A *Tīrtha*-Centric Investigation of Indian Pilgrimage Towns for Holistic Urban Development: a study of Varanasi

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CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

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DEDICATION

*To **Dadi Maa**,*

who sowed in me, during childhood, the earliest seeds of tradition, reverence, and love for our ancient texts. Her stories, her gentle insistence on ritual, and her unwavering faith nurtured an inner world that slowly took root and grew into the foundations of this research long before I ever knew its direction.

This thesis is, in many ways, a flowering of the wisdom she planted.

*To **Mummy** and **Dady Ji**,*

whose support, strength, and blessings have carried me through every stage of this journey.

Har Har Mahadev!

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Abstract

Pilgrimage towns in India have always been more than just places of worship—they are living embodiments of the country's spiritual, cultural, and ecological heritage. Cities like Varanasi, often described as "older than history," have grown over centuries around sacred geographies known as *tīrthas*. Today, however, many of these historic towns are at a crossroads. The rush for urban modernization—through Smart City projects and heritage corridors—is transforming their ancient landscapes, sometimes at the cost of their soul.

This research, *"A Tīrtha-Centric Investigation of Indian Pilgrimage Towns for Holistic Urban Development: A study of Varanasi,"* arises from a deep concern: Are we losing the very essence that makes these towns sacred and resilient? By taking Varanasi as a case study, the work seeks to bridge the growing gap between modern development practices and traditional urban wisdom preserved in ancient texts like the *Purāṇas*, *Tīrtha Māhātmya*, and *Sthala Purāṇas*.

Through field visits to over 280 sacred sites, community interactions, and structured consultations with experts, the study uncovers how deeply the concepts of sacred place-making, memory, and ritual are woven into the urban fabric. It argues that development doesn't need to erase the past to build the future. Instead, by recognizing the spiritual and cultural logic that shaped these towns, we can create models of urban planning that are both rooted and forward-looking.

The outcome is not just a critique of current trends, but a proposed framework—grounded in traditional knowledge systems—that can guide holistic urban development in Varanasi and other pilgrimage towns. In doing so, the research invites policymakers, planners, and citizens alike to rethink how we shape our cities, not just for infrastructure, but for identity, meaning, and continuity.

Keyword: Tīrtha-Centric Urbanism, Heritage Development, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), Sacred Geography, Pilgrimage Towns Planning

Chapter - 1: Introduction

"Benaras is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together". (Mark Twain 1897)

The first chapter introduces the foundation for the research, beginning with an overview of its context in the preamble section 1.1. It then addresses the purpose and driving factors behind the study, alongside the central research theme. Sections 1.2 and 1.3 elaborate on the research questions and the study's aim and objectives, respectively. Section 1.4 emphasizes the significance of the research contributions, while section 1.5 provides an overview of the thesis.

1.1 Preamble

The urban landscape of Indian pilgrimage towns, exemplified by Varanasi, is undergoing a transformative phase marked by rapid urban development and heritage rejuvenation initiatives. These towns, revered as tīrthas—sacred sites of spiritual and cultural significance—are at the heart of India's cultural and religious identity. However, the current trajectory of urban development in these towns, as observed in recent news articles and academic journals, raises critical concerns about the sustainability of their urban systems. The pressures of unchecked urban alterations, driven by the dual objectives of heritage preservation and modern infrastructure development, have led to an alarming strain on the urban fabric of these pilgrimage centres. Varanasi, with its ongoing heritage-driven projects, serves as a poignant case study, reflecting a broader trend affecting similar pilgrimage towns across India, such as Mathura, Ayodhya, and Haridwar.

Growing public apprehension has emerged in response to the contentious 'modernisation' initiative of the corridor's, which has significantly disrupted the ancient urban structure encompassing temples and adjacent regions. Scholarly reports, such as those featured in Archaeology magazine, highlight comparable threats to living heritage sites like Hampi, while personal accounts, including a teacher's reflections in the Varanasi Diary, underscore the diminishing cultural identity resulting from the displacement of historic neighborhoods, notably affecting residents of areas like Baba ki Nagri who face involuntary relocation, transforming the once-vibrant 'oldest living city' into a potential 'lost city'(Figure 1). This scenario raises pressing inquiries regarding the integration of tourism-led expansion with the preservation of cultural heritage, calling for a comprehensive reevaluation of existing methodologies to safeguard Varanasi's deep historical legacy.

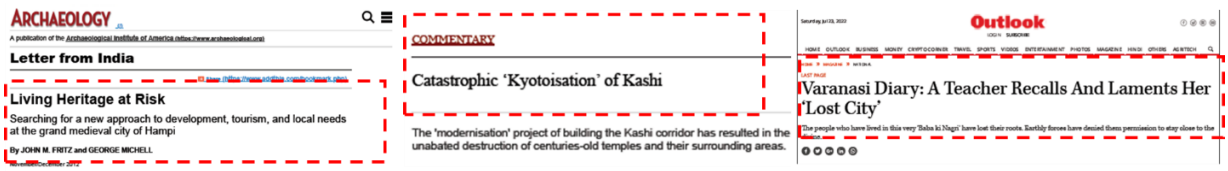


Figure 1: news articles referring to the issue in Varanasi.

Recent news further reveals that this destructive development is not confined to Varanasi alone but extends to other pilgrimage towns across modern India. For instance, the demolition of Patna's over-century-old heritage market for a Smart City project, the road-widening initiative in Ayodhya leading to the demolition drive near Sanskrit Vidyalay, and the ongoing loss of heritage sites in Hyderabad, including rock formations, despite High Court rulings, indicate a widespread trend (Figure 2). This pervasive pattern of unchecked urban alteration poses a major concern, threatening the cultural and historical integrity of pilgrimage centers such as Mathura, Ayodhya, Haridwar, and beyond, necessitating urgent national attention to preserve these sacred landscapes.

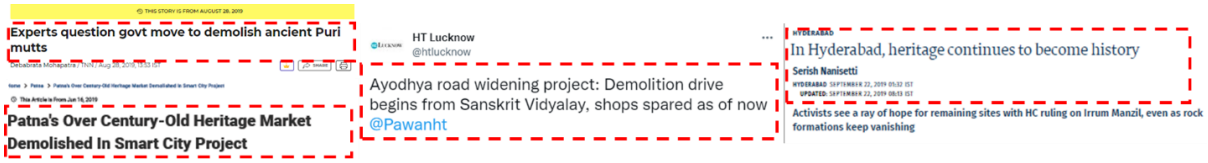


Figure 2: News articles referring to the issue in the other pilgrimage towns of india.

This research, titled A Tīrtha-Centric Investigation of Indian Pilgrimage Towns for Holistic Urban Development: A Case of Varanasi, originates from the recognition of a critical gap in the contemporary approach to urban development in these sacred landscapes. The recent surge in interest towards Indian pilgrimage towns, fueled by national and global tourism, cultural revivalism, and government-led urban rejuvenation projects, has amplified the demand for modern urban infrastructure. This demand, while advocating for the rejuvenation of tangible and intangible heritage, often overlooks the foundational principles that define these towns as tīrthas. The Puranic literature, including texts like the Tīrtha Mahatmyas, Sthala Puranas, and other traditional narratives, articulate a holistic understanding of tīrthas as sacred geographies and cultural landscapes. These texts emphasize the concept of tīrtha as place-making, where spiritual, social, and ecological dimensions converge to create a balanced urban system. Yet, the current development paradigm, with its focus on superficial heritage restoration, fails to engage with these root elements, resulting in haphazard and unsustainable urban growth.

The heritage of Indian pilgrimage towns is not merely a collection of monuments or traditions but a living legacy of spiritually motivated built environments, patronage, and planning. These towns embody cultural landscapes shaped by centuries of devotion, imagined as sacred geographies and contested as tīrtha landscapes. However, contemporary heritage assessments and cultural augmentation policies often misinterpret or undervalue this heritage, treating it as an obstacle to modern development rather than an asset. The spiritually driven constructions and urban planning principles documented in Puranic narrations offer a blueprint for a holistic urban system that integrates ecological sustainability, social cohesion, and spiritual significance. The failure to incorporate these traditional frameworks into modern urban planning has led to a fragmented approach, where heritage rejuvenation becomes a superficial exercise rather than a transformative process.

This study seeks to address these challenges by advocating for a tīrtha-centric approach to urban development. By investigating the continuity of traditional urban systems in Indian pilgrimage

towns, with a specific focus on Varanasi, this research aims to evaluate how Puranic references can inform contemporary urban planning for holistic development. It posits that a deeper understanding of tīrtha landscapes—as articulated in traditional texts—can bridge the gap between heritage preservation and modern urban needs, ensuring that development respects the spiritual, cultural, and ecological ethos of these sacred towns. Through this exploration, the study aspires to contribute to a more nuanced and sustainable framework for the urban development of Indian pilgrimage towns, where heritage is not a hindrance but a guiding force in shaping resilient and vibrant urban futures.

1.1 Research Question

India's historic pilgrimage towns, particularly Kāśī (Varanasi), represent distinctive forms of settlement shaped by the enduring relationship between Tīrtha, community, landscape, and cultural practice. Rather than functioning solely as conventional urban settlements, these places have evolved through layered socio-spatial relationships in which sacred sites, pilgrimage routes, settlement patterns, community practices, and cultural memory are closely interconnected. This distinctive spatial logic has contributed to the continuity and resilience of pilgrimage settlements over time.

However, contemporary urbanization and infrastructure-led development are increasingly transforming the historic fabric of such towns. In Varanasi, interventions associated with modernization and urban development have generated significant changes within historic precincts, routes, neighbourhoods, and culturally significant spaces. While these interventions seek to address contemporary requirements, they also raise questions regarding the continuity of the socio-spatial relationships that have historically structured the pilgrimage landscape.

The concern of this research, therefore, is not to examine all dimensions of urban development in pilgrimage towns independently, but to investigate how Tīrtha-centric knowledge and associated socio-spatial practices have contributed to the formation, continuity, and resilience of pilgrimage settlements, and how these relationships may inform their contemporary development. The central inquiry is consequently framed as:

"How can Tīrtha-centric knowledge and socio-spatial practices contribute to a context-sensitive understanding and development of historic pilgrimage settlements?"

To address this inquiry, the research adopts Tīrtha-centric urbanism as its central conceptual lens. Paurāṇika literature, particularly *Sthalapurāṇas* and *Tīrthamāhātmyas*, along with associated spatial traditions and cultural narratives, is examined as a source for understanding the conceptualization and significance of Tīrtha. Rather than treating Paurāṇika narratives as independently verifiable historical accounts, the study considers them as sources of cultural knowledge, spatial meaning, ritual associations, and perceptions of place. These insights are examined in relation to the spatial and socio-cultural characteristics of pilgrimage settlements.

Kāśī/Varanasi is selected as the principal case study to examine how this Tīrtha-centric logic is expressed spatially and socially. The research investigates the relationship between Tīrtha

sites, sacred routes, settlement structure, landscape, community practices, and cultural continuity through textual study, spatial mapping, historical analysis, and field investigation. The study particularly examines selected Tīrtha sites and associated settlement contexts to identify the socio-spatial attributes through which Tīrtha contributes to the organization and continuity of the pilgrimage landscape.

The identified attributes are subsequently examined through empirical investigation and expert validation. Field-based observations and stakeholder responses are used to understand existing conditions and transformations, while the Delphi method is employed to validate and refine the identified indicators. Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) is then used to examine the interrelationships among these indicators and to identify their relative structural influence. Thus, the methodological framework progresses from conceptual identification to empirical examination, expert validation, and structural interpretation.

The research ultimately seeks to establish a Tīrtha-centric framework for understanding the socio-spatial structure and development of pilgrimage settlements. The framework is not proposed as a replacement for contemporary statutory planning or infrastructure systems; rather, it seeks to complement them by making visible the cultural, spatial, ecological, and community relationships associated with Tīrtha that may otherwise remain overlooked in conventional development approaches. While Kāśī serves as the principal case study, the framework is intended to provide a basis for further contextual investigation in other historic pilgrimage settlements.

Accordingly, the subsequent inquiries focus specifically on understanding the conceptual basis, spatial expression, socio-spatial functioning, empirical characteristics, and contemporary relevance of Tīrtha-centric urbanism in Kāśī.

- **How** can the ancient idea of *Tīrtha* from the *Purāṇa* help us understand and shape the Indian pilgrimage towns?

  – Observing the evolution of Indian pilgrimage landscapes and understanding the fundamental roots of Paurāṇika place-making.
- **How** has Varanasi grown and developed as a *Tīrtha* over time, and **How** do *Purāṇa* describe holistic urban system?

  – Investigating tīrtha-centric traditional literature and references – Tīrthamāhātmya, SthalPuran, Folklores, and practices, etc. to understand its role in urban development process: Studying Kāśī/Varanasi
- **How** is the *Tīrtha*-based tradition can be used to plan and develop Indian pilgrimage towns in a more holistic and comprehensive way?

  – Investigating factors from traditional literatures and analyze the indicators leading to development intervention.

Hence Aim of the Thesis is:

To revisit the *Tīrtha*-centric *Puranika* construct of Indian pilgrimage towns, with a focus on Varanasi, to propose an integrated approach for a holistic urban development.

1.2 Research Objective

The research is structured around three primary objectives, each designed to systematically explore and redefine the Tīrtha-centric urban framework of Varanasi, drawing inspiration from their Puranika constructs and evolution. These objectives are:

- **Objective 1:** To investigate the epistemological evolution of *Purana* and *Puranika Tīrtha* and position the *Tīrtha-Centric* place-making of Indian pilgrimage towns.
- **Objective 2:** To explore Varanasi as *Puranika Tīrtha* and investigate the *Tīrtha*-centric Urban System.
- **Objective 3:** To Identify and Position the Indicators for Holistic Urban Development.

1.3 Scope and Research Contribution

The present research makes three interrelated contributions towards understanding Tīrtha-centric urban construct of historic pilgrimage settlements, with Kāśī (Varanasi) serving as the principal case study. These contributions are derived from the central premise that the Tīrtha represents not merely an individual sacred site, but a socio-spatial construct connecting sacred places, movement networks, settlement structure, landscape, community practices, and cultural memory. The contributions are as follows:

- *A Tīrtha-centric research methodology for the study of pilgrimage settlements:* The research develops an interdisciplinary methodological approach to investigate the relationship between Paurāṇika knowledge, Tīrtha, and the socio-spatial structure of pilgrimage settlements. Paurāṇika sources, particularly *Sthalapurāṇas* and *Tīrthamāhātmyas*, are examined as sources of cultural knowledge, spatial associations, ritual practices, and perceptions of place rather than as independently verifiable historical accounts. These insights are brought into dialogue with spatial analysis and field-based investigation to identify the socio-spatial attributes through which Tīrtha has contributed to the formation and continuity of pilgrimage settlements. The methodology is intended as a context-sensitive approach that can inform comparative studies of other pilgrimage settlements, subject to appropriate contextual validation.
- *Identification of Tīrtha-centric socio-spatial patterns in Kāśī:* The research identifies and organizes patterns associated with the Tīrtha-centric structure of Kāśī through an examination of Paurāṇika references, particularly the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*, spatial evidence, historical development, and field observations. These patterns include relationships among Tīrtha sites, sacred routes, settlement areas, landscape elements, ritual practices, and community interactions. Rather than treating these patterns simply as physical forms, the study interprets them as interconnected socio-spatial relationships that contribute to the identity and continuity of the pilgrimage landscape. The resulting repository provides an analytical basis for understanding how Tīrtha has historically influenced the spatial and cultural organization of Kāśī.

- *A Tīrtha-centric framework for contemporary development of Kāśī:* Based on the identified socio-spatial patterns and empirical investigation, the research develops a context-sensitive framework for considering Tīrtha within contemporary urban development. The framework brings together identified development indicators and examines their interrelationships through expert validation using the Delphi method and structural analysis using Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM). The objective is not to replace existing statutory planning, infrastructure, or urban-development systems, but to demonstrate how Tīrtha-related cultural, spatial, ecological, and community relationships can be incorporated into contemporary planning considerations. While the framework is developed through the case of Kāśī, its conceptual structure may provide a basis for further contextual investigation in other historic pilgrimage settlements.

As established in the preamble, the research titled "A Tīrtha-Centric Investigation of Indian Pilgrimage Towns for Holistic Urban Development: A Case of Varanasi" examines the relationship between Tīrtha and the socio-spatial structure of historic pilgrimage settlements, with Kāśī/Varanasi as the principal case study.

The study focuses on how urbanization, infrastructure development, and heritage interventions are transforming the historic and cultural fabric of Kāśī, particularly its sacred sites, routes, settlements, and associated practices. Rather than addressing urban development in its entirety, the research focuses specifically on Tīrtha-centric knowledge and socio-spatial practices and their relevance to contemporary development.

Tīrtha is understood as a relational construct connecting sacred sites, routes, settlement structure, landscape, community practices, and cultural memory. Paurāṇika sources are examined as sources of cultural knowledge and perceptions of place, supported by spatial, historical, and field-based evidence. Through field investigation, Delphi validation, and Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM), the study identifies and examines key socio-spatial indicators and their relationships. The research ultimately proposes Tīrtha-centric urbanism as an analytical and context-sensitive framework that can complement contemporary planning approaches for historic pilgrimage settlements.

The study therefore focuses on understanding the Tīrtha-centric socio-spatial logic of Kāśī and exploring its relevance to contemporary development, while providing a basis for further investigation in other pilgrimage settlements.

1.4 Structure of Research

The research is systematically organized into seven chapters, each addressing a distinct phase of the investigation into the Tīrtha-centric Puranika construct of Indian pilgrimage towns, with a focus on Varanasi. Chapter One introduces the research framework, providing a preamble that outlines the context and motivation behind the study. It succinctly presents the research questions, aim—to rediscover the Tīrtha-centric Puranika construct for holistic urban

development—and objectives, alongside a discussion of the anticipated contributions to future research.

Chapter Two constitutes a comprehensive literature review, delving into relevant scholarly works that expand on the primary research concerns. This chapter synthesizes existing knowledge across three dimensions—historical, cultural, and urban—culminating in the formulation of a robust research framework that underpins the study's theoretical foundation.

Chapter Three details the research methodology, delineating the study area (Varanasi), the relevant data repository, and diverse data sources, including textual, spatial, and ethnographic inputs. It also outlines the tools and techniques employed, such as mapping, surveys, and analytical models, ensuring a rigorous approach to data collection and analysis.

Chapter Four explores the epistemological evolution of Purana and Puranika Tīrtha, investigating their conceptualization as pilgrimage constructs. It examines Tīrtha categorization in Puranic texts and identifies key parameters for place-making, establishing a theoretical basis for understanding sacred urbanism.

Chapter Five evaluates the evolution of Varanasi as a Puranika Tīrtha, drawing on insights from Chapter Four. It revisits the holistic urban construct of Puranika Varanasi, analyzing its sacred geography, temporal development, and cultural practices through historical and spatial lenses to reposition its Tīrtha-centric identity.

Chapter Six focuses on identifying and positioning indicators for holistic urban development and policy-making. This chapter incorporates public surveys, ethnographic field visits, and analytical methods like the Delphi experiment and Interpretative Structural Modelling (ISM). It applies these techniques to case studies of selected sites within Varanasi, generating a taxonomy of indicators tailored to sustainable urban growth.

Chapter Seven consolidates the overall findings and conclusions derived from the research. It presents strategic recommendations and actionable insights for heritage-led urban development. The chapter concludes by highlighting the research's contributions and significance, acknowledging its limitations, and proposing future research directions to further advance the field.

Chapter - 2: Conceptual Foundations and Literature Review

This chapter presents literature review process and the evolution of the research framework adopted in the study. It begins with the identification of the central research problem, which revolves around understanding and applying the *tīrtha*-centric Paurāṇika constructs for the holistic urban development of Indian pilgrimage towns, with a particular focus on Varanasi. From this core problem emerge three research questions that guide the inquiry: (1) understanding the conceptual foundations of tīrtha-centric Paurāṇika constructs, (2) investigating the relevance and continuity of these constructs in the case of Varanasi as a living tīrtha landscape, and (3) identifying specific indicators derived from these constructs that can contribute to holistic heritage-based urban development.

