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In Kashi the Earth Speaks

- Ethnographic Inquiry into the Cultural Practice of Hindu Pilgrimage in Kashi and Literature Research on Cross-Cultural Holistic Conceptions of Nature, Landscape and Place.

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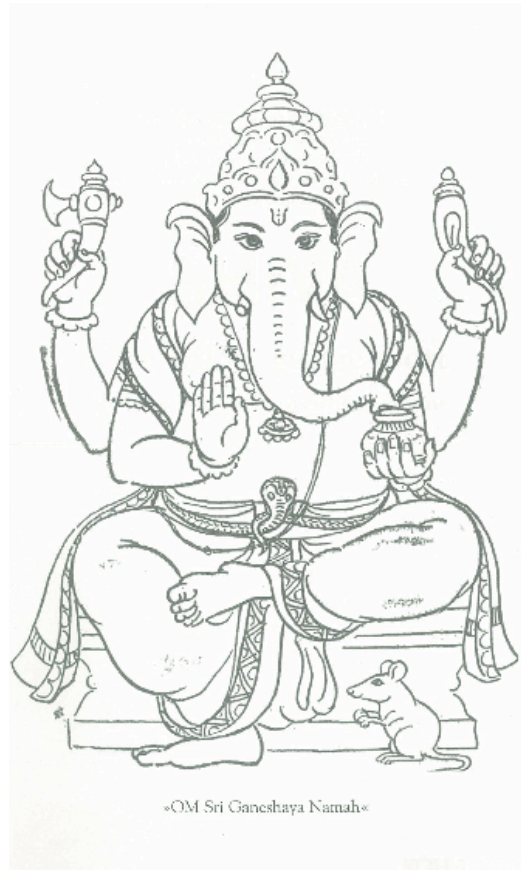


Figure 1: Om Shri Ganeshaya Namaha

Ganaesh – Lord of Beginnings – Remover of Obstacles

Picture cf. Storl 2005:1

Special Thanks

This work is dedicated to my parents.

Thank you Mama for showing me the path of intuitive knowledge, compassion and joyful interest. Thank you Papa for showing me the path of clarity, equanimity and generosity. Thank you Lisa for informing my heart with love and happiness.

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May all beings be happy and experience the peace of Nibbana within.

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Abstract

The ethnographic inquiry has been initiated by questions such as: How do people sense and experience places and in particular holy places? What kind of perceptions and experiences are characteristic within the framework of Hindu pilgrimage? What do the mythic place-narratives tell us about the power of sacred places? How do pilgrims establish contact with the inhabitants of the divine realm? Such questions have initiated my ethnographic inquiry. The literature research focused on holistic conceptions of place in various cultural contexts. They are termed holistic because they acknowledge multiple layers of reality, transpersonal experiences and enhanced modes of perception. The conceptual framework of the text encompasses etic and emic concepts that constitute a worldview that, favours the establishment of a reciprocal relationship between human and non-human beings. Throughout the text etic concepts intermingle with various emic Hindu conceptions of the tirtha (sacred place) and tirtha yatra (pilgrimage). Qualitative research methods such as participant observation and narrative interviews have been the tools for gaining an emic understanding of the concepts of place and pilgrimage within the Hindu context. The empiric data have been collected during altogether a year of ethnographic fieldwork in the North Indian pilgrimage centre Kashi, also known as Banaras. The inquiry into the cosmic identity of Kashi can be understood as part of an ancient human tradition of human-place interrelatedness. A contemporary form of Geomancy is introduced as holistic and practical approach to place. Landscape cosmograms in this context are the result of an ancient tradition of human-earth interrelatedness. Worldview connects theory and practice in the sense that cultural conceptions of a living earth may be applied in terms of perception and experience and can lead to a respectful environmental behaviour. The experiences along the path of the research have strengthened my wish to establish and maintain a respectful relationship with my natural environment. I hope that the thesis contributes to a nature-loving worldview that favours cross-state communication between the human being and the life force in its various cultural forms of manifestations. The research vision is an applied form of 'Anthropology of the Living Earth.'

Abstrakt

Das große Thema der vorliegenden ethnographischen Arbeit sind die verschiedenen Wahrnehmungen und Erfahrungen von Landschaften und Orten, speziell von heiligen (Kraft-) Orten. Die Autorin geht auf Landschafts- und Ortskonzeptionen ein, die als holistisch verstanden werden können, insofern als sie die vielschichtige Realität eines Ortes anerkennen und transpersonale Erfahrungen sowie erweiterte Modi der Wahrnehmung berücksichtigen. Als empirisches Beispiel fungiert Kashi, auch Banaras genannt, eine Pilgerstätte in Nordindien. Die empirischen Daten wurden im Rahmen ethnographischer Feldforschung erhoben, mit Methoden der teilnehmenden Beobachtung im Feld und bei Pilgerreisen, Feldnotizen und narrativen Interviews. Das Kontextkapitel ist das Ergebnis intensiver Literaturrecherche und soll die LeserInnen mit emischen und ethischen Erfahrungs- und Wahrnehmungskonzepten rund um spezielle Orte vertraut machen. Vor diesem konzeptuellen Hintergrund zeigt der empirische Teil die Ergebnisse der ethnographischen Forschung. Das Konzept der Weltanschauung verbindet Theorie und Praxis, im Sinne theoretischer holistischer Konzepte der Verbundenheit von Mensch und Ort, die zu einem respektvollen Umgang mit der natürlichen Umwelt beitragen. Die Forschungserfahrungen haben die Autorin bestärkt, eine reziproke Beziehung mit ihrer Umwelt zu pflegen und eine Forschungsvision entstehen zu lassen, die eine angewandte ‚Anthropologie der lebenden Erde‘ genannt werden könnte.

I. Autoethnographic Introduction, Method and Theory

Epistemic Interest

From my present perspective I can locate three main fields of fascination, the soil for the fruits of this research. I will use an autoethnographic style of writing here.¹

I have always felt attracted by places, by the atmosphere of places or as some people call it a 'spirit of place.' As a child it was the place under the oak tree in our garden, where I used to play for hours apparently alone, yet I was well aware of the presence of a benevolent being attached to that tree. His intentions were kind and pure as my own. Even at night, when I usually was scared of the dark, I felt protected at that specific spot. As teenagers my friend Elena and me searched for special places in the countryside around our hometown, we searched for places that felt good, that favoured good and extraordinary experiences. Each place has its distinct effect and enhances specific sentiments and states of being. It often seemed like the places found us and radiated some magnetic force that attracted us by means of intuitive orientation towards them. The urge to search places emerged more likely in times of my life when my mind was open and at ease. The ability to 'feel places' depends strongly on the ability to open ones perceptive inner space, get rid of mental occupation with thoughts and transcend ones historicity. The same holds true for pilgrims who enter into a relationship with holy places. Singh notes in this matter²: "The more a pilgrim's consciousness is awakened, the more she/he transcends her/his historicity."

When I started my studies in anthropology in 2001 I was introduced to the Anthropology of landscape, of myth and of the extraordinary. I felt happy that there existed a wide range of scientific and ethnographic discourses, wherein experiences and perceptions that always had puzzled me were in the centre of interest. It became obvious to me that narratives of place and landscape were offsprings of the human inquiry into the various powers of the earth.

¹ I will briefly introduce the autoethnographic research method in the methodic part of this chapter.

² Singh 2002: 15

After arriving in India on the undergraduate quest to research narratives related to nature phenomena, I could not exactly find what I was looking for. Rather I realised that the topic of research related to my interests was a more obvious one: Myth and place immersed into one emic concept: the tirtha, the place of pilgrimage. Further pilgrimage as a frame for religious and spiritual experience had a strong autobiographic relevance in my life.

• **Autoethnographic approach to pilgrimage and to Banaras³**

I grew up in an Austrian family devoted to the Buddha Dhamma. Thus the life of the Buddha Gautama and his previous lives as Bodhisattva were part of the vivid imagery of my early childhood. Many of these Jataka tales take place within the setting of Banaras. Brahmins, merchants and servants who lived in Banaras were thus the heroes of my early memories and in that time I perceived the wisdom and the descriptions inherent in these stories as truths and ongoing reality. In the seventh year of my present existence my parents and I accompanied our beloved teacher Mother Sayamagi on a pilgrimage to the main holy places of the Buddha's movement through space. It was in Banaras that I ate the best sweets and it were the streets of Banaras that nurtured an inner image of a wonderful otherworld, a colourful wonderland that would remain within my heart until I returned 17 years later. When I finally returned in 2005 I found myself within this otherworld that I had been missing softly all these years. The Banarasi lifeworld was both to me, familiar as well as absolutely other. Most locals perceived me as outsider, as usual tourist, yet I felt like coming home. In the following months I would learn about my ignorance about the Indian way of life, the Indian philosophical concepts and I would learn as well about the easiness of tuning into the energetic flow of that specific place. From times to times I felt that I had been living in Banaras again and again, life after life. In some sense I never acknowledged the Austrian way of life as real. The common sense of society, the energetic expressions of the main stream, the ideas about life, death and the aims of humanity never felt right to me. Maybe that is why I was always drawn to outsiders of society, alternative or criminal people. When I came to Banaras I had the idea that here the people would finally understand me, that I would be in harmony with the way of life and be able to tune in to their energetic flow. Of course I have been disappointed with most of this assumptions and had to realize that I had been expecting the impossible, an idealistic illusion of the naively hoping. When I prepared myself for fieldwork in 2005 I was fascinated by Goddess worship, mythological narratives about nature and landscape and thus William Sax's book „Mountain Goddess“ arrived in my hands. His

³ another name for Kashi

radical empiric ethnographic approach and respectful love for emic universes of meaning motivated me in the pre-field. Other important authors that prepared my mind for an experience of sacred time and sacred space in India were the two indologists Heinrich Zimmer and David Kinsley. By reading their books my inner cognitive organs were tuned in terms of myth and ritualistic worship. I longed for entering the space of mythic time, the field of divine efficacy. I was sure to arrive in the land of divine presence. One main motivation for travelling to India was the hope to experience contact with Shiva, Krishna and the Goddess in her various forms. Now, 5 years later I understand that it is exactly this experience which Hindu pilgrims seek for, when they journey to sacred places, tirthas.

• **Researching pilgrimage in Banaras**

After arriving in Banaras, I searched for a suitable topic for my thesis and focused upon mythological narratives about nature and about place. Consequently I entered the field of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is a symbol for a cosmic journey, as Singh calls it⁴. Hindu places of pilgrimage (tirthas) are often perceived as an axis mundi, an axis connecting the worlds. Such places favour an experience of contact with other planes of existence. These are places where gods descend and humans may ascend. The Ganga River herself is a natural example for an axis mundi as she connects the three worlds. She flows from heaven to earth and onto the underworld. I understood that these are contact points between various spheres of reality. I perceive our planet Earth as Mother, as living organism. I say Mother Earth because I feel it. I was very happy when I found scientific support for this feeling⁵. Most cultures at most times assumed that the earth is alive and since the 1960s the Gaia hypothesis is present in scientific discourses⁶. Later I found this concept within the Hindu worldview. Geomantic approaches as well fit into such a perception of the earth. According to these systems of thought there are places upon the earth body where we humans may charge our energetic system.

⁴ Singh 2002: 9

⁵ see for example Devereux 1989, Storl 2005, Singh 1994

⁶ Lovelock introduced the concept of Gaia

• **Personal approach and entrance into the field**

When I arrived in Banaras in 2005 the focus of my interest were stories about rivers, lakes, mountains, trees and powerful places and I hoped to find these stories being told from Grandmother to Granddaughter, from Mother to daughter, from women to women. This was a romantic approach.

Reality hit me first by the division of language. I understood that I had to learn Hindi well before I could talk to and understand what women are telling. So I started to study Hindi, with a man, an old and sensitive man. He told me the story of the heavenly river Ganga descending to earth. I felt like this story is part of the written tradition and therefore not exactly what I was looking for. Now I understand that the Ganga story lies at the heart of story telling in Kashi and is definitely being told from old to young. It is a significant story to understand the purifying efficacy of the place Banaras.

Later I searched for informants and was directed from one man to the next. Even if I was to visit a house and tried to talk to the women present, it would be the man answering the questions and the women would remain quiet in the back. I ask myself why I was not connecting to women, why the men would always stand in my way. The language is a marker of division. Mainly men speak English. When I would ask questions directed towards the women, the men would answer and argue that the women do not know all this. Even my later teacher, who was very concerned about the well-being of his wife would arrogantly assume that his wife was not-knowing, ignorant. And even my teacher at the University who was well versed in the social sciences would assume that all that women did on the roof-top was gossiping.

As an anthropologist I am interested in the lived practices of people, their understanding of the holy and their versions of mythological wisdom. Therefore I always appreciated when locals were willing to share their feelings, thoughts as well as cultural observations of their own everyday life with me. I am not an Indologist, who tries to find the correct commentaries in the holy texts. For me there is not absolute right and wrong. I am interested in the religion in common people's mind. In Banaras the religious elite is strong and authoritative. There is a strong division between the ones who know about the divine agencies and the ones who approach them as ignorant people, not knowing and therefore dependent upon the priests as a medium between human and divine. There is a strong materialistic aspect in this relationship. The priests depend upon the donations of the religious. To perform rituals for pilgrims is big business. The priests have an interest to keep

the people dependent on them. Further I feel that most people did not want to give me personal reports about their religious worldview because I am a scientist. I ask as a white researcher and it is the privilege of the priests to give the correct answers. When I spoke to intellectual Banarsis they mostly reacted irritated when I told them that I spoke to a low cast woman on the street about religious matters. They are considered 'not-knowing' and I am again and again referred to male religious experts. Yet in the Banarsi religious history we do find low casts who had a direct communication with the Divine. The great saint Kabir for example was neither Hindu nor Muslim but a great mystic who valued only a natural and direct path to the divine. He rejected the ritual norms of the Brahmin orthodoxy in Banaras. Even today Kabir is highly respected in Banaras. He definitely is a raw model.

• **Writing about Banaras**

The ethnographic text is the manifest product of the experiences during the fieldwork. It has been a challenge to connect with the 'Kashi-specific state of being', now it is a challenge to connect with it over distance while I am writing. How could I possibly write about Kashi if I don't feel it in my heart? The heart informs the mind. That's the only way to write about Kashi. The words of Wolf Dieter Storl strengthen me during the writing process: You can leave Kashi but Kashi never leaves you.⁷

Hypotheses and Research Questions

• **Hypotheses**

Elements of my own personal worldview have informed the process of formulating hypotheses and have intermingled with various scientific discourses.

- I. Place is a living being and imbued with an all-prevailing life force. Hindu Pilgrimage is part of a human tradition of approaching place in a communicative way within a holistic relationship. Just like a human being, place has its own identity, its own skills. The distinct atmosphere of a place has been experienced as spirit of place.

⁷ "Du kannst Kashi verlassen, aber Kashi verlässt dich nie." Storl 2.7.2010 Personal Communication 00:03:09

2. Some places of planet earth reveal extraordinary skills. People have sensed concentrated divine powers around specific places and called them sacred, holy or power places. The emic Hindu term for such a place is tirtha. The mythic narratives that emerge around a great tirtha, such as Kashi, contain informations about the subtle body of the place.
3. The practice of Hindu pilgrimage contributes to 'spiritual well-being' and thus maintains health in a holistic sense. It enhances the human ability to experience wholeness and cosmic integrity by interrelating the pilgrim with a divine dimension of place and nature.
4. Cognitive pilgrimage maps depict the pilgrim's cosmologically oriented movement through sacred space. They are the cognitive tools of a sacred topography and show constitutive elements of a holistic worldview that gives way to a transpersonal experience with the landscape. Such mystic experiences depend on the pilgrim's state of mind, of being, upon the degree of realization of consciousness.
5. During the pilgrimage process the mythological worldview becomes a vivid reality, a reality of experience due to faith. Within the Hindu worldview the spiritual process of tranformation of the pilgrim's person depends on the grace and blessing of the Divine. Experience and faith again strengthen human devotion, a crucial element in order to establish contact with a divine or holy realm, a sphere of wholeness.

• **Research Questions**

The questions evolved during the explorative phase of the research within the field. The following questions have thus emerged:

1. How to enter a reciprocal relationship with the world in a holistic sense? How to establish contact with a divine realm and how to relate to place as living being?
2. Which emic and etic conceptions of place constitute a worldview that favours the establishment of a reciprocal relationship between human and nature, human and place? How has the spirit of place been experienced?
3. Which qualities and skills are attributed to the holy place Kashi? What is the effect of being and pilgrimaging in Kashi? How do people for example perceive the cosmic identity of the place Kashi?

4. Does the experience of the human-earth interrelatedness and as an example therefore the practice of Hindu pilgrimage contribute to well-being?
5. What are sacred cosmograms and how are they, as cognitive pilgrim's maps connected to the field of pilgrimage in Kashi?

• **Main Threads**

1. Central in this ethnographic text are ways of entering and maintaining a reciprocal relationship between human and non-human persons (agency), the contact and communication with the divine. I take into account emic and etic concepts.
2. The second thread is the inquiry into conceptions of sacred place, and into the human tradition of sensing the character of holy places, such as Kashi for example. I will present mainly emic concepts.
3. The third thread is the practical experience of pilgrimage itself. This is the empirical part based on ethnographic and autoethnographic fieldwork.

Methodic Venture

The methodological tools were adjusted to the specific situation within the field of research. Somehow the spirit of place informed the spirit of research. Mainly this text is the ethnographic account of my empiric fieldwork in Kashi.

An Empiric Approach to Literature Research

I tried to adjust my methodic tools to the research situation. Somehow it has been the place and its inhabitants who initiated the choice of method. I tried to stay flexible and plan as less as possible. It has been clear from the pre-study that my topic would demand a sensitive methodic approach and further that the central instrument to collect data would be myself, the primary tools my cognitive organs. To acquire knowledge about the characteristics of the sacred place Kashi I started with reading local pilgrim's pamphlets containing sthala puranas (mythic place narratives) that I mostly purchased outside of the temples or at the local bazaar (market). The act of reading itself was part of the empiric project and usually

took place near to the holy site I visited. I searched for an inviting spot in the lanes of the cityscape and sat down if possible with a chay. I read about and observed the atmosphere of the place, the spirit of place in turns, forming a practice that led to the experience of entering a mythic realm of reality. I will introduce a similiar method of ancient Greek travellers in order to develop a sense of feeling for the place in chapter 1.2 and I will explain the concept of a ‚mystic approach to mythology’ referring to such a usage of mythic information in chapter 2.9. In addition I read books of local and international scholars explaining emic concepts of the spirito-cultural practice of tirtha yatra (Hindu pilgrimage). Theories have thus intermingled with practical experience. After arriving from my last research in Kashi in autumn 2008 I spent my time in the Vienna University libraries searching for etic theories that I felt applicable to the data I had collected and experienced.

Fieldwork with Participant Observation ‚going native’

At the heart of anthropological research we find the method of ethnographic fieldwork mainly based on participant observation. The goal of such an empiric inquiry is to develop an understanding of the emic perspective, in other words the „view from within“ or the „native’s point of view(.)“⁸ The ethnographer tries to see the world as the locals see it, to understand their worldview, to incorporate it and feel it. In order to learn another culture we have to live it. In anthropological discourses we find the concept of ‚going native.’ It describes a research situation where the ethnographer tries to transcend the limitations of her own worldview and enters the reality of the subjects of research. In my own experience ‚going native’ was an illuminating as well as exciting process and sometimes even frightened me. Nevertheless after returning home to Austria from a year of ethnographic fieldwork I was motivated to (re-)establish the roots to my homeland and (re-)discover my Austrian identity.

Interviews

The ethnographic inquiry included various forms of communications within the field, from unstructured to semistructured, narrative interviews that emerged within an open and free communicative situation. I experienced the finest success with interviews in times when I felt at ease in my mind, centred in my heart and open to the spontaneous possibilities of the here and now. Anyway I carried a set of research questions with me moving through the cityscape. Whenever I took food, drank chay, roamed the markets searching for interesting

⁸ T.H. Eriksen 1995: 36

articles to sell back in Austria, along those natural daily pathways there happened moments of interpersonal contact, being the potential soil for the collection of research data. For the expert interviews such as with cultural geographer Rana P.B. Singh, pilgrimage guide Uma Shankar, anthropologist Wolf Dieter Storl and Geomancer Dagmar Kalb I used to prepare myself and take with me a written copy of relevant questions. In those cases I had prepared open and narrative interviews. My recording machine was so small that I could easily take it with me anytime.

Ethnography and Autoethnography

The text is ethnographic in the sense that it involves a descriptive research strategy and provides account of empiric data acquired in the context of long-term ethnographic fieldwork encompassing participant observation and various forms of communications in the field. It is autoethnographic in the sense that I partly used a personal and evocative style of writing. Chang, Hernandez and Ngunjiri's article *Living Autoethnography: Connecting Life and Research*⁹ presents 10 articles that discuss autoethnography as contemporary practice of research. Autoethnography is a qualitative method that focuses on narratives of the researcher's person. It takes into account the personal experiences of the researcher situated within a specific cultural context, the interrelatedness of self and others and writing as evocative tool. It is a reflexive account of such experiences and thus is especially suitable for the inquiry into sensitive fields of research, such as spiritual and emotional experiences for example. The ethnographic text is based on my recordings as well as on the fieldnotes in my field-diary.

Conceptual framework

The theoretical and conceptual framework of the ethnographic text is composed of emic and etic conceptions and terminologies of place, pilgrimage and transpersonal experiences of the environment. I will explain the following concepts in the context-part of the work. Etic concepts encompass notions such as ,chora', an ancient Greek holistic approach to place; the Latin ,genius loci' referring to the distinct atmosphere of a place, the ,spirit of place' also termed ,soul of the land' by contemporary Geomancers; Paul Devereux term ,Earthmind' suggests the possibility of cross-state communication with the environment; the ,axis mundi'

⁹ Ngunjiri, F. W., Hernandez, K. C., & Chang, H. (2010). Living autoethnography: Connecting life and research [Editorial]. *Journal of Research Practice*, 6(1), Article E1. Retrieved [date of access: 5.12. 2010], from <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/241/186>

concept has been applied to the Hindu sacred place, the ,tirtha' by Rana P.B. Singh as well as Diane Eck and identifies place as medium in order to establish contact with the divine realm; Diane Eck elaborates on the emic Hindu cognitive concept of ,darshan', the visual perception of the divine and cognitive tool for cross-state communication; Rana P.B. Singh introduces the term ,faithscape' referring to the human ability to interconnect with nature in a spiritual way; whenever I speak of the healing potential of place and pilgrimage I use the term healing in Devereux's sense as „movement towards wholeness“¹⁰; I use the term health in Gregory Fields sense of ,spiritual health'; i will present geomantic theories of landscape-cosmograms as product of a human-earth communicative relationship and I will present Hindu notions of cosmograms, as psycho-cosmograms interrelating the devotee with the divine, by help of the analogy of micro- and macrocosm;

State of the art – books that influenced the research

In order to understand what I experienced within the field of Kashi, I searched for mythological narratives, emic narratives that describe and explain this sacred field. Uma, a friend from the women hostel at the Banaras Hindu University sent me to the Harmony Book Shop where I connected with local and foreign researchers and scholars. Rakesh, the owner of the shop introduced me to specific books suitable for guiding me through the sacred space of Banaras. Diane Eck's „Banaras“ was my first guide in form of a book and helped me to ,search Kashi.' Her approach is primarily indological but due to her long-term research within the field and her approval of emic perspectives I consider her a remarkable ethnographer. Her book led me to places I would have never found alone and her romantic style of writing helped me establish a relationship with the place Banaras. The next book that became an inspiring companion along the paths of Kashi was Rana P.B. Singh's „Towards the Pilgrimage Archetype – The Pancakroshi Yatra of Banaras,“ a book that initiated my understanding of the emic equivalent of pilgrimage, tirtha yatra as well as of the city's divine personality.

Gaia theories

Of course it is part of ancient tradition's of wisdom that the Earth is a living being. Since I always felt and believed that the Earth is alive I was happy to find scientific support within the writings of Paul Devereux who introduces the term Earthmind to refer to the planetary loci

¹⁰ see Devereux 1996: 44

of knowledge.□ Further the book gives a beautiful outline of ancient conceptualisations of a living earth. Especially his 1996 book ,Re-Visioning the Earth' supported my urge to establish a reciprocal relationship with the Earth and her places. The realization of such human-earth interrelatedness is an important part of the Hindu pilgrimage project.

For Hindu Pilgrimage and Kashi (Banaras):

As general introduction to the field of cultural and sacred geography within the tradition of Hindu Pilgrimage and it's pilgrimage places I suggest S.M. Bhardwaj's book ,Hindu Places of Pilgrimage.' When I first arrived in Banaras I was introduced to the book ,Banaras – City of Light' written by the revered Indologist Diane Eck. Eck draws on a vast repertoire of Sanskrit texts and yet brings it into the field of lived reality. The book has given me mythic information that enhanced mystic experiences within me. This is the book Banaras themselves would recommend me to read as introduction to the divine reality of the city.

The author, painter, photographer and long term Banaras pilgrim Richard Lannoy has written an excellent, poetic and sensitive book on Banaras. His ethnographic skills of participant observation and empiric research shine throughout the book and his illustrations are unique and have been used by many other scholars, for example Rana P.B. Singh.

I consider Prof. William Sax's book ,Mountain Goddess' an empiric and ethnographic masterpiece for gaining an emic understanding of Hindu pilgrimage. He focusses on the Nanda-Devi (Goddess) pilgrimage in the Himalayas and integrates his personal experiences into the ethnographic account and further truly honours the emic perspective throughout the text.

For contextual information about the pilgrimage tradition of Banaras I suggest the writings of Rana P.B. Singh, Professor of Geography at the Banaras Hindu University and cultural coordinator with excellent guiding skills. He writes in a sensitive and holistic sense about sacred geography and ways of experiencing sacred sites. His writings are scholarly yet spiritual and therefore his books have been of great help during my attempts to understand the experiences within the sacredscape.

For the Goddess pilgrimage tradition D.C. Sircar has written an excellent book about the ,Sakta Pithas', the seats of the Goddess. There are various such shrines all over India and following mythic tradition they are associated with various parts of Goddess Satis body. She has been the first wife of Shiva and died in the sacrificial fire. The most important Shakti

□ Devereux 1989

Pitha is Kamakhya in Assam, the place where her Yoni (Vagina) fell. The place is frequented mostly by Tantrics as a place of pilgrimage.

Books containing conceptions about pilgrimage and places of power:

Coleman, Simon & Eade, John. 2004: Reframing pilgrimage; Badone, Ellen and Roseman Sharon R. (eds.) 2004: *Intersecting Journeys – The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism*; Devereux, Paul: 1996. *Re-Visioning the Earth – A Guide to Opening the Healing Channels Between Mind and Nature*; and Devereux, Paul (ed.) Steele, John and Kubrin, David. 1989: *Earthmind*;

II. Context

I. The Interrelatedness of Human and Place

Place is alive. Place is an expression of the all-prevailing life force. The earth was perceived as planetary Mother encompassing humans as well as places. That the earth is not not only matter but spirit also has been acknowledged by revered psychoanalyst C. G. Jung¹² who further assumes that if one approaches the spirit of nature in a friendly way it will be helpful for humans.¹³ Just as we have our particular personality so do places have their's. We are all part of a whole and jet every part has its quality and specific task to contribute to the whole. Places are gateways to the Earth's wisdom. Planet Earth releases particular messages at particular places. The message may be a specific feeling, sensation, imagination or poetic inspiration. Those messages are sensed by humanity and are further communicated in terms of 'sacred space' and religious mappings, or in the form of cosmograms that are representations of the perceived messages. The human experience of such a Nature-Revelation is the constituent initiator for the establishment of an earth-human reciprocal relationship. The experience of sensing place opens humans for contact with planetary and cosmic wisdom, the 'Earth Mind' as Devereux calls it.¹⁴ This Earth Mind communicates through place as interface.

In order to maintain a sense of interrelatedness with the Earth as living and knowledgeable agent humans have developed various ritualistic activities. All over the world we find such communications between human and place. Sometimes the place itself appears as a living being, sometimes the qualities of the place take the form of place-bound entities, such as deities, spirits or fairies. Tirtha Yatra, the journey to a sacred place, is the Hindu equivalent to pilgrimage, and is rooted in such a longing for place-human relation.

¹² see Sabini 2002: 80

¹³ see Sabini 2002: 81

¹⁴see Devereux 1989

I.1. The Concept of ‘Place’ in Contemporary Scientific Discourses

The Dictionary of Anthropology ¹⁵ defines the term place as “a space made meaningful by human occupation or appropriation and is a cultural concept fundamental to describing human beings’ relations with their environment.”¹⁶ Further, place is described as physical setting including a geographic location and an “econiche, or site of habitual occupation, a concept used principally by ethnographers to situate descriptions of peoples they study.”¹⁷ Place is a theoretical concept and was long ignored in social and cultural anthropology, for culture was understood as a set of collective mental phenomena without concrete physical location. Geographers have focused upon place and recognized its “essential moral qualities(.)”¹⁸ Luis Wirth and the Chicago School of Sociologists introduced a “socio-spatial concept” of place “as a geographic locale invested with moral value”.¹⁹ Place is what you experience directly, space offers contextual information to enhance the experience of place.²⁰ Throughout such discourses the human appears as agent, while the place is rather a lifeless object. In order to approach the Earth and her places in a respectful way, I find the transpersonal research approach most suitable because it honours human experience and interacts with the physical as well as with the spiritual dimension.

I.2. Ancient Greek Conceptions of Place

There are various ways to sense a place. The ancient Greeks understood that place is more than location and position. They used two concepts to refer to the experience of place. Devereux explains that a place could be approached as topos or as chora.²¹ Topos is similar to our common concept of place as a location, a point on the mundane geographic map. Chora is the older term and encompasses a holistic understanding of place as “expressively potent, place as experience, place as a trigger to memory, imagination, and mythic presence(.)”²² In times before Aristotle Greek travellers would approach places in specific ways. They would develop a feeling for the place, by listening to the mythic narratives about

¹⁵ ed. by Thomas Barfield 1997

¹⁶ Barfield 1997: 360

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Barfield 1997: 361

²⁰ see Gaenzle and Gengnagel 2006: 8

²¹ see Devereux 1996: 82f.

²² Devereux 1996: 82

the place and talking to locals.²³ Experiencing place in the tradition of the Chora concept involves altered states of consciousness. The mythic consciousness is suitable to become aware of Chora. Techniques such as 'lucid dreaming' are suitable to develop a mode of perception that is similar to a waking dream state. Myths have been understood as collective dreams.²⁴ This is an ancient Greek example for the cultivation of a human-place relationship or in other words for the human experience of their interrelatedness with the Earth as a whole.

I.3. Multilayered Reality of the 'Place-Body'

Place is alive and it is also embodied. The physical landscape is the most obvious body of the place. It correlates with the notion of the gross body, the material and physical body. In Hindu thought the human body encompasses more than the physical and material dimension.

The Upanishads "present the widely employed *panca-kosa* or five sheaths model of the person, whose core and source is *atman*. The five sheaths (*panca*, 'five'; *kosa*, 'sheath') are conceived as enveloping one another, and at their centre is the true Self. The outermost sheaths is the *body of food*, or the material body, which is filled successively with the sheath or body of *prana*, *breath* (life-force), then *mind*, *consciousness*, and at the centre, *bliss*. The sheath of bliss is interpreted as either identical to, or containing, the innermost true Self, the *atman*."²⁵ This basic Hindu concept is applied to the place Banaras. Just like the human body, place itself is depicted as having five sheaths. Kashi, as living being is represented in its embodiment and the corresponding sheaths.²⁶ At its centre we find the main deities Vishwanath and Annapurna (Shiva and Shakti) residing in the sheath of bliss. Further, the inner sheath of bliss is associated with the heart of the place. To move from the outer to the inner sheaths is to move towards one's own self and to realise the blissful nature of existence.

In the Vedanta model of the "three bodies"²⁷ it is explained that the human body exists on three levels. One is the gross body, the physical body. Further there exists a subtle body, called *sukshma sarira* that can sense the subtle elements, called *tanmatras* also understood as the contents of dream consciousness. Those *tanmatras* lack material properties yet they

²³ see Devereux 1982: 82

²⁴ see Devereux 1996: 87

²⁵ Fields 2001: 25

²⁶ see Singh 2002: 47-49; Eck 1983: 116; Lannoy 2002: 60, 93

²⁷ Fields 2001: 27

influence a person's personality and waking consciousness. It is impossible for the gross body to understand the subtle forces of the tanmatras, only the subtle body can. The third body is the kausal body or karmic body that contains impressions of past experiences and results of one's actions. If we apply this concept to the embodied place it becomes clear that we have to strengthen our subtle body's cognitive capacities in order to sense the information that is stored in the subtle layers of the place.

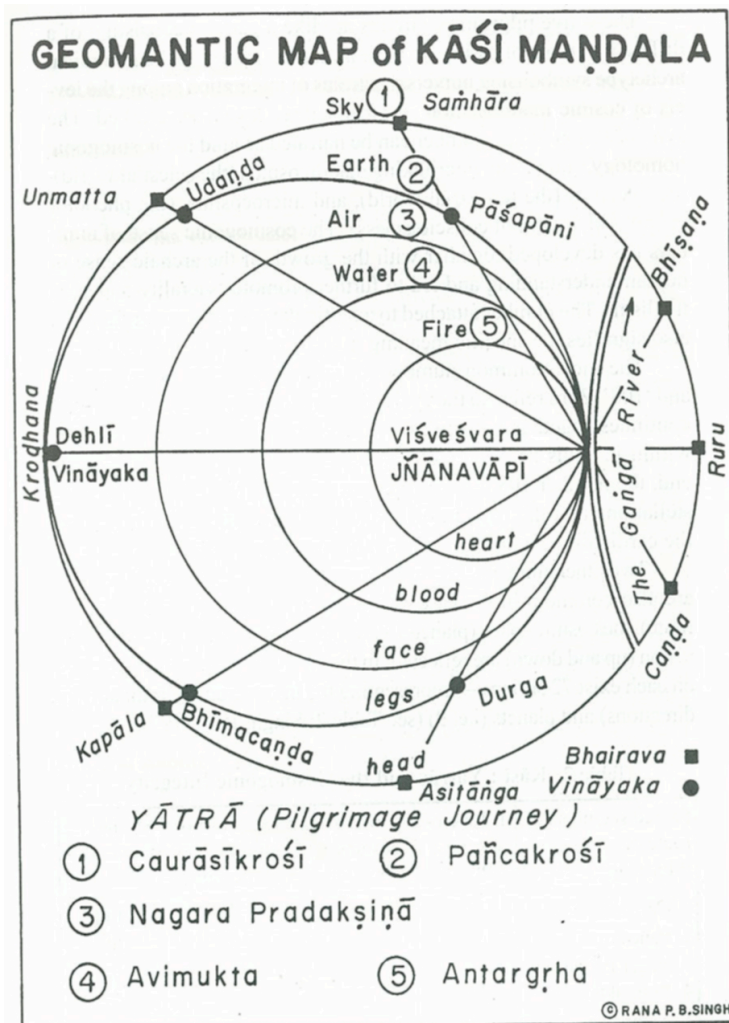


Figure 2: The image depicts a cosmogramic representation of Kashi, in which Kashi is presented as place and as body. The elements are connected with parts of the body and with the respective pilgrimage routes. Geomantic Map of Kashi.²⁸

²⁸ Picture cf. Singh 2002: 49

1.4. The ‘Spirit of Place’

Place as a living being, has its own distinct character. This ‘spirit of place’ is what makes us feel a certain way at specific spots. Singh expresses beautifully the living character of place. Reading the following lines brought me closer to an understanding of what is meant by ‘Spirit of Place,’ and how it may help us to experience ‘Oneness’ in the sense of an interrelatedness of human being, Earth and Cosmos. He describes his relatedness with place in an autoethnographic style, and evokes in me the wish to relate to places in this manner.

