

## **Varanasi (India): Perspectives and Visions of Strategic Urban Development of a Heritage City**

### **1. The Background to the City Personality**

Varanasi, known as the Cultural Capital of India, records a settlement history since ca 800 BCE. However, the present city has grown during the early 18th century. Varanasi acquired status of a million city (as urban agglomeration) in 1991 and recorded a population of 1,211,749 in 2001, and ranked 23rd in the hierarchy of million cities in India. The city's population consists of predominant Hindus (63%), substantial Muslims (30%) and other religious groups. The main city spreads over an area of 84.55 km<sup>2</sup>, and is inhabited by 1.21 million people, consisting of Hindus (63%), Muslim (30%) and other religious groups. Additionally, everyday about 40,000 commuters visit the city, which increases to 60,000 during festive season. There are ca 3000 Hindu sanctuaries, and 1388 Muslim shrines. Existence of 6 Universities and similar institutions, 150 Muslim schools, ca 100 Sanskrit schools, and 50 Inter and Degree colleges make the place as "City of Learning". The vividness and multiplicity, and diversity and unity are easily envisioned in its religion, culture, society and economy – altogether making a cultural mosaic, in which festivities play a major role.

The impact of intense development pressures is harder in the old city centre where population density reaches to 500 to 700 persons/ha. Every year about half million Indian pilgrims/ devout Hindus comes here, and approximately 125,000 tourists from abroad visit this city. Till mid 19th century the urban landscape was dominated by tracts of garden-groves and linking water bodies and drains that helped to maintain ecological order and escape from water logging. Under the 'Master Plan 2011' the expanded area proposed for the Greater Varanasi is 179.27 km<sup>2</sup>. The major changes since 1991 as in the Plan, indicate a catastrophic increase of land under government and semi-government uses (+390.50%), and public and community facilities (+190.63%). This catastrophic change spoils the ecological system of land use; the most crucial group is park and open ground that records decrease of over 60% in comparison to 1999.

### **2. The Basis: Growth of Urban Fabric in the Past**

Like other ancient cities those grown along the major river in the alluvial plains, Varanasi might have grown in the similar way, and later became the most famous sacred place of Hinduism. The archaeological findings at Rajghat (northern part of Banaras city) confirm the existence of urban settlements during 800-500 BCE. Ashoka (272-242 BCE), the great Mauryan king, had declared Buddhism a state religion and visited Sarnath. Under his patronage there developed a Buddhist township with many monasteries, *stupas* and shrines. The inscriptions of Kushana king Kanishka, dated 3rd century CE, refer to the persistence of Buddhism together with animistic religion of Yaksha.

The Pali and Buddhist literature mention the structure, condition and some plans of the city of Varanasi, especially narrating the six beautiful gates surrounding the city and moats along the main protecting rampart walls. Perhaps these gates were linked to the market areas in the city. The city was dominated by mud houses planned in a rectangular design, but by the turn of 2nd century BCE burnt bricks became common in making buildings. The structural plan clearly showed the open spaces between two houses and segregating lanes. Such plans continued even in the Gupta period, 4th to 6th century CE. By CE 490 the Vishvesvara (Vishvanatha) temple had already been built, and in CE 6<sup>th</sup> century Jangamabari Math was already established.

By the Gupta period the city expanded, following a rough rectangular plan. The main roads were running parallel to the Ganga river, north-south. Evidences support that the city was divided by many wide roads and lanes, however there was no well-planned design. Even today north-south main axial roads and similar structure are marked (cf. Singh, 2005). During the period

of Harsha (606-648 CE), a great Chinese pilgrim Hsüan-tsang paid visit to Varanasi and described the city as conglomerate of congested houses separated by narrow lanes, garden and groves, and water pools with lotus flowers.

The major expansion and transformation of landscape took place between 8th and 12th centuries. The first settlements were in the north to the confluence of the Varana to the Ganga, and later by the mid 10th century city expanded in the southern side. At the turn of 11th century the city came under the Gahadvalas that continued till 1197. In the Gahadavala period the city reached to its zenith. Three zones surrounding Omkareshvara, Vishveshvara and Kedareshvara temples came out in full bloom associated with sacredness and settlements, inhabited by traders and migrants belonging to various linguo-cultural groups from different parts of India. Temples were destroyed in 1300s under Firoz Shah Tughlaq (1351-1388). In the 1400s, again under the rule of Sharqi kings of Jaunpur temples were destroyed. During the moments of calm, the Hindus rebuilt temples and *lingas* but they were again destroyed by the next wave of invaders. Under the rule of Lodis (1451-1526) a major part of the city was destroyed by Sikander Lodi.

A great sigh of relief was surely heaved when Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556-1605) granted more religious freedom. The Rajputs Man Singh and Todarmal, the two senior ministers in the court of Akbar, participated actively in repairing, rebuilding and in new construction of temples and Banaras ghats during his period. The Vishvanatha temple was rebuilt for a third time at a third place under the supervision of Narayana Bhatta. By the order of Aurangzeb (1658-1707), around thousand temples, including city's greatest temples like Vishveshvara, Krittivasa, and Vindu Madhava, were razed. In 1665 the French traveller Jean Baptiste Tavernier, paid a visit to Banaras and described the architectural beauty of Vindu Madhava temple at the riverside. There is no major religious sanctuary in the city of Banaras that pre-dates the time of Aurangzeb in the 17th century. Of course, the sacred city could not be destroyed, but it could certainly be defaced.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century under the influence of the Marathas (1734-1785), substantial part of the city had been rebuilt. The city became the recipient of the gratitude, the wealth, the skill and energy of the Marathas. It is said that 'Modern Banaras is largely a creation of the Marathas'. Bajirao Peshva I (1720-40) had patronised construction of several ghats and nearby residential quarters, a number water pools and noted temples of Vishvanatha, Trilochana, Annapurna, Sakshi Vinayaka and Kala Bhairava. Queen Ahilyabai of Indore built the present Vishvanatha temple in 1775-76. As one after another ghat was added, the temples rose, the city regained its gaiety, and its educational system was revitalised. The urban area of the city continued to develop along the river under the British rule.