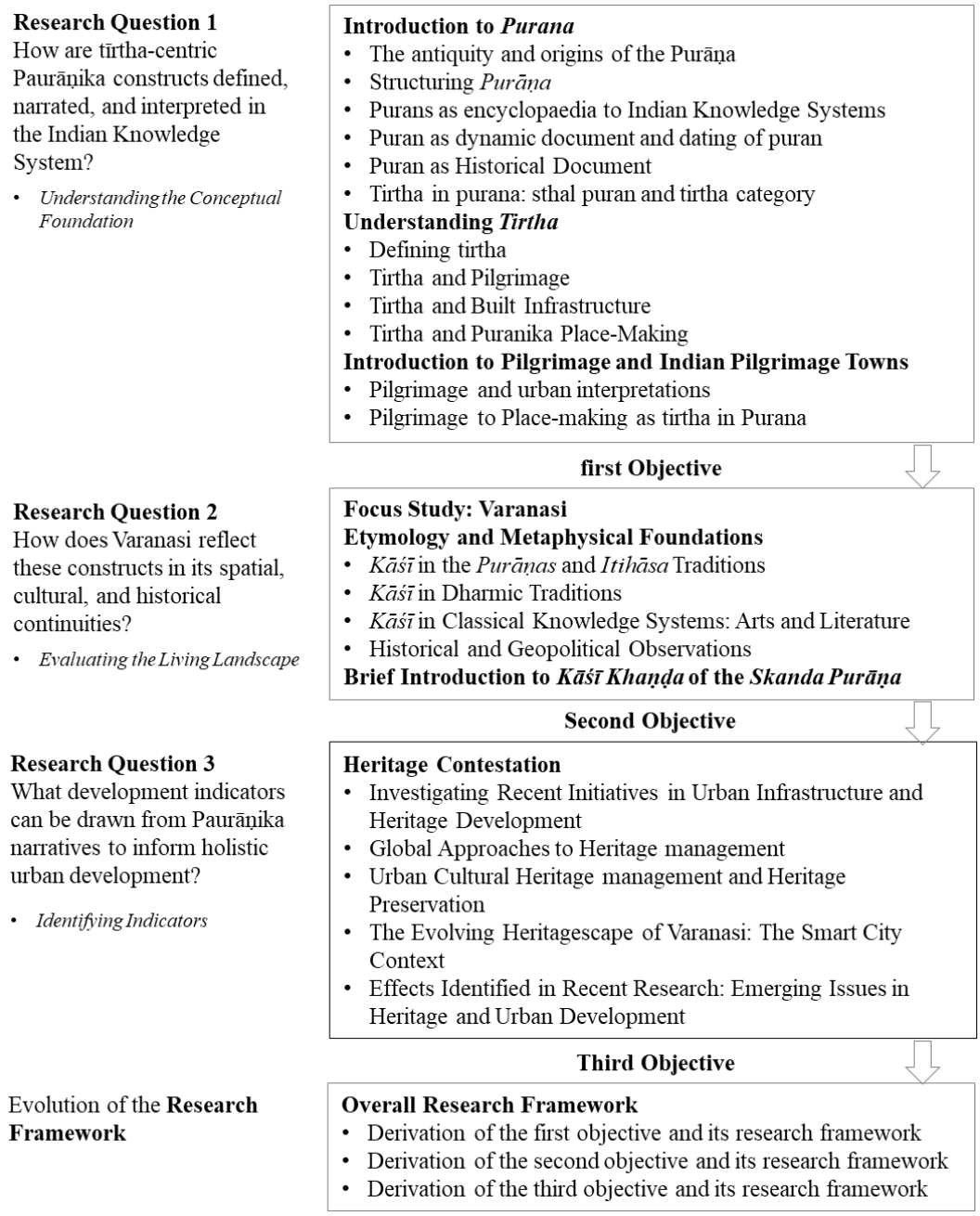


Figure 3: Literature Review Approach (Source: author)

To address each of these questions, the literature review is organized into corresponding sections. Sections 2.1 to 2.3 explore the theoretical and textual dimensions of tīrtha traditions, sacred geography, and mytho-historical place-making found in Purāṇika literature. Section 2.4 examines the continuity and lived practices of Varanasi, drawing upon historical, cultural, spiritual, and spatial studies. Section 2.5 delves into urban planning literature, identifying measurable indicators and frameworks that bridge cultural heritage and contemporary development. These reviews collectively inform the research objectives, which mirror the structure of the research questions and ensure a logical progression from theoretical understanding to contextual evaluation and finally towards practical application.

At the base of the framework, Section 2.6 outlines the evolution of the research methodology, integrating textual analysis, field investigation, public surveys, and expert-driven participatory methods like the Delphi technique and Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM). This framework provides a comprehensive and interdisciplinary structure that connects traditional Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) with contemporary urban development practices, thereby ensuring both scholarly depth and practical relevance. The flowchart thus illustrates a coherent, step-wise approach from problem identification to research implementation, grounding the study in both scriptural authority and empirical validation. The overall literature review approach is visually represented in Figure [3].

2.1 Introduction to Purāṇa

The term "Purāṇa", derived from purā (ancient) and anati (to breathe or endure), originally referred to ancient tales or traditional knowledge passed down through generations (Singh R. P., 2009). Over time, particularly well before the Common Era, the word came to denote a distinct category of religious literature that combined mythology, cosmology, moral teachings, genealogies of sages and deities, and detailed descriptions of sacred places or tīrthas (Bhardwaj, 1973; Bakker, 1990). This vast and evolving corpus of literature played a foundational role in shaping religious consciousness, regional identities, and devotional practices across the Indian subcontinent.

Early references to the Purāṇas can be found in Vedic texts such as the Atharvaveda, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, and Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, attesting to their antiquity and influence. For instance, the Atharvaveda states:

ṛcaḥ sāmāni chandāṃsi purāṇaṃ yajuṣā saha ucchiṣṭājjajñire,

suggesting that the Purāṇas originated alongside the Vedic mantras from the remnants of a primordial sacrifice. This raises scholarly debates on whether the term here refers to a distinct textual form or to oral narratives embedded within Vedic contexts.

Over centuries, the Paurāṇik tradition expanded into a formalized body of literature. Eighteen texts came to be recognized as *Mahāpurāṇas*, namely: Vāyu, Brahmāṇḍa, Mārkaṇḍeya, Viṣṇu, Matsya, Bhāgavata, Kūrma, Vāmana, Liṅga, Varāha, Padma, Nārada, Agni, Garuḍa, Brahma, Skanda, Brahmavaivarta, and Bhaviṣya Purāṇa. Despite their canonical status, none of these texts exists in a singular, original version; rather, they have undergone continuous redactions and interpolations over centuries (Dubey, 2000). Additionally, a secondary corpus known as the Upapurāṇas emerged, further diversifying the tradition.

Notably, the Purāṇas place strong emphasis on tīrthas—sacred sites of pilgrimage. From around the 4th century AD, there is a discernible increase in the number and detail of tīrtha-

related narratives (Bharati, 1963; Feldhaus, 2003). This reflects a growing effort to document and institutionalize pilgrimage practices, as well as to integrate geography with sacred memory and regional identities (Coleman, 1995). This period also witnessed the expansion of temple economies, religious tourism, and the development of tīrthas as spiritual, social, and commercial centers (Glushkova, 2003).

Scholars like P.V. Kane have extensively analyzed these texts, highlighting the significance of *tīrtha-māhātmyas* (glorifications of sacred places) in Mahāpurāṇas such as the Matsya, Varāha, Padma, and Brahma Purāṇas. These texts not only provide theological significance but also detailed geographic and classificatory information about sacred landscapes. Remarkably, the Purāṇas refer to as many as three and a half crore tīrthas across the Indian subcontinent, underscoring the magnitude and spiritual centrality of pilgrimage in the cultural imagination of ancient India.

As K.M. Munshi aptly observed in his introduction to Studies in the Epics and Purāṇas,

"The Purāṇas occupy a unique position in Indian literature, both sacred and secular. After the Mahābhārata, they have been the main source of inspiration in the life of our people for over 1500 years."

Thus, the Purāṇas are not merely mythological or religious texts—they are dynamic cultural instruments that have shaped and sustained India's sacred geography, ritual practices, and community identities over millennia.

2.1.1 The antiquity and origins of the *Purāṇa*

The antiquity and origins of the Purāṇas remain a subject of scholarly inquiry, as their formation is intricately connected with the evolution of India's sacred literary traditions (Rocher, 1986; Smith, 2007). Though regarded as second only to the Vedas in terms of antiquity and spiritual authority, the Purāṇas themselves assert a divine origin, frequently equating their sanctity with that of the Vedas. Early references to the term *Purāṇa* are found in texts such as the *Atharva-Veda*, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa*, and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. These works describe the Purāṇa as emerging from the breath of the Supreme Being (Mahābhūta or Paramātman) and, in some instances, refer to it as the "Fifth Veda" (Harper, 2022). For instance, the *Atharva-Veda* proclaims that the ṛcs (hymns), sāmans (melodies), chandas (metres), yajus (sacrificial formulae), and the *purāṇa* originated from the *ucchiṣṭa* (residual essence) of a cosmic sacrifice. Similarly, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* aligns the *Vedas*, *Itihāsa*, and *Purāṇa* as emanations of the Supreme Self, reinforcing their integral role in the Vedic cosmological and sacrificial worldview (Feldhaus, 2003).

The narrative tradition of the Purāṇas likely evolved from the *ākhyāna-bhāga* (narrative section) of Vedic sacrificial rites. In particular, *pariplava-ākhyānas*—cyclical stories recited during the *aśvamedha* (horse sacrifice)—served both as ritual components and vehicles of mytho-historical memory (Rocher, 1986; Nath, 2007). The *Bṛhaddevatā* also highlights the importance of recounting the origins of mantras, suggesting a deep-rooted relationship between myth, memory, and ritual in early Vedic practice (Nath, 2001). This connection between mythological narration and sacrificial ritual implies that the Purāṇas were not separate inventions but organically developed from earlier Vedic traditions. The *Purusha Sūkta* of the *Ṛgveda*, which describes the creation of the cosmos through a primordial sacrifice, further supports this association. In this light, the Purāṇas can be understood as vehicles of cultural

memory, emerging from sacrificial liturgies and evolving into comprehensive texts that carried historical, cosmological, and ethical meanings into the classical and medieval Hindu worlds.

2.1.2 Structuring *Purāṇa*

The severe scarcity of reliable historical records renders our understanding of the character and content of ancient Purāṇika works obscure, as none of these texts have survived in their original form (Turner, 1973; V. Nath, 2001). The extant Purāṇas that we possess today have undergone significant interpolations, redactions, and modifications over centuries. This makes it challenging to reconstruct the precise nature of the earliest Purāṇika compositions.

sargaś ca pratisargaś ca vaṁśo manvantarāṇi ca |

vaṁśānucaritaṁ ceti purāṇaṁ pañcalakṣaṇam ||

An important clue to the fundamental structure of the Purāṇas is found in the Amarakosha, a renowned Sanskrit lexicon compiled around the sixth century AD (Hazra, 1958). This lexicon provides an early definition of the *Purāṇa*, which is reiterated in several existing Purāṇika texts. According to this definition, a *Purāṇa* is a literary composition characterized by five key thematic components, known as the *pañcalakṣaṇa* (S.D.Gyani, 1964). As per the definition mentioned in the famous lexicon *Amarakoṣa*, a *Purāṇa* should have Pañcalakṣaṇas [*pañca-lakṣaṇa*], i.e., five characteristics. These five defining features are:

Table 1: five characteristics of *Purāṇa.*

	A *Purāṇa* is that which describes five topics	
1	*sarga*	creation of the universe
2	*pratisarga*	recreation after destruction of the world
3	*vaṃśa*	the order of generations or dynasties of gods and sages
4	*manvantara*	the periods of Manu, i.e., the epochs each of which has a Manu or fore father of human race
5	*vaṃśānucarita*	the history of the dynasties of both the solar and the lunar race

Not only the *Amarakoṣa* but many Purāṇas themselves endorsed the pañcalakṣaṇa definition of the Purāṇas either in exact form or with slight modification. Some of the Purāṇas contain more than what is included in the Pañcalakṣaṇas. On the other hand, some others do not at all treat these subjects, but to compensate this, they treat some other quite different things. Some Purāṇas reveal that these five characteristics are applicable to the *Upapurāṇas*, whereas the Mahāpurāṇas have ten characteristics.

However, many Purāṇas contain many more topics, not limited in even *daśalakṣaṇas*. The *Matsyapurāṇa* fulfills all the pañcalakṣaṇas. Each of the five-fold characteristics is found to be discussed in this *Purāṇa*.

1. *Sarga* (Primary Creation) – Sarga refers to the act of creation, encompassing the formation of various elements and the world. In the Bhāgavatapurāṇa, sarga is described as the subtle creation. It explains how Brahmā created the Lokas, Vedas, and Purāṇas. The sarga section also includes accounts of the creation of gods, demons, plants, rivers, and other beings. It addresses primary creation, including the progenies of Vasus, Rudras, and Kāśyapa, aligning with the lakṣaṇa of sarga within the pañcalakṣaṇas framework. This refers to the original process of cosmic evolution, detailing how the universe emerges from its natural cause, typically associated with the manifestation of fundamental elements and the emergence of cosmic order.

2. *Pratisarga* (Secondary Creation or Re-creation) – Pratisarga denotes the cyclical process of dissolution and renewal of the cosmos, characterized by periodic annihilation and recreation. It pertains to the gross aspects of both mobile and immobile entities within the natural world. The pratisarga section of the Bhāgavatapurāṇa provides detailed accounts of the deities associated with various manvantaras and the progeny of different Manus, elucidating their roles in the cosmic cycles. This describes the cyclical dissolution and recreation of the universe, wherein the world dissolves into its constituent elements at the end of a cosmic epoch (*kalpa*) and is subsequently reconstituted.

3. *Vaṃśa* (Genealogies of Gods and Sages) – Vaṃśa refers to the genealogical lineage of divine beings, sages, and royal dynasties, tracing their origins and succession from Brahmā. This concept encompasses comprehensive accounts of the ancestries of gods, sages, and kings, spanning past, present, and future epochs. In the Matsyapurāṇa, which exemplifies the characteristic of vaṃśa as one of the pañcalakṣaṇas, detailed descriptions are provided of the genealogies of significant cosmic entities such as Soma (the lunar deity), Sūrya (the solar deity), and the Pitṛs (ancestral spirits), along with their associated cults and rituals. These genealogical narratives not only establish the divine and royal lineages but also highlight their roles in the cosmological and societal order, underscoring the interconnectedness of divine and human realms within the Paurāṇik framework. This section deals with the lineage and descent of celestial beings, sages, and other divine entities, providing a cosmic hierarchy that establishes the divine and semi-divine order of the universe.

4. *Manvantara* (Cosmic Cycles and Ages of Manus) – Manvantara refers to an extensive period of time named after Manu, the progenitor of mankind. The dynastic accounts in the *Matsya Purāṇa* encompass the genealogies of notable royal lineages such as the Yadu, Bṛṣṇi, Turvasu, Druhya, and Anu dynasties. These accounts also detail the familial lineages of eminent sages, including Bhṛgu, Aṅgirā, Atri, Viśvāmitra, Kāśyapa, Vaśiṣṭha, Parāśara, and Agastya, among others. This component explains the different ages of the world, each ruled by a Manu, the progenitor of mankind. These cycles elaborate on governance, cosmic order, and the moral framework governing the universe across vast epochs.

5. *Vaṃśānucarita* (Royal Genealogies and Dynastic Histories) – Vaṃśānucarita denotes the dynastic narratives that chronicle the histories of both early and later royal lineages. These accounts trace the genealogical origins of kings to solar and lunar progenitors, thereby giving rise to the Sūryavaṃśa (Solar Dynasty) and Candravaṃśa (Lunar

Dynasty), respectively. Additionally, they encompass the royal lineages of the Kali Yuga. The Matsya Purāṇa's section on vaṃśānucarita offers detailed information on the succession of dynasties and monarchs, ranging from Bṛhadratha in the 6th century BCE to the rise of the Gupta Empire in 319 AD. This encompasses detailed accounts of various royal lineages, especially those connected with significant historical and mythological figures, including the Solar (*Sūrya-vaṃśa*) and Lunar (*Chandra-vaṃśa*) dynasties.

The foundations of these thematic structures can be traced to ancient forms of storytelling and oral traditions. The *Vāyu Purāṇa*, *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* explicitly state that the earliest Purāṇika compilations were derived from *ākhyānas* (narrative tales), *upākhyānas* (anecdotal expansions), *gāthās* (metrical verses and proverbial songs), and *kalpoktis* (sayings passed down through generations) [1]. These various literary forms were systematized and compiled by Sage *Vyāsa*, who is traditionally credited with organizing the original *Purāṇa Saṁhitā*.

The Purāṇas, far from being mere collections of myths and legends, are structured and formal digests that encapsulate a comprehensive vision of cosmic, genealogical, and ethical order. Through frameworks like the *pañcalakṣaṇa*—which includes sarga (creation), pratisarga (dissolution and re-creation), vaṃśa (genealogy), manvantara (cosmic cycles), and vaṃśānucarita (dynastic histories)—they systematically document the evolution of the universe, the succession of Manus, and the continuity of dynasties from mythical to historical times. This structural rigor positions the Purāṇas as encyclopaedic repositories of traditional knowledge, serving both pedagogical and civilizational functions across generations.

2.1.2.1 *Revisiting Puran*

The Purāṇas reveals them not merely as religious texts but as multidimensional repositories of India's civilizational knowledge, embodying spiritual, philosophical, historical, and cultural wisdom. Described by scholars such as Winternitz (1927) and Pusalkar (1950) as "encyclopaedias" of Indian life, the Purāṇas integrate cosmology, mythology, geography, and social philosophy into a continuous intellectual tradition. Their dynamic nature—marked by centuries of composition, redaction, and regional adaptation—reflects a living textual ecosystem rather than a fixed corpus (Wilson, 1840; Kane, 1958; O'Flaherty, 1975). Far from being mythic fables, they preserve valuable historical and genealogical records that illuminate India's dynastic and cultural evolution (Pargiter, 1913; Vincent Smith, 1908). Moreover, through the concept of tīrtha and localized Sthalapurāṇas, they anchor the sacred within geography, transforming the Indian landscape into a network of spiritual and cultural meaning (Skanda Purāṇa; Feldhaus, 2003). Thus, the Purāṇas emerge as dynamic, layered, and dialogic texts—simultaneously repositories of knowledge, records of history, and living narratives of sacred tradition.

[1] Vāyu, Matsya, Padma, Agni, and Brahma Purāṇas, ed. under the Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, Ānandāśrama Press, Pune.
Brahmāṇḍa, Kūrma, Vāmana, Nāradiya, Skanda, and Bhaviṣya Purāṇas, ed. by Śrīvenkaṭeśvara Steam Press, Bombay.
Mārkaṇḍeya, Viṣṇu, Liṅga, and Brahmavaivarta Purāṇas, ed. by Jīvānanda Vidyāsāgara, Vaiṣṇava Press, Calcutta.

