence. Gautama, later

known as the Buddha, delivered his first sermon during this era. And Mahavir, the founder of the ascetic and nonviolent Jain religion, was born during this period. Every morning, starting as early as five AM, he rows tourists down the Ganges in a foot-long blue wooden boat. The most popular time for a boat ride is sunrise, when the surface of the sacred river flames with reflected color and bathers line the waterfront. Each ghat was constructed by a different medieval king, and though they are young compared to the ancient ruins on Rajghat, the ghats have inspired their own mythology. The most famous is the Desaswamedh Ghat, where the father of Lord Rama once sacrificed 10 horses in an appeal to the sun. At Kedar Ghat a priest used to perform a daily prayer to Lord Shiva. Further down the river, a ghat is abandoned. Ashes and flowers dot the waves. These are the burning ghats, where relatives bring their loved ones to be cremated. According to Hindu legend, those who are cremated in Varanasi will achieve enlightenment and be free of the cycle of death and rebirth. Nearly bodies are cremated every day. The bathers are out in full force. Some lather up, while others dance and sing in the water. In the narrow alleys behind them, the city of Varanasi is just waking up.

### Chapter 6 : Difference between Varanasi and Haridwar | Difference Between

*Though little is known of the life of the Indian mystic and poet Kabir, it is believed he was born in or near Benares. He grew up in a family of Muslim weavers before becoming a disciple of the Hindu ascetic Ramananda.*

Home - Places to Visit in Varanasi Places to Visit in Varanasi Being the oldest city of the world and an important Hindu pilgrimage center, Varanasi attracts a large number of people from all over the world. For centuries, Varanasi is famous for spiritualism, mysticism, Indian philosophy and Hinduism. All these are reflected in numerous sects, temples, Ashrams and Ghats. Varanasi is associated not only with Hinduism but also with Buddhism and Jainism. Besides numerous temples, Varanasi also boasts of Buddhist Stupas and Jain temples. Varanasi is also a mirror of the age-old Indian civilization. The archaeological museum at Sarnath houses numerous remains of the past, including the National emblem of India, the Ashoka pillar. Since Varanasi is mainly associated with Hinduism, temples form the main attraction. The Ganga Ghats river fronts are the main center of religious activities and rituals and also form one of the main attractions of Varanasi. The Alamgir Mosque, blend of the Hindu and Mughal styles of the architecture, is another important attraction of Varanasi. The Bharat Mata Temple houses a huge relief map of the whole of Indian subcontinent and Tibetan plateau. Situated on the banks of the holy River Ganges in the state of Uttar Pradesh in India, Varanasi is believed to have been the abode of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, who stood upon this land at the beginning of time. Steeped in tradition and mythological legacy, Varanasi is also considered sacred because of the presence of the mighty Ganges River, which, many believe, possesses miraculous powers to wash away the sins of mortals. Varanasi – The City of Light attracts scores of pilgrims and devotees from all corners of the world. A Tour to Varanasi can be the experience of a lifetime, a self-discovery of its own kind, whereby your body and soul will experience an eternal oneness. Though the origin of Varanasi is not clearly known, the town is believed to have witnessed the flourish of knowledge, philosophy, culture, devotion to Gods, arts and crafts. Every year, hundreds and thousands of devout Hindus flock to this holy city, with a wish to expiate their sins. Since time immemorial, Varanasi has attracted hundreds and thousands of pilgrims and tourists from all corners of the world. An important cultural and religious centre of northern India for ages, Varanasi is also renowned for the Benares Gharana school of Indian classical music which had its origin here. Besides, Varanasi has been home to numerous eminent Indian philosophers, poets, writers, and musicians. The local people of Varanasi are true exponents of literature, music, Vedic philosophy, arts, crafts and architecture. Among the main tourist places in Varanasi are the numerous Hindu temples, ashrams and ghats, several Buddhist Stupas and Jain temples. The Ganga Ghats are the main center of rituals and religious activities in Benares.