By the approval of the British Governor-General Warren Hastings in 1791, Jonathan Duncan, a British resident in Banaras, founded a Sanskrit College, and in 1853 the present buildings of the college were built in Gothic style. In 1916, the Viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge, laid the foundation stone of what would become one of the largest and most beautiful universities in Asia, i.e. Banaras Hindu University. During the early decades of the 19th century Banaras was typical of an oriental city. Streets were not wide enough for wheeled carriage particularly in the densely settled residential areas. The streets generally were at a lower level than the entrance of the houses and shops that lined them. The Grand Trunk road passed from the northern outskirts of the city and the river Ganga was not bridged near Rajghat. The riverside and the inner zone of the city were approached by numerous narrow lanes as one can see even today.

The Municipal Board was instituted in 1867 under the Municipal Act XXVI of 1850, with a view to introducing a general improvement in the existing condition of the city. In continuation of such improvements, the site of the Maidagin tank gradually came to be replaced by a park known as the Company Garden, north of the present Maidagin-Kashi station road. Opposite the garden, to the south of the road, the Town Hall was built, as a result of the efforts of the Maharaja of Vijayanagar (cf. Singh, 2007). The introduction of various branches of railways along with the construction of the railway bridge near Rajghat, installation of water works and provision of improved sewerage and drainage works in the last quarter of the 19th century, all these widely modified the urban fabric of Banaras.

India received independence from the British rule on the 15th of August 1947. Since then no substantive change in the urban fabric and city morphology is recorded. On 15th October 1949

the district of Banaras assumed its present form and area by the merger of the erstwhile Banaras State (Kashiraj), and the city of Varanasi became the district headquarters. In 1948 The Banaras Improvement Trust was constituted for making '*Master Plan of Banaras*', and in 1951 the first such plan was prepared. The latest plan, that also demarcates heritage areas, was approved by the State Government on 10th of July 2001. However, due to lack of the public awareness and active participation, the complex web of bureaucracy and the rise of both individualism and consumerism, there seems to be little hope for the proper implementation of these plans.

### 3. Population change in the 20th Century & across

During the three early decades (1891-1921), the population of the city declined by 11.2 per cent mainly due to several unfavourable factors like poor harvest, droughts, irregularities of weather, floods, epidemics and the post-war effects of the World War I. In fact, during 1901-1925, Varanasi was one of the most deadly cities in northern India recording high population and unsanitary conditions. Since 1921 the city has recorded constant growth of population, recording a growth of + 28.77 per cent in 1981-91. During 1821-31 the growth rate was 3.81 per cent, while it reached to 28.10 during 1931-41. The closing impacts of World War II had also encouraged city-ward march of population. The post-war developments, the influx of rural population for employment and immigration of refugee population were responsible for a very rapid growth during 1941-51, however the abrupt situation had changed in course of time, that is how during 1951-61 the growth rate had slightly declined. This tendency had continued till 1971-81. However, again during 1981-91 the growth rate became slightly higher, mainly due to impact of tendency of rural to urban migration in search of better livelihood and employment opportunities in the city. The city is also upgraded as metropolis in 1991 by recording population over a million. It is expected that the growth rate would further be increased in spite of measures to check it (Table 1). Among the metropolises, Varanasi has constantly been losing its rank in population size: its rank was 12<sup>th</sup> in 1961 which became 15<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> in the decades of 1971, 1981 and 1991, respectively. In comparison to other metropolises, its growth is slower mostly due to lack of services related to administrative- capital and diversified industrial developments.

**Table 1.** Varanasi, Municipal and Urban Area addition: Population Growth, 1991-2031.

Units / Year	1991	2001	2011	2021	2031
Municipal Area	929,270	1,103,951	1,367,278	1,640,216	1,835,197
Urban area Addition	101,593	107,798	205,558	344,502	511,962
VUA, Varanasi Urban Agglomeration	1,030,863	1,211,749	1,572,836	1,984,718	2,347,159
Decadal growth, VUA,%	29.48	17.55	29.80	26.19	18.26

(Source: Based on Census of India reports. \*Low projection estimates)

Varanasi Urban Agglomeration (VUA), i.e. metropolis, is constituted of seven urban units of different characteristics and status as defined by the Census of India 1991 and 2001. The details of population of these units are given in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Varanasi UA: Population Characteristics, 2001

Urban unit (Uttar Pradesh, code 67)	Population, 2001	Decadal Growth Rate, %			
		1961-71	1971-81	1981-91	1991-01
<b>VARANASI U.A.</b> (Varanasi District)	<b>1,203,961</b>	23.85	25.50	29.48	16.69
(1) <b>Varanasi</b>	1,092,445	23.04	22.45	28.95	17.58
i. Varanasi (MC)	1,059,961	23.89	22.45	28.57	14.47
ii. Lahartara (OG)	5,223	----	----	----	67.03

iii. Lohta	19,706	----	----	----	----
iv. Kandwa	7,555	----	----	----	----
(2) Varanasi Cantt.	17,259	81.99	65.73	1.64	18.03
(3) Maruadih Rly. Sett.	18,739	----	85.38	17.56	- 23.45
(4) Ramanagar (MB)	40,619	7.17	35.13	28.26	34.87
(5) Sheodaspur (CT)	11,420	----	----	85.43	50.08
(6) Phulwaria (CT)	11,971	----	----	61.87	22.60
(7) Banaras Hindu Univ.(NA)	7,788	40.90	26.12	- 6.63	- 32.3
<b>Mughalsarai U.A. (Chandauli)</b>	<b>116,308</b>	----	----	----	27.11
(1) Mughalsarai (MB)	88,387	----	----	----	32.85
(2) Mughalsarai Rly settl. (NAC)	27,921	----	----	----	11.79

(Source: Census of India 2001, Series-1, INDIA. Registrar General of India Office, New Delhi, 2003).