Table 2: Revisiting Paurāṇika literature (Source: Author)

Section	Core Idea	Key Points / Description	Scholarly Citations
Purāṇas as Encyclopaedia of Indian Knowledge Systems	Purāṇas as repositories of Indian civilization and holistic knowledge.	- Encapsulate religious, philosophical, social, historical, and political knowledge. - Function as "encyclopaedias" of ancient Indian civilization. - Bridge the Vedic and classical periods. - Illuminate religion, philosophy, folklore, linguistics, and cultural history.	Winternitz (1927); H.H. Wilson (1840); F.E. Pargiter (1913); A.D. Pusalkar (1950)
Purāṇas as Dynamic Texts and Their Dating	Purāṇas as evolving, multi-layered texts defying fixed chronology.	- Evolved from pañcalakṣaṇa to encyclopaedic works. - Reflect continuous recasting and regional adaptation. - Western scholars dated them late (post-Buddhist or medieval). - Indian scholars considered them ancient or Vedic. - Exhibit interpolation, expansion, and contraction across centuries. - Should be viewed as *living traditions*, not static scriptures.	Bentley (1799); H.H. Wilson (1840); Kennedy (1902); S.G. Kantawala (1949); Hazra (1940); P.V. Kane (1958); Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (1975); Bhandarkar (1913)
Purāṇas as Historical Sources	Purāṇas as repositories of dynastic and cultural memory.	- Contain genealogies (vaṁśānucarita) of Sūryavaṃśa and Candravaṃśa. - Reflect ancient *Kṣatriya literature* later redacted by Brahmins. - Historical data corroborated by inscriptions and numismatics. - Offer cyclical yet meaningful temporal historiography. - Important secondary sources for reconstructing Indian antiquity.	Vincent Smith (1908); F.E. Pargiter (1913); R. Morton Smith (1973); A.L. Basham (1954); D.D. Kosambi (1965); Ferdinand Bork (1920)
Tīrtha in Purāṇas: Sthalapurāṇas and Sacred Geography	Tīrtha as sacred geography and spiritual transformation.	- Tīrthayātrā as moral and spiritual purification. - Sthalapurāṇas localize cosmic myths into regional geographies. - Skanda Purāṇa and others describe rivers, lakes, forests, and towns as tīrthas.- Reflect growth of	Mahābhārata; Skanda Purāṇa; Bharati (1963); P.V. Kane (1958); Anne Feldhaus (2003); Glushkova (2003); Coleman (1995)

		religious tourism and temple economies post-4th century CE. - Weave geography, theology, and community memory into sacred landscapes.	

2.2 Understanding *Tīrtha*

In the Paurāṇik worldview, *Tīrtha*—literally meaning "a crossing" (from *tṛ*, to cross)—signifies a sacred threshold where the divine and the earthly converge, offering *mokṣa* (liberation) and *puṇya* (spiritual merit) to devotees (Dundes, 1965). The *Skanda Purāṇa*, especially its *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*, provides the most detailed exposition of *Tīrtha Māhātmya*, describing Varanasi's sacred geography—its rivers, temples, and water bodies—as dynamic interfaces of spirituality, ecology, and urban life (Dubey, 2000; Dange, 1986). The *Sthalapurāṇas* further localize these narratives, mapping the transformation and continuity of sacred landscapes through regional mythologies.

The Purāṇas portray *tīrthayātrā* not merely as physical travel but as a moral and spiritual journey rooted in purity, discipline, and self-realization (Padma Purāṇa; Devī Bhāgavata). The *Brahma Purāṇa* classifies *tīrthas* into divine, demonic, sage-originated, and human-made, emphasizing their cyclical sanctity across *yugas*. Yet, as the texts assert, true sanctification arises from inner purity rather than ritual formality. In *Kāśī*, pilgrimage is both a geographic and metaphysical realignment with cosmic order (Singh R.P., 2015). From the 4th century CE onward, the *tīrtha* tradition expanded alongside temple economies and religious mobility (Nath, 2000; Glushkova, 2003). Pilgrimage thus evolved into a form of cultural continuity—linking nature, devotion, and community within India's sacred geography. Modern shifts have reinterpreted many *tīrthas* into hybrid pilgrimage-tourism centres like Rishikesh and Haridwar, reflecting changing socio-economic dynamics while retaining spiritual cores (Shinde, 2003).

The Purāṇas, as mythic-historical texts, are also instruments of *place-making*—embedding sacredness through narrative, ritual, and collective memory (Eck, 1998; Doniger, 1995). Through *Tīrtha Māhātmya* literature, ordinary landscapes become storied geographies charged with divine presence. Myth functions here as epistemology—a medium through which Indic cosmology, ecology, and ethics are articulated (Coomaraswamy, 1933; Aurobindo, 1997).

In essence, the Purāṇas present *tīrtha* as a dynamic living landscape—a synthesis of narrative, ritual, and memory where geography becomes theology. Revisiting these texts allows us to understand *tīrtha* not as static heritage but as a continuing process of cultural renewal, embodying the civilizational wisdom of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS).

2.3 Introduction to Pilgrimage and Indian Pilgrimage Towns

Pilgrimage, as considered in the Indian subcontinent, is the oldest form of the motivated journey undertaken to a religious and sacred place (Singh R. P., 2009), *Tīrtha*. Sacred, the divine act of nature, paths, riverbanks, and sacred landscapes, regarded as '*pratyaksh dev*'- 'Prima facie of Divine,' and the journey so traveled is considered *Tīrtha yātrā* (Bhardwaj, 1973; Feldhaus, 1990). The essence of this faithscape is glorified in the epigraphs of the traditional knowledge systems and composed as *Tīrtha mahatma* and the *sthal puranas*. Pilgrimage to such *Tīrtha* destinations is a widespread practice since the Vedic ages, as got mentioned in

Rigveda (Bharati, 1963). While such travels were a difficult task with limited resources; their purpose and benefits established their motivation. Pilgrimage, trade, or journey, amusement/tourism, can have multiple names based on their purpose of movement (Coleman, 1995). However, such connotations were not as sharp reference in their meanings, as they are in present days (Dubey, 2000). Around the time the Puranas were written, the marketing of locations based on their *Tīrtha* status rose to the forefront.

The Purāṇas, as dynamic repositories of India's cultural and spatial imagination, serve as foundational resources for understanding the *tīrtha*-centric formation of pilgrimage towns. They not only document mythic geographies and ritual practices but also encode principles of place-making that integrate ecology, cosmology, and community life. Within these texts—particularly the *Skanda*, *Padma*, and *Brahma Purāṇas*—the concept of *tīrtha* transcends its literal meaning of "a crossing place" to represent a sacred urban order where geography becomes theology. By situating rivers, mountains, forests, and settlements within divine narratives, the Purāṇas shaped enduring models of urban sacredness that continue to inform India's heritage towns such as Kāśī, Puri, and Madurai. The following table synthesizes key scholarly and textual sources that examine pilgrimage, heritage, and *tīrtha*-based place-making, providing a comprehensive framework for interpreting the Paurāṇik foundations of Indian pilgrimage urbanism.

Table 3 Literature Review on Pilgrimage, Urbanism, and Tīrtha in Paurāṇik and Heritage Contexts.:

Theme / Focus	Key Idea / Contribution	Refrences
Heritage and Urban Development	Heritage conservation and urban growth are not conflicting but complementary dimensions of sustainable transformation; integrated management frameworks are needed.	Araoz (2013); Pereira Roders & Van Oers (2014); Bandarin & Van Oers (2012); Fairclough et al. (2008); Getty Conservation Institute (2010)
Integrated Heritage Management	Advocates a holistic definition of heritage—encompassing built, natural, and living dimensions—requiring participatory governance and clear policy frameworks.	Feilden (1994); National Commission on Urbanization (1988)
Tīrthayātrā (Pilgrimage) as Spatial and Cultural Practice	Pilgrimage (*tīrthayātrā*) embodies spatial, ecological, and spiritual interaction with sacred landscapes—comprising path, riverbed, site, and divine territory.	Singh et al. (2001)
Modern Transformations in Pilgrimage	Pilgrimage has evolved into a hybrid of spiritual and recreational tourism shaped by improved mobility and commercialization.	Shinde (2003)
Urban Heritage in Pilgrim Cities	Indian temple towns face urban pressures—overcrowding, infrastructural strain, and heritage loss—requiring integrated planning to maintain spiritual and cultural identity.	Alley (2000); Heitzman (1987, 1991); Michell (1993); Acharya (1946); Snodgrass (1992)

Sacred Geometry and Urban Morphology	Temple towns follow cosmic mandala geometry linking temple and town; sacred urbanism integrates ritual, political, and economic functions.	Michell (1993); Acharya (1946); Eliade (1961); Wheatley (1969); Champakalakshmi (1993)
Geddes and Spiritual Urbanism	Patrick Geddes recognized the synthesis of sacred and civic rhythms in Indian cities, emphasizing human-centred and heritage-sensitive planning.	Geddes, as discussed in Wheatley (1969) and Michell (1993)
Concept of Tīrtha in Vedic and Paurāṇik Literature	*Tīrtha* ("crossing place") symbolizes purification and divine descent—rooted in Vedic cosmography and later expanded in Paurāṇik literature.	Ṛgveda; Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa; Haigh (2011); Jacobsen (2012)
Paurāṇik Expansion of Sacred Geography	*Skanda*, *Padma*, and *Brahma Purāṇas* extend the *Tīrtha Māhātmya* genre, linking divine acts with localized sacred landscapes.	Dubey (2000); Dange (1986); Haigh (2011); Jacobsen (2012)
Classification of Tīrthas	Fourfold typology—divine, demonic, sage-originated, and human-made—illustrates the layered creation of sacred space.	*Brahma Purāṇa*; Haigh (2011)
Tīrtha as Place-Making Construct	*Tīrthas* function as cultural scripts where mythology, ecology, and ritual converge—creating sacred topographies and sustaining collective memory.	Eck (1998); Doniger (1995); Coomaraswamy (1933); Aurobindo (1997)

2.3.1 Pilgrimage and urban interpretations: Tīrtha-centric Urbanism

In contemporary discourse, heritage preservation and urban development are often perceived as conflicting goals; yet scholars emphasize their complementarity in achieving sustainable urban transformation (Araoz, 2013; Pereira Roders & Van Oers, 2014). While heritage resists unregulated urban growth, development itself can threaten cultural continuity (Bandarin & Van Oers, 2012). Hence, integrating both within a shared urban framework is now central to global and national heritage policies.

In India, Tīrthayātrā—pilgrimage—embodies this balance between culture, space, and spirituality. Defined as a sacred journey comprising the path, riverbed, site, and territory linked to divine presence (Singh et al., 2001), pilgrimage reflects human engagement with natural landscapes such as rivers, hills, and forests. Traditionally rooted in devotion, it now increasingly overlaps with tourism, shaped by modern mobility and leisure-driven motivations (Shinde, 2003). This evolution illustrates how sacred geographies adapt while sustaining their spiritual and communal significance.

Recognizing this, the National Commission on Urbanization (1988) highlighted the need to conserve urban heritage that nurtures social, cultural, and spiritual wellbeing. An inclusive approach—embracing tangible, natural, and living heritage—is essential for aligning

conservation with sustainable urban growth (Feilden, 1994). Such integration demands participatory governance and adaptive policies that empower local communities as custodians of their sacred urban landscapes.

2.3.1.1 Concept of Tīrtha-centric Urbanism

Based on this understanding, the thesis defines Tīrtha-centric urbanism as an analytical and interpretive approach to understanding the formation, organization, continuity, and transformation of pilgrimage settlements through the organising principle of Tīrtha.

It does not refer simply to planning a city around temples or sacred monuments. Rather, it examines how Tīrtha-related relationships connect:

- sacred sites and routes;
- settlement structure and morphology;
- water bodies and natural landscape;
- ritual and community practices;
- cultural memory and place identity; and
- contemporary patterns of urban transformation.

Thus, Tīrtha-centric urbanism is positioned in this thesis as a socio-spatial framework rather than a purely religious or philosophical concept. It provides a means of analysing how sacred meaning and associated practices have historically influenced the spatial organization and cultural continuity of pilgrimage settlements.

The concept is not proposed as a replacement for contemporary urban planning, heritage conservation, or statutory development mechanisms. Rather, it is proposed as a context-sensitive complementary framework through which the cultural and socio-spatial relationships associated with Tīrtha can be recognized within contemporary planning and development processes.

Accordingly, the present research uses Tīrtha-centric urbanism as its central conceptual thread, with Paurāṇika knowledge providing the cultural and textual basis, field investigation providing empirical understanding, and Delphi and ISM providing validation and structural analysis. This enables the research to move from a descriptive understanding of sacred places towards an analytical examination of the relationships that constitute and sustain the Tīrtha-centric character of pilgrimage settlements.

Operationally, therefore, Tīrtha-centric urbanism in this thesis refers to the study of how Tīrtha-related sacred, spatial, ecological, social, and cultural relationships contribute to the formation and continuity of pilgrimage settlements, and how these relationships may be considered in their contemporary development.

2.3.1.2 Pilgrimage to Place-Making: Tīrtha in the Purāṇas

India’s pilgrim cities embody the convergence of faith, culture, and urbanism. Evolving from small temple settlements, they now face pressures of overcrowding, infrastructural strain, and heritage loss due to rapid urbanization (Alley, 2000). Historically, these cities were structured on sacred geometries—mandalas—with temple cores defining spatial and social

order (Michell, 1993; Acharya, 1946). As Geddes and Eliade (1961) observed, cities like Madurai, Puri, and Tirupati integrate ritual rhythm, political authority, and community life, exemplifying how spirituality once guided urban form and civic identity.

In the Vedic and Paurāṇik imagination, tīrtha—literally "a crossing place"—signifies both spiritual transition and sacred geography. The Ṛgveda and Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa describe tīrtha as loci of purification, divine acts, and cosmic descent, while the Skanda and Padma Purāṇas expand them into networks of sacred places through Tīrtha Māhātmya narratives (Haigh, 2011; Jacobsen, 2012).

The Brahma Purāṇa classifies tīrthas into divine, demonic, sage-originated, and human-made, reflecting both divine agency and community participation. Each pilgrimage reenacts the primordial act of crossing—transforming geography into sacred topography. Thus, the tīrtha becomes a cultural and cosmological construct, where mythology, ritual, and ecology converge, shaping India's enduring sacred urbanism and its living tradition of spiritual place-making.

2.3.2 First Research Objective

The exploration of the three aforementioned sections (2.1 to 2.3) can be assimilated and re-expressed in the following research concerns and subsequent first objective of the research.

Despite rapid modernization and shifting urban paradigms, the sacred institution of tīrtha and the tradition of pilgrimage remain foundational to the spatial, cultural, and spiritual organization of Indian cities—especially pilgrimage towns. However, the modern treatment of pilgrimage spaces within urban discourse often divorces them from their indigenous epistemologies. The Paurāṇik corpus, particularly the genre of *Tīrtha Māhātmya* and *Sthalapurāṇa* literature, offers a rich textual tradition that encodes not only mythological and theological narratives but also place-making frameworks rooted in sacred geography, environmental ethics, ritual cycles, and community memory. The idea of *tīrtha*, understood through these layered lenses, transcends the physical and becomes a cultural-symbolic ecosystem.

While classical philological traditions and modern heritage discourses have engaged with the content of Purāṇas either as myth, history, or theology, their role in structuring spatial identity, memory, and ritual geography of Indian pilgrimage towns remains under-theorized—especially in relation to contemporary challenges of urban development, tourism commodification, and the erosion of intangible heritage. The Paurāṇika narratives of tīrthas thus provide a critical yet overlooked epistemic lens to interpret how sacred urbanism evolves, sustains, and negotiates with modernity.

2.3.2.1 *First Research Objective*

"To investigate the epistemological evolution of Purana and Puranika Tīrtha and position the Tīrtha-Centric place-making of Indian pilgrimage towns."- to objective is examine the tīrtha-centric conceptualization of space and place-making in Indian pilgrimage towns through the epistemological evolution of Paurāṇik literature, with a focus on integrating narrative transmission, ritual practice, and collective memory as instruments of sacred urban sustainability, (explained in detail in section 2.6).

This objective aims to:

Explore how the concept of *tīrtha*—as described in Purāṇas—functions as a spatial, metaphysical, and ecological construct.

Analyze how *Tīrtha Māhātmya* and *Sthalapurāṇa* narratives contributed to the spatial design, ritual cycles, and socio-cultural resilience of pilgrimage towns like Kāśī.

Investigate and establish the performative and mnemonic role of pilgrimage practices in reinforcing sacred geography and communal identity.

Reconstruct a place-making framework based on Paurāṇik epistemology that can inform modern heritage management and urban policy for religious towns.

2.4 Focus Study: Varanasi

Kāśī—known today as Vārāṇasī or Banaras—is among the world's oldest living cities and the radiant heart of India's spiritual heritage. Cradled on a crescent ridge beside the Ganga and flanked by the rivers Varana and Asī, it forms a divine geography celebrated as the "city of light." The *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa* personifies these rivers as cosmic guardians—Varanā dispelling ignorance and Asī cutting bondage—while the *Vāmana Purāṇa* describes them as emanations of the cosmic Puruṣa, sanctifying the land they enclose.

Over time, Kāśī has been venerated by many names—*Avimukta*, *Ānandakānana*, and *Mahāśmaśāna*—each revealing its layered sacred essence. Rooted in *kaś* (to shine), the name Kāśī embodies its role as a luminous meeting of the material and spiritual realms, where liberation (*mokṣa*) is assured.

Historically, Kāśī was a major *Mahājanapada* and a flourishing cultural and commercial hub, famed for its fine textiles noted by Patañjali. Nearby Sarnath marks the Buddha's first sermon, linking Kāśī to both Buddhist and Jain traditions. Astronomically, Varāhamihira situated it in the sacred *Pūrvadeśa* under auspicious constellations, aligning heaven and earth.

Built upon a resilient limestone ridge, Kāśī has endured through ages, nurturing a pluralistic landscape of thousands of temples, mosques, and learning centers. Its sacredness pervades literature, art, and philosophy—from Purāṇas and epics to *Bhakti* poetry—embodying what Richard Lannoy called "a sacred city dreamed into existence."

Today, Varanasi harmonizes the ancient and the modern: ghats lit by oil lamps and smartphones alike. To live in Kāśī is to dwell between the temporal and eternal—a living *tīrtha*, a radiant text of light, and the enduring soul of India's sacred imagination.

2.4.1 Kāśī in purana and itihas traditions

The study of Kāśī (Vārāṇasī/Banāras) as a *tīrtha-centric* urban phenomenon draws upon a rich corpus of Purāṇika, Itihāsa, classical, and archaeological sources. These textual, philosophical, and empirical records—ranging from the *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Śiva Purāṇa* to Varāhamihira's *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* and Gupta inscriptions—collectively illuminate Kāśī's multilayered identity as a metaphysical light, political capital, and sacred geography. The following table compiles major primary and secondary references with interpretive observations that contextualize Kāśī's etymology, cosmological symbolism, historical evolution, and civilizational continuity.

Table 4: Literature Review on Kāśī: Textual, Historical, and Civilizational Perspectives.

S. No.	Source	Theme / Context	Key Verse / Citation	Major Findings / Observations
1	*Skanda Purāṇa* (IV.26.67; 4.2.53). (1928–1935). Ed. Kṛṣṇaprasāda Bhaṭṭa. Bombay: Venkateshvara Press.	Etymology and metaphysical foundation of Kāśī.	"Yatra Śivaḥ svatejasa prakāśate tasmāt Kāśī iti smṛtā."	Derives the name Kāśī from Śiva's radiant presence (*tejas*), symbolizing illumination and liberation (*mokṣa*). Establishes Kāśī as a luminous *tīrtha* dissolving *saṃsāra*.
2	*Vāmana Purāṇa* (Ch. 32). (1901). Bombay: Ānandāśrama Saṃskṛta Series.	Cosmological symbolism of Varana and Asī rivers.	—	Describes the rivers as emanations of the cosmic *Puruṣa*, marking Kāśī as a divine threshold surpassing heaven and the netherworld.
3	*Śiva Purāṇa* (1.25). (1910). Calcutta: Śrī Candra Press.	Kāśī as *Avimukta* (never forsaken by Śiva).	—	Affirms Kāśī's permanence as Śiva's abode among the *Sapta Mokṣapurīs*, where death grants *mokṣa*.
4	Vettam Mani. (1975). *Puranic Encyclopaedia.* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.	Compilation of Purāṇika references and tīrtha-māhātmya.	—	Summarizes Kāśī's cosmic and ritual geography, linking Paurāṇik myth with cultural-historical continuity.
5	*Mahābhārata* (VI.10.38; Bhīṣma Parva, Ch. 106). (1890 Ed.).	Kāśī as Janapada and dynastic polity.	Mentions kings of Kāśī and princesses Ambā, Ambikā, Ambālikā.	Demonstrates Kāśī's role as a political power and royal lineage embedded in *Itihāsa* tradition.
6	*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (9.17.4). (1916 Ed.).	Genealogy and royal descent of Kāśī.	"Kāśya sutaḥ Kāśīḥ tasya Rāṣṭraḥ putra abhavat."	Illustrates divine kingship and spiritual inheritance within Kāśī's dynastic narratives.

