



SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A STUDY OF KASHI, UTTAR PRADESH

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Abstract : Kashi is an ancient holy city of India known by many names. It is a religious and tourist attraction for international visitors. The visitor feels a vibrant connection with this city. City presents a spiritual quality and universal value. One connects himself with spirituality and culture as well. Kashi has been playing a lead role in the field of spiritual communication like Kashi Vishwanath temple known as the home of Lord Shiva. There are uncounted cultural attractions. The present study used qualitative and quantitative data to have a comprehensive grasp of the topic. Data collection methods includes participatory observation method.

IndexTerms - Communication, Spirituality, Culture, Masaan Holi, Vishalakshi Devi, Aghorpeeth, Ravidas Temple.

INTRODUCTION

Kashi also known as Varanasi, holds a significant role in the spiritual and cultural communication in India. Varanasi the city of streets, the word Varanasi shares two places Varanasi means the place between the Varuna River and Assi ghat become Varanasi, earlier this city is known as Banaras but when Dr. Sampurnanand become the second chief minister of Uttar Pradesh he ensured renaming of district from Banaras to Varanasi on 24th May 1956. The Hindu scriptures, Rigveda, Ramayana, Skanda Purana, and Mahabharata mention the city in their text. Skanda Purana glorifies well the Kasi Khanda. The literature mentions that thousands year ago, the city of Kashi was founded by Lord Shiva, the Hindu deity and according to beliefs, the city rests on the "Trishul" (Trident) of Lord Shiva.

'Varanasi' is heritage of Hindu Spirits is also known as Banaras, Benars of Benaras, or Kashi or Kasi. Varanasi is a famous city and probably the most famous spiritual city of the country. It has been located on the bank of Ganga river in Uttar Pradesh state. Rigveda mentions the city as 'Kasi' "glowing". Varanasi is also often mentioned as "the city of moksha and city of spiritual learning" (1)

"Banaras is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together." -MARK TWAIN

The city was originally developed as sacred and later became synonymous to holy city of India. The pilgrimage make the city peculiar, the interlinking of the shrine and temples is wonderful. Kashi, i.e Kashya eti Kashi has been the ancient name of the holy city. The shrines and temples have menifestive powers(2) The city of Kashi reflects all the basic criteria for cultural and spiritual communication “culture is what makes humans human” Cultural communication is what connects one culture to another culture and create a bond between two different culture. Likewise, if someone is coming to Kashi he feels a different connection with Kashi and kashi wasi (the resider of Kashi) feel their culture too this is what shows intercultural communication it maybe by eye contact, dress sense, social standard, architectural style, custom and tradition. Culture of kashi symbolically adding so many cultures with itself examples are Buddhism (Sarnath) , Sikhism [(dera sacha) Ravidas temple], Muslims (Mosques) Hindus (Temple, Ganga).

Kashi has the epitome of the entire country’s culture and is therefore called a mini museum of Bharat. Kashi, Kashi culturally communicates with southern India by Kashi Yatra, Kashi Yatra is a ritual followed by in some marriages in southern India which is a mockery of intended journey of bride and groom to Kashi, the groom is coaxes by the bride’s parents to marry first and lead the married life for years before planning to go for studies in Kashi. The bride would be waiting to garland the groom and she would be well decorated with a Banarasi Saree (The famous attire of Kashi) (3)This is the “Abhilashi” love for kashi in the heart of southern people, Southern India and Kashi the places places that are separated by distance and connected by culture and spirituality.

Indian society has always valued sharing of heritage and the process went on improving and developed along with trade development, and development of science. Kashi and Tamil Nadu had strong relations and this was recently strengthened by recentnt Kashi- Tamil Sangamam, organised by Ministry of Education, Govt. of India during 16-22 Dec. 2022. The samagamam is the celebration of India’s diverse culture. The traditional and ancient system of knowledge exists across all the religions and societies in India, the speciality of Tamil and Kashi is that these are two oldest centres of the country. The two are the oldest fountainheads of knowledge in cultural, intellectual, artinasal and spiritual domains. India is ‘one’ and such programs provide strong linkages for ‘one India’.

