

= Varanasi =

Varanasi (Hindustani pronunciation : [ʋaʋʋraʋʋsi]) , also known as Benares , Banaras (Banʋras [bʋʋnaʋʋs]) , or Kashi (Kʋʋʋ [ʋkaʋʋi]) , is a North Indian city on the banks of the Ganges in Uttar Pradesh , India , 320 kilometres (200 mi) south @-@ east of the state capital , Lucknow , and 121 kilometres (75 mi) east of Allahabad . The spiritual capital of India , it is the holiest of the seven sacred cities (Sapta Puri) in Hinduism and Jainism , and played an important role in the development of Buddhism . Varanasi lies along National Highway 2 , which connects it to Kolkata , Kanpur , Agra , and Delhi , and is served by Varanasi Junction and Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport .

Varanasi grew as an important industrial centre , famous for its muslin and silk fabrics , perfumes , ivory works , and sculpture . Buddha is believed to have founded Buddhism here around 528 BC when he gave his first sermon , " The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Dharma " , at nearby Sarnath . The city 's religious importance continued to grow in the 8th century , when Adi Shankara established the worship of Shiva as an official sect of Varanasi . Despite the Muslim rule , Varanasi remained the centre of activity for Hindu intellectuals and theologians during the Middle Ages , which further contributed to its reputation as a cultural centre of religion and education . Goswami Tulsidas wrote his epic poem on Lord Rama 's life called Ram Charit Manas in Varanasi . Several other major figures of the Bhakti movement were born in Varanasi , including Kabir and Ravidas . Guru Nanak Dev visited Varanasi for Shivratri in 1507 , a trip that played a large role in the founding of Sikhism . In the 16th century , Varanasi experienced a cultural revival under the Muslim Mughal emperor Akbar who invested in the city , and built two large temples dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu , though much of modern Varanasi was built during the 18th century , by the Maratha and Bhumihar kings . The kingdom of Benares was given official status by the Mughals in 1737 , and continued as a dynasty @-@ governed area until Indian independence in 1947 . The city is governed by the Varanasi Nagar Nigam (Municipal Corporation) and is represented in the Parliament of India by the current Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi , who won the Lok Sabha elections in 2014 by a huge margin . Silk weaving , carpets and crafts and tourism employ a significant number of the local population , as do the Diesel Locomotive Works and Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited . Varanasi Hospital was established in 1964 .

Varanasi has been a cultural centre of North India for several thousand years , and is closely associated with the Ganges . Hindus believe that death in the city will bring salvation , making it a major centre for pilgrimage . The city is known worldwide for its many ghats , embankments made in steps of stone slabs along the river bank where pilgrims perform ritual ablutions . Of particular note are the Dashashwamedh Ghat , the Panchganga Ghat , the Manikarnika Ghat and the Harishchandra Ghat , the last two being where Hindus cremate their dead . The Ramnagar Fort , near the eastern bank of the Ganges , was built in the 18th century in the Mughal style of architecture with carved balconies , open courtyards , and scenic pavilions . Among the estimated 23 @, @ 000 temples in Varanasi are Kashi Vishwanath Temple of Shiva , the Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple , and the Durga Temple . The Kashi Naresh (Maharaja of Kashi) is the chief cultural patron of Varanasi , and an essential part of all religious celebrations . An educational and musical centre , many prominent Indian philosophers , poets , writers , and musicians live or have lived in the city , and it was the place where the Benares Gharana form of Hindustani classical music was developed . One of Asia 's largest residential universities is Banaras Hindu University (BHU) . The Hindi @-@ language nationalist newspaper , Aj , was first published in 1920 .

= = Etymology = =

Traditional etymology links " Varanasi " to the names of two Ganges tributaries forming the city 's borders : Varuna , still flowing in northern Varanasi , and Assi , today a small stream in the southern part of the city , near Assi Ghat . The old city is located on the north shores of the Ganges , bounded by Varuna and Assi .

In the Rigveda , an ancient Indian sacred collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns , the city is referred to

as Kāśī (Kashi) from the Sanskrit verbal root ka- " to shine " , making Varanasi known as " City of Light " , the " luminous city as an eminent seat of learning " . The name was also used by pilgrims dating from Buddha 's days .

Hindu religious texts use many epithets to refer to Varanasi , such as Kāśīkā (Sanskrit : " the shining one ") , Avimukta (Sanskrit : " never forsaken " by Shiva) , Ānandavana (Sanskrit : the forest of bliss) , and Rudravāsa (Sanskrit : the place where Rudra / Śiva resides) .

Over most of the last millennium , the city was known as Banaras . In the 1950s , Indian government decided to return to the Sanskrit form Varanasi ; however , Banaras is still the predominant form used locally .

= = History = =

According to legend , Varanasi was founded by the god Shiva . The Pandavas , the heroes of the Hindu epic Mahabharata , are also said to have visited the city in search of Shiva to atone for their sin of fratricide and Brāhmanahatya that they had committed during the climactic Kurukshetra War . It is regarded as one of seven holy cities which can provide Moksha ; Ayodhyā , Mathurā , Gayā , Kāśī , Kāñchi , Avantikā , and Dwārāvātī are the seven cities known as the givers of liberation .