It is estimated that the decadal growth rate of Varanasi UA would be increased slowly from 16.64 to 26.19 per cent from 2001 to 2021, however most likely the growth rate will decline to 18.26 by 2031 (cf. Table 1). At present the Varanasi UA spreads over 144.96 sq.km, thus recording density of 7081 persons/ sq. km, while it was 9434 persons/ sq.km in 1981. The decline of density is the result of the growth of residential colonies outside the UA area together with increase in the defined area of the UA in 1991. According to the Census of 2001, of the total population (1,203,961) only a little over quarter (26.6%) was employed, in which industry and manufacturing recorded 10.72%. Trade and commerce (6.8%) and other services (5%) were the other main categories of employment. Among the population engaged in industry and manufacturing about half were in spinning and weaving, followed by metal and manufacturing (15%), printing and publishing (6.2%), and electrical machinery (5.02%).

#### 4. Industrial Landscape

Out of total inhabitants of 1,202,443 (in 2001) in Varanasi UA, only 26.64% was recorded as employed, in which only 10.72% was engaged as industrial and manufacturing workers. Earlier the city had attracted the artisans, potters, and weavers who initiated the household industrial establishments like ivory work and making of idols, silken brocades, utensil and *zarda*. Even at present the people engaged in household industries (i.e. spinning and weaving) here constitute a very high share of workers (51%) which is more than that of Kanpur, the industrial hub of Uttar Pradesh. Metal and manufacturing (15%), printing and publishing (6%), and electricity-machinery (5%) are the other important sectors.

The small scale and household industrial industries mostly include spinning and weaving, followed with textiles, hosiery, chemicals and soap, food, printing and publishing, utensil, fencing net, tobacco, golden and silver foil making. Spinning and weaving is the oldest and most important household industry employing more than half of the industrial workers. During post-independence period several large scale factories have been developed in and around the city. With the establishment of Diesel Locomotive Works (D.L.W.) during 1961 in the western part of the city, another industrial landscape has emerged. The factory manufactures diesel locomotives and employs more than 10,000 workers.

An Industrial Estate has been developed to the west of the city at Lohta where small-scale industries have sprung up. These incorporate manufacturing of chemicals, plastic goods, iron bars and metal equipments, etc. The city has recently developed a specialised industrial wing of bead and carpet manufacturing. Precisely, no industrial zone is identifiable. The city has grown haphazardly in a natural process.

#### 5. Tourist Landscape

Varanasi is one of the top individual tourist destinations in India where about 6 per cent of total international tourists coming to India pay visit to Varanasi. Like any other heritage city,

Varanasi is also a product of a unique set of historical, cultural and functional circumstances and presented to particular group of people (i.e. devout Hindus) as a distinct sacred place (for pilgrimage). Arrivals in recent years in Varanasi shows continuously increase of tourists/pilgrims and also of International tourists (Singh and Singh, 2007). In 2006 the city recorded close to a million domestic tourists and a little over two hundred thousands international tourists, respectively recording 20.6% and 26.1% increase over the previous year.

This city is very important especially for pilgrimage tourism where tourist enjoy morning boat ride, walk in narrow lanes (*gali*), feel the Banarasian as well as visit Sarnath where Lord Buddha had given first sermon and established his commune. Sarnath is the second most important tourist attractions after the Ghats of Varanasi. Indirectly by attracting lots of tourist those are followers of Buddhism, Sarnath additionally supports tourists' growth in Varanasi. The number of Indian tourists is continuously increasing since 1998 in case of domestic visitors, but the tendency of international visitors changes according to the global happenings. But in the preceding periods the trend was abrupt that turned according to the prevailing situation in India and internationally.

## 6. The Master Plan & Heritage Zones

In 1982 the Varanasi Development Authority (VDA, formed in 1974) made an assessment of the earlier plans of the city. And, under its direction, the Town & County Planning Organisation, TCPO, prepared a comprehensive Master Plan of Varanasi 1991-2011, during which time the population of Varanasi Agglomeration is expected to double of the 1991 (cf. Table 1). The five-tier areal units are defined on the basis of administration and planning strategy, taking **Varanasi Development Region**, VDR (as in Master Plan 2011). From lower to higher hierarchy they are: Varanasi City Municipal Corporation 84.55 km<sup>2</sup>, Varanasi Urban Agglomeration, VUA 112.26 km<sup>2</sup>, Varanasi Master Plan - Operative Area 144.94 km<sup>2</sup>, Varanasi Master Plan - Projected Area 179.27 km<sup>2</sup>, and the outer most Varanasi Development Region, VDR 477.34 km<sup>2</sup>.

Under the Master Plan 2011 the expanded area proposed for the Greater Varanasi is 179.27 km<sup>2</sup>, however no way the land use categories fit to the standard norm of ecological balance. The most noticeable change during 1991-2011 plan is expansion of the area of the city (+112%). The major changes since 1991 as in the Master Plan 2011, introduced after 1988, indicate a catastrophic increase of land under government and semi-government uses (+390.50%), and public and community facilities (+190.63%). The increasing pace of population results to increase area under residential uses up to 253.63% over 1988 (cf. Table 3). This catastrophic change spoils the ecological system of the land use; the most crucial group is park and open ground that records decrease of over 60% in comparison to 1999. Similarly a great loss of agriculture and open land within the master plan area at the rate of above 40% is again a great warning. In addition to the city's population, everyday about 40,000 commuters visit the city; this numbers increases to 60,000 during festive season.

For the first time in the history of Master Plans for Varanasi, some strategies of urban heritage and heritage zoning were proposed in the recent Master Pan (1991-2011; Table 3) to maintain and preserve the religious and cultural symbols of the ancient glory of Varanasi, and to identify necessary facilities and infrastructure and various heritage complexes (cf. Rana and Singh, 2000: 150-154). A little over 2 per cent of the total area in prescribed under tourism and heritage zone. More emphasis has been laid on the government and semi-government uses.