7	*Vāyu Purāṇa* (Ch. 57). (1910 Ed.).	Mythic lineage and ritual sanctity.	—	Reinforces Kāśī's ancient genealogies and divine association with Rudrākṣa traditions.
8	*Harivaṃśa Purāṇa* (Ch. 2–3). (1897 Ed.).	Kṛṣṇa-Pauṇḍraka narrative.	—	Depicts Viṣṇu's *Sudarśana Cakra* purifying Kāśī; represents divine correction and cosmic renewal.
9	Somadeva. (11th c.). *Kathāsaritsāgara* (Ch. 19). Trans. C. H. Tawney (1880).	Kāśī in Sanskrit *Kāvya* and political imagination.	—	King Brahmadatta's submission to Udayana reflects Kāśī's literary portrayal as a strategic and cultural power.
10	Mukundarāma Kavikankan. (17th c.). *Chandikāvya.* Calcutta: University Press.	Kāśī in regional Bengali poetic tradition.	—	Kāśī appears as a renowned trade city, symbolizing sacred prestige and mercantile pride in Gangaic networks.
11	Varāhamihira. (6th c.). *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* (Ch. 14). Tr. Hultzsch (1884).	Jyotiṣa and cosmographic mapping.	—	Places Kāśī within *Pūrvadeśa* under constellations Ārdrā–Punarvasu–Puṣya, linking geography to cosmic order.
12	*Nāṭyaśāstra* (Ch. 23). Trans. M. Ghosh (1951).	Ethnographic representation in drama.	—	Depicts Kāśī tribes as *asita* (brown) in color; early sign of regional identity in classical dramaturgy.
13	Yāska. (c. 7th BCE). *Nirukta.* Trans. L. Sarma (1928).	Linguistic analysis of "Kāśī" from root *kaś* ("to shine").	—	Interprets Kāśī as "radiant city," aligning language, symbolism, and metaphysical lumi

2.4.2 Brief Introduction to Kāśī Khaṇḍa of the Skanda Purāṇa

The Purāṇas, a vital category of Sanskrit literature, are eighteen in number and constitute one of the most profound mediums for mythological, cosmological, and spiritual knowledge in Hindu tradition. Among these, the Skanda Purāṇa is the largest, encompassing over 81,000 verses, and is chiefly dedicated to the glory of Lord Śiva. It derives its name from *Skanda*

(*Kārttikeya*), the son of Śiva and *Pārvatī*, who holds particular reverence in South India under names like Murugan, Kandan, and Āru Muka Bhagavān.

The Skanda Purāṇa is organized into seven major Khaṇḍas (sections):

- *Maheshvara Khaṇḍa*
- *Vaiṣṇava Khaṇḍa*
- *Brahma Khaṇḍa*
- *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*
- *Āvantya Khaṇḍa*
- *Nāgara Khaṇḍa*
- *Prabhāsa Khaṇḍa*

Among them, *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*, comprising over 13,000 verses across 100 chapters, is a detailed spiritual and geographical glorification (*māhātmya*) of the sacred city of Kāśī (Vārāṇasī). It is presented as a divine dialogue between Lord *Kārttikeya* and Sage *Agastya*, originally narrated by Sage Vyāsa in the Dvāpara Yuga, though the events it recounts are said to have taken place in the Satya Yuga. As per tradition, oral transmission preserved these narratives for centuries before being committed to writing, possibly as early as the 12th century AD, with textual reverence evident by the 14th century, as noted by scholars like Pt. Kuber Nath Sukul.

2.4.2.1 *Narrative Structure and Theological Significance*

The *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* opens with a powerful legend involving Sage Nārada, Vindhya mountain, and the consequential intervention by Sage Agastya. When Vindhya began growing in height out of rivalry with Mount Meru, it disrupted the solar orbit, leading to global chaos. Upon the plea of the gods, Sage Agastya, residing in Kāśī, intervened and restrained Vindhya by instructing it to stay bowed until his return. Agastya then departed, knowing he would not return in that lifetime. This story not only reflects the cosmological centrality of Kāśī but also symbolically establishes its supremacy among sacred places.

On his journey southward, Agastya reaches Kolhāpur, where Goddess Mahālakṣmī reveals to him that he would be reborn as Vyāsa in a future Dvāpara Yuga, thereby contributing to the Vedas and Purāṇas. She directs him to Śrī Śaila, the abode of Kārttikeya, who ultimately reveals the profound sanctity of Kāśī.

Kārttikeya, despite his divine powers, confesses that even he has not attained access to Kāśī, underlining that entry into Kāśī requires the grace of Lord Śiva alone. He extols Kāśī as the ultimate spiritual destination—one that transcends ordinary pilgrimages and grants liberation (mokṣa) by mere residence or remembrance.

2.4.2.2 *Unique Spiritual Geography of Kāśī*

In contrast to other tīrthas (pilgrimage sites) like Prayāga, Kurukṣetra, and Badrinātha, which also bestow mokṣa, Kāśī is considered incomparable. The Kāśī Khaṇḍa offers an encyclopedic account of its temples, deities, legends, rivers, ghāṭs, and tīrthas, grounding them in cosmology and dharma. The section also elaborates on Jangam Tīrtha (mobile holy presence such as sages), Sthāvara Tīrtha (fixed sacred places like Kāśī, Kailāsa), and Mānasa Tīrtha (mental states of purity like truth, compassion), showcasing a sophisticated typology of pilgrimage as found in the Skanda Purāṇa itself.

a) Composition and Evolution of the Skanda Purāṇa

Modern scholarship suggests that the core text of the Skanda Purāṇa was likely composed by the 8th century AD, with critical manuscript evidence found in Nepal (e.g., a palm-leaf manuscript dated to ca. 810 AD). However, due to centuries of accretions and interpolations, especially post-12th century, numerous khaṇḍas have variant recensions. Some like the Reva Khaṇḍa and Ambikā Khaṇḍa are thought to be later additions.

According to critical editions and paleographic analysis by scholars such as Hans Bakker, R. Adriaensen, and Yuko Yokochi, the Kāśī Khaṇḍa attained its present form around the 13th century AD. Nevertheless, its content suggests a much older oral tradition rooted in the classical Paurāṇika worldview.

b) Structure and Mahātmya Tradition

The Kāśī Khaṇḍa is bifurcated into two segments:

- Pūrvārdha (first 50 chapters)
- Uttarārdha (last 50 chapters)

Each chapter is styled as Mahātmya—a sacred glorification embedded with pilgrimage instructions, hymns, ethical teachings, temple lore, and esoteric cosmography. It systematically lays out the sacred cartography of Kāśī, aligning physical landmarks with mythological and spiritual meaning.

The Kāśī Khaṇḍa of the Skanda Purāṇa stands as a cultural, spiritual, and textual cornerstone of the Hindu sacred geography tradition. It not only sanctifies Kāśī as the epicenter of spiritual liberation but also reflects deeper narratives of devotion, cosmic balance, and divine grace. Through layered storytelling and theological depth, it has preserved and shaped the urban religious fabric of Vārāṇasī, sustaining its identity as Avimukta, the place never forsaken by Śiva.

2.4.3 Second Research Objective

The exploration of the aforementioned subsections (2.4.1 to 2.4.6) can be assimilated and re-expressed in the following research concerns and a subsequent research objective.

The sacred city of Kāśī, variously known as Vārāṇasī or Banaras, stands as one of the oldest living urban centres in the world, uniquely positioned at the intersection of mythology, cosmology, pilgrimage, and urban development. Its identity as a Paurāṇika Tīrtha is deeply entrenched in the Skanda Purāṇa's Kāśīkhaṇḍa and other classical and regional texts, which project the city as a metaphysical realm rather than merely a geographic or political entity. Despite changes in geopolitical regimes, socio-economic structures, and urban morphology, Kāśī retains a core spatial and spiritual character shaped by its tīrtha-centric sacred geography, ritual economy, and narrative memory systems. This calls for a reinterpretation of Kāśī not merely as a city, but as an evolving civilizational construct grounded in Purāṇika epistemology.

2.4.3.1 *Second Research Objective*

To explore Kāśī (Varanasi) as a Paurāṇika Tīrtha and investigate its tīrtha-centric urban system through an integrative framework of sacred geography, textual narrative, and spatial continuity.

This objective is further divided into the following interrelated research sub-tasks:

To Revisit Historic Varanasi (Section 5.1): Analyze the material and textual history of Kāśī through archaeological, epigraphic, and classical literary sources to contextualize its early urban development and dynastic legacy within the broader Indian civilizational timeline.

To Investigate the Tīrtha-Centric Paurāṇika Construct of Varanasi (Section 5.2): Examine the narrative foundations of Kāśī as a sacred geography using Skanda Purāṇa (Kāśīkhaṇḍa), Śiva Purāṇa, Mahābhārata, and other sources to identify the theological, ecological, and ritual components that shaped the city's spatial identity and urban ethos.

To Reinterpret Varanasi Tīrtha (Section 5.3): Reconstruct the living experience of Kāśī as a tīrtha through community memory, pilgrimage practices, and present-day urban interactions, with an emphasis on sustainable heritage development, metaphysical symbolism, and the spiritual logic of the city's spatial organization.

2.5 Heritage Contestation

The contemporary trajectory of urban development in India, especially in its historic pilgrimage towns, is increasingly shaped by population growth, economic expansion, and an insufficient institutional and legal framework for heritage conservation. These towns—repositories of social, cultural, architectural, and spiritual heritage—are witnessing a progressive erosion of their historic urban fabric. While cities adapt to the demands of modern stakeholders through evolving streetscapes and built environments, the critical role of heritage in shaping sustainable urbanization is often overlooked.

Urbanization, projected to encompass 69% of the global population by 2050 according to the UN (2017), presents a paradox. While it offers avenues for agglomerated growth and infrastructure expansion, it simultaneously threatens the integrity of heritage areas that define the identity and cultural continuity of Indian cities. Pilgrimage towns, in particular, face acute development pressures—rising demands for housing, deteriorating infrastructure, and socio-cultural shifts—placing their unique character under constant strain. Rapid transitions often result in irreversible alterations to sacred precincts, undermining their historical and spiritual significance.

Despite the economic potential embedded in heritage—particularly through tourism, which significantly contributes to India's GDP and employment—heritage is largely treated as a passive backdrop rather than a guiding force in urban policy. Initiatives such as urban renewal and restoration have been limited in scope and effectiveness, primarily confined to high-profile or UNESCO-designated sites. In many instances, heritage structures are replaced by standardized commercial developments that prioritize short-term economic gains over cultural authenticity and integrity.

The consequences of such an approach are evident: loss of traditional practices, dilution of sacred landscapes, and weakening of community identity and belonging. Pilgrimage towns, once centers of spiritual and communal life, are increasingly reduced to market-driven urban zones. This calls for a paradigm shift in urban development and policy making—one that recognizes heritage not as an obstacle to development, but as a living framework vital for inclusive, resilient, and contextually grounded city planning.

2.5.1 The Evolving Heritagescape of Varanasi: The Smart City Context

Varanasi, one of the world's oldest living cities, represents a continuously evolving sacred landscape shaped by centuries of cultural, political, and religious transformations. Its

heritagescape—comprising temples, ghats, monasteries, and ritual networks—embodies a living intersection of Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, and colonial influences (Desai, 2017; Singh, 2009). Contemporary urban schemes such as the Smart City Mission and HRIDAY attempt to merge modernization with heritage preservation but have generated tensions between spatial renewal and cultural continuity. Projects like the Kāśī Vishwanath Corridor reveal contestations where decongestion and beautification often lead to displacement and loss of lived heritage. Studies show that fragmented governance, unplanned expansion, and weak heritage zoning threaten the city's unique identity. To sustain Varanasi's sacred urban fabric, future planning must integrate cultural values, local livelihoods, and ecological balance—viewing heritage not as a static relic but as a living framework for inclusive, resilient urban development.

2.5.2 Third Research Objective

The exploration in the three aforementioned subsections (2.5.1 to 2.5.3) can be assimilated and re-expressed in the following research concerns and a subsequent research Objective.

The evolving landscape approach to heritage management, as exemplified by UNESCO's Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) framework and other supranational instruments, raises several critical research concerns when applied to culturally layered and sacred cities like Varanasi. Foremost among these is the translational gap between global policy frameworks and their practical integration into subnational planning contexts. While frameworks like HUL advocate for holistic and integrated management, their adaptation at the city level often suffers due to institutional silos and lack of interdisciplinary convergence. There is a notable fragmentation between urban and heritage planning, with heritage policies frequently marginalized in broader development agendas. This is further complicated by the challenges of multilevel governance, where heritage policies operate simultaneously across supranational, national, and local levels, often without coherence or coordination.

Another pressing concern is the absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the real-world impact of these global frameworks. The HUL Recommendation, despite its widespread endorsement, lacks robust data on its effectiveness in diverse cultural contexts, making its outcomes difficult to quantify or compare. Moreover, the landscape approach, though holistic in theory, often risks reducing heritage to tangible aesthetics and spatial beautification, thereby underrepresenting intangible, ritualistic, and community-based values that are central to Indian pilgrimage towns. This underscores the need for a deeper inquiry into how such frameworks can meaningfully incorporate local epistemologies, traditional ecological knowledge, and performative heritage practices.

In cities like Varanasi, where sacred geography and ritual temporality shape urban life, there is a significant concern that global heritage policies may lead to commodification, gentrification, and community displacement, unless carefully contextualized. The participatory ideals promoted by HUL often fall short in practice, raising questions about the authenticity of community engagement and the representation of diverse local voices. Furthermore, there is growing recognition that the current HUL framework, while progressive, may not fully address the sacred spatial logic and metaphysical values embedded in pilgrimage towns. This necessitates critical reflection on whether a new or expanded model—such as a Sacred Urban Landscape approach—is needed to more appropriately guide heritage governance in such culturally resonant settings.

2.5.2.1 *Third Research Objective*

This objective responds to a significant gap identified in global heritage discourse: while contemporary heritage frameworks—such as the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach—advocate integrative and community-based development, their implementation often struggles to align with the sacred, performative, and lived dimensions of tīrtha towns like Varanasi. Hence, this objective seeks to ground urban development strategies in the local epistemologies, ritual geographies, and spiritual ecologies that shape tīrtha landscapes, offering an alternative and culturally rooted planning paradigm.

To operationalize this objective, the chapter is structured into three methodological tasks, each building upon the last and culminating in a comprehensive synthesis. The flow of these tasks is illustrated in the accompanying figure (Figure X), and is summarized below:

- To identify the indicators for contemporary urban development at tīrtha sites:

This task captures the on-ground perceptions of current development through a semi-structured public survey conducted at selected tīrtha locations in Varanasi (discussed in Section 5.4 of the previous chapter). The aim is to reveal community-valued development priorities and emerging urban concerns within sacred landscapes.

- To investigate the aforementioned development indicators in urban policy making:

The second task involves a critical interpretative analysis of the development indicators through a Delphi method with a selected panel of domain experts. The task is informed by the narrative and spatial realities of the surveyed tīrthas, allowing experts to contextualize their responses across multiple rounds of feedback and reflection.

- To examine and analyse the levels of intervention of development indicators:

The third task builds upon the prior insights using Interpretative Structural Modelling (ISM). This expert-based analytical method identifies the hierarchical relationships and interdependencies among the selected indicators, allowing for a structured understanding of leverage points and priority areas in policymaking for tīrtha-centric urban development.

Together, these three tasks form the analytical core of this chapter, enabling a bottom-up yet critically structured investigation into how urban development can be reconceptualised from the perspective of tīrtha-based tradition and sacred place-making. The chapter concludes by identifying key policy considerations and proposing a holistic indicator framework that can inform integrated heritage and urban planning for Indian pilgrimage towns.

2.6 Conclusion and Evolution of Research Framework

This section consolidates the overall research framework and analytical flow as visualized in Figure 2.1, titled "A Tīrtha-Centric Investigation of Indian Pilgrimage Towns for Holistic Urban Development: A study of Varanasi." The figure illustrates the structured evolution of research across the three primary objectives and corresponding research questions, rooted in the central theme of reinterpreting Indian pilgrimage towns through a tīrtha-centric, Purāṇika lens. The inquiry is positioned at the intersection of traditional Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and contemporary urban heritage discourses, particularly in the case of Varanasi—a living tīrtha and sacred urban landscape.

The diagram outlines a three-stage conceptual and methodological journey:

First, a textual and conceptual foundation is established by investigating the epistemology of the Purāṇas and the spatial logic embedded within the tīrtha traditions (Research Question 1).

Second, the focus shifts to the lived landscape of Varanasi, exploring its continuity as a Paurāṇika Tīrtha and its dynamic negotiation with historical and cultural layers (Research Question 2).

Third, the study identifies and interprets development indicators and heritage management strategies, rooted in sacred geography and public engagement, to envision a holistic framework for urban development in pilgrimage towns (Research Question 3).

These three layers are methodologically guided by:

Textual Analysis and Criticism, which examines classical texts such as the Skanda Purāṇa's Kāśīkhaṇḍa and Sthalapurāṇas to understand place-making, ritual cycles, and sacred ecology.

Contextualization, through which Varanasi is analyzed as a living heritage site using historical data, fieldwork, and community narratives.

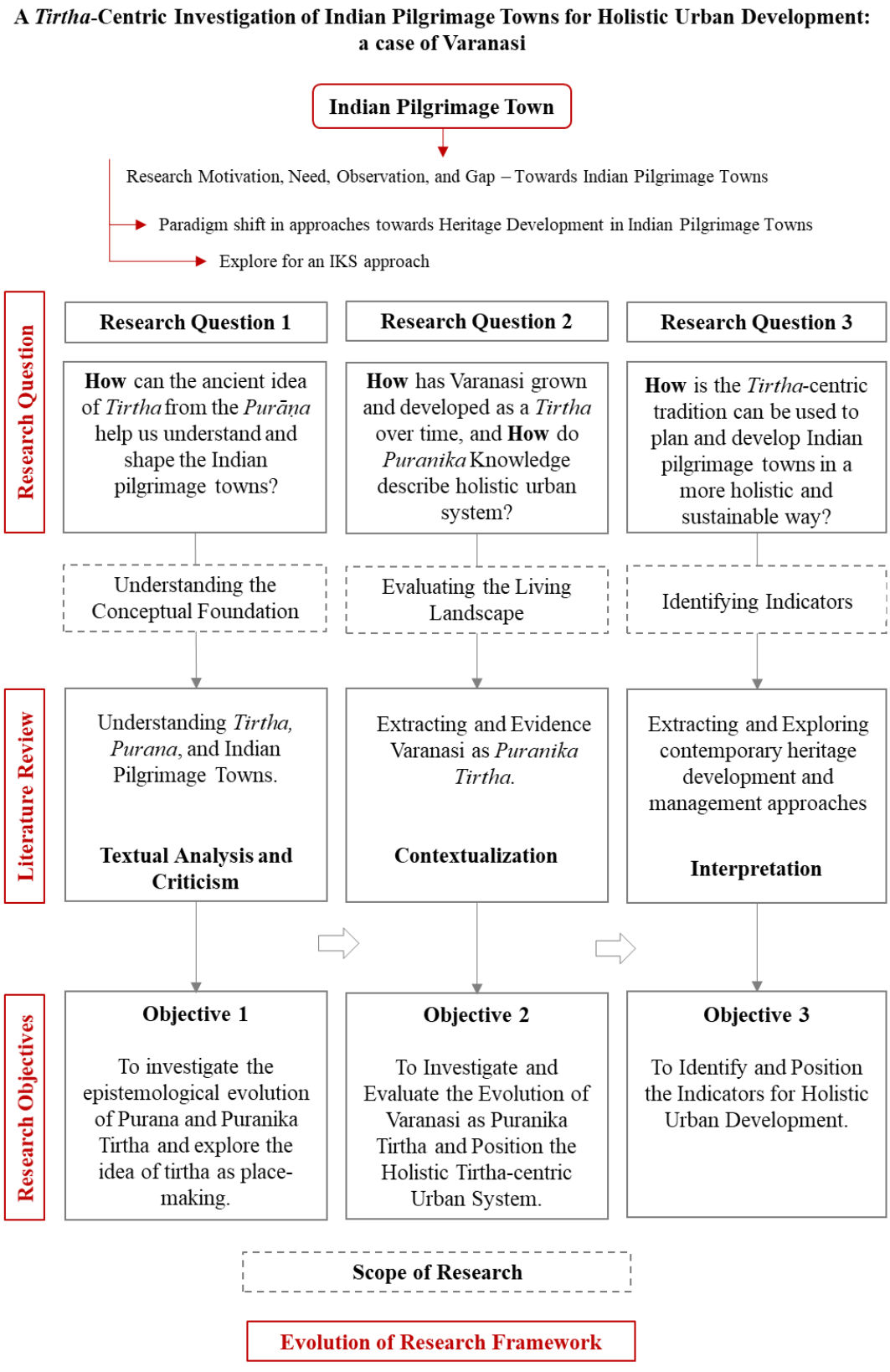


Figure 4: Research Framework and Literature Review.

