

Design Resource

## Ghats of Varanasi

A Glimpse of Life at the Ghats

by

Prashant Sharma

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<http://www.dsource.in/resource/ghats-varanasi>

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## Introduction

The holy land of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh; also referred to as Banares and Kashi, is the most famous pilgrimage spot for Hindus for hundreds of years. Known as the oldest city, Varanasi is visited by Hindus for the peace of mind and soul and to wash away all the sins. It is the Ghats of River Ganga in Varanasi that complement the concept of divinity.

A Ghat is a series of steps leading down to the river. Varanasi has nearly 100 Ghats, whose steps are leading to the banks of River Ganges. Ghats of Ganga are perhaps the holiest spots of Varanasi. These Ghats are full of pilgrims who come to the place to take a dip in the holy Ganges which is believed to wash away all the sins. It is at the Ghats of Ganga where we Life and Death can be seen together.

Different kinds of people with different reasons, different thoughts and purpose of their visit are seen at the Ghats. If one thinks of spending a day at the Ghats, various kinds of activities can be witnessed. But by the evening, everyone has just one purpose, the 'Ganga Aarti' (prayer). Every evening a large aarti (prayer) called as 'Ganga Aarti' is performed at the main Ghat - Dasaswamedh Ghat.

There are number of temples on the banks of Ganga. Among which 'Kashi Vishwanath Temple', dedicated to Lord Shiva is the most famous one. Situated in Gadauliya, near Dasaswamedh Ghat, it is also a tourist place where people come to rest in peace and feel the spirituality in the air.

Some of the popular Ghats at Varanasi are the Assi Ghat, Dasaswamedh, Manikarnika, Tulsi and Panchganga Ghats among others.

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## Life at the Ghats

If one wishes to spend a day at Ghats, numerous kinds of activities can be witnessed. From people offering prayers to few meditating in peace. Some travelling in boat from one Ghat to another, while some repairing their boats. Whereas, some simply enjoying a cup of tea with music.

Mythological figures illustrated on walls of the Ghats coexists with the advertisements and self expressing graffiti, is an uncommon view. Tourists enjoying their time, devotees offering prayers, graffiti on walls, fishing, various stalls or shops etc. all can be seen at one place itself.



Flower shop at the Ghat.

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A glass factory in Firozabad industrial area.



Diesel engine boat, with devotees on a tour across the Ghats.



Repairing boat at the Ghat.



A priest preparing for evening aarti.

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Saint with devotees practising meditation.



A foreigner meditating at the Ghat.



Buffaloes grazing at the opposite bank of the river.



A girl reading a guide book.

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An old lady reading newspaper.



Girl writing notes of the places to be visited.



Learning time at the Ghat.



Conversation of two strangers.

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Gestures games.



A few busy in capturing photographs at Ghat.



Conversation and music with tea.



A lady wandering around the Ghats.

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A lifetime spent at Ghats.



An old man tinted in Varanasi colours.



A saree being used as fishing net.



A saree being used as fishing net.

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Mandali fish.



Kids enjoying the act of fishing.



Food stall at Ghat, selling savouries.



Huge Graffiti on the walls of the Ghat.

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Mythological illustrations on small temple



Graffiti on walls.



Yoga drawings with address.



Graffiti on wall, showing mythological stories.

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Illustration at Shivala Ghat.



People sitting on the staircase of Kedar Ghat.



Illustration of Goddess Kaali on a wall.



Illustration by local foreigners.

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Youth at Ghat.



Calves tied at Ghat.

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Daandi Ghat illustration.



Illustration by local foreigners.

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Illustration of a colourful elephant at an entrance.



Hip Hop cow illustration.

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Illustration of Lord Ganpati.



Illustration on the temple.

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Evening at Ghat.



Restaurant advertisement on a wall.



Illustration of Lord Shiva on a water tank.



A man relaxing at Raja Ghat.

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Illustration on Chausatti Ghat.



Munshi Ghat.

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Staircase leading to the temple.



Advertisement for Hindi classes.

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Graffiti at the Ghat.



Assortment of different cultural graffiti at the ghat.



People bathing on the ghat.



Cremations at the Ghat.

