

Design Resource

Culture, City and Crafts of Varanasi

Life Style in Uttar Pradesh

by

Prof. Bibhudutta Baral, Aakash Sharma and

Amulya S.

NID Campus, Bengaluru

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/culture-city-and-crafts-varanasi>



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3. Ganga and Ghats
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Introduction

Varanasi is one of the old and holy cities situated in the banks of the river Ganga for about three thousand years of history and civilization. The place has got other names like Kashi and Benaras or Banaras. Varanasi is described in several poetic adjectives like “The city of temples”, “The holy city of India”, “The religious capital of India”, “The city of learning” and “The cultural capital of India”. The name of the city Varanasi derived by two holy tributary rivers flowing into the River Ganga “Assi” and “Varuna”. Ganga River and their Ghats are one of the prominent must visit places in Varanasi; it is a stretch about 2.5 miles. It is the land of spirituality and origins of many religions, dharma and movements like Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Bhakti Movement and many more. It is been told that Lord Shiva found and resided in the Varanasi city, thus in “Mahabharat” pandavas went to Kashi in search of Lord Shiva to atone the sins committed in the War of Kurukshetra. Varanasi has one of the famous twelve Jyotirlinga Visvanatha temples at the banks of the River Ganga. It is one of the seven holiest cities in India. Varanasi is the co-existing city of the past and present, eternity and continuousness. Shaivism and Vaishnaviam have cohabited in Varanasi cordially. It is also a place where Buddha first preached his sermon after enlightenment. Ayurveda is originated from Varanasi and has constructed a strong base for the modern medical sciences. Many philosophers and great personalities like Gautama Buddha, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Munshi Premchand, Ramanuja, Ravidas, Tulsi Das, Mahavira, Kabir, Patanjali, Rajan-Sajan Mishra and Jhansi Rani Lakshmi Bai took birth in this beautiful city.

Varanasi is one of the old luminous cities, which is also a successful industrial city, a place of knowledge, philosophy, education, culture, music and Indian traditional arts and crafts. Industries in fine silks, silver and gold is said to be famous and renowned in their unique and purity in work.



Girija Ghar Chauraha a very prominent street which leads to “Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple”, River Ganga and to the Ganga Ghats.

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Gullies of old interior Varanasi city.

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A basic transportation Cycle Rickshaw commonly used in the city.



Sugarcane sold on the occasion of Chhath pooja.

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A busy and an important lane “Dashashwamedh Ghat Road” in Varanasi.

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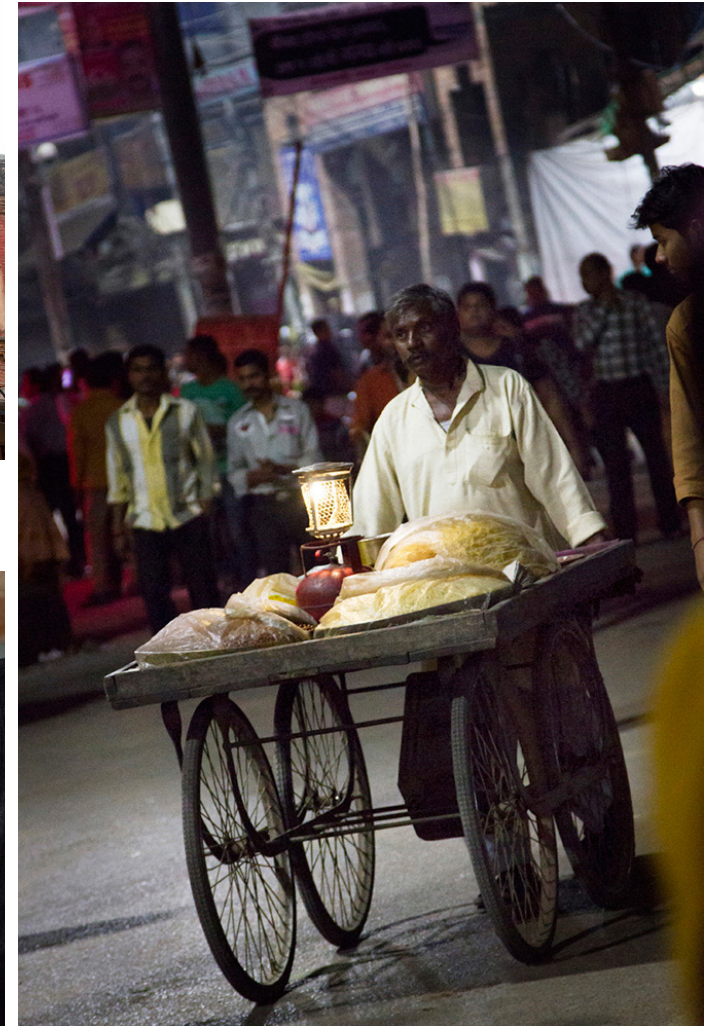
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Old Architectural Building in Varanasi.