Interpretation, incorporating participatory methods—semi-structured public surveys, Delphi technique, and Interpretative Structural Modelling (ISM)—to analyze and structure contemporary development indicators within the sacred landscape.

In articulating this tiered methodology, the study aligns with Abraham Kaplan's definition of method as articulated in The Conduct of Inquiry (1964), where he states,

"Method is the way in which problems are attacked, not the solution itself. It is the process, rather than the product, of inquiry."

This approach underscores the central research commitment: to investigate not only the urban form or policy output, but also the sacred processes, epistemologies, and narratives that shape the being and becoming of Indian tīrtha towns.

The research framework hence evolves as an integrative process—beginning with conceptual investigation (Objective 1), transitioning through civilizational contextualization (Objective 2), and culminating in development-oriented interpretation (Objective 3). This progression enables a dialogical structure between traditional sacred spatialities and modern urban policy, bridging the epistemological divide through a grounded IKS approach.

In sum, the flowchart (Figure 6) encapsulates the multidimensional logic of this research: an IKS-driven inquiry, rooted in Purāṇika traditions, that proceeds from the philosophical to the empirical, from the textual to the lived, and from conceptual foundations to policy frameworks.

Chapter - 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted for critically investigating the epistemological, historical, and policy-oriented dimensions of Purāṇa and Paurāṇika Tīrtha in the context of Indian pilgrimage towns, with a focus on Kāśī (Varanasi). The methodological structure corresponds to the research framework illustrated in Figure, titled "A Tīrtha-Centric Investigation of Indian Pilgrimage Towns for Holistic Urban Development: A study of Varanasi." This framework presents the evolution of research across three primary objectives and corresponding research questions, each positioned to reinterpret Indian pilgrimage towns through a tīrtha-centric lens rooted in Purāṇika epistemology and Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS).

The research operates within a Tripartite Epistemological Approach, consisting of:

- Textual Analysis and Criticism
- Contextualization
- Interpretation

These three phases structure the inquiry into Purāṇas as dynamic, evolving texts that shape not only sacred narratives but also historical memory, spatial logic, and civic life in Indian pilgrimage towns. This approach is situated within the broader cultural, historical, and sacred landscapes of the Indian subcontinent, allowing the study to examine both traditional worldviews and contemporary developmental challenges.

To position this study within broader architectural and cultural research paradigms, it draws from the theoretical contributions of Pentti Routio (2007) and Groat and Wang (2002)—who provide foundational classifications for research in architecture and spatial humanities. Pentti identifies three approaches—descriptive, explanatory, and normative—which are instructive in contextualizing the nature of this inquiry. The present research primarily adopts a descriptive-explanatory mode. It aims to describe the historical and spiritual frameworks of tīrtha spaces (particularly through textual and ethnographic data) and to explain their relevance in structuring sacred urban systems. Although interpretive value judgments are employed, the study does not assume a strictly normative stance but rather provides critical reflection on modern policy through an IKS lens.

Aligned with this, Groat and Wang's (2002) typology of architectural research strategies further contextualizes the methodological grounding. This research incorporates multiple strategies, including:

- Interpretive-Historical Research:

Investigating the evolution of tīrtha spaces through the narrative and performative dimensions embedded in Purāṇika texts, primarily Tīrtha Māhātmyas and Sthalapurāṇas. This strategy is critical for Objective 1 and 2, especially in establishing the textual foundations and historical context of Kāśī as a sacred urban system.

- Qualitative Research:

Employed especially in Objective 3, through ethnographic field surveys, public interviews, and stakeholder perceptions at Varanasi's tīrtha sites. This strategy enables the study to gather bottom-up insights into contemporary development trends and spiritual landscapes.

- Logical Argumentation:

Applied throughout the dissertation to synthesize conceptual, textual, and spatial insights into a coherent policy discourse. It helps construct a culturally grounded yet analytically robust framework for tīrtha-centric heritage development, bridging the gap between traditional cosmologies and contemporary governance models.

- Case Study and Combined Strategies:

The research adopts Tīrtha-centric urban construct as its central conceptual and analytical framework, with Kāśī/Varanasi serving as the principal case study of a living Tīrtha landscape. The framework understands Tīrtha as a socio-spatial construct connecting sacred sites, routes, settlement structure, landscape, community practices, and cultural memory. This provides a common theoretical thread linking the textual, spatial, empirical, and analytical dimensions of the research.

Following Groat and Wang's emphasis on empirical inquiry within real-life contexts, the study integrates interpretive-historical research, qualitative field investigation, and expert-based analytical methods. Paurāṇika texts and related sources are examined to identify the conceptual and spatial dimensions of Tīrtha, while field observations and stakeholder interactions are used to examine their manifestation and transformation in Kāśī. The Delphi method supports the validation of identified indicators, while ISM is employed to analyse their structural interrelationships.

Accordingly, the methodology progresses through a focused sequence: (i) conceptual understanding of Tīrtha and its Paurāṇika foundations; (ii) examination of its socio-spatial expression in Kāśī; and (iii) analytical interpretation of identified indicators and their relevance to contemporary development. This progression moves the study beyond descriptive documentation towards comparative interpretation, empirical validation, and structural analysis.

The methodology chapter has therefore been reorganized to make the relationship between the central theoretical framework, research objectives, methods, and analytical outcomes explicit. The revised structure presents the theoretical positioning and methodological approach first, followed by the methods corresponding to each research objective and the instruments used for data collection and analysis. This ensures that each methodological component directly contributes to the central inquiry into Tīrtha-centric urbanism and its relevance to the contemporary development of pilgrimage settlements.

Accordingly, the present chapter delineates the comprehensive research framework and methodology adopted to fulfill the three core research objectives. It is organized into six main sections: Section 3.1 presents a review of relevant research methodologies and scholarly paradigms. Section 3.2 outlines the integrated methodological approach employed in this dissertation. Sections 3.3 to 3.5 elaborate the detailed methodological frameworks corresponding to each of the three research objectives respectively. The chapter concludes with Section 3.6, a discussion on research instruments used and a summary reflection on how each methodological layer contributes to the broader aim of tīrtha-centric urban investigation and policy formulation.

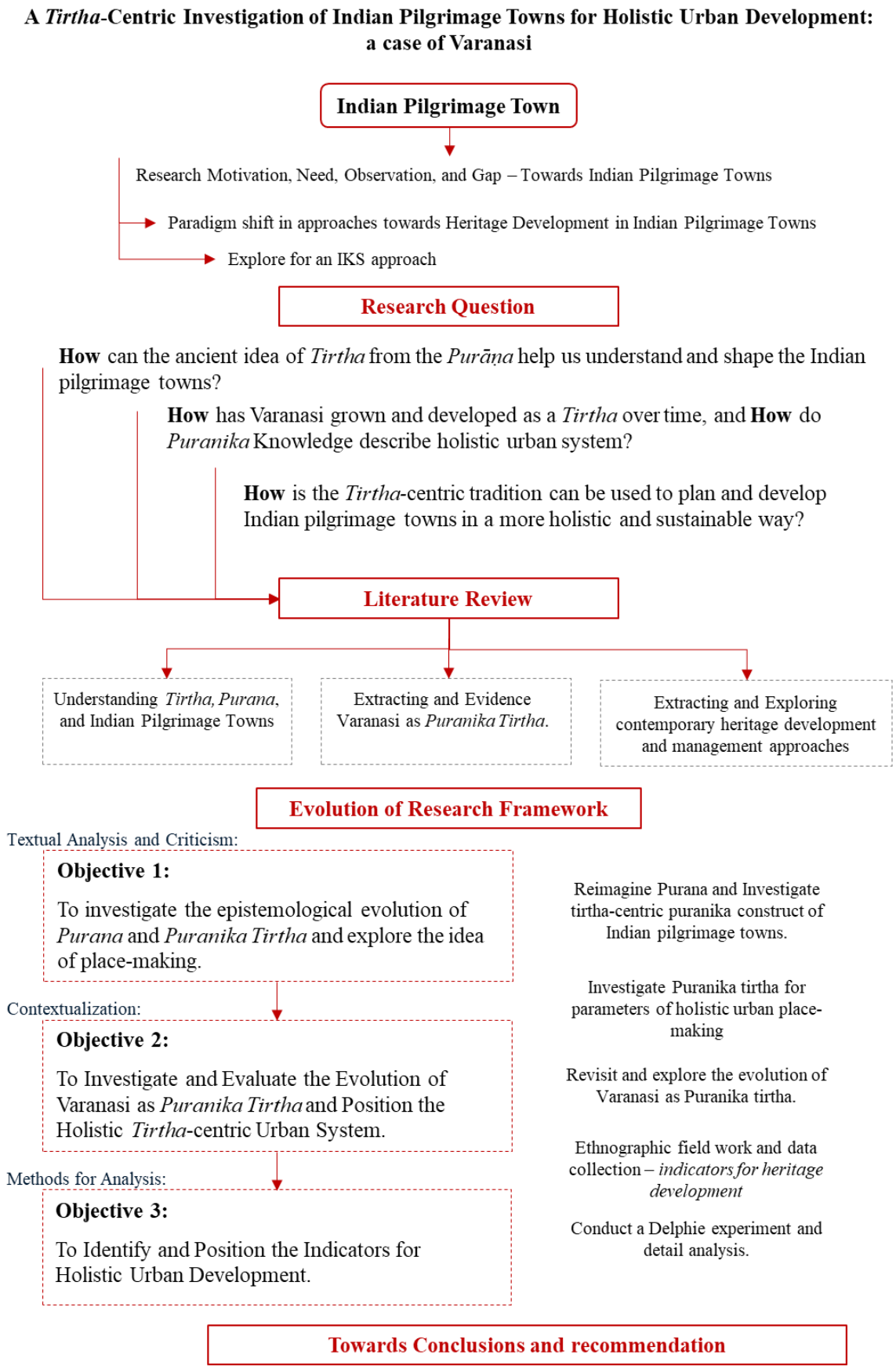


Figure 5: Research Approach and Strategies for Research.

3.1 Methods Adopted for the Research

The research adopts a tripartite epistemological framework to investigate Indian pilgrimage towns through a tīrtha-centric lens, specifically focusing on Kāśī (Varanasi) as a living sacred landscape. This methodology unfolds in three interrelated stages for three set objectives: textual analysis and criticism, contextualization, and interpretive analysis. In the first stage, various Purāṇika manuscripts are critically examined to trace the processes of textual transmission and transformation over time. Historical criticism situates these texts within the broader sociopolitical and religious evolution of Indian pilgrimage traditions, while narrative analysis focuses on the role of tīrtha as an institutional and symbolic force in shaping urban structures. Literary devices such as allegory, metaphor, and symbolic identifiers are decoded to understand their influence on place-making within urban and social frameworks. The second stage, contextualization, grounds these textual insights in historical, cultural, and interdisciplinary contexts. It incorporates critical readings of classical references (including Jātaka tales and Purāṇas), alongside inputs from archaeology, art history, and heritage studies, to interpret Kāśī's transformation as a sacred urban system. This stage also examines how the Purāṇas construct communal cultural identity and shape the collective memory of sacred space. The third stage employs interpretive strategies to connect traditional cosmologies with contemporary urban challenges. Public perception is gathered through semi-structured interviews and field surveys, and a Delphi study is conducted with selected experts at key tīrtha sites—Kardameśvar, Avimukteśvar, and Ramnagar—to refine indicators of urban heritage development. The interrelationships among these indicators are modeled using Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM), revealing a layered understanding of heritage, spirituality, and governance.

Since a significant portion of the study is interpretive and qualitative, the researcher's positionality is consciously articulated through William Pinar's "Method of Currere," which frames the preface of the dissertation. This reflexive autobiographical method—regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical—enables the researcher to examine personal experience and scholarly insight as mutually reinforcing forces. Overall, this integrative methodological strategy allows for a multidimensional exploration of Kāśī as a paradigmatic case study, bridging Purāṇika narratives and modern policy discourse to propose a culturally grounded framework for sustainable tīrtha-centric urban development.

A *Tirtha*-Centric Investigation of Indian Pilgrimage Towns for Holistic Urban Development: a case of Varanasi

Research Methodology

The methodology for critical investigation into Puran and Puranika tirtha studies incorporate Tripartite Epistemological approach, set at three steps: 1. textual analysis and criticism, 2.Contextualization, and 3. Interpretation; within the broader cultural and historical Indian pilgrimage landscapes. This approach involves Evidence based Ethnographic and Interpretive analysis to examining the Puranas as dynamic, evolving texts shaping the Historical landscapes of Indian Pilgrimage towns.

1. Textual Analysis and Criticism:

•Manuscript Study:
•Analyze various Puranika manuscript to understand the process of textual transmission and context in evolution.
•Historical Criticism:
•Place the Purana within the broader historical, social, and political evolution of puran and puranika tirtha landscapes of its creation and transmission.
•Analyzing Narrative Context:
•Interpretation of tirtha as puranika pilgrimage institution influencing urban constructs.
•Literary Devices of investigation:
•Recognize the use of symbolism(tirtha urban identifies), allegory, and other literary devices within the text and how they might relate to Place making (urban planning and social structures).

2. Contextualization:

•Historical Context:
•Place the Purana within the broader historical, social, and political evolution of Varanasi as pilgrimage landscape of its creation and transmission.
•Interdisciplinary Approach :
•Evidence based critical observation of Varanasi in traditional references (jataka and puran).
•Integrate insights from archaeology, art history, and other relevant disciplines to gain a more holistic understanding of the Purana's cultural significance.
•Cultural interpretation:
•Interpreteing Varanasi as tirtha Place-making in puranika narrations.
•Examine the Purana's role in shaping community cultural construct of Varanasi.

3. Interpretation (Analysis):

•Structure:
•Examine the underlying structures and indicators of current urban development (trend) in Varanasi. (Public Interviews, semi structured questionnaire)
•Intervention perspectives:
•Delphie method to investigate and critically interpret the above indicators with selected set of experts.
•Multiple levels of Delphie experiment (reiterative expert responces with selected site study (kardameshwar, avimukteshwar, and ramnagar)
•Examination and interrelation:
•Examining the hierarchical interrelation of the identified indicators using Interpretative Structural Medelling (ISM) method. (Expert based analysis)

Results and Conclusion

Figure 6: framework of research methodology adopted.

3.1.1 Textual Analysis and Criticism

The first phase of the research methodology undertakes a critical textual analysis of Purāṇika sources to explore how *tīrthas*—as sacred and spatial constructs—have been articulated and

transformed through time. It begins with a manuscript study, examining multiple versions and regional recensions of texts like the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa* to trace textual transmission, interpolations, and the evolution of Kāśī's sacred geography. Using historical criticism, the texts are contextualized within their socio-political milieu, revealing how the glorification of sacred spaces paralleled shifts in dynastic patronage, sectarian movements, and pilgrimage economies. Through narrative analysis, *tīrthas* are understood not merely as places but as dynamic narrative institutions where myths, rituals, and performances shape spatial and social realities. Finally, an examination of literary devices—metaphor, allegory, and symbolism—deciphers how the Purāṇas encode theological and urban meanings, linking cosmology to physical form. Together, these approaches uncover the epistemological foundations through which sacred cities like Kāśī were conceptualized, sustained, and continually reimagined within the Indian Knowledge System.

3.1.2 Contextualization

The second phase of the research methodology situates the textual analysis of *Purāṇika* narratives within broader historical, spatial, and cultural contexts to understand how sacred ideas translate into lived urban realities. It employs three key strategies:

(1) Historical Contextualization: This locates Kāśī's *Purāṇika* portrayal within India's socio-political and religious history—from the *Janapada* and Gupta eras to the medieval and colonial periods—correlating textual timelines with archaeological and dynastic developments. Kāśī thus emerges as both a sacred abstraction and an adaptive pilgrimage landscape shaped by shifting patronage and cultural continuity.

(2) Interdisciplinary Approach: Drawing from archaeology, art history, folklore, Buddhist and Jain texts, and regional traditions, this approach bridges textual narratives with material evidence. Excavations at Rajghat, references in *Jātakas*, and temple networks affirm Kāśī's role as a multi-religious, civilizational hub, validating *Purāṇika* descriptions through tangible and ethnographic observations.

(3) Cultural Interpretation: This reconstructs Kāśī as a *tīrtha-urban system*, where metaphysical concepts like *Avimukta* and *Ānandavana* manifest through spatial practices—ritual bathing, circumambulation, death rites, and pilgrimage circuits. These embodied acts continually recreate Kāśī's sacred geography.

Together, these strategies bridge scriptural imagination and historical reality, revealing Kāśī as a living cultural landscape—an enduring synthesis of text, space, and community rooted in the Indian Knowledge System (IKS).

3.1.3 Interpretation (Analysis)

The third and final phase of the research bridges the sacred and the secular, translating the *Purāṇika* worldview of *tīrtha*-centric urbanism into a policy-relevant, empirical framework. Building on the epistemological and cultural foundations established earlier, this phase aligns textual insights with contemporary urban planning, governance, and community perceptions through three interlinked strategies:

(1) Structure Analysis: Field studies, stakeholder interviews, and site observations across key *tīrthas* of Kāśī (ghats, temples, kunds, and neighborhoods) examine how modernization interacts with ritual practices and collective memory. This reveals tensions between

beautification-driven development and sacred continuity, providing an empirical base for heritage-sensitive planning.

(2) Delphi Method: Expert consultations with scholars, planners, and policymakers generate context-specific intervention perspectives. Focused on Kardameśvara, Avimukteśvara, and Rāmnagar, this iterative process refines development indicators that balance spiritual ecology, cultural authenticity, and urban functionality within IKS-informed frameworks.

(3) Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM): Using SmartISM software, the interrelationships among validated indicators are mapped hierarchically to identify drivers, dependencies, and policy priorities. The model emphasizes memory, ritual ecology, and heritage continuity as core components of sustainable development.

Together, these methods create an integrated system linking sacred spatial logic with modern planning paradigms, demonstrating how *tīrtha*-centric urbanism can guide inclusive, resilient, and culturally rooted urban development in heritage cities like Kāśī.

