

Durga Temple – The Benevolent Guardian Goddess of Varanasi

Varanasi, the eternal city, has for ages been under the benevolent protection of Goddess Durga. As the legends say, she appeared to King Subahu, the ruler of Kashi, and pledged: “As long as Kashi stands upon the face of the earth, I, in my form as Durga, will reside here.” It was here, in this sacred place, that she defeated the demon Durga-asura (also called Durgamasura), following which she became known as Goddess Durga, protector of Kashi. (Kashi Khand of the Skanda Purana)

Legends

- Centuries ago, Prince Sudarshana of Ayodhya was exiled after his father, King Ikshvaku Dhruvasandhi, passed away. He came to Kashi’s deep forested region called Ananda Vana, where he met and fell in love with Princess Shashikala, daughter of King Subahu of Kashi.
- When the time came for her swayamvara (bride’s self-choice ceremony), Shashikala had a prophetic dream from Goddess Durga, who revealed that Sudarshana was her destined husband. On the day of swayamvara, Shashikala rejected all suitors, declaring by Durga’s blessing that Sudarshana was her choice.
- Enraged, the other kings attacked Kashi. As the war turned against King Subahu, both Sudarshana and Shashikala prayed to Durga. A divine host of goddesses riding fearsome beasts appeared, slew the invaders, and bathed the field in the enemy’s blood. Subahu surrendered before Durga, who restored Sudarshana to his kingdom and sanctified the union. (From Devi Bhagavata Purana)
- It is also believed by locals that after slaying demons Sumbha and Nishumbha, Durga rested here. The central shrine later came to be worshipped in yantra form. Some say the original murti (idol) was hidden for safety during periods of invasion.

Architecture & Significance

- The present temple complex, including the Durga Kund (a water reservoir), was reconstructed in 1760 AD by Rani Bhavani of Bengal/Natore.
- The temple’s style is Nagara (northern Indian) architecture, painted in crimson-red and ochre, matching the iconography of Goddess Durga.
- The main idol is worshipped in the yantra form and identified with Kushmanda, the fourth form of Durga, sometimes described as the creator form. Alongside her are idols of Bhadra Kali (Tantric Kali), Chand Bhairava, Rudra Bhairava, Maha Lakshmi, and Maha Saraswati.
- In the outer courtyard are smaller shrines to deities including Kukkuteshwara Mahadev, Tilparneshwar Mahadev, Surya, Jwarhareshwari, Lakshmi Narayana, and Radha-Krishna

Present Day and Ritual Practices

- The temple is especially vibrant on Tuesdays and Fridays. During the Hindu month of Shravan, the goddess is adorned in various ‘shringar’ (ornaments and ritual decoration).

- There is an annual Durga Kund Sangeet Samaroh in Shravan/Bhadrapada (August-September), where classical musicians perform in her honor.
- The fourth day of Navratri holds special importance here, as it is dedicated to the Kushmanda aspect of Durga.

Timing & Location

- The temple is open daily, from 4:00 AM to 1:00 PM, and then from 3:00 PM to 10:30 PM.
- Located in the Kedar Khand of Varanasi, near Durga Kund and along Sankat Mochan Road, it is close to other well-known temples such as Tulsi Manas Mandir, Senapati Hanuman Temple, Kaudi Mata Temple, and of course Sankat Mochan.

Veda / Skanda Purana Connection

This section gathers the scriptural references and relationships of the Durga Temple with Vedic or Puranic (especially Skanda Purana) texts.

- The Skanda Purana contains a section called Kashi Khand, which narrates the legends of Kashi (Varanasi) including tales of Durga, her dwelling, her battles, and the importance of the goddess in guarding Kashi.
- According to the Devi Bhagavata Purana (referred in Skanda Purana/Kashi Khand or parallel Puranic tradition), the story of Sudarshana and Shashikala is established, along with the Goddess Durga intervening to protect Kashi.
- On the subject of Kushmanda, scriptures describe her as the fourth form of Navadurga. Her name is derived from Ku = little, Ushma = energy or warmth, Anda = egg, meaning “she who creates the cosmic egg / universe”.
- Kushmanda is associated with certain mantras, offerings, and symbolisms in Puranic and devotional texts: she is worshipped on the fourth day of Navratri, depicted with eight arms, rides on a lion, holds weapons, rosary, perhaps jars of elixir, etc.
- There is also mention in Skanda Purana of the Vinayakas of Kashi (fifty-six Vinayakas) called Kūṣmāṇḍa / Kūṣmāṇḍavināyaka located in the sacred geography of Kasi-mandala.

Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple — The “Reliever of Troubles” of Varanasi

Nestled in the Lanka area on the bank of the Assi River (now reduced to a nallah), the Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple is one of Varanasi’s most beloved shrines. Known also among locals as the Monkey Temple for its many resident monkeys, this temple serves not only as a place of worship but as a peaceful refuge amid the bustle of Banaras.

Sankat Mochan means “one who removes crises, troubles, and pain,” and every month, lakhs of devotees visit seeking relief from their problems.

History & Legend

- The temple traces its founding to the 16th century when the saint-poet Goswami Tulsidas, author of the Ramcharitamanas, had a vision of Lord Hanuman at this very spot. The present temple stands where Hanuman is said to have appeared to Tulsidas.

- An old story tells that Tulsidas, disappointed at not meeting the divine, flung his water pot in frustration; it fell upon a dead tree. That event pleased a thirsty spirit, who appeared, offered him one wish, and upon hearing that Tulsidas wished to meet Lord Rama, suggested Hanuman as the mediator, because Hanuman “never skips Ram Katha” (the telling of Lord Rama’s story).
- Over time, the temple complex was expanded. Notably, Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya contributed to its enlargement, giving it much of its present layout.

Spiritual & Cultural Significance

- Devotees flock here especially on Tuesdays and Saturdays, believing Hanuman’s grace helps relieve planetary afflictions—particularly those involving Shani (Saturn) and Mangal (Mars).
- It is believed that Tulsidas composed significant portions of the Ramcharitamanas while staying within or near this temple’s precincts.
- The temple also preserves a fig tree under which many verses of Ramcharitamanas are said to have been written. This tree is considered sacred.

Events, Rituals & Festivals

- Hanuman Jayanti is celebrated with processions, special prayers, and Ram Katha recitations.
- The Sankat Mochan Music Festival is a major cultural event held annually in the temple grounds, featuring classical music artists.

Today: Management & Social Role

- The temple is managed by its Mahant; currently Prof. Vishwambhar Nath Mishra is the Mahant.
- The Sankat Mochan Foundation was established in 1982 by Veer Bhadra Mishra, who was also a Mahant. This foundation works towards cleaning and protecting the Ganga among other social and environmental projects.

Veda / Purāṇa Connection

Here is what is known (or believed / speculated) about connections of the temple with Vedic texts or Purāṇic lore:

- While there is no clear citation in the Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva) that names this specific temple, the temple is deeply embedded in the Purāṇic-Bhakti tradition via Tulsidas and the Ramcharitamanas. The Ramcharitamanas is not part of the classical four Vedas, but is considered a sacred text in North India especially among Vaishnavas and Rama devotees.

- The temple's founding legend (Tulsidas's vision of Hanuman) resonates with themes common in the Bhakti movement, which borrowed from Purāṇic and Itihāsa (Ramayana) sources.
- In Purāṇas like those recounting the story of Lord Rama and Hanuman (for example, Valmiki Ramayana, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, etc.), Hanuman is repeatedly characterized as Sankat Mochan—remover of troubles—especially for devotees. While those texts may not mention this temple's name, the ideology aligns strongly: worship of Hanuman to alleviate fear, suffering, planetary affliction, etc.
- Some devotees claim that Sundar Kāṇḍa recitations (part of the Ramayana) and Ram Katha (stories of Rama) which happen regularly here form part of timeless Purāṇic / Itihāsa tradition. Though not a direct Vedic reference, these activities are part of living oral transmission of ancient sacred literature.
- There is also the Hanuman Aashtak devoted to Sankat Mochan Hanuman (eight-verse devotional prayer), widely recited by devotees here. While authorship is attributed to Goswami Tulsidas or his tradition, it reflects the devotional / Purāṇic tradition more than the Vedas in the strict sense.