**Table 3.** Varanasi Master Plans, MP: Land Use, I: 1961-91, and II: 1991-2011

S e	Land Use Category	1988		I: MP, as in 1999		II: MP, as in 2011		Change, I – II, %
		Area, ha	% of area	Area, ha	% of area	Area, ha	% area	
1.	Residential	2,615.64	46.16	5,457.24	37.65	9,254.61	51.62	+ 69.58
2.	Commercial	176.08	3.11	475.10	3.28	618.23	3.45	+ 30.13
3.	Industrial	195.31	3.45	981.37	6.77	656.19	3.66	- 33.13
4.	Public & Comm- unity facilities	261.05	4.61	450.42	3.11	1,309.07	7.30	+ 190.63

5.	Recreation (Park/ Open ground)	53.04	0.94	2,705.76	18.67	948.47	5.49	- 64.95
6.	Services & Utilities	----	----	----	----	103.97	0.58	---
7.	Govt. & Semi-Government	56.69	1.00	292.18	2.01	1,433.15	7.99	+ 390.50
8.	Tourism (area) & Heritage zone	----	----	----	----	423.73	2.37	---
9.	Transport & Communication	914.30	16.13	1300.27	8.97	1,460.35	8.15	+ 12.31
10.	Other (agriculture & open space)	1,393.79	24.60	2,832.06	19.54	1,683.45	9.39	- 40.56
	<b>TOTAL Area</b>	<b>5,665.90</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>14,494.40</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>17,927.22</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>+ 23.68</b>

(Source : *Varanasi Master Plan—2011*. Varanasi Development Authority, & Town & Country Planning Organisation, Varanasi Uttar Pradesh. 13 July 2001; 50pp + 1 Map; ref. page 5)

According to the zoning plan, five heritage zones can be identified in Varanasi (Fig. 1):

**Fig. 1.** Varanasi, Development Plan 2011.

**Fig. 2.** Riverfront Varanasi, World Heritage Site

1. **Riverfront Ghats** (stairways to the riverbank), the crescent-shaped 6.8km bank of the Ganga river (Ganges), from the confluence of Asi drain in the south to the confluence of the Varana river in the north, where lies eighty-four *ghats* which are marked by lofty palatial buildings built mostly by kings and lords from different parts of India between eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Among the 84 *ghats* Dashashvamedha Ghat is the most important place for visitation, festivities and architectural grandeur (Fig. 2).
2. **Durgakund-Sankatmochan Area**, consisting of about twenty temples and shrines and the historical water pools of Durgakund, Kurukshetra and Lolark *kundas*.
3. **Kamachcha-Bhelupura Area**, possessing some of the old monasteries, ancient shrines and a site associated with the Jain Tirthankara Parshvanath, together with many buildings of the British period (18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries).
4. **Kabir Math (Lahartara) Area**, having monasteries related to the life of Kabir.
5. **Sarnath**, where the Buddha gave his first sermon in 532 BCE, and Ashoka developed township in the 2nd century BCE.

Among the above five, of course the Riverfront City is underway of enlisting under 'mixed cultural landscape' in UNESCO Heritage List, ultimately there is an urgent need to re-vitalise the city with re-establishing the ecological ordering by promoting civic sense and active public participation.

The impact of urban sprawl and neighbouring effect is constantly marked by the expansion and growth of two towns across the Ganga river, i.e. Ramnagar and Mughalsarai, lying only at 5km and 18km east of the main city, respectively, respectively recording population of 40,619 and 116,308 in 2001. During 1991-2001 they recorded growth of 35 and 23 per cent, and expected according to the Master Plans up to 30 and 38 per cent in 2001-11, respectively. It is further estimated that both of these towns will be directly linked as a continuous urban space by 2031. This tendency will further intensify the demographic and economic pressure on the city of Varanasi.

## 7. UNESCO guidelines for Cultural Heritage and Cultural Landscape

According to **Operational Guidelines** (2005) of the World Heritage Committee UNESCO, a property designated as cultural heritage nominated should:

- i. represent a masterpiece of human creative genius (monument, group of buildings or site);
- ii. exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;
- iii. bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared;
- iv. be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;
- v. be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change; and
- vi. be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (the Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria).

Additionally, it would be more plausible to have one more criterion from the natural heritage to be taken into consideration for identifying cultural heritage:

- vii. contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance.

The "Riverfront cultural and heritage landscape and Old City Heritage of Varanasi" fully identify all the above criteria of WHC UNESCO 2005 (i to vi and vii).

## 8. Varanasi on the criteria of UNESCO-WHC

### i. *Representing a masterpiece of human creative genius*

There are several examples of master pieces of architecture attached with inherent meanings, archetypal representations and continuity of performances and rituals. The micocosmic temple of Panchakroshi that places 273 deities in three-dimensionality as replica of the originally existing images and shrines along the five sacred routes in the city is unique example (Gutschow 2005). Built in 1936 Bharat Mata ('mother India') temple, which interior is dominated by a remarkable 90-square-metre map of India carved in a relief out of marble blocks set into the floor, is an example of perceiving nation as goddess as eulogised in the ancient mythologies. Other distinct and unparallel examples include temples of Gurudham, Kardameshvara, Vrisabhadhvajeshvara, Amethy, Mahamaya, Lolarka water pool, and some others too (cf. Michell and Singh 2005).

One of India's earliest, most picturesque and one of the finest Gothic Revival structures in Perpendicular style, the building of Sanskrit University, Varanasi, dates from 1848-52. Of course the Sanskrit University (earlier college) was founded in 1795, later it shifted in the present building. This is the only institution in the whole world that is based on Sanskrit language and ancient Indian tradition. It has also the richest collection of ancient manuscripts, possesses in the Sarasvati Vidya Library. Presently the building and the collections in the library, both are facing the problem of destruction and loss.