*“All my life I have felt close to place. Place speaks. Place talks. Place communicates. Place is a growing organism, a form of being. Place is an interrelated community, playing between Man and Cosmos. (...) Somehow later in life I learn that place attachment is a human quest for understanding and also a feeling – the immanence and transcendence of a force linking Man and Cosmos.”*²⁹

Place has thus been considered and perceived as living organism, as a form of being that embraces the various layers of reality. Marco Pogacnik, a Slovenian geomancer and teacher of my interviewpartner Dagmar Kalb, speaks of the dimension of mind and soul as corresponding with the spiritual background of a landscape, which he calls the ‘soul of the land’. He mentions the Latin ‘genius loci’ (spirit of place) as a masculine term indicating the same phenomena.³⁰ The Romans identified the supernatural life force as ‘Numen’. This Numen is the “intangible spirit of place, the charged aura of places of power.”³¹ It further emanates the other world’s atmosphere. Deities are thought to possess a concentration of this force and the same holds true for particular places. In the case of Kashi, the place itself is considered a deity.

²⁹ Singh 1994: p. I of email; my emphasis

³⁰ see Pogacnik 1996:85

³¹ Devereux 1989: 30

1.5. Communication with Place

Communication is one hallmark of relationship. So who is the communicative partner in this earth-human interrelatedness? It is the life force itself, Mother Earth, as a living organism and Place as agency with concrete tasks, skills, powers and qualities. In this manner Devereux writes that “(p)lace is not passive. It interacts with our consciousness in a dynamic way. It contains its own memory of events and its own mythic nature, its *genius loci* or spirit of place, which may not be visible but can be apprehended by the human—and animal—interloper, especially in the appropriate mental state(.)”³² Such a Spirit of Place reveals itself within a deeper interconnectedness of human and place. John Steel mentions ‘psychometry’ as enhanced cognitive skill in order to understand the language of place. The term refers to “the psychic ability some people claim to have to pick up information from objects or places.”³³ Such informations or traces are thought to be located within the “aura associated with objects: the akasha, the ether, the morphogenetic field”³⁴ or the subtle layer of reality of a place. This is also the loci of the Spirit of Place. I perceive the Spirit of Place as expression of the life force that encompasses the earth. It is an expression of the Earth Goddess, whom the ancient Greeks called Gaia. Gaia was considered to be the source of dreams, and thus the incubation of dreams at sacred sites “was believed to be a method of bypassing the images of the conscious mind and thus receiving guidance from the spirit of place.”³⁵ What Devereux describes here is a cross-state communication between the life force and the human being, a process whereby messages from another ‘dimension’ or layer of reality may be received.

The human ritual participation within a place-human relationship is an expression of reciprocity. According to Singh³⁶ the cosmic forces inherent to the tirtha are kept alive through human actions and rituals. We can thus conclude that there exists a reciprocal relationship between humanity and place, in other words between humanity and the earth as living organism, between humanity and their terrestrial Mother. At sacred places, “the relationship of devotees to sacred land is expressed simultaneously in terms of myth, history, cultural traditions, rituals, kinship and politics(.)”³⁷

³² Devereux 1996: 88

³³ Devereux 1989: 3-4

³⁴ Devereux 1989: 4

³⁵ Devereux 1989:26

³⁶ Singh 1997: p.I of email

³⁷ Singh 2002: 16-17

I.6. Holistic Experience of Place

Tuning the cognitive organs as tools to communicate with the Spirit of Place

Sensitivity to what has been experienced as the Spirit of Place, the genius loci, identity of Place, is the starting point for extra-ordinary sensory experiences. The experience of the Spirit of Place, – the distinct atmosphere of a particular place – involves all senses and feelings. Singh draws our attention to the holistic theory of ‘theoria’. This ancient Greek way of experiencing reality and gaining knowledge from it is an appropriate method for approaching the Spirit of Place.³⁸ John Steele writes about an ‘intuitive sense of place’³⁹ as one way of tuning one’s organs of perception, widen them.

To observe subtle energies within ones own body and mind is helpful to sensing such energies within a place. Vipassana meditation and the consequently increasing awareness of anicca has helped me to sense, therefore I am thankful to my Burmese teacher Sayamagi. All my life she has been the source of peace and true happiness. Sayamagi’s teacher Sayagi U Ba Khin has encouraged people to learn to feel people and places. Dagmar gave me an idea of the geomantic way of inquiry into the nature of a place. She took away the fear of subjectivity and strengthened the trust in intuitive and imaginative skills as means to receiving and increasing knowledge. Geomancy can be understood as “holistic science of experience.”⁴⁰

At the temple place of Chidambaram in Tamil Nadu, South India I met Nataraj, one of the Dikshitar pandits, temple priests, who are believed to be “Shiva family” and trace back the origins of their caste to the time of the divine competition dance of Shiva and Kali. When I asked him how we can benefit from the energy of a place he explained me the concept of ESP (extra sensitive perception), which may be realized by means of practicing Yoga. In this state of perception the pilgrims may extract the energy stored within the place due to the continuous performance of rituals over at least three thousand years.

³⁸ see Singh 1994: p.1 of email

³⁹ cf. Devereux 1989: 8

⁴⁰ Devereux 1991/2000: 6

1.7. Sacred Places

Pilgrimage Centres - Fields of Divine Presence

Thus humans have found particular spots that reveal the life force more easily than others. These are holy places, later expressed by humans in terms of sacred places and by others simply called places of power. David Kubrin describes the human recognition of the distinct character of such places when he writes that “worship, celebrations and healings traditionally took place at particular power spots where the life-giving energies of the Earth Mother were especially accessible and powerful.”⁴¹ Eck notes in this manner that “(l)ike the body, the creation is differentiated in power and function. Some earthly places reveal the Divine more readily than others.”⁴²

A place is commonly termed a sacred place, when humans sensed their sacrality. In the Hindu context such a place is called tirtha. Ritual activities and religious mappings mark the transformation of a place into a distinct sacred place.⁴³ The conception of the ‘Sacred Place’ serves as frame for the pilgrim’s experience. It favours mystic experience. It presents the universe in condensed, microcosmic form, and thus allows the devotee to understand her or his identity within the bigger whole, the cosmic flow. Singh refers to the human quest for a divine connection with nature, landscape, environment and place as faithscape.⁴⁴ During our first conversation at the harmony Book Shop in 2008 Singh emphasized that a sacred place is not solely a human invention. The place reveals its power to the human aspirant. It is rather discovered by man, never created by man. At such places the ordinary sensory perception is altered. Due to their intrinsic power of awakening tirthas, the Hindu sacred places and transitional sites help the pilgrim to alter his or her everyday sensory perception and may even let them drop out of their ordinary state of mind into an ocean of altered states of consciousness.⁴⁵ Steele beautifully describes the effect of such tirthas when he writes that “(a)t tirthas we remember to remember; we wake up to our life force connection not only with the Earth, but with the whole cosmos.”⁴⁶

The development of the sacred space of the tirtha starts with the sensory and sensitive ability of human beings to perceive concentrated (divine) powers attached to place. In the Hindu Tradition those humans are called the Rishis, the seers, the ones to whom truth

⁴¹ Devereux 1989: 35

⁴² Eck 1983: 34

⁴³ see Singh 1994

⁴⁴ see Singh 2002: 185

⁴⁵ see Devereux 1989: 19

⁴⁶ Devereux 1989: 19

revealed itself. The word rishi originates in the ability to see, to see in an extra-ordinary mode, it means to see truly. It means in our context here the cognitive ability to see the multiple layers of reality corresponding with the various bodies of the place. In contemporary discourses such persons possessing extra-ordinary-perception are also referred to as Siddhas.

Sacred Places that are further constructed by human ritual activity can be understood as systems. They take and give energy as well as information.⁴⁷ The information that is stored in a place can be received by human sensual, intellectual, spiritual and technical abilities.⁴⁸ The keys are 'altered modi of perception' or the development of approaches to 'reading information'.⁴⁹

The holy place as healing place

A 'holy place' is a place where the qualitative characteristic of holiness is perceived and preserved. The English words holiness and health are related and have their common origin in the Germanic word for 'whole'.⁵⁰ Rana P.B. Singh reminds us that in the Hindu tradition a place is holy where we may experience 'wholeness.' He writes: "By the combined process of sacralization, ritualization and deeper interconnectedness, the place becomes a distinct 'sacred place' (...) *Sacredscape* is the place (and territory) of transformation. A place is holy where 'wholeness' is preserved."⁵¹ Throughout the text I will use the term healing according to Devereux's definition as "a movement towards greater *wholeness*."⁵²

⁴⁷ see Devereux 1991: 42

⁴⁸ see Devereux 1991: 43

⁴⁹ see Devereux 1991: 45

⁵⁰ see Devereux 1991: 23

⁵¹ Singh 2002: 16-17

⁵² Devereux 1996: 44

2. Tirtha Yatra and the Reciprocal Relationship between Human and Place

When I began my inquiry into notions and concepts of holiness ascribed to the landscape of India in 2005, I realized that the ancient knowledge about places of power had been incorporated into the Hindu tradition of pilgrimage. Whenever I arrived at a sacred place or tirtha there arose in me rather unscientific questions such as ‘how to cross over to the other world, the world where more is possible, where magic is still alive? These could be the questions of a child listening to fairy tales. How may we enter a field of communication with Ultimate Reality, the All, the One, the source of universal wisdom, pure consciousness, God, the Goddess, the cosmic heart, Allah, the electromagnetic field?’ Again and again I tried to root my questions in the more logically oriented foundation of anthropological science. When I was introduced to the transpersonal approach to research, I understood that such questions are definitely scientific in a transpersonal sense.

2.1. Tirtha and Tirtha Yatra

Tirtha means ford or crossing place and many of these tirthas were located where one could cross over a river. In the pilgrimage context the tirtha is a place to cross to the world of the Divine, to cross from the world of suffering to the safe shore of liberation, moksha. The Tirtha is a place of concentrated divine powers. It is a place to perceive the laws of cosmic order. It is a place that favours a process of realizing ones cosmic integrity, ones identity in the cosmos. Here humans may contact the Divine. Here the Divine may contact humans. Here we can establish a relationship with inhabitants of the divine field of effect.

“A tirtha is a place where the boundaries between dimensions dissolve, allowing cross-state communication with the memory or morphogenetic field of the Goddess or God which has been established over centuries of worship.”⁵³

The presence of the divine is focussed at tirthas, this is what Hindu pilgrims believe and that’s why the main focus of the pilgrimage is to visit the presiding deity. The main deity of the place is often located at the focal point of potency. In the case of the Kashi mandala this focal point is at the centre, the field of bliss, the heart of the place and the home of Vishwanath and Annapurna (Shiva and Shakti).

⁵³ Devereux 1989: 19; my emphasis

In ancient times tirthas were located at rivers and still the river Ganga, the heavenly river, the Mother Goddess who purifies her devotees and liberates by her loving and forgiving touch is one main aspect of the city's sacredness. Rivers transport the sensation of movement. To visit the river Ganga in Kashi, to approach her in a respectful and devout state of mind, initiated within me the experience of movement, of transformation and of equanimity. Whenever I felt tensed in my mind or overloaded by the impressions of the lanes of the city, I sat down at the banks of Ganga and watched her flow thus becoming Ganga myself. To realize the oneness of self and Ganga initiates a state of liquid knowledge, ungraspable but real in terms of perception.

*"A tirtha is an earthly place, charged with power and purity. We call it a "sacred" place, but it is important to realize that there is not a Hindu term that means quite what we mean by "sacred." The term "pure" (shuchi, pavitra) is used, as is good (punya) and "auspicious" (shubha, mangala). As for sacred, in the sense of bearing the essence of the divine, we might say that in the Hindu view the whole earth is sacred, for it is all the embodiment of the Divine."*⁵⁴

The understanding that the earth is the embodiment of a divine life-force, correlates with the Gaia-concept, which is central to the practice of geomancy. The perception of the earth as the embodiment of the divine is a transpersonal experience for it involves a feeling of 'Oneness.' After visiting the shrines of the Goddess in India, reading her Gita (song), listening to people speak about her, watching devotees worship their Ultimate Mother, worshipping her myself and hoping to realize what she is, there was one moment during Navaratri (Nine Nights of the Goddess), while at home in Austria, on my bike to the shopping mall, when I experienced the Goddess in All. There was no separation between phenomena, all was connected, was her divine play. I perceived the earth as being a manifestation of the Divine. Waves of happiness enlivened my mind and my body. I felt happy and alive, infused with love and trust in all that is. Thus I call it an emotionally and spiritually healing experience.

Following Diane Eck's elaborations about the Hindu concept of the tirtha, we can imagine the tirtha as a place of extraordinary power. It is a doorway between heavenly and earthly existence. It is a place where human prayers and rites cross upwards and where divine agency crosses downwards. In the Hindu tradition those divine descendents are called avataras. Etymologically the two words come from the same roots, tr (to cross over) and avatr (to cross down). The tirtha is thus a connecting sphere, where cross-state communication is possible. "One might say that the *avataras* descend, opening the doors of

⁵⁴ Eck 1983: 34; my emphasis

the *tirthas* so that men and women may ascend in their rites and prayers.”⁵⁵ Prayers and rites thus become more effective by the help of the distinct quality of the place. The ‘Spirit of Place’ embracing the various layers of reality mediates between the spheres of existence. The Spirit of the sacred place is like an amplifier and thus the potency of religious and spiritual work increases.

The tirtha as sacred place further “possesses the integrative entity of an eternal bond between human-psyche and nature-spirit”⁵⁶ and thus serves as interface for human-earth communication.

Yatra means journey. The journey to a tirtha is called Tirtha Yatra. In the Hindu terminology a pilgrimage to a holy place is called tirtha yatra, which means literally to undertake a journey to the river fords. The significance of pilgrimage within the Hindu Tradition is emphasised by Diane Eck when she writes that Hinduism is “a tradition of pilgrimage to sacred places, bathing in sacred waters, and honouring divine images. It is a tradition in which all of the senses are employed in the apprehension of the divine.”⁵⁷ Bhardwaj calls pilgrimage “a panhuman phenomenon” and further states that, “(t)he concept of pilgrimage exists in all major religions, although, not unexpectedly, its meaning varies widely within canonical structure of each religion.”⁵⁸ We find places of local relevance as well as places with Pan-Hindu relevance. Banaras is a tirtha of Pan-Hindu relevance.

In the Hindu tradition the cosmologically oriented movement through space is called Tirtha Yatra. It involves a place, the intention of approaching that place and the actual movement. It involves the understanding that particular places of the Earth are especially sacred. Pilgrims learn about the distinct character of the sacred place, and with the help of an attitude of deeper faith the essence of the ‘sacred place’ may be experienced. A holistic experience of place encompasses moments of contact with entities that inhabit the layers of the place that are not visible to the physical eye. The aim of pilgrimage has been identified as the acquirement of an insight into “universal expositions of interconnectedness between the physical realm of human consciousness and the divine realm of superconsciousness.”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Eck 1983: 35

⁵⁶ Singh 2002: 16

⁵⁷ Eck 1983: 6

⁵⁸ Bhardwaj 1973:1

⁵⁹ Singh 2002: 15-16

Banaras is part of a web of holy places (tirthas) all over India. The Hindu landscape is a holy landscape. Diane Eck beautifully describes the Hindu perception of landscape when she writes:

*“For Hindus, the landscape of India is holy, from the Himalayas, the home of the gods, in the North, to Cape Comorin or Kanya Kumari, where the Goddess dwells at the southernmost tip of the subcontinent. The land that stretches out between is a land of sacred hills, rivers, and cities, webbed with pilgrimage routes. Going on a pilgrimage for the darshana of such places has long been an important and vibrant aspect of the Hindu religious tradition.”*⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Eck 1983: 34; my emphasis

2.2. Tirtha and Axis Mundi

The experience of being at the Center of the World

We have seen that in the Hindu worldview certain places on earth are perceived as gateways to other worlds. These are termed tirtha. In this sense the Hindu concept of tirtha correlates with the well-known concept of the axis mundi, which is present in mythic narratives all over the world. Devereux reminds us that in Northern Europe, Siberia and arctic Eurasia such a World Axis or World Tree signified the World Center. The axis mundi is the place where the world of humans is linked with the underworld as well as the world of the deities.⁶¹ A tirtha such as Banaras is as well perceived as the Center of the World. Thus the pilgrimage place of Banaras serves as the place where the spheres of existence connect. One may enter into communication with other layers of reality. It is not so much a question of connecting to some distant place, some far away other world, but of one's ability to perceive those various layers that are interwoven with each other. People with extra sensitive perception may perceive and even see those other planes of existence. The deities descend at the tirtha, the living may establish contact with the divine and the dead may ascend there.

In this sense the tirtha is a field of concentrated divine presence and divine agency. Place – and sacred place in particular – serves as a gateway to those layers of reality that are more subtle and therefore demand extra sensitive skills of perception in order to communicate with the 'knowing field' of such a wider form of reality that encompasses more than the physical and intellectual realm.

The Center of the World may be anywhere. The World Center cosmology encompasses human experience, more precisely a sense of 'being centered' and 'being here,' or as Devereux puts it "the experience of being at the center of the world (.)"⁶² This axis is always a passage between the various worlds or between states of consciousness. Regarding shamanic use of the axis mundi concept, Devereux writes: "Access to this axial element at the heart of the Center is by means of ecstatic states of consciousness."⁶³ In this context the axis mundi served as a signifier for altered states of consciousness and for the transformation of the image of a self at the heart of our cognition.⁶⁴

⁶¹ see Devereux 1996: 52

⁶² Devereux 1996: 69

⁶³ Devereux 1996: 71

⁶⁴ see Devereux 1996: 72

In the Hindu context we find pillars that resemble the World Center. The most important one is the mythic image of the pillar of light or in the emic sense the linga of light. In Hindu perception all creation starts with the union of the linga and the yoni. The male linga represents Shiva, consciousness, form and the plan of the universe and the female yoni represents Shakti, energy, substance and the dynamic principle of creation. We meet this image throughout India's shrines. Shiva and the Goddess in divine union, in a state of bliss and oneness.

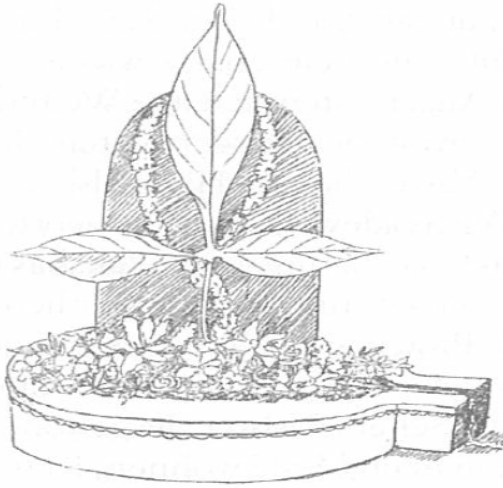


Figure 3: Lingam and Yoni in blissful unity.⁶⁵

Danielou writes: “The principle of Shiva can be represented as the axis of world manifestation, which develops starting from the limit point, the *bindu*, the point from which the universe arises. The world axis is represented as a pillar of light crossing the universe from top to bottom.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Picture cf. Storl 2005: 56

⁶⁶ Danielou 2003: 29

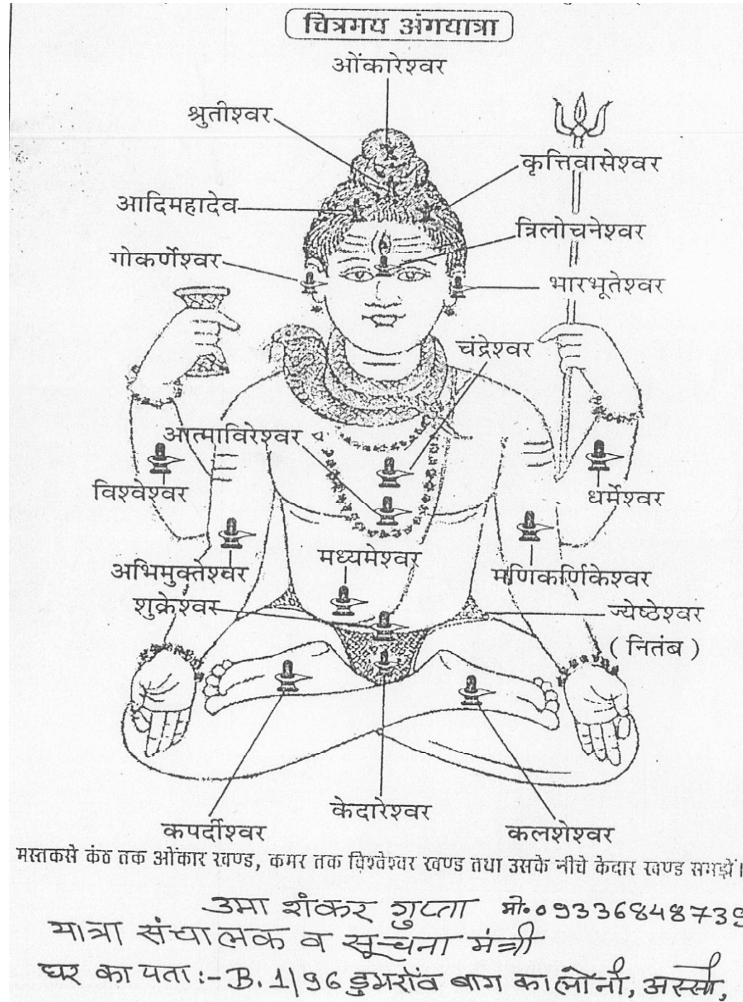


Figure 4: The 12 lingams of light correspond to 12 holy sites in Kashi, which is here depicted as Shiva's body. This image can be understood as cognitive pilgrimage map for it reveals the pilgrimage of the inner most field of Kashi, from where Shiva moves the universe.⁶⁷

The 12 yotirlingas are marked within Banaras, “representing twelve places throughout the country where the divine broke through to the earthly in a blinding shaft of light(.)”⁶⁸ When I was on a train from Bodh Gaya to Banaras in March 2008 I met a middle-aged man. He did not speak English. I communicated in Hindi that I was going to Kashi. He smiled and wrote something in my book. Later I understood that he wrote the names of the 12 Shiva lingams. This instance revealed the importance of the lingams for Hindu devotees. Following the tradition of Yoga, we can find this image within the human body, where the “subtle center located at the base of the spine is a triangle of desire, knowledge, and action forming the yoni, in the center of which rises the linga born-of-itself, shining like a thousand suns.”⁶⁹ Devereux as well points out to the correspondance of the World Navel and the human

⁶⁷ Picture cf. Uma Shankar's pilgrimage information leaflet, which he gave me in the context of the performance of the Pancakroshi Pilgrimage in November 2008.

⁶⁸ Gesler and Pierce in: *Geographical Review* 90 (2) 2000: 225

⁶⁹ Shiva Purana cf. Danielou 2003: 29

navel.⁷⁰ He writes that “(t)he human being is an axis at the meeting point of the four bodily directions, mirroring precisely the World Pillar.”⁷¹ He further mentions “C.G. Jung’s identification of an archetype of quaternity, a deep psychic pattern that expresses wholeness.”⁷² Pilgrimage in the emic sense is a way to experience oneself at the centre of the world, or as Lannoy puts it: “Pilgrimage is a journey to the centre of the Cosmos in search of self-renewal, an act of consecration symbolic of renewal of the World.”⁷³

2.3. Darshan

Relating with the Divine

Darshan means the visual perception of the Divine. Darshan is the visually initiated form of mystical experience. It encompasses visions of the physical eye as well as visions of the inner eye. Darshan is the main motivation for pilgrimage. The divine sight of the place itself is considered an auspicious experience. The revered indologist and long-term pilgrim of Kashi, Diana Eck wrote an excellent book about this cognitive phenomenon. I will give a short introduction into the experience of darshan. Darshan is one of the means to establish contact between the human sphere and the divine sphere. People take darshan of places and thus they receive the blessing of the place itself. In her book *Darsan*⁷⁴ Eck gives way to an understanding of the importance and power of seeing in the Hindu tradition. Deities never close their eyes and devotees too must keep their eyes open “in order to make contact with them, to reap their blessings, and to know their secrets. When Hindus go to the temple, their eyes meet the eternal gaze of the eyes of God. It is called *darsan*, “seeing” the divine image, and it is the single most common and significant element of Hindu worship.”⁷⁵ Darshan may be taken not only of the image of deities but also of places of power, the Hindu tirthas. Eck notes that tirthas are perceived as divine images as well. Hindu pilgrims are “sacred sightseers”⁷⁶ who come to visit the powerful places where darshan may be experienced. They “seek the *darsan* of the places themselves which are said to be the natural epiphanies of the divine(.)”⁷⁷ The experience of darshan is initiated by the divine agency. The deities see the devotee and decide to show themselves. Thus in the popular terminology

⁷⁰ see Devereux 1996: 67

⁷¹ Devereux 1996: 68

⁷² Devereux 1996: 69

⁷³ Lannoy 2002: 45

⁷⁴ Eck 1998

⁷⁵ Eck 1998: 1

⁷⁶ Eck 1998: 5

⁷⁷ Eck 1998: 5

people say that the deity gives darshan and the devotee takes darshan.⁷⁸ The moment of darshan is a moment of contact, a moment of energy exchange, an intimate moment of interrelatedness of human and divine. Eck notes that “(t)he contact between devotee and deity is exchanged through the eyes.”⁷⁹ She draws on Kramrisch’s insights that the energy inherent in the object is communicated within the moment of the divine sight.⁸⁰ The meaning of seeing in the Hindu tradition is rather different from the western conception. Seeing is a kind of touching. Seeing is a way of knowing, which becomes obvious as the terminology of seeing encompasses notions of knowing. The concept of darshan is further related with the concept of the rishi, the ancient Vedic seer. To see, in terms of a visionary and mystic experience is the base for developing wisdom.⁸¹ It initiates the experience of the mystical beholding of a cosmic reality.

When the devotee feels as being in the “immediate presence” of a deity we speak of saksat-darsan, whereby this feeling is described as an exchange of consciousness, the devotees forgetting their worldly bonds. In a philosophical context darsana “implies the realization of, or an insight into, the nature of reality.”⁸² Further we can speak of a heightened sense of awareness inherent to darsan as a subjective experience.⁸³ Darsana can be understood as a state of mind in which the image is perceived as an actual manifestation of the deity.⁸⁴ It is seen as a sentient being with whom the devoted may establish a relationship of loving care. As we have seen, a place of power such as Banaras understood as divine image and deity can be approached in terms of devotional love.

2.4. Performing Pilgrimage Within

Tirtha-yatra means visiting holy sites, yet similarly to the axis mundi concept it can also be understood metaphorically or in other words in a microcosmic sense. Singh follows Brereton when he writes that sacred space “includes spaces that can be entered physically, as geography of holy land, imaginatively as the inner geography of the body in Tantric yoga, or visually, as the space of mandala(.)”⁸⁵ The Yogi can thus visit the seven shrines through

⁷⁸ see Eck 1998: 6

⁷⁹ Eck 1998: 7

⁸⁰ Eck 1998: 9

⁸¹ see Eck 1998: 9-10

⁸² Lynch 1990: 206

⁸³ Lynch 1990: 192-1993

⁸⁴ Lynch 1990: 200

⁸⁵ Brereton cf. Singh 2002: 21

specific types of meditation, while his physical body remains at the same place. Suresh Josi told me to view the whole body as place for pilgrimage. He pointed at the top of his head, the Crown chakra and said: “Here is Kailash.” The shrine or tirtha may also refer to a certain quality, as truth or knowledge. Bhardwaj states consequently from the Skanda Purana, an ancient religious text of the Hindus: “Truth, forgiveness, control of senses, kindness to all living beings and simplicity are *tirthas*.”⁸⁶ Bhardwaj defines tirtha yatra thus as more than a physical activity. More significantly it involves mental and moral discipline and further points out to the fact that “without the latter, pilgrimage in the physical sense has little significance in the Hindu tradition.”⁸⁷ For the householder pilgrimage serves as a temporal frame for living the holy life and focussing all one’s actions on the experience of mystic knowledge.

2.5. Religious framework for pilgrimage

Titha Yatra involves Sanatan Dharma (emic concept of Hinduism) as Sanata Dharma involves Tirtha Yatra. In other words the religious discourse legitimates and explains pilgrimage. It gives meaning to the traditional practice of pilgrimage. “Religion provides the basis of pilgrimage by offering the reward of purification of the soul and the attainment of objectives related to the problems of mundane existence” as Bhardwaj puts it.⁸⁸ And Singh writes that, “pilgrimage tends to strictly follow the rules obtained in the religious literature.”⁸⁹

Hindu pilgrimage is thus imbedded in a contextual framework of understandings of its philosophies. The four basic concepts of dharma (righteousness, duty, virtue), artha (material gain, worldly advantage, success), kama (love, pleasure), and moksha (realization and self-emancipation, salvation from transmigration) are of central relevance.⁹⁰ Titha Yatra contributes to the fulfilment of these four aims of life. The final goal is thus spiritual bliss and the first three aspects converge into the same. There are specific activities rituals and rites as well as observances that may help attaining the final goal of liberation, whereby Hinduism provides various paths toward spiritual fulfilment. The path of knowledge is called jnana yoga,

⁸⁶ Bhardwaj 1973: 2

⁸⁷ Bhardwaj 1973: 2

⁸⁸ Bhardwaj 1973: 1

⁸⁹ Devereux 1989: 19

⁹⁰ see Bhardwaj 1973: 2

the one of action karma yoga and the one of devotion bhakti yoga. During the Tirtha Yatra all the paths are strengthened within the devotee.”⁹¹

“Journey to sacred places provides opportunity for the householder to detach himself for some time from the cares and worries of daily life and to devote that time to prayer, contemplation, and listening to the spiritual discourses of holy men.”⁹² He forgets to mention the housewives and the holy women.

The early references to pilgrimage as spiritual aim can be found in the Rg Veda. Bhardwaj suggests that there are conceptual similarities between pilgrimage of today and of Vedic period and perhaps the concept of tirtha (ford) derived from Aryan references for rivers. So even though pilgrimage is not specifically mentioned in Vedic literature, the reverence for rivers and the merit of travels, that are still two important aspects of the present concept of pilgrimage, are found. Later developments added more specific meaning and content.⁹³

At the time of the great epics, namely the Mahabharata (about 300 BC) and the Ramayana and the Puranas pilgrimage had gained increasing popularity. The Mahabharata and especially the section named Aranyakaparvan (Book of the Forest) gives detailed description of sacred place and the merits of their visit throughout India. This was the time when Hinduism became kind of a formalized religion and thus the significance of ritualistic elements increased. Through medieval India the ritualization of religion was accompanied by a Brahmin revival, absorbed partially into local and non-Brahmanic cults.⁹⁴

2.6. Religion and Spirituality

As I will follow the conceptual distinction between religion and spirituality as found in the book “Religion – Mystik – Schamanismus⁹⁵”, I will introduce it briefly.

People are religious when they merely believe something, have faith in something without correlating experience. People are spiritual when they experience what they believe and believe only what they experience. Mystic experiences belong to the field of spirituality. Spirituality is based on actual experience whilst religion may be based on ‘blind’ faith only. The spiritual or mystic experience involves experiences of extraordinary perception. These two

⁹¹ Bhardwaj 1973: 3

⁹² Bhardwaj 1973: 3

⁹³ see Bhardwaj 1973: 3-4

⁹⁴ see Bhardwaj 1973: 5

⁹⁵ see Scharfetter and Rätsch 1998

categories are technical in term because they may not be separated totally. Religious practice may be the base or mental framework for spiritual experience. Yet a spiritual person may be lacking any religious doctrine. The pilgrims approach to pilgrimage will mostly involve aspects of the both domains, the spiritual and the religious. Religious discourses may enhance mystic experience.

2.7. Faithful Mindset as Prerequisite for Religious Experience

As I mentioned before a faithful mind-set opens the pilgrim to experience the essence of a sacred place in other words the mythic reality of the place. I thus consider faith as a key to experience. When we are in a state of sceptical doubt, it is almost impossible to open the doors of perception because thoughts will occupy all the inner space. This does not mean that one should not question what is being told or give up one's ability of knowing what is true and real. To trust one's own experiences and integrate them in a harmonic way is an important part of the religious or mystic experience. It is a necessary process for the achievement of a sense of integrity.

The images of the Kashi mahatmyas (mythic narratives about Kashi), which are known by most pilgrims since their childhood include the image of Kashi presented as equal to the whole world including all sacred places of India and also her sacred waters, all the gods, all that is powerful and auspicious. These are "statements of faith about a sacred city"⁹⁶ During the time the pilgrims stay in Kashi they will learn a little more about it, may it be from the Pandas, assisting them with the rituals during their pilgrimage, from the story tellers, charlatans, or from the penny paperback mahatmyas that one can buy on the bazaar.⁹⁷ Eck mentions that, "(a) great *tirtha* such as Kashi collects a vast array of such mythic events. (...) It is not only the legends and myths that communicate the power of a place (...) the place itself has traditions."⁹⁸

Sacred Space means a cosmological arrangement of space and Singh⁹⁹ cites Brereton writing that it "includes spaces that can be entered physically, as the outer geography of a holy land, imaginatively as the inner geography of the body in Tantric yoga, or visually, as the space of mandala." And continues on the same page: "With this manifestive sanctity, sacred space

⁹⁶ Eck 1983: 22-23

⁹⁷ see Eck 1983: 24

⁹⁸ Eck 1983: 35

⁹⁹ 2002: 21

serves as a means of communication with the gods (...) and also as a divine power which led to develop the tradition of pilgrimage in Hinduism(.)” Here we find the motives of bhukti and mukti, religious benefit and salvation.

2.8. Experiencing Tirtha Yatra

The experience of the Tirtha Yatra encompasses notions such as sacred space and sacred time, being interrelated. This becomes obvious when Steele writes that “(t)o enter sacred space is to enter sacred time, where the present time expands to eternity without past or future.”¹⁰⁰ Sacred Space and Sacred Time transcend the notions of now and then and even here or there.

Of course every pilgrim experiences pilgrimage in his or her own personal way. Yet there exist shared characteristics of experience among the pilgrims. Richard Lannoy, the western scholar and long term pilgrim of Banaras picks up one of those shared assumptions about pilgrimage when he writes: “Pilgrimage is a journey to the centre of the Cosmos in search of self-renewal, an act of consecration symbolic of renewal of the World(.)”¹⁰¹ Singh gives a detailed description of the Hindu conception of the pilgrimage experience and it becomes clear that pilgrimage is more than physical movement¹⁰²:

“It is a performance of a passage to meaning, understanding, mythology and its context, experiencing the transformation of penance into peace, and from ignorance to knowledge. Pilgrimage is a journey across space, a journey into sacred time and through oneself, crossing the landscape of the soul (...) it is soul mapping (...) The more a pilgrim’s consciousness is awakened, the more she/he transcends her/his own historicity.”

We can see that pilgrimage in the Hindu context is a means to self-realisation. As the pilgrim moves through the physical landscape, he or she moves through the inner landscape of the soul, thus learning about one’s cosmic identity. Such a self-realisation involves the transformation of the pilgrim’s personality and ideally increases the pilgrim’s knowledge about energies and their interplay within the pilgrim and in the universe. The ritual of taking

¹⁰⁰ Devereux 1989: 19

¹⁰¹ Lannoy 2002: 45

¹⁰² Singh 2002: 15

the vow (sankalp lena) marks the moment of firm determination and strengthens the pilgrim's will to perform and complete the pilgrimage.