Animals most noticed around on the streets and gullies of Varanasi.



A typical Chaat peddler with his hand pulled Chaat cart.

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Fruits and Flower garland vendors on the streets in the early mornings.

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A narrow gully with small shops, stalls and homes of Varanasi.



A traditional cityscape of Varanasi and localities.

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Lively and strong Cycle Rickshaw rider.

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Dwar, an entrance made at the time of Mughal Empire with beautiful intricate designs in Mughal style.



A local "Banarasi Pann and Chai shop".



A temple in interiors of Varanasi.

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One of the small red shrines made in the elegance of Peshwas.



One of the old devastated Shrines at Varanasi.

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A milk vendor at the early mornings, selling the milk respectively to the houses.

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History

The evolution of the city took place from the times of Rig Veda, Atharvaveda, Buddhism, Gahadvala dynasty, Mauryan dynasty, Bhakti movement, Sikhism, Mughal dynasty, Maratha Dynasty, Bhumihaar (Brahmin) community and British ruling times. The city came through many struggles and tough times in history by the army of Qutb-din Aibak in 1194 CE who destroyed the actual Vishwanath temple when he won the battle on Raja of Kannauj as a commander of Mohammad Ghori. Later the Gujarati merchant rebuilt the temple during the region of Delhi's Sultan Iltutmish. The temple was demolished again at the time of Hussain Shah Sharqi or Sikandar Lodhi, which was built back by Ahilyabai Holkar Daughter-in-law of Malhar Rao in the year 1780 just to the adjacent of the mosque. Mughal Empire kings like Aurangzeb, ordered the destruction of many temples; and the reconstruction of the city took place at the time of Akbar's kingship of the same kingdom. Ganga Ghats were built at the time of Maratha Empire in 1700 A.D and developed throughout the others kingdoms like Shindes (Scindias), Holkars, Bhonsles and Peshwes (Peshwas).

There are more than thousands of temples in Varanasi out of which three predominant temples are "Sankat Mochan Hanuman", "Kashi Vishwanath Temple" of Lord Shiva and "The Durga Temple" known as Monkeys temple. There are about ten to fifteen mosques with historical significances like Gyanavapi Mosque, Alamgiri Mosque, Bibi Razia, Chaukhamba and many others which were reconstructed out of the Hindu shrines, that once destroyed by the Muslim invaders and rulers.



Entrance gate "Singh Dwar" of a very famous shrine "Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple" from the ghats side.

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A traditional procession of the deities on an auspicious day.



Elegantly built temple for Lord Brihaspati at Varanasi.

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Ganga and Ghats

Ganga river water was said to be pure which contained medicinal properties that helped the humankind in cultivation of good crops, preparation of medicines and many other beneficial purposes. Ganga is the sign of purity where one comes to the river at their old age to wash out all their sins and to attain salvation. She also represents the nectar of immortality by flowing spiritedly. Most of the Hindu dead bodies are cremated in the banks of the river Ganga at Manikarnika ghat and Harischandra ghat to attain moksha and to liberate from the endless cycle of rebirth.