This unification will certainly result in development of education, trade and scientific innovation in country. It will result in cultural unification as well. This holy city has been famous seat of culture, philosophy, and literature. Devotion to Gods, and Indian crafts and arts also found a proper place to bloom in this city. The city was also platform for freedom movement and patriotism. Mahakavi Subramanya Bharati and Rani Lami Bai taught and practiced lessons of patriotism in this city only. Saint Kumaraguruparar, Srivaikundam (Tuthukudi district, Tamilnadu) bargained with sultanate of Kashi and lion was driven to his courtyard and got back Kedar ghat. This Kedar ghat is podium for consecration of Vishweshwara lingam.

He came up with “Kasi Kalambagam” , which is a grammatical composition of poem on the city of Kashi. A shiva temple at Tenkashi (Tamilnadu) was dedicated by Adhiveera Rama Pandiyan, the king after his visit to the shrine of Kashi. His ancestors had established Shivkashi. Such has been importance and grand image of he holy city. The Tamil poetic vers, “Kashi Khandam” (Skanda Purana) was written by Adhiveera Rama Pandiyan, the king.(4) Many religious people in Tamil household started naming their children as Kailashnath and Kashinatha, the same was practiced in Kashi. This indicates that they desired to explore links between Tamil and Kashi, thinking that the two religious centres could lead to upsurge of important societies of both in practical and intellectual domains. Thsis way, they thought, they would be able to preserve their spirituality for Kashi. What an attachment of Tamil with Kashi! This is adorable.

People believe that ending their life would provide ‘nirvana’ to any body who completes the journey of life here in Kashi. There is one famous ‘mumukshu bhavan’ where many such people wait for their ‘nirvana’. But, in the researcher’s opinion, Kashi is the ideal place to begin your life, in Kashi anyone can connect themself to each religion either Hinduism, Muslims, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism. In Kashi you will find foreigners greet Mahadev or namaste instead of good morning, at banks of river Ganga while attending subah-e-Banaras you can feel a different vibe, burning body at Manikarnika ghat can make you feel the truth of life then you will get to know the real meaning of the song “tann mitti hai man maya” everybody wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die if somebody really wants to see heaven on earth then can visit Kashi, the multi-religious city. In Kashi, spirituality is interwoven with classical Indian music. Sarnath, the place where Gautam Buddha preached (528 BCE) the sermons, has a completely soothing Buddhism aura. There are standing Stupas and a tall (80 ft) elegant Buddha statue. The site also contains several other Buddhist temples which are regularly visited and supported by Thailand, Sri Lanka, Japan, China, etc. Pilgrims from these countries are regular visitors of the shrine of Sarnath. People need to communicate for existing in the society. Think of a place where they are from different communities, different languages, different places but are all

connected with religious faith. (5) They are all, though different but are all connected through spirituality. The platform is provided by the shrines like Sarnath, Kashi.

The Kashi and Kashi society provides cultural and spiritual expressions by individuals and it accumulates into a wonderful treasure for people. Its really amazing to note a spirituality in communication and a communication in spirituality here at Kashi! But it is another amplitude of the topic that spiritual communication and communication in spirituality could be positive as well as negative and it is basically spirituality and culture in Kshi that keeps strong bond between people together. Communication can simply mean the sharing of thoughts, feelings, desires, etc. between persons and groups with the help of symbols and sounds could be perceived as communication. Further, it could be understood as the process which helps assigning a meaning and which is conveyed to render the people to understand and share amongst them.(6)

The defines culture is a complex process which includes knowledge belief, art, morals and other capacities which are adopted by men as a member of a society.(Edward Burnett Tylor,1871) It is mainly an intermingling aspect which defines culture as a process of communication and communication, a cultural process.(7). The researcher always attempt to find out a connect in Kashi between spirituality and culture where language, characteristics, families, and blood are different their culture and spirituality make a connection in all either they can be from east, west, north or south but they came and try to follow all the rituals like taking bath in Ganga, do worship of Surya (sun) Vishwanath temple, etc, have a taste of street foods and explore streets even belonging from a different language they use to talk each other by the way of the spirituality of culture.