“Through the deep sensibilities engendered by pilgrimage (soul mapping) at a specific sacred place, one can transform one's materialistic identity into cosmic integrity. For Hindus, pilgrimage (Tirthayatra) is an act and process of spiritual crossing; to cross the sacredscape is to be transformed (...) pilgrimage is a process of realising energies within”¹⁰³

That the soul is here perceived as inner landscape becomes clear by Singh's term soul mapping. The experience of pilgrimage in my own case has been an adventure through my inner universe. Throughout the process I had to face the dark and hidden sides of my personality before I could integrate them into a temporarily aligned and holistic perception of my self and my place within the Universe. Pilgrimage truly is an experience that initiates personal and spiritual transformation. It shocked me from time to time that in Banaras I had to see the patterns of my life in such an intense way. Now I consider it as part of the process of self-realisation.

The five main routes for pilgrimage in Kashi demarcate the boundaries of the sheaths of the place's body that have been explained previously.¹⁰⁴ Those sheaths resemble the concept of a multilayered nature of reality. Thus in a metaphysical view of the city, the circles signify the potency of the place concerning the pilgrim's experience, from the gross reality to the subtle, finally arriving at the centre of the mandala of place, the most sacred field associated with the experience of bliss. The pilgrim thus moves from the outer sheath, the gross body to the sheath of bliss at the centre of creation. The result of such a journey is the transformation of the pilgrim's person so that she may find her 'identity in the cosmos'.¹⁰⁵ In this sense pilgrimage contributes to the human ability to experience bliss and self-realisation. Bhardwaj writes that it is “one of the many ways toward self-realization and bliss.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Singh 2002: 16-17; my emphasis

¹⁰⁴ see chapter II. 1.3.

¹⁰⁵ see Singh 2002

¹⁰⁶ Bhardwaj 1973: 3

2.8.1. Entering the Faithscape – The Spirit of Pilgrimage

Singh refers to the manifestation of sacredness on the Earth as *faithscape*.¹⁰⁷ He draws on Gastner who postulates the transposition of such a high state of sacredness as abode of divine beings. This abode has its correspondance in a transcendental sphere, often referred to as heaven.¹⁰⁸ The faithscape encompasses the sacred place itself, sacred times, rituals and meaning.

To realise the holiness of a place is a mystic and transpersonal experience for it encompasses a sense of oneness. The devout pilgrim is connected with the 'Ultimate' through sacred space and sacred time.¹⁰⁹ The mythic place narratives interrelate the divine biographies with the natural environment and contribute to the conception of a divine landscape. The environment is thus perceived as sacred, as whole, holy and consequently as healing and further the meaning faithscape increases. Because millions of pilgrims have walked along the same path, pilgrims gain a sense of eternity and timelessness.¹¹⁰

Singh mentions the relationship between the human psyche and a nature spirit in the contextual for understanding the work of the sacredscape and continues by naming motives for going on pilgrimage, pilgrims go "to revive themselves and their spirits" or "come to find what is timeless and eternal"¹¹¹ while they believe that they are in the company of those who walked on the sacred route in the past.¹¹² He calls pilgrimage "a spirit (...) a guiding force unifying divinity and humanity (...) a search for wholeness"¹¹³

The sensual and spiritual experiences of the tirtha yatra lead the pilgrim to the realisation of his or her identity within a cosmic whole. The tirtha yatra involves the belief in a force guiding the spirit and unifying the divine and the human realm.¹¹⁴ In the context of Hindu pilgrimage the earth, landscape and place are honoured as divine and living organisms. The

¹⁰⁷ see Singh 2002: 57

¹⁰⁸ Gastner 1954: 191 cf. Singh 2002: 57

¹⁰⁹ see Singh 2002: 17

¹¹⁰ see Singh 2002: 17

¹¹¹ Singh 2002: 16

¹¹² see Singh 2002: 17

¹¹³ Singh 2002: 17

¹¹⁴ see Singh 2002: 17

natural environment is sensed as imbued with spirit and knowledge. Such a worldview gives way to the establishment of a reciprocal human-earth relationship.

“Pilgrimage is concerned with the spirit and a deeper sense of human psyche in search of identity and interconnectedness to nature (...) The act of pilgrimage (...) is itself a ritual, which has transformative value, a reinterpretation of the idea of experience (...) By pilgrimage one gets ‘transformed into a new life’ (...) one moves towards wholeness – the essence of being holiness – a soul healing. Pilgrimage is a way to healing of the body, and also healing of the soul through cleaning the body by walking and revealing the soul by realisation of the spirit inherent to the mother Earth.”¹¹⁵

Singh calls pilgrimage a process of soul healing. He uses the term healing in the sense of a realization that nature is imbued with a spiritual life force. This reminds us of Devereux statement that the earth helps us to heal the “alienation of the psyche from nature”¹¹⁶ that is so typical for our western modern mind. Further to tune in to the holiness of a place leads to the experience of one’s own wholeness. The sacred environment is respected as source of knowledge.

In order not to get lost on the route a pilgrim should know about his or her spiritual goal. Pilgrimage then is a process of soul cleansing. Singh speaks about an insight into the mental state from transcendence to immanence and calls it ‘the way’. “The ‘way’ is an insight, or a mental state, for travelling the path in the right manner and the essential experiential dimension of the pilgrimage is that of the ‘spirit of place’, which should be realised by faith.”¹¹⁷ Thus Singh considers the spirit of place to be the key into this way.¹¹⁸

Intergenerational pilgrim’s experiences of the spirit of place conceptually converge into a cyclic frame in three phases and resemble a pilgrimage mandala:¹¹⁹

I. The phase from awareness to start, the *Initiation* is encouraged by the “human quest to get peace and to get experience of the manifestation of places”¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Singh 2002: 19-20; my emphasis

¹¹⁶ Devereux 1996: 19

¹¹⁷ Singh 2002: 17-18

¹¹⁸ see Singh 2002: 17

¹¹⁹ see Singh 2002: 19

¹²⁰ see Singh 2002: 19

2. To the journey itself and the experiences within Singh refers to as the stage of *liminality*, developing itself in the “passage of *experientiality*”¹²¹
3. Finally the pilgrims return home with some kind of transformation and share their feelings and memories with their society, which resembles the stage of *reaggregation*.

2.8.2. Tirtha Yatra as Shared Experience

Most pilgrims walk the holy path accompanied by co-pilgrims. They may be family members, they may be strangers from a far away region of India, they may be members of a different caste, they may be people with whom they would never join to eat together in everyday life. For the time of pilgrimage, nevertheless people from all social classes and castes move equally together. Various regional and cultural diversities become secondary for the time of pilgrimage.¹²² Following the Turners in their famous contribution to anthropological pilgrimage studies Singh suggests the use of the term *communitas* in this regard.¹²³ Strauss and Quinn¹²⁴ suggest that shared experience is the base for culture. Through shared participation emerges a culture of practice. We can thus speak of a ‘pilgrimage culture.’

2.9. Mystic Approach to Mythology

Suresh Joshi distinguished between mystical or spiritual experiences and ‘childish’ religious behaviour without ever using these terms. For him the temples and the religious festivities were ‘chocolates’ for children, same as concepts like heaven and hell. There one may learn about the divine in a simplified form. Whenever we were discussing about pilgrimage, the Divine or spiritual progress he drew my attention to the fact that knowledge must be experienced. He gave me ‘tools’ for experiencing that which makes up the essence, the holiness of Banaras. These mental ‘tools’ involved mythic images, allegories and similes. He used to say: “I will give you this concept.” Then he would explain it to me and in the moment I felt and perceived the meaning, he would clap, laugh or shout out joyously: “Now you got it.” Of course our communication took place on verbal as well as non-verbal levels, including gesture and mimic, eyes and breath, so it was easy for him to recognize when I got the meaning of the theoretical knowledge. I will give an example of such a mental tool of

¹²¹ see Singh 2002: 19

¹²² see Bhardwaj 1973: I

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ see Strauss & Quinn 2004

perception later on. The mythic and religious allegories and images became the root for mystic experience. I would like to call this process ‘mystic approach to mythology’.

2.10. Fruits of Pilgrimage

The fruits of the pilgrimage can be understood as the effect of the sacred journey. I perceived the effect of Banaras according to my own state of being. When I arrived first time I had prepared myself by means of meditation and by living life according to harmonious principles, how I understand them. During that time Banaras interrelated with me in its Kashi-form, in it's Anandavan-form. The experience was situated within biographical moments. Steele mentions the alteration of one's state of being as fruit of visiting a sacred place. The place shows effect upon the consciousness frequency and the sensory perception of the ‘pilgrim’ or any visitor. Steele suggests that rituals enhance such an experience of alteration or transcendence. Such ritual activities encompass notions such as meditation, prayer, food, music, dance, song, or psychedelic plants which Steele calls “morphogenetic field amplifiers”¹²⁵ in this regard. The experiences of my autumn 2008 visit were shaped due to moral failure. Bhardwaj expresses the same phenomena: “Pilgrimage to sacred places is of no avail if a person does not lead a moral life” and refers further to references within the religious literature that emphasise a moral life as precondition for earning merits, fruits (*phala*) through sojourning at holy places or bathing in sacred rivers.¹²⁶ Bhardwaj writes that even bathing in the Ganga is usually not understood as superior to meditation by Hindu scholars as pilgrimage is no substitute for meditation and control of senses, which are so crucial in Hinduism. Pilgrimage “is always considered an *additional* redemptive practice, an adjunct to other forms of worship.”¹²⁷ Today I understand this phenomenon in terms of resonance and correspondance between place and pilgrim and their layers of personality. When I am tuned to sattvic (pure, light, spiritual) frequencies, the place's sattvic sphere (or personality) will respond. This is part of a communicative relationship. The fruits of the pilgrimage are given by the place itself and by the place-bound divine agency. The place is somehow like a fruit bearing tree and the fruits themselves depend on the quality of correspondance. One local friend told me that Kashi sucks your bad energy with every step. This statement suggests that merely by walking in Kashi we get released of bad energies accumulated over past times. The famous mystic Kabir on the other hand neglects the

¹²⁵ Devereux 1989:20

¹²⁶ see Bhardwaj 1973: 3

¹²⁷ Bhardwaj 1973: 5

efficacy of holy places when he says that God lives in one's heart only. This is a mystic approach transcending the concept of place. The common saying that Kashi is wherever you are corresponds with such a mystic approach.

2.11. Shadow Sides of Pilgrimage

I feel that priests mostly occupy holy spots, as does the Catholic church here in Europe. The old places of worship that were merely natural epiphanies of divine forces are occupied, locked by the dominant religions. A free and personal approach to the divine is almost dangerous to the profession of priests. Some priests, Aryan or Catholic ones, truly have spiritual skills. They will be revered and respected by people anyway. But most priests I met with in Banaras are business oriented and arrogant dominators of religious feeling. One might have all the theoretical knowledge in the world and yet lack practical, intuitive, emotional intelligence and therefore all his knowledge is wasted. A priest who curses an innocent girl is impure by my definition for his heart is polluted by greed and hate. He can wash himself as often as he wishes in the purest water of all, his heart is polluted and therefore impure. *Panda Gunda hai*. This statement holds true for most of the Banarsi pilgrimage priests, yet one might meet priest of extraordinary personality, sweet and humble, talking from a pure heart.

Singh calls some “shadow sides of pilgrimages related to mob psychology, chances of catastrophes in organised pilgrimages, possible use of pilgrimage camps or meetings for religious, national, or ethnic prejudice”¹²⁸ to our awareness and writes: “When it moves around blind faith, mob psychology turns to superstition, self-gain, and creates danger for the others. This can be minimised by a strong wish and awareness of the deeper messages and meanings.”¹²⁹

Senthil Ganesh told me¹³⁰ that he doesn't like the pilgrimages around the Arunachala mountain because the pilgrims ask too many favours to the Gods. They are motivated selfish. I had told Senthil Ganesh, my friend and Dikshitar priest at the Nataraj Temple in Chidambaram, that I am planning to take part in the full-moon-circumambulation-pilgrimage of the holy mountain Arunachala. He said he doesn't like this mass pilgrimages because everybody is asking the Gods for personal favours. They want this and that and I can hear

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ see fieldnotes March 2006

and understand it, he argued. I still went and I could sense, what he meant but still many devotees were singing bhajans, reciting mantras and dancing into trance and it felt real to me.

There are these two ways of Bhakti, in the one the devotee has no selfish wishes, his only wish is to sense his ishta devata, to perceive the divine, to attain moksha, liberation. In the other way the devotee has particular problems in his mundane life and wishes to get release from the same, there is a selfish interest existent but still faith and love for the deity may be present and who am I to judge. If I had a big problem, I would as well wish to be freed from the same. In Buddhism we find a similar concept when it comes to dana, generosity. Gifts should be given only with the aim to attain the peace of Nibbana. If there are selfish wishes involved it will make us happy for time being just to tie us stronger to the cycle of rebirth and the reality of suffering.

Banaras had started as Anandavan (forest of bliss), as a place for ascetics and practitioners, rshis, sadhus etc. Sureshji told me that when the rajas (mundane kings) came with all their comfort, Banaras changed. During one of his discourses he narrates about this change: “Banaras it was not settlement. It was not house. It was a place for spiritual activities, only. The people they started to kill the Banaras, they entered here. They are killing Banaras.”¹³¹ Turner suggests that tourism and spirituality may be strictly separated. But Sacred Sightseers are still sightseers and they have to eat, sleep and drink. The economic aspects of pilgrimage are the income of many priests. They sit on the Ghat offering their skills to tourists and pilgrims. Suresh Joshi used to say: Panda Gunda hai (it is a word play and means: Priest is gangster or Mafia). What he thus refers to is a situation of economic and political power rivalry among priests on the main Ghats.¹³²

2.12. Etic Perspective on Pilgrimage

“Through the journey to a distant holy place, the pilgrim is separated from the rule-governed structures of mundane social life, becoming both geographically and socially marginal. Turner (1974) argues that pilgrimage centres are frequently found in peripheral locations distinct from centres of political and economic influence. Thus, the pilgrimage shrine is spatially liminal, but for the pilgrim it also “represents a trishold, a place and moment ‘in and out of

¹³¹ see Suresh Yoshi Interview 2. 2008: 0:08

¹³² see Freitag 1989: 145

time” where “direct experience of the sacred, invisible or supernatural order” can be expected”¹³³

“Significantly, it is the “touristic” aspect of pilgrimage journeys that sacred authorities frequently condemn, such as sightseeing or participation in markets or fairs. From the Turners’ point of view, however, these activities represent an important aspect of the total pilgrimage process and should not be ignored in anthropological analyses. The nonliturgical features of pilgrimage also give rise to *communitas*, even if such activities are not declared legitimately “religious””¹³⁴

The theoretical approach of the Turner’ has been challenged throughout the discipline. Several ethnographic accounts from various pilgrimage contexts demonstrate an absence of the “quality of antistructure and the experience of *communitas* (...) John Eade and Michael Sallnow (1991) argue against a global, essentialist approach that focuses on the universal characteristics and social functions of pilgrimage. Rather, they advocate analyzing each specific pilgrimage in terms of its particular social context and its “historically and culturally specific behaviours and meanings”¹³⁵ Yet Singh applies Turners concept of pilgrimage.

¹³³ Turner 1974:197, cf. Badone and Roseman 2004:3-4

¹³⁴ Turner and Turner 1978:37, cf. Badone and Roseman 2004:4

¹³⁵ Badone and Roseman 2004:4

3. Cosmogrammic Mode of Communication

A cosmogram resembles the original plan of something. In regard to place it pictures the original identity of the place. The cosmogram depicts in simplified form the identity of the place. Dagmar helped me to understand the ways in which the cosmogram works. It conveys the quality and characteristics of the place and thus helps us humans to feel the place, as experienced living being, imbued with memory and knowledge. The cosmogram further helps the place to remember its original identity. I will narrate Dagmar Kalb's discourse about her way of receiving and using cosmograms within her geomantic work later on.



Figure 5: Here we can see a cosmogrammic representation of Banaras. Cosmological worldviews are depicted through such cognitive pilgrimage maps. These are mythological landscapes that carry meaning for the people who decode the images.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Picture cf. Singh 2002: 8

3.1. What is a Cosmogram?

According to Slovenian Geomancer Marco Pogacnik (Dagmar's teacher), cosmograms have a threefold function¹³⁷:

1. To lead force and information in specific directions.
2. To determine the quality of the force flowing through it
3. To maintain a specific intensity level of power current

Pogacnik portrays landscape and space as multidimensional. In his model of multidimensional space – which is aimed at accessing an archetypal dimension containing all seeds of the possible developments of the universe¹³⁸ – he relates space-dimension, four elements with corresponding sphere and characteristics to their appearance in the landscape.¹³⁹

3.2. Hindu Cosmograms

There are various forms a cosmogram can take on. In the Indian tradition we find the Yantra. Ramachandra Rao writes that in religious context “it means physical or diagrammatic representations of the objects of worship.”¹⁴⁰ The mandala as a symbolic diagram is one specific form of Yantra. Technically, the term mandala describes a process through which powers are involved into a design. Cultivated intentionality of the devotee as well as the design itself conforms to traditionally stylized patterns. The mandala is the concentration of significant aspects of the world in which the devotee seeks to carry out his devotion, as well as of the most significant aspects of the devotee's psychological constitution. Thus the mandala is a congregation of energies and a symbol of the effective interplay of forces, in other words it gathers and concentrates the numerous forces of the universe and the forces active in the human being. The mandala's centre and region of origin is called bindu. This centre is understood as equal to the centre of the devotee's being. This process of absorption is referred to as samhara. In this centre of the mandala lie dormant the forces of multiplication, transformation, harmony and integration. The centre is like a seed that spreads out on all sides, and thus the concentrated forces emanate to all sides. This function of emanation, creation and projection is called srshti. Rao calls the mandala a psycho-cosmic

¹³⁷ see Pogacnik 1996: 347 (all Pogacnik my translation)

¹³⁸ see Pogacnik 1996: 61

¹³⁹ see Pogacnik 1996: 71

¹⁴⁰ S.K. Ramachandra Rao 1989: 7

mechanism that effectively relates the inner space of individualized consciousness with the outer space of the three dimensional world. It is designed to activate as well as to direct energies inside and outside of the devotee into integrative and essential consciousness, where the dichotomy of subject and object is altogether transcended. The Sanskrit word bindu means centre, seed, drop or sperm. It gathers the forces of the outer space into a starting point and at the same time unfolds inner forces. It represents the place where outer and inner worlds meet.¹⁴¹ The formation of an image of the world through a cosmic frame, creating a sense of wholeness, referring to holiness, is based upon the intermingling of the human quest for cosmic integrity with the respective experiential feelings, as Singh describes: “In Hinduism, the spatial manifestation referring to the integration of the cosmos and human beings is known as *mandala*(.)”¹⁴²

Rao writes¹⁴³: “Thus the mandala is rightly described as a psychocosmogram. It is a plan of the presented universe as well as of the perceiving individual. The entire universe is stylized into a pattern of energies that is symbolized by the graphic or iconic layout of the mandala. The reorganization of the individual in terms of the same mandala during worship makes the mandala an effective model for transformation, projection, concentration, and integration. Consciousness of the individual finds in it an articulation, and the model helps it expand beyond the barriers of subjective feelings and objects around.”

3.3. Mandala and Place

The mandala is a microcosmic representation of the universe. It is equal to the universe in the sense that it gathers all forces, energies and characteristics that are at work within the macrocosmic universe. The mandala is further a tool for human experience. “In Hinduism, the spatial manifestation referring to the integration of the cosmos and human beings is known as *mandala*, which in ancient times was incorporated to develop an ideal city in accordance to the cosmological arrangement of space, better known as *sacred space*.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ see Rao 1989: 8-9

¹⁴² Singh 2002: 21

¹⁴³ Rao 1989: 9

¹⁴⁴ Brereton 1986:526 cf. Singh 2002: 21

3.3.1. The Kashi Mandala

Cosmogram and Associated Deities of the Place

Within the Banaras region we find various cosmograms depicted in religious mappings, identified within a sacred geography and strengthened by the feet of the pilgrims. The question of whether the cosmogram is projected onto the landscape by human religious activity or whether humans discover the cosmogram within the landscape is unanswerable. Following an emic perspective we can assume that the holy landscape reveals sites of power to sensitive humans, and that those sites of power may emerge in a cosmogramic structure. Within the sacred territory of Banaras we find various cosmogramic routes, serving as pilgrimage routes. The most obvious one is the Kashi Mandala, the city viewed through a mandalic frame. The city becomes the equivalent of the entire cosmos. The city is a mandala and is thus itself a tool for experience, a tool for gaining knowledge about cosmic laws and energetic flows.



Figure 6: Here we can see Banaras, the Ganga river and a mandalic shape which demarcates the 'territory ever having light, the Kashi field of sacrality. The route of the Pancakroshi Yatra is at the left side of the Ganga.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Picture cf. Singh 2002: 27

“The city with its divine inhabitants may be likened to the symbolic structure of the mandala. In a religious and ritual sense, a mandala is a sacred circle that represents the entire universe, its powers, its interrelations, and its grounding centre.”¹⁴⁶

To circle the boundary of Kashi is to circle the universe. Vishvanath, as Shiva is called in the heart of Kashi, is the Lord of the Universe. He sets the Universe in motion. The sacred circle, the cosmogram of Kashi and the depicted worldview of the Hindu tradition that is inherent in it, is an example for a cognitive pilgrimage map. This map can be used as an image of possible ways of experiencing the city and its spots. And because a mandala is not only the symbol for the universe, but in a ritual sense actually is the universe, Kashi is the universe. Kashi transcends space and place.

Sacred Space, as we have seen before, is not limited to the outer geography but coexists within the human body. “According to Singh¹⁴⁷ the Asi, the Varana, and the Ganga symbolise the Pingala, the Ida, and Susumna within Tantric tradition. “In this way, marching from the macrocosmos, passing through the mesocosmos and reaching to the microcosmos completes the pilgrimage journey.”¹⁴⁸ “As with the human body, the kasi mandala is the Brahmanda (the cosmos) who illumines the world and dwells inside the citadel of the above mentioned five kosas, the world within.”¹⁴⁹ Singh continues with citing Tuan¹⁵⁰: “man tries to integrate multifaceted nature in terms of the intuitively known unity of his body. This perception of and analogy between human anatomy and the physiognomy of the earth is widespread.” With citing Eliade Singh opens the possibility of the cosmos becoming a hierophany and writes: “The revelation of the hierophany gets initiated and finally completed at fixed centre, i.e. Jnanavapi (‘well of wisdom’), the source of the primordial waters from where life begins.”

Here Singh describes experiencing revelation of hierophany. This experience is directly linked with a physical place within the sacred space of Kasi, the Jnanavapi, which is the present “navel-point”¹⁵¹ of the cardinality and sacred geometry of the Pancakrosi Yatra. “Varanasi is one of the ideal cities of the celestial archetype where a material expression to

¹⁴⁶ Eck 1983: 146

¹⁴⁷ Singh 2002: 57

¹⁴⁸ Singh 2002: 57

¹⁴⁹ Singh 2002: 48

¹⁵⁰ 1997:89 cf. Singh 2002:48

¹⁵¹ Singh 2002:35

that parallelism between macrocosmos and microcosmos is still existent (and referred as Kasi Mandala).¹⁵² Mandala means circle, but the meaning could also be expressed using the words of Olsson¹⁵³: “ a representation of the universe in which an encircled consecrated area is treated as receptacle for the gods and a collection point of universal forces(.).” According to Singh the concept of sacrality is linked to order in terms of spatial limitation, to wholeness in terms of cosmological representation and to power in terms of faith system.¹⁵⁴ The Kasi Mandala, delimits the “area of concentrated divine powers,”¹⁵⁵ the Kasi Ksetra (field or territory).

3.3.2. The Relevance of Pilgrimage for the Kashi Mandala

The cosmogram becomes alive due to the pilgrim’s corresponding movement. Lannoy writes in this manner: “Without pilgrimage, the Kashi cosmogram is no more than an archaic relic. It is the pilgrim (...) who makes the cosmogram a living reality.”¹⁵⁶ The cognitive pilgrim’s map serves the inner navigation system of the pilgrim. Spots and places are thus experienced in a meaningful way. Such cosmograms enhance the pilgrim’s experience.

The Kashi Mandala can be understood in terms of a geomantic frame of five sacred territories that are connoted as five sheaths are depicted as five concentric rings. The Caurasikrosi Yatra encircles the cosmic territory of Varanasi, which is also referred to as Kashi Mandala.¹⁵⁷

“By this archetypal manifestation the interconnectedness between the divine and the human realms can be perceived”¹⁵⁸ and the five koshas are also analogous “with the human being where the outermost (*annamaya*/ food-made) *kosa* being the material body and the innermost (*anandamaya*/ bliss-made) *kosa* being the subtle body.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² Singh 2002: 22

¹⁵³ 1980: 20e cf. Singh 2002: 22

¹⁵⁴ see Singh 2002: 22

¹⁵⁵ Singh 2002: 23

¹⁵⁶ Lannoy 2002: 45

¹⁵⁷ see Singh 2002: 47

¹⁵⁸ Eck 1982:30 cf. Singh 2002: 47

¹⁵⁹ Eck 1986: 46 cf. Singh 2002: 47

<i>Macrocosmic view</i>	<i>Microcosmic view</i>	<i>Transcendental power</i>	<i>Kosha (sheath)</i>	<i>Mesocosmic view: Yatra</i>
Sky	Head	Consciousness	Food	Caurasikroshi Yatra
Earth	Legs	Action	Breath	Pancakroshi Yatra
Air	Face	Cognition	Breath	Nagara Pradakshina Yatra
Water	Blood	Wisdom	Intellect	Avimukta Yatra
Fire	Heart	Bliss	Bliss	Antargraha Yatra

Figure 7: Geomantic Framework for the Kashi Mandala

Singh presents the five sacred territories within a geomantic framework and compares them as symbols for the five gross elements, the mahabhutas with their corresponding body parts, transcendental powers and the five sheaths or kosas.¹⁶⁰

3.3.3. Value of the Kashi Mandala for Well-being

As I mentioned before, healing can be understood as developing a sense of wholeness. We have seen that Hindu pilgrimage offers a foundation for experiencing wholeness, for perceiving oneself at the centre of the world, in other words it is a means of centering oneself.

The Kashi Mandala, as cognitive pilgrimage map is a tool for the transformation of the pilgrim's person towards self-realisation and salvation. In terms of religious therapeutics, Fields mentions the need for an inquiry into the relation of soteriology (theory of salvation) and the art of healing.¹⁶¹ Integration is a crucial concept within the field of Hindu pilgrimage. The “cosmogonic homology”, around which the symbolisation of numbers is narrated, is

¹⁶⁰ see Singh 47f.

¹⁶¹ see Fields 2001: 3

thought of as interlinking the macro- meso- and micro- cosmos.¹⁶² The Kashi Mandala and the place it depicts can further be understood as an axis mundi. Singh writes that pilgrims expressed their understandings that the divinities are performing pilgrimage in heaven, while they themselves perform it upon sacred earth.¹⁶³

In this sense I understand the Kashi Mandala, within a geomantic frame, as a tool for experience. We can call it a transpersonal experience, for it can make us perceive the interconnectedness of the realms of existence. Further it marks where to put our awareness while being present in specific places within the sacred space of Kasi. For me Kasi offers the possibility of understanding the “drama of divine forces, (*maya*/ or *lila*), which while developing in complexity, converges into simplicity and resulting in an order.” as Singh puts it.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² see Singh 2002: 50

¹⁶³ see Singh 2002: 51

¹⁶⁴ Singh 2002: 48

4. Kashi – Divine Field of Research

This chapter is intended to weave the information I gathered during the time of my research into an image of the sacred space of Kashi. The ethnographic project is informed by the search for place identity. The sources of this data vary from textual references – be they emic or etic – to pictures and images and communications with locals within the field. This chapter should give a basic outline of the possible modes of perceiving the place, of entering a communicative and reciprocal relationship with the ‘spirit of place’. It should help to develop a sense of feeling for the place. I intend to present the partial knowledge that I gained and that shaped my own perception of Kasi. The ancient holy narratives contain messages about the characteristics of the spirit of place, who may be experienced within a realm of mythic and mystic perception. When the city is perceived and described in terms of its metaphysical layers of reality we can speak of a divine mode of perception.



Figure 8: Temple-rooftop at the main burning ghat, Manikarnika Ghat¹⁶⁵

Various names are used to refer to this sacred city. The names serve as vehicles of meaning. Each name carries a specific mythic connotation. Such holy narratives inform us about the qualities and potential effects of a place. Pilgrimage is an important practice within the context of the Hindu way of life and I will try to provide a basic understanding of Hindu

¹⁶⁵ copyright Anna Neuner 2008

Pilgrimage within the text. Since pilgrimage is also an act of devotion my perceptions and feelings concerning the main deities that are believed to live within the sacred boundary will pop up throughout the text.¹⁶⁶ This data is rooted in an emic understanding of the phenomena of pilgrimage and pilgrimage space. The secondary data derives from research of western scholars investigating Banaras as a holy site. The results of my ethnographic field research form the empiric base for primary data as well as writings of native researchers that may also be considered primary data.

a) Calling Place

Due to the multiplicity of names referring to the sacred place, it depends on personal choice how I call it in the text. Mostly I use the term Banaras. I do not intend to follow British colonial tradition that corrupted the ancient name Varanasi into Benares but I wish to respect Banarasi contemporary discourses. Bana means 'ready made' and ras means 'juice of life'. My friend Santosh gave me this explanation and later I read it in a book of Rana P.B. Singh as well. The name Banaras carries its own meaning yet it is not as specific as Mahashmashana (Great Cremation Ground), for example. Whenever I use another epithet I intend to emphasise consciously the quality evoked by the specific name.

The culture specific perception of Banaras is shaped and informed by a huge web of associative mythological knowledge. How much of this is actually recorded in the person of the pilgrim varies, but the basic myths are shared by all of them. During the pilgrimage the devotees listen to mythic stories (kathas) told by the pilgrimage priests. The knowledge transferred through the kathas further informs the pilgrimage experience and enhances the meaning of the act of pilgrimage itself. Faith can help to initiate religious experience. Due to a faithful state of mind the mythological wisdom helps to develop a sense of feeling for the place, a starting point for the establishment of a reciprocal relationship between human and land.

¹⁶⁶ For further inquiry into the characteristics and personalities of the main Hindu deities I suggest the following books: For Shiva: Wolf-Dieter Storl 2005; Subramuniyaswami „Dancing With Siva“. For the Goddess and her various manifestations: Brown 1998, Pintchman 2001, Coburn 1991, Kinsley 1986, 1997; Sax 1991; For Kali and Krishna: Kinsley, 1975.

b) Naming Place

The various names of the city contain traces of information about the specific powers, characteristics and attributes of the place.¹⁶⁷ The names serve as evocative tools to increase the understanding of specific meanings that are held by residents as well as visitors. To investigate into names and their context is a method to develop a sense of feeling for the specific pilgrimage setting, in other words the spirit of place. To enter the setting means to enter a specific hall of perception, the Banaras realm of sensual experience. The sacred scape is arranged in order to evoke specific experiences, more precisely to experience the Hindu worldview, its cosmological truths and mythological wisdom.

Kashi means light, referring to the quality of enlightenment. The root may be the Sanskrit word *kash* (shine). *Kashi*, the city of light, shimmering so brightly that, it even rivals the sun in its glowing divine brilliance, is also personified as Goddess, as Shiva's beloved. As *Kashi Devi* the city is a shimmering lovely feminine deity, beautiful and holy. *Kashi* is light. Light is *Sada Shiva*.¹⁶⁸

Varanasi is an ancient name, later corrupted as *Benares*. *Varanasi* refers to the land between the *Varana* and the *Asi* rivers. The name *Varanasi* is associated with the sacred quality of water. The three rivers *Varuna*, *Assi* and the *Ganga* encircle the sacred territory of *Varanasi*. The watery personality of the place is thus evoked by naming it *Varanasi*. Further people worship the city as *Varanasi Devi* (Goddess).

This place is called *Avimukta* because it is never forsaken by Shiva, therefore one should also never leave this place. Shiva holds it on his trident. When we call it *Avimukta* we emphasise the emotional and devotional attachment to the place, experienced by her devotees. The city has not only human devotees but divine ones as well, the most revered one being *Vishwanath Shiva* himself. These devotees are the reason why the city may be called *Avimuta*, the never forsaken one.

Anandavan refers to the idyllic time of mythical beginnings, when the forest was full of *Shiva lingas*, the forest of bliss. *Ananda* is associated with the bliss of *Brahman*. Whenever people want to emphasise the blissful aspect of *Banaras* they call it *Anandavan*, meaning forest of

¹⁶⁷ see Eck 1983: 25

¹⁶⁸ see Ibid.:24

bliss. When one meets another on the street it is a common thing to ask: Sab ananda hai!¹⁶⁹ Then the other person could answer: Sab ananda hai!¹⁷⁰

Rudravasa is so named because Shiva dwells in the ground and substance of Kashi, like the old saying shows: “Kashi ke kankar, Shiva Shankar haim.” (the stones of Kashi are Shiva Shankar) The related term *Rudramaya* means everything is saturated with Shiva.¹⁷¹

Mahashmashana: Usually creation happens outside the city, it is inauspicious. Only here in Kashi it is auspicious. The whole of Kashi is a cremation ground.¹⁷² As *Mahashmashana* Banaras is perceived as one big cremation ground, overseen by the ascetic Lord Shiva who transfers the liberating mantra in the moment of death, thus the dying may receive his ultimate blessings in the crucial moment of death. I have heard that Shiva as well as Kali transfer this liberating mantra. People here in *Mahashmashana* die in the company of their beloved gods. Mother Kali herself embraces the dying in her lap. That is why Hindus wish to die here.¹⁷³

4.1. Divine Sphere of Reality

I focus my own scholarly attention upon the human perception of Kashi, the ancient city of Pilgrimage, the field (*ksetra*) of concentrated divine agency, the potential setting for religious and spiritual experiences of holiness and wholeness. I call it potential because the perception of Kashi is dependent upon the cognitive abilities of the visitor. Such a conception of Kashi is a frame to view cosmic reality. Experience is born as child of set and setting.¹⁷⁴ In our case the inner world of the pilgrim is the set and the constructed environment of Kashi as well as its spirit of place form the setting. Within this sacred field we find religious, spiritual and ritual practices, which help to interrelate the devotees, being part of the human realm, with the forces and powers of a superhuman realm.

¹⁶⁹ Is everything blissful?

¹⁷⁰ Everything is blissful

¹⁷¹ see *ibid.*: 31

¹⁷² see *ibid.*: 32

¹⁷³ see Bradley R. Hertel and Cynthia Ann Humes: 3

¹⁷⁴ Dr. Timothy Leary introduced the concept of set and setting in regard to psychedelic experience. Set refers to the personality, state of mind and the storage of memory within the user. Setting refers to environmental factors that may influence the situated experience.



Figure 9: Avimukta – a mythic conception of Banaras¹⁷⁵

As an anthropologist at the beginning of the 21st century I clearly honour the emic perspective of the phenomena I research. It is the perspective of the people who reveal the phenomena, the insider's or local perspective. Diane Eck gives way to an emic and anthropological perspective when she states: "We must know what Kashi means and has meant in the Hindu tradition."¹⁷⁶

Now what does it mean to see Banareas 'through divine eyes'? Many Indian as well as Western scholars have written about the topic.¹⁷⁷ I do not intend to reproduce the mythic knowledge in detail. Much of this information is subject only to highly philosophical circles and religious experts, yet we find certain images that pop up in 'daily talk' about Banaras. These specific images are constitutive of the pilgrimage experience. The divine image of Kashi is the result of an ancient tradition of communication with the earth. It encompasses mythic narratives from various peoples at various times and tells us how they perceived the place. These are statements about the distinct spirit of place. Inquiry into such a mythic biography helps us to understand the place as our communicative partner.