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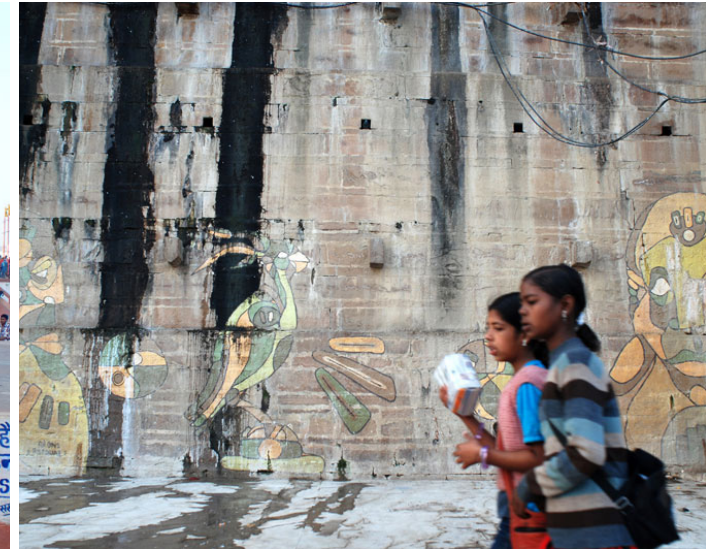
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Kids playing cricket.



Girls walking by a huge graffiti.



People clicking pictures.

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## Evening at the Ghats

There are different kinds of people at the Ghats for different reasons with different thoughts and purpose of their visit. While some are playing cricket at one of the Ghats, last rites of a small boy are performed at the other. Boat ride scenes are common view on the Ghats. Some enjoying the boat rides, while some making their way towards Ghats for 'Evening Aarti' (prayer). By the evening, everyone is left with only one purpose, the 'Ganga Aarti' which takes place at the main Ghat - Dasaswamedh Ghat. As the sun sets, the devotees finish their individual prayers and reach back to Ghats, where the assistants to priests set up the stage for Ganga Aarti.

Everyone gathers at Ghat and reserves their places while a few prefers to watch the prayers from boats. The whole environment is mesmerized with chants and the sound of bells..



Dashaswamedha Ghat.



Devotees boarding boat to reach the other side of the river.

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A group of people hire a full boat.



People enjoying the boat ride.



People enjoying the boat ride.



Fleet of migratory birds on the river Ganges.

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Birds flying over the river.



Ghat at the time of sunset.



Boats reach the other side of the river.



Devotees performing prayers.

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Priests performing prayers for devotees.



Huge crowd performing prayers.



Photographer delivering instant photographs.



Horse riding on a deserted portion of the river bank.

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Kite flying on the river banks.



A few perform prayers in solitude.



Fleet of boats await for the devotees.



Devotees boarding back on boats.

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While rest of the boats wait for their passengers.



Loaded boats leave for Ghat.



Few individuals prefer to hire small boat.



All the boats row towards the main Ghat.

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Ghat illuminates in the evening.

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## Prayers

In Varanasi, the day starts with Prayers and Chants at the Ghats. There are number of temples on the banks of Ganga. Most famous of which is 'Kashi Vishwanath Temple' dedicated to Lord Shiva. Everyday hundreds of devotees and saints from all over the India and different parts of the world come here. As we walk towards the Kashi Vishwanath temple, one can witness stalls and shops selling 'Pooja Samagri', items for prayer required at the temple. Procession passing by and huge crowd bustles to enter the temple.

During evening hours, people make their way towards Ghats for Evening prayer - 'Ganga Aarti' which takes place at Dasaswamedh Ghat. As the sun sets, the devotees finish their individual prayers and reach back to Ghats, where stage is being set up for the 'Ganga Aarti'.

Crowd is gathered on stairs of the Ghats. The whole process, from setting up the stage for evening procession, the final preparations for the prayer ceremony to the Priests performing sacred prayer and ending the prayers with blowing of the conch shell; and at the end people taking blessings from the 'Aarti' is simply mesmerizing and worth watching.

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Cleaning and placing mat for evening procession.



Cleaning and placing mat for evening procession.

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Setting up traditional oil lamps.



Lady waiting for the evening prayer.



Final preparations for the prayer ceremony.



Arrangement of chairs in boat for viewing the evening prayer, 'Aarti'..

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Priests dress up for the evening prayer.



Priests performing prayers.



Slowly the crowd gathers.



Prayer, called 'Ganga Aarti' goes for an hour and half.

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Holy prayers and chants witnessed by a huge crowd.



Holy prayers and chants witnessed by a huge crowd.



Priests performing sacred prayer.



View of prayers from a boat.

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Priests blow the conch shell.



Prayer ends.



Foreigners can be seen photographing, the spiritual event.



People witnessing prayers.

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Families on a boat.



Foreigners capturing the event in their cameras.



People on the boat.



Crowd on Ghat stairs.

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Crowd on Ghat stairs.



Ceremony of distributing deities' blessings, in the form of sweets.



Prayer ends with final chants.



Devotees follow the priests for final chants.

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An old lady takes the blessings.

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## Contact Details

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