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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### BANARAS: A PARALLEL SPACE OF THE COSMIC UNIVERSE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO ARCHITECTURE

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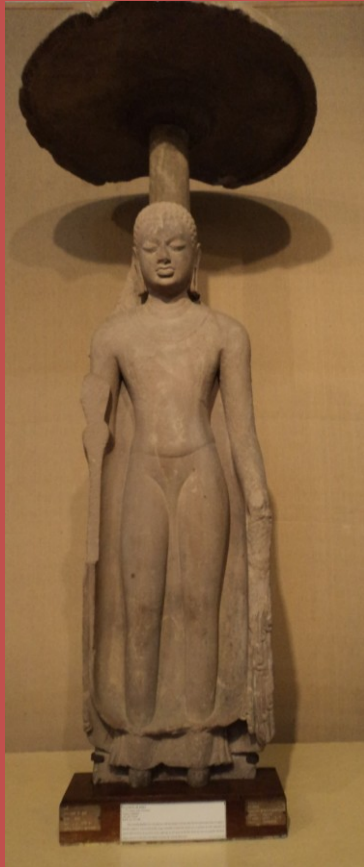
#### Abstract

From its prominent position on the river Ganges, Banaras has borne testimony to a flourishing civilization and the many socio-political turmoil associated with a thriving territory from the ancient kingdoms of Aryans with its mention in Ramayana to the combats of medieval rulers of Mauryan and Gupta dynasty and the never ceasing instability during the dominance of Muslim and British regime.[1] The historical unrest has vanished and the city with its inhabitants of “grin-and-bear-it” attitude; endured every phase of this turmoil and adapted to it and commemorated every such change in their stories and culture. Every paradigm shift gave Banaras its own unique Art and Culture which it (Banaras) has assimilated and made it its very own signature be it Food, Fabric, Jewellery, Lifestyle, Mode of communication, Weapons, Architecture, Mythology, Tales, Culture, Cult, Art and much more. The city’s divine image, its elaborate traditional rituals, its prodigious display of the hand-in-hand existence of art and the mundane activities of life. All give it a peculiar feel, though the city has tried to keep pace with time, it has modernized or commercialised but what has stayed with time is what satiates the quench of a mystic or an explorer of Art and Culture. This write up here is an attempt to bring to words the connection between what the oldest civilizations or cults have left to enrich the Art & culture or other-way-round, how by exploring the existing we are able to get a glimpse into the glorious past that has passed and enriched India. This manuscript is a study and construal of Varanasi from the perspective of one who is close enough to the Hindu tradition to see its religious significance and also close enough to art, design and academics to know the understanding that Arts and Varanasi might pose. The journey towards the finalization of this script started with mapping the city and searching for the temples mentioned in various texts and my work is based on two primary sources: the city itself with its multitude of temples, its seasons of pilgrimage, the ‘Akharas’, voluminous literature on Banaras and its pandas and lay interpreters.

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*From being imagined to imaged*



### **Introduction:-**

It is a city that has witnessed the 'Divine Drama' it never belonged to a ruler the city belongs to Shiv in its very essence . It has Imagined and imaged God his divine play in thousand ways . It is here that all the Hindu Gods have emerged from the shadows into bold relief. **From being Imagined to Imaged in bold relief**



“Bishop Reginald Heber , Anglican Bishop of Calcutta’s account :No Europeans stays in the town , nor are the streets wide enough for a wheel carriage some alleys so crowded , so narrow , and so winding , that even a tonjon passed with much difficulty .

The streets are considerably less than the ground- floors of the homes, which have mostly arched rows in front, with little shops behind them .



**Above these the houses are richly embellished with verandahs , galleries , projecting orient windows and very broad overhanging eaves, supported by carved brackets .”[2]**

**LOLARK** not only the lofty houses the city has some unique architecture. We are conditioned to look up at architecture and not down into it and one gets stunned to see Lolark at Assi Gha. The ground falls away and one stares deep into the man-made chasm with a parade of ornate columns descending deep into the earth.