¹⁷⁵ Picture cf. Singh 2002

¹⁷⁶ Eck 1983: 7

¹⁷⁷ see Lannoy, Singh, Saraswati, Eck, Parry

4.2. Sacred Geography

Sacred geography takes into account data from the religious and mythic fields of knowledge. It acknowledges multiple layers of reality, multiple ways of experiencing landscape. “A sacred geography maps a believer’s values, aspirations, and beliefs. Mythical worlds are mapped”¹⁷⁸ I consider sacred geography to be a navigation system for the cosmologically oriented movement through space.

Prof. Rana P. B. Singh, Professor of geography at the Banaras Hindu University focuses his research attention on sacred topographies within the territory of Banaras and speaks of cognitive pilgrimage maps. I had the opportunity to go on a pilgrimage within the Banaras region with Rana Ji and am very thankful for his explanations and his energetic company. I will discuss his books as well as speak about the sequence of events and the characteristics of this specific pilgrimage.

The spatial arrangement of Banaras is an example for a psychic cosmogram, a city in the form of a mandala, depicted through cognitive pilgrimage maps. Religious images and spiritual insights are projected upon the geographic landscape. Pilgrimage is a symbolic journey through the cosmos.

4.2.1. Transposition of Place

The conception of ‘Spatial transposition’ is found throughout the Hindu geography as well as in Kashi, and it transcends the concept of place itself.

“Because Kashi represents the cosmos, all places, especially sacred places, are said to be there either in concrete form (such as a temple) or in symbolic form (...) At the same time, Varanasi diffuses its sacred power by being represented in many other sacred places, often by a temple.”¹⁷⁹

Kashi is also present elsewhere.¹⁸⁰ At the local chay shops, a common statement to foreigners visiting Kashi is: “Find your kashi at home!”

¹⁷⁸ Gesler and Pierce in: *Geographical Review* 90 (2) 2000: 222

¹⁷⁹ Gesler and Pierce in *Geographical Review* 90 (2) 2000: 224-225

¹⁸⁰ see Eck 1983: 40

4.3. Religious Spatiality

From the bird-perspective we can see clearly the patterns of religious spatiality throughout Kashi. This is the subject of sacred geography as it is taught and continuously re-studied, foremost by Rana P.B. Singh, at the Banaras Hindu University. The routes connecting the holy sites can often be understood as resembling sacred cosmograms, in mandalic or hexagramic shape. Pilgrims travel along these fixed routes. The Nine Durga-Yatra within Kashi, the Yatra of Vindhyavasini within the greater Banaras region as well as the Panchakroshi Yatra are examples of these types of pilgrimages. I will narrate my personal experiences along those sacred journeys. Religious symbolism is hereby being projected meaningfully onto the landscape. Following Dagmar's discourse, religious symbolism including the pilgrimage cosmograms, is an expression of the 'spirit of place' itself. Imagination in this geomantic worldview is not reduced to the 'unreal' but rather serves the description of multiple layers of reality. A mystic vision carries meaning. The natural place, itself informs human imagination and thus imagining in the sense of an inner sight, is part of a communicative relationship between human and nature.

Some knowledgeable Banarsis such as Uma Shankar and his group are guiding devotees from all castes (even outcastes like myself) and all places of origin free of cost.

4.4. Microcosm Kashi

The universe is depicted in a microcosmic form as a mandala. Kashi is the spatial representation of the mandala. It symbolizes and resembles the entire plan of the universe. As the universe is holographic, every part contains the whole. To perceive the wholeness as it is perceived in Hindu cosmology is the aim of the pilgrimage space of Kashi. The cognitive pilgrimage maps help us perceive and understand the whole universe through the lens of a replication. How do the Hindus perceive the ordered whole? The universe is an ordered whole. It evolved out of the primordial chaos, out of the waters of chaos, before there was a difference between gods and demons, before duality evolved and good and bad were separated.¹⁸¹ The demons were beaten back into the state of chaos. In yearly cycles they challenge the ordered whole, the divine universe, and are fought by Durga Mata, the Great Goddess in her warrior function.

¹⁸¹ see Kuiper 1983

Banaras is a sacred place. The place Banaras has been revealed to humanity as potent place of concentrated powers and consequently the place has been transformed into a sacred place. In his 1994 article “The Spirit & Power of Place. Human Environment and Sacrality” Singh explains the correlation between the two concepts of sacred place and microcosm when he writes¹⁸²: “(S)acred place is the representation of cosmic manifestation – a process of condensing the cosmos into a smaller sphere.” Through observation and experience of the laws of the condensed cosmos the human gains practical understanding of his or her own cosmic identity.

Banaras is the Hindu world in microcosmic form. Banaras can be further understood as an archetypal form of the ‘Hindu Place’.¹⁸³ Diane Eck writes that Kashi “stands at the center of the earth as the place of creation, and gathers together the whole of the sacred universe in a single symbolic circle, a mandala(.)”¹⁸⁴ The idea of a place as microcosm is found frequently within the Hindu World and connected to this idea is the one of an axis mundi, or a centre of the world. Many sacred centres claim to be at the centre of the world or even of the universe. This concept of axis mundi has an equivalent in the emic sense. It is the concept of the yotirlingas or the svayambhuvalingas. They connect the three spheres, devlok, mrtlok, and patalok. These columns of light are thought of as lying at the centre of the world – and Banaras is identified with the main yotirlinga and svayambhulinga.

Banaras contains all major sacred places, all sacred sites of the Hindu geography. Pilgrim visitors may thus take darsan of all sacred sites of pan-Hindu importance. These sites are commonly constructed in the architectural style of the region. The priests often come from these linguistic groups as well. The various shrines and temples represent distant sites and are commonly named after them. The Brahma Kund in Banaras is an example of this sort. Michael, a Canadian friend and long term Kashi pilgrim told me that there exists only one Brahma temple in India. It is in Pushkar, Rajasthan. Then he said that I could visit the Brahma temple here in Kashi. I was irritated. “So there exist two,” I argued. He smiled and said: “Now it is the same one.” In this way distant places are linked with the claim that they are actually identical in a mythical sense.¹⁸⁵

In their article “Hindu Varanasi” Gesler and Pierce focus on shrines and temples as built environment that “are physical representations of religious beliefs at three levels: the

¹⁸² Singh 1994 p. 1 of email

¹⁸³ see Bradley R. Hertel and Cynthia Ann Humes: 3

¹⁸⁴ Eck 1983: 6; see 1983: 25, 41

¹⁸⁵ see Morinis 1984: 31-32 for West Bengal

cosmos or universe, the national (India), and the local (Varanasi).”¹⁸⁶ The common belief that all powers that organize the universe, space and time, are present in Kashi is for Gesler and Pierce an indicator for the cosmic level. Further they mention the image of Kashi resting on Shiva’s trishul as part of the city’s cosmic identity. Here it is interesting to note that Kashi not only encompasses the whole world but is also perceived to be not from this world but above it.¹⁸⁷ “The three points of the trident are variously interpreted as the three hills on which Varanasi lies or as three worlds: the netherworld, the world of human life and death, and heaven above.”¹⁸⁸ The city further expresses its own sacred geography, the auspicious course of the Ganga, moving from South to North here, from the realm of trouble, to the realm of the divine.¹⁸⁹

4.5. Ritual Sphere of Banaras

Banaras is as well a great ritual scape. One reason why Hindus come to Banaras is the wide spectrum of rituals that may be observed here. These rituals may be associated with various cycles within a life, as cycles of the day, the week, the year of life itself and other temporal frameworks.¹⁹⁰ Banaras is famous for death rituals, as for example the shraddha. Thus people come not only to die here but also to observe death rituals for the departed. Rituals of various kinds and in particular the Vedic sacrificial altar contribute to the process of ‘sacralisation,’ in other words to the transformation of place into sacred place.¹⁹¹ Energy flows from heaven to earth, just like Ganga herself. The ritual framing of experience favours the opening of the levels of existence. The division and dichotomy of the divine realm and the human realm is overcome, and cross-state communication is facilitated. A natural place itself can be understood as cosmogram¹⁹² and cosmograms take over the function of rituals in contemporary society.¹⁹³ I argue that Kashi as spirit of place enhances the ritually framed human experience of holiness, of wholeness and of interrelatedness of the multi-dimensional reality of existence. We may call it a mystic experience as well as a healing experience in terms of spiritual well-being.

¹⁸⁶ in: *Geographical Review* 90 (2) 2000: 223

¹⁸⁷ see Interview on Ghat 2008

¹⁸⁸ Gesler and Pierce in *Geographical Review* 90 (2) 2000: 225

¹⁸⁹ see Suresh Joshi Personal Communication

¹⁹⁰ see Bradley R. Hertel and Cynthia Ann Humes: 3

¹⁹¹ see Singh 1994 ‘The Spirit & Power of Place’

¹⁹² see Pogacnik 1996

¹⁹³ see Dagmar interview 2010

4.6. Kashi's Divine Inhabitants

„The Ganges, Shiva, and Kashi: Where this Trinity is watchful, no wonder here is found the grace that leads one to perfect bliss.“¹⁹⁴ ‘Hare Hare Mahadeva Shambo. Kashi Vishwanatha Gange.’ These famous lines are found in a bhajan that pilgrims recite and sing along the way. Thus the mind of the pilgrim is set upon the associated qualities. The person of the pilgrim is tuned to correspond with the quality of Kashi.

It is said that all deities of the Hindu pantheon have chosen to dwell within the boundaries of Banaras because it is such a great place. Its central position within the mytho-religious Hindu World is of primordial nature. “The place itself is what renders the city sacred; the temples and illustrious inhabitants serve merely to mark the sanctity of the place”¹⁹⁵ Somehow it is the identity of the place, its ‘personality’ that attracts the deities. It is the ‘spirit of place’ that initiates the emergence of the ‘sacred space’. It is common understanding among Banarsi Hindus, that one can find all the gods and goddesses within the sacred city. All 330 million deities dwell in Kashi because it is the greatest tirtha of all. In the context of Hindu places of pilgrimage, a place usually becomes a tirtha because of the local presence of a deity or a holy person, but the sacred power of Kashi “predates the arrival of all Hindu deities”¹⁹⁶

The divine population includes the main deities of the Hindu pantheon, Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma. The Goddess in her multitude of forms and names is omnipresent in Kashi. The city is, further protected by seven concentric circles of protective forms of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god removing obstacles. Kala Bhairava is Shiva’s ruling deputy and maintains right and order. The eight directions are guarded by respective deities, as are the days of the week. Twelve shrines are solely dedicated to the sun. The whole divine field of Kashi is filled with the presence of ganas, nagas and yakshas, nature-bound deities from the time before the Aryans arrived.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Eck 1983: vii

¹⁹⁵ Bradley R. Hertel and Cynthia Ann Humes: I

¹⁹⁶ Bradley R. Hertel and Cynthia Ann Humes: 181

¹⁹⁷ see Eck 1983: 146

4.7. Divine Soundscape

While walking along the Vishnu Yatra route one other pilgrim tuned in the following bhajana: Hara Hara! Mahadeva Sambho! Kasi Vishvanatha Gange! The other pilgrims, myself included were tuning in and I felt how it gave me strength, to sing and focus my mind upon one thing: the connection to the holy ground and its divine residents. Singh translates it with: “Victory to our Lord Siva, living in Varanasi together with his liquid energy the Ganga river, and his consort Mother Parvati.” (he adds the line: Mata Parvati sange. That I didn’t hear on the Visnu Yatra.) According to Singh¹⁹⁸ the chanting of the bhajan verses cited above transform the area along the sacred route into a holy soundscape, which helps to awaken the immanent spirit. The pilgrims chant while walking, the air is filled with devotional words, melodies, and feelings. According to Singh, “group chanting provides an energy and cohesion for a peaceful journey, as well as the psychic strength necessary to concentrate upon right acts, right thoughts, and right movements(.)”¹⁹⁹

Conclusion: This chapter has presented various conceptual mythic elements that make up an image of Kashi that encompasses a divine sphere of reality and thus evokes a sense for Kashi’s ‘Spirit of Place.’ I would like to close the contextual part of my work with the experienced words of nature-loving anthropologist Wolf-Dieter Storl:

“Indien überhaupt und Kashi insbesondere ist wie ein Spiegel der Seele und man trifft sich selbst dort. Und am besten nimmt mans auf, wenn man langsam hingeht und ohne Vorstellungen. (...) Erstmal ein paar Wochen am Ganges, einfach meditieren (...) und man muss sich auch genügend Zeit nehmen. (...) Es ist ein heiliger Ort, voller Wunder. (...) Es sprengt den Rahmen unserer Vorstellungen sewegen ist es so heilsam, es kann den Rahmen ins Göttlich-ekstatische sprengen oder in absolute Paranoia, Horror, Krankheit, Todesnähe. Und so erweitert es unsere Seele, das ist das Heilsame dran, es nimmt uns aus der Enge heraus. Und wie es heisst: du kannst Kashi verlassen, aber Kashi verlässt dich nie. Einfach dort sein und es wird sich zeigen, an der Ganga meditieren.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ see Singh 2002: 52

¹⁹⁹ Singh 2002: 52

²⁰⁰ Storl 2.7.2010 Personal Communication

III. Empiric Inquiry

I. Place Speaks

A contemporary vision of Kashi and geomantic approach to human-place interrelatedness

Conceptual framework: In our common ‘modern’ worldview the term place is mostly associated with a location. This view represents a lifeless vision of our planet Earth. Past cultures, including our pre-Celtic and Celtic European ancestors have experienced the earth as living organism, commonly as Mother. And even today we find such conceptions of nature in the Hindu worldview and all around the world. Place within a holistic worldview is perceived as expression of an all-encompassing life force, as gateway to the planetary consciousness. Human beings approach place in terms of ‘Spirit of Place’ and thus enter a reciprocal and communicative relationship with their natural environment. The spirit of place reveals knowledge and memory of the Earth and the Cosmos.

There are many ways to start a communication between the human consciousness and the planetary consciousness, the “Earthmind” as Devereux calls it in the title of his book.²⁰¹ Devereux’s book “Re-Visioning the Earth”²⁰² examines practical methods to initiate an opening of healing channels between the human mind and nature. Contemporary practices of Geomancy are imbedded within a worldview that cultivates the awareness of human-earth interrelatedness and encourages human beings in their attempt to communicate with the earth and the inhabitants of its non-physical dimensions. In this paper I focus on the narrative of Dagmar Kalb, a female contemporary Geomancer in Carinthia, South Austria.

I.1. Dagmar

Dagmar Kalb is a trained and skilled practitioner of geomancy in my home place Carinthia. She has learned from Marco Pogacnik, who has also written several books on the topic. Dagmar herself has published her insights and has further written several unpublished papers about her work. Dagmar’s approach to Geomancy is intuitive and “Gaia-centred”. We are Mother Earth’s children as Dagmar says. We are a part of that living organism that we call

²⁰¹ Devereux 1989

²⁰² Devereux 1996

earth or Gaia. The experience of a communicative transfer of messages and feelings as active participation within an earth-human relationship lies at the heart of this approach.

I.2. Situated Interview

Every interview happens within a specific situation and atmosphere and all people involved contribute to forming the space in which the interview happens.

April 2010. I felt more and more puzzled about what actually happens with a pilgrim who visits a sacred place such as Kashi. I could not express the fundamental knowledge I had acquired during my fieldwork verbally or textually. It seemed to slip through the scientific, sceptical grasp of my mind. It was intuitive knowledge, a form of liquid knowledge, hard to communicate through words and thus I decided to focus on the graspable data that had been verbalized by informants and was recorded. This was my safe ground. But it did not satisfy me. I felt as if the main thing was missing. That 'something' which pilgrims come to 'search' for in the lanes of Kashi, that which is beyond intellectual proof, which does not quite fit into the conceptualized world of our mental dimension. That which, is yet real in terms of perception and experience. When my Mother, Irmgard told me that her Geomancer friend Dagmar Kalb had designed a cosmogram for Banaras I was immediately interested. Yet it took me two years to arrange an interview. The conversation with Dagmar helped me to understand much of what scholars of pilgrimage, for example cultural geographer Prof. Dr. Rana P.B. Singh and others have written about sacred space.

I felt that I was ready to meet Dagmar and ask the right questions. I had met her a couple of times before, mainly when she was doing a project with my Mother in 2004. One time I joined them for a small geomantic work on the landscape around my native place. Still I have the experience in good memory. My Mother accompanied me to the Interview.

I.3. Geomancy

Geomancy, in the way I was introduced to it by Dagmar Kalb is an art of divination that gives way to a holistic experience of place and landscape. It is a transpersonal experience that involves the perception of various layers of reality, from gross to subtle, from the physical landscape to the 'Spirit of Place' that shows characteristics of identity and personality. The aim of this approach is the establishment of a human-place communicative relationship. The methods are contemplative, meditative, intuitive and creative. The following concepts of

place and of cosmograms emerged out of an analysis of the data of the interview that I conducted with Dagmar Kalb in April 2010.

When I asked Dagmar about the meaning of Geomancy she traced the words origin to the concept of Gaia, indicating the perception of the earth as living and conscious entity and mantra, meditative accommodation. Her teacher Marco Pogacnik traces the term Geomancy to its twofold origin of ge (greek earth) and manteia (greek prediction). The term has been used in reference to a form of divination since the 18th century and since the end of the 19th century Geomancy in reference to acquaintance with forces of the earth.²⁰³ Within the geomantic discourses the Earth, landscape and place as well as the human being are embodied in a multidimensional universe. At the heart of the geomantic project we find the inquiry into the 'invisible' dimensions of space, whereby it always involves and relates to the world of matter, manifested space.

Geomantic knowledge may be termed as intuitive, sensitive, perceptive, subtle and flowing. If the researcher wishes to understand such phenomena from the emic point of view he or she is thus challenged in his or her intuitive skills.

1.3.1. Subtle Nature of Geomancy

The geomantic experience presents itself as extremely subtle, intuitive and sensitive within the Interview context. Dagmar uses expressions as 'a bissl' (a bit like) or 'irgendwie so' (somehow like) when describing her perception of place. She does not make hard statements like 'It is like this' but rather soft statements that slip the grasp of scientific proof-fanatism. Nevertheless one senses the meaning clearly.

1.3.2. Holistic Experience of Knowledge

The geomantic approach to acquiring knowledge encompasses notions such as intuitive flow of associations. It values the human ability of 'imagination' and acknowledges the reality of imagination simply as 'one image of something.'

We are reminded of the scientific art of 'Intuitive Inquiry' how it is presented and introduced in Rosemarie Anderson's article "Intuitive Inquiry – A Transpersonal Approach"²⁰⁴. She

²⁰³ see Pogacnik 1996:86

²⁰⁴ in: Braud and Anderson 1998: 69-94

writes: “(T)he researcher looks around from inside the experience and notes what is there.”²⁰⁵

In the interview Dagmar activated the image of the earth as living being imbued with intelligence, knowledge as well as planetary memory. The human potential for tapping into this storage of knowledge offers a widely holistic possibility of gaining knowledge. It is visionary, subtle and may even be imaginary knowledge. It may be taken serious in terms of multi-layered truth or perspectival truth as described by J.N. Mohanty.²⁰⁶

In order to receive messages from the planetary consciousness practitioners leave the sphere of rational thinking. One appeases and calms oneself by help of a ritual or a meditation. Dagmar uses the term ‘Einstimmung’ here which literally means ‘accommodation’ but carries the meaning of tuning into something and could be translated as ‘attunement’. To tune into the vibration or energy of a place is meant, an inner accommodation of perception. One concentrates upon the inner self and its cognitive abilities, the inner eye, the inner ear, the inner feeling. The goal hereby is to look into the world with the third eye and not with the physical eye. After such a tuning of ones inner cognitive abilities one is ready to ask specific questions. She mentions the example of the Equilibrium Project. ‘Which landscape wants to have contact with me for this project?’ Then inner pictures may arise, images of the landscape, words or sentences may arise. In the case of Banaras even a poem ‘came’. We can see that in order to receive the knowledge that is stored in the planetary memory one must sharpen one’s intuitive skills and tune ones inner cognitive instruments such as the inner eye or ear.

The earth mediates and sends information and knowledge in a way so the people may understand.²⁰⁷ That explains cultural and local varieties.

1.3.2.1. Knowing Entities of the Geomantic Worldview

The fundamental understanding that the earth itself is the source of knowledge gives validity to inner pictures and human imagination because it is understood that it is the earth herself who initiates them. What people feel, what they imagine, what they perceive at particular places is taken seriously because ‘nothing happens in a vacuum’ as my Mother uses to say. We are inseparable from Gaia and therefore all knowledge is stored in the source within

²⁰⁵ Braud and Anderson 1998:81

²⁰⁶ Mohanty 2009:6

²⁰⁷ Bilder, die wir verstehen see Dagmar Interview 2010

ourselves. Dagmar says: 'Your cells know.' In the geomantic worldview all is connected through a subtle web of information that may be tapped²⁰⁸ by the ones who train their extra-sensitive perception.

In our case here the earth, the planet, or 'Gaia' as Dagmar calls her, is the main 'knowing entity' that encompasses all planetary knowledge. The earth is imbued with memory and this memory may be experienced through the sensitive process of tuning oneself into the subtle spheres of nature and landscape. In a geomantic context the earth is, just like us, a living being and just like us it has a memory repository. We have access to that storage of knowledge. By means of meditatively joining into the earth and landscape we can tap the memory of that knowledgeable being called earth or Gaia who consequently sends inner pictures or initiates words or sentences to the human as response.²⁰⁹

It is also in the context of such 'new discourses' about Gaia that the earth may be approached in such a communicative way. Whether Gaia is considered a field of knowledge manifested in the dimension of materiality as landscape or whether the earth is perceived as habitat of an all-encompassing knowledgeable being, attached to landscape may vary from person to person. There may exist many such entities, imbued with knowledge and connected to specific landscapes.

A geomantic way of acquiring knowledge is legitimated by the sensory fact of perception within an experience. As is the case for the essential knowledge one might receive in Banaras, the Geomantic approach is operated and characterized by a form of 'liquid knowledge' for it is less rigid and more transformative and flowing.

The geomantic setting for experiencing nature is ideally free of dogma. It is clear, however, that concepts and theories as well as characteristics of personality might nevertheless introduce dogmatic tendencies. The experience of nature is situated within a specific mental framework. In other words the way humans perceive nature and landscape is informed by worldview. We could also call this the lenses of perception. Mythic narratives of place and the natural world are constitutive elements of worldview. The mythic language is a symbolic language and tells us in an encoded way about the (hidden) powers and qualities of a place. In other words a Geomancer might search the storage of place-narratives to gain a deeper understanding into the ways, the spirits of place were perceived by people of the past. Since worldview is nothing static, nothing rigid, but a fluent and transformative process

²⁰⁸ angezapft

²⁰⁹ Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:24:00)

experiences of nature contribute to shaping worldview, as worldview frames the interpretation of experience.

The most obvious and central assumption of the geomantic worldview is, that the earth is a conscious and living organism. Another constituent for a meaningful geomantic experience is the image of personified or non-personified forces or powers attached to place and landscape. This reminds me of the various, material, fine material and immaterial planes of existence, as we know them from the Buddhist worldview, all with their inhabitants. On the base of such a holistic worldview a respectful relationship between humans and the earth with all its visible and invisible inhabitants may be established. Landscape is perceived as the habitat of humans, animals, plants, minerals and beings that are invisible to the ordinary eye. How these subtle, fine and invisible 'beings' are depicted, which shape they take depends on worldview and symbolic language of the Geomancer. We absorb the quality of places and strengthen the place in return. Thus a reciprocal human-place relationship is maintained.

1.3.2.2. Extra Sensitive Perception and Geomancy

„Only by help of perception can we experience the invisible dimensions of the earth, nature and landscape as real, yet only if perception is not being reduced to the sensual sphere, but widened to encompass extra sensitive perception.“²¹⁰

Geomantic practitioners perceive the invisible dimension of the earth through all their senses and due to extra sensitive modes of perception. Dagmar speaks of a multilayered universe and the existence of another reality that withdraws itself from the sphere of intellect. She opposes here the sensory abilities of the domain of feeling to the domain of intellect.²¹¹ Her term 'Einstimmung' coincides in with a tuning of the extra sensory organs. As an example Dagmar refers to 'looking into the world with the inner eye, the third eye' as opposed to the physical eye in order to perceive those layers of reality transcending the materiality as we know it. This is not at all esoteric nonsense but even in physics we know that there exists materiality that is more subtle and fine and thus may not be seen with the 'ordinary eye'.

²¹⁰ Pogacnik 1996: 118 "Nur mit Hilfe der Wahrnehmung können wir die unsichtbaren Dimensionen der Erde, der Natur und der Landschaft als wahr erleben, allerdings unter der Bedingung, dass die Wahrnehmung nicht auf die sinnliche Ebene beschränkt bleibt, sondern auch die übersinnliche Wahrnehmung einschließt." (my translation)

²¹¹ Gefühlsebene vs. Verstandesebene

I.3.2.3. Specialists of Perception – Rishis, Siddhas and Geomancers

In the Indian context the sages of the old ages, the rishis have felt the power of places and thus pilgrimage places were established. According to Rana P.B. Singh man was much closer to nature in that glory past of India and thus they could identify places of special power. Dagmar tells us the same about the people of the Megalith cultures in Europe. Singh writes²¹²: “Humans have used all their senses to search for places where divine beings manifest their power.”

Another concept reminds us of the geomantic practitioner's skills. It is the concept of Siddhas, those persons with extra ordinary powers, who Rana Ji called 'awakened ones'. Those Siddhas are skilled with extra sensitive perception. Only the Siddhas can see Kashi because only they have the divine sight. Siddha is an emic term. They are the ones possessing what parapsychology as well as scientifically educated Indian priests call E.S.P. Those Siddhas are the ones who have access to finer layers of reality. I have narrated one example of the Siddha's skill of perception in chapter III.3. They have the divine eyes to see the true nature of things. As I have shown²¹³ in Hindu thought there are more layers of reality than the bodily, material one, called Annamaya kosa. The other four layers or immaterial bodies are perceivable only with enhanced senses.

In our present Austrian culture we have lost our emic terms. Our ancestors may have called those people seers or sensitive people or what ever. The very concept of perception that is connected to those people may be found in the practical approach of Geomancy as I have been introduced to through Dagmar Kalb. It is an open question, if Geomancers are the Western Siddhas.

I.4. 'Searching' as Spiritual Practise

Tuning the Inner Navigation System

Searching the lanes of Kashi is one of the main quests of its pilgrims. Searching for that 'something', which is said that one may find in Kashi, searching for spots that maintain a concentrated level of holiness or power. It is the search for the very essence of Kashi, for its spirit of place. How to search? What in us is it that leads the search? How may we prepare for this quest? These are questions that might pop up in the mind of the searching.

²¹² Singh 1994: p.1 of email

²¹³ see chapter II.3.3.2

Dagmar mentions three levels of 'orientation', she writes:

“Und so werde ich vom Göttlichen, von der göttlichen Fügung, meiner Intuition und verschiedenen Einheimischen an heilige Plätze geführt.”²¹⁴

- The first instance of orientation is the divine stroke of destiny, a kind of divine call. It reminds me of an incident in the Vienna Bollywood Vediothek in the 16th district of Vienna. I spoke with Satish, an Indian migrant and owner of the Vediothek. I told him that I want to go to Vaishno Devi.²¹⁵ He adverted to the proper way of formulating such a wish: 'Jab mata ji ka bulava aega, tabhi men jaungi.'²¹⁶ It is not solely in our hands. As it turned out, I could not go and my plans got scattered.
- The second is intuition, an inner instrument or inner navigation system. The 'voice' of intuition becomes stronger the more we listen to it.
- The third kind of guiding forces are the human inhabitants of the area, who somehow may be perceived as imbued with the essence of the place as well. For the time of Navaratri, when the Great Goddess is celebrated in her various form all through the cityscape of Banaras, it was a common saying that a girl or woman you meet was referred to as manifestation of the Goddess herself. Women were the human representations of the Goddess especially during this sacred period of time.

²¹⁴ Kalb 2004: I

²¹⁵ Goddess pilgrimage place in the NW Indian mountain area

²¹⁶ 'when the call of the mother comes, then I will go'

1.5. Cosmograms – A Universal Language

The perception and reception of the quality of a specific place is not the end of the geomantic project. The experiences are further mediated and communicated to the surrounding social world, in Dagmar's case in form of text production that encompasses research into mythology, folk narratives, history and geography of the place and by designing cosmograms that resemble the messages she received from the place. Sensitive people understand the language of the place and identify cosmograms that become part of cultural knowledge, cultural memory that recalls a state of close relationship with the earth. At the centre of the pilgrimage experience, lies the process of receiving the blessings of the deity of place, receiving the power stored in place. This process involves a reciprocal dimension. The devote pilgrim offers devotional love, a feeling for the deity and the place itself. The pilgrim walks along fixed routes that resemble as landscape-cosmograms the identity of the place. The bare human feet acupuncture the earth and strengthen the identity of the place, the spirit of place.



Figure 10: Clay version of the Banaras cosmogram.²¹⁷

In this sense Dagmar designs cosmograms corresponding to her communicative experience of the place during the visionary process, she then carves them into stone for example and places them at specific points to contribute to the maintenance of the landscape's state of equilibrium. In other words she feels the quality of the place, receives and interpretively expresses its messages and helps to strengthen the 'spirit of place'.

²¹⁷ Copyright Dagmar Kalb 2007

1.5.1 Geomantic Theory of Cosmogramic Pilgrimage

In the Hindu pilgrimage context many of the ancient pathways correlate with the structure of cosmograms, such as the Kashi mandala for example. The pilgrimage route is depicted in cognitive pilgrimage maps. Pilgrims walk the cosmogram onto the earth, onto the landscape and thereby activate the information stored in the cosmogram. The place is thus reminded of its original quality. Dagmar tells us that one can dance the cosmogram onto the earth and we inquire into the possibility to walk it as a pilgrimage route. The traditional emphasis of Rana P.B. Singh during a conversation in the 'Harmony' bookstore suddenly makes sense. He gets annoyed with my question if one could walk a form of personal route. Then he points out clearly that sacred routes are fixed in time, revealed to the rishis. It makes sense that pilgrims walk and help the place to remember its cosmic identity and in return the spirits of place help the human pilgrim to find her place within the cosmos.

1.5.1.1. Power and Use of the Cosmogram

A cosmogram is similar to a symbol. Nevertheless the cosmogram exceeds the function of a symbol. A cosmogram represents the original quality of a landscape²¹⁸ through the lens of the particular Geomancer. The Geomancer becomes a channel for the quality of the landscape and consequently receives and expresses the corresponding cosmogram. In the case of Dagmar she received the vision of Banaras and then translated it into a simplified image and put it into practice as cosmogram. The experience is somehow simplified and interpreted by the Geomancer.²¹⁹ The cosmogram can take on various forms. It may be carved into wood, metal or stone, it may be drawn on a paper, scratched into the earth or danced onto the earth.²²⁰ Thus an object absorbs the information for long-term. A marble stone or granite stone further has a micro-crystalline structure and crystals have repository abilities. Dagmar for example carves the information received through her vision into stone or clay that is fixed onto a stone. She thus carves into the multitude of crystals the information all that which she perceived in her vision.²²¹ Consequently the object is placed within a landscape that is thus reminded by the cosmogram who it really is. Dagmar tells us that not only the place is reminded by the cosmogram 'who it really is' but also the human is

²¹⁸ Urqualität

²¹⁹ see Dagmar Interview 2010 Dos Kosmogramm is einfocha als dos was I gsehen hab, dos war komplexer.

²²⁰ Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:22:20)

²²¹ Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:22:56)

reminded that he may find the same quality within himself.²²² Dagmar refers to a fundamental difference between cosmogram and symbol when she says that ‘the symbol only shows what is going on. A cosmogram is effective on its own.’ Thus when they carve the cosmogram into stone for example there results a play of shadow and light that effects not only landscape, place and humans but all inhabitants of the various layers and dimensions of the landscape reality.²²³ The process of receiving, manifesting and setting cosmograms is also called earth healing and because we humans have our body from the earth, it may be called human healing as well.²²⁴ Dagmar’s teacher Marco Pogacnik started using cosmograms for Earth-Healing in the 1980s. In the ideal case the cosmogram pictures the “inner identity of a place” he writes.²²⁵

We can see thus that the information is understood on a non-mental level. The object carries, spreads and activates the information on its own. Even without knowing the meaning of the cosmogram, merely by looking at it its inherent information affects the person. The cosmogram influences permanently the human, the earth, the elements, the animals, the plants, in other words it effects and influences the place with its inhabitants of all the various dimensions of reality. It reminds all of its inherent message and information.

We can say that the cosmogram is the product of a deeper contact and interconnectedness of human and landscape and manifests according to the Geomancers abilities of expressing the knowledge acquired within the context of his or her vision. The vision is initiated by a knowing entity, in my ethnographic case the place Kashi as divine agency.

1.5.1.2. Cosmogram as Ritual

In old times the people made stone settings, such as Stone Henge. They used to visit their holy sites to renew and activate the inherent consciousness by the help of rituals.²²⁶ Today people don’t have time for rituals anymore and thus the cosmogram takes on the function of rituals. Dagmar gives an etymological explanation of the cosmogram. She says that ‘Cosmo’ means universal and ‘gramma’ means letter of the alphabet. In this sense it is a universal language that every being understands, from the human, animal, plant, element, landscape or

²²² see Dagmar interview 2010

²²³ Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:24:35)

²²⁴ Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:26:16)

²²⁵ Pogacnik 1996:349

²²⁶ Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:25:08)

place with all its various inhabitants.²²⁷ All beings understand the cosmogram, all are affected by it. Sometimes important organs of the landscape are blocked by cities or highways. Consequently such organs cannot breathe well and thus cannot be so effective. This irritates the landscape. In such cases the cosmogram gives the landscape another impulse to remember its original potential, it strengthens the landscape in its awareness who she really is.²²⁸ In this sense the cosmogram is a retrieval cue that reminds the landscape what she can do.

I.6. The Vision – Banaras seen through ‘intuitive eyes’

Kinsley uses the term vision

“in a positive sense to denote man’s apprehension of the real. Visions (...) enable man to see-to see things as they really are. Visions enable men to see beyond the immediately sensed world of bits and pieces (...) (t)hey situate man vis-à-vis an ultimate reality that grounds all else. Visions explode man out of his bound condition as a purely historical, and therefore limited, being and enable him to participate in a transcendental realm of “otherness”. Visions impel man out of the ordinary and enable him to discern the extraordinary. Visions are not mere dreams, not hallucinations, but glimpses of something other that is ultimately meaningful to man.”²²⁹

When I use the term vision, I mean an inner sight of something, a deeper insight into the quality of something or someone, the experience of knowledge that may involve various senses.

There exist at least two different ways of seeing. I have read many books about seeing Banaras through Hindu eyes²³⁰ and seeing Kashi through divine eyes²³¹ and the cosmic symbolism of the city.²³² Sometimes merely by reading about its qualities, I had the feeling of realization. I felt the meaning of Kashi. Yet this knowledge is book knowledge, even though it might initiate real mental experience. It is ghyān, as Suresh Joshi calls it. theoretical knowledge. It is not bad. It may be the base for real knowledge, informed by experience, which is called vighyan. On the path to liberation only vighyan holds true. So to see ‘Kashi through divine eyes’ as Parry calls his chapter about the cosmological representation of

²²⁷ Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:25:25)

²²⁸ Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:25:50)

²²⁹ Kinsley 1975:4

²³⁰ see Eck 1983

²³¹ see Parry 1993

²³² see Lannoy 2002:41

Banaras, may be based on reading mythic descriptions of the city or it may be truly seen within actual experience. As I have shown previously²³³ such an experience depends on an enhanced mode of perception.