Annapurna Temple – Goddess of Nourishment in Kashi

The Annapurna Mandir in Varanasi, located in the lane near Visheshwarganj and adjacent to the revered Kashi Vishwanath Temple, is dedicated to Goddess Annapurna — the Divine Mother who ensures that her devotees are never deprived of food. With a golden ladle in one hand and a bowl of rice in the other, she is worshipped as the provider of nourishment and sustenance. The name itself holds meaning: Anna means food, while Purna means fullness or completeness. As a form of Goddess Parvati, she plays an essential role in the spiritual and mythological fabric of Kashi (Varanasi).

Key Features & Administration

- The Annapurna Devi Mandir was built in 1729 A.D. by the Maratha ruler Peshwa Baji Rao I, in the Nagara architectural style.
- Within its large pillared sanctum are two idols of the Goddess: one brass, available for darshan every day, and another gold, shown to devotees only once annually on Annakut (the day after Diwali).
- The temple design follows the Panchayatana layout, meaning there are subsidiary shrines too — dedicated to deities like Ganesha, Kubera, Surya, Yantreshwar Mahadev, Satyanarayan, and Hanuman among them.

Beliefs

- One popular legend says that Parvati, seeking to restore her fair form (Gauri) after a disagreement with Shiva, was instructed by Shiva to distribute food in Varanasi. Adopting the form of Annapurna, she provided nourishment in the holy city.
- Another telling is that Shiva once declared that everything, including food, is maya (illusion). Disturbed by this, Parvati made all food vanish, causing suffering. Realizing the importance of sustenance, Shiva eventually begged Parvati at her door. Parvati then relented, feeding the world and setting up her kitchen in Varanasi. It is through this myth that Annapurna is celebrated as essential to life and well-being.

Festivals, Rituals & Access

- Annakut (the day after Diwali) is the most important festival for the temple. On this day, the golden idol is unveiled for public worship, and special offerings (Annakut coins) are distributed to devotees.
- During Navratri (in both October and April), the temple receives large crowds for special pujas.
- The temple premises are maintained by the Kashi Annapurna Annakshetra Trust, which also runs social service activities: free food (annadaan), elderly care, medical clinics, education, and more.
- The temple's location: House No. D-9/1, Vishwanath Gali, roughly 15 meters north-west of Kashi Vishwanath Temple. It is about 5 km from Varanasi Junction railway station.

Veda / Purāṇa Connection

Here is what can be gathered from Purāṇic / Paurāṇic (and related) sources, and what is not explicitly found, to give better understanding and possible links:

- The temple is not clearly named in the major Vedas (Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, Atharvaveda). There are no direct references in those texts that mention “Annapurna Temple, Varanasi” by that name.
- However, the Skanda Purāṇa, especially the Kashi Khand section, is rich in narratives about Kashi (Varanasi) and its deities. It mentions the spiritual greatness of Kashi, its temples, and the divine family of Shiva and his consort in multiple forms. The temple trust website for Annapurna Temple states that as per Skanda Purāṇa, “as long as Kashi exists, Lord Vishwanath (Shiva) and Goddess Annapurna have influence throughout the world.”
- There is mention in some devotional literature (and blogs quoting Kashi Khand) that Annapurna (also called Bhavani Gauri in older tradition) is considered one of the forms of Parvati residing in Kashi. Over time, Annapurna came to be specifically worshipped as the Goddess who nourishes, while Bhavani Gauri became less invoked in that specific role.
- Some texts/legends say that the worship of Annapurna with certain practices (e.g. offering food, annadan) is especially meritorious in Kashi, and that Annapurna is called the queen of Kashi — acting as complement (Shakti) to Kashi Vishwanath.

Kaal Bhairav Temple — The Kotwal (Guardian) of Kashi

वाराणस्यां भैरवः देव ...

The ancient śloka common among the people of Kashi praises Kaal Bhairav — fierce in appearance yet compassionate — whose very presence is believed to dissolve sins. He occupies a unique place in Varanasi's spiritual geography, embodying Shiva's role as destroyer and protector.