**Chapter 7 : Ganges River in Varanasi - History, Attractions & Location**

*Varanasi, also called Benares, Banaras, or Kashi, city, southeastern Uttar Pradesh state, northern www.nxgvision.com is located on the left bank of the Ganges (Ganga) River and is one of the seven sacred cities of Hinduism.*

See Article History Alternative Titles: It is located on the left bank of the Ganges Ganga River and is one of the seven sacred cities of Hinduism. History Varanasi is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Its early history is that of the first Aryan settlement in the middle Ganges valley. By the 2nd millennium bce, Varanasi was a seat of Aryan religion and philosophy and was also a commercial and industrial centre famous for its muslin and silk fabrics, perfumes, ivory works, and sculpture. Varanasi was the capital of the kingdom of Kashi during the time of the Buddha 6th century bce , who gave his first sermon nearby at Sarnath. The city remained a centre of religious, educational, and artistic activities as attested by the celebrated Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang , who visited it in about ce and said that the city extended for about 3 miles 5 km along the western bank of the Ganges. There was another setback during the reign of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in the late 17th century, but later the Marathas sponsored a new revival. Varanasi became an independent kingdom in the 18th century, and under subsequent British rule it remained a commercial and religious centre. In , after Indian independence, the Varanasi state became part of the state of Uttar Pradesh. The inner streets of the city are narrow, winding, and impassable for motor traffic; the newer outer suburbs are more spacious and are laid out more systematically. The sacred city is bounded by a road known as Panchakosi; devout Hindus hope to walk that road and visit the city once in a lifetime and, if possible, to die there in old age. The site receives more than a million pilgrims each year. In addition, thousands of domestic and foreign tourists flock to the city annually, and tourism-related activities constitute a significant component of the local economy. The Durga Temple is famous for the swarms of monkeys that inhabit the large trees near it. The Great Mosque of Aurangzeb is another prominent religious building. Two of the more important modern temples are those of Tulasi Manas and the Vishvanatha on the campus of the Banaras Hindu University. The city has hundreds of other temples. At Sarnath, a few miles north of Varanasi, there are ruins of ancient Buddhist monasteries and temples as well as temples built by the Maha Bodhi Society and by the Chinese, Burmese, and Tibetan Buddhists. There are innumerable schools and countless Brahman pandits learned scholars , who are responsible for the continuation of traditional learning. There are three universities, including the large and important Banaras Hindu University , and more than a dozen colleges and high schools. The city is a centre of arts and crafts and of music and dance. Varanasi is famous for its production of silks and brocades with gold and silver threadwork. A renowned carpet-weaving centre is at Bhadoi. Wooden toys, bangles made of glass, ivory work, and brass ware are also produced in Varanasi. The city is host to numerous religious festivals. Mahashivaratri, the great night of the god Shiva , is celebrated by a procession from the Mahamrityunjaya Temple to the Kashi Vishvanath Temple. The Ganga festival in November or December is dedicated to the goddess of the Ganges River , considered sacred by all Hindus. Thousands of lamps are placed on the ghats and set afloat on the river. The festival of Bharat Milap in October or November commemorates the reunion of Lord Rama with his younger brother Bharat after 14 years of exile. Yusuke Kawasaki Varanasi is a major regional transportation hub. It is an important railway junction and is connected by highways to other cities in Uttar Pradesh and surrounding states. Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport lies about 12 miles 20 km from the city centre. Learn More in these related Britannica articles:

**Chapter 8 : 20 important and interesting ghats in Varanasi - Path is my goal**

*Situated on western bank of the Ganga river, Varanasi is a very important pilgrimage site for Hindus. Know more about the temples and other places to visit in Varanasi at [www.nxgvision.com](http://www.nxgvision.com)*