The structure of the city Varanasi is somehow too much for the mind to comprehend as when the ghats seem to be on levelled ground and on top of these steps moves the unceasing worldly drama of vitality and mortality . You climb the steps of the ghats to see cows and cars moving above those steps , its bizarre !!! and for a second your are struck with the illusion of a city above a city.

**Mandala** : If one ever comes across the spiritual Asian art they will definitely encountered a mandala. Mandala is Sanskrit for a discoid or circular object . It is design with measured geometric patterns that holds a great deal of significance for Hindu and Buddhist cultures. Mandalas are used for meditation and prayers notably in South Asian Countries and are believed to represent different aspects of the universe.

In addition to placing the historical Buddha's lifetime in a relatively explicit time-frame between the middle of the fifth century and the beginning of the fourth century BCE, it is also possible to locate hagio- graphical events memorialized in Buddhist literature, inscriptions, monuments, and art in a geographical network of sacred sites similar such Mandala can be located on the walls of Sankatha Devi Mandir, Varanasi premises since times immemorial (Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks, Jason Neelis),[3]



Mandala in Buddhist culture.

## LOLARK at Assi Ghar, Varanasi





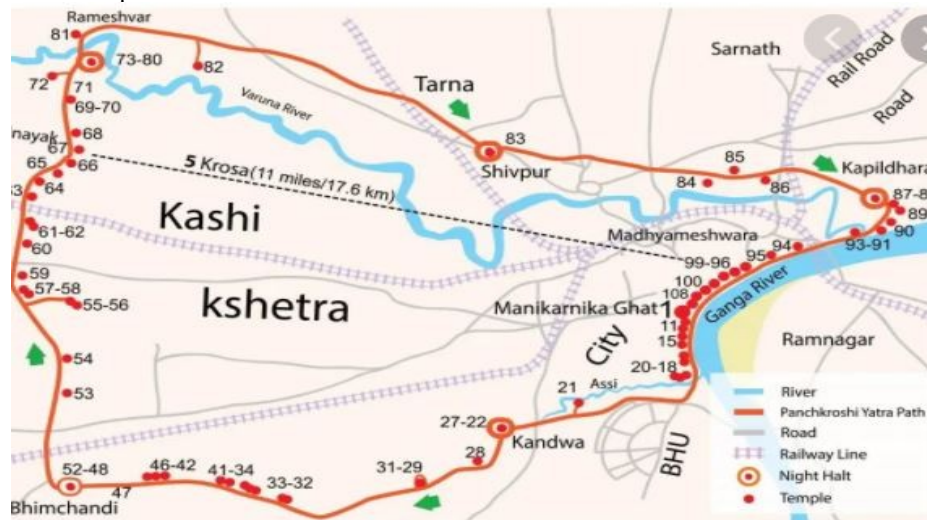
Mandala in Sankatha Devi Mandir, Varanasi premises since times immemorial.

In the Hindu culture it is believed that one should gain knowledge by reading all the holy scriptures i.e. the Vedas **Or** benefit from their teachings by cramming few mantras meaning that the essence of the whole of the sacred Vedas may be packed in a single powerful mantra **Or** the whole of the assemblage of all the Gods can be evoked in a single multi-armed deity **Or** the whole of the universe in a compact form may be depicted in the "Sacred Circle" of a cosmic map called a Mandala .

**Kashi is that geographical Mandala that condenses the whole of India into a great "Sacred Circle"**. It has Kedareshwar Mandir from far North to a place called Lanka in far South .

Varanasi has its center at the Madyameshwara temple meaning "Lord of the Center" and the great Panchakroshti [4] Road circles the whole of Kashi . To follow the Panchkroshti Road around Kashi is to circle the world . In the vedas Kashi is the parallel space of that cosmic universe on earth in the geographical form of a city

The sacred route from Kapiladhara to Kashi.