There are eighty-seven Ganga Ghats in Varanasi, in which Dashashwamedh Ghat, Manikarnika Ghat, Harischandra Ghat, Assi Ghat, Kabir Ghat, Lalita Ghat, Scindia Ghat, Chet Singh Ghat, Jain Ghat, Panchganga Ghat, Chaowki Ghat, Ahilya Ghat, Munshi Ghat, Gai Ghat, Tulasidas Ghat, Manasarovara Ghat and Raj Ghat are some of the prominent Ghats among rest of them. Each Ghat has got its own history and purposes. Ghats are built in memory of famous personalities for their contribution to the humankind like Tulsidas who composed an outstanding literary work called Ramacharitamans, which is now a guiding lamp for humanity. Many ghats are allied with folktales or mythologies while many ghats are privately owned. Dashashwamedh Ghat is one of the outstanding ghats that leads to Vishwanath Temple and it is the most active ghat, where many ritual honors occur like “Ganga Aarathi”, “Dev Deepawali”, “Chhath Pooja”, “Ganga Dussehra” and many more. “Ganga Aarathi” is a daily evening ceremonial homage offered to the Goddess Ganga twice a day by Brahmin priests, at Dashashwamedh Ghat; Whereas, special aartis are made on every Tuesdays. It is a ritual of giving homage to Lord Shiva, River Ganga, Surya (Sun), Agni (Fire), and the whole universe. “Dev Deepawali” is a festival of Kartik Purnima (full moon day), which occurs after fifteen days of Diwali festival. This day particularly we get to see huge number of crowd in the ghats. The complete ghats are decorated with lit earthen lamps on all the stone steps along the Goddess Ganga River, Firecrackers are burst, and processions of decorated deities are taken to gullies of Varanasi. It is the belief of people that this day all the gods descend to earth to bathe in Ganges. It is also said that Dashashwamedh Ghat was created by Lord Brahma to welcome Lord Shiva to the city. Dashashwamedh Ghat is the place where Lord Brahma sacrificed ten horses during Dasa – Ashwamedha Yajna performed here. Ghats are built over the steps made of stone slabs, which is leading along the river Ganga. We see lot of tourists and pilgrims in the ghats of Ganga early in the mornings taking a spiritual dip and bath in the river, performing meditation, yoga and witnessing a beautiful sunrise. We also see lots of fishermen fishing and boatmen taking the tourists around the river guiding them towards the stories and history of Ganga and Ghats of Varanasi. The saints and pilgrims perform the ceremonial homage to the river by lighting the diyas and floating it in the river. Sometimes at the ghats or interiors we come across spiritual liberated people around called Aghoris and Naga Sadhus, who are covered with holy ash (cremated body ash) completely on their nude body, they are great devotees of Lord Shiva. They live and work for peace, love and nature, they overcome the taboos and they believe that everything in life is Maya (illusion).

Kashi Vishwanath Temple is one among the reasons for the number of tourists and pilgrims come to Varanasi. This temple was built very long ago, where it is evident in the Puranas.

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Boats of vary sizes in different colors and locomotives are used in Ganga for the boat rides.

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Siberian birds usually known as Black head gulls are usually seen in the River Ganga.



Holy animals like Cows, Bulls and Buffaloes are generally sighted at the Ghats and Gullies at Varanasi.

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Pilgrims and tourists taking a ride on the boat to mesmerize the beauty of the Ghats and nature from the other side.

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Night sight of Rana Mahala Ghat, a Rajasthani Architecture from the boat.



The two sides of the goddess River Ganga.

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Local folks like Priests, small stall vendors and boatmen are sighted the most at the ghats.

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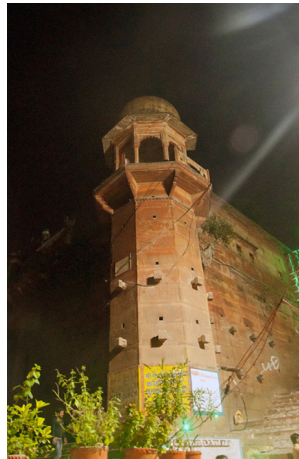
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Ganga Ghats were built at the times of Marathas, Shindes and Peshwas kingdoms.