Legendary Origins

- A cosmic debate once flared between Brahma (the Creator) and Vishnu (the Preserver) over who was supreme. A blinding pillar of light (Jyotirlinga), the manifestation of Shiva, emerged. Both tried to find its beginning and end. Vishnu humbly admitted defeat; Brahma did not. His arrogance enraged Shiva. From his matted locks, Shiva created a fierce being — Kaal Bhairav — who cut off Brahma's fifth head.
- Since that act was Brahmahātya (sin of killing a Brahmin), the severed head stuck to Bhairav's hand. He wandered the cosmos seeking atonement. It was only upon reaching Kashi that the sin was finally absolved — where the Brahma's head fell at what became known as Kapal Mochan Tīrtha. In Kashi, Bhairav was freed of Brahmahātya and ordained to remain as the Kotwal of the city — the guardian and keeper of order.

Other Shrines & Worship

- Within the temple complex are smaller shrines to Navagraha (nine planets), Goddess Durga, Hanuman, and Ganesha.
- Rituals often include offerings like til (sesame seeds), mustard oil, flowers, sweets. On special occasions, some worshippers also offer alcohol, in line with certain local tantric traditions associated with Bhairava worship.

Festivals & Timings

- Major festivals: Bhairava Ashtami, Mahashivratri, Annakut. Weekly auspicious days include Tuesday and Sunday.
- Daily rituals include Mangala Aarti, Sandhya Aarti, Shayan (night) Aarti, etc. The temple opens early morning and closes late in the evening, with midday break in summer & winter.

Veda / Purāṇa Connection

Here are what sources say (and what is known / uncertain) about connections between the Kaal Bhairav Temple / Bhairav legend and Vedic or Purāṇic literature, especially Skanda Purāṇa / Kashi Khand:

- The Skanda Purāṇa, especially the Kashi Khand section, is among the primary Purāṇic sources that narrate many stories about Varanasi. It provides legends of its deities, gods, and

sacred places. The tale of Kaal Bhairav — cutting Brahma's head, wandering with the sin, being freed in Kashi — appears in summaries of Kashi Khand.

- The Kashi Khand describes how when Brahma's arrogance grew, Shiva appeared in the form of Bhairava; this form then punished Brahma by cutting his head. The place where the sin is relieved (i.e. Kapal Mochan) is also tied to Kashi in these texts. Thus, the legends associated with Kaal Bhairav are considered to have scriptural backing in the Purāṇas.
- Although there is no explicit mention in the four Vedas (Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, Atharvaveda) of the Kaal Bhairav temple structure itself, the Vedas do contain hymns and mantras invoking aspects of Shiva, time, death, protection (which are thematically related). The temple and legend draw from the broader Vedic–Purāṇic Shaiva tradition.
- The Kashi Mahatmya (part of Kashi Khand) is said to extol Kashi as the place where Shiva's light shines, where sanctity is supreme, and being a tirtha where sinners are relieved. Bhairav, as the guardian who removes sins, fits this Purāṇic vision of Kashi's role as a place of liberation.

Shri Kashi Vishwanath — The Sacred Jyotirlinga of Varanasi

Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple is one of the most venerated shrines in India. It hosts one of the twelve Jyotirlingas, the self-manifested lingams of Lord Shiva. A mere glimpse of this Jyotirlinga is believed to wash away sins and purify the soul.

Historical Background

- The temple has gone through many cycles of destruction and reconstruction over centuries, especially between 1194 AD and 1777 AD.
- In 1777, Queen Ahilya Bai Holkar of Indore built the current main structure.
- The temple also features in many traditional legends; one says Lord Brahma performed the Dashashwamedh Yajna (ten-horse sacrifice) at Dashashwamedh Ghat, which lies close to the temple. This gives additional mythic significance to the location.

Kashi Vishwanath Corridor Project

To improve the pilgrimage experience, a project called the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor was launched:

- The corridor covers about 5.5 acres and includes a direct route (a four-lane pathway) connecting the temple premises to the Ganges (the ghats), so devotees can move more easily between the temple and the river.
- Phase-1 cost was about ₹339 crore.
- During construction, over 300 properties around the temple were acquired, and more than 1,400 shopkeepers, tenants, and homeowners were relocated/rehabilitated.
- Approximately 40 ancient temples were rediscovered during the project, and efforts were made to restore them without altering their original structures.