Masaan Holi:

The masaan holi is a unique cultural event that takes place in Kashi, it celebrates of life and death and people come from all over India to participate in this event. The masaan holi also known as chita bhasma holi is the unique tradition in the city of Kashi, while most of the people play the mainstream Holi by colourful colours the masaan Holi gets played by pyre ashes instead of colors. It is an age-old ritual performed by devotees on the manikarnika ghat for centuries. The chita bhasma holi is part of a unique series of rituals including rangbhari Ekadashi program both of these festivals are interlinked. According to Hindu mythological scriptures, lord shiva and goddess Parvati united on the day of rangbhari Ekadashi, the day after ranghbhari Ekadashi devotees visit at Manikarnika ghat to show their devotion to the lord. It is said that lord shiva descends to celebrate the chita bhasma holi with his ganas or with the aghoris, sagas and the followers. Once everybody gathers on the grounds they use the ashes from the burnt pyres to smear over each other.(8) Researcher itself felt the energetic vibe while celebrating chita bhasma pyres to smear over each other.(8) Researcher itself felt the energetic vibe while celebrating chita Bhasma



Figure 1. Masaan holi at Manikarnika ghat

Holi here also you can have bhaang beverage and food after the chita bhasma Holi in Varanasi. The Masan Holi is depicted in Figure 1 (9).

On Rangbhari Ekadashi, Kashipuradhipati Baba Vishwanath plays Holi with Abir Gulaal along with the devotees and deities of his city. The next day, at the cremation ground, Manikarnika Ghat, Baba plays Holi with pyre ashes along with his ganas. It is believed by the people of Kashi that Baba (lord Shiva) comes to Manikarnika pilgrimage in the afternoon to take mid-day bath. After his bath, all the pilgrims go to their places after taking holy baths from here and distribute those virtues to those who bathe there. Baba comes to the Manikarnika Mahamashan with his dear ones after a bath and plays Holi with pyre ashes. This tradition has been celebrated grandly here since time immemorial.

VISHALAKSHI DEVI TEMPLE

Varanasi is regarded as city of temples and one of the most valued temple is Vishalakshi Temple or temple of Vishalakshi Gauri Temple. The temple is dedicated to Goddess Vishalakshi: meaning Goddess with large eyes. The temple is situated at Manikarnika ghat (Miraghat). The temple is in serendipity of Lord Vishwanath temple and has a mention in Devi Purana. The temple is known for 'Kajali Teej'. Kajali Teej is held on Vishalakshi temple is known for the Kajali Teej festival, which is held on the third day in the fortnight of August (Bhadrapad, Hindu Month). The Vishalakshi Temple is one of the 51 Shaktipeethas of the Devi maa.

Baba Kaal Bhairav is worshipped as patron and Maa Vishalakshi as Shakti. Puranas mention an episode where once Daksha Prajapati, father of devi Sati organised a great yagya and invited everyone except Sati and her husband. Sati, out of affection went to attend the yagya where she was insulted by everyone. Sati could not bear this insult of herself and of her husband (lord Shiva) and jumped into the fire of yagya. Sati died but her body was not burnt.