The focus of this chapter is placed upon Dagmar's vision of the place Banaras that she had received during a geomantic project in Prague. I will show that even though she has never been there physically in this life, and further does not know anything about the geographic, mythic, ritualistic characteristics of the place, there appear similarities between the image of Banaras how it is described in the ancient mythologies, how it is seen "through divine eyes"²³⁴ and the image she saw in her vision.

I.6.1. Situated Vision

Dagmar Kalb was invited by her Geomancy teacher Marco Pogacnik to participate in a Geopuncture-Stone-Setting in the botanical garden of Prague. They were 8 international Geomancers. The issue of the project was 'equilibrium'. They started with the mental image of two spirals each consisting of 26 stones. The inner spiral represented places or landscapes in Europe to which the Geomancers had a personal connection, places or landscapes that they had already visited or that were of importance to them. The Geomancers chose those places consciously. They sensed those places in the context of an 'tuning-in' (Einstimmung) to the qualities of the places. Then they communicated their experiences or visions to the group. The names of the places were thus written down. The second spiral, the outer spiral stood for places that correspond with the first places. The aim of the project was to create cosmograms for the respective landscapes and position them in the botanical garden in Prague.

²³³ see III.1.3.2.3.

²³⁴ see Parry 1994: 11f.

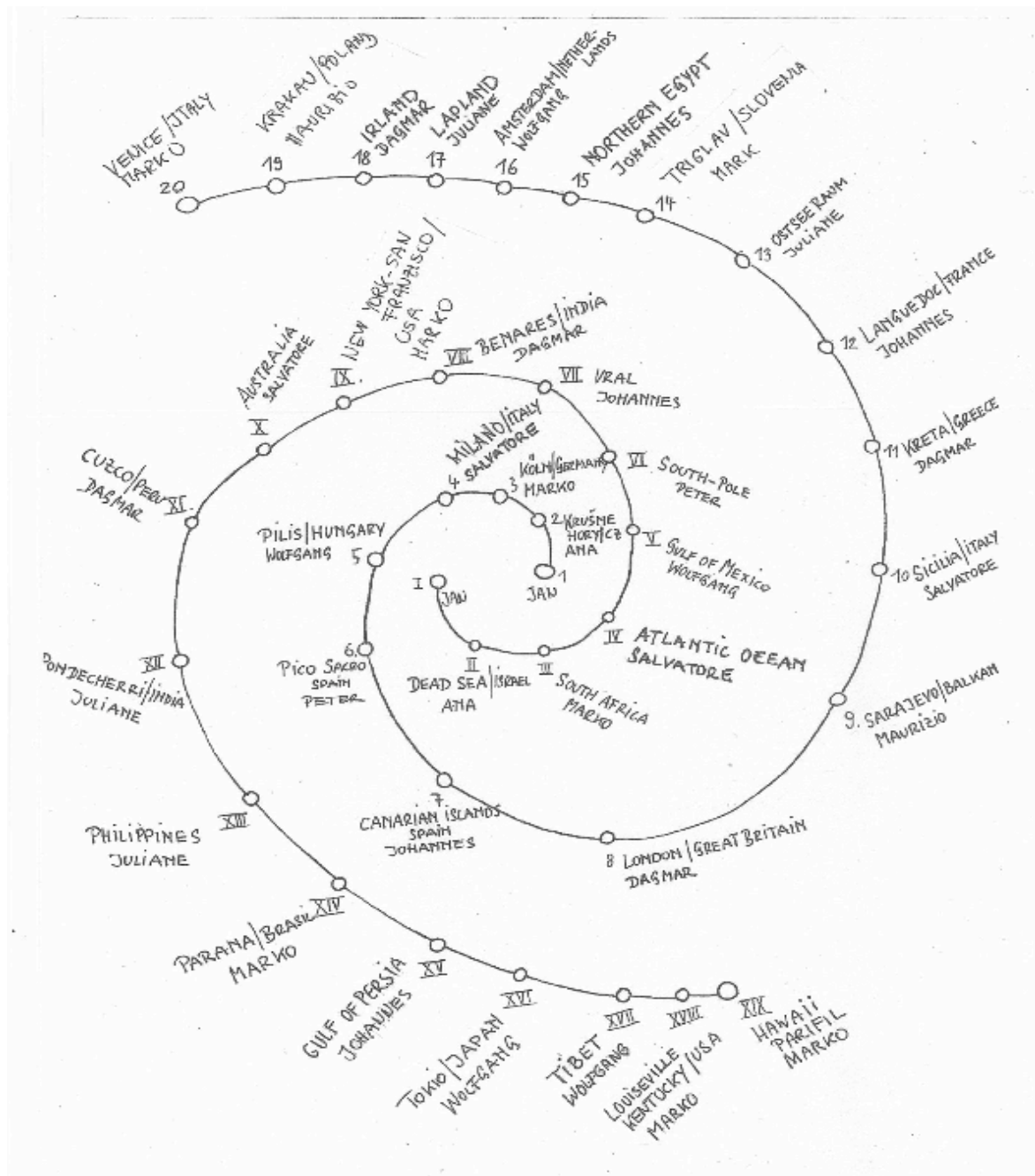


Figure 11: Two Spirals containing names of geomancers and respective place.²³⁵

Dagmar for example had chosen Irland for Europe. She then entered another sensitive accommodation and formulated her question 'Which landscape has a similar energy as Irland?' She consequently received the vision of a landscape and the name Benares. I asked her what she had known before about Banaras. 'Nothing' she answered. She didn't even know that this place existed. 'How did you know the name then?' I asked sceptically. 'The name simply came and with it the vision of a landscape, I got the name and I saw a landscape.' I ask her what her relation with India is in general and she tells me that she has

²³⁵ Copyright Dagmar Kalb 2007

been to Kerala and Goa for 2 weeks. I ask if she has been to the North or to Banaras Region. She negates and points out once more to the fact that she even today doesn't know where Banaras is. 'Interesting that you approach me about Banaras now.'²³⁶

I.6.2. Place communicates its Identity

In Dagmar's vision Banaras appears as an extremely watery landscape. She perceives many rivers, very holy waters flowing in that landscape. Due to this high concentration of water fluxionary, feminine and sentimental aspects effectuate the landscape and have a focal point there.

She speaks of a strong elemental consciousness focussed in the landscape of Banaras, the water element being present foremost. Qualities of dance, softness and holiness appear. The place appeared to her with an intensely sacred quality. She saw a huge cone of light. That cone moved within the earth as a spiral and consequently rose up from the earth.

Dagmar's discourse reveals that people of the ancient past have simply sensed place in a holistic way. For example a place where three rivers meet manifests the threefold aspect of cyclicity and animates the landscape. Something begins, is and ends. The three rivers serve as manifest symbol of the equilibrium of coming into being, of creative forces and of ceasing to be. People who come to such holy waters are supported in the process of letting go of the old and starting the new. This is the effect of a watery landscape and especially of the flowing waters. The water activates the emotional dimension, the heart-dimension within us, the dimension of feeling. Those dimensions initiate the processes of flowing and opening.²³⁷ This imagery reveals like a dance and at the same time like the cone of light, where one can meditatively tune in.²³⁸ It's even impossible to not be spiritual at such places, she adds.

In alliance to this vision she drew the cosmogram. The cosmogram is thus a simplified representation of this complex flux of inner images she received from the far away place.

²³⁶ Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:07:18)

²³⁷ da kommt etwas ins fließen, da öffnet sich was Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:15:30)

²³⁸ meditativ einstimmen Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:15:45)



Figure 12: Dagmar gave expression to her vision of Banaras in the formation of a cosmogram.²³⁹

Dagmar's cosmogram of Banaras encompasses three spheres. One sphere originates inside the earth, the second is the surface of the earth, the habitat of humans and the third is the sphere of mind and spirit. All three spheres again are interconnected, they fluently inform each other in a spiral and triangle form.

The centre of the cosmogram is like a seed²⁴⁰ that contains everything, a seed that germinates in the water.²⁴¹ The seed carries spiritual information and carries it out into the world. Human beings are such a seed as well.²⁴² We can open ourselves to a spiritual dimension or simply the dimension of the 'Whole.'²⁴³ The narrowness of the Western World expresses itself in term of 'seeing only the material world.' If we could see the bigger picture then we would change the way we treat the earth, animals, plants or even each

²³⁹ Copyright Dagmar Kalb 2007

²⁴⁰ Samenkorn

²⁴¹ Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:19:00)

²⁴² Wia Menschn sin a so a Samenkorn

²⁴³ Größeren Ganzen Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:19:13)

other. In this context Banaras as spark of light is an impulse that radiates and carries such qualities into the world in a dancing and fluent way, just as the water moves.²⁴⁴

I.6.3. Poetic Realisation

Dagmar expresses the communicative relation with the place Banaras in a poetic way²⁴⁵. She searches for a poem, that she received in the context of her vision and reads it to us in English first and then in German.

*The water of the worlds
Accompanies you towards your centre
To receive the blessings,
open your heart to the divine light
speaking to you from the depths and hights
of the source
fructile you become in spirit and soul
thus creating the mystery of your life
be prepared for the birth into your body
a touch of peace by the One
you will be guided to penetrate
the crystal of vivid breath
reawakened to the maternal portal
being one with eternity*

²⁴⁴ Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:19:48)

²⁴⁵ Copyright Dagmar Kalb 2007

Das Wasser der Welten
Spült dich in deine Mitte
Um den Segen zu empfangen
Öffne dein Herz dem erhabenen Licht
Das aus den Tiefen und Höhen des Seins
zu dir spricht
fruchtbar werde im Geist wie in der Seele
und schöpfe das Gleichnis deines Lebens
sei zur Geburt bereit
in deinen Körper
Ein Gleichnis des Frieden
Zwischen dem Sein
Du bist geführt dich einzulassen
In den Kristall des lebendigen Atems
Wiedererwacht im mütterlichen Schoß
Unendlichkeit und eins zugleich

I.7. Banaras and Irland

Relatedness of Places

Banaras and Irland carry the same energy for the earth. We could say that there exists a kind of spatial kinship among the various places around the world. What Irland is for Europe, Banaras is for the whole Earth. They are important geomantic organs in the landscape.²⁴⁶ Their similarity lies in the function fulfil and in their personality. The main correspondence in respect to quality, energy and function of place is that of Banaras – Irland. For the planet it's Banaras, for Europe it's Irland, then there exists such an area in Carinthia, in each house garden or flat.

This is a holographic perspective that is present in every discourse about correspondence between micro and macro cosmos, universe within universe, layers within layers that is so common in Hindu mystic traditions.

For Carinthia Dagmar identifies the area around the ruin Hohenstein, situated in the middle of the four holy mountains that are connected by the four-mountain-pilgrimage. There she locates a centre for those feminine, soft and fluent heart-forces or qualities.²⁴⁷

I encountered the idea that every landscape has 'it's own Kashi' as beautiful tool for transcending a fixed and static concept of place. Such a conception comes close to the understanding that place can be a state of mind and that a state of mind can be experienced as place, as inner place.

I.8. Scientific Context

To acknowledge the earth as conscious and divine entity is an ancient idea. In the Vedas the earth was personified as the Goddess Prthivi and later on Goddesses such as Bhudevi (the Goddess who is the earth), Lakshmi, Sakambhari and generally the Mahadevi are identified with earth.²⁴⁸ Vedanta as well as Tantra considers prakrti, material nature as conscious.²⁴⁹

In order to gain an understanding of the character of a place in the Hindu context we find sthala puranas, mythologies of the place. Each tirtha has such mahatmyas or sthala puranas. These are often collections of narratives describing the qualities of the place in a mythic

²⁴⁶ geomantische Organe in der Landschaft, Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:14:20)

²⁴⁷ weiche, fließende Herzenskräfte Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:21:05)

²⁴⁸ see Kinsley 1986: 179

²⁴⁹ see Fields 2001: 32-33

style. Place – narratives help to develop a sense of feeling for the place as a living being, with experience and knowledge as well as memory. Pogacnik and Dagmar Kalb honour such texts along their search for the identity of place.²⁵⁰ Whenever I roamed the markets of pilgrimage places in India, I picked up some pamphlets or comics as source for information about the character of the place. I identify such mythic texts as representations of the perception of the ‘effect of the place.’ As I have showed before²⁵¹, such place-stories are traces of an ancient tradition of communication between human inhabitants and place-bound entities.

Similar to contemporary geomancers the rishis, have been the ancient seers in the Hindu tradition. They have sensed and identified the quality of place. They were able to receive and understand the messages of the place. People up to the present day sense the presence of the divine at particular spots and thus emerge focal points for pilgrimage, tirthas. People with extra sensitive perception thus receive knowledge from the inhabitants of the ‘knowing field.’ The insights into the quality of place was further expressed and mediated by help of cultural symbolic systems communication. One has to investigate into the deeper layers of meaning when reading or hearing the mythologies of the place. The sites remain and developed into centres of pilgrimage, *tirthas*. By connecting sites that are associated with concentrated divine energy, cosmograms emerge.

Concerning the geomantic practice of perceiving subtle or fine material layers of a place in the Hindu context we find the concept of the tanmatras, the subtle elements of objects. Only the subtle body can perceive this tanmatras. Samadhi or meditative trance is mentioned as a key to cognition of the tanmatras.²⁵² Chakras are considered to be tanmatras as well.²⁵³ Can we assume that the earth has its tanmatras? Pasyanti-sabda is visible sound, known as anahata also and refers to sound that has no material vibration as its base. It is associated with the heart chakra. Due to this specific sound the Yogin can see the universe.²⁵⁴ In Yoga the human cognition is elaborated in a five fold classification. The processes of the mind, the vrttis occur in five forms. One of them is Vikalpa and refers to imagination and conceptualization. Yet the seers goal is to stop the vrttis and thus remain in a state of nirodha. Concerning the subtle body, Fields writes: “In *dreaming*, images, meanings, and experiences of the ‘subtle body’ or ‘dream body’ occur independently of sensory input, and

²⁵⁰ Pogacnik 1996

²⁵¹ see chapter II.4.1.

²⁵² see Fields 2001: 127, 27

²⁵³ see Fields 2001: 148

²⁵⁴ see Fields 2001: 156

dream-cognition is non-rational”²⁵⁵ Nevertheless in Yoga sleep is thought to originate in the *tamas* in is therefore contrary to higher knowledge that occurs in a state of *Samadhi*.²⁵⁶

The divine image of Banaras I intended to present in the previous chapters is part of subtle layers of reality. The Banaras of mythic descriptions may be realized through the divine sight.

1.8.1. Emic Concepts Correlating with Dagmar’s Vision

Within the interview situation I share those emic Hindu concepts with Dagmar, that I feel relevant concerning her vision.

The poetic text that resembles the message Dagmar received from the place Banaras correlates with the microcosmic perspective, characteristic for Banaras religious discourse, where all that exists in the universe is found within the sacred space of Kashi. That’s why people say in Banaras you can find all deities, all sacred places. Banaras is a microcosmic form of the universe. After hearing her poem, my association is Shiva as seed and Shakti as water. She says that we humans mirror the dance of cosmic forces and that the same universal principles manifest as landscape. This is the common Hindu concept of layers within layers, the smallest part containing the picture of the biggest. Creation starts in both discourses in the centre. From there it spreads out into the worlds. Kashi illumines the three worlds.

Due to her perception of a strong watery quality of the place, in my mind the term Varanasi echoes. The ancient name for Banaras, the field encircled by the waters of the three holy rivers Ganga, Varuna and Assi. The term refers to the watery quality of the place. In ancient times there have been countless pools and small rivers that have dried today. During monsoon one may see some of those rivers reappear for some time. There still exist maps of British travellers showing the richness and concentration of water within Banaras of the old times. I tell her about the maps that show the rich water landscape of the old times. I tell her about the river Goddess Ganga and that she is the reason for most pilgrims to come. ‘Ahh! She flows there.” She calls out with euphoric interest. She must have heard of the Ganga for she adds that it is ‘The River’. She also saw many people going into the river, washing and cleaning or performing rituals.

I tell her that Banaras is actually a Shiva place and she associates quickly a harmonious existence of the male aspects of Shiva and the Ganga and the water in general who

²⁵⁵ Fields 2001: 98

²⁵⁶ see Fields 2001: 98

symbolizes the feminine, fluent and intuitive aspects.²⁵⁷ She truly catches the point of relevance here. Banaras is cosmologically constructed in a way that the shiva-shakti equilibrium is maintained. For each feminine divinity stands one male divinity. Even in my personal perceptions I had always perceived Shiva in the lanes and stones of the city and Shakti in her liquid form as river Ganga. There is a common saying in Banaras: Ganga is Shiva's shakti²⁵⁸ in liquid form.

I tell her about cosmograms of Banaras that show an upper triangle symbolizing the male aspect, Shiva and a downward triangle symbolizing the feminine aspect, Shakti. In the centre creation is initiated.

Shiva as comic dancer moves the universe from its ground that is Banaras. Therefore he is called Vishvanath, Lord of the Universe. The representation of the unity of the five elements is referred to as supreme Lord Shiva himself. Shiva is depicted as threefold linga encompassing Brahma and evolution, Vishnu and preservative and Shiva and destruction. This image symbolises Shiva's supreme state of unity and stands for all knowledge. "With the superimposition of the greatest divine power it was realised that Shiva was at the bottom of everything that is moving, thus He was called *Ishvara*, or "I" "*chara*" (I, this; *chara*, to move). The same idea is expressed in his pose of dancing, i.e., *Tandava Nartakari*, or one that keeps up the rhythm of the world."²⁵⁹

Dagmar points to the spiral in her cosmogram. Due to the spiral he moves all kinds of things. The light sends out beams all over the world. It radiates into the cosmos and back to earth. On another level the light originates in and radiates from an axis of stomach and heart and thus affects us. Dagmar calls Banaras a 'heart-place' carrying a strong heart-quality. Whenever I used to discuss topics of my Banaras research with Suresh Joshi, he used to emphasize, that it is 'a heart matter'. She emphasises the spiritual character of this particular heart-quality and explains it in terms of 'unconditional love, universal alignment and orientation, opening ones heart to everything, all is connected, not to judge, taking all as it is, all is a present, orientation towards a higher order, comprehending oneself as more than material and physical body, understanding that within one exists mind and spirit.'²⁶⁰ For Dagmar this is Banaras. Banaras activates such qualities in the landscape and in the people, it initiates that those things start flowing. 'Like this I saw it also.'²⁶¹ She tries to symbolize this

²⁵⁷ Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:09:40)

²⁵⁸ Shakti as power, energy as well as the divine feminine

²⁵⁹ Pillai cf. Singh 1987

²⁶⁰ Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:17:15)

²⁶¹ Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:17:50)

spiritual spark within her cosmogram as well. This spark of spiritual light opens the people for their spiritual way, cleans them from that which is a hindrance to their way. Due to the meditating pose of the being in her cosmogram, I tell her that in ancient times people came to Kashi to meditate and she points to her cosmogram. 'There he sits in the cosmogram.'²⁶²

The story of Shiva's manifestation as column of light corresponds with Dagmar's perception of a huge cone of light. In the Hindu context it is the story of the jyotir linga, the linga of light that pierced the earth at the spot where Kashi lies. Most pilgrims come to Kashi for two reasons: To take darshan of the holy Ganga and to take darshan of the linga of light the jyotirlinga of Vishvanath, the Lord of the Universe. Shiva is identified with the five elements. The Lord of Banaras, Shiva represents the unity of the five elements. Thus where Shiva is strong, the elemental powers are strong, just as Dagmar's perceived it in her vision. Singh gives a table of correspondences between locatable forms of Shiva in Banaras and elements, cognition, mantras etc.²⁶³

1.8.2. Etic Concepts

Prof. Dr. Manfred Kremser drew my attention to the question how such similarities as between Dagmar's vision and a culturally shared divine Hindu conception of Banaras may be explained. How is it possible that there emerge similar images in India and in Austria? There are various explanatory approaches to this question. One approach is to postulate the existence of an interrelated web of knowledge, one may call it a field, or an electromagnetic field or morphogenetic field, as Rupert Sheldrake calls it. Kremser has introduced the term 'Wissende Instanzen' (knowing entities) to refer to the inhabitants of such a field of knowledge.

This is a similar conception to Rupert Sheldrake's morphogenetic field or knowing field that is inhabited by 'knowing entities.' Prof. Dr. Manfred Kremser introduces the German term 'Wissende Instanzen' in his 2002 article "Am Anfang war das Ritual" as an uncommitted term for all those beings from the so-called invisible world. The horizontal axis of a ritual refers to our embodied sphere of existence, the human participants of the ritual. The vertical axis refers to all those beings of the invisible sphere. Those may be called spirits, ancestors or deities. The function of the ritual is to intersect those two axes, to establish contact between those two cosmological spheres or domains of consciousness, the social

²⁶² Dagmar Interview 2010 (00:08:58)

²⁶³ Singh 1987

human world and the world of those mostly not material 'knowing entities'. The German 'Instanzen' is more neutral than entities, maybe more like 'beings', something that is, but is not defined any further. When the contact is established then communication can happen. Then emerges the question: How to understand the language of this other worlds? According to Prof. Dr. Manfred Kremser ritual specialists are trained in such other languages. In the context of feeling and direct knowledge transfer we are independent, we are free from Dogma, free from the need of religious, ritual or spiritual mediators. In the sense of symbolic knowledge we are either experts ourselves or we happily accept the help of religious hermeneutics. They may help us on the way to understand potential and actual experiences. I am thus aware of an occupying tendency dominating the religious and ritual arena in Banaras. Whenever people claim to have the only right to communicate with the divine, in such cases I sense the very quality of inquisition. In my mind echoes the parole: Give the ancient sites of worship free, in Austria as well as in India! Such potent places should not be occupied and locked by any one religion.

The Greek term Gaia was applied first by Dr. James Lovelock in the 1970s when he introduced a wider public to his Gaia-theory about planet earth.²⁶⁴ There emerged alternative theories around Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis. Those 'New Age' or Neo-Pagan approaches considered and perceived the earth as divine entity, as Mother of all, as possessor of total planetary knowledge and memory. I recommend the two books: "Gaia's Body"²⁶⁵ for inquiry into the physiology of the earth and "Earthmind"²⁶⁶ for insights into communicative relationships with the planet as living being. For a more practical approach I suggest "Re-Visioning the Earth."²⁶⁷

Devereux, Steele and Kubrin depart from archaeological and anthropological insights: "The overall picture which emerges shows quite clearly that most early peoples venerated the Earth, and their religious sensibilities gravitated around the worship of the land and nature."²⁶⁸ They further describe the early human-earth-relationship: "(T)he people who lived on our planet for tens of thousands of years, from the dawn of the Upper Palaeolithic period some 40,000 years ago, experienced it as a great living being that was responsive, intelligent and nurturing. (...) In the archaic world, the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms were seen as inseparable elements of the web of life that arose, abided and dissolved in endless

²⁶⁴ further reading: Gaia – a new look on life on Earth.

²⁶⁵ Volker 1998

²⁶⁶ Devereux 1989

²⁶⁷ Devereux 1996

²⁶⁸ Devereux 1989:1

cycles.”²⁶⁹ They postulate that the modern cultures have forgotten how to live in harmony with the planet. The loss of memory is nevertheless not total and thus by means of extraordinary perception traces may be found in the morphogenetic field or the akasha level. He mentions the psychic ability of people to pick up information from objects or places subject to the study of psychometry and writes: “every age has a different name for a subtle environmental memory field, a frequency domain in which events are imprinted with vibrational patterns that we sense as the ‘atmosphere’ of a place. (...) To people of ancient traditions, however, who lived close to the Earth, not only crystals but ordinary rocks recorded memory and were responsive to consciousness.”²⁷⁰ He narrates several examples from the Hopi, Seneca and other American Indian tribes.

1.8.2.1. Awareness of Reciprocal Interrelatedness

Sensual experience of terrestrial knowledge

Devereux examines various levels of communicating with earth and various ways how humanity is and was linked with the planet. He uses Levy-Bruhl's term ‘participation mystique’²⁷¹ to introduce the reader to a form of unitary experience where there exists no awareness of the difference between object and subject. This state of unity was extended to the web of life on the planet, the biosphere or simply life force. In the context of ‘Gaia discourses’ this is our locus of knowledge, of planetary memory. Access to that storage demands extraordinary sensory skills. “The communication of archaic humanity with the Earth was thus based on a completely different outlook, which in turn was determined by the value given to each sense in reading reality.”²⁷² He speaks of cross-sensory abilities, where sound may be seen and colour heard. An empathic and deep ecological vision evolves out of the combination of such cross-sensory perceptions and emotional bonding to the Earth. Devereux calls shamans “spiritual ecologists”²⁷³ who maintain the equilibrium of their people and their natural environment due to communication skills that enable them to communicate with other worlds. I consider Dagmar Kalb as an example for a contemporary form of geomancer as spiritual ecologist in Devereux's sense. She has encouraged me to actively interrelate with my natural environment of which we humans ultimately are a part.

²⁶⁹ Devereux 1989:3

²⁷⁰ Devereux 1989:4

²⁷¹ Devereux 1989:7

²⁷² Devereux 1989: 7

²⁷³ Devereux 1989: 8

2. Pancakroshi Yatra with Uma Shankar²⁷⁴

The panca-kroshi pilgrimage route marks the boundaries of the sacred space of the Kashi mandala. Pilgrims, along with their families walk it in five days in the month of margh. Mainly young and strong men walk it in a single night for Shivaratri. One may also perform it with the auto rikshaw in one day. When one who is unfamiliar with the route performs it during times other than when it is prescribed, a guide is necessary. A guide leads the pilgrim along the divine route and through sacred space. A guide knows which deity to visit, whos darshan to take and how to worship in the prescribed ritual way. I found my guide in Uma Shankar. I feel thankful to him for his peacefulness, for his compassion and his sensitivity. He led in a determined way, and yet left space for deep and personal experience.

a) Entrance into the path

Pilgrims walk along a sacred path, which is imbued with religious and spiritual meaning and is fixed by tradition. The path connects various sacred sites. When we draw a line between those spots, the pilgrimage path takes on specific shapes.

They circumambulate the sacred space of Kashi. The form of this particular pilgrimage path is like a circle. If we were to fly high up in the sky and view the lines of the path from a bird's perspective, we would realize the mandalic shape it takes. It is thus a mandalic form of pilgrimage route. The pilgrimage path is depicted with the help of a cosmogram, a cognitive pilgrimage map. In this case the corresponding cosmogram is the 'Kashi Mandala.' The cosmogram is a simplified representation of the form of the cosmos. It is a microcosmic form of the universe. The panchakroshi route corresponds with the boundaries of the universe.

b) Uma's sweetness

It is November 2008. Sunrise was beautiful but I could not enjoy it with all my heart. Together with a local friend we sit in Kashi chayshop and have morning chay. I remain quiet and reflect on the fruits of my research. Questions of scientific relevance penetrate my mind and cut the flow of pure being that is so inviting here in Banaras.

²⁷⁴ I am thankful to the members of the Zabaan Company, a Delhi based language and translation institute for their professional help. All translation by S.A. Zabaan Pvt. Ltd.

'Did I take enough Interviews? How do I unite personal experience and professional research? Did I loose myself in self-inquiry and sole perception, or in endless conversations that transfer merely liquid knowledge, that may remain wordless because it slips from the grasp of the 'describable'? I sense the pain of failure. Twice in 2008 I had come for three month to do research on pilgrimage in Banaras and even though I had visited several spots, and performed a couple of pilgrimages, I still did not do the main one. For almost six months I tried to perform the Panchakroshi Yatra, the great pilgrimage encircling the sacred space of Kashi. I know very well that I cannot walk it on my own, I would loose the way or get lost along the route.²⁷⁵ Who could be my pilgrimage guide? Rana Ji is in Scandinavia and will not return before I leave. Also I do not want to pay for the yatra because I feel like then it's not the real thing. I want to find someone 'real'. After a while Kedar, a Mexican friend of my local friend joins us for chay. We talk a few moments. I ask where his wife Ruby, is. She is Italian and they were married according to Vedic tradition and live in Banaras most of the time. Soon I open my heart to him. The pancakroshi yatra is the main focus of my research and I am still stuck to theory. My greatest wish for the moment is to perform the yatra. He looks at me with a sense of awareness that makes me alert. He and Ruby have performed the pilgrimage with a competent pilgrimage guide. His name is Uma Shankar and he lives just around the corner here in Assi. His Guru lives near Durga Kund and is a famous and revered expert of pilgrimages. Kedar speaks in the best of tones about this man and listening to him makes my heart jump. I ask for the phone number and he says that Uma Shankar cannot speak English so it would be better for my Banarsi friend call him. I thank him, and he moves his head but remains obviously unmoved by my sentiments. I am excited, and in the afternoon I call to introduce myself and pass on the phone to my friend, who arranges for chay in Kashi Chay Shop for the next day.

We arrive a bit early because I want to be there before Uma Shankar. After a few chays he arrives. A rather small and thin man with an open and stable look in his eyes. He is dressed traditionally in lungi and shirt. We greet each other in Hindi and I try to explain that I am interested in pilgrimage, the Pancakrosi Yatra, that I will leave in three weeks and if he will be my guide. He remains relaxed and orders a chay. His smile is sweet and humble and his sight evokes compassion in me. He does not push as the priests on the Ghats often do. He makes a soft and honest impression on me and I do not sense greed in the way he acts. My friend speaks further with him and translates parts of the conversation to me. We arrange to

²⁷⁵ as Singh calls it 2002: 17

perform the Panchakroshi on the 5th of November, which is also the date of my 28th birthday. I do not tell them for I feel like this is my personal present to myself. He gives us a list of names of ritual items that we should buy and bring along with us. He emphasizes the need to bring Ganga Jal²⁷⁶ and sketches the sequence of the happenings of the pilgrimage.

My local friend has never met Uma Shankar before, and I sense respect from his side. Usually he has a provocative nature, especially with regard to religious experts, for he is himself a Brahmin of Banaras. Yet with Uma Shankar I observed him being humble, respectful and friendly. “He doesn’t want nothing’ he answers when I ask his opinion about the meeting. What he means is that Uma Shankar’s intentions seem pure, free of greedy or manipulating tendencies. I feel further strengthened in my impression and feel euphoric about the coming pilgrimage.

Kedar had told me that Uma is a member of an organization that helps people of all social stratas to perform Yatras. He made a soft, humble and likable impression on me. He did not push and I felt friendly respect from his side. I felt trust for him. He radiated peacefully and yet with a distance that I enjoyed. He did not want anything from me except to help me perform the Yatra. This was his only interest. With the help of Ruby and Kedar I had found the most affectionate and sincere pilgrim leader I could possibly wish for. My friend Pawan²⁷⁷ joined us on the pilgrimage and took pictures that I am not using now due to personal reasons.

It is the evening of the 4th of November. We approach a small shop near Assi Crossing. A woman is there and I tell her enthusiastically that tomorrow we will perform the Panchakroshi. She shakes her head, lifts her eyebrows and smiles. My friend talks to her in local dialect and I give her the list. She puts together a package and I pay around 50 Rs.

We meet Uma Shankar the next morning and take the vow of performing the Yatra at Vishvanath temple. It is not easy for me as a Westerner to enter the sacred site. Police presence is heavy and they stop me immediately. Uma Ji is obviously used to these kinds of obstacles and tells me it will be all right, we have to visit the chief police officer. He will give permission. He takes me to an open place inside the temple compound. A few police officers stand around at the platform and one sits behind a big desk. To that one I bow with folded hands and a facial expression that could question my pride. I feel like he has all the power and I am dependent upon his compassion. Uma Ji speaks to him with folded hands and I

²⁷⁶ the holy water of the Ganga

²⁷⁷ Pankaj Kumar Mishra, a 30 year-old Brahmin and resident of Banaras. He accompanied me along the Panchakroshi pilgrimage and took professional pictures.

show my passport. The policeman starts a personal conversation. Why I want to see Vishvanath and if I like India. I cannot remember what exactly I answered for I was rather nervous. After a little while of silence from his side and increasing tension on my side, he gives back my passport and moves his head so as to communicate that I can go. His face remains serious but not unfriendly during the whole conversation. Relieved, we proceed to the main Vishvanath shrine, where we pour liquid over the Shiva lingam. In that moment, I arrive fully in the 'Here and Now'. I am aware of the fact that this spot is loaded up by pilgrimage activities for a few hundred years and the image of the lingam and the yoni much longer. Next we visit Annapurna, the female aspect of Divinity at the heart of Banaras. There Uma Ji shows us a metal form of the Sri Chakra, the famous cosmogram of the Goddess. We circumambulate the shrine of the Goddess, take her Darshan and that of all the deities in her compound.

c) Being guided

I cannot relate all this exactly for I merely followed my guide. He showed me where to look, he showed me where to bow, he mentioned the names of the deities and most of those names evoked more or less associative knowledge in me. He showed me how to perform the ritual worship. I recorded whatever he said and during the resting times of the day I asked some questions, but what he really gave me was his own exemplary ritual behaviour and the possibility to imitate it. Thus I did not want to ask in the very ritual moment because that would have destroyed the atmosphere. As most other pilgrims, I did not know quite what and how I was doing, I was entirely dependent upon the guidance of my guide. I am very happy that it was Uma Shankar because he did not take advantage of his powerful position. Even after the Yatra, when Pawan and I visited his house and ate with his family, he offered me books and papers free of cost. Of course I gave him some dakshina for all that he did for me but I feel full trust that the money is not the central reason for his performing the yatras and helping others to perform it. Uma Shankar represents the human manifestation of the guiding quality. Ganesh is the deity that resembles the guiding quality and thus on a divine level we are guided by the Lord who removes all obstacles.

2.1. The Pancakroshi Yatra in the Sanskrit texts

The greater Kashi Kshetra that is described within puranic accounts, has reduced its form to the sacred space of Kashi, demarked by the Pancakroshi route. Singh mentions three ancient religious texts²⁷⁸:

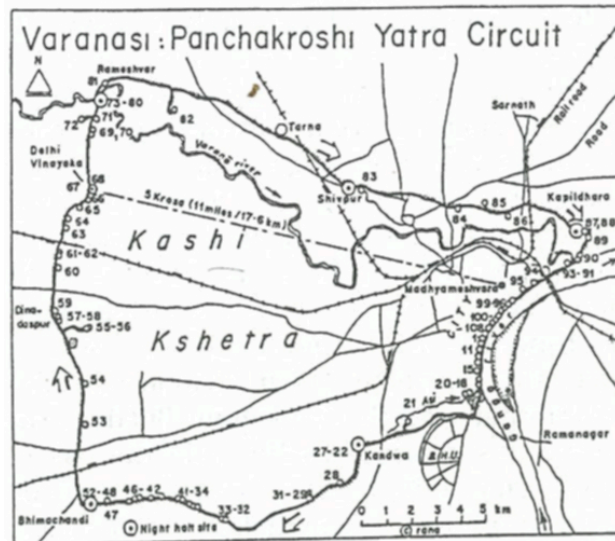


Figure 13: Kashi Kshetra 'The territory ever having light'²⁷⁹

- Padma Purana: The Kashi Kshetra corresponds to the circle of the Caurasikroshi Route. The Pancakroshi Route has the same control points, the Madhyamesvara as centre and the Dehli Vinayaka as radial point.

The Padma Purana tells how Ganesha and his brother Skanda were facing a competition to circle the whole cosmos. Ganesha circumambulated his parents and won. This mythology is the basis for the Pancakroshi Route, which encircles the entire cosmos as well. Madhyamesvara is the resort of Siva and Parvati. Singh²⁸⁰ cites Courtright's definition of a bhakti tradition of pilgrimage: "going a great distance and grasping the prize of the auspicious sight (darsana) of the deity".