Basic caste is called varn. Sometimes "caste" is avoided as a word for varn. Whether or not that is done, it is common for "caste" to be used for the subcastes. The Bhagavad Gita says this about the varn. And the work of the Shudra is service. Sometimes it is denied that the varn. This is no more than a rationalization: The urge to deny that varn. Given the eternity of the Vedas, it should be, strictly speaking, perplexing why and impossible that they need to be "reformed. Thus, the theory of varn. And, since, indeed, things like Untouchability are not even mentioned in sacred texts, such as the Bhagavad Gita, their illegitimacy is self-evident. All of this may not seem entirely honest as history; but as a strategy for reform, its point may be sympathetically well taken. The habit of such creative interpretation, however, elicits less sympathy when it merely serves a nationalistic mythology, as discussed elsewhere. Associated with each varn. These sound suspiciously like skin colors; and, indeed, there is an expectation in India that higher caste people will have lighter skin -- although there are plenty of exceptions especially in the South of India. This all probably goes back to the original invasion of the Arya , who came from Central Asia and so were undoubtedly light skinned. The people already in India were quite dark, even as today many people in India seem positively black. Apart from skin color, Indians otherwise have "Caucasian" features -- narrow noses, thin lips, etc. Because Untouchables are not a varn. I have supplied blue, since this is otherwise not found, and it is traditionally used for the skin color of Vis. Chief among those is Kr. The first three varn. This has nothing to do with reincarnation. Being "twice born" means that you come of age religiously, making you a member of the Vedic religion, eligible to learn Sanskrit, study the Vedas , and perform Vedic rituals. The "second birth" is thus like Confirmation or a Bar Mitzvah. Unborn, indeed, is a man so long as he does not sacrifice. It is through the sacrifice that he is born, just as an egg first burst. But if we compare this to the four stages of life, there is a curious parallel. The student is born again but actually labors in preparation to become a householder, who is characterized by sacrifice which cannot be done without marriage. This parallels the stage of the wandering ascetic, who ritually dies at the moment of renunciation but then labors in preparation for actual death and cremation. So, if cremation is a form of rebirth, then renunciation is the rehearsal for this as studenthood is for sacrifice. I am not aware, however, that much is ever really made of this comparison. According to the Laws of Manu whose requirements may not always be observed in modern life , boys are "born again" at specific ages: A thread is bestowed at the coming of age to be worn around the waist as the symbol of being twice born. Nevertheless, the bestowal of the thread is part of the wedding ceremony. That part of the wedding ritual is even preserved in Jainism. Ancient Iran also had a coming of age ceremony that involved a thread. Even the distant Celts believed in three social classes. Although there must have been a great deal of early intermarriage in India, nowhere did such an Indo-European social system become as rigid a system of birth as there. The rigidity may well be due to the influence of the idea of karma , that poor birth is morally deserved. But there is no doubt, from the Laws of Manu and from the history, that all they apply to all the twice born. Nevertheless, various anomalous constructions of the system occur. These provisions apparently result from the kind of systematizing beloved of the tradition, i. An element of that may reflect the actual debate that, since marriage defines householdership, and since Shudras do legitimately marry, then they legitimately become householders. This excludes Shudras and provides studenthood for Vaishyas, but it limits or abolishes the ascetic stages outside the Brahmin varn. Less systematized was how long the stages should each last, and various versions can be found. Adding the 8 years of childhood for a Brahmin, this adds up to 70 years -- coincidentally the Biblical "three score and ten. I suspect that it would have been unusual, however, for a Ks. For boys, the student is supposed to go live with a teacher guru , who is a Brahmin, to learn about Sanskrit, the Vedas, rituals, etc. The dharma , of a student includes being obedient, respectful, celibate, and non-violent. A comparable status of the teacher, without quite the same religious dimension or obligation, can be found in China. For girls, the stage of studenthood coincides with that of the householder, and the husband stands in the place of the teacher.

This is one of the points in the tradition that conflicts with another proposition in Manu, that "if a twice-born seeks renunciation without studying the Vedas, without fathering sons, and without offering sacrifices [i. These ritual separations are also consistent with the practice of disfavored alternatives, such as continuing as a student for life or renouncing ordinary life as a forest dweller or wandering ascetic. This distinction, however, did not catch on. Being a householder is the stage where the principal dharma of the person is performed, whether as priest, warrior, etc. Besides specific duties, there are general duties that pay off the three R.

*One does not become a (Hindu). One IS a (Hindu) when he respects the freedom of another to believe in what they want to believe, when one learns to understand and accept this, he is a (Hindu) In fact all are (hindus) till they infringe upon other s BELIEFS.*