AGHORPEETH ASHRAM BABA KEENARAM

The Aghorpeeth Keenaram baba is another notable spiritual attraction in Kashi, Aghorpeeth Keenaram Baba also known as keenarami baba, was a spiritual leader and a great saint of the aghori sect. Aghora is a form of spiritual practice that involves the devotion to lord shiva and the worship of elements of nature. Keenaram Baba was known for his asceticism and his deep spiritual knowledge. He travelled extensively throughout India and Nepal, spreading his teachings and helping people to find inner peace and enlightenment. He spent many years in the city of Varanasi, where he established his ashram and gained many followers. Baba keenaram established four centres of aghor pant at Krmikund (Varanasi), Ramghat (Chandauli), Devan (Gajipur), and Hariharpur (Chandavak). Baba wrote four books, titled Viveksar, Ramgita, Ramrasal and Gitavali. The aghor gaddi of Keenaram survives even today and has its disciples, Baba jai Narain Rama (Jivan Rama) was the 7th mahanta in the line of Kalu Ram the guru of Keenaram, Jivan Ram was a famous sitarist of Kashi and it is said that he has 18 rooms filled with musical instruments.(11) One of the most famous stories about Keenaram Baba relates how he once pulled out his own eyes to demonstrate that he was able to see beyond the limitations of the physical world. He believed that the human body was like a temple, and that by subjecting it to extreme austerity and renunciation, one could achieve spiritual liberation. Keenaram Baba's teachings continue to inspire followers of the Aghori sect, who seek to attain spiritual transcendence through devotion and self-discipline.

RAVIDAS TEMPLE

The saint Ravidas Temple is a famous and important temple of the city of Kashi. The temple is located in seer govardhanpur near to Banaras Hindu University. The temple is dedicated to the famous saint and poet Guru Ravidas, who lived during the 15th century and is revered by people of the Dalit community. Devotees regularly visit the temple and seek blessings of the Guru. The Ravidas temple has a typical north Indian architecture with attractive carvings and scriptures adorning walls and the pillars. The temple houses a statue of Guru Ravidas, which is adorned with flowers and offerings by the devotees.

Saint Ravidas was born in the untouchable cobbler caste, and was forbidden to know anything about Vedas and Sastras. He was not allowed in any temple and could not dream of becoming a Sadhu, and it was ludicrous of him to think of

teaching dharma to others! Paradoxically he became the symbol of sastra. Thus living by the banks of ganga he exclaimed “If the mind is pure, Ganga is in your tumbler”., he exposes the make-believe world of traditional pandits and sadhus. He makes on walk around the rough path of the world to his destination, wearing the rough footwear sewn by him, there is no unwanted decoration, no false nicety, no show or pomp but simple and open utility that helps a man tread the rough path.(12). One of the interesting features of the Ravidas Temple is the annual festival that takes place here, called Ravidas Jayanti. This festival is celebrated in honor of Guru Ravidas, and attracts thousands of devotees from all over India. The festival is marked by singing, dancing, and feasting, and is a great opportunity for devotees to come together and celebrate their shared faith. The Ravidas Temple is a significant cultural and religious site in Varanasi, and is an important destination for those interested in exploring the rich religious heritage of India

This paper is totally inspired by the energy of spirituality and culture which researchers always use to feel while living in the city of light Kashi, Kashi is a spiritual and cultural hub that holds immense significance in the promotion of Indian culture and spirituality. Kashi makes us realize that spirituality is a roadmap to peace, Kashi is the most surviving city in the world. Its rich heritage and traditions have contributed enormously to the country’s development, it is considered the major pilgrim site for Hindus and attracts millions of devotees and tourists every year. Devotees from India and abroad visit the temples to seek blessings and offer prayers. The role of Kashi in spiritual and cultural communication will continue to remain unparalleled for the generation to come. Varanasi is the melting pot of traditions, music, art, and literature and it attracts visitors from around the world seeking spiritual enlightenment and cultural experience overall in Varanasi cultural and spiritual communication intertwine to create a deeply immersive and transformative experience for all involved.

Research Methodology

This article is based on participatory observation method in Varanasi, the researcher focuses on spiritual communication and the second cultural communication associated with the city Kashi. This paper aims to explore the spiritual and cultural aspects of communication in Kashi, to know the effect of cultural communication on personal growth and self-reflection and To throw light upon the meaning behind cultural activities in Varanasi.

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