²⁷⁸ Singh 2002:52

²⁷⁹ Singh 2002: 66

²⁸⁰ Singh 2002:53

- The BvP describes a smaller unit, whereby the boundaries closely correspond to the route of the Pancakrosi Yatra.²⁸¹

“The transformation of macrocosmos into microcosmos in accordance to the need of society and easiness in ritual performance has been common in Hindu tradition”²⁸² and “finally one part of the whole becomes a symbol of the whole(.)”²⁸³ In this context it is to be understood that the Pancakrosi Yatra resembles a circumambulation of the cosmos. Thus 108 shrines are also to be found along the Pancakrosi route, as before on the Caurasikrosi route. The treaties of 1110 (KKT), 1460 (TC) and 1585 (TS) eulogise the Pancakrosi territory and not the former bigger territory. The pilgrimage journey of the Pancakrosi Yatra had become popular until the 16th century.

- The BP describes landmarks and edges and mentions a Sarasvati river in the east that has no other record of existence.

Even the great Bhakti poet Tulasi mentions the sacred territory. Singh²⁸⁴ cites from the Vinaya Patrika: “Manikarnika is her moon-face beautiful, and the joy of God’s river is the beauty of her countenance, Her greatness is the Pancakrosi replete with one’s own and others’ good.”

In the KKh of the 12th century the journey was mentioned as “ giver of merits for liberation (moksa) from the world”²⁸⁵

The Kasi Rahasya of the 16th century gives a detailed description of this Yatra.²⁸⁶

“The Pancakrosi pilgrimage journey starts with the worship of the Visvesvara Linga, the lingam of light itself, symbolising the image of the supremacy of Siva. This may be referred as the *axis mundi*...the pillar at the centre of the world, originating deep in the underworld, cracking the surface of the earth, and splitting the roof of the sky. ”²⁸⁷ He continues with a reference to Eck (1982:109) about how the entire sacred space of this territory becomes

²⁸¹ Singh 2002: 53

²⁸² Singh 2002: 53

²⁸³ Singh 2002: 54

²⁸⁴ Singh 2002: 54

²⁸⁵ Singh 2002: 55

²⁸⁶ further reading in English: Herbert 1957, Korom 1983, Singh 1991, 1998, Gutschow and Michaels 1993

²⁸⁷ Singh 2002: 55

the lingam of light. This light is called Visvesvara and it illumines the sacred territory and extends five krosas.²⁸⁸

According to the Kasi Rahasya at the time of destruction, pralaya, this cosmic circuit of Kasi exists as a linga, it is to this that the city's name, Pancakrosatmaka Lingasvarupa Kasi, refers.²⁸⁹

The same Text (KKh) mentions Kasi as Siva's body: 18 selective lingams resemble the various body parts, converging into one lingam, the Krttivasesvara Lingam, being Siva's body. 18 branches of knowledge are symbolised by the number 18 and thus "the cosmic territory demarked by the Pancakrosi Yatra rout is a symbol of the total forms of Siva and represents total knowledge."²⁹⁰ Shiva's lingam is the source of the world and the whole world is considered a lingam.

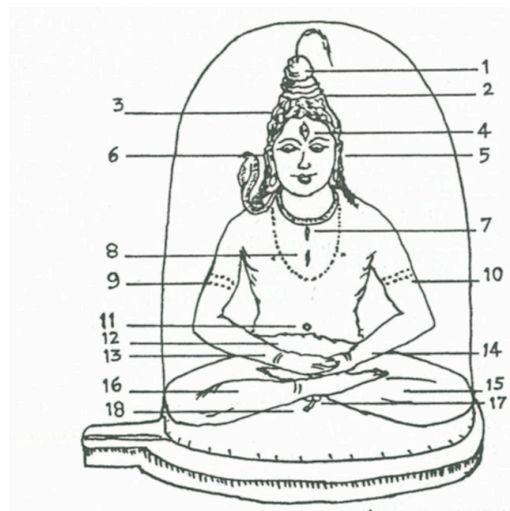


Figure 14: The lingam as Shiva's body in Kashi.²⁹¹

The number 5 is Shivas number and symbol for wholeness. In the mythic context the Pancakrosi Kshetra (field) is referred to as 'light manifested Shiva Linga' the Pancakrosatmaka jyotirlinga.

²⁸⁸ see Singh 2002: 56

²⁸⁹ see Singh 2002:56

²⁹⁰ Singh 2002: 56

²⁹¹ Singh 2002: 56

2.2. Reasons for performing the Pancakroshi Yatra

Uma Shankar: “In our daily routine, in the work we do at home all day, whatever sin or mistake is committed by us by accident, the Panckosi Yatra is taken for its²⁹² atonement.”²⁹³

Preparation and firm resolve in order to establish a relationship with the Divine before starting the pancakroshi yatra:

Uma Shankar: “In order to take the Panckosi Yatra, you must first be clear about your thoughts, feelings, and wishes for your future.”²⁹⁴ Thereby he uses the phrase ‘man men’ meaning ‘in the mind’, to be clear about your intentions in the mind, thus it becomes obvious that the state of mind is a crucial point for the efficacy of the pancakroshi yatra. He further suggests exemplary mental orientations concerning all aspects of life, such as ‘success in your studies, success in ones career, peace and happiness for ones family, wishing that one’s family may live peacefully and happily, success in whatever they do’. For peace and happiness he uses the words ‘sukh and santi’ that carry conceptual meaning by itself. Uma Ji continues: “With a firm resolve for all this,²⁹⁵ the Panckosi Yatra is done. And whichever pilgrim takes (i.e. such a) resolve with a genuine heart, feelings, and intention before setting off on the Panckosi Yatra, will be protected and aided by Kashi Visvanath Ji.”²⁹⁶

The wishes he suggests can be traced back to the Hindu concept of the four aims of life. They are concerned with material welfare, family life as well as spiritual elaboration. The resolve should be taken within a specific emotive mind set and in a genuine way. His statements suggest that if the pilgrim thus prepares himself, he is protected by Shiva, being called Kashi Visvanath in this context, himself. Thus we can comprehend that the specific feeling and mindset establishes a primary relationship between the human and the divine, in which the human pilgrim is the one who wishes to be protected and the divine agent is the protector.

Uma Shankar explains that the Yatra is performed in one to five days and that on the special time of Shivratri people walk the 84 kilometres within one night, he further points out the difficulties of such an undertaking. In this regard he emphasizes the importance and relevance of divine grace and blessing with the following words:

²⁹² i.e. the mistake or sin's

²⁹³ Interview, 5.II.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210125

²⁹⁴ Interview, 5.II.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210125

²⁹⁵ i.e. to be

²⁹⁶ Interview, 5.II.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210125

“On the day of Shiv Ratri, people walk. How difficult it is to walk 84 kilometres in one day! But by the grace of Visvanath Ji, people (i.e. manage) to do this with ease. Because of this, gods and goddesses accompany you and help you during the Panckosi Yatra.”²⁹⁷

Here we can clearly see that within the framework of pilgrimage a relationship is established between the human and the divine spheres. This reminds us of the concept of hierophany as well as of an ‘axis mundi’ (connecting the realms or the three loks, worlds). The base for all such religious or spiritual undertakings in the Hindu context is the concept of ‘kripya’, the grace of the deity, as Suresh Ji introduced it to me. As a Buddhist I was used to implying this benevolence from the divine side when good deeds are done automatically.

The first deity that is ritually being approached is the Lord of obstacles, the remover of obstacles, the protector of sacred space and the Lord of the Beginning, Lord Ganesh, the child of Shiv and Parvati.

Uma Shankar explains that before one starts the yatra, Lord Ganesh is praised and asked thus: “He Lord Ganesh Ji, I am setting out to do the Panckosi Yatra for my family, for myself, for my peace and happiness, for my education, and for (i.e. achieving) success in my life. During this Panckosi Yatra, bearing witness (i.e. to what goes on), protect me and save me from all pains and sorrows.”²⁹⁸

U.S. gives an outline of the sequence and order of the pilgrimage²⁹⁹:

Pundiraj Ganesh Ji - Mata Annapurna – Vishvanath Ji – Manikarnika Ghat – Karnika Ghat - Tyagraj Ghat – Shiva Ghat – Nagpur – Welcome Assi Ghat Tilkesvar Mahadev - with autorikshaw to Kandava, Kapilesvar Mahadev – Teen Chandi Devi mandir – Rameshvaram, where Ram Chandra established Lingam and performed Panckosi Yatra- Panchon Pandava – Kapildhara – Lauh Vinayaka – by motor boat, Adikeshava – Manikarnika – Visvanath worship completes yatra.

He adds to all the names of the sites that we will worship there, and for worship he uses the conceptual expression ‘darsan – puja’ which implies that taking the darsan of the deity is central, as is performing the devotional rites, puja.

²⁹⁷ Interview, 5.11.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210125

²⁹⁸ Interview, 5.11.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210125

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

2.3. Contextual Information of the Pancakroshi Yatra

U.S. explains the svayambho quality of the temples and the context of the pancakroshi yatra³⁰⁰:

I had asked him if the temples were svayambho, self-existent, and he affirmed it with the explanation that they are so old that they do not have a recorded history. Some are 400, 500 or 1000 years old he says and I feel that these are mere numbers for him. Every three years occurs the month of Puroshottam Mas, called Adhikmas during which people from every corner of India come to Banaras to perform the Pancakroshi Yatra. Uma Shankar narrates: “Every three years comes this Adhikmas, which is called Puroshottam Mas, which is the month of Vishnu. In this month people only worship God, meditate on God, pray to God, adorn (i.e. images of) God, make offerings (i.e. to God). From doing (i.e. all of this), the businesses of the devotees profit.”³⁰¹

Here we can see again that mundane desires are not separated from religious and spiritual activities such as pilgrimage, meditation and worship, rather these dimensions intermingle with each other. The month of Vishnu is appropriate for sustaining one’s life for he is commonly perceived as the preserver of the universe.

Uma Shankar locates Kashi within a mythic landscape when he narrates the famous image of Kashi on top of Shiva’s trident: “Kashi is situated in the trident of Lord Shiva (...) rivers on all sides (...) and additionally, Visvanath Ji himself established it. When Shankar Ji’s (i.e. that is to say) Visvanath Ji’s marriage was in the works, Parvati’s father told Shankar Ji that ‘Your marriage is being fixed and you are someone who lives in the Himalayas, where will you take our daughter? (...) You’ll marry immediately (i.e. but) you live in the Himalayan mountains (...) do you have any home, any place to stay? Where will you shelter (i.e. my daughter)?’ So the Shankar Ji replied, ‘Yes, this is true, I don’t have any place to stay, I live in the mountains, sitting performing tapas.’ Shankar Ji said: ‘It’s all well and good.’ Then Shankar Ji cast his trident, and the trident went into Kashi, and stopped, standing upright in the Ganges, and in this way, Kashi Visvanath established Kashi. As Shankar Ji establishes Kashi and begins to live there, all of the gods come to meet Shankar Ji in Kashi and there they remain. All of the gods who came to Kashi, become happy seeing Shankar Ji’s city, Kashi, and say: ‘Kashi is the city (i.e. the greatest)’ and asked Shakar Ji for their own places there and Shankar Ji provided all of them with their own abodes. When Ganesh Ji arrived in all of his forms, he took up 56

³⁰⁰ Interview, 5.11.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210125

³⁰¹ Interview, 5.11.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210125

places in Kashi. There are 56 Vinayak temples in every corner of Kashi. (...) 12 Jyotirlingams (...) Our Kashi is divided into three parts, or zones. Our city is divided into three parts: Bihar Khand (i.e. sector), Visvanath Khand, and Omkareshvar Khand.”³⁰²

There are various depictions of Kashi, yet in a mythical context the most significant may well be Kashi resting on top of Shiva’s trident, ever protected, even in the times of cosmic destruction, pralaya. As the trident has three tips, Kashi has three khands. As the following explanation from Uma Shankar implies this division into three Khands serves as a marker for respective pilgrimage routes. He starts with describing where the Khands start and where they end.

Uma Shankar: “(i.e. People) circumambulate these three parts (i.e. of Kashi). In the inner section of Bihar Khand there are two hundred and five temples of Shiva to worship. This yatra (i.e. in Bihar Khand) happens in just one day. After that, in the inner part of Visvanath Khand, (i.e. people) worship Ganesh Vinayak and Shiva Lingams. And in the inner part of Visvanath Khand, the yatra of Visvanath Ji’s ariel (i.e. divine) vehicle, that’s shaped like a jalebi, takes place. (i.e. People) make offerings to all of the gods in the inner part of Visvanath Khand for (i.e. obtaining) happiness and comfort. In the inner part of Omkareshvar Khand, (i.e. people) worship 205 Mahadevs. (...) It takes a lot of time to do this. Which is why it takes two days in the inner part of Omkareshvar Khand. (...)’s circumambulation is done on Maharavira (i.e. the Great Sunday), the day of Surya Bhagvan. (...) 12 Jyotirlingams, 4 Mahamukhs, 11 Maharup Jyotirlingams, 11 Ganesh sons, 11 Bhairav sons (...); all of these yatras (i.e. are done) continuously.”³⁰³

2.4. Experiencing Kashi – Searching Kashi

Uma Shankar continues by describing Kashi and its quality that is beyond the understanding of the intellect and, beyond book knowledge, but has to be experienced and especially ‘seen’ by the aspirant. The importance of seeing is central in Hindu worship and religious experience. Diana Eck has explored the meaning of the sacred sight, called darsan. I have given an explanation of this experiential concept of the texts. Further Uma Shankar emphasizes the religious and cultural diversity and plurality of Kashi as a plus factor and advantage. Not only does the human realm of Kashi show plurality but even moreso the

³⁰² Interview, 5.11.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210125

³⁰³ Interview, 5.11.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210125

divine realm, the inhabitants of which being 330,000,000, a number signifying the totality of divinities.

“330,000,000 gods and goddesses live in our Kashi. You’ll find every sort of caste and religion in Kashi. Kashi is a unique city. For this reason, it has been said that our Kashi is special within all three worlds. From every corner of the country, and from abroad, everyone comes here to understand that which is in Kashi, that which receives praise by everyone. They understand this Kashi upon seeing it. Until you see Kashi for yourself, you won’t be able to understand it. It is said that, ‘People search in Kashi, shave their heads (mundan) in Prayag (i.e. Allahabad), and offer oblations to their ancestors (pinddan) in Gaya.’ So, you’ll find Kashi only by searching for it. You cannot find anything without searching in Kashi (Kasi dhurhe). Prayag Munde – people go to Prayag and shave their heads, and Gaya Pinde – people go to Gaya and offer oblations in the name of their ancestors. Therefore we have this saying: ‘Kasi dhurhe, Prayag Munde, Gaya Pinde.’ People come to Kashi and worship in all of the temples while searching, from which they obtain true peace in their lives.”³⁰⁴

I was introduced here for the first time with the concept of the qualities of the three places Kashi, Prayag and Gaya, yet consequently I heard this saying again and again and after I had returned home and did my literature research I read it in at least two books on Kashi. Through this concept I could make sense of the central and most natural activity I engaged with in Kashi: searching the lanes for places that felt ‘real’ – wandering around the city without concrete goal, watching at every corner the visible scenes of life. After I became familiar with this concept, this kind of ‘doing nothing’ suddenly made sense and could be understood as ‘doing something meaningful’. Even before I had the feeling that the endless small journeys without concrete orientation through Kashi were useful for developing a feeling for the place, to get to know the micro spaces of the city. Within these searches the navigation system is one’s intuitive centre. But from time to time I had the feeling I was doing nothing, wasting my time. The perception of the ‘searching Kashi’ depends on one’s state of mind and flux of being, and is further led by the ability to connect to one’s intuition. Here the concept of ESP kind of intermingles with my personal understanding of an intuitive centre and the possibility to clean and clear the connecting path to the same. Whether it sits in the physical centre of the heart or in the solar plexus (or watox, as it is called in the Amazon) is not the question I intend to answer. More interesting is how to clear oneself from personal

³⁰⁴ Interview, 5.11.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210125

thinking or 'transcend ones historicity' as Rana Ji calls it.³⁰⁵ Whenever I was aware of the moment, consciously observing and perceiving the power of the here and now I knew this 'act of searching' was meaningful. Whenever I was scattered in my mind, occupied with my ego, in those moments I was truly wasting my time. Kashi dhurhe. Searching Kashi. Searching for the essence of Kashi that is beyond words and concepts but rather a feeling we may grasp in some happy moments.

2.5. Kripya as key to access

Before the yatra started I asked Uma Ji if it is possible to start the yatra when the mind is not 'good,' for that was what I understood from our previous conversation. He affirmed it by saying: "Yes, until one receives the grace and blessings of God, one can't do anything."³⁰⁶ Here again the concept of 'kripya' is fundamental. The question that penetrates my mind is: How to be worth the 'kripya'?

Today I believe it is the guru inside who answers this question. It is the challenge of 'integrity'. To live according to one's insights, to put into practice the knowledge one gathers along the path, this makes me worth the kripya. I feel that this is true. I remember a hot morning walk along the ghats with a french flute player, who had taken on a Hindu name and was occasionally booked by Indians for their wedding ceremonies. I told him that I felt tensed about whether or not I should regard my teacher as my Guru. He obviously created an atmosphere of Guru–student relationship, which implied that I should become an empty vessel for his knowledge. I did not quite accommodate this position. He smiled and looked at me in a kind yet pitiful way. "You find your Guru inside. You learn to listen to that subtle voice. Then you know." Waves of release passed through my mind and I felt connected with that knowing entity that rests in every heart. Now I know that I meet many teachers along the way. Yet all they may do is connect me with the quality of knowing from various perspectives. When the mind is cleansed from agitations all becomes clear. Then we are lead by the Guru inside who is in alignment with the Divine in all its manifestations. The Goddess is our Mother, the Hindu tradition says. Isn't a mother always happy when her children are happy? I do not speak about selfish happiness but real happiness, which always make others

³⁰⁵ 2002:15

³⁰⁶ Interview, 5.11.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210126

happy as well. As the Dikshitar priest Ganesh wrote in my book in March 2006: “Be happy and make others happy. Om Namaha Shivaya.” He thus referred to Lord Natarajs blessing.³⁰⁷

2.6. Guided by divine agency

We praise Lord Ganesh Ji, and Uma speaks the following words that he had explained before. I repeat after him. The words initiate an interactive relationship between the human aspirant and divine agency, in this first instance Lord Ganesh Ji.

Line 1: He Sakshi Vinayak Ganesh Ji!

2: I

3: regarding you as (my) witness

4: Panckosi Yatra

5: I am going to start (it)

6: you

7: protect

8: me.

9: Fullfill

10: the wishes

11: of my family

12: and all the members of my home.

13: And

14: may no sort of

15: trouble

16: arise

³⁰⁷ i.e. Dancing Form of Shiva

17: during my Pancakroshi Yatra.

18: I

20: am going to start

21: the Pancakroshi Yatra

22: regarding you as my witness.

23: Lead

24: me

25: as my guide.³⁰⁸

It is clear from this approaching text that the deity is attentive to the calls and needs of the pilgrims. During the Yatra the deity is the protecting force, the guiding force and the witness to all that happens. The aspirant starts by explaining what he or she is about to do and in which regard the deity is needed. The human pilgrim entrusts herself to the divine agent.

2.7. Uma Shankar's Yatra Biography

When Uma Ji's father started performing the yatras of Kashi in 1973, Uma Ji who was still young at that time used to accompany him. He learned how the pilgrimages are done, how worship is performed. He learned about the temples and now, just like his father he searches for the temples, learns about the value of the place and what sort of rewards one can get, and he imparts the information to everyone. Like his father trained him, he is now training his own son, who is 14 years old (in 2008). His son performs the Nav Durga and Nav Holi Yatras.³⁰⁹

2.8. Story of Kardameshvara Lingam

When we arrive at Kardameshvar Mahadev Kandva, U.S. narrates the origin story of the lingam. He tells how Karmath Brahmarishi has taken the form of Vishnu and after asking

³⁰⁸ Interview, 5.11.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210128

³⁰⁹ Interview, 5.11.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210129; 210144

permission of his wife and son, started a life of asceticism. He went to Kashi, worshipped there, and went on to the village of Kandava, where he established Kardameshvar. He praised and worshipped the gods with hymns and started performing tapas. Some days later, Bhavani Shankar (Shiva) arrived. He said to Karmath: “I am pleased by your tapas, ask for a boon.” Karmath answered: “I don’t need anything. He Kardameshvar, grant the boon to the devotees of Kardameshvar.” Lord Vishvanath (Shiva) granted the following boon: “Whichever male or female worships and makes offerings at the feet of Kardameshvar, the wishes of those pilgrims will be fulfilled. The wealth, wisdom, devotion, and knowledge of their families will be increased.” The offerings for Kardameshvar include the holy water of the Ganga, Shree Khand Chand, flowerless leaves, incense, earthen lamps, clothes, sweets and various kinds of food. After giving money to beggars, sprinkling the holy Ganga water, taking a posture and resting in the evening, the pilgrims should focus their attention on Lord Kardameshvar. Then they worship at the Kardameshvar kund (well), at all the shrines and then they move on to Teen Chandi Devi, the next stop of the Pancakroshi Yatra.³¹⁰

2.9. Adhikmas – sacred time, auspicious time

Every three years occurs a special time for performing the Pancakroshi Yatra. This Adhikmas is called Purusottam Month and during this special sacred time pilgrims come in the thousands every day, from all corners of India and from abroad. That specific Pancakroshi Yatra has a special significance for it occurs during this especially auspicious time. For the whole month there is a festive atmosphere. All Dharamshalas (rest houses) are full at that time. Roughly two to five thousand people participate every day in the Yatra.³¹¹

2.10. Teen Chandi Devi

When we arrive at the Teen Chandi Devi Temple, I ask the Panda to narrate about the Goddess. His name is Sharda Mishra Panda. He tells that the Himcandi Devi is the Goddess who defeated Mahisasur (demon bull). She was born on the West coast of North India. She is the primordial power, the adi shakti and therefore she is called the goddess of the abode of power (shakti pith).³¹²

³¹⁰ Interview, 5.II.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210130-31

³¹¹ Interview, 5.II.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210132

³¹² Interview, 5.II.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210134

The concepts Sharda Mishra Panda uses in his narration are part of specific religious discourses. The conception of a Mahadevi (Great Goddess) becomes clear due to terms as adi skakti or shakti pith.

2.11. Reciting Mantras

The Pandit's communicative skill

Pandit Surendra Nath Mishra, also a Panda of the Chandi Devi compound tells us about ways of approaching the Goddess. He narrates from the Shastras (holy scriptures) that if a human is stuck in the battlefield or in sadness and he invokes the names of Chandi Devi, then he will be victorious. In the Durga Saptasati (main text for Goddess worship) it is written that she is worshipped with coconut, cunari (red cloth), unpasteurized milk, batase (sugar cake), stone powder and lotus flowers. He continues that there is only one Goddess and gives us her mantra of departure: “Bhimacandi mahadevi sarvarogh, sarvapaph, sarvaduakhah bhaksini, pracandani, mamovignayah anasayah namastetu gamisyami punardarsan namostute.” (He Goddess Chandi, forgive us for all our sins, make our Panckosi Yatra successful, grant us permission (to go to) Rameshvaram.)³¹³

Following Pandit Mishra's discourse we can see that he is skilled in the recitation of mantras. Thus a further connection is established with the inhabitants of the pilgrimage field, in this case Chandi Devi, who is invoked for victory over enemies of the battlefield or enemies within, as sadness. He follows the prescribed modes of worship from the Durga Saptasati. Chandi Devi is approached as protector for pilgrims on the Pancakroshi Yatra.

2.12. Forgiving the Curse

The next stop is Vishveshvar Mahadev. A friendly priest talks to us. I feel touched by his calm voice. His name is Chandshree Goswami and he is 65 years old. His maternal grandfather passed on the temple responsibilities to him. He is not married and therefore he still has time for worship he says. He tells us that most pilgrims come to perform the Yatra together with their family. They sing hymns and worship and after thoroughly 'seeing' they return home. The people who live here (within the Yatra field) offer ghee (clarified butter) and puri and set out on a one day Pancos (Pancakroshi Yatra) of God. I ask him how the reward of

³¹³ Interview, 5.11.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210135

the Yatra is obtained. He answers that the reward is definitely obtained after performing the Pancakroshi Yatra. "This is the money of Lord Shiva." He says "leaves of the Wood Apple tree (offered to Lord Shiva) will give you esteem, happiness, position, reputation (...) Stand up and take his name. Vishveshvar Mahadev." He tells us further that Vishveshvar Mahadev rewards those who do good deeds. "Whatever you need, make offerings to God and go about your business, then you'll be rewarded." He continues by telling how the prince of Kashi came to his temple and donated 501 Rupees without the priest having to ask for a donation. Goswami says that nobody comes at this time (November). Someone might come by chance or because they fulfil a vow. The pilgrims come to thank God for helping to fulfil their vow. Thus the temple has no earnings. Every three years, when the month of Shat occurs the temple becomes very crowded. It is the last place of the Pancakroshi Yatra and the people donate money for the priest's food. Goswami asks me where I am from and we talk a little. Then he says that God will protect me and will grant me whatever I seek, knowledge etc. God will accept however much I will offer. "I am a priest here, I bless you." He gives me a gift of the temple, sweets and rice balls in a plastic bag with Shiva and Parvati picture. He adds that this piece of paper is more valuable than a gold or silver coin. "You won't lack anything in your life." I give him a donation of 11 Rupees and ask him to bless me. "May God protect you" he says and then he utters a curse. "For what you have given, may God ensure that you have no offspring."³¹⁴

I did not understand properly what the priest spoke due to my basic Hindi capacities. Only a year later, when I got the translation from the Zabaan translators in Delhi did I understand that Goswami cursed me because I did not give enough money. Had I understood the financial crisis the temple faces, I would have given more. When I learned about the curse I felt cheated, I felt abused by the priest because I did not see my mistake. In my view the priest was nothing but a greedy bastard. Only after a conversation with my mother did I sense my own failure. She reminded me that I come from a financially well off family, that I never had to worry about food or housing and that I never experienced these kinds of hardship. She pointed to my ignorance and arrogance in this regard. The priest obviously expected financial help from me and was disappointed when I gave him the same as an average Indian pilgrim would give. He knew very well that I have more money as member of Western Society and maybe for him, I was the greedy bastard. I forgive him the curse and thank him for making me more sensitive to the needs and hardships he and his people have to face.

³¹⁴ Interview, 5.11.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210141-42

2.13. Three Spheres of Realities of River Ganga

The pandit, 33-year old Sanjay Gupta tells me about the importance of putting the departed person's ash into the Ganga. He legitimates this practice with the myth of King Sagar, who couldn't obtain liberation after death because his soul was stuck. The Ganga was thus summoned for the reason of purification.

"Where did she (Ganga) come from' I ask. "From heaven. The Ganges was born from the lotus feet of Lord Vishnu," he answers and relates the well-known story of the descendance of Ganga, how she agreed due to Bhagirath's tapas (austerities) to come down to earth and flow to the underworld, passing seven worlds. Lord Shiva, the great ascetic of the mountains as well agreed due to Bhagiraths devotional austerities to catch Ganga in his Jata (matted hair). My friend Pawan starts to inquire into the knowledge of the Pandit. "Yes, please answer what I'm asking." he says, and to me it sounds like a provoking command. "Why only Bhagirath? The life story of Bhagirath before his tapas, how was his time spent?" The priest takes on a defensive form. "I don't know much about that." Pawan emphasizes his unknowing position. "You don't." Then the priest defends his knowing position. "I do, but I'm not sure." I sense tension from the panda's side. Pawan talks with calm yet determined voice and at the same time tests the knowledge of the priest and to me he seems like Muhammad Ali fighting a bout in the religious arena of Banaras. I get nervous but then I see Uma Shankar's compassionate face, unchanged by the discussion of the two younger men. I relax and observe the scene.

Even though the panda may not have won the 'religious battle,' I found it beautiful how Sanjay Gupta's discourse reveals the divine conception of the river Ganges. In mythic context the river is called Ma Ganga, Mother Ganga and is worshipped as Goddess. He refers to a culturally shared perception when he says:

"We believe that the Ganga is our mother, our god. Because she provides us liberation. (...) Even after dying, the soul doesn't automatically obtain liberation (...) it doesn't have a direct path to God."³¹⁵ In order to support the dying person in his or her journey to the heavenly realm, the family members perform a ritual called 'gaudan'. "Just as a guide guides people, like that the cow guides us on the path to God, and therefore the gaudan is done. (...) After the gaudan a person goes (to heaven) directly crossing the seven worlds. There are three worlds above Earth, and three worlds below Earth. The Ganga is (a) line to moksha."³¹⁶

³¹⁵ Interview, 5.11.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210145

³¹⁶ Interview, 5.11.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210145

What he refers to is an image of the soul following the path of the Ganga, flowing through the various spheres of existence. I ask him, if the worlds are connected. “They’re connected, (all) seven worlds” he answers. I ask for the names of the worlds and he recollects the names of Atal, Satal, Patal (the underworld), Pital and Mritya-lok (land of humans; lok mean world or sphere.) He continues by locating the Ganga: “The Ganges is in the underworld, and even in heaven. When the Ganges flows in heaven, it’s called akash Ganga³¹⁷.” Pawan emphasises that when people speak about the waters of the Ganges they do not call it ‘water’, it is ‘amrit dhara’³¹⁸. “There is a different Ganga,” he says.³¹⁹ There is the akash Ganga, the waters of the the heavens, there is patal Ganga, the Ganga of the underground and there is “mrityalok ganga, which you see.”³²⁰ Speaking about their beloved Ganga, the two men seem to have forgotten the former discussion and Sanjay Gupta tunes in to confirm Pawan’s discourse. “The water of Ganga is amrit dhara³²¹. Whatever water is in Gangotri³²² it is amrit, it can never be polluted by any living thing.” Pawan and another man present emphasise this point. “Other water will be polluted, but not this (water), no matter how dirty it may be,” Pawan adds.

³¹⁷ heavenly Ganges

³¹⁸ nectar of immortality

³¹⁹ Interview, 5.II.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210145: 0:08:07

³²⁰ Interview, 5.II.2008 on the Pancakroshi Yatra: 210145: 0:08:15

³²¹ holy nectar of immortality

³²² source of the Ganges

This is an interesting concept. The water of the Ganga on a physical level may be dirty, but on a subtle level of manifestation it is pure. We have seen thus that the Ganga is similar to the concept of an axis mundi, connecting the spheres of existence and after death the human soul follows it's metaphysical flow to reach heaven. The Ganga is not merely a river but a purifying and compassionate Mother Goddess.



Figure 15: Ganga at sunrise, the most sacred time of the day. ³²³

3. Vindhyachala Yatra with Rana P.B. Singh

Vindhyachala is the home of the Devi Vindhyavasini and is an important pilgrimage centre for goddess worship. The place is famous for recitations of goddess texts, primarily the Devi Mahatmya but also the Devi-Bhagavata Purana.³²⁴ The concept of Maha Devi who encompasses and interrelates all forms of goddesses is dominant in those scriptures. When the Devi Mahatmya is used ritually it comes to be named Durga Saptasati. The text is important in Tantric Tradition.

3.1. Goddess Vindhyavasini and her Vindhyachala Kshetra

Vindhyavasini is a manifestation of the Great Goddess, the Universal Mother. The worship of the Maha (Great) Devi (Goddess) is prevalent throughout the Hindu devotional tradition. The concept of Maha Devi or Maha Shakti (Great or Primordial Power) encompasses all those uncountable tasks and place specific goddesses of local or regional significance. The Great Goddess may be worshiped in innumerable aspects. Names serve again as vehicles for meaning.

Vindhyavasini is the Great Goddess dwelling in the Vindhyan Mountains. Usually Goddess Durga is associated with mountains, especially the Himalayas and the Vindhyas. Vindhyavasini is an epithet for Durga in some texts.³²⁵ Vindhyavasini has a strong connection to tribal culture, to the thugs and outlaws, which mirror Durga's liminal aspect.³²⁶ In the 7th century text Gaudavaho by Vakpati Kali is portrayed as an aspect of Vindhyavasini who is again understood as an epithet for the Goddess Durga.³²⁷

Thus we can see a strong connection of Vindhyavasini with Goddesses residing over the tamasic aspects. Nevertheless the Yatra and its associated cosmogram clearly refer to an atmosphere of equilibrium of all the three cosmic forces (gunas). Suresh Joshi had explained the guna concept to me in 2005. He associated the three main Hindu Goddesses with the gunas. Kali controls tama, Lakschmi raja and Sarasvati sattva. Therefore he sent me to the Kali mandir when he diagnosed me as 'parishan'³²⁸ due to tama overload. When the three

³²⁴ see Brown 1998:xii

³²⁵ see Kinsley 1986: 99, 107

³²⁶ see Ibid.

³²⁷ see Kinsley 1986:117

³²⁸ disturbed, confused

gunas are balanced, we find ourselves in the centre of creation at the point called bindu. According to Suresh, when we balance the three gunas we may access the upward triangle consisting of sat, chit, ananda. This is further a formula for pure consciousness and Ultimate Reality. In the case of the Vindhyachala cosmogram, both triangles are necessary for creation. The Goddess dominates the whole scenery. She is clearly the primary force. In the Shakta tradition Shakti presides over Shiva. He is clearly dependent upon her for without Shakti he is a lifeless corpse, Shava. The hexagramic cosmogram of the Vindhyachala landscape further represents the equilibrium of male and female forces, Shiva and Shakti. For each Shakti temple we find one Shiva temple, as is also the case with the image Kashi as found in cognitive pilgrim's maps.

Thus we can see that the Goddess Vindhyavasini at her dwelling place of Vindhyachala is associated with the Shakta Tradition as well as with Tantric tradition. The place shows a strong connection with a famous pilgrimage place in Assam, the North East of India. It is the foremost place of feminine divine power, in Hindu terms called Shakti pitha, which literally means seat of the Goddess. There are 51 such shakti pithas, in other traditions there are 108. The origin myth of the Shakti piths is found in the ancient puranic texts.

Sati was the first wife of Shiva. She killed herself in the sacrificial fire at her father Prajapati Daksh's jagya due to his lack of respect for her husband Shiva. When Shiva came to know this he destroyed the sacrificial fire of Prajapati Daksh and beheaded him in the battle. Many people know this story. At the times of Navaratri when the Great Goddess is celebrated in her various forms, this story is narrated. I found it in a local Navaratri booklet that I had bought at the bazaar near Assi Crossing in Banaras. The story was the contextual narration for Shailaputri. Shailaputri means daughter of the mountains and primarily refers to Shiva's spouse Parvati.

On a personal level, the most significant experiences along the Vindhyachala pilgrimage happen within the context of meetings with extraordinary persons. Whom one meets at the pilgrimage site depends on the quality of the site and on the quality of the guide, be it a human guide, one's own intuition, or a non-human guiding entity. Vindhyavasini is a form of the Great Goddess and thus is a place frequented by the Tantrics. It is a Tantric site and thus one may encounter with Siddhas there. It has been our fortune to have such a competent guide as Rana P.B. Singh who is a spiritual coordinator as its best. Due to him we had the chance to visit and meet with two great Siddhas, living within the pilgrimage territory. It was due to his networking capacities that those Siddhas were speaking to us with affection and time.

It is a well known phenomena that pilgrims seek the advice and the blessing of ‘holy men and women’ at the places of pilgrimage all over India and it was after visiting the Vindhyachala kshetra, territory that I understood the significance of such meetings. To visit the Goddess is still the primary reason for this pilgrimage, yet the understanding of the power and energy felt at her location may be enhanced with the help of her foremost devotees. I felt that they are a medium for the Goddess and that they help devotees to grasp the meaning of the divine energy for the sake of integrating it practically into the pilgrim’s worldview and life-style. Definitely they helped me to understand myself.