3.2 Objective One: To investigate the epistemological evolution of Purana and Puranika Tīrtha and explore the idea of tīrtha as place-making.

The research methodology to achieve Objective 1, which seeks "to investigate the epistemological evolution of Purāṇa and Purāṇika Tīrtha and explore the idea of tīrtha as place-making", is structured through a multi-layered, reflexive framework rooted in textual analysis and criticism. This methodology unfolds through three interrelated tasks, aligned with the subsections, and grounded in four interpretive strategies: manuscript study, historical criticism, narrative context analysis, and literary interpretation.

The overarching research approach operates through the epistemological lens of Indian Knowledge Systems, grounding textual sources such as the Skanda Purāṇa, Tīrtha Māhātmya, and Sthalapurāṇas into contemporary urban analysis. The objective is met through a three-task structure, each focused on a specific aspect of the epistemology-place-making connection:

Task 1 To explores the evolution of Purāṇa as a knowledge tradition through textual criticism, establishing the foundations of tīrtha in Paurāṇik narratives.

Task 2 To empirically investigates the influence of Purāṇika tīrtha on urban development through public surveys and town-level documentation.

Task 3 To synthesizes these textual and field-based findings into a tīrtha-centric place-making framework, identifying typologies and development indicators.

The core tools include secondary textual sources, archaeological and epigraphical references, narrative mapping, public surveys, and field-based data collection across 51 tīrtha sites.

The first task begins with exploring the epistemological evolution of Purāṇa, particularly emphasizing the early foundations of Paurāṇik literature and its relationship with pilgrimage settlements. Here, the study reimagines the Purāṇa not merely as static religious texts but as dynamic documents that have evolved through layers of interpretation, ritual contextualization, and socio-political shifts. The sub-sections such as Reimagining Purāṇa and Purāṇa as a Dynamic Document critically review secondary literature and interdisciplinary sources to examine how the idea of tīrtha emerges as a spatial, ritual, and cultural construct. This is

followed by a detailed textual investigation of Purāṇas through Tangible Testimonies and a chronological mapping titled Purāṇika *Kāla-Mīmāṁsā*, which traces the development of Paurāṇik tradition from early Vedic references (c. 1200 BCE) through its crystallization in the Gupta period and encyclopedic expansion up to 1200 AD.

Subsequently, the study turns to reinterpret the Skanda Purāṇa, especially the Kāśīkhaṇḍa, as a core textual corpus embodying the tīrtha-centric vision of sacred urbanism. The subsections examine the compositional setting, scribal interpolations, and thematic evolution of the text, establishing its critical relevance in the epistemology of tīrthas and its influence on spatial and ritual constructs.

The second task moves towards evaluating the influence of Purāṇika tīrtha narratives on the establishment and urban development of Indian pilgrimage towns. This task bridges the textual with the empirical by initiating a tīrtha-centric survey study. first sets the background for tīrtha studies, followed by the development of a semi-structured questionnaire, pilot testing in Kāśī , and the refinement of research instruments and base map. This culminates in a large-scale field survey across 51 tīrtha towns, mapping the manifestation of Purāṇika narratives within actual pilgrimage landscapes. This process of analysing narrative context integrates local memory, ritual cycles, and spatial embodiments of tīrtha, highlighting the performative and mnemonic functions of Paurāṇik storytelling in place-making.

The third task aims to investigate and establish a tīrtha-centric place-making framework, synthesizing both textual and field-based insights. This is undertaken through a tīrtha-centric urban experiment, starting with a timeline evolution of tīrtha mapping and referencing tīrthas as understood in Skanda Purāṇa. This is followed by a critical literary analysis, exploring pilgrimage profilation and the layered construction of tīrtha-making, including the replication of societal norms, sacred claims, and cultural acculturation through narratives. The investigation decodes the literary devices of the Purāṇas—cosmograms, metaphors, and allegories—as epistemic tools that embed spatial codes and ecological consciousness within mythic expressions.

Finally, the task leads to identifying the identifiers of tīrtha-centric place-making, culminating in a typology of tīrthas—including *Deva-Tīrtha, Ṛṣi-Tīrtha, Kṣetra-Tīrtha, Pitṛ-Tīrtha, Tattva-Tīrtha*, and *Smṛti-Tīrtha*. It also explores the foundational pillars of tīrtha-centric urbanism—namely community, resources, and landscape—as essential elements for sustainable heritage development. These insights coalesce in the final section, which draws broader theoretical conclusions and lays the groundwork with related publications.

The methodological process of Objective 1 is both diachronic and synchronic, combining textual hermeneutics with empirical validation to reconstruct the role of tīrtha in Indian pilgrimage towns. It bridges Purāṇika epistemology with contemporary urban and heritage discourse, providing a robust framework for understanding pilgrimage towns like Kāśī not just as ancient settlements but as living tīrthas embedded in timeless cultural memory and spiritual geography.

3.2.1 Task 1: Investigating the Epistemological Evolution of Purāṇa

This task explores how the Purāṇas shaped the philosophical and cultural foundations of *tīrtha* as a multidimensional construct—spiritual, spatial, social, and ecological. It establishes

the textual and epistemic roots of Indian pilgrimage towns and interprets how Purāṇika knowledge guided early models of sacred settlement and urban formation.

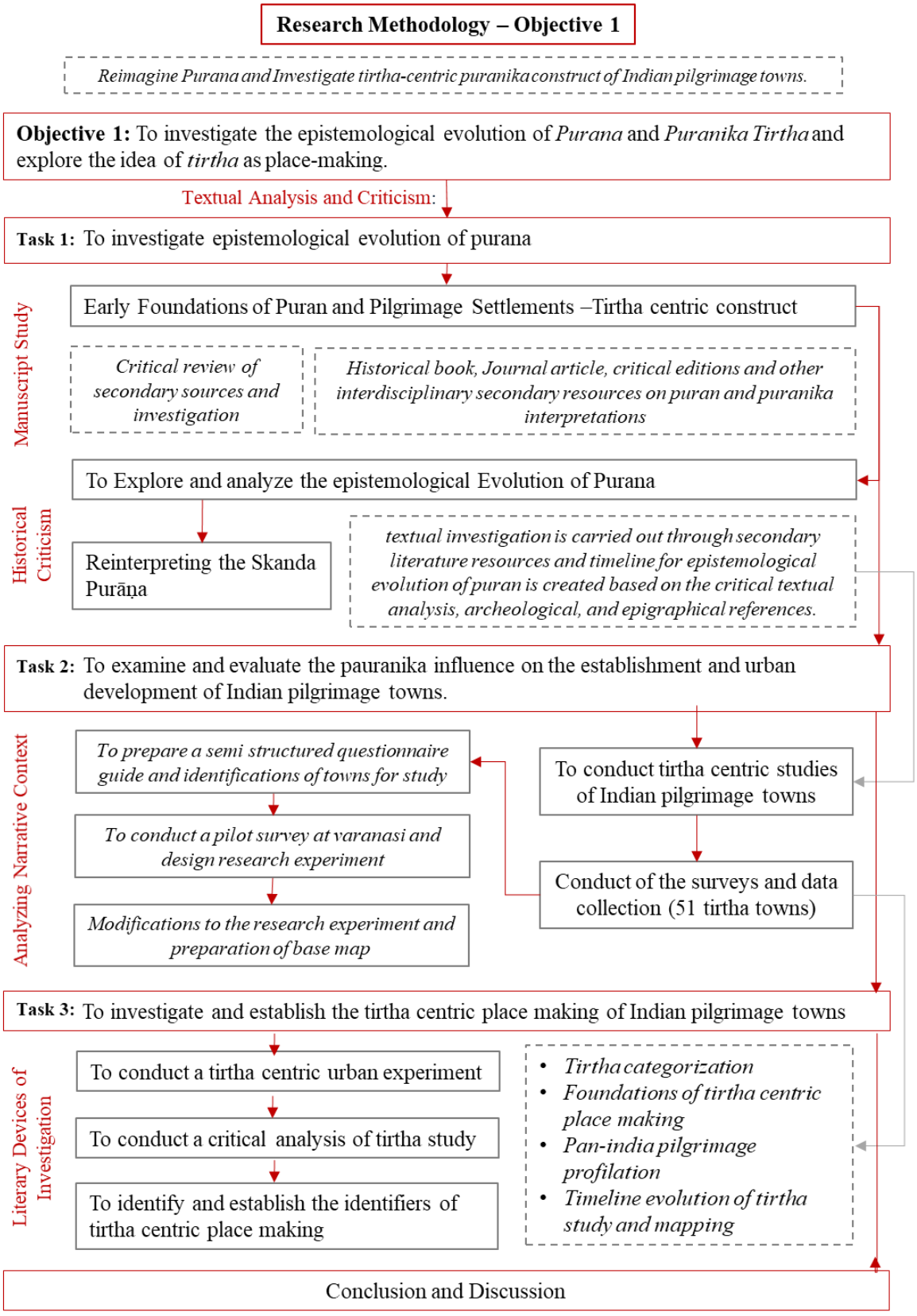


Figure 7: Methodological flow of research for Objective 1.

- **3.2.1.1 Early Foundations:** Reviews Purāṇas as dynamic, living texts—ritualistic, mythic, and community-oriented—that continuously evolved through interpretation and practice. It highlights how early Paurāṇik compositions were integral to the genesis of *tīrtha* towns, embodying sacred geography and metaphysical vision.
- **3.2.1.2 Epistemological Evolution:** Traces the chronological development of the Paurāṇik corpus through four major stages—from Vedic origins and early formation to Gupta consolidation and medieval encyclopedic expansion—showing how these layers sustained sacred geographies and ritual-spatial systems.
- **3.2.1.3 Reinterpreting the Skanda Purāṇa:** Uses *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* as a central case to demonstrate *tīrtha*-centric sacred urbanism in Kāśī (Varanasi). It examines the text's narrative geography, ritual mapping, and its embodiment in the spatial organization of *ghāṭs*, *kundas*, and temples.

3.2.2 Task 2 – Examining Purāṇika Influence on Pilgrimage Urbanism

Task 2 bridges textual knowledge with lived spatial realities by examining how Purāṇika narratives have influenced the establishment and evolution of Indian pilgrimage towns. Through field-based inquiry, it validates the epistemological insights of Task 1.

- A semi-structured questionnaire was designed and tested in Kāśī to capture local perceptions of sacred space, ritual experience, and *tīrtha* association. Responses identified 51 pilgrimage towns across India linked through Paurāṇik references, ritual circuits, or collective memory.
- Field surveys, textual mapping, and expert consultations were conducted across these towns, documenting their sacred networks, urban morphology, and narrative continuities.
- The analysis revealed regional clusters and ritual linkages, confirming that Paurāṇik imagination provided the generative framework for urban morphology, sacred zoning, and community identity.

3.2.3 Task 3 – Establishing the Tīrtha-Centric Place-Making Framework

This task synthesizes textual interpretations and field findings into a structured framework for *tīrtha*-centric urbanism. It decodes how sacred narratives, ritual systems, and ecological symbols collectively shape the spatial logic and community life of pilgrimage towns.

- **Urban Experiment:** Categorizes 51 towns based on their historical evolution—archaeological mentions, textual references, settlement growth, major temple construction, and urban infrastructure—revealing sacred layering and spatial continuity.
- **Critical Analysis:** Interprets the constructive grammar of *tīrtha* creation—replication of social structures, mythic sanctification, and cultural assimilation—showing how ritual, memory, and narrative transform ordinary landscapes into sacred places.
- **Indicator Identification:** Develops a typology of *tīrthas*—Deity, Ṛṣi, Kṣetra, Pitṛ, Tattva, and Smṛti types—and identifies three foundational dimensions of *tīrtha*-centric place-making: *community* (custodian of the sacred), *resource* (spiritual-ecological base), and *landscape* (ritual terrain).

Through these three interlinked tasks, the study redefines pilgrimage towns as *civilizational ecosystems* sustained by Paurāṇik epistemology—where spirituality, ecology, and community intersect. The findings offer a heritage-sensitive model for contemporary urban development grounded in India's sacred traditions and knowledge systems.

3.3 Objective Two: To Investigate and Evaluate the Evolution of Varanasi as Puranika Tīrtha and Position the Holistic Tīrtha-centric Urban System.

The sacred city of Kāśī—known variously as Vārāṇasī or Banaras—stands among the oldest living urban centers in the world, deeply interwoven with layers of mythology, ritual memory, sacred geography, and spiritual cosmology. Unlike a conventional urban settlement defined merely by geography or polity, Kāśī is represented in the Paurāṇika corpus, especially in the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, as a metaphysical field—a tīrtha that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries. Chapter 5 addresses the second core objective of the research: To explore Kāśī (Varanasi) as a Paurāṇika Tīrtha and investigate its tīrtha-centric urban system through an integrative framework of sacred geography, textual narrative, and spatial continuity.

To comprehensively explore Kāśī as a Paurāṇika Tīrtha and investigate its tīrtha-centric urban system, the second objective adopts a structured methodological framework, visually represented in the accompanying flowchart. This framework is designed to progressively analyze the sacred urbanism of Varanasi through three interdependent research stages—historical contextualization, interdisciplinary synthesis, and cultural interpretation. Each stage builds upon the findings of the previous, while also looping back to allow for feedback, reinterpretation, and layered synthesis, reflecting the dynamic and nonlinear nature of Kāśī's civilizational evolution.

Despite significant shifts in political regimes, socio-economic conditions, and morphological transformations, Kāśī has retained a continuous identity as a sacred urban organism, shaped by its ritual economy, ecological wisdom, and narrative traditions. Therefore, the chapter aims to reinterpret Kāśī not merely as a city but as an evolving civilizational construct, rooted in Purāṇika epistemology.

To fulfill this task, the objective is structured into three interrelated research sub-tasks, each addressing a critical dimension of the tīrtha-centric framework:

3.3.1 Task 1: To Revisit the Historic Varanasi

This task reconstructs the historical evolution of Kāśī (Varanasi) as a sacred urban center, tracing its transformation from early settlements to a living *tīrtha* and civilizational hub. It integrates archaeological, textual, and cultural evidence to situate Kāśī within the broader context of India's sacred geography and ritual ecology.

3.3.1.1 Historicity of Varanasi: The approach combines archaeology, mythology, and environmental data through a *mytho-scientific* synthesis to rebuild Kāśī's sacred topography. Excavation sites, material culture (pottery, fire altars, iron tools), and geo-spatial formations at Aktha and Ramnagar are correlated with Paurāṇik and Vedic references to reveal the city's deep continuity. The analysis spans from protohistoric and Janapada phases to Mauryan, Kushan, Gupta, and Medieval periods, highlighting Kāśī's sustained civic and spiritual identity.

Key components include:

- Archaeological Evidence & Sacred Topography: Mapping settlement patterns and ritual nodes.
- Myth and Memory: Interpreting cultural narratives alongside scientific data.
- Mytho-Scientific Synthesis: Integrating textual cosmology with archaeological realities for holistic historicization.

3.3.1.2 Contextualization: Tīrtha as Urban Foundation: This section establishes Kāśī's *tīrtha*-centric urban identity by examining how sacred narratives shaped its form, function, and cosmological meaning. Drawing on Vedic, Epic, and Paurāṇik sources—especially *Skanda* and *Śiva Purāṇas*—it interprets Kāśī as *Avimuktakṣetra*, the eternal abode of Śiva and a center of liberation (*mokṣa*).

The analysis unfolds across three textual layers:

- Vedic/Brāhmaṇa texts: Kāśī as a ritual-sacrificial field.
- Epics (Mahābhārata): Kāśī as a dharma-kṣetra and political capital.
- Purāṇas: Kāśī as a sacred geography embodying cosmic and social order.

Complemented by Buddhist sources such as the *Jātakas* and Xuanzang's travelogues, this study portrays Kāśī as a multi-faith cultural landscape and continuous urban organism where spiritual symbolism and urban life coexisted seamlessly.

3.3.1.1 Prepration of base map

The development of a contour base map for Varanasi and its hinterland region was carried out using GIS-based spatial analysis tools. High-resolution DEM (Digital Elevation Model) data were processed in QGIS to extract elevation values, generate contour lines, and delineate the topographical framework of the region. As illustrated in the attached screenshots, the workflow involved the integration of raw DEM layers, contour extraction, hill-shading, and elevation color coding to visualize terrain variations across the Ganga valley and adjacent upland areas. The resulting contour base map provides a detailed understanding of the geomorphological setting of Varanasi, highlighting river terraces, floodplains, and elevated mounds that have historically shaped the city's settlement patterns and sacred geography. This GIS-based mapping not only enhances the interpretation of historical urban development but also serves as a critical tool for heritage management and sustainable planning in the region.

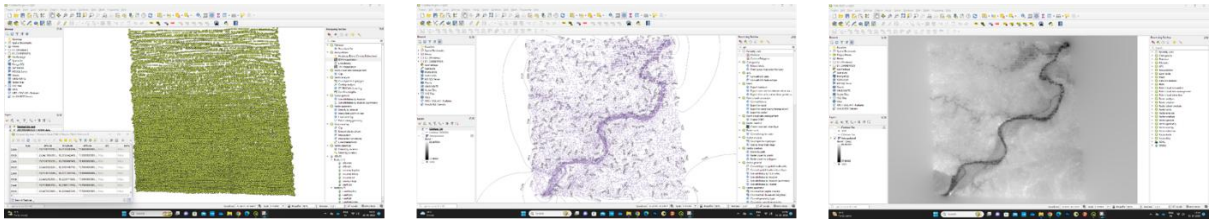


Figure 8: development of varanasi base map for study.

The development of a contour base map for Varanasi and its hinterland region was undertaken using DEM (Digital Elevation Model) data created from Google Earth–derived point cloud information. The process followed a structured GIS workflow to ensure precision and applicability for both historical and urban analysis.

a) Stepwise Methodology:

Point Cloud Extraction: Elevation points were systematically collected from Google Earth by digitizing a dense grid of coordinate points across the Varanasi and hinterland region. Each point included latitude, longitude, and altitude attributes.

1. Data Conversion: The extracted point cloud was saved in a spreadsheet (CSV format) and georeferenced using WGS84 coordinate system.
2. Import into ArcGIS/QGIS: The CSV file was imported into ArcGIS (or QGIS) as an *XY point layer*, converting the raw elevation dataset into a geospatial point 3. layer.
3. Interpolation for DEM Generation: Using spatial interpolation techniques such as IDW (Inverse Distance Weighting) or Kriging, the point data was interpolated to create a continuous Digital Elevation Model (DEM) raster surface.
4. Hillshading and Visualization: The DEM was processed with hillshade rendering and color ramps to visualize terrain relief, slopes, and elevation variations across the Ganga floodplain and adjoining uplands.
5. Contour Extraction: From the DEM raster, contour lines were generated at predefined intervals (e.g., 1m or 5m), producing a detailed contour base map that captures the micro-topography of the region.
6. Final Layout and Integration: The contour map was integrated with hydrographic layers (Ganga River, tributaries, and kunds) and urban settlement data to contextualize the sacred and historical landscape of Varanasi.