A wonderful experience of rowing boat along the Ganges.



Ganga Ghats magnificently standing strong at the banks of River Ganga.

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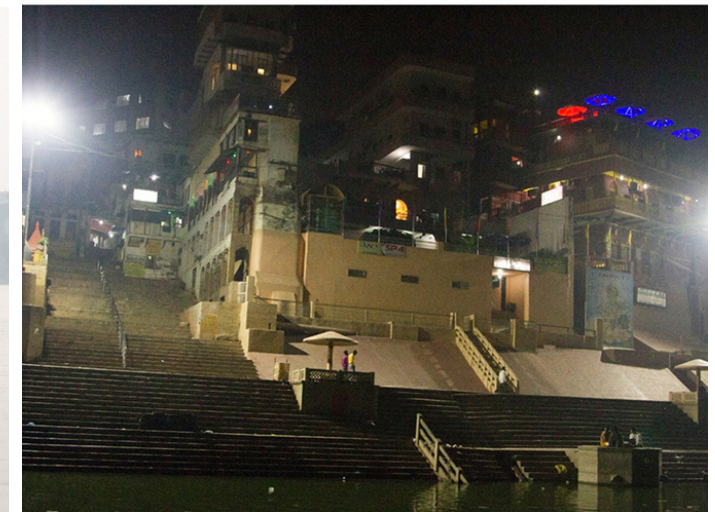
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Boatmen feeding some munchies to the birds to entice tourists.



A nighttime view of the renovated Ghats into cafes and restaurants.

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Shrines and stairs along the banks of River Ganga.

A sight of the Ghats at the early peaceful mornings and the sunset evenings.

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A lot of wall art like Mural Painting, Graffiti is witnessed on the walls of the Ghats.

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A newly painted boat on the occasion of Dev Deepawali.



Rested rowing boats parked at the end of the river.

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Man Mandir Ghat is one of the gigantic buildings with the beautiful ornamental carvings on the windows.



Manikarnika Ghat is one of the Ghats, where cremating of Hindu dead bodies takes place.

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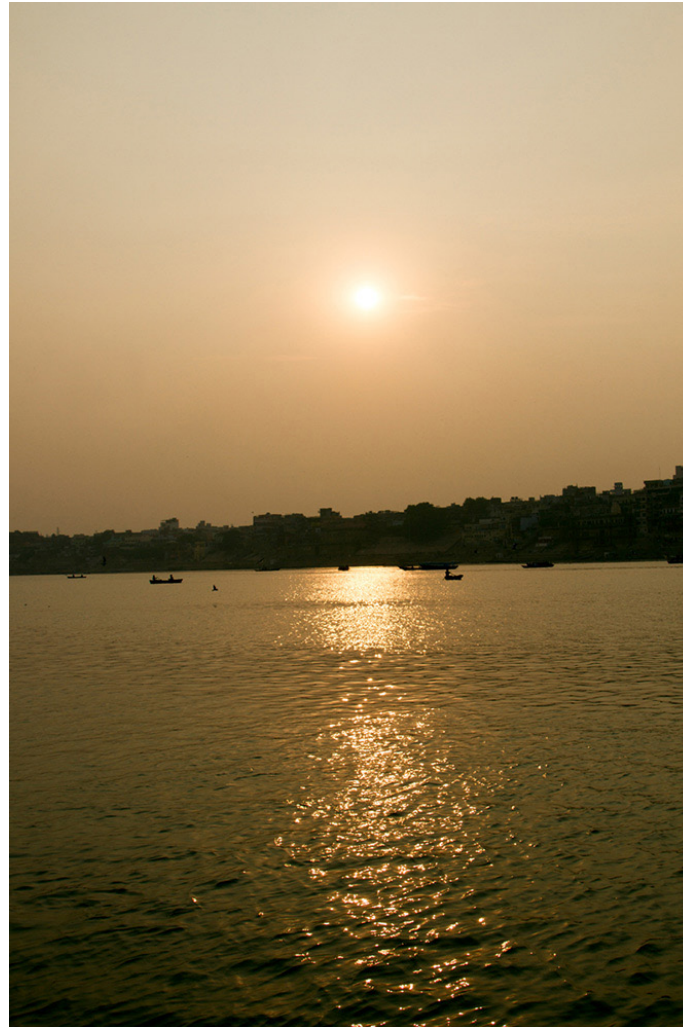
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A beautiful sight of sunset from the opposite banks of the Ghats.