= = Archaeological evidence = =

Archaeological evidence of the earliest known settlements around Varanasi in the Ganges valley suggest that they began in the 20th century BC , placing it among the world 's oldest continually inhabited cities according to Kenneth Fletcher . These archaeological remains suggest that the Varanasi area was populated by Vedic people . However , the oldest known text referencing the city , the Atharvaveda , which dates to approximately the same period , suggests that the area was populated by indigenous tribes . It is possible that archaeological evidence of these previous inhabitants has yet to be discovered . Recent excavations at Aktha and Ramnagar , two sites very near to Varanasi , show them to be from 1800 BC , suggesting Varanasi was also inhabited by this time .

= = Ancient period = =

Varanasi grew as an important industrial centre , famous for its muslin and silk fabrics , perfumes , ivory works , and sculpture . During the time of Gautama Buddha , Varanasi was the capital of the Kingdom of Kashi . The Buddha is believed to have founded Buddhism here around 528 BC when he gave his first sermon , " The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Dharma " , at nearby Sarnath . The celebrated Chinese traveller Xuanzang , also known as Hiuen Tsiang , who visited the city around 635 AD , attested that the city was a centre of religious and artistic activities , and that it extended for about 5 kilometres (3 @. @ 1 mi) along the western bank of the Ganges . When Xuanzang , visited Varanasi in the 7th century , he named it " Polonisse " and wrote that the city had some 30 temples with about 30 monks . The city 's religious importance continued to grow in the 8th century , when Adi Shankara established the worship of Shiva as an official sect of Varanasi .

= = Medieval period = =

Chandradeva , founder of the Gahadvala dynasty made Banaras a second capital in 1090 .

During the Birth Period , Varanasi was connected by a road starting from Taxila and ending at Pataliputra .

Feroz Shah ordered Hindu temples at Varanasi destroyed in 1376 .

Varanasi remained the centre of activity for intellectuals and theologians during the Middle Ages , which further contributed to its reputation as a cultural centre of religion and education . Several major figures of the Bhakti movement were born in Varanasi , including Kabir who was born here in 1389 , and Ravidas , a 15th @- @ century socio @- @ religious reformer , mystic , poet , traveller ,

and spiritual figure , who was born and lived in the city and employed in the tannery industry .

= = Modern history (1500 ? present) = = =

Similarly , numerous eminent scholars and preachers visited the city from across India and south Asia . Guru Nanak Dev visited Varanasi for Shivratri in 1507 , a trip that played a large role in the founding of Sikhism .

Varanasi experienced a Hindu cultural revival in the 16th century under the Muslim Mughal emperor Akbar , who invested in the city and built two large temples dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu . The Raja of Pune established the Annapurna Mandir , and the 200 @-@ metre (660 ft) Akbari Bridge was also completed during this period . The earliest tourists began arriving in the city during the 16th century . In 1665 , the French traveller Jean Baptiste Tavernier described the architectural beauty of the Vindu Madhava temple on the side of the Ganges . The road infrastructure was also improved during this period . It was extended from Kolkata to Peshawar by Emperor Sher Shah Suri ; later during the British Raj it came to be known as the famous Grand Trunk Road . In 1656 , Emperor Aurangzeb ordered the destruction of many temples and the building of mosques , causing the city to experience a temporary setback . However , after Aurangzeb 's death , most of India was ruled by a confederacy of pro @-@ Hindu kings . Much of modern Varanasi was built during this time , especially during the 18th century by the Maratha and Bhumihar kings . The kings governing Varanasi continued to wield power and importance through much of the British Raj period , including the Maharaja of Benares , or Kashi Naresh .

The Kingdom of Benares was given official status by the Mughals in 1737 , and continued as a dynasty @-@ governed area until Indian independence in 1947 , during the reign of Dr. Vibhuti Narayan Singh . In the 18th century , Muhammad Shah ordered the construction of an observatory on the Ganges , attached to Man Mandir Ghat , designed to discover imperfections in the calendar in order to revise existing astronomical tables . Tourism in the city began to flourish in the 18th century . In 1791 , under the rule of the British Governor @-@ General Warren Hastings , Jonathan Duncan founded a Sanskrit College in Varanasi . In 1867 , the establishment of the Varanasi Municipal Board led to significant improvements in the city 's infrastructure and basic amenities of health services , drinking water supply and sanitation

In 1897 , author Mark Twain , said of Varanasi , " Benares is older than history , older than tradition , older even than legend , and looks twice as old as all of them put together . " In 1910 , the British made Varanasi a new Indian state , with Ramnagar as its capital but with no jurisdiction over the city of Varanasi itself . The religious head , Kashi Naresh , has had his headquarters at the Ramnagar Fort since the 18th century , also a repository of the history of the kings of Varanasi , which is situated to the east of Varanasi , across the Ganges . The Kashi Naresh is deeply revered by the local people and the chief cultural patron ; some devout inhabitants consider him to be the incarnation of Shiva .