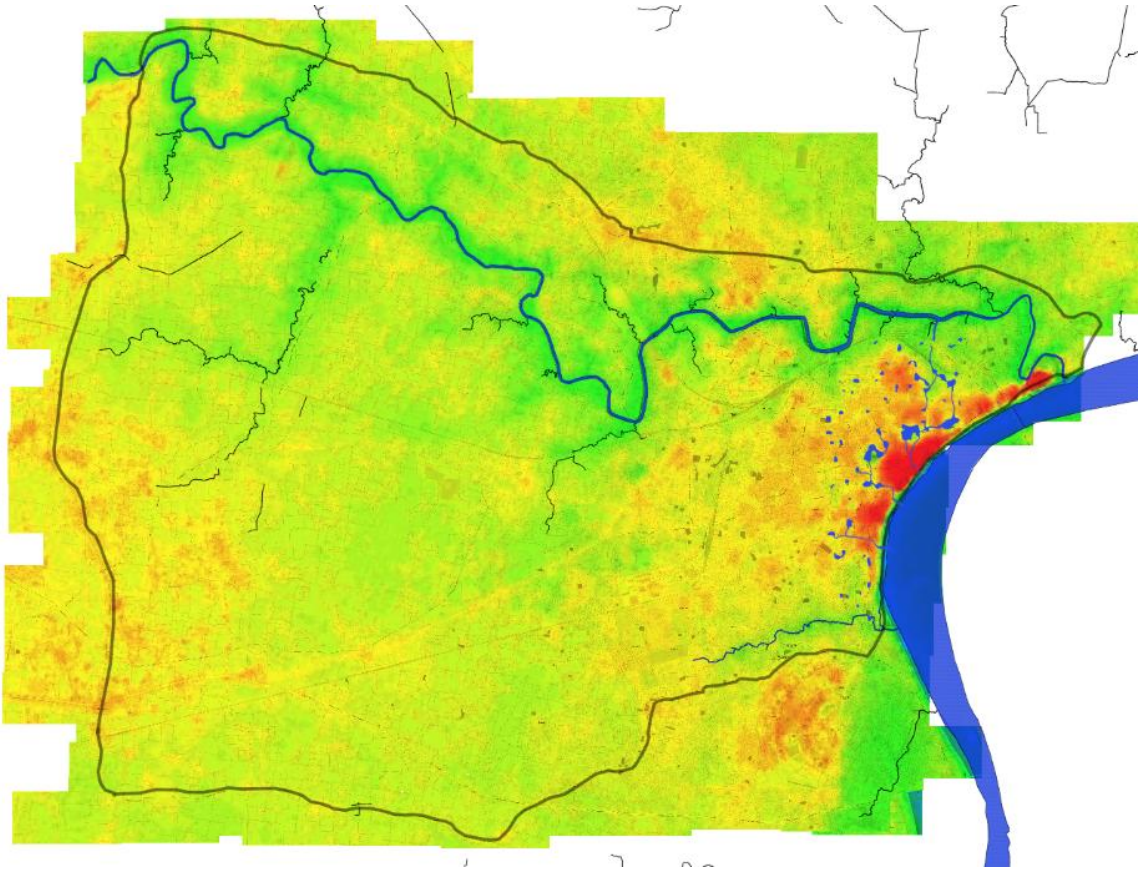


Figure 9: Contour basemap for Varanasi (Kāśī Kṣetra).

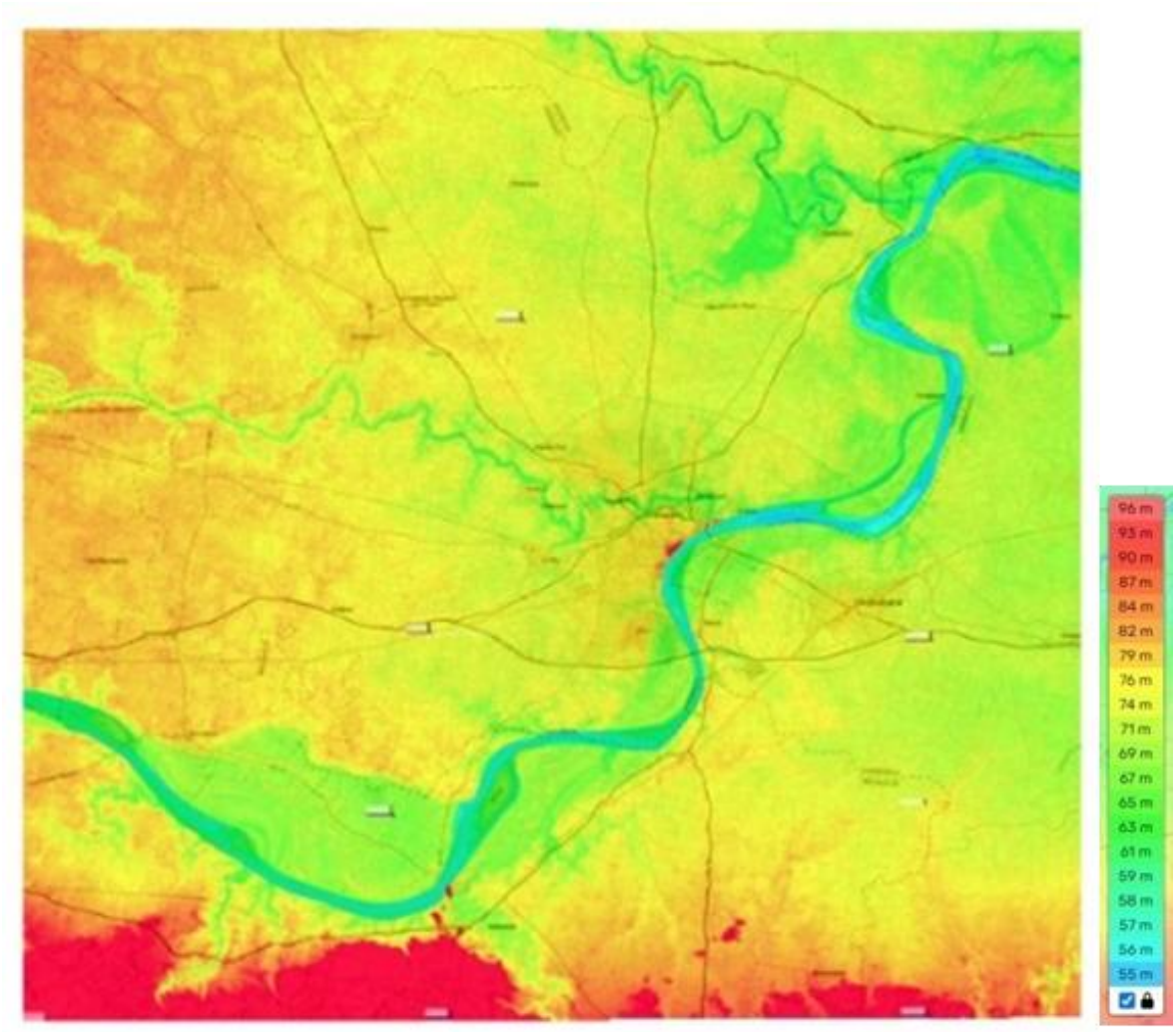


Figure 10: Contour base map for varanasi Hinderland for tīrtha study.

The resulting contour base map, as illustrated in the attached screenshots, provides a precise representation of terrain variation, highlighting river terraces, floodplains, and elevated mounds that have historically influenced settlement morphology and sacred geography in Varanasi. This GIS-based tool not only aids in interpreting historical urban development but also offers a reliable base for heritage management and sustainable planning in the region.

3.3.2 Task 2: To Investigate the Tīrtha-Centric Paurāṇika Construct of Varanasi

This task decodes the Purāṇika imagination of Kāśī as a *tīrtha*, using the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa* as the main source, supported by the *Mahābhārata*, *Śiva*, *Padma*, and *Vāmana Purāṇas*. It interprets these narratives not as mythology alone but as embedded knowledge systems reflecting ecological, spatial, and ritual order. Kāśī's sacred epithets—*Avimukta*, *Anandakanana*, *Mahāśmaśāna*, and *Śivapurī*—are treated as markers of its evolving identity as a divine and urban field (*kṣetra*).

The study examines how myths—such as Śiva's exile by King Divodāsa, the return of deities, the creation of *Avimuktakṣetra*, and the establishment of *kuṇḍas*—encode sacred geography, ecological adaptation, and ritual governance. By integrating textual analysis with environmental and spatial studies, Kāśī emerges as a *ritual ecosystem* where landscape, myth, and memory intersect.

Key themes include:

- Evolution of *Avimuktakṣetra* as Kāśī's spiritual and ecological core.
- Myths of drought and migration as metaphors for urban renewal.
- *Kuṇḍas* and water networks as instruments of sacred resource management.
- The formation of temple grids and ritual circuits as metaphysical infrastructure.

Despite challenges of chronology and symbolism in Purāṇika literature, the study cross-references textual, archaeological, and environmental data to interpret Kāśī's *tīrtha*-centric logic as both a sacred cosmology and a practical model of urban sustainability.

3.3.3 Task 3 – Reinterpreting Varanasi Tīrtha

This task synthesizes historical and textual findings through empirical validation and ethnographic research. Kāśī is studied as a *living tīrtha*, where ritual continuity, spatial memory, and community participation sustain sacred identity.

A field survey of 286 tīrtha sites—including the *Pañcakrośī Yātrā* circuit—was conducted based on *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* references. Each site was documented for its deity association, structure, ritual function, and present condition, with public perception surveys capturing local engagement and conservation status.

The "Divodāsa Paradigm" serves as a key interpretive lens, viewing Śiva's exile and divine re-entry as a symbolic urban process that diffused sacred density across Kāśī. The city thus functions as an *urban mandala*, where every shrine, *ghāṭ*, and *gali* reflects distributed divinity and living continuity.

The findings are organized under a triadic framework:

- Kāśī-Vāsī: Community stewardship and ritual performance.
- Kāśī-Nagara: Distributed sacred morphology embedded in the urban fabric.
- Kāśī-Yoga: The metaphysical and ritual coherence binding city, time, and devotion.

Together, these dimensions' reveal Kāśī as a *tīrtha-centric urban organism*—a continuous spiritual ecology where sacredness is lived, enacted, and renewed through people, place, and practice.

Through this task, the research affirms that Kāśī's sacredness is neither static nor archaeological alone—it is performative, participatory, and resilient. The city functions as an active tīrtha-scape, where the metaphysical is inscribed into material structures and revived through daily practice. The spatial density of tīrthas, their connection to cosmological events, and the continuing community engagement all contribute to Kāśī's enduring identity as a living sacred city and a timeless model of tīrtha-centric urbanism.

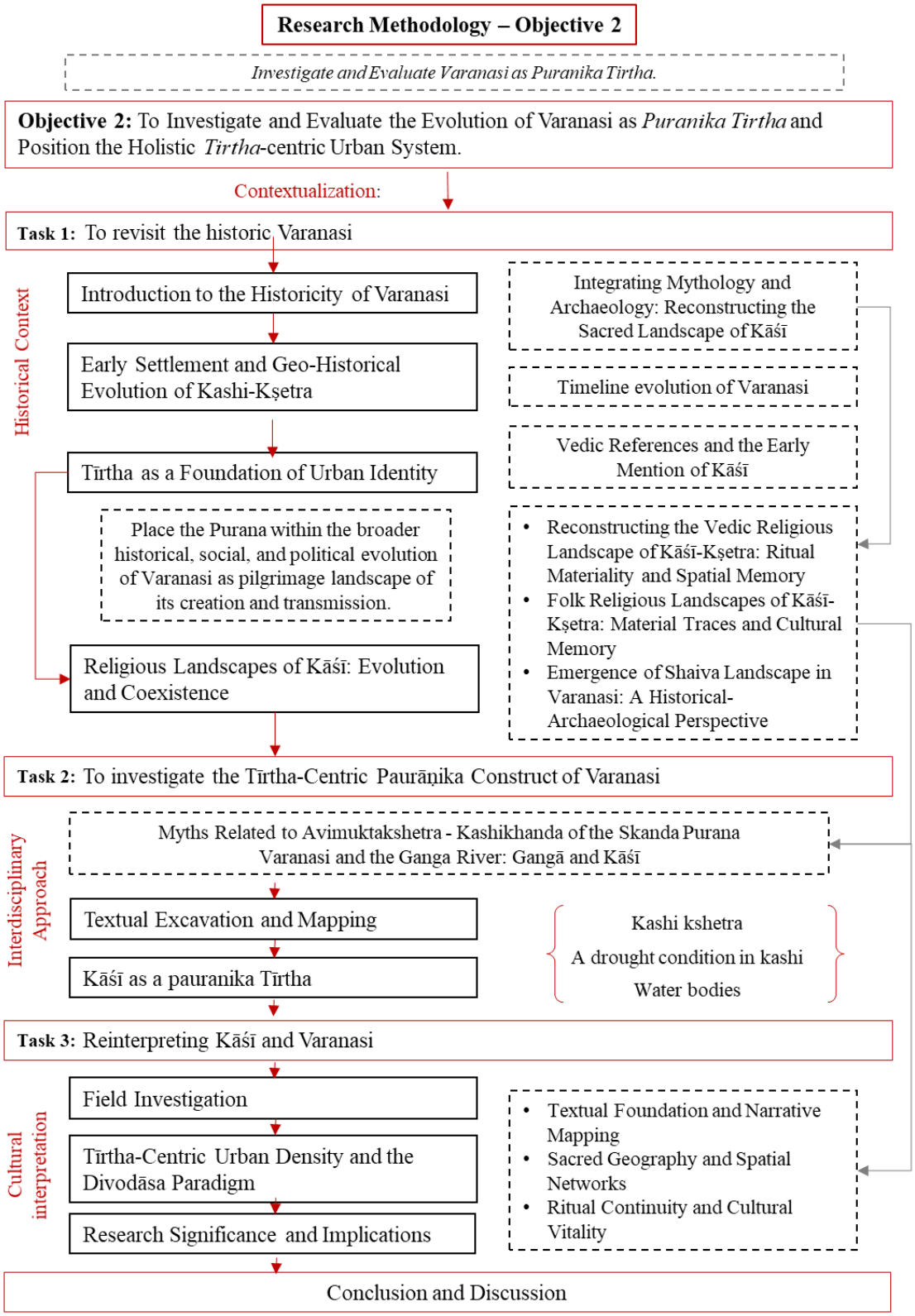


Figure 11: Methodological flow of research for Objective 2.

3.4 Objective Three: To Identify and Position the Indicators for Holistic Urban Development

The flowchart illustrates a structured three-tiered methodological approach designed to fulfill the third objective of the research, which seeks to identify and position development indicators for a holistic, tīrtha-centric urban development model in Indian pilgrimage towns like Varanasi. This objective is executed through three interlinked tasks that move from public perception to expert interpretation, and finally to analytical modeling. The first stage, labeled "Structure," begins with extensive fieldwork conducted at 286 tīrtha sites in Varanasi and along the Pañcakrośī Yātrā route. A semi-structured questionnaire, thematically divided into six sections, was used to engage diverse stakeholders—residents, priests, pilgrims, shopkeepers, and visitors—capturing demographic profiles, awareness of Paurāṇika narratives, community roles, perceptions of development, and visionary reflections. This ethnographic and participatory approach, adapted midway to a conversational and narrative-based method, resulted in the extraction of 64 indicators ranging from basic infrastructural needs to broader heritage and policy-level concerns.

Building on this empirical foundation, the second stage, termed "Intervention Perspectives," utilizes the Delphi method to critically evaluate and contextualize these indicators within tīrtha-centric urban paradigms. A carefully selected panel of ten experts—ranging from archaeologists and urban historians to senior administrators and cultural scholars—engaged in iterative discussions and site-based observations across three distinct tīrtha landscapes: Avimukteśvara (urban core), Kardameśvara (sacred-agrarian periphery), and Rāmnagar (ritual-royal edge). These expert reflections helped reinterpret the public-identified indicators through lenses of heritage governance, cultural memory, and policy planning, aligning traditional narratives with contemporary urban challenges.

The final stage, "Examination and Interrelation," operationalizes these findings using Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM). From the original 64 indicators, a core group of 15 was selected for this modeling exercise. Conducted with three domain experts using the SmartISM software, the ISM process mapped the hierarchical relationships between indicators, resulting in the creation of a Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM), a Reachability Matrix, and ultimately, a digraph (directed graph) representing multilevel dependencies. This analytical tool revealed foundational indicators that drive other development processes and those that function as outcome-level markers, thus offering strategic insights for policy formulation. Importantly, the flowchart includes a feedback loop—signifying that insights from ISM modeling can refine earlier survey methods and policy engagement, establishing an iterative and evolving framework for holistic urban development in sacred cultural landscapes.

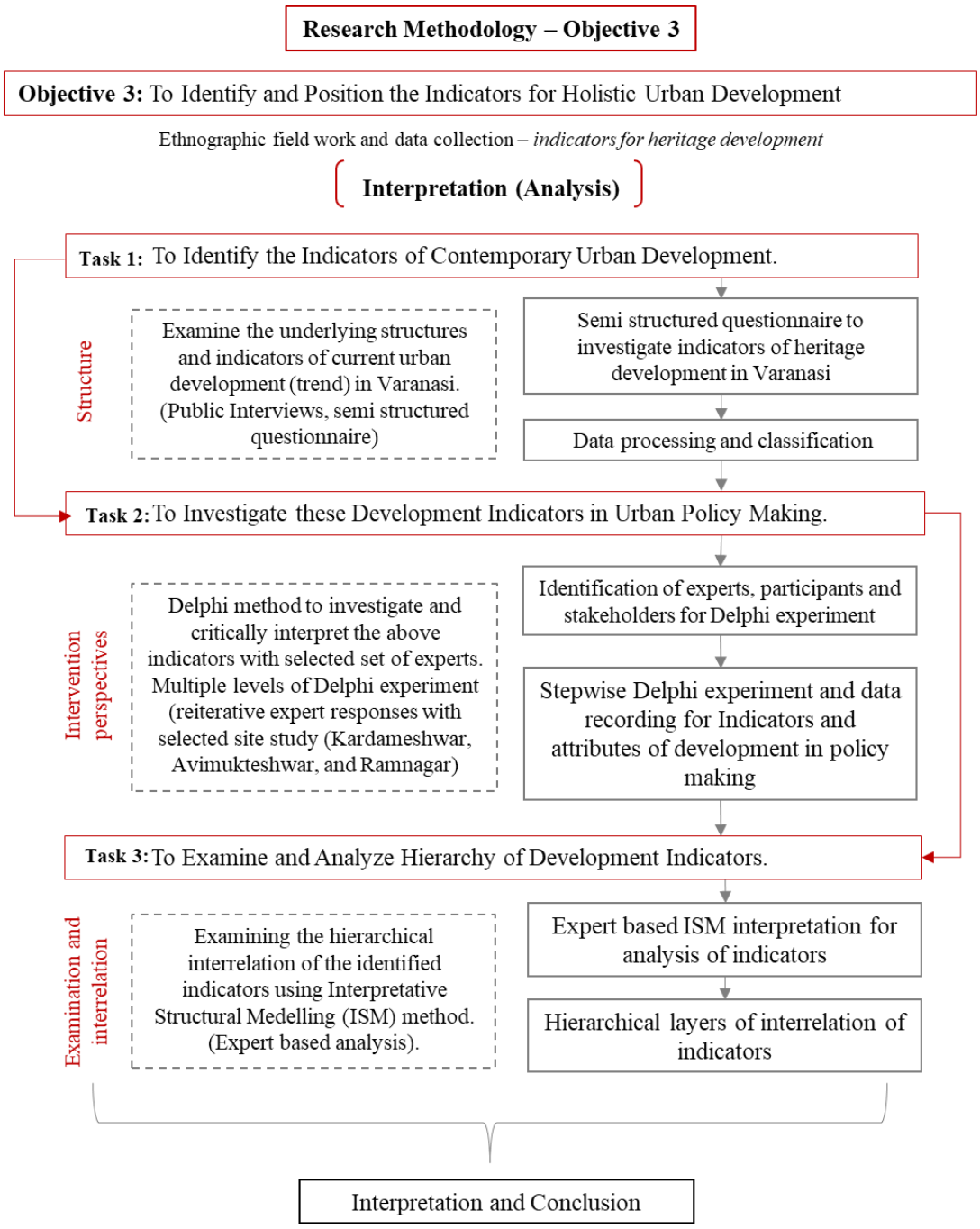


Figure 12: Methodological flow of research for Objective 3.

3.4.1 Task 1: To Identify the Indicators of Contemporary Urban Development

Builds a bottom-up picture of development at tīrtha sites in Varanasi from **150** semi-structured interviews across **286** locations (incl. *Pañcakrośī Yātrā*). Shifted from forms to ethnographic, narrative audio interviews to capture layered perceptions from residents, priests, shopkeepers, pilgrims, and visitors.