- The corridor includes modern amenities for pilgrims: better access, wider walking paths, museum/gallery spaces, tourist facilitation centres, viewing galleries and improved connectivity with the river.

Veda / Purāṇa Connection

This section discusses what is known (from authoritative Purāṇic sources) about Shri Kashi Vishwanath's place in scriptural literature, especially the Skanda Purāṇa / Kashi Khand, and related texts.

- The Skanda Purāṇa contains a section called Kashi Khand (or Kāśī Khaṇḍa), which dedicates many chapters to describing the city of Kashi (Varanasi), its sacred geography, temples, deity-stories, pilgrimages, etc.
- According to Kashi Khand, there were once 1,099 temples in Kashi, among which 513 were dedicated to Shiva. The text also refers to the temple of Vishvanath, describing its walls, mandapas (halls), and sanctum.
- Skanda Purāṇa's estimate is that the "Kashi territory" is the grand spiritual zone that includes many sacred tirthas (pilgrimage spots) between rivers Varana and Asī, and that Kashi (sometimes referred to synonymously with Avimukta) has a central place in the Shaiva tradition.
- Some sources note that the original temple was called Moksha Lakshmi Vilas, and that it had five mandapas: Jnana Mandapa (east), Ranga Mandapa (west), Aishwarya Mandapa (north), Mukti Mandapa (south), and the garbhagriha (sanctum) in the center for the lingam.

Shri Kardameshwar Mahadev Temple — The Ancient Survivor of Kashi

Kardameshwar Mahadev Temple, located near Kandwa Pokhra in Varanasi, is one of the few temples that withstood the Mughal destructions of the 17th century. The temple's walls still display beautifully carved figures of dancers, musicians, serpents, and mythical creatures—sculptures dating back to the 6th-7th century.

It is recognized as an archaeological monument under the U.P. Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Preservation Act, 1956.

History, Architecture & Legends

- **Origins & Age:** The original structure is believed to have been built in the 6th-7th century, likely during Gupta times. Over time, various dynasties, including the Gahadavalas, made restorations and additions.
- **Architecture:** The temple features Gupta-style sculptures (hair, garment carving, figure-proportions) on its external surfaces. The temple appears to follow a pancharatha layout (five-projection plan), with an ardha mandapa (partial hall) and square garbhagriha (sanctum), crowned by an ornate shikhara over it.

- **Water Elements:** A kund or tank known as Kardama Kunda lies beside the temple. Inscriptions suggest a spring / water source in the north-west corner of the sanctum whose water continuously flows over the Shiva lingam.
- **Survival through Destruction:** While many temples of Kashi were destroyed during Mughal invasions (especially in the 16th-17th centuries), Kardameshwar remained intact. One reason is its slightly remote location (once thickly wooded) which offered protection.
- **19th-18th Century Patronage:** The large pond (Kund) at the site was renovated by Rani Bhavani of Bengal (mid-18th century), who also patronised many temple restorations in Varanasi.

Significance & Pilgrimage

- Kardameshwar Mahadev is part of the Panchakroshi Yatra, a pilgrimage route around Varanasi. It is one of the night-halt temples (places pilgrims rest during the Yatra).
- Devotees believe that taking a dip in the Kardama Kunda and performing parikrama (circumambulation) of the temple help in minimizing sins and in spiritual purification.

Protected Status

- The temple is an official protected monument under Uttar Pradesh's laws for preserving ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites.