### ii. *Exhibiting interchange of human values in architecture and monuments*

It is the only city in India where textually described cosmogonic frame and geomantic outlines are existent in their full form and totality, thus the city becomes universally significant even today. The City is a mosaic of the various religious groups and their traditions. In city alone, there are over 3000 Hindu shrines and temples, about 1400 Muslim shrines and mosques, 12 churches, 3 Jain temples, 9 Buddhist temples, 3 Sikh temples (*Gurudvaras*) and several other sacred sites and places. Here Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity and even Islam have their distinct traditions and on the other end they together make the harmonious life and culture in the city, called 'Banarasian'. The life style of Banaras is distinct in nature, and

referred to as Banarasipan. It is an art of living, both passionate and carefree, what the Banaras dwellers call *masti* ("joie de vivre"), *mauj* ("delight, festivity") and *phakarpan* ("carefreeness"). Here the deepest spirit of place involving sacred ecology, spatial manifestation and historical events is in its superb form. Layers of time and traditions are superimposed one upon the other but the essence of the life has maintained its continuity. That is how the city is known as the 'cultural capital of India', or microcosmic India. Teaching and training of Sanskrit and Ayurveda (traditional system of Indian Medicine) has been here since at least 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE and still in practice prominently.

### **iii. Testimony to cultural tradition in history**

The city has two remnants of a holy past: the first one being Sarnath where Buddha gave his first sermon, "Turning the wheel of law" in ca.528 BCE. Later during 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE king Ashoka built a monastery township there which continued its existence till 12<sup>th</sup> century CE and was later destroyed. The second one is Rajghat Plateau, where the archaeological findings and the C<sup>14</sup> dating of some of the wares excavated from the earliest level (upper part of IA layer, sample No. TF-293) refer the existence of urban settlements in the period during 1000-500 BCE. The archaeological investigation is further supported by Robert Eidt (1977) on the basis of scientific analysis of chronosequence of non-occluded/occluded phosphate ratios of the vertical profile of anthrosols in the Rajghat area of Varanasi. The results support the fact that residential settlement during this time span was uninterrupted. This site has been the original centre of one of the oldest continuously occupied modern cities in the world. The site evidences refer small farming to domestication of animals, a sign of pastoral economy.

### **iv. Outstanding example of architectural ensemble and landscape**

The unique crescent shaped arc of the Ganga river has attracted people from various parts of India to come, settled and make their own distinct block along the 7km bank of the river as clearly visualised in the architectural grandeur and the cultural landscapes. The existence of 84 *ghats* (stairways) along the Ganga river symbolises archetypal connotations, e.g. 12 division of time x 7 cakras (sheaths), or layers in the atmosphere; like the number 84 refers to 84 *lacs* (hundred thousands) or the organic species as described in Hindu mythologies. This development records sequential growth during the last two-thousand years. Since sunrise to sunset the cultural landscape along the Ganga river is dominated by the ritual scenes and religious activities, and a supportive system other profane functions are dependent on this.

### **v. Example of a traditional habitat, culture and interaction**

Since the past people from different cultures, religions and territories came and settled here while maintaining their own distinct traditions in their own community, and also developed a harmoniously integrated culture of mixed traditions, which still visualised on different festive occasions. Of course, there also happen religious conflicts, tensions and contestations, however during natural calamities like flood, water logging, heavy rains, or human induced occurrences like bomb blasts and riots, people from such diverse ideologies, like Hindus and Muslims, work together to save the city and prove that this is a city of humanity and universality. There are fourteen tombs of Muslim Sufi saints which are regularly visited by Hindus and Muslim performing their own rituals side-by-side.

### **vi. Example of the continuity of living traditions of life (tangible)**

Since ancient times the natural and cultural landscapes of the city have retained an active social role in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life. The city is a place of pilgrimage and a holy site for sacred baths in the Ganga River, to have a good death, to get relief from transmigrating, to learn and receive spiritual merit, etc. The city has still maintained its traditions. In spite of several downfalls and upheavals, traditions are fully alive even today. Presence of "dying homes", charitable homes and pilgrims' rest houses, are some of the city's unique characteristics. Additionally, silk weaving and sari making, metal, wood and terracotta handicrafts, toy making, particular painting forms, etc., comprise the continuity of historico-cultural tradition. Banaras is considered to be a veritable jumble of fairs and festivals with respect to



variety, distinction, time, sacred sites, performers, overseers and side-shows. The popular saying that there 13 festivals happen in the 7-days of a week express that richness. "Every day is a great festival in Banaras" – so says the tradition. Recently some of the old festivals have been revived in the original style, despite some modern touches. This lifestyle has manifested itself in a musical tradition known as the Banaras Gharana (style). Many great musicians and performing artists have been born here and still regularly return to visit and to perform their art for the public as tribute to the spirit of the soil.

#### **vii. Beauty of natural phenomena & aesthetic importance**

The city represents a unique natural shape along the Ganga river which forms a crescent shape, flowing from south to north, for about 7km and the city has grown on the left bank in circular form around it. The area along the right side is a flood plain, preserving the natural ecosystem. Thus, together the two sides represent the cultural and natural beauty, which is unique in whole course of the Ganga river. This is described in ancient mythology and religious literature that became part of the religious and ritual activities that are still prominent. The eastern edge of the city faces the rising sun and making the ghats of Banaras sacred and unique for all Hindu rituals. This aesthetic harmony between the river and the city is unique in its presentation.

### **9. Old City Heritage and Riverfront Cultural Landscape**

All the criteria, according to Article 2 of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention of the 2003, which manifested in the domain of intangible cultural heritage, are part of age-long traditions in Varanasi. This includes oral traditions of ritual performances, folk music and songs; performance arts like traditional dance, music and theatrical performances on special festive occasions throughout the year; social practices in celebrating festivals and events; knowledge and practice concerning nature (like naturopathy, alternative medicine, yoga) and the universe (classical astronomy and astrology); and traditional craftsmanship like toy and pot making, silk embroidery, etc. Moreover, other characteristics as defined in the above Article also part of life in Varanasi that continued and maintained since the past, being transmitted from generation to generation; being constantly recreated by communities and groups, in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history; providing communities and groups with a sense of identity and continuity; promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity; being compatible with international human rights instruments; and complying with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, and of sustainable development.