In 1857 , the British Army committed a massacre of Indian troops and city residence during the early stages of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 . Annie Besant founded the Central Hindu College , which later became a foundation for the creation of Banaras Hindu University in 1916 . Besant founded the Central Hindu College because she wanted to bring men of all religions together under the ideal of brotherhood in order to promote Indian cultural values and to remove ill @-@ will among different sections of the Indian population . "

Varanasi was ceded to the Union of India in 1947 , and Dr. Vibhuti Narayan Singh incorporated his territories into the United Provinces in 1949 . He died in 2000 . The current king and the resident of the fort is Anant Narayan Singh , since 1971 .

= = Geography and climate = =

= = = Geography = = =

Varanasi is located at an elevation of 80 @. @ 71 metres (264 @. @ 8 ft) in the centre of the Ganges valley of North India , in the Eastern part of the state of Uttar Pradesh , along the left crescent @- @ shaped bank of the Ganges , averaging between 15 metres (50 ft) and 21 metres (70 ft) above the river . The city is the headquarters of Varanasi district . By road , Varanasi is located 797 kilometres (495 mi) south @- @ east of New Delhi , 320 kilometres (200 mi) south @- @ east of Lucknow , 121 kilometres (75 mi) east of Allahabad , and 63 kilometres (39 mi) south of Jaunpur . The " Varanasi Urban Agglomeration " ? an agglomeration of seven urban sub @- @ units ? covers an area of 112 @. @ 26 km ² (approximately 43 mi ²) . Neighbourhoods of the city include Adampura , Anandbagh , Bachchhaon , Bangali Tola , Bhelpura , Bulanala , Chaitganj , Chaukaghat , Chowk , Dhupchandi , Dumraon , Gandhinagar , Gautam Nagar , Giri Nagar , Gopal Vihar , Guru Nanak Nagar , Jaitpura , Kail Garh , Khanna , Kotwali , Lanka Manduadih , Luxa , Maheshpur , Mahmoorganj , Maulvibagh , Nagwar , Naipokhari , Shivala , Siddhagiribagh , and Sagra .

Being located in the Indo @- @ Gangetic Plains of North India , the land is very fertile because low level floods in the Ganges continually replenish the soil . Varanasi is located between the Ganges confluences with two rivers : the Varuna and the Assi stream . The distance between the two confluences is around 2 miles (4 km) , and serves as a sacred journeying route for Hindus , which culminates with a visit to a Sakshi Vinayak Temple .

= = = Climate = = =

Varanasi experiences a humid subtropical climate (Köppen climate classification Cwa) with large variations between summer and winter temperatures . The dry summer starts in April and lasts until June , followed by the monsoon season from July to October . The temperature ranges between 22 and 46 ° C (72 and 115 ° F) in the summers . Winters in Varanasi see very large diurnal variations , with warm days and downright cold nights . Cold waves from the Himalayan region cause temperatures to dip across the city in the winter from December to February and temperatures below 5 ° C (41 ° F) are not uncommon . The average annual rainfall is 1 @, @ 110 mm (44 in) . Fog is common in the winters , while hot dry winds , called loo , blow in the summers . In recent years , the water level of the Ganges has decreased significantly ; upstream dams , unregulated water extraction , and dwindling glacial sources due to global warming may be to blame .

= = Administration = =

= = = Politics and law = = =

Varanasi is governed by a number of bodies , the most important being the Varanasi Nagar Nigam (Municipal Corporation) and the Varanasi Development Authority , which is responsible for the master planning of the city . Water supply and sewage system is operated by the Jal Nigam . Varanasi is represented in the Parliament of India by the current Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi who won the Lok Sabha elections in 2014 by a huge margin .

= = = Healthcare = = =

Sushruta , the great surgeon and author of the Sushruta Samhita , the Sanskrit text of surgery , lived in Varanasi and practised medicine and surgery sometime during the 5th century BC . Since 1922 , Ayurveda has been a subject of training in the Banaras Hindu University and in 1927 a separate Ayurvedic College was established . There are many Ayurvedic centres in Varanasi like Sparsa Ayurvedic Centre which provide Ayurvedic treatments such as Panchakarma and other methods . S S Ayurveda Hospital operates a Panchakarma treatment centre , in association with Kerala Ayurveda Ltd .

Varansi has several hospitals , including Heritage Hospital , Marwari Hospital , Pitambari Hopspital ,

Mata Anand Mai Hospital , Rajkiya Hospital , Ram Krishna Mission Hospital , Shiv Prasad Gupta Hospital , Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay hospital (managed by state govt .) the largest & superspeciality hospital is Sir Sunder Lal Hospital (University Hospital) having more 1150 beds & a separate trauma centre having 340 beds , and Varanasi Hospital and Medical Research Centre . A separate cancer institute is also operated in Varanasi . The Varanasi Hospital , established in 1964 by Dr. Baijnath Prasad . The hospital , which in 2012 had 66 beds , serves Varanasi and surrounding districts and states , many of which rely on it for surgery . Although the hospital suffers from a lack of funding , it has facilities such as x @-@ ray , ultrasonography , echocardiography and a pathology lab . The urban portion of Varanasi District had an infant mortality rate of 70 per 1 @,@ 000 live births in 2010 ? 2011 .