Devotees and pilgrims performing homage and taking a spiritual dip in the Goddess River Ganga.



Subah-e-Banaras, sight of people talking bath, performing rituals, worshipping the Sun and washing clothes.

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Culture and Heritage

Ganga river water was said to be pure which contained medicinal properties that helped the humankind in cul- Mahashivarathri is one of the big festivals celebrated in Varanasi and we can view pilgrims rushing to Varanasi on this auspicious day to witness the ritual homage given to Lord Shiva.

Apart from the temples, ghats and Ganga River; Varanasi city has got beautiful culture and atmosphere with people around earning with the tradition of Paan Shops, Cycle Rickshaw, Traditional Puruas (kullad) cup Chai and Food Stalls, Chaat Bhandars, Banaras Sweet Shops, Lassi and Thandai Bars and very famous Banaras Silk Saree Shops. There are also some servicing small stall centers roadsides like massage parlour center and parlour for men. People of Varanasi like loud music and they are fast bike riders. Children and teenagers of the city like flying the kites. It is city concealed with maze of narrow ancient Gullies (Lanes, Streets), old buildings, and new transformations like small continental food shops and stalls of clothes, spices and many more. Since it is said that Lord Shiva has resided in Varanasi we get to see his Vahan (Vehicle) that is sacred Bulls and Cows all over the city wandering, littering and resting.

Varanasi's breakfast plate is filled with Banarasi Kachori with Aloo Subzi and a plate of sweet-syrupy Jalebis. For lunch it is stomach full of Rotis, two Subzis, Flavoured Chawal, Gulab Jamoon and thick Lassi Dahi or Rabri and Malai for desert. There are variety of Banarasi Paan (betel leaves with variety of grated ingredients), which is a must try to taste which is usually eaten to freshen the mouth after having food. There is a famous Bollywood song made on Banaras Paan stared by the renowned Indian actor Mr. Amitabh Bachchan called "Khaikhe paan Banaras-wala". Evenings we see huge crowds front of Chaat Bhandars wanting to eat variety of chats like Tamatar chaat (tomato chaat), Papri chaat, Aloo Tikki, Paani Puri Ke Rakam, Rabri Jalebi, Khatta Meetha Chaat, Chuda Matter, Gulgappa, Samosa Chaat, Palak Papdi chaat, Dahi Bhalle, Dahi Puri, Ghugni Chaat, Gulab Jamoon, Kulfi Faluda and many more which tastes very delicious.

We see a cluster of people dancing in colorful clothes for loud music followed by the groom on the decorated horse. A group of people leading the procession holding fancy, huge lights on their heads to brighten up the atmosphere. It's a celebration ceremony from the groom side before they go to bride's home or the wedding hall for the main wedding ceremony and it is called has Shaadi Baarat. The wedding takes place over night with many rituals and it ends at the banks of river Ganga after taking blessings from the river Goddess Ganga.

Birth of Indian Classical Music is traced back to Vedic period, which is originated from the atmospheric place Varanasi. Music is been considered as "The language of the gods". Lord Shiva was evolved with the embracement of music and dance together. Varanasi is one of the peaceful places for the musicians to emerge with beautiful music. Tulsidas, Surdas, Raidas, Meera and Kabir are few of the musicians who contributed to devotional music, bhajans and made Varanasi a flourishing musical center.