Article 1 of World Heritage Convention of 2003 clarifies its purpose for safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage by ensure respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned, raising awareness at the local, national and international levels of the importance of the intangible cultural heritage, and of ensuring mutual appreciation thereof, and ultimately providing international cooperation and assistance. Nevertheless it is to be noted that for all these plans have to pass through governmental and bureaucratic procedures that many times suffered delays, obstacles and priority and choices irrespective of universal importance and urgency.

The Ganga riverfront with its ghats fully fulfil the criteria of Cultural Landscapes as designated in Article 1 of the Convention and specifically that of a cultural landscape "that retains an active social role in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life, and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress" and an associative cultural landscape "by virtue of powerful religious, artistic, cultural associations of the natural element."

The history of preservation and renovation of *ghats* goes back to early 1930s when a religious trust, Kashi Tirtha Sudhar Samiti, KTSS (founded in 1926), realising the serious threats to riverfront, made an improvement and development plan with a starting fund of then Rs 50,000. This project was supported by the Viceroy & Governor-General of India, Lord Baron Irwin. The trust has prepared a book of detailed account of the *ghats* and improvement plan (1931), with an estimated cost of Rs 3 millions. But this amount had never been allocated, and that is how the whole project left full implementation. The second attempt was made during early 1960s by the

American Academy of Banaras (known as American Institute of Indian Studies, since 1970), taking Rewan Palace at the ghat as a pilot project where started their first establishment. This was a successful project, and later the building was transferred to Banaras Hindu University. The third wave of conservation and preservation was started in 1980s under the sponsorship of Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, INTACH. By their support the whole palace of Raja Ghat was completely restored, renovated and preserved as fitting into its original form. The INTACH has further supported the restoration and cleaning of the Manikarnika Ghat. Since then, no such sponsored and community-based restoration and renovations took place, except some individual attempts.

The conservation of most heritage properties faces intense pressure. Even if these properties are presently in the same physical conditions as in the last couple of decades and their architectural characteristics are being maintained without many legal and administrative measures, their architectural integrity is now being threatened. In the name of development, old structures are modified or demolished, even where the structures are made of stone and are not weak. Since the ownership is collective or remote (like *maths*, *ashrams*, *havelis*, palaces, etc.), and renovation work is expensive. Unless stringent measures are taken for protection, there is high probability that new structures, using new building materials, will increasingly replace old architectural shapes and material. Recent construction work and events in the old city demonstrate that even when ownership is in a single proprietor's hands, he prefers rebuilding rather than renovating. Besides these risks, the buffer zones and the skyline of the old city, whose status quo is preserved at this moment, are also being threatened by encroachments and rising heights of buildings.

The increasing impact of pollution and the decreasing volume of water in the Ganga together have a multiplier effect in Varanasi. By end of March the growth of a huge sand-island and speedily downing the water level of the Ganga will be soon proved as a threat to the existence of the Ghats. About three decades ago the width of the river had been 225-250m, however it reached to around 60-70m. The main stream has lost the high speed of the current due to less volume and pressure of water. Close to the Asi Ghat, the first one, the river has already left the bank about 7-8m. The existence of Ghats in Varanasi is in danger because the existence of the Ganga is in danger.

#### **10. JNNURM and the Varanasi CDP: Dilemmas!**

According to the census of 2001 a little over 28% of India's total population (1.2 billion) lives in urban areas, and expected that its share will be close to 45% by 2050. To handle India's rapid urban growth and sprawl and its consequential problems a comprehensive and sustainable development strategy is designed and inaugurated by the Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, on 3rd December 2005. This is named Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), which will work for a period of 7 years beginning from 2005-06 under the central Ministry of Urban Development/ Ministry of Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation, under the 74th Constitution Amendment Act (CAA), 1992. The main components under the mission include urban renewal, water supply and sanitation, sewerage and solid waste management, urban transport, re-development of inner city areas, development of heritage areas, preservation of water bodies, slum development, basic services to urban poor and street lighting. In the first phase, the Mission is being executed in 63 cities with a population of one-million and above, State capitals and 23 other cities of religious and tourist importance. With an estimated provision of rupees, Rs, 614.6 billion [1 US \$ = Rs 40] for 7 years, the Mission is the single largest Central Government initiative in the urban sector. The PM emphasised the importance of cities that are internationally known for heritage, tourism and pilgrimages and maintained their historical and cultural glories, like Varanasi, Amritsar, Haridwar, Ujjain, etc.

The Mission has to work on two ways of improved urban infrastructure and improved urban basic services. The JNNURM plans to trigger deeper process of reform at the state and city level, viz. (i) using fiscal flows to entire service utilities and local governments to change and reform, (ii) decentralisation as potential to spark change and create incentives with the support of

effective regulation, and (iii) promoting citizens' demand by making service delivery provision directly to grass level.

The primary objective of the JNNURM is to create productive, efficient, equitable and responsive cities. In line with this objective, the Mission focuses on: (i) Integrated development of infrastructure services, (ii) Securing linkages between asset creation and maintenance for long-run project sustainability, (iii) Accelerating the flow of investment into urban infrastructure services, (iv) Planned development of cities including the peri-urban areas, outgrowths (OG), and urban corridors, (v) Renewal and redevelopment of inner city areas, and (vi) Decentralization of urban services to ensure their availability to the urban poor. In view of these issues the future vision for Varanasi city has emerged to keep and develop it as "economically vibrant, culturally rich tourist city". Under this programme the City Development Plan (CDP) was prepared by the Municipal Corporation (MC) within a month through a hired agency, Feedback Ventures (FV) of New Delhi, and was submitted to the Central Government in September 2006.

For implementing the Mission's objectives of equitable, sustainable and rationally service delivery mechanism through community participation and involvement of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) for individual cities comprehensive City Development Plans (CDP) are prepared. The CDP aims to provide a rational perspective and vision for the development of city where lessons to be learnt from the past, problems of the present be critically examined and solved, and prospects of the future be made reality. The CDP plans to have the outcome of the strategy in making vision of the city as "Economically vibrant, Culturally rich and Liveable tourist city". The Varanasi CDP was submitted on 22 August 2006, and the evaluation report on it was released on 12 October 2006. Quite surprising that only within two months of time the CDP was prepared on the basis of secondary sources and over-emphasis on the structural plan with financial allocations.