= = = Public maintenance = = =

Because of the high population density of Varanasi and the increasing number of tourists , the Uttar Pradesh government and international non @-@ governmental organisations and institutions have expressed grave concern for the pollution and pressures on infrastructure in the city , mainly the sewage , sanitation , and drainage components . Pollution of the Ganges is a particular source of worry because of the religious significance of the river , the dependence of people on it as a source of drinking water , and its prominence as a symbol of Varanasi and the city itself . The sewage problem is exacerbated by the role of the Ganges in bathing and in river traffic , which is very difficult to control . Because of the sewage , people using local untreated water have higher risk of contracting a range of water @-@ borne stomach diseases .

Parts of Varanasi are contaminated with industrial chemicals including toxic heavy metal . Studies of wastewater from Varanasi 's sewage treatment plants identify that water 's contamination with metals and the reuse of this water for irrigation as a way that the toxic metals come to be in the plants that people grow for food . One studied example is palak , a popular leafy vegetable which takes up heavy metal when it is in the soil , and which people then eat . Some of the polluting sludge contains minerals which are fertiliser , which could make polluted water attractive to use . Pesticides used in local farming are persistent enough to be spread through the water , to sewer treatment , then back to the farms as wastewater .

Varanasi 's water supply and sewage system is maintained by Jal Nigam , a subsidiary of Varanasi Nagar Nigam . Power supply is by the Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Limited . The city produces about 350 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 litres (77 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 imp gal ; 92 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 US gal) per day of sewage and 425 tonnes (418 long tons ; 468 short tons) per day of solid waste . The solid wastes are disposed in one landfill site .

= = Demographics = =

According to provisional data from the 2011 census , the Varanasi urban agglomeration had a population of 1 @,@ 435 @,@ 113 , with 761 @,@ 060 men and 674 @,@ 053 women .

The population of the Varanasi urban agglomeration in 2001 was 1 @,@ 371 @,@ 749 with a ratio of 879 females every 1 @,@ 000 males . However , the area under Varanasi Nagar Nigam has a population of 1 @,@ 100 @,@ 748 with a ratio of 883 females for every 1 @,@ 000 males . The literacy rate in the urban agglomeration is 77 % while that in the municipal corporation area is 78 % . Approximately 138 @,@ 000 people in the municipal area live in slums .

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= = Economy = =

According to the 2006 City Development Plan for Varanasi , approximately 29 % of Varanasi 's population is employed . Approximately 40 % are employed in manufacturing , 26 % work in trade and commerce , 19 % work in other services , 8 % work in transport and communication , 4 % work in agriculture , 2 % work in construction , and 2 % are marginal workers (working for less than half

of the year) .

Among manufacturing workers , 51 % work in spinning and weaving , 15 % work in metal , 6 % work in printing and publishing , 5 % work in electrical machinery , and the rest work in a wide variety of industry sectors . Varanasi 's manufacturing industry is not well developed and is dominated by small @-@ scale industries and household production .

Silk weaving is the dominant industry in Varanasi . Muslims are the influential community in this industry with nearly half a million of them working as weavers , dyers , sari finishers , and salespersons . Weaving is typically done within the household , and most weavers are Momin Ansari Muslims . Varanasi is known throughout India for its production of very fine silk and Banarasi saris , brocades with gold and silver thread work , which are often used for weddings and special occasions . The production of silk often uses bonded child labour , though perhaps not at a higher rate than elsewhere in India . The silk weaving industry has recently been threatened by the rise of power looms and computer @-@ generated designs and by competition from Chinese silk imports .

In the metal manufacturing sector , Diesel Locomotive Works is a major employer . Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited , a large power equipment manufacturer , also operates a heavy equipment maintenance plant . Other major commodities manufactured and traded in Varanasi include hand @-@ knotted Mirzapur carpets , rugs , dhurries , brassware , copperware , wooden and clay toys , handicrafts , gold jewellery , and musical instruments . Important agricultural products include betel leaves (for paan) , langra mangoes and khoa (solidified milk) .

Tourism is Varanasi 's second most important industry . Over 3 million domestic and 200 @,@ 000 foreign tourists visit annually (in 2005 and 2010 , respectively) , most commonly for religious purposes . Most domestic tourists are from Bihar , West Bengal , Madhya Pradesh , and Uttar Pradesh , while the majority of foreign tourists are from Sri Lanka and Japan . The peak tourist season falls between October and March . In total , there are around 12 @,@ 000 beds available in the city , of which about one half are in inexpensive budget hotels and one third in dharamsalas . Overall , Varanasi 's tourist infrastructure is not well developed .

The prominent malls and multiplexes in Varanasi are JHV Mall in the Varanasi Cantonment area , IP Mall in Sagra , IP Vijaya Mall in Bhelupur , and PDR in Luxa . The city has several banks , including the Allahabad Bank , Andhra Bank , Bank of Baroda , Canara Bank , Central Bank of India , Corporation Bank , Indian Overseas Bank , and State Bank of India .