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At the time of Bhakti Movement great saints like Chaitanya and Vallabhacharya brought admiration towards music in Varanasi. Accordingly the Indian Classical music brought unique and varies forms of styles in Musical singing like Dhrupad, Dhamar, Chaturang, Thumri, Dadra, Chaiti, bhairavi, Kajri, Sargam, Kirtan, Ramayan, Hori, Ragmala, Qauwali, Bhajan, Kathagayan and many more. Renowned instrumentalists like Pandit Ravi Shankar (famous sitar player and a Bharat Ratna Awardee), Pandit Vikash Maharaj and Ustad Bismillah Khan (Shehnai Maestro and a Bharat Ratna Awardee) all are sited from Varanasi.



Floating diyas kept for the ceremonial homage (ganga aarthi) and to glide it into River Ganga.



Devotees performing the ceremonial homage (ganga aarthi) and letting it into the river.



A group of priests performing ceremonial homage (Agni pooja) everyday to Lord Shiva, River Ganga, Surya (Sun), Agni (Fire) and the whole universe.



Pilgrims and Disciples taking spiritual dip in River Ganga.

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Devotees in different regimes like being a Sadhu, a businessman and a mother.



Two holy and religious men called Sadhus.



A balloon and toy peddler on the busy streets of Varanasi.

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Dashashwamedh Ghat decorated on the occasion of Dev Deepawali.

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Spiritual men in two different personification of their own like a sadhu and an Aghori.



Manikarnika Ghat , a place were Hindu cremate the dead bodies.

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Innumerable Diyas (Clay lamps) lit on the occasion of Dev Deepawali and Priests performing homage.



A huge number of devotees, pilgrims and tourists taking part in Dev Deepawali celebrations.

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Festive celebration and entertainment oriented sight at Ganga Ghats.



Two Sadhus dedicating their lives to spirituality.

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Festive decoration and celebration at Ganga Ghats.



Ascetic shaiva sadhus called Aghoris.

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Beautiful deity Idols ornamented and decorated with colorful garland.

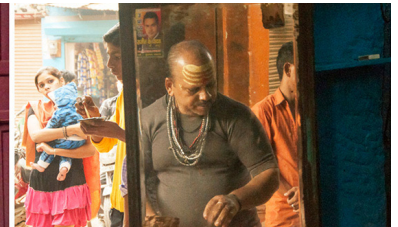


Ceremonial Homage Articles used while doing Ganga aarthi.

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Priests performing the homage with spiritual essence.



Varanasi localities and people in normal day routine.

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A typical ceremonial wedding procession called Shaadi Baarat at Varanasi.



Stage built and decorated with beautiful flowers and stage props upon the River Ganga for the occasional celebration to happen.

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Clay lamps lit all over the Ghats at the time of Dev Deepawali.



Depiction of active participation from people at any age on the day of the occasion.

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All Ghats and shrines well decorated with golden serial lights.



Rangoli made of beautiful bright color powders, flowers and lamps.

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Decorative huge stage props used in enhancing the place.



Chinese Sky Lanterns were also floated into the skies in process of celebrations.

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Astonishing sight of the decorated Ganga Ghats.



Dazzling view of the Ghats from the other sides.



Mesmerizing enhancements made at the Ghats for the occasion of Dev Deepawali.

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Early morning street breakfast Dosa, Masala dosa and Onion dosa.

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Delicious sweets Malai Rabri and Motichur laddu.

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Vegetable stuffed Samosa for evening snacks.



Traditional Puruas or kullad cups for drinking tea (Chai) made with clay and placed it under the sunlight to dry.

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Mouthwatering Snacks and refreshments made and sold on the streets.

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An aluminum teakettle used in making Adrak ki Chai.



Adrak ki Chai (Ginger tea) made and sold in Small Tea stalls and shops.



Hot Sweet syrupy Jalebis and Stuffed Banarasi Kachoris made in Bhandars.