Veda / Purāṇa Connection

Here is what is known from Purāṇic literature and local tradition about the temple's ties to scriptures such as Skanda Purāṇa / Kashi Khand:

- **Mention in the Kashi Khand of Skanda Purāṇa:** Kardameshwar Temple is explicitly named in Kashi Khanda of the Skanda Purāṇa. That shows its antiquity and traditional importance in the sacred geography of Varanasi.
- **Legend of Lord Rama and Brahmahātya (sin of killing a Brahmin):** One legend says that after killing Ravana, Rama carried the sin of brahmahatya. Sage Vashistha advised him that visiting Kardameshwar Mahadev Temple, dipping in the Kandwa Sarovar (pond), and circumambulating the Shiva Linga along with his family would absolve him of the sin. This story is told in Kashi Khanda.
- **Rishi Kardam's Tapasya:** The name "Kardameshwar" comes from Rishi Kardam, who is said to have performed severe austerities (tapas) here for thousands of years. It is said that tears of joy from his penance formed the pool in front of the temple. He is also said to have been granted youth by Lord Shiva after bathing in the kund. These legends are preserved in local Puranic tradition and in the commentaries/local stories based on Skanda Purāṇa's Kashi Khanda.

Vishalakshi Devi Temple — The Shakti of Varanasi

Vishalakshi Devi Temple, also known as Vishalakshi Gauri Temple or Manikarnika Vishalakshi, is one of the ancient and sacred Shakti Peeths located at Mir Ghat, near Manikarnika in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. The temple is dedicated to the Shakti form of Goddess Sati. According to the lore, the earring (kundala) from Sati's right ear fell here, which is why the goddess is also called Manikarni Devi.

In the main sanctum sanctorum of the temple, the merit and power of Shakti are worshipped in the form of Vishalakshi Devi, while her counterpart Bhairav is worshiped as Kaal Bhairav.

Location, Architecture & Timings

- **Where:** The temple is situated at Mir Ghat (Kashi Lahori Tola), close to Manikarnika Ghat and fairly near to Kashi Vishwanath Temple.
- **Temple Structure:** The current building was constructed in 1893 by the Nattukottai Nagarathar community (a mercantile group from Tamil Nadu) in a style that shows some influence of Dravidian architecture, though it blends with local styles.
- **Deities:** There are typically two idols in the sanctum: a smaller black-stone idol known as Adi Vishalakshi (older) at the back, and a taller idol installed later.
- **Timings:** Open every day. Morning hours start around 4:30 AM, and evening darshan resumes at about 5:00 PM till approximately 10:00-11:00 PM.

Significance & Worship Practices

- **As one of the 51 Shakti Peeths,** the temple is part of the sacred network of sites where parts of Goddess Sati's body are believed to have fallen. Vishalakshi is the presiding Shakti here.
- **Devotees believe** worship at this temple bestows blessings of beauty, prosperity, and relief from sorrows. Many unmarried girls come here seeking a good spouse; childless couples pray for children.
- **Festivals:** The annual festival of Kajali Teej (in Bhadrapada) is celebrated with special pujas. Navratri (both in Chaitra and in Sharadiya) sees high attendance. On the fifth day of Navratri, many devotees visit this temple as Vishalakshi is considered one of the forms of the Navadurga / nine Gauris.

Veda / Purāṇa Connection

Here are what scriptures and traditional texts indicate about Vishalakshi Temple, especially from Skanda Purāṇa / Kashi Khand and related Purāṇas:

- **The Skanda Purāṇa,** particularly in its Kashi Khand section, mentions the temple of Vishalakshi at Mir Ghat. It speaks of Vishalakshi as one of the Navadurga / nine Gauri forms, and mandates (vidhi) worship of Vishalakshi Mata.
- **In these Purāṇic stories,** there is an episode involving Maharishi Vyasa who curses the people of Varanasi for neglecting the offering of food. In response, Vishalakshi appears

disguised as a housewife to provide food to Vyasa, showing her power to sustain even sages. Some texts equate her early identity with Annapurna in this regard.

- The temple is also referred in lists of Shakti Peeths in Purāṇas and Tantras, where the location where the earring (or ornament) fell is described. Because the ear ornament of Sati fell here, this place is considered sacred. The term Manikarnika (meaning “ear ornament” or “ear jewel”) is used in connection with this temple site and the ghat area.

- Furthermore, in Kashi Khand, Vishalakshi is associated with Kashi Vishwanath (Shiva’s form in Kashi). There are shlokas in which Shiva is said to grant boons via Vishalakshi. Also, some texts say that before completing a pilgrimage (Kashi Nivās / Kashi Yatra), devotees should have darshan of Vishalakshi Devi to make the pilgrimage complete.