= = Notable landmarks = =

Apart from the 19 archaeological sites identified by the Archaeological Survey of India , some of the prominent places of interest are the Aghor Peeth , the Alamgir Mosque , the Ashoka Pillar , the Bharat Kala Bhawan (Art Museum) , the Bharat Mata Temple , the Central University for Tibetan Studies , the Dhanvantari Temple , the Durga Temple , the Jantar Mantar , the Kashi Vishwanath Temple , the Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple , the Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith , the New Vishwanath Temple on the BHU campus , the Ramnagar Fort , the Riverfront Ghats , the Tulsi Manas Temple .

= = = Jantar Mantar = = =

The Jantar Mantar observatory , constructed in 1737 , is located above the ghats along the Ganges , and is adjacent to the Manmandir and Dasaswamedh Ghats and near the palace of Raja Jai Singh of Jaipur . While less equipped than the observatories at Jaipur and Delhi , the Jantar Mantar has a unique equatorial sundial which is functional and allows measurements to be monitored and recorded by one person .

= = = Ramnagar Fort = = =

The Ramnagar Fort , located near the Ganges on its eastern bank and opposite the Tulsi Ghat , was built in the 18th century by Kashi Naresh Raja Balwant Singh with cream @-@ coloured chunar

sandstone . The fort is a typical example of the Mughal architecture with carved balconies , open courtyards , and scenic pavilions . At present , the fort is in disrepair . The fort and its museum are the repository of the history of the kings of Benares . Cited as an " eccentric " museum , it contains a rare collection of American vintage cars , bejewelled sedan chairs , an impressive weaponry hall , and a rare astrological clock . In addition , manuscripts , especially religious writings , are housed in the Saraswati Bhawan which is a part of a museum within the fort . Many books illustrated in the Mughal miniature style are also part of the collections . Because of its scenic location on the banks of the Ganges , it is frequently used as an outdoor shooting location for films .

= = = Ghats = = =

The Ghats in Varanasi are world @-@ renowned embankments made in steps of stone slabs along the river bank where pilgrims perform ritual ablutions . The ghats are an integral complement to the Hindu concept of divinity represented in physical , metaphysical , and supernatural elements . 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 Harishchandra Ghat , where Hindus cremate their dead . Many ghats are associated with Hindu legends and several are now privately owned .

Many of the ghats were built when the city was under Maratha control . Many ghats were constructed under the patronage of the Marathas , Shindes (Scindias) , Holkars , Bhonsles , and Peshwas . Most of the ghats are bathing ghats , while others are used as cremation sites . A morning boat ride on the Ganges across the ghats is a popular tourist attraction . The extensive stretches of ghats in Varanasi enhance the riverfront with a multitude of shrines , temples , and palaces built " tier on tier above the water 's edge " .

The Dashashwamedh Ghat is the main and probably the oldest ghat of Varanasi located on the Ganges , close to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple . It is believed that Brahma created this ghat to welcome Shiva and sacrificed ten horses during the Dasa @-@ Ashwamedha yajna performed there . Above and adjacent to this ghat , there are also temples dedicated to Sulatankesvara , Brahmesvara , Varahesvara , Abhaya Vinayaka , Ganga (the Ganges) , and Bandi Devi , which are all important pilgrimage sites . A group of priests perform " Agni Pooja " (Sanskrit : " Worship of Fire ") daily in the evening at this ghat as a dedication to Shiva , Ganga , Surya (Sun) , Agni (Fire) , and the entire universe . Special aartis are held on Tuesdays and on religious festivals .

The Manikarnika Ghat is the Mahasmasana , the primary site for Hindu cremation in the city . Adjoining the ghat , there are raised platforms that are used for death anniversary rituals . According to a myth it is said that an earring of Shiva or his wife Sati fell here . Fourth @-@ century Gupta period inscriptions mention this ghat . However , the current ghat as a permanent riverside embankment was built in 1302 and has been renovated at least three times throughout its existence .

The Jain Ghat or Bachraj Ghat is a Jain Ghat and has three Jain Temples located on the banks of the River . It is believed that the Jain Maharajas used to own these ghats. Bachraj Ghat has three Jain temples near the river 's banks and one them is a very ancient temple of Tirthankara Suparswanath .

= = = Temples = = =

further information at Religion in Varanasi

Among the estimated 23 @, @ 000 temples in Varanasi , the temples most popular for worship are : the Kashi Vishwanath Temple of Shiva ; the Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple ; and the Durga Temple , known for monkeys that reside in the large trees nearby .

The Kashi Vishwanath Temple , on the Ganges , is one of the 12 Jyotirlinga Shiva temples in Varanasi . The temple has been destroyed and rebuilt several times throughout its existence . The Gyanvapi Mosque , which is adjacent to the temple , is the original site of the temple . The temple ,

which is also known as the Golden Temple , was built in 1780 by Queen Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore . The two pinnacles of the temple are covered in gold and were donated in 1839 by Ranjit Singh , the ruler of Punjab . The dome is scheduled to receive gold plating through a proposed initiative of the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs of Uttar Pradesh . Numerous rituals , prayers , and aartis are held daily at the temple between 02 : 30 and 23 : 00 .

The Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple , which is situated by the Asi River , is one of the sacred temples of the Hindu god Hanuman . The present temple was built in the early 1900s by the educationist and Indian independence figure , Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya , the founder of Banaras Hindu University . According to Hindu legend the temple was built on the very spot where the medieval Hindu saint Tulsidas had a vision of Hanuman . During a 7 March 2006 terrorist attack , one of three explosions hit the temple while a wedding was in progress , and resulted in injuries to 30 people apart from 23 deaths . Following the attack , a permanent police post was installed inside the temple .

There are two temples named " Durga " in Varanasi : Durga Mandir built in the 16th century (exact date not known) , and Durga Kund (Sanskrit ' kund ' meaning " pond or pool ") built in the 18th century . A large number of Hindu devotees visit Durga Kund during Navratri to worship the goddess Durga . The temple , built in the Nagara architectural style , has multi @-@ tiered spires and is stained red with ochre , representing the red colour of Durga . The building has a rectangular tank of water called the Durga Kund (" Kund " meaning a pond or pool) . During annual celebrations of Nag Panchami , the act of depicting the god Vishnu reclining on the serpent Shesha is recreated in the Kund . While the Annapurna Temple , located nearby to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple , is dedicated to Annapurna , the goddess of food , the Sankatha Temple adjacent to the Sindhia Ghat is dedicated to Sankatha , the goddess of remedy . The Sankatha Temple has a large sculpture of a lion and a cluster of nine smaller temples dedicated to the nine planets . Other temples of note are : the Bharat Mata Temple , dedicated to the national personification of India , which was inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi in 1936 , the Kalabhairav Temple , the Mrithyunjay Mahadev Temple , and the New Vishwanath Temple located in the campus of BHU , the Tulsi Manas Mandir .

Parshvanath Jain temple : The Parshvanath Jain temple , Varanasi is temple of Jain religion dedicated to Parshvanath , the 23rd Tirthankara who was born at Bhelapur in Varanasi . The idol deified in the temple is of black colour and 75 cm in height . It is located in Bhelapur about 5 km from the centre of Varanasi city and 3 km from the Benares Hindu University . It belongs to the digambara sect of Jainism and is a holy tirtha or pilgrimage centre for Jains

== = Mosques == =

There are 15 mosques of significant historical value in Varanasi . Of particular note are the Abdul Razzaq , Alamgir , Bibi Razia , Chaukhambha , Dhairi Nim Kangore , Fatman , Ganje Shahada , Gyanvapi and Hazrat Sayyed Salar Masud Dargah . Many of these mosques were constructed from the components of the Hindu shrines which were destroyed under the auspices of subsequent Muslim invaders or rulers . The two well known mosques are the Gyanvapi Mosque and the Alamgiri Mosque .

The Gyanvapi Mosque was built by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1664 CE , after destroying a Hindu temple . Gyan Vapi (Sanskrit : " the well of knowledge ") , the name of the mosque , is derived from a well of the same name located within the precincts of the mosque . The remains of an erstwhile temple can be seen in the foundation , the columns and at the rear part of the mosque . The façade of the mosque is modelled partially on the Taj Mahal 's entrance . The mosque is administered by the Anjuman Inthazamiya Masajid (AIM) .

The Alamgiri Mosque was built in the 17th century by emperor Aurangzeb over the ruins of a Hindu temple . The Hindu temple that was destroyed was dedicated to Vishnu , and had been built by Beni Madhur Rao Scindia , a Maratha chieftain . When emperor Aurangzeb had captured Banaras , he had ordered total destruction of all Hindu temples there . Aurangzeb then built a mosque over the ruins of this temple in 1669 and named it as Alamgir Mosque in the name of his own honorific title " Alamgir " which he had adopted after becoming the emperor of Mughal empire . The mosque is

located at a prominent site above the Panchganga Ghat , which is a funerary ghat facing the Ganges . The mosque is architecturally a blend of Islamic and Hindu architecture , particularly because of the lower part of the walls of the mosque having been built fully with the remains of the Hindu temple . The mosque has high domes and minarets . Two of its minarets had been damaged ; one minaret crashed killing a few people and the other minaret was officially brought down because of stability concerns . Non @-@ Muslims are not allowed to enter the mosque . The mosque has a security cordon of a police force .

= = = Shri Guru Ravidass Janam Asthan = = =

Shri Guru Ravidass Janam Asthan , at Seer Goverdhanpur is the ultimate place of pilgrimage or religious headquarters for followers of the Ravidasi religion . The foundation stone of this Mandir was laid on 14 June 1965 on Ashad Sankranti day at the birthplace of Guru Ravidass . The temple was completed in 1994 .

= = Culture = =

= = = Literature = = =

Varanasi has its own culture of fine art and literature . Renowned Indian writers who have resided in the city were Kabir , Ravidas , and Tulsidas , who wrote much of his Ram Charit Manas here . Kulluka Bhatt wrote the best known account of Manusmṛiti in Varanasi in the 15th century , Later writers of the city have included Acharya Shukla , Baldev Upadhyaya , Bharatendu Harishchandra , Devaki Nandan Khatri , Hazari Prasad Dwivedi , Jaishankar Prasad , Munshi Premchand , Tegh Ali , Jagannath Prasad Ratnakar , Kshetresa Chandra Chattopadhyaya , Sudama Pandey (Dhoomil) , Vagish Shastri , and Vidya Niwas Mishra .