The Varanasi CDP submitted to the JNNURM lacks the survey and understanding of the present ground realities faced by the city. Of course, the report recognises that 'the process of CDP being a multi disciplinary platform includes various stakeholders who work towards the development of the city. As the stakeholders know the city better and are responsible citizens, their views are important at every step, while preparing the CDP'; in fact, the city authorities had been least concerned with this objective. In 2006, later half, for this purpose meetings were held for an hour in the forenoon (i) on 20 July having discussions with District Industrial Association and INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art, Culture and Heritage), (ii) on 6 June with people involved in sari (silk lion-cloth) industry, (iii) on 8 June with Weavers Association, and also (iv) on 13 June with Sankatmochan Temple trust. Using their usual colonial setup of complicated bureaucracy, and neglecting active involvement of people, stakeholders and scholars who worked life-long on the various aspects of Varanasi, the Municipal Corporation (MCV) and Varanasi Development Authority (VDA) had succeeded. That is how having four hours of discourses with stakeholders, in which only two persons in each group represented, the city authorities took two months (15 July to 15 August 2006) for assessment and documentation of the CDP under the contract of a private agency, Feedback Venture of New Delhi (FV 2006) to get it finalized.

In the spirit of JNNURM, making of Varanasi CDP had claimed to follow the two-stage procedures: *consultation* for the purpose of making the people understands the existing situation, followed with *participation* process for involving the people to take *decisions*. However, at no stage the first draft had been put before the public, thus their claim for transparency and active public participation is not justified. In the appraisal report of the Varanasi CDP the above issues are mildly mentioned and further clarifications were asked for. In a bureaucratic way the list of NGOs and persons attended the meetings were submitted and that is how the CDP has been approved (cf. Rao 2006). This whole CDP report (3 parts and annexure; and appraisal report) turned to be mere good-looking report, lacking the contemporary surface realities like complexity of land use and space allocation, priority concerns, the Ganga riverfront heritage planning that attracted attention of UNESCO WHC, civic amenities, etc.

Surprisingly, the appraisal report at the end appreciated the 'vision of the CDP in making the city economically vibrant, cultural rich tourist destination', adding further that 'the vision lays emphasis on heritage and cultural preservation' (Rao 2006: 13), but no where in the CDP these aspects are considered as measures of urban planning, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting religious (like pilgrimages) or sustainable heritage tourism. Since 2001 the city has

recorded a mass movement to get enlisted the “Riverfront and Old City Heritage and Cultural Landscape” in the World Heritage List by the UNESCO. Following the guideline and identifications of the current Master Plan, 1991-2011, thematic surveys and documentations of the state and conditions of heritage buildings and the regional perspectives were prepared under the auspices of Varanasi Development Authority and reports were sent to the government (see full report: Singh, et. al. 2002; also Hohmann 2006). Of course, no progress has yet been noticed, again primarily due to lack of bureaucratic and governmental support, and strong public involvement. In the meantime some architects, urban planners and conservationists from Austria, Germany and France with assistance of their students and collaboration of Indian colleagues have prepared detailed inventory and documentations, including some major publications (cf. Michell and Singh 2005, and Gutschow 2005). To fill up the blanks under the key issues in the Varanasi CDP few sentences and a chart had been added that refer to planning the riverfront heritage and the old city heritage zones while integrating heritage conservation with developmental activities (cf. FV 2006: 140). The critical issues of environmental deterioration, preservation of cultural heritage (tangible and intangible), demographic pressures and illegal encroachments along the riverfront heritage zone are not given any reference. Additionally the legislation system and mass wakening are not taken into consideration in the CDP.

### **11. Deteriorating Heritagescapes and Issue of Awakening**

Since late 1990s, mainly due to loose administration and lack of administrative control from the VDA (Varanasi Development Authority), along the riverfront ghats there has been spate of illegal encroachments and opening of restaurants and guest houses, partly conversion of the houses into shops or paying guest houses, silk and handicrafts shops, and also transformation of heritage properties for more economic benefits. The well known heritagescape of Mir Ghat is now changed into a commercial hotel, and most of the hospices there taken up the hotel. The Prayageshvar temple at Prayag Ghat (built in 1934) is slowly becoming part of private possession and subject of destruction of the main architecture and the colour symbolism.

Based on survey (2006-7) and understanding the public participation and resultant action (PPRA), it is obviously noted that in order to achieve a long term self-sustained maintenance of the healthy life in Varanasi, an extensive programme of public awareness should be conducted to communicate and educate about the value of public hygiene, health and heritage and their potential socio-economic and cultural benefits that can be enhanced by harmonious integration between the old heritagescape and the modern constructs. This strategy will help stakeholders to participate in sustainable operations, management and maintenance plan effectively and successfully. On the line of marching from a development culture based on physical infrastructure to a development culture based on accumulation and sharing of knowledge, we need to realise that sustainable planning is possible only by active public awareness and participation. Of course, this is true everywhere, but is more true in Varanasi, where the root of underdevelopment is none other than lack of knowledge, awareness and participation.

The passive fatalism and uncooperative acceptance of ‘made-elsewhere’ policies that has previously characterized urban planning in Varanasi hygiene, now can be reversed by the methodology of participated programme design, implementation and evaluation that the local development institutions have illustrated and recommended too.

### **12. Concluding Remarks**

Heritage is the mirror of mankind’s growth, progress and prospects; that must be preserved. One has to remember that modern science and way of life, and ancient wisdom and its messages can work together to help in searching harmonious and peaceful path of mankind’s integrity with nature. In order that this heritage become a resource for development, it needs to be first documented, then protected, maintained and finally utilized according to specific heritage guidelines and legislations. Only then, combined with an increased stakeholder awareness and participation, will policy efforts and interventions become sustainable – environmentally, socially

and culturally. We may separate ourselves from the web of our heritage in the line of modernity and secularism, but it would always be in the heart and soul of ourselves (cf. Singh, 1993: 306).