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Education

There is a huge opportunity of learning and gaining knowledge on Hindu shastras, Sanskrit literature, arts, music and science at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi. This university is found by one of the freedom fighters, a great nationalist, a social activist, and educationist with a visualization of growth of knowledge in India called Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya in the year of 1916. Great personalities like Annie Besant, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and many others have supported this initiative for the power of education. Banaras Hindu University is also known as “Temple of Learning”. This place covers around 1300 acres of land. This university has produced great scholars, artists, scientists and great citizens for India.



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Art and Crafts

Varanasi is the place where we find master craftsmen of traditional Banaras saree handloom weavers, brass utensil makers, goldsmiths, silversmiths, terracotta, metal work, Carpet and Durries weavers, Musical Instrument makers and wooden toy makers who have been recognized and appreciated by our honorable Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi. Youngsters of Varanasi are so enthusiastic, energetic and quite liberal.

Art is taken in a different attribute when it comes to the ancient city Varanasi. The lion capital of the Ashokan pillar from Sarnath, the Buddha stupa, toys and terracotta sculptures are some of the discovered artifacts at Rajghat, Varanasi in history Varanasi can be represented has a museum of Indian art and culture. We still see the old traditional antiquated buildings and lifestyle of people in this 21st century, thus the title “Cultural Capital of India”. Varanasi portrays her art on the streets with various co-ordination of forms, like Rajasthani, Mugal and company art on the front walls of the buildings. Wall paintings are spread across the city, which contributes for the beauty of the city. Previously paintings were discovered on the stone blocks and walls of several cave walls in and around the city like Rajgarh region, Gwalior, Manikpur, Singhanpur, Bhopal, Mirzapur and many places.

Varanasi or Banaras word itself correlates to the famous Banarasi Silk Sarees. Silk saree weaving was adopted by the migrant's Gujarati silk weavers. Varanasi is very prosperous in cotton textile industry from ages. They are very popular in typical Varanasi Zari/Zardozi embroidery and Brocade weaving. They are about more than 12 lakh hard working and skillful people associated in the handloom saree weaving cottage industry in Varanasi. Banaras silk has gained demand in the international market.

Wood and Lac Turnery is one of the crafts were the people of Varanasi is so familiar with. In Hindu weddings the grooms apply vermilion powder onto the bride's forehead in the center from the traditional Sindora (Traditional container for vermilion). The Sindora is made out of the eucalyptus wood in lac turnery process. Likewise many new designs of toys, bangles and many designs of containers are crafted.

Wood carving in Varanasi is very special and unique for its amazing detail carving of tiny mythological characters (Ravana, Ram, Krishna and many more), animals, birds, gods and goddess. They look so bright and fancy to display in cabinet. The articles are painted with bright colors and to enhance it black strokes are made.

Repousse is one of the art forms done on the metal sheet. Repousse is nothing but metal sheet decorative engraving to reveal the design relief. This craft is also one of the traditional crafts on Varanasi. Floral and flower motifs are most repeated in this craft. This craft is made on utensils, trays, plates, masks for gods and goddesses, bowls, ornamental doors for temples, ritual utensils and most of all temple accessories.