Several newspapers and journals are or were published in Varanasi such as Varanasi Chandroday and its successor Kashivartaparakashika , which became a weekly journal , first published on 1 June 1851 . The main newspaper is Aj , a Hindi @-@ language nationalist newspaper first published in 1920 . The newspaper was the bulwark of the Indian National Congress and is still a major newspaper of Hindi northern India .

= = = Art = = =

Varanasi is a major centre of arts and designs . It is a producer of silks and brocades with gold and silver thread work , carpet weaving , wooden toys , bangles made of glass , ivory work , perfumes , artistic brass and copper ware and a variety of handicrafts . The former cantonment graveyard during the British Raj is now the location of Varanasi 's Arts and Crafts .

Artists (musicians and dancers) and historians of repute who belonged to this city were : Anand Krishna , Anokhelal Mishra , Bismillah Khan , musicians Omkarnath Thakur , Ravi Shankar , Girija Devi , Gopal Shankar Misra , Gopi KrishnaKanth Maharaj , Kishan Maharaj , Lalmani Misra , N. Rajam , Rai Krishnadasa , Siddheshwari Devi , Samta Prasad , Sitara Devi , Thakur Rajbhan Singh , and Pandit Vikash Maharaj .

= = = Music = = =

Varanasi ? s music tradition is traced to the Pauranic days . According to ancient legend , Shiva is credited with evolving music and dance forms . During the medieval era , Vaishnava , a Bhakthi movement , grew in popularity , and Varanasi became a thriving centre for musicians such as Surdas , Kabir , Raidas , Meera and Tulsidas . During the monarchic rule of Govind Chandra in the 16th century , the Dhrupad style of singing received royal patronage and led to other related forms of music such as Dhamar , Hori , and Chaturang . Presently the Dhrupad maestro Pandit Ritwik

Sanyal from Varanasi is working for the revival of this art @-@ music .

In recent times , Girija Devi , the native famous classical singer of thumris , was widely appreciated and respected for her musical renderings . Varanasi is also associated with many great instrumentalists such as Ustad Bismillah Khan , Pandit Vikash Maharaj , and Pandit Ravi Shankar , the famous sitar player and musicologist who was given the highest civilian award of the country , the Bharat Ratna . Varanasi has joined the global bandwagon of UNESCO " Cities of Music " under the Creative Cities Network . Varanasi chosen in music category of creative cities network clearly signifies the rich musical heritage of this ancient city .

= = = Festivals = = =

On Mahashivaratri (February) , a procession of Shiva proceeds from the Mahamrityunjaya Temple to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple . Dhrupad Mela is a five @-@ day musical festival devoted to dhrupad style held at Tulsi Ghat in February ? March . The Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple celebrates Hanuman Jayanti (March ? April) , the birthday of Hanuman . A special puja , aarti , and a public procession is organised . Since 1923 , the temple has organised a five @-@ day classical music and dance concert festival named Sankat Mochan Sangeet Samaroh , when iconic artists from all parts of India are invited to perform .

The Ramlila of Ramnagar is a dramatic enactment of Rama 's legend , as told in Ramacharitamansa . The plays , sponsored by Kashi Naresh , are performed in Ramnagar every evening for 31 days . On the last day , the festivities reach a crescendo as Rama vanquishes the demon king Ravana . Kashi Naresh Udit Narayan Singh started this tradition around 1830 .

Nag Nathaiya is celebrated on the fourth lunar day of the dark fortnight of the Hindu month of Kartik (October ? November) . It commemorates the victory of Krishna over the serpent Kaliya . On this occasion , a large Kadamba tree (Neolamarckia cadamba) branch is planted on the banks of the Ganges so that a boy , playing the role of Krishna , can jump into the river on to the effigy representing Kaliya . He stands over the effigy in a dancing pose playing the flute , while an audience watches from the banks of the river or from boats . Bharat Milap celebrates the meeting of Rama and his younger brother Bharata after the return of the former after 14 years of exile . It is celebrated during October ? November , a day after the festival of Vijayadashami . Kashi Naresh attends this festival in his regal attire . The festival attracts a large number of devotees .

Ganga Mahotsav is a five @-@ day music festival organised by the Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department , held in November ? December . It culminates a day before Kartik Poornima , also called the Ganges festival . On this occasion the Ganges is attended by thousands of pilgrims , release lighted lamps to float in the river from the ghats .

Every year , the primary Muslim festivals celebrated in the city are the Id @-@ ul @-@ fitr ' (Ramzan) , Bakrid , Shab @-@ e @-@ Barat , Bara Wafat and Muharram . Additional festivals include Alvida and Chehlum . A non @-@ religious festival observed by Muslims is Ghazi @-@ miyan @-@ ka @-@ byaha (" the marriage of Ghazi Miyan ") .