3.2. Contextual information

The famous temple of the Goddess Vindhyavasini is found on the banks of the River Ganga, about 78km southwest of Banaras. There are three Goddess temples and three Shiva temples, and thus emerges a “triangular pilgrimage circuit (***trikona yatra***)”³²⁹ The walk along the pilgrimage route takes about three hours. The holy territory, the Vindhyachala Kshetra is demarcated in the east by the Ojhala river and in the west by the Karnavati river. (similar Ganga Varuna and Assi)

The first reference to the worship of the Goddess in an established form is the 7th century text of the Devi Mahatmaya or Durga Saptasati.³³⁰ The myth of Vindhyavasini as the child of Krishna’s foster mother is narrated in the Harivamsa Purana, part of the Mahabharata of the 2nd to 5th century. Goddess Durga is related to mountains, especially the Himalaya and the Vindhya. Dwelling in the Vindhyan mountains she is referred to as Vindhyavasini. Vindhyavasini is further narrated as an aspect of Kali being worshipped by inhabitant tribes.³³¹ There is a connection between Vindhyavasini (and Kali in general) and a network of thieves, known as thugs. Archeologically the area contains sites of the late Stone Age and pre-historical settlement. Nevertheless, within the triangular holy territory no such sites have been found. Only the Naga Kund is associated with ancient history.³³²

The temple of Bhairava, a terrific form of Shiva is the first place to worship. The awakened image is a territorial guardian. Nearby we visit the Naga Kund, the Well of Snakes, a square water pool constructed by the Naga Dynasty in the 3rd – 4th century. They worshipped snakes, and their crown symbol was a snake. In the waters of the southeast corner of the

³²⁹ Singh & Rana 2002: 254

³³⁰ 700 verses in the praise of Durga

³³¹ according to the Gaudavaho by Vakpatiraja, 8th century Prakrit drama

³³² see Singh & Rana 2002: 256

kunda is found a Shiva linga, called Nagesha, 'Shiva as Lord of the Snakes' "Rituals and holy baths in the tank are still performed on the annual festive day of *Shravana* (July-August), 5th day of the light fortnight."³³³

Kali is known by many names, as Bhairavi or Chamunda. To be introduced to the meaning of her names is to gather information about her characteristics. They help us develop some sort of feeling towards the Goddess. Some worship Kali as Ultimate Reality itself. She is the one who destroys the devotee's illusions, she is the challenge on the way. Some are afraid to speak out her name. Others again emphasize her motherly nature. She is the divine mother that helps her children detach from the world of illusions. This may be a painful process. Sometimes suffering is increased just to understand the limits of egoistic joy. To face Kali is to face the terrible, the destructive nature of reality. Her devotees perceive her as Mother and approach her in a Bhakti way. When you look in the face of death and overcome your fear then you are deathless. This is Kali's present. A lot has been written about Kali's attributes and mythic biography. The next stop of the Vindhya Vasini Yatra is the Kali Khoha, the cave of the cosmic mother's terrible and frightening expression.

As Rana P.B. Singh told us on the Vindhya Chala Yatra, only the Siddhas, the great mystics can see the image of Lal Bhairava increase, they only perceive the image grow. Thus their cognitive abilities are specialized. In his book "Banaras Region A Spiritual and Cultural Guide"³³⁴ he writes about the very same phenomenon at the Lal Bhairava temple at Vindhya Chala, a pilgrim place near Banaras:

"According to folk history this image is an awakened one, and those having deeper faith can have miraculous experiences"³³⁵

During the Yatra he expressed at the same Lal Bhairava temple:

"Folk story about this only those who are the great siddhas, siddhas you know? Awakened having that mystical power, they can only see that this image is going to increase and vibrate this is believed like this, this destruction you see this is all within ten years, earlier this was only pillar this was more open and here was a mark they are all broken and changed it they used to narrate that earlier the image was up to this size then the image increased this size that's how they tried to convince

³³³ Singh & Rana 2002:257

³³⁴ Singh & Rana 2002

³³⁵ Singh 2002: 256

devotees still the size is increasing but only those who are real awakened mystics they can see it otherwise not and those who are from Austria they can easily see it (we laugh)''³³⁶

2.3. Personal experiences of Vindhyachala Yatra



Figure 16: The picture shows the Shiva Lingam with Yoni at the male Siddha's home. This is the main symbolic image of the tantric tradition.³³⁷

I attended the pilgrimage of Vindhyachala following the local 'spiritual coordinator' Rana P.B. Singh, who led us safely through the wild area of the Goddess Vindhyavasini. Vindhyavasini is the name of this particular form or manifestation of the Great Goddess living in the Vindhyan mountain range. What Kinsley pointed out for the Goddess Durga holds true for Goddess Vindhyavasini as well. Her "preference for inaccessible dwelling places, her worship by tribal peoples, her taste for intoxicating drink, meat, and blood, her ferocious behaviour on the battlefield"³³⁸ portray a picture of a Goddess who stands outside the orthodox order of Dharma and transcends notions of purity and pollution. Rana P.B. Singh is the cultural coordinator, designing and kindly leading our pilgrimage experience. His narrations about the history and quality of the place and spiritual practices of pilgrims were highly illuminating. Rana-Ji also made us meet with two Siddhas of the place for which I am very grateful to him.

³³⁶ Rana P.B. Singh 2008 Personal Communication

³³⁷ Copyright Anna Neuner 2008

³³⁸ 1986:100

One female, one male Siddha, like Shakti and Shiva they appeared to me. Through the biography of these two Siddhas it becomes obvious that the place of Kamachha in Assam, northeast India has a special significance as prime Shakti pith and is thus connected to Vindhyachala through a network of power places following the Shakti pith tradition. Here the Shakta tradition is interwoven with Tantric practices or sadhanas. Furthermore the Shakta tradition is always connected to the Shaiva tradition. Hence we can speak of a strong emphasis upon Tantric worldview and practices, which becomes obvious already when looking at the mental map of the hexagram. It is a tikona yatra or pilgrimage, and the yantra or cosmogram or cognitive pilgrimage map of the hexagram reveals Tantric symbolism as well.

I intensely felt the effect of meeting two extraordinary persons along the pilgrimage path. As we visit the two Siddhas who live within the territory of Vindhyachala I understand why contact with 'holy persons' is one of the hallmarks of pilgrimage. It is the chance to meet 'awakened' persons living the holy life. It is the chance to meet people who may help us understand fundamental questions about life, about the ancient roots of our existence. (see Rana Singh, the ancient roots of the mind) Thanks to Rana Singh's networking capacities we had the chance to meet two Siddhas on our pilgrimage path. The first one is a female Siddha, who Rana affectionately calls Mother and the second is a male Siddha, who lives with his family at the pilgrimage place. He is well known among the pilgrims and is consulted in cases of 'possession' as well.

The Tantric tradition rests upon the concepts of Guru-Disciple. The search for the Guru is the first step of the aspirant. After the 'real Guru' is found, the Guru feels if the aspirant is the 'real pot' for receiving his or her knowledge. To 'become a vessel', to become empty is a concept that my Hindi teacher Suresh used several times. I never quite understood the Tantric underpinnings of his knowledge transfer approach. Nevertheless I understood that he could not be my 'real Guru' for I already had a teacher. I could have never been the 'real pot' for I was never willing to let go the triple gem that was rooted deep within me since the time I lived in my Mother's womb. I was not the 'real pot' and I knew it. Yet I was eager to receive his knowledge. When I view the scenery of our relationship retrospectively I feel that I was not completely honest. I could have told him that I do not perceive him as my spiritual Guru because I had already found mine. Yet I felt as though he was my Guru, one out of many. Well he also never asked.

The Tantric tradition is secret and that's why when Suresh spoke about the knowledge he 'received' it always seemed puzzling, and at the same time it was clear what he meant. It was clear in terms of intuitive knowledge transfer. It was puzzling in terms of verbal expressions that can be recorded, and make sense in terms of words. When he spoke he used facial expressions, breathing emphasis, and I always 'felt' what he was telling me. This process was not one sided, it was an obvious part of our communication. At times I would exhale and thus signify 'I got it' and he would happily react with laughter and expressions like: 'Now you got that concept.'

Flowers are offered in a ritualistic way to the deities. There are specific ascriptions which flower should be offered to which deity. For example the Hibiscus is offered to all forms of the Goddess. It symbolizes blood. Rana P.B. Singh explains this ritual flower offering at the Vindhyachala Yatra.

As we come to the Cremation Ground at the river Ganga, the atmosphere kind of opens, I feel light and my perception intensifies. Tranquillity, turning insight, being aware of the reality of decay, impermanence. All that is will cease to be. I recall Suresh's narrative about the peaceful quality of Mahashmashana and Anandavan. In that time I had only known the Banaras Cremation Grounds and had always perceived them as busy. In Vindhyachala I perceive the Cremation Ghat as a peaceful place, far beyond the concerns of everyday mental processes. I become quiet and tranquil inside. When I start thinking, the thoughts are clear and I feel they come directly from the depths of my intuitive knowledge. I understand for myself, what is important in my life and what is useless to practice, and all becomes very simple and clear.

4. Worshipping the Divine Mother in Banaras

The ethnographic focus of this chapter rests upon the nava durga yatra, a pilgrimage performed in Banaras. It is a spatial translation of the temporal concept of the Nine Durgas. Each day devotees visit a specific temple within the sacred scape of Banaras. The temples are promoted through newspapers and pilgrimage pamphlets. The *Nine Durgas* are part of a meaningful network of groupings of feminine deities. Some of them are independent Great Goddesses, some are spouse deities. The groupings of various feminine deities are sanctified through the holy texts, written documents in Sanskrit, the holy language. As soon as these deities can be located geographically, a holy topography emerges and gives way to pilgrimage practices. When the seats of the Nine Durgas are connected through lines, a hexagramic cosmogram evolves. The *Nine Durga* pilgrimage is part of cultic Hindu Goddess worship during the autumn *Navaratra*, the “nine nights” dedicated to celebrating and worshipping the Great Goddess in her various manifestations. Hindu worship, the cult of the Mother Goddess, the cult of her specific manifestation as *Durga* and the concept of the *Nine Durgas*, altogether constitute the context for the nava durga yatra.

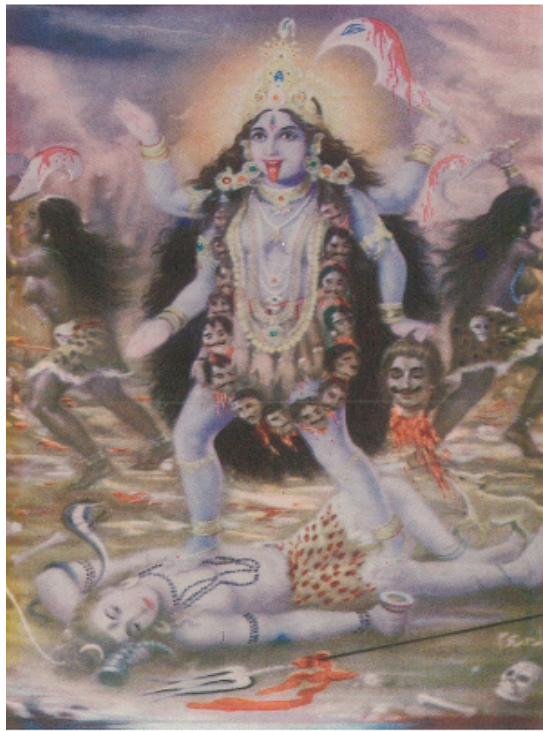


Figure 17: Goddess Kali corresponding with Kalaratri, remover of ignorance.³³⁹

³³⁹ Picture cf. Storl 2005:128-129

4.1. Context

The worship of the divine feminine reaches its yearly peak during the auspicious time of the Nava (nine) ratri (nights). All over India people focus on the various manifestations of the Great Goddess. Some pray and honour the goddesses residing over their house, over a mountain, river or forest near-by, over their land, over the world, over the cosmos. Goddess worship in India dates back to pre-historic times. It has its roots in pre-aryan India. According to archaeological inquiry the oldest settlement in Banaras was at Raj Ghat. The findings include female statues and ring stones. Thus Banaras has an ancient tradition of Goddess worship. Over time those pre-aryan feminine deities were incorporated into the Vedic tradition. The conglomerate of all those traditions is called Hinduism.

Within the Hindu pantheon of 330 million gods and goddesses we find goddesses of Pan-Hindu or regional significance. We find Independent Great Goddesses, as well as Spouse deities, old folk Goddesses, that have been incorporated through Sanskritization into the brahminical circles. We also find groups of female deities as multiple manifestations of the Great Goddess, all of whom are connected to specific tasks, qualities, characterizations and states of being. When we find the concept that all these goddesses are manifestations or aspects of one all-encompassing Great Goddess we speak of the Shakta tradition of Hinduism. Here the Goddess is the Universal Mother, the Supreme. There is no strict line between the various traditions anyway. The mode of worship during Navaratri carries Shakta tendencies, which doesn't mean that the same person can't worship in a Shaivait mode at Shivaratri, the Great Night of Shiva. Navaratri takes place during the bright half of Asvina (September-October). A second, yet less celebrated Navaratri takes place in springtime. In the context of Navaratri the goddess of central significance is Durga. That's why the festival is commonly called Durga Puja. She is the great warrior goddess who conquers the buffalo demon, Mahishasura. Therefore she is called Mahishasuramardini. Her mythic function is to defeat demonic tendencies. In her main myth she unites the powers of all the various male deities and fights the demon for nine days. On Vijaya Dasami, the tenth day she succeeds and the celebration of that day symbolises the victory of light over darkness. She is the maintainer of cosmic order. When tama tendencies become too strong she intervenes and re-establishes the equilibrium state. She is linked to Goddesses like Kali and Vindhyavasini and thus resides over the tamasic quality. During Navaratri Durga is identified with the Great Goddess herself. All other feminine deities are considered her qualities. She is thus Ultimate Reality in a Shakta sense. Her devotees call her Maa Durga, Mother Durga.

Concerning the *Durga Puja*, Hillary Peter Rodrigues has researched in *Banaras* and written an extended work about the ritual worship of the Great Goddess. Rodrigues uses the term *Durga Puja* for “the celebrations, both domestic and communal, which occur mainly during the last days of the autumn Navaratra.”³⁴⁰ According to Rodrigues the *Durga Puja* is characterized by a combination of widespread popularity, community participation, visual splendour and ritual complexity, as well as an increasing popular interest among Hindu communities in India and its Diaspora.³⁴¹ The phenomenon of worship at temporal shrines during *Navaratri* is found throughout the city of *Banaras*. The rites of the *Durga Puja* at these temporary shrines involve the awakening and installation of the *Mahadevi* into a temporary abode, where she is worshipped and afterwards dismissed again. The “*Durga Puja* is a yearly ritual of cosmic renewal.”³⁴² Citing Cane, Rodrigues³⁴³ quotes about the *Durga Puja* from the *Devi Purana*: “This is a great and holy *vrata* conferring great *siddhis*, vanquishing all enemies, conferring benefits on all people, especially in great floods; this should be performed by *brahmanas* for solemn sacrifices and by *ksatriyas* for the protection of the people, by *vaisyas* for cattle wealth, by *sudras* desirous of sons and happiness, by women for blessed wifehood and by rich men who hanker for more wealth; this was performed by *Sankara* and others.” Also from Cane’s translation of the *Bhavisya Purana* “*Durga* is worshipped by various groups of *mlecchas*, by all *dasyus*, by people from *Anga*, *Vanga*, and *Kalinga*, by *kinnaras*, *Barbaras*, and *Sakas*” *Mlecchas* are outcastes, *dasyus* are thievish tribes or outcastes, *kinnaras* are mythical half-human musicians and *Barbaras* are non-Aryans. “Diverse classes, regions, and sects were united by common participation in the ritual of Goddess worship.”³⁴⁴ Rodrigues refers to the *Navaratras* as times of worshipping the Great Goddess in her various manifestations and under her various names.³⁴⁵ For example, devotees may visit the *Nine Durgas* in their specific temples and known under their specific names, such as *Annapurna*, *Kalaratri* or *Siddhimata*, but especially during *Navaratra* each of these differentiated goddesses are regarded as the Great Goddess *Durga*.

The sacred time of *Navaratri* favours ritualistic worship in the sense that the time is especially auspicious and effective for worshipping the Goddess. She is especially alert to the concerns of her devotees at this time. On the other hand each week has its particular day for worshipping the Goddess in her various forms. *Navaratri* is thus connected to *Durga*, but

³⁴⁰ see Rodrigues 2003: 17

³⁴¹ see Rodrigues 2003: 3

³⁴² Rodrigues 2003: 11

³⁴³ Rodrigues 2003: 316

³⁴⁴ Rodrigues 2003: 16

³⁴⁵ see Rodrigues 2003:16

when we look more closely, Durga resembles the concept of an all-encompassing Universal Mother, the Maha Devi (Great Goddess).

The Durga Chalisa is a ritual text of central importance to Goddess worship. It can be found on youtube with Sanskrit as well as English subtitles (put in Durga Chalisa English Subtitles and you will find it). Youtube videos are used more and more for devotional and meditative purposes. When I took a singing class with my Indian teacher Amita Lugger in Vienna on the first day of the spring Navratri in 2010. We watched 'You tube videos' as a tool for devotional worship. We bowed to the moving images of Goddess Durga on the computer. One may thus take darshan by watching video clips. The Durga chalisa narrates the characteristics of Goddess Durga. Chanting her various names evokes specific mythic episodes that are familiar to most of her devotees.

The second central ritual text is the Durga Saptasati (or Devi Mahatmyam) that is recited during the whole festival. Here we find a list of Nine Durgas. Each day is associated with one Durga. It is thus primarily a temporal concept for it follows a fixed sequence in time. Nevertheless we will see how the temporal concept is translated into a spatial concept. We will see how the Nine Durgas are projected onto the sacred space of Banaras and how thus a cosmogram emerges and constitutes the base for the Nava Durga (Nine Durga) Yatra (pilgrimage).

The common approach to Navaratri is that the Goddess is worshiped in her forms of Maha-Kali, Maha-Lakshmi and Maha-Sarasvati. In the religious booklet "Devi Mahatmyam The Glory of Goddess" which I bought on a bazaar in Banaras, the sequence of worship during Navaratri is associated with the seeker's or devotee's stages of spiritual evolution:

"On the first three days the seeker worships Mother Durga, the Terrible, as the embodiment of supreme power and force. He prays to her to remove all his defects, impurities and vices. Once this is accomplished, the devotee's next task is to pray to Mother Lakshmi to bestow on him pure, divine qualities. (...) Lakshmi is the wealth-giving aspect of God. She is repository of pure and good qualities. (...) Once the evil qualities are destroyed and pure qualities developed, the aspirant becomes competent for the light of divine knowledge. In this third and last stage, the devotee must propitiate Mother Sarasvati to bestow on him supreme wisdom. (...) Sarasvati (is) (...) the embodiment of knowledge of the absolute reality, or divine knowledge personified. The sound of her celestial Veena awakens the notes of the sublime utterances of the Upanishads which reveal the truth and the significance of the sacred mystic sound, Om. She then gives complete knowledge of the Self, as represented by her pure, dazzling, snow-white appearance. The tenth day, Vijaya

*Dasami, celebrates the triumphant victory, the achievement of the goal, the unity of Atman with Brahman, through the descent of wisdom by the grace of Sarasvati.*³⁴⁶

According to Sircar³⁴⁷ the various names of the mother-goddess indicated various tribal deities in the time before the Aryans arrived. The pithas, seats or altars have been „used as objects of aniconic worship“ by the people of Mohenjo Daro and the tribal goddesses were later identified with the spouse of Siva-Pasupati, a pre-aryan god. The holy places where particular ascetics or Yogins meditated and attained siddhis, perfections as result of their tapasya, are called pitha or siddhipitha. Sakti, force and Adya Sakti, the primeval force are names to „indicate the power underlying creation and the controlling energy responsible for the universal order“³⁴⁸ Sakti can also mean the female organ, that is worshipped by Saktas and many times it is used in reference to the energizing power of male gods.

By calling the Goddess Durga or Parvati her relation with inaccessible mountain regions, as the Himalaya is being emphasised. Originally these were names of deities worshipped by mountain people. Gauri is the name for the Goddess' manifestation as white complexioned goddess and implicates her original worship among Himalayan Mongoloid xanthoderms. The names Uma and Ambika derive from the Dravidian word amma, meaning mother in a broader sense refering to the universal mother. Katyayani means a middleaged widowed woman in red clothes, and may indicate a connection to a family or tribal goddess. Mahamaya represents the Goddess as spirit of the magician priests of tribal people.³⁴⁹

The first Durga to visit is called Sailaputri, meaning Daughter of the Mountains. Sailaputri is explained in terms of the Sati-story. The Great Goddess in the form of Sati was the wife of Siva, Rudra, the great ascetic on Mount Kailash. She found out that her father was organizing a big sacrifice. Shiva didn't want to go, for they had not been invited. She insisted and Shiva let her go. There her father insulted her and her husband and she is said to have died of Yoga, of a broken heart, or put herself into the sacrificial fire. This story is also the seed story for the Sakta Pitha Pilgrimage tradition.³⁵⁰ The second Durga is Brahmacharini, the Goddess in her unmarried form, the third is Chandraghanta, the angry form wearing a moon in her hair, the fourth is Kushmanda, who creates the solarsystem, the fifth is Skandamata, the mother of Skanda, sixth is Katyayani who destroys demons, the seventh is Kalaratri, who corresponding with Kali is dark in complexion and is the remover of ignorance, eighth is

³⁴⁶ T.R. Ramachandran 2005: 102-103

³⁴⁷ 1973:3

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ see Sircar 1973:3

³⁵⁰ Further reading: D.C. Sircar 1973

Mahagauri, the ever pure Goddess with white complexion who provides everlasting bliss. The ninth is Siddhidatri, the bestower of mystical powers and spiritual progress.

4.2. 'Observing Participation' of the Nava Durga Yatra

In front of this contextual frame emerged the questions relevant to the empiric inquiry. Who is the Goddess and how to establish contact? These were my personal as well as ethnographic questions I took along with me when I came to Banaras especially for the celebrations of Durga Puja in 2008.

I had experienced a spring Navaratri in Banaras in 2006 and I was impressed by way the atmosphere changed during the time of collective Goddess worship. The Goddess had fascinated me for a long time. So before I arrived to do fieldwork in Banaras in 2005 I had read books about the Divine Mother of the Hindus (Heinrich Zimmer wrote about symbols and myths related to gods and goddesses in India, Svoboda about experiences of practical Tantric Kali Worship, David Kinsley about the conceptions of the sacred as Kali and Krishna) and thus she had been present already in my inner imaginative world. For me as a Buddhist the Hindu deities were as real as the Buddha. The difference was one of significance. For us Theravada Buddhists only the practice of the Buddha Dhamma is considered the way to final liberation. Yet the Buddha never denied the existence of the Hindu deities. When I started reading about Hindu mythology I connected with my childhood experiences in India. I felt like returning home to the mental frame that constituted reality before school started and brought with it Austrian scepticism.

So in 2006 I did not know much about Navaratri and it's potential. People told me that it's the festival of the Goddess and she is being worshipped in her three main forms, the dark, the red and the white aspects of the divine. The sound-scape of Banaras was filled with sounds of chants and prayers. I started thinking about the Goddess. Who she was and what she meant to me. I spoke with people about her various qualities and powers. Suresh Joshi gave me the concept of gunas in relation to the three Goddesses. Kali resides over tama, Lakshmi over raja and Sarasvati over sattva.

One night I lay in my bed in the dark room due to electricity cut. Suddenly I saw a form of Kali in front of my inner eye. First I was shocked and scared, I wanted to leave the room, escape the dark and cut the vision. The sight overwhelmed my sensory perception. Then I remembered what I read in Kinsley's book. To face the terrible sight of Kali means to

conquer fear. I stayed and focused on my breath thus calming my psycho-physical organism. Slowly the terrible image transformed into a compassionate appearance and the dissolved and a landscape emerged. I felt myself on a hill. To my back was a beautiful leafy forest and to my front opened a soft green and vast landscape. I saw a house nearby and I knew that my husband and my children were inside. In my vision I felt serene, peaceful and strong. I opened my eyes and was filled with deep trust for a cosmic order that leads life and a sort of acceptance of impermanence that was similar to meditative experiences during Buddhist mediation courses.

During *Durga Puja* the main celebrations in Banaras take place on the streets, where huge *Durga* statues, made of clay are worshipped accompanied by loud almost technoid music from amplifiers. Sometimes this goes on until the early morning hours. But there is another, more secretly celebrated cult concerning the nine *Durgas*. It is the pilgrimage cult of the nine *Durgas*. In Banaras the Nine *Durgas* are associated with particular sites and thus emerges a pilgrimage route, the Nava Durga Yatra. The group of the nine *Durgas* are subject of their own respective (pilgrimage) cult, which gains high popularity at the festival of Navaratri. In this case of worship the temporal sequence known from the Devi Kavaca is connected with a spatial sequence. Sacred time meets sacred space and thus we know where and when to meet with the divine Mother. The route gives way to a spatial system that may be viewed in terms of a cosmogramm. It is a hexagramic structure that becomes obvious again only from a bird perspective. The sites of the daily *Durgas* are announced in the radio as well as in the daily newspaper and pilgrimage pamphlets. Even though it looks like a vivid pilgrimage tradition for those of us who join the crowds of devotees at the nine temples it is a more quiet form of *Durga* worship compared to the main festivities of the *Durga Puja* all around the city.

In Banaras the Nine *Durgas* are associated with particular sites and thus emerges a pilgrimage route, the Nava Durga Yatra. In this case of worship the temporal sequence is intertwined with a spatial sequence. Sacred time meets sacred space and thus we know where and when to meet with the divine Mother. The route gives way to a spatial system that may be viewed in terms of a cosmogramm. It is a hexagramic structure that becomes obvious again only from a bird perspective. The sites of the daily *Durgas* are announced in the radio as well as in the daily newspaper and pilgrimage pamphlets. Even though it looks like a vivid pilgrimage tradition for those of us who join the crowds of devotees at the nine temples it is a more quiet form of *Durga* worship compared to the main festivities of the *Durga Puja* all around the city.

According to Annette Wilke³⁵¹ pandits of Banaras interpret this temporal-spatial concept of worship in hermeneutic ways. It is an inner progress, transformation that is happening within the devotee. Finally one meets Siddhidatri, the Goddess who bestows the boon of knowledge and mystical power onto the devotee. In this sense I understand the Nava Druga Yatra as transformative experience, a way to understand the cosmic qualities within the devotee's person. To experience the perception of the whole in the little, the connection between macro and micro cosm, to travel through sacred space in sacred time mentally set on wholeness.

4.2.1. Personal Experiences during Navaratri 2008 in Banaras

Suresh Joshi draws my awareness to the heart as the inner gateway to spiritual experience. He emphasizes the development of a feeling for the Mother and gives me tools how to feel the Mother. He shows me a combination of mudras. The mudras are of an individual character. When I ask him where he knows them from he hesitates a moment and then says with soft voice: "I got it." What he means is that he intuitively got it from the realm of the divine. He would never speak this out clearly but I understand it. The way he looks up, the way his voice changes from the typical Banarsi Brahmin arrogance to the humbleness of a child in front of it's strict mother. All this non-verbal communication levels make it very clear what he means. He shows me the mudra and explains me its symbolic significance. The hands touch over the head, at the heart level the outer fingers join, then the hands turn downward and with three middle finger touch the ground in front of the muladhara, the base chakra. The sequence is related to Lakshmi on top, Lakshmi at the heart and Kali at the base. He advises me to do this devotional mode of worship with my heart open for the Mother, with my mind set on her presence.

It is the 29th of September 2008. I came by the bookshop at the bazaar at Assi Crossing. They are specialized on religious images, pictures, magazines and also sell pilgrim pamphlets and religious maps of Kashi. A middle-aged Woman in Sari comes and asks for the Ganesh Stuti. Pawan had brought me a booklet about Navratri and opens the page with the 108 names of the Goddess. Later in the evening my attention rests upon the katha of the 9 avatars of the Goddess. Suresh pays short attention to the booklet before he states that it is a popular information for the masses and roots in the Devi Bhagavata Purana, which is the respectable source. The booklet is printed in Banaras and is therefore primary data for me.

³⁵¹ Wilke in: Gengnagel & Genzle 2008

I wrote into my field-diary: “I hope that I will enter the Sailaputri Mandir with an open and pure heart even after this Shiva night on this particular Monday. She is the Goddess from the mountains and I feel that she doesn’t care about my dressing. She is a manifestation of the Maha Devi.”

Pawan told me at the 64 Yogini Temple, that for Hindus the names of the Goddess carry meaning, incorporated, intuitive knowledge, gained through kathas, holy stories, and through their senses from the surrounding environment, it is natural for them to feel something specific when listening or saying the various names of the Goddess, they don’t have to think about it, it is natural for them. The names evoke a specific feeling or consciousness. For us Westerners it is more difficult, we have to learn to perceive the meaning, the effect of this evocative names.³⁵² The 108 names of Durga that are recited by devotees during Navaratri evoke specific qualities within, patterns of being. The names function as retrieval cues in cognitive psychology. When we hear the word water, we know what is meant, when he hears the 108 names it’s the same. He incorporated this knowledge since his childhood, we (outsiders) have to still learn it.

I spoke with Suresh about Navaratri and asked him if I should keep a fast. He answered that it was not so important. It’s more about a feeling for the Mother Goddess and an open heart. Pawan said it was good to offer something to the Goddess that we find difficult to do without. I feel that the relationship with the Goddess is a mirror for the relationship to my Mother, for she is the most close by source of motherly energy to me. My fast is my offering to the Goddess. She is the Goddess who conquers tama energies, who vanquishes negative and dull forces, so I intend to renounce intoxicants.

I wrote into my field-diary: “O Devi, I want to offer to your feet all my addictions and desires for intoxication, I want to abandon what destroys and weakens me, for you are the source of life that I want to respect and regard.”

Mama told me on the telephone that I should try to bring into harmony my strong male side, the intellect and toughness with my inner feminine side of loving kindness and softness.

³⁵² Personal Communication, March 2008

4.2.2. Contemporary Emic Conceptions of Navaratri

During the Nine Nights of the Goddess I have spoken to various locals about their understanding of Navaratri and Goddess Durga. I took field notes during the conversations. I used the methods of participant observation, open narrative interviews and literature research.

Rukmini's perception of Katyayani's image

Rukmini Ji lives in a clay hut in Nagwa, a southern area of Banaras, along with her husband and her three children. The hut is one of approximately 20 huts along the Assi nadi. She earns some money by giving massages to Westerners and thus contributes economically to the maintenance of the family. She speaks a bit of practical English. When I visited her house for the kitcheri festival in January 2006 along with two friends from California I perceived her husband as a gentle and friendly person and compared to most of the men I had met in Banaras being kind of the more typical Banarsi walas, I sensed his humbleness also through his way of interacting with his wife Rukmini. When she spoke, he would listen and let her speak, which is not at all 'normal' in Banaras Hindu relationships. I would even go as far as postulating that she enjoyed more personal freedom than the high cast Hindu women I met. At the heart of the Nagwa area, just next to the Mosque and nearby Rukminiji's house is a small Shrine for Sitala Devi.

It is the 6th of October 2008. I am reading the Navaratri pamphlet, the page for Katyayani, the sixth of the nine Durgas, when Rukminiji sits down next to me and looks into my booklet. She points at the painted image of Katyayani and euphorically says "Sitala Ma." I point at the Hindi title of the page and respond "Katyayani" In that very moment I feel embarrassed, for I am suddenly aware of the arrogance accompanying my postulation. She does not lose her ease and repeat with a smile "Sitala Ma."

The following questions consequently were born of the ethnographic value of this incident.

- Who is Sitala Ma?
- Is there a connection between Sitala Ma and Katyayani?
- Why does Rukminiji call Katyayani Sitala Ma?

I attempt to answer the first two questions, whereas I missed the chance for inquiry into the third and ethnographically perhaps most interesting one.

It is the 22th of October 2008 and Pawan narrates about the healing significance of Sitala Mata. He says when he had been sick with small box, he was given water to drink that had been taken from the Sitala Temple. Additionally his family members observed a fast for him, even the cousins in the other village. The one who is sick from small box is treated as God or Goddess he says.

Santosh's interpretation of the immersion of Durga statues

Santosh runs a restaurant for travellers in the Sonarpura area. His son helps him with the business and from time to time his wife and daughter accompany him in the restaurant. I met Santosh in 2005, when I was still staying at the international women hostel in the Banaras Hindu University. He had helped me to understand themes like corruption in the educational system and the Banaras way of life in general. He speaks good English and has a sensitive perception of his social and cultural surrounding. When I was in Banaras in 2006, he helped me with a difficult situation related to health issues and thereafter I felt him as a friend. In Banaras even a friend may try to earn money with u Westerners when he needs it and I do not take it personal that he tried as well.

It is the 6th of October, 2006. I had come back from the Katyayani temple and sit down in Santosh place to write, reflect about the impressions at the temple and rest before walking the 5 km home. After a while I look up from my data and our eyes meet. Santosh, who is familiar with my research interest, has already quietly noticed that I am reading the Navaratri pamphlet and gives me an interpretation that has been unheard of by me. He says that the last three days of the Durga Puja are the most special for there will be more Pujas. And on the last day finally, everybody will dance and celebrate together and then, when the Durga statues will be immersed in the holy waters of the river Ganga, the statues return to their husband Shiva. I ask a bit irritated "Back into the river? What you mean?" He smiles as if forgiving me my ignorance and continues to explain that ultimately all these forms of Durga come from Parvati and on the other hand Ganga flows from Shiva's Jata and consequently they may reunite through the immersion in the river.

This explanation gives way to the inquiry into some implicated concepts.

- The deity is actually present in the murti (image or statue) and thus travels along with the image
- All forms of Durga originate in Parvati
- Shiva is the husband of the Nine Durgas
- Ganga flows from Shiva's Jata

The association of the Nine Durgas with Parvati is a quite typical one in Banaras for it is a place of Shiva worship and Parvati is the wife of Shiva.³⁵³ Thus the Nine Durgas are related to Shiva as their husband. That the Ganga flows out of Shiva's matted hair is part of a popular myth relating the descent of the Goddess Ganga from heaven to earth. I had been introduced to this famous story by the 'Sir', my first Hindi teacher at the BHU. He narrated it in Hindi and I had to write it down the way I heard the words. Then he would translate sentence by sentence and finally, after two weeks we had the complete story line. He regarded it as THE essential 'history' to understand the mythic underpinning of the Banarsi life. In his words "You must know this history and then look what people do at the banks of river Ganga."³⁵⁴ Every iconographic presentation of Shiva shows the Ganga flowing from his Jata.

Jai Prakash Mishra's hermenutics of Kashi and Navaratri

Kashi is Shiva's beloved one and Kashi is also a Devil he adds.

For Jai Prakash Mishra, a 22-year old Brahmin mechanical engineer and resident of Banaras, Navaratri is for "honouring the woman in society"³⁵⁵ He further draws my attention to the nine small girls who are dressed up and worshipped as goddesses.

Pawan's Mother celebrates Navaratri

Pawan is a 30 year-old Brahmin and residential Banarsi. He is a learned cameraman and figured as research assistant for an American Indian Researcher the time I met him in March 2008. Further he accompanied me on various research trips through Banaras and led me to hidden places within the sacred scape, for which I am very thankful to him. At the Navaratri

³⁵³ see Wilke 2008

³⁵⁴ The Sir, at BHU 2005 see field notes

³⁵⁵ 4.10.2008 see field notes

festival in 2008 he introduced me to his mother. She did not speak much English so it was mainly Pawan who told me about the way she celebrates Navaratri.