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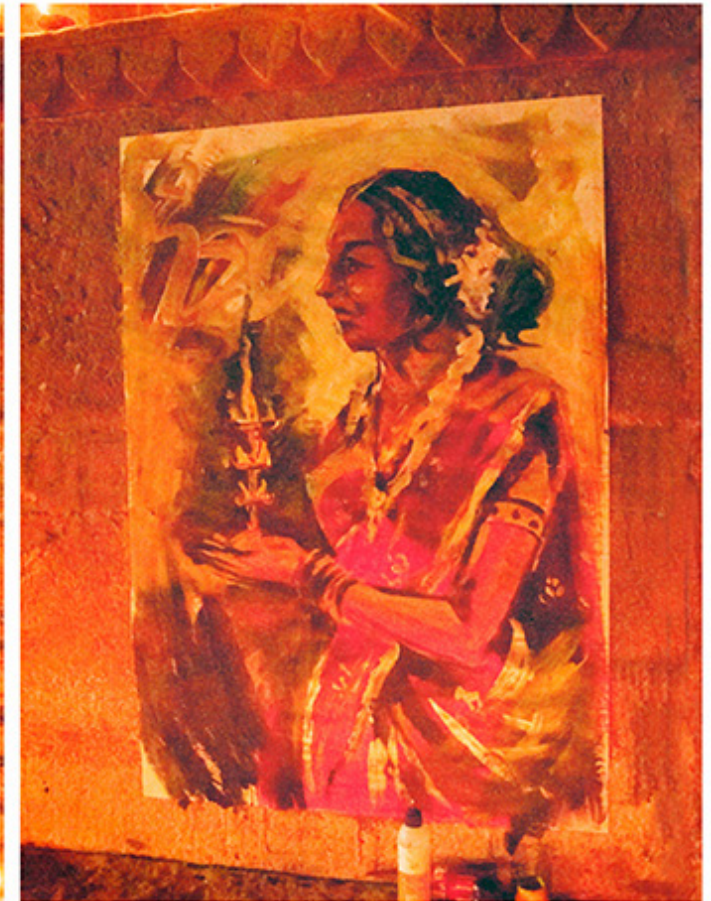
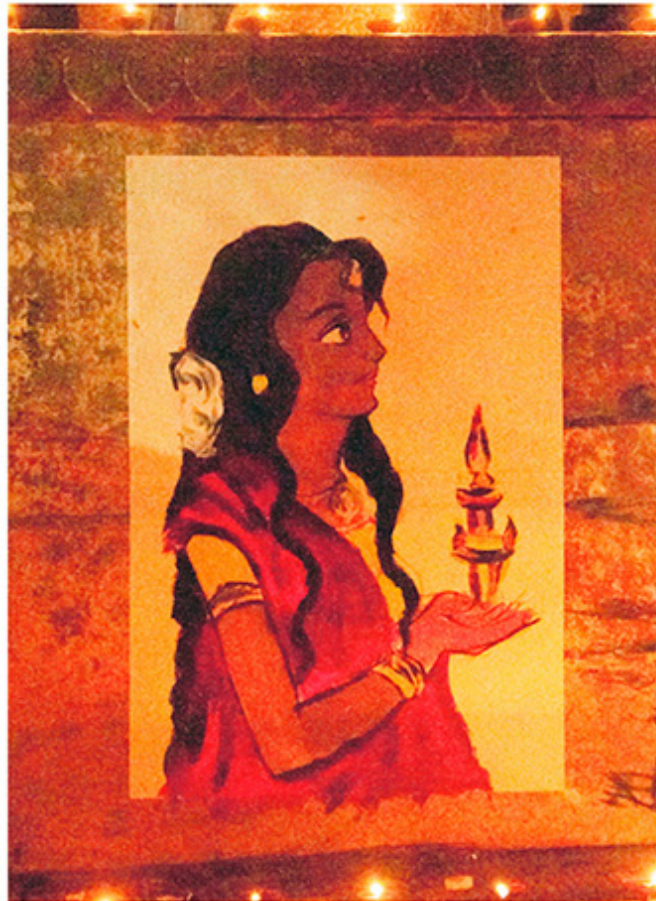
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Carpets and Dhurries of Varanasi are world famous, high quality and most of it is exported to European countries. Wool and silk yarns are used in knotting them on cotton warp base in vertical loom. The knots are in Persian and Tibetan style. There are multiple processes followed through to make one carpet like spinning, dyeing, designing and weaving. Most of the carpet weavers in Varanasi are farmers. This craft initially began at the time of Mughals for prayer rugs and huge carpets to spread it around in the meeting halls.

Meenakari is a form of art in which enamels of bright colors are used in ornamenting the intricately designed metal articles. Many of the jewelry artisans have taken up Meenakari art because of its demand and beauty. The metal base is engraved enough for the bright color enamels to set in place, later it is kept inside the furnace for fusing and hardening the meena. Enamel colours are nothing but metal oxides mixed with a tint (chemicals with color contents) of finely powdered glass where the oxide content controls the shade obtained.



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Video



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