Rama is the prime deity of the Sangh Parivar, whose aim is to change the Indian Constitution and establish "Hindu Rashtra", or more correctly, Hindutva Rashtra. I have explained why Hindutva is not Hinduism in this piece. Reuters file photo Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat said recently that if Ram temple is not rebuilt, "root of culture will be cut". Even pop-fiction writer Chetan Bhagat wrote a piece last year to argue in favour of a Ram temple in Ayodhya. So the drumbeats for a Ram temple in Ayodhya are being played through multiple voices to manufacture "consent" and create a "plank" before General Elections. The aim of this essay is not to delve into the arguments about the Ram temple in Ayodhya, but rather to tell a story. But no other god of Hindu religion plays such a prominent role in the politics of modern India, than Rama. He has played a major part in determining Indian political history for the last hundred years. Mohan Bhagwat associates Ram temple with the "root of culture". I wish to travel to the "root"; unearth perspective, understanding and insight. In this essay, I will be exploring the most fundamental of all questions: This story is surprising, intriguing and fascinating. I also know that the earliest version of any text where Rama appears is the Buddhist Jataka No called the Dasaratha Jataka. But Rama and Sita are siblings. Dasaratha does not banish them but sends them away to protect them from their jealous step-mother; they are exiled to the Himalayas. This classic poem was written in - the birth year of Rabindranath Tagore, who himself went on to write a review of the poem later. In Meghnad Badh Kavya "Ravana is portrayed as a responsible king " blessed with many qualities " and Meghnad is portrayed as a tragic hero " a brave individual and a worshipper of Shiva " while Lakshmana is portrayed as deceitful and unfair. There are many versions of Ramayana in many Indian languages; Kamba Ramayana 12th century created a cultural celebration invented by the Tamils. Many Indian religious traditions " Buddhist, Sikh and Jain " have their own adaptations. In one version Ravana is the hero, not Rama. But it is considered as the "original" Ramayana " one of two great epics of Indian literature, and also of world literature. Ramayana has been located during Treta Yuga - more as an act of faith, than of actual recorded history. They are many who also believe that the Ramayana actually took place in an ancient age whose records no longer exist in recorded history. That is their belief. But what turned Rama " from a character of epic literature " into a deity or a god and a "real historical figure" in the minds of millions in the Hindi-Hindustani belt is another text: Tulsidas was a great scholar of Sanskrit " that was the language of the elite " but he wanted to tell the story of Rama in another language so that it becomes accessible to the general masses. Tulsidas was a contemporary of William Shakespeare. Just like Shakespeare wrote in English - the language of the plebeians, not of the elite who spoke Latin - Tulsidas too wanted to reach out to the masses by writing the story of Rama in Awadhi. Tulsidas had to face a tirade of criticisms from the Sanskrit scholars of Benaras for being a bhasha vernacular poet. But Tulsidas remained steadfast in his goal and also wanted to simplify the knowledge contained in the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Puranas for the benefit of the common people. Tulsidas echoed the revolt of Buddha against Brahmanical elitism; he challenged the dominance of high-class Brahmanical Sanskrit by writing Ramacharitmanas in the language of the plebeians. Tulsidas began writing his poem in Ayodhya in and also wrote it in Benaras and Chitrakoot. This north Indian culture north, central and western India - what we call Hindi-Hindustani culture in Bengal - is not pan-India. South India, eastern India and northeastern India have their own cultures and sub-cultures; and Hindi is not the national language of India " it is one of the 24 recognised languages of India which also include English. In India only 25 per cent of the people identify Hindi as their first or second language; 45 per cent speak and understand Hindi. In the belt of Hindi-Hindustani culture, Rama became a divine hero, a Hindu deity and a historical figure in the minds of millions. In Ramayana, Ravana is described as a devotee of Shiva, a great scholar, just ruler and a maestro of the veena. His ambition was to defeat the devas and dominate over them. The ten heads of Ravana - as per Valmiki - signified his profound knowledge of the