**Bharat Mata Mandir** it was inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi. It is the only temple where Bharat Mata is worshipped as a deity and it is her personal temple where a relief map of India made in marble to symbolise undivided India is made on the floor .

A flight of stairs below this relief map of India leads us to a slit in the wall and when seen from there we can see the mountains, planes , ranges and oceans all made to the scale . If water is poured on this map then it flows in the actual direction for west flowing rivers and east flowing rivers .



In the chapters of A relook at the observatory at Varanasi (B.S. Shylaja, 2011) he has tried to bring forth an important point that in its architecture which is way different from the observatories at Delhi, Jaipur and Ujjain in terms that here is a possibility of two of the lesser known instruments at the observatory at Varanasi. One is perhaps a combination of two ideas and for the other, only a description by Aryabhata and other astronomers is available. This report therefore takes a new look at two instruments at the observatory in Varanasi. The name Chakra Yantra may be a misnomer and actually it is a Bhagana Yantra. The unidentified instrument may be a remnant of Dhruvabhramaka Yantra, meant to mark the time in the night [5].



These are the only remains of the Sharqis standing at Kangura Masjid at Banaras , the rest having been demolished by Sikandar Lodhi; all are of stone, largely pillaged from Hindu temples, and cement, the work of Hindu craftsmen. Echoes of the characteristic style of the capital (Delhi) occur in other places within Banaras [6]



The narrow lanes of Banaras were also a strategic decision to fight the invasions they were made so narrow that only one horse could pass through them and the passage of a chariots would be completely impossible and during foreign invasions the inhabitants as a combat measure could pour hot oil on the attackers and survive .[7]



In the Kali Age people reap misery as the fruit of their actions.  
 Recognizing that, the Lord created a way to alleviate the suffering.  
 For the express purpose of saving all peoples, that Great Protector  
 manifested himself in this world, wearing the garb of one who begs for food.  
 The Lord Himself extended his immanent dominion across the earth.  
 He appeared as Satya Pīr, the perfection of all phakīrs.  
 Listen one and all and be glad at heart, for your misery will flee,  
 your afflictions will disappear, and happiness will to you accrue.  
 Dviija Ghanarām has composed this sweet song—  
 Now Lord, may you quickly fulfill every heart's dreams and desires.  
 —Ghanarām Cakravartī, Satyanārāyaṇ ras sindhu [8]

Similar structures over the ghats get flooded with Nagas during the holy months some Sadhus stay for a lifetime as it is believed that death at Kashi brings salvation . The carriers of information of the times immemorial , the people of the akharas believe these structures as stables for the ‘ashavas’ , the horses for the Ashwamedha Yajnas



This is the ‘Kirana Nadi’ , the celestial river when it ran on earth in Kashi . The Sadhus of this Akhara have a great belief in its piety and revel in the celestial status of this once flourishing river . Banaras is believed to be the play of life in between Kirana and the Assi . In other words it's his cosmic play that defines the typography of the chandrakar ghats by the banks of river Ganga . It is the city where the lord dwells alongside his consort and that is why this city is home to an extraordinary ritual of wedding ceremony of Shiva and Parvati brought to life in an annual festival on Shivratri during the month of April/May .[9]



Infinite amount of literature can be written with Banaras and art as subject because as ancient as the city is there is record of art *at every footprint* and a multitude of perspectives still awaiting elucidation. There are numerous many facts or tales that have still not been scripted in any periodicals. Here in this manuscript I have tried to bring forth some of the facts or still unscripted tales from some lay interpreters, sadhus from kharas and pandas about Kirana Nadi, Astabals, Mandals and the lofty structures within those meandering narrow lanes that have a story of art in *every footprint*.

The article is by Kumar Vikas, Associate Professor at National Institute of Fashion Technology, for more than a decade and has been a Centre Co-ordinator for Shillong and Patna for Fashion Design and Fashion Communication Departments.

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