= = Education = =

Historically , Varanasi has been a centre for education in India , attracting students and scholars from across the country . Varanasi has an overall literacy rate of 80 % (male literacy : 85 % , female literacy : 75 %) . It is home to a number of colleges and universities . Most notably , it is the site of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) , which is one of the largest residential universities in Asia with over 20 @, @ 000 students . The Indian Institute of Technology , BHU is designated an Institute of National Importance and is one of 16 Indian Institutes of Technology . Other colleges and universities in Varanasi include Imania Arabic College , the Institute of Integrated Management and Technology (IIMT) , Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith , Nav Sadhana Kala Kendra , Sampurnanand Sanskrit University , Sri Agrasen Kanya P.G. College , and Udai Pratap Autonomous College . Various engineering colleges have been established in the outskirts of the city .

St. Joseph 's Convent School , in Shivpur , in Varanasi was established by the Sisters of Our Lady of Providence of France as a Catholic (Christian) minority institution with due approval of the Government of Uttar Pradesh . It is an autonomous organisation under the Bishop of Varanasi Diocese . It provides education not only to the Catholic Christian children but also to others who abide by its rules .

Another important institution is the Central Hindu School (CHS) , Varanasi which was established by Annie Besant in July 1898 with the objective of imparting secular education , is located in Kamachha . It is one of the reputed schools in the country and is also one of the largest such schools . It is affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) It is open to students of all culture .

Schools in Varanasi are affiliated with the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) , the CBSE , or the Uttar Pradesh Board of Technical Education (U.P Board) . The overall " state of education in Varanasi is ... not good . " Schools in Varanasi vary widely in quality , with private schools outperforming government schools . In government schools , many teachers fail to come to class or to teach children . Some government schools lack basic equipment , such as blackboards and sufficient desks and chairs for all students . Private schools vary in quality , with the most expensive conducting lessons in English (seen as a key to children 's success) and having computers in classrooms . Pupils attending the more expensive private schools , tended to come from upper @-@ class families . Lower @-@ cost private schools attracted children from lower @-@ income families or those lower @-@ income families with higher education aspirations . Government schools tend to serve lower @-@ class children with lower education aspirations .

= = Sport = =

Basketball , cricket , and field hockey are popular sports in Varanasi . The main stadium in the city is the Sriga Stadium , also known as Dr Sampurnanda Stadium , where first @-@ class cricket matches are held . Local cricket matches are also played on the BHU Ground Dr. Bheem Rao sports complex .

The Physical Education Faculty of Arts of BHU offers diploma courses in Sports Management , Sports Physiotherapy , Sports Psychology and Sports Journalism .

Gymnastics is also popular in Varanasi , and many Indian girls practice outdoors at the ghats in the mornings which hosts akhadas , where " morning exercise , a dip in the Ganges and a visit to Lord Hanuman " forms a daily ritual . Despite concerns regarding water quality , two swimming clubs offer swimming lessons in the Ganges .

The Varanasi District Chess Sports Association (VDCSA) is based in Varanasi , affiliated to the regional Uttar Pradesh Chess Sports Association (UPCSA) . Udai Pratap Autonomous College is also known for its world class athletes like Prashanti Singh .

= = Transport = =

Varanasi is well @-@ connected by air , rail and road . One of the major factors in Varanasi 's is its access to all parts of the country . Within the city mobility is provided by taxis , rickshaws , cycle rickshaws and three wheelers but with certain restrictions in the old town area of the city .

Varanasi is served by Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport , which is approximately 26 km (16 mi) from the city centre in Babatpur . The airport inaugurated a new terminal in 2010 , and it was granted international airport status on 4 October 2012 . Air India , Buddha Air , Jet Airways , Jet Konnect , IndiGo , and SpiceJet operate flights from Varanasi to Delhi , Gaya , Kathmandu , Khajuraho , Sharjah , Lucknow , Mumbai , Hyderabad , Bangalore , and Kolkata . Over 330 @,@ 000 passengers pass through the airport each year .

Varanasi Junction , commonly known as Varanasi Cant Railway Station , is the city 's largest train station . More than 360 @,@ 000 passengers and 240 trains pass through each day . Some of the important express trains operating from the Varanasi Junction railway station are : the Udhna Varanasi Express that runs between Udhna (Surat) junction and Varanasi , a distance of 1 @,@

398 kilometres (869 mi) ; the Kashi Vishwanath Express that runs between Varanasi and New Delhi Railway Station ; the Kanpur Varanasi InterCity express , also called Varuna express , which runs over a distance of 355 kilometres (221 mi) and connects with Lucknow (the capital city of Uttar Pradesh) and Kanpur ; and the Sabarmati Express which runs between Varanasi and Ahmedabad . Varanasi lies along National Highway 2 , which connects it to Kolkata , Kanpur , Agra , and Delhi . National Highway 29 connects Varanasi to Gorakhpur via Ghazipur to the northeast . National Highway 56 connects Varanasi to Lucknow via Jaunpur and Sultanpur , to the northwest . National Highway 7 , the longest National Highway in India , is the most important road connecting Varanasi to southern India , passing through the cities of Hyderabad , Bangalore , Salem , Madurai , Tirunelveli , and Kanyakumari . Auto rickshaws and cycle rickshaws are the most widely available forms of public transport in old city . In the outer regions of the city , buses are common , and taxis are available .

= = Twin towns ? Sister cities = =

Varanasi is twinned with :
Kyoto , Japan