It is the 4th of October 2008. I walk along the Ghats with Pawan. I ask him how his Mother celebrates Navaratri. He says she goes to the chausatti devi mandir for nine days and then on the last day, on the 10th day she feeds nine girls. I ask how old the girls are and he says they don't menstruate. These girls are considered manifestations of the Devi. Pawan's mother then visits all the Nine Durga temples on one day.

Pawan's hermeneutics of Kashi

He continues to explain about the chausatti mandir. "The 64 Saktis, qualities, energies send by Shiva to destroy the devil Kashi, but they stay in Kasi. Shiva come and Kashi is devoted to Shiva." Saktis are female deities, personifications of shakti, power or energy. For Pawan Kashi Devi is a form of Kali. Ka means Kali and shi means Shiva and consequently Kashi is the place to worship Kali and Shiva.

Personal associations to Pawan's Kashi concept

When Pawan gives me this hermeneutical explanation of the city's name Kashi it immediately connects to an experience with in me. When I first arrived in Banaras in 2005 I had been dreaming to see the Ganga for so long. I had been longing for the sight of Banaras and the holy waters for many years. It is the Diwali festival of 2005 and I am searching the lanes and streets of the city to find the river Ganga. It is the first week in India and I ask the people "Ganga?" and gesticulate them that I want to know where to go. Some do not understand me and I feel stupid. One laughs and shout out "Gangaa" The emphasis of the name Gangaa is on the last a. Now I understand why the other ones did not understand. He points one way and I follow the narrow lanes and finally cross under a red stone gate. There she is. So soft she touches my heart, the rhythmic flow of her waters make me sit down in peaceful contentedness. There I sit, at the stone steps of Narad Ghat. I sit and watch the water, asking myself if I am dreaming or if I am awake and finally sitting here in real. The feeling connects with the thought: Finally I arrived. I feel like there is no other place for me to go. This must be the goal of my long journey. I sink into the sight of a huge Shiva painting on the wall of a red house to my right, I watch the Baba who takes care of the shrine to my left. I contemplate over the flow of the Ganga, watch the activities on the Ghat and realise that my awareness is heightened. Suddenly a noise in the water pulls me out of my meditative state and I see some water buffalos jumping. I think they must be scared of something and wonder

what it is. Then I see a small water buffalo floating in the water, lifeless I understand. It is dead. I feel compassion for the mother of this buffalo. The painful notion of loss of loved ones overcomes me and leaves again like a wave. I associate the insight into impermanence with the Buddhist notion of anicca and react on the situation by sending metta, loving kindness from my heart to the Buffalos. I remain seated and spent the rest of the afternoon observing the scene at the Ghat. As I finally get up and turn to my back, I see a huge painted image of the Goddess Kali on the wall. I smile and wonder how I did not see and know that I am sitting in front of a Kali painting. I perceived the place as Shiva place, but Kali was at my back. When Pawan told me that Kashi is the place to worship Shiva and Kali, this experience was activated within me.



Figure 18: Shrine at Narad Ghat. The picture shows the place of my first contact with the river Ganga. The picture shows the view to my left.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁶ copyright Anna Neuner 2008

5. Kashi Dhurhe

Searching Kashi as a Way of Approaching the Spirit of Place

Everybody who stays in Banaras for a while knows that intuitive knowledge is the way to move through this sacred space. Intuitive, nonverbal knowledge is central in Kashi, it shapes the experience of the place. Liquid knowledge. You may perceive it, you experience it but as soon you want to grasp it, it slips from your hands. Within myself I locate the liquid knowledge in the region of the solar plexus. If it is possible to connect the liquid knowledge with the brain knowledge, if the one informs the latter, we are then able to gain real knowledge.

The leading questions of this chapter's ethnographic inquiry have been: How to move through sacral-geographic space? How to contact spirits of place? How to communicate with Mother Earth?

I will narrate my experiences at various holy sites of Kashi in an autoethnographic style of writing. The deities of place can be understood as integral part of the spirit of the place Kashi. Those place narratives are thought to evoke a sense of feeling for place within the reader.

5.1. Sankatha Devi

We find Sankata Ji at Sindhiya Ghat. Her temple compound is peaceful and beautiful. Within the yard lives a huge tree that serves as shrine.

It is beginning of March 2008. I enter the compound of Sankatha Devi. Immediately I sense peaceful atmosphere, as if time moves slower inside the temple compound. The term Shanti enters my mind and spreads its effect within. At the centre of the yard is situated a huge tree, worshipped by the devotees and thus transformed into a shrine. Small stone images are placed at the tree's roots, countless red threads are wrapped around it's trunk. I cross the yard and come to the entrance of the Goddess chamber. There sits, like a guard a figure of a fierce lion like 'monster' with big teeth and huge round eyes. I look at it and touch it's feet as I had seen other devotees do it. It seems like I get permission to proceed to the Devi. Some people stand there in front of her murti with folded hands, some are whispering obviously in devotional approach to Sankatha Ji. I place myself behind them with a good view on the image of the Goddess. Her eyes are widely opened as if alert. Her facial expression is benevolent due to her loving smile. I feel strength, mild forgiveness and the urge to practice

the theoretical knowledge I have gathered throughout my life. She awakens a kind of laid-back motivation to live according to what I regard as right deep within my heart. I feel the assurance that all that I need to know can be found within my heart, that the intuitive centre situated at the inner source of my existence will lead me for good. I feel the blessing of faith, in the universe and in the helping forces of the divine and in myself. “All for Good” comes to my mind and I remember the Dikshitar priest Ganesh from Tamil Nadu.

It is middle of March 2008. I sit in the Kashi Chay shop with Pawan and tell him about Sankatha Devi. “She takes the fear,” I say and he replies: “It’s like medicine but you have to go more times. You should go one time after the other or every day or once a week. Otherwise it will not work.

If I am to visit Sankata Ji, the Great Goddess in her aspect as vanquisher of dangers, there is a whole set of cognitive effects involved. As a devotee I visit the Goddess of danger to take her darshan that gives way to experiencing her blessing that is a state of fearlessness. My friend Pawan argued that Sankata Ji’s visits are like a remedy. For lasting results one will have to visit her frequently. Nevertheless I experienced a kind of instant healing right after taking her first darshan. My state of mind had been irritated before the visit, I had felt insecure, doubting myself, all sorts of mini-fears crossing my mind and body. After I took her darshan I left the temple empowered. I felt a kind of strength and faith in cosmic goodness, in the universal law of cause and effect, that ultimately makes us the designers of our own happiness. I felt faith in the cosmic order that protects the good-hearted, the ones in tune with the quality of compassion, of loving kindness and truthfulness. Her darshan strengthened my faith in leading a morally good life as a process of seeding. Although she is a Hindu Goddess she made me trust in the truths of my Buddhist understandings and experiences. After I left her Temple my mind was alert and peaceful, I felt motivated to live for I strengthened the faith into my insights of what is morally good. Her darshan felt like the hug of a Mother, like the understanding of a Mother and the security to be protected.

5.2. Kamachha Devi

Whenever I remember the day I visited Kamachha Devi together with my friend P. , it seems to me that we were not in Banaras, we were in the far east of India, in Assam, at the home of the great Yoni, the ultimate feminine quality of the Maha Devi. It was a Rikshaw drive of about half an hour from Assi to the Kamachha Temple, yet it seemed to me we had travelled for thousands of miles. The atmosphere of the temple, the smell of the air, the touch of the

stones, the sight of the Goddesses murti, the sound of the temple bell, the taste of her Prasad, all seemed far above the earth, far beyond the busy life world of the street of Banaras. Exactly this feeling, of being out of common sense reality might be one of the characteristics of the mystic experience. Place might as well have been just an illusion. Banaras, the east of India or Mount Kailash, it might as well have been one and the same place, here and there being just two parts of this duality that separates us from being one with it all. This experience of exposition of place is a known concept among the researchers of sacred landscape. All sacred places, all important pilgrimage sites exist within the territory of Kasi. Kamachha Devi has her abode in Assam and yet she dwells within Kasi in the neighbourhood of Kamachha.

We visited the Kamachha Temple and I felt disturbed by the fact that I had come with a man, with a man I did not love and yet I slept with him. I felt embarrassed facing the Great Goddess, the independent Devi, the Maha Yoni, the Feminine Devine itself. I was scared to face her, the Great Mother, I felt weak and sexually defeated. The Goddess has multiple facets, various patterns of being, ways of existing, paths of living within this world of endless possibilities. The Goddess Durga, with who Kamachha is connected, has Nine main manifestations, nine feeling, nine ways of talking, nine patterns. Kamachha is definitely one of the most powerful, feminine and independent manifestations. Thus I have experienced this specific image as challenging. My own feminine power was challenged in the reflection of her mirror.

5.3. Laxmi Kund

It was one of the worst days I lived in Banaras. I felt sick. I felt scared. I sat in the restaurant of my friend Santosh. He decided to help me and offered me to bring me to his family doctor. We walked, along the Bengali Tola, passed Godauwlia crossing and took rights, lefts and straights that I would have never found on my own. I followed S. without speaking, trying to keep my body straight, keep my mind from drifting off, fainting away. He looked back from time to time as if to assure that I can still walk and follow him. We reached a kund and he stopped. I was surprised because I did not expect a temple visit in this weak situation. When I looked at the water of the kund my mind became calm and I felt a wave of relief. I looked at S. and he told me that this is the Lakshmi Kund and it to see it will help me get healthy, it will strengthen my mind and body. After we walked to the doctor, after he waited for quite some time for me to be ready and after we returned to Bengali Tola, I

understood that the Lakshmi Kund was not exactly on our way but that we had walked circuitous. I understood that it was intended by S., despite my weakness and his short time that we would visit the Lakshmi Kund before visiting the doctor. This is an example of fusing the healing power of darsan of a deity, of the healing power of a place with the healing power of modern medicine. It might have been a matter of coordination that we visited exactly the Lakshmi Kund, for it was near the road of the doctor. Lakshmi is the preserving energy of the Great Goddess, she is the aspect of prosperity, the Goddess of wealth and connected to the earth.

5.4. Trilokasundari

She is also called Tripurasundari and we find her near to Manikarnika Ghat. I walk up the steep stairs. Up to the beautifully decorated temple of Tripurasundari. She is the Goddess of the three worlds and she is sundar, beautiful. From her temple one sees the Ganga flowing way down and it feels as if I am looking from heaven to earth, I hear the birds singing from the trees and feel myself like a bird, so light in body and mind. The view on the Ganga is specially pleasant here. The temple is decorated with sculptures of Kinnaras, heavenly dancers and musicians. The murti of the Goddess herself wears a silver mask and the carvings are detailed, fine, delicate and radiate pure grace. Her chamber is pleasing me and I feel like staying. I look around and my eyes meet that of the temple priest. I know that I have to go and step down the many steps to the dirty and dark lane.

5.5. Vishalakshi

The main Shakti peeth, place of the power, the feminine power, the place within Banaras, where the Great Goddesses eyes are wide open is Vishalakshi. Vishalakshi is one of the shakti peeths, the places of the power that are related to the Sati myth, as is as well the case with Kamachha in Assam, where the Yoni of Sati fell. Vishalakshi is the Goddess with the open eyes, the beautiful eyes. Here in her temple South Indian priest mediate between devotees and the Great Goddess, the Mother of All.

How many times must I have come more, to visit her? How many times more would the priest drive me away? I felt rejected when the priest denied me entrance into her home. The first time I felt a wave of anger against this man, who put himself between the divine Mother and her child, which I was. I realised that I could see her image from the doorstep and went

down on my knees. I ignored the priest who seemed to watch me in distrust. I could take her darshan and it made me feel in peace. She seemed to smile in a beauty of a special kind, her eyes wide-open and radiating grace and charm. When I returned to the temple a few weeks later, the priest still rejected my entrance but I did not feel angry this time. I took it with ease and took her darsan and the priest seemed more trustful this time as well. I could accept it with all my heart that he did not allow me to enter and I understood it as political statement, beyond personal involvement. She is the Mother of All and the All knows no separation between Hindus and Non-Hindus, Man or Woman etc. I felt this truth so strong that my anger vanished and love radiated from her eyes through my eyes into my heart and back out into the world.

5.6. Baba Kinaram Ashram with Suresh Joshi

When I came to Banaras in 2005 I saw the two huge skulls at the entrance to the Baba Kinaram Ashram and without knowing what exactly this place was, I felt scared, I felt like it's a place of black magic and even though I came by various times, I never intended to go inside, I never even asked someone what this place was about. The skulls made me careful. In 2008 finally my Hindi teacher Suresh Josi introduced me to this place and I know very well that I would have never gone alone. Suresh Josi is a Brahmin of Banaras. His father was a revered astrologer and Suresh himself has learned much of his father's skills. I met Sureshji in 2005 and started my Hindi classes with him. Soon we switched from Hindi to Hindu philosophy and spiritual talks. Whenever he spoke about his spiritual experiences, that were mainly tantric in characteristic, he pointed to my tape recorder and said: 'Stop this one then I give you.' The knowledge transfer was secret and most of the times I could not verbally grasp it anyway. On the 27th of September we discussed about the Goddess and Navaratri.³⁵⁷ He explained me the temporal concept of the Shraddha period, the sacred time of the Goddess. This auspicious time starts when the dark period ends with the black moon, Amavashya. This is the black date called Shrad. It is the time for farewell to the ancestors. Generally this is regarded a dangerous period for it is associated with death and evil spirits. The last day of the dark period is Amavashya and it is considered a tantric date. It is the date for tantric rituals to control spirits. Especially for bad people this is a dangerous time. Sureshji calls it 'wrong work' and translates it into the etic concept of 'black magic.' They do their work in the dark night, which is the darkest night of all. Sureshji calls this date a hot date, an exciting date for anything may happen. Nevertheless we can take the beneficial of

³⁵⁷ Interview Suresh Josi 27.9.2008 VVS 210099

that potent time. That's why people visit the temples of Shiva or other terrifying yet protective deities. Those deities such as Kal Bhairav or Rudra are aggressive on that day and one can approach them for special protection. "If you are good then you should go and take the shelter. Vibration is running on that day" Suresh states with eyes opened widely in excitement. He mentions that he will visit the Kinaram Baba Ashram that specific day because it is the "place for dark protections."³⁵⁸ Nobody can do bad there because it is the place for Shanti (peace) and it is very disciplined there, he adds. I take my chance and ask him if I can come. He agrees. We meet the next day at 7.30 in the evening at Assi Crossing near his house. He moves with fast steps turning from one lane into the next. The next morning I write in my field-diary:

"Today the sun came late. I think it was around half past six. Yesterday I went to Kinaram Baba Ashram with Sureshji. We entered the compound, passing the huge skulls at the entrance and leaving our shoes. He walked his rounds in silence, touching the stones of the shrines with his forehead and I did it alike joining into the atmosphere of shantiness (peacefulness). The main and central shrine is a room with glass walls. A fire burns inside and people sit and watch the fire. Some meditate, some pray. Sureshji tells me that the fire comes from the main burning ghat of Banaras, Manikarnika Ghat. The murtis are statutes of Aghori saints, like Kinaram Baba. They are believed to remain meditating at this spot. Later we arrive at a kund (lake) and I see cloths all around. Sureshji tells me that people who are possessed by evil spirits come here to take a bath. They leave their old cloths here and are released from the evil influence. Outside on the street the activities seemed restless and my inner life was filled with thoughts, longings, images of past memories and future dreams, lacking focus, confused. I followed Sureshji through the Ashram, from one shrine to the next. In silence we walked, in silence we sat, in silence we looked and in silence we left. It was around 9 o'clock that we left the Ashram. My head was free, my mind filled with peaceful emptiness. After I described my state of being to Sureshji he laughed and said his wife felt the same. Without knowing what is happening to her she feels like this, he says. The place evoked a strong sense of concentration, focus and clarity within me."

³⁵⁸ Interview Suresh Joshi 27.9.2008 VVS 210099

Conclusion: As we have seen each place affects the visitor on a sensual, emotional and spiritual level. Some of the place bound deities have been experienced as evoking peace of mind, some vanquish fear, some help to activate the healing energies inherent in the person. Each place has it's distinct atmosphere and in the Hindu context this atmosphere is described by help of divine images who transport knowledge about the spirit of place.

IV. Conclusion

The text has presented the results of my ethnographic inquiry into the field of human experience and perception of landscape and place. The intention of this empiric research work is to initiate a sense of interrelatedness within the reader. I hope to offer some motivation to start feeling places, to open one's inner universe of perception to a holistic experience of the earth and places as living organisms. Cultural conceptions of a living earth may enhance environmental awareness. I hope to arouse an interest in the establishment of a reciprocal relationship with sacred places and the realm of divine agency. I present my research data of the place and ethnographic field Kashi (Banaras) as an example of the inquiry into the characteristics of a sacred place as field for communicative and transpersonal experience. Such a kind of communication encompasses insights, imaginations, feelings, inner pictures as well as bodily sensations. Within a holistic worldview, such as the Hindu worldview or the shared conceptual framework of contemporary geomantic practitioners, nature as well as place is a living being, nothing static but itself subject to change and transformation. The place remembers and is responsive to human agency.

Conceptual framework I: Place is a living being and imbued with an all-prevailing life force. Hindu Pilgrimage is part of a human tradition of approaching nature and place in a communicative way within a reciprocal relationship. Just like a human being, place has its own identity, its own skills. The distinct atmosphere of a place has been experienced as spirit of place.

Research Questions I: How to enter a reciprocal relationship with the world in a holistic sense? How to establish contact with a divine realm and how to relate to place as living being?

Conclusion I: The empiric part of the text presents the empiric data of my fieldwork in Kashi. Further it takes into account a contemporary form of geomancy, as practiced by my Carinthian interview partner Dagmar Kalb and shows that her terminology correlates with Hindu notions of a living earth and a multilayered reality of landscape. The ethnographic narrative should encourage the reader to enter and maintain a reciprocal relationship with nature and places. Dagmar's vision of Kashi shows how the place communicated its identity to a human aspirant. The field of contemporary geomancy offers practical cognitive tools for interrelating humans with their natural environment. Dagmar's geomantic approach to

environment offers various ways to interrelate with the earth as living being encompassing attempts to heal wounds of the earth body. Ultimately earth healing is a healing of our human mind. “The healing we need in an ecopsychological sense is a healing of the mind” as Devereux puts it.³⁵⁹ There are tendencies in psychotherapy to approach the earth for healing the shaft between nature and mind. The approaches of such an ecotherapy acknowledge the earth as a kind of “ecopsychologist”.³⁶⁰ I understand the practice of Hindu pilgrimage as a form of union with place and earth. People feel the earth with their naked feet, they approach place as living being. When I attended the 2009 Autumn Navaratri (Goddess festival) in Vienna together with my sister Lisa, we met a family from Rajasthan in the subway and one of the men told me that he wants to visit Banaras because he felt the place is “calling” him.

Conceptual framework 2: Special places of planet earth reveal extraordinary powers and skills. People have sensed concentrated divine powers around specific places and called them sacred, holy or power places. The emic Hindu term for such a place is tirtha. The mythic narratives that emerge around a great tirtha, such as Kashi, contain information about the subtle body of the place.

Research Questions 2: Which emic and etic conceptions of place contribute to a worldview that favours the establishment of a reciprocal relationship between human and nature, human and place? How has the spirit of place been experienced?

Conclusion 2: Hindu pilgrimage is imbedded in a worldview that enhances the experience of the earth as living being, imbued with a conscious and divine life force. Place in such a holistic worldview is acknowledged in terms of ‘spirit of place’ and is approached as interlocutor. People of all times have felt such a ‘spirit of place’. They have found these places of power all over the world and consequently they have tried to give way to expressions of this ‘spirit of place’. Mythic narratives inform us about the identity of a place, about its characteristic and efficacy. The tirtha, the Hindu sacred place is understood as the habitat for divine beings and field of concentrated cosmic forces. As ‘axis mundi’ it is a place where the boundaries between the multiple layers of reality dissolve and cross-state communication is favoured. The literature research of my work is intended to be a contribution to the investigation into cultural conceptions of nature, landscape and place. The empiric inquiry of my work offers an insight into practices of acknowledging, establishing and maintaining an interrelatedness of humans with their natural environment and contacting

³⁵⁹ Devereux 1996: 19

³⁶⁰ Devereux 1996: 21

inhabitants of the invisible layers of place. Pilgrimage as cosmologically oriented movement through sacred space has been ethnographically presented as cultural technique in order to maintain a reciprocal relationship between human and earth, between the human and the divine realm of existence. Hindu Pilgrimage serves as framework for developing an enhanced awareness of the multiple layers of the reality of natural environment and place. The reality I try to describe within the text is of a multifaceted nature and is real in terms of perception and experience. What the text doesn't intend is to give scientific proof that invisible beings exist. The empiric inquiry into the perception and experience of Kashi as sacred place is rooted in an ancient human longing for a reciprocal relationship with nature and place as embodiment of the divine quality of existence. The divine field of Kashi serves as example for the conception of a sacred place. Kashi is viewed in terms of microcosmic manifestation of the macrocosmic universe. In this sense pilgrims come to learn about the interplay of cosmic forces and find their identity within the cosmos. I came to the insight that pilgrims move through a sacred yet geographical landscape and find a place within. In other words they gain practical knowledge of their cosmic integrity.

Conceptual framework 3: The practice of Hindu pilgrimage contributes to 'spiritual well-being' and thus maintains health in a holistic sense. It enhances the human ability to experience wholeness and cosmic integrity by interrelating the pilgrim with a divine dimension of place and nature.

Research Questions 3: Does the experience of the human-earth interrelatedness and as an example therefore the practice of Hindu pilgrimage contribute to well-being?

Conclusion 3: The ethnographic report of the pilgrimages I attended within the context of ethnographic fieldwork offers a holistic approach to place in terms of 'spirit of place' envisioned as divine inhabitants of the sacredscape. Pilgrims experience interconnectedness with the divine in a ritual context. Pilgrimage encompasses activities such as meditation, ritually relating the human with the divine and experiencing what is holy and whole. One emic example of such human-divine interrelatedness is darshan, the visual perception of and interaction with the divine. Such practices enhance the human ability to experience a profound feeling of inner peace, self-realization, bliss and wholeness and thus tirtha yatra contributes to a sense of spiritual well-being. As I have shown in chapter II.1.6 the development of Extra Sensitive Perception (achieved for example by means of Yoga and meditation) can be understood as a way to absorb the energy inherent in a place.

Conceptual framework 4: During the pilgrimage process the mythological worldview becomes a vivid reality, a reality of experience due to faith. Within the Hindu worldview the spiritual process of transformation of the pilgrim's person depends on the grace and blessing of the Divine. Experience and faith again strengthen human devotion, a crucial element in order to establish contact with a divine or holy realm, a sphere of wholeness.

Research Questions 4: Which qualities and skills are attributed to the holy place Kashi? What is the effect of being and performing pilgrimage in Kashi? How do people for example perceive the cosmic identity of the place Kashi?

Conclusion 5: In chapter II.4 I have tried to present the main characteristics of a culturally shared image of Kashi in terms of mythic reality. Within such a divine mode of perception the place is venerated as shimmering goddess and as purifying territory, field of concentrated cosmic powers and divine agency.

Conceptual framework 6: Cognitive pilgrimage maps depict the pilgrim's cosmologically oriented movement through sacred space. They are the cognitive tools of a sacred topography and show constitutive elements of a holistic worldview that gives way to a transpersonal experience with the landscape. Such mystic experiences depend on the pilgrim's state of mind, of being, upon the degree of realization of consciousness.

Research Questions 6: What are sacred cosmograms and how are they, as cognitive pilgrim's maps connected to the field of pilgrimage in Kashi?

Conclusion 6: The text presents conceptions of cosmograms as expression of a reciprocal human- earth relationship within which humans receive messages from specific places. In the Hindu context the rishis, the ancient seers have received the knowledge about the sacred sites and their cosmogramic structure. The contemporary pilgrimage routes correspond to such cosmograms in madalic or hexagramic shape and are depicted within cognitive pilgrimage maps. In the geomantic context the experience of place-human communication finds its expression in the shape of individual cosmograms, according to the worldview and symbolic language of the geomancer. The vision is initiated by a knowing entity, in my ethnographic case the place Kashi as divine agent. We can conclude that cosmograms within the ancient Hindu tradition as well as within the contemporary geomantic tradition are the product of a deeper contact and communication of human and place.

In Kashi the Earth Speaks

Kashi means light. Whithin a Kashi-specific realm of enhanced perception the mind is clear and illuminated. It is a state of being that sharpens our cognitive abilities and thus the human being starts to understand the language of the holy place, the language of the earth. The aim of the pilgrimage venture is not so much to reach a physical place, but to reach an inner place, a specific state of mind. In this sense, in Kashi the earth speaks...

Research Vision:

I perceive this ethnographic text as my first contribution to an '*anthropology of the living earth*.' Future empiric inquiry into cultural practices of establishing a reciprocal relationship between human being and natural environment may result in the production of sensitive and evocative ethnographic narratives about the ancient and contemporary human tradition of interrelating with the living earth. Such narratives may enhance fascination, respect and love for nature. Human beings are able to develop deep "emotional bonds with nature," as Tobias Schmitt postulates in his master thesis 2003. A holistic worldview that encompasses the understanding that the human is an integral part of a web of planetary as well as cosmic life contributes to a protective environmental attitude. The ethnographic contribution to promoting a nature-loving worldview may be a way to protecting nature and the 'spirits of place.' I have asked myself if nature and holy places increase human well-being, now I want to investigate into ethnographic possibilities to increase the well-being of the earth.

V. Appendix

1. Field-diary

Personal Experiences during Spring Navaratri 2009 in Austria

The last ten days have been a soft yet intense inner pilgrimage experience to me. I did my own sort of fasting, a vow I had given the Goddess last autumn in Kashi but had failed to live up to it. This year I finally changed some fundamental corpo-mental habits of mine to favour a more direct experience of the energy that is personified as Divine Mother. It has been very difficult to sleep during the nine nights and it really seemed like I witnessed the fight of divine and demoniac, the mythic fight between good and evil, between gods and demons, finally leading to a distinction between knowledge and ignorance. This was perceivable as an inner film with the quality of self-knowledge. Today I understand Rana-ji's point, that faith is a crucial element in the context of religious experience. It has been of central importance within my own experiences of communication with the Devi (Goddess). Before and during Navaratri I consciously deepened my knowledge about her qualities and manifestations. I concentrated my mental awareness on the fact, that all is a manifestation of the Goddess, the world is her divine play and thus I perceived her as Mother Nature when I was riding my bike along the river through the countryside to Oberpullendorf. I perceived her as river, as Austrian river, the Stoober Bach and I thought of Annapurna, who told me that they had chanted Kashi-Vishwanathe-Gange under the shower in Vienna, after they had left India as children. Thus the water transformed into Ganga-jal, holy Ganga water. I was happy, that she had given me this information because now I was chanting it to transform the Stoober Bach water quality into Ganga-jal. The Hindu Concept of holy water can be applied to water all around the world. All water is potential Ganga water. I followed the flow of the river and it filled my heart with joy and my mind with the quality of flow, impermanence, anicca, my dear Buddhist concept for experiencing permanent flux. The surrounding had been transformed into the manifestation of the divine Mother through an internal awareness of divinity. It all had transformed into holiness, entering through the doors of perception. I perceived the Divine Mother as thoughts and feelings, also concerning my own mother and the love for one let grow the love for the other. Who could worship honestly a Mother without also worshipping their own mother. My mother is a manifestation of the Great Goddess.

I perceived the Goddess as self-knowledge as I experienced intense moments of clearance according my very nature of being, of doing things, of effecting my surroundings, my habits, the reason for my actions, that were not always charming, the truth about cause and effect

as observable throughout my own biography. The sleepless nights have been of immense importance for an understanding of my place within the cosmos and micro-truths about my life and actions as well as how to relate to biographical happenings on a meso cosmos and finally an intense experience of cosmic interrelatedness on a macro level.

Every day I tried to focus my mind upon the specific qualities of the Durga of the day and consequently it was easy to identify the same within myself and in the outer world, that seemed much less 'outside' than within ordinary experiences. It has been an enlightening process of temporal intensified awareness. The more I kept my mind and heart easy, unoccupied and open the more I could sense her presence... or was it due to her presence, that my mind and heart were at ease. This must be the blessing of the Goddess. It filled me with happiness and trust in existence, in life in the world, not naively that there is nothing bad out there but in the sense that there doesn't have to be attachment to all this, that we can experience for good and that there will be a way out of suffering if we follow the heart and increase cosmic knowledge, intuitive knowledge. The more I kept my mind clean and clear and hence opened up the space of perception within, the more the Mother seemed to reveal herself, being the totality of existence. Even though the insight into qualities of my being as present formation called Anna Neuner were not always charming, I deeply felt embraced by a cosmic form of mother which is at the same time not to separate from my mother. She blessed me with the tranquillity of mind and the gift of self-love necessary to withstand the look in the mirror of my very existence.

Last year in Kashi I had been probably at the right place to worship Durga Mata but I failed in some way. I did not give respect to the life that I am. Also last year she revealed qualities of her, it were the fierce qualities, she was fighting the tama tendencies within me, which I understand as demoniac qualities because they are terrorizing, violating and darkening life within. I couldn't bear it. I tried to escape. My ego did not want to know about its existence and its failure.

My conclusion is thus: The inner pilgrimage is the base for the experiences of the outer geographical pilgrimage even though they influence each other. To be on the right place is powerful but still useless if my set is not prepared to receive the information important for inner growth and self-knowledge, for this is the knowledge the Goddess bestows as blessing.

Metta³⁶¹ and Bhakti Yoga³⁶² is more similar than I thought. If I live according to the principle of metta, towards the world, I worship the Mother accordingly, I consequently live in harmony with her manifestations. METTA and BHAKTI of the GODDESS is in harmony within my heart, within my mind. I worship her as all that lives, I want to perceive all her manifestations through the lens of loving kindness. I love the divine mother and all her creatures including myself. JAI MATA DI! My way of Bhakti Yoga is as clear to me as it was never before. I give up this tough identity I have created over the years, to protect my heart, to impress the tough world. I open my heart for existence, for life, for all the loving tendencies of what lives and I give my compassion for that which is in difficulty, sharing my merits with the suffering ones.

Thank you Mother for this journey through your sacred time leading me to an inner space of holiness, of wholesomeness, where one can experience intuitive as well as concrete knowledge about ones own place in the cosmos.

Field-diary 19.9. 2009

Shaila Putri, daughter of the mountains, the himalaya being her devotee, as Uma she did tapasya and won Shiva blessings and love, she is the great ascetic, the great woman also as the strong Parvati, who can turn into Kali if the emotion change. She is Shivas spouse and still she is more than that, she is the Devi.

In the Internet, beginning from informative websides and including you tube videos with bhajans and mantras as well as pictures with strong mythological reference, we find lots of references to the Navaratri festival, the Durga Puja. On one side I read today about the fasts connected with the Goddess festival. The various vrats are observed in accordance to the devotees, some only eat fruits, while others eat only one meal a day, (ekana) others only eat specific things. It is mentioned that it is important to restrain from all kind of intoxicants.

Also in You tube we find the common interpretation of the Navaratri festival: The first three days devotees pray and give devotion to Goddess Durga, Kali, the second three days for Mother Lakschmi, and the last three days to Mother Sarasvati.

³⁶¹ Emic Buddhist Concept of 'unconditional love'

³⁶² Emic Hindu Concept of 'devotional love' as one path to moksha (liberation)

Sureshji interpreted it in terms of the gunas-concept, connecting Kali with the tama qualities, Lakschmi with the raja qualities and Sarasvati with the sattvic qualities. The goal of the practitioner is to remain in the centre of the three, a place of equilibrium.

Jai Mata Di, Jai Ma. The bhajans are going on in my head, the pictures from you tube can be brought in front of the inner eye. I feel her presence in my awareness of her qualities. She is the meditating Self, the archetype of determination. I m with a headache but my attention is still awake. All the pictures, all the bhajans, the meaning inside them, the feelings connected with them, all these are lenses through which to perceive the universe, the qualities and the streams of energies, like archetypal happenings also of the mind, inside oneself.

Shaila putri is a manifestation of the Maha Devi. She is the first of the nine Drugas. Her mytho-biography is connected to the Sati incarnation and with it the actions of Uma and consequently Parvati and Kali. To see her picture is helpful to feel her qualities, to hear her bhajans is helpful to perceive her presence. The setting can be helpful for the perception of holiness, wholeness. She is the mountains daughter, she is the wife of the great ascetic Shiva, and still she herself is the great female ascetic, she is powerful as Kali or Durga.

Brahmacharini, the second Durga of the Nine. What does she mean to me? I consider her the Pure One, she is not falling for desires. She is strong concerning her clarity, her inner purity, wholesome actions of the mind, of the speech, of the body. Morality, according to the inner self, is easy for her, it is natural for her. I am her. She is an aspect of me.

Chandraghanta, the third. Jai Mata Di. Jai Mata Di... I chanted out while riding my bicycle along the Stoober Bach river today. My mind focused upon the loving Mother Earth, Mother Universe, the river, the plants, the trees being her play. Divine, it means real, it means according to a cosmic order. The Mother Goddess, she is all, transcending her own descriptions, her images being there as a help for us to understand as children do. I remember Sureshji, as he laughed about my attachments to temples, saying that it is for children, good to learn sattva actions, but still it is not the real thing, it is like a toy elephant for children to play. Still, the temples store some awareness of the things that are holy, divine... real. Jai jai ma. Love fills up my perception. I am clear and happy for I sense the presence of loving kindness within my universe. It is about the relation between macro and micro-cosmos. If I feel it, it is. Faith is central. Trust also. If there is no faith, there will be no feeling and without feeling, what will I offer the Goddess? Developing a feeling for the Goddess, this was the main advice of Sureshji last year.

Today I read that the demon, Mahishasura represents passion and that the Goddess is specifically destroying these energies, the tama energies within me. Last year I was there, visited her temples, but I was not able nor willing to give up my tama addiction, my sexual desires taking over my mind occupying the heart that should have been filled with love for her only. Today I am here in Austria, celebrating Navaratri rather isolated, no mandir around, no pujas to attend.... but while I m riding my bike, watching the river flow and the leaves dance, I sense her presence, for she is all that lives. She makes me want to respect life and all that lives, love life, enjoy it too.

We entered a period of sacred time, a time window through which to perceive cosmic realities, cosmic order, cosmic play.

Field-diary 22.10.2009

Why I am writing about the Great Goddess and pilgrimage as a form to worshipping her is easy to answer: I feel the Goddess. She is present in Banaras in various forms. From all the deities I have been introduced with the Goddess is my 'ishta devata', my chosen deity for I feel her. I was already afraid of her as well. I felt her like an angry mother, I felt her like an all-embracing mother transmitting motherly love through all particles of my existence.

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3. Curriculum Vitae

a) Personal Data

Given names: Anna Maria

Family name: Neuner

Date of birth: 05.11.1980

Place of birth: Klagenfurt

Nationality: Austrian

b) Education

Elementary school: Volksschule Krumpendorf

Graduation: AHS Matura at Abendgymnasium Klagenfurt 2001

University of Vienna: 2001- 2010 (Social and Cultural Anthropology)

Degree sought: Mag.a phil.

c) Active Membership and practical experiences

Fieldresearch in Banaras: 2005-2006; 2008 (all together one year)

Ethnographic Journeys to India: 2006; 2007; 2009 (all together nine months)

Member of the 'Awariness Research Group – Forschungsgruppe für anthropologische Bewusstseinsforschung' since 2009

d) Languages

German (mother tongue); English (fluent);

Hindi (good)

Italian (good); Portuguese (basic)