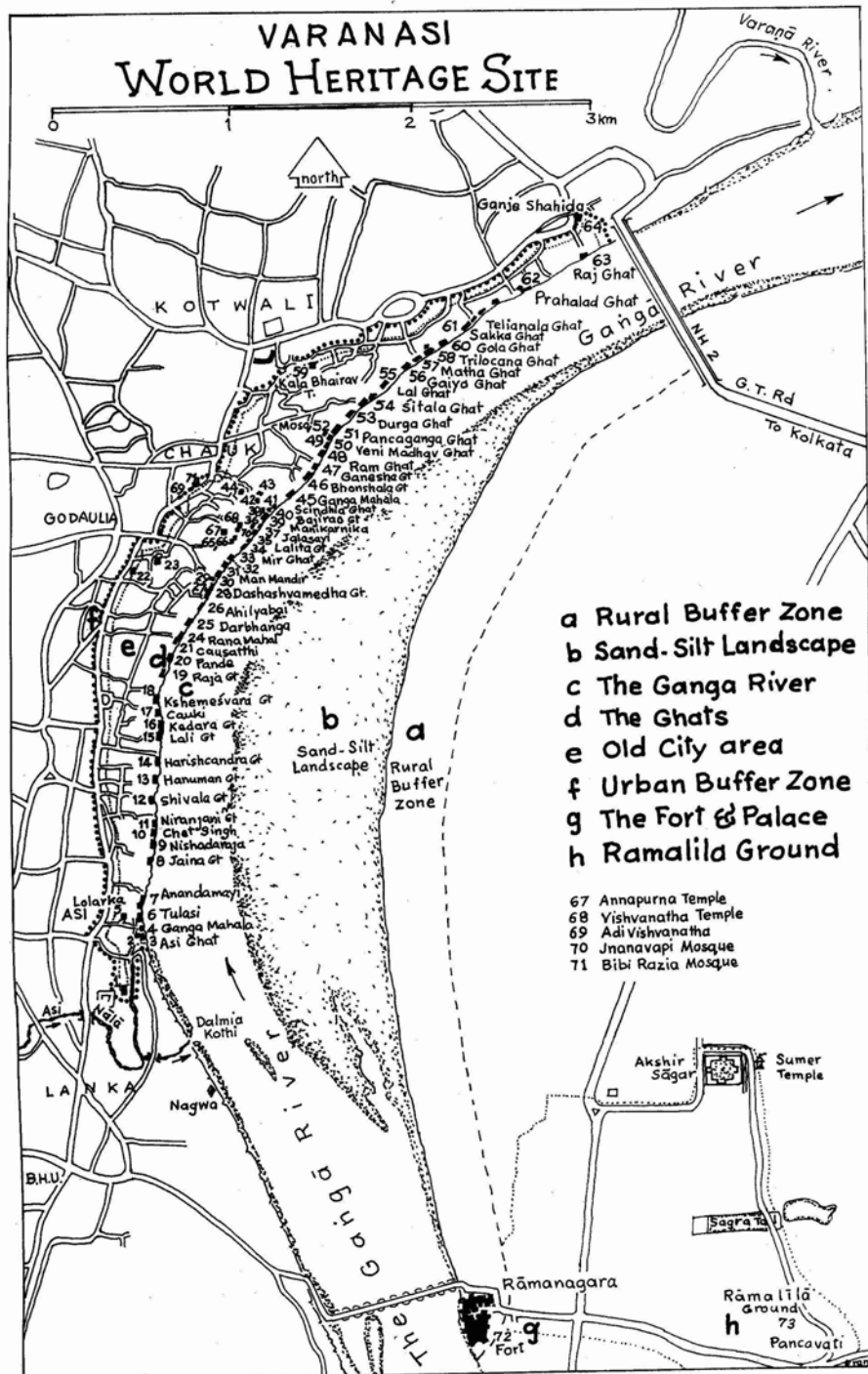
It is notable that the move made by local NGOs, experts and eminent citizens of the city, to propose the nomination of the old city centre of Varanasi for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List has activated the present sensitive and positive city administration to propose comprehensive measures for the preservation of the cultural heritage of Varanasi. A mass awakening of awareness in the context of old cultural values would promote a new spirit of sustainability. Such a revival, however, need not turn into fundamentalism nor should it cause any damage to secular life.

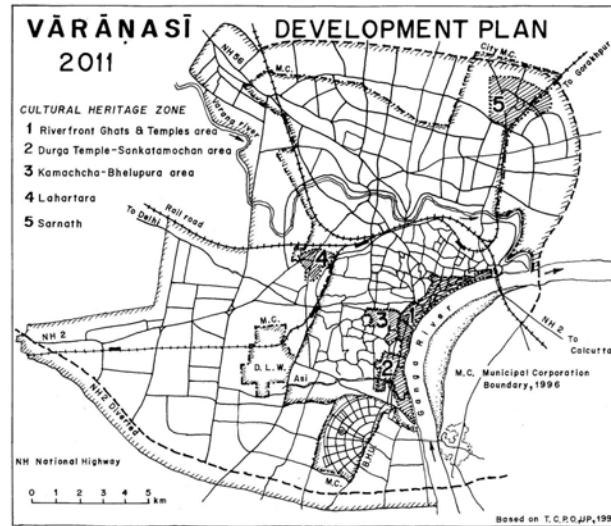
In temporal frame we have to give respect to the past, search solutions in the present, and make directions for the future. Moreover the issue of urban sprawl and interlinks with the surrounding areas (peri-urban) also taken together in the CDP. Remember, a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the site as living organism. In order that this heritage become a resource for development, it needs to be first documented, then protected, maintained and finally utilised according to specific heritage guidelines and legislations. Only then, combined with an increased stakeholder awareness and participation, will policy efforts and interventions become sustainable – environmentally, socially and culturally. Mahatma Gandhi rightly warned us that “nature has enough for everybody’s need, but not for everybody’s greed”.

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174pp + 70 figures/ maps (locational, site plans, cross sections), 70 plates of photographs, including historical outline and Selected Bibliography.





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