four Vedas and the six Shastras. This meaning has been supplanted in the north Indian Hindi-Hindustani culture by bringing Ravana within the Navratri celebration through Ram Lila. The profound inner meaning of Navratri nine nights is the battle of soul to defeat the ego; the triumph of good over evil. The nine forms of the goddess rage a battle through nine nights with the demon, and ultimately triumphs. The goddess signifies human energy and consciousness. The nine evils which need to be eliminated from consciousness are the evils of ego. The "I" of ego-sense lower self needs to be defeated by the "I" of soul-sense higher self, so that the higher qualities come to surface within human consciousness: Navratri is symbolic of the process of inner transformation from the human to the humane. This is the actual spiritual and philosophical meaning of Navratri that has been forgotten due to the spirit of festivity and the capitalist commerce that comes with it. The killing of Ravana by Rama is now known as Dussehra - that happens after the nine nights of Navratri. The ten heads of Ravana has come to mean the ten evils of ego; victory of Rama over Ravana, as the triumph of good over evil. Dussehra is connected to the north Indian Hindi-Hindustani version of Navratri. In Bengal, we celebrate Navratri through Durga Puja. The demon of ego is represented by Mahishasura, not Ravana. Even Ram Nabomi - a separate festival - is celebrated via Annapurna Puja. But Ravana decided not to punish Shurpanakha because his wife Mandodari convinced him to respect the wish and will of his sister. Ravana accepted the marriage and went to visit his newly married sister. The true motive of Vidyutjihva to marry Shurpanakha was to kill Ravana. Ravana felt great hurt for having to kill Vidyutjihva and make his sister Shurpanakha a widow. Shurpanakha then split her time between Lanka and the forests of south India. She also conceived a son from Vidyutjihva named Shambhri, who was accidentally killed by Lakshmana. Shurpanakha met the exiled prince Rama during one of her visits to the forest of Panchavati. She was instantly smitten by Rama, who spurned her advances, and told her that he was faithful to his wife Sita. Shurpanakha realised that the two brothers were making fun of her; she felt humiliated, angry and envious. This sparked a series of events. Shurpanakha went back to Lanka and first went to Khara - who was another brother - who sent seven Rakshasa warriors to attack Rama. The warriors were easily defeated by Rama. Then Khara himself attacked with an army of warriors - of which all were killed except one warrior who went back to Lanka. After this Shurpanakha went to Ravana and enticed him to abduct and marry Sita by tempting Ravana with her virtues and her beauty. So, the three primary female characters - Kaikeyi, Shurpanakha and Sita - virtually triggered all the main episodes. Shurpanakha and Sita suffered the most. Sita got abducted by Ravana and had to protect herself from all his advances. Ravana to his credit never tried to force himself on Sita and wanted to win her heart. After Rama rescued Sita - after the battle of Lanka - she had to pass through fire to prove her purity before Rama accepted her. Rama and Sita return to Ayodhya where they are crowned as the King and the Queen. After few months, Sita became pregnant and this sparked doubts within the kingdom. Sita - while being pregnant - is banished into the forest by Rama due to the persistent rumour-mongering within the subjects of his kingdom. Did Valmiki execute a meta-fictional device - undoubtedly for the first time in poetry and epic literature in all of human history - by becoming a character of his own work? Or was he simply retelling the epic as a poet historian? Valmiki educated them and they also learnt the story of Rama. Then years later, Sita unites Luva and Kusha with their father - Rama. They sang the songs of Rama, who recognised them by hearing his own story and accepted them as his sons. But Sita returns to mother earth, for her final release from a cruel world. The etymology of the word "Sita" is derived from the Sanskrit word for furrow. But Sita in reality goes back a very long way. An ancient Vedic earth goddess - associated with fertility - who is mentioned once in Rig Veda as "auspicious Sita". There is no mention of Rama in the Vedas. Rama gets introduced in one of the Buddhist Jatakas, as mentioned earlier. Sita is so flawless - as a character in the Ramayana - that even an Upanishad is named after her. There are 13 ancient texts which are called the "Principle Upanishads". The core of the spiritual and the philosophical thoughts are contained in them. Through the passage of centuries, another vastly expanded list was compiled. The cannon of Upanishads came to be known as the Muktika or the Liberation. There are eight texts within this Muktika cannon that is known as the Shakta Upanishads. The Sita Upanishad - with 37 verses - has the Muktika serial number of 45 amongst texts. He wanted to finish Ramcharitmanas in a positive note; and many scholars of the time had criticised Tulsidas for the abrupt ending of his masterful bhakti poem. This is reflected by the popular

iconography in the Hindi-Hindustani belt that often represents Rama and Sita with Luva and Kusha, to denote the ideal family: But one has to understand the bhakti impulse of Tulsidas – he was writing a devotional poem based upon the Ramayana and never quite wanted to re-tell the epic in full. He was a devotee, writing about lord Rama and mata Sita. And this devotional impulse spread within the Awadhi readers of his poem, and the Hindi speaking belt of India became a devotee of lord Rama. So, the religious devotional aspect to Rama never developed in Bengal, like it did in Hindi-Hindustani culture.