- **Field & Sites:** Inner-core *tīrthas* (Avimuktakṣetra), *Pañcakrośī* belt, and liminal sacred zones drawn from *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*.
- **Participants & Sampling:** Purposive selection; balanced by age, gender, caste/sect, role (ritual/commercial/custodial/devotional), and location (core–periphery).

- **Method Turn:** From Google/printed forms → in-situ conversations (ghats, mandapas, tea stalls); consented audio; verbatim transcription; thematic coding.
- **Questionnaire (6 sections):** Profile; Paurāṇika awareness; community role; development perception; pilgrim experience; reflective vision.
- **Output: 64** development indicators grouped into three domains:
    1. **Heritage & Cultural Anchoring** (ritual continuity, iconographic integrity, narrative memory, intergenerational pride)
    2. **Governance & Infrastructure** (schemes awareness, sanitation, roads/signage/lighting/toilets, stakeholder engagement)
    3. **Sacred Space & Tīrtha Upgradation** (kuṇḍ restoration, pilgrim facilities, minor-shrine protection, ritual infrastructure)

3.4.2 Task 2 — Analyze Interrelations via Expert Evaluation (Delphi)

Validates and refines the **64** indicators through a three-round Delphi with **10** transdisciplinary experts (heritage, planning, culture, environment, temple management, community leadership).

- **Rounds:**
    1. Present indicators + context (Avimukteśvara kṣetra) → importance ratings & comments.
    2. Revise/merge/add; re-rank with inputs from Kardameśvara *tīrtha* observations.
    3. Final prioritization & interdependency mapping (Ramnagar comparative narration).
- **Outcome:** Consensus set of relevant indicators with preliminary influence relations, feeding ISM in Task 3.

3.4.3 Task 3 — Examine & Model Indicator Hierarchy (ISM)

Structures the validated indicators into a systems model for *tīrtha*-centric development using Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM).

- **Set-up:** Three experts (historian, conservation architect, Vedic practitioner).
- **Procedure:** Select 15 indicators (tīrtha sites) and 13 (non-tīrtha analogs); build SSIM → Reachability/Final matrices → level partitioning → conical matrix & digraph → Reduced Conical Matrix → MICMAC.
- **Findings:** Base drivers (e.g., spirit of place, ritual knowledge, community-led conservation, sacred ecology) propel dependent outcomes (pilgrim experience, accessibility, tourism). MICMAC classifies indicators by driving/dependence power to reveal leverage points.
- **Result:** A hierarchical, decision-support roadmap aligning community memory and Paurāṇika values with policy and planning for sustainable, *tīrtha*-sensitive urban development.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has articulated a comprehensive and transdisciplinary methodology for investigating the epistemological, historical, and policy-oriented dimensions of *Purāṇa* and *Paurāṇika Tīrtha*, with a focused case study on Kāśī (Varanasi). The research adopts a tripartite epistemological framework—*Textual Analysis and Criticism, Contextualization, and Interpretation*—to explore how tīrthas, as sacred urban constructs, have evolved across time through narrative tradition, spatial memory, and ritual performance. Grounded in the paradigms of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and informed by the theoretical models of Pentti Routio and Groat & Wang, the methodology integrates multiple strategies, including interpretive-historical research, qualitative ethnographic fieldwork, logical argumentation, and combined case study approaches. These methodological layers support the study's threefold objective: first, to uncover the epistemological foundations of *Purāṇika tīrtha* through textual hermeneutics and field-based validation across 51 tīrtha towns; second, to reinterpret Kāśī's sacred urban system using historical, environmental, and narrative mappings, including a detailed field survey of 286 tīrtha sites and the application of the "Divodāsa Paradigm" for spatial analysis; and third, to identify and structure holistic urban development indicators through semi-structured interviews, Delphi expert consultation, and Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) analysis. By synthesizing ancient textual worldviews with contemporary urban realities, the chapter establishes a methodological scaffold that is both analytically rigorous and culturally rooted. The adoption of reflexive tools like Pinar's Method of Currere further enriches the researcher's positionality, allowing the inquiry to remain embedded in lived experience and tradition. Ultimately, the methodology positions tīrtha not merely as a religious concept but as a holistic civilizational model for sacred urbanism—offering a viable, culturally sensitive framework for sustainable heritage planning and urban policy in Indian pilgrimage towns.

The research adopts and adapts a blend of theoretical paradigms articulated by Pentti Routio and Groat & Wang, incorporating:

- Interpretive-Historical Research to decode the evolution of *tīrtha* through narrative constructs and performative traditions;
- Qualitative Research to understand stakeholder perceptions through ethnographic surveys and semi-structured interviews;
- Logical Argumentation to synthesize traditional cosmologies with modern policy models;
- Case Study and Combined Strategies to position Kāśī as a living sacred landscape and a model for tīrtha-centric urbanism.

Each methodological phase aligns with the research objectives through layered tasks:

- Objective 1 explores the epistemological evolution of *Purāṇa* and the construction of *tīrtha*-based place-making through manuscript study, historical criticism, narrative analysis, and typological synthesis across 51 tīrtha towns.
- Objective 2 reinterprets Kāśī as a Paurāṇika *Tīrtha*, using historical and textual contextualization, environmental correlations, and a field study of 286 sacred sites—including detailed documentation and the "Divodāsa Paradigm" to decode Kāśī's sacred spatial logic.

- Objective 3 identifies and structures urban development indicators rooted in sacred heritage using a three-tiered methodology: participatory public surveys, expert consultations via Delphi method, and analytical modeling through Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM).

Key Methodological Innovations:

The integration of Purāṇika narrative analysis with spatial ethnography and Delphi-ISM modelling provides a robust, multi-scalar methodology that moves beyond descriptive scholarship to strategic planning insights.

The adoption of Pinar's Method of Currere for reflexive positioning allows the author to incorporate subjective experiential insights while maintaining analytical rigor.

The methodology accounts for both the diachronic evolution of tīrthas and their synchronic living continuities, making it uniquely suited for examining Indian pilgrimage towns as systems of sacred urbanism rather than isolated religious sites.

This methodological framework establishes a transdisciplinary bridge between traditional Indian sacred epistemology and contemporary urban policy discourse. It demonstrates that *tīrtha*-centric models offer not only cultural depth and spiritual integrity but also resilience, inclusivity, and sustainability—qualities critical to modern heritage planning. By structuring narrative, memory, ritual, and spatial consciousness into a coherent methodological design, this chapter lays the groundwork for the upcoming analytical and policy-centric chapters that follow.

In conclusion, the methodology adopted in this research represents an innovative, culturally rooted, and academically rigorous approach to understanding and planning Indian pilgrimage towns. It reclaims *tīrtha* not merely as a religious concept, but as a foundational principle for holistic urban development—one that honors continuity, community, and cosmology in equal measure.

Chapter - 4: Objective One: Epistemological Evolution of Puran and Indian Pilgrimage Towns

This chapter presents the analysis and findings related to the first research objective, which seeks to explore the influence of Purāṇas and the Paurāṇika tīrtha-centric framework on the establishment and subsequent urban development of Indian pilgrimage towns. It addresses the foundational research question: *How is the study of Purāṇas and tīrthas relevant to the urban development of Indian pilgrimage towns?* In response, this objective delves into the epistemological evolution of the Paurāṇik tradition and its role in shaping pilgrimage towns as tīrthas.

The investigation is grounded in a systematic textual analysis and criticism, aiming to trace how Paurāṇik narratives and metaphysical constructs have contributed to the spatial, cultural, and civic evolution of ancient urban centers. Both primary and secondary sources—literary, archaeological, and ethnographic—are employed to substantiate this inquiry.

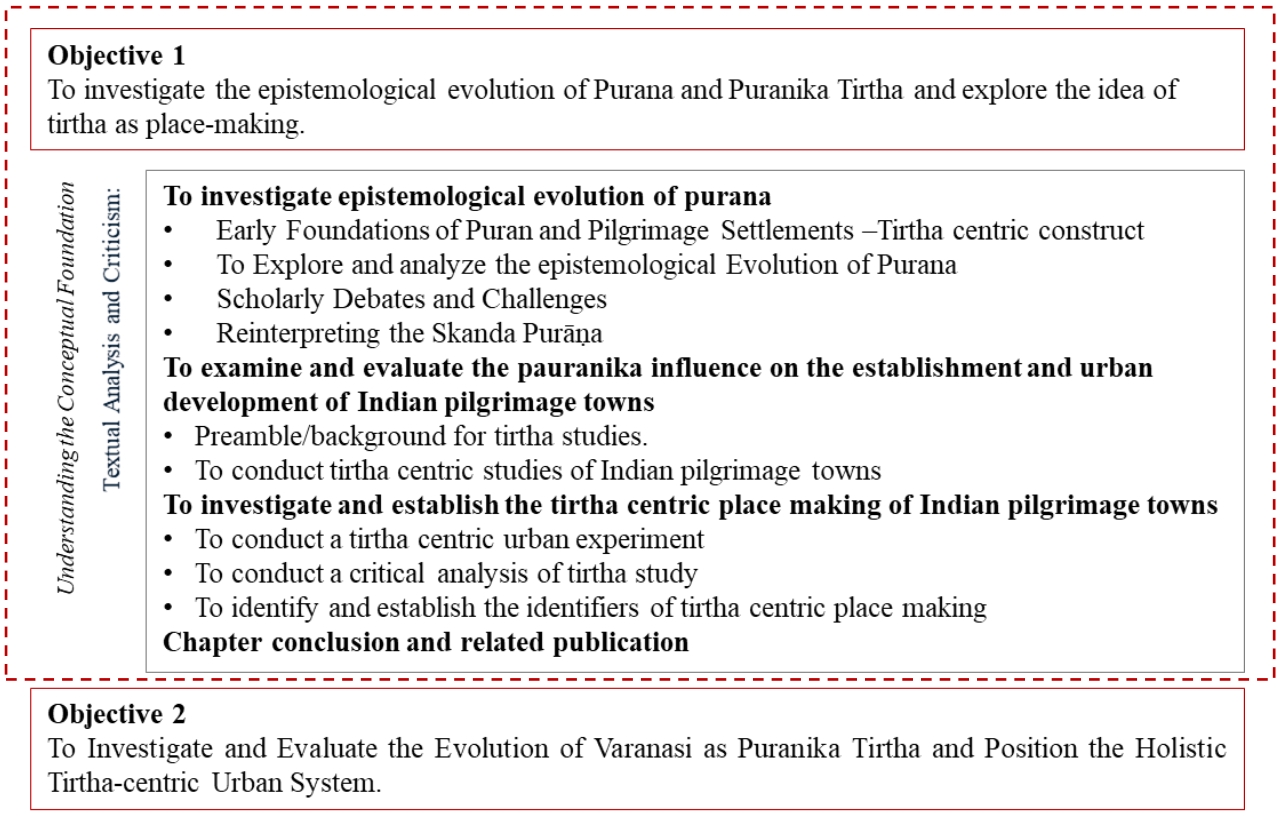


Figure 13:Structure of the chapter- Objective One

The objective unfolds across three interlinked tasks, each discussed in detail in the corresponding sections of the chapter:

1. To investigate the epistemological evolution of the Purāṇas (Section 4.1)
2. To examine and evaluate the Paurāṇika influence on the establishment and urban development of Indian pilgrimage towns (Section 4.2)

3. To investigate and establish tīrtha-centric place-making frameworks in Indian pilgrimage towns (Section 4.3)

The insights, implications, and identified tīrtha-centric factors contributing to the place-making and sustainable urban development of these towns are synthesized in the concluding section of the chapter (Section 4.4).

4.1. To investigate epistemological evolution of purana

The first task focuses on developing a comprehensive understanding of the Purāṇ and Paurāṇika textual traditions, with particular emphasis on revisiting the dynamic and evolving nature of Paurāṇik compositions. This objective is supported by two parallel sub-tasks aimed at deepening the investigation.

The initial step involves examining the early foundations and conceptual frameworks of the Purāṇas by engaging with secondary literature and existing Paurāṇika studies. Following this, a critical textual analysis is undertaken to trace the epistemological evolution of the Purāṇas. Drawing upon secondary sources, archaeological evidence, and epigraphic references, a chronological framework—*Paurāṇika Kāla-Mīmāṁsā*—is developed to outline the progressive stages of Paurāṇik development. This study is presented in Section 4.1.1, which breaks down the evolution into four key stages.

The investigation then turns to the primary focus of this research—the Skanda Purāṇa—in Section 4.1.2. This section analyzes the composition, structure, and evolution of the Skanda Purāṇa while also contextualizing it within its geographical and historical frameworks.

Finally, Section 4.1.3 presents the synthesized findings and concluding remarks of this task, establishing a foundational backdrop for the subsequent research experiments and deeper exploration into the tīrtha-centric constructs of Indian pilgrimage towns.

4.1.1. To Explore and analyze the epistemological Evolution of Purana

Early Western scholars once regarded the *Purāṇas* as late and purely mythological compositions, but modern research recognizes them as ancient, multilayered texts of immense historical and cultural value. Internal references, literary citations, and epigraphic evidence confirm their authority from the early centuries CE onward. Mentions by *Bāṇabhaṭṭa*, *Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja*, and Al-Bīrūnī attest to their early circulation and canonical status. Scholars like Winternitz (1927) traced the earliest Paurāṇik layers to the 1st century CE, noting affinities with Mahāyāna Buddhist literature.

Following the *pañcalakṣaṇa* model—creation, dissolution, genealogies, cosmic cycles, and dynastic histories—the Purāṇas record transitions from mythical to historical dynasties, offering key data on rulers such as the *Śiśunāgas*, Nandas, Mauryas, and Guptas (Hazra, 1953; Smith, 1919). Their narratives extend to later interactions with *Śakas*, *Yavanas*, and *Hūṇas*, reflecting India's evolving sociopolitical landscape.

Epigraphic and archaeological evidence further demonstrates the tangible presence of Paurāṇik influence. Inscriptions from Podagadh (6th c.), Samoli (646 CE), and regions like Rajim, Chittor, and Deogarh record temple foundations and land grants inspired by Paurāṇik devotion. These inscriptions show how Paurāṇik ideals fostered temple-building, agrarian expansion, and sacred geography across diverse terrains. Texts like the *Agni* and *Liṅga Purāṇas*

codified temple architecture (*Vāstu Vidyā*, *Prāsāda Vidhi*), shaping the classical Hindu temple tradition of the Gupta era.

Thus, the Purāṇas stand as dynamic historical chronicles—integrating theology, genealogy,

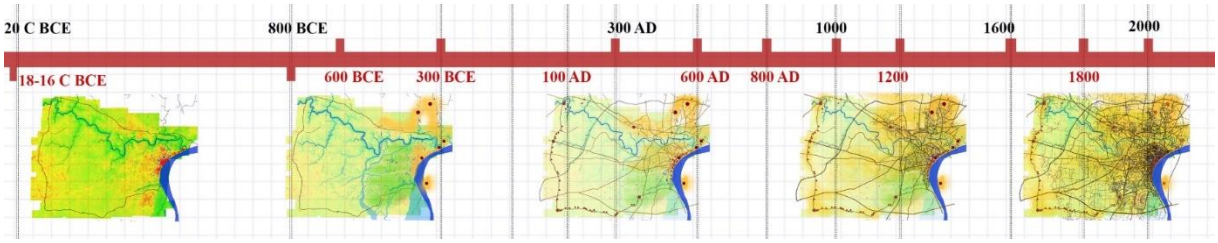


Figure 14: Timeline evolution of Varanasi.

and geography to anchor India's sacred landscapes within its civilizational continuum.

4.1.1.1. Purāṇ in Timeline- Purāṇika Kāla-Mīmāṁsā

The chronology of the *Purāṇas* has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry, often intersecting with *Kāla-Mīmāṁsā*—a methodology that systematically analyzes historical timelines. A growing body of evidence suggests the *Purāṇas* are not merely late compositions but evolved organically over centuries, deeply embedded in India's literary, ritual, and cultural history (Table 5).

References from the pre-Gupta period provide compelling insights into their antiquity. The 7th-century poet *Bāṇabhaṭṭa* refers to the public recitation of the *Vāyu Purāṇa* in his *Harṣacarita* and again alludes to it in *Kadambarī* with the phrase *"puraṇeṣu vāyupralāpitam"*—attesting to its popularity and established tradition (Rocher, 1986; Winternitz, 1922; Hazra, 1962). Similarly, historical accounts within the *Viṣṇu* and *Matsya Purāṇas* reference dynasties such as the *Mauryas* and *Andhras*, while the *Vāyu Purāṇa* acknowledges the Gupta Empire—indicating that substantial portions of these texts predate the Gupta period.

Intertextual parallels between the *Mahābhārata* and *Purāṇas* further affirm their early origins. The *Matsya Purāṇa* is explicitly cited in the *Mahābhārata*, while shared narratives—such as the tale of *Ṛṣyaśṛṅga* found in both the *Padma Purāṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*—highlight their intertwined development. Scholars such as Dr. Luders argue that many epic stories predate their *Paurāṇik* versions, reinforcing the antiquity of the *Purāṇika* tradition (Luders, 1897).

The *Purāṇas* are also referenced in ancient treatises, confirming their authoritative role in statecraft and dharma. *Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra* (3rd c. BCE) incorporates economic ideas traceable to *Paurāṇik* teachings (Pargiter, 1962). Legal texts like the *Gautama-Dharmasūtra* (11.19) recommend consulting the *Vedas*, *Vedāṅgas*, and *Purāṇas* for righteous governance. The *Apastamba-Dharmasūtra* even quotes verses from the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*, confirming their transmission during the Sūtra period.

ṛgvedaṃ bhagavo'dhyemi yajurvedaṃ sāmavedam ātharvaṇaṃ caturtham |

itihāsapurāṇaṃ pañcamaṃ vedānāṃ vedam ||- (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 7.1.2)

The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (7.1.2) famously refers to *Itihāsa-Purāṇa* as the "fifth Veda," a sentiment echoed in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* (1.4.20) and *Atharva Veda*, which describe the

Purāṇas as emerging alongside the four Vedas from the cosmic sacrifice (*Ucchiṣṭa*). *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* (3.12.39) affirms that *Itihāsa* and *Purāṇa* arose from the divine consciousness of the Creator, while the *Reva Māhātmya* (1.23.30) of the *Padma Purāṇa* maintains that *Vyāsa* did not compose but compiled the *Purāṇas*, acting as a transmitter of eternal wisdom revealed by *Brahmā*.

This ontological framing of the *Purāṇas* as eternal scriptures is reiterated in the *Matsya Purāṇa* (3.3–4):

"Purāṇaṁ sarvaśāstrāṇāṁ prathamaṁ brahmaṇā smṛtam,

anantaraṁ ca vaktrebhyo vedās tasya vinirgataḥ."

And in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (3.6.39):

"Itihāsapurāṇāni pañcamaṁ vedam īśvaraḥ,

sarvebhya eva vaktrebhyaḥ saṣṛje sarvadarśanaḥ."

From a *tīrtha* perspective, the *Purāṇas* play an instrumental role in mapping India's sacred geography. Kāśī stands as a prime exemplar, with the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa* providing a detailed spiritual topography of the city (Bhardwaj, 1973; Eck, 1981; Nath, 2001; Singh R.P., 2009). Here, Kāśī is not just a geographic entity but a metaphysical space, transcending temporal cycles and serving as a living tīrtha across yugas.

The cumulative evidence—from epics, legal and economic treatises, Vedic and Upaniṣadic literature, and sacred geography—attests to the profound antiquity and organic evolution of the *Purāṇas*. They were not merely retrospective mythologies but dynamic, living texts central to India's religious, legal, and cultural life from the Vedic through the Gupta periods. In the context of *tīrtha darśana*, Kāśī epitomizes the enduring relevance of *Purāṇika* traditions in shaping sacred landscapes and guiding pilgrimage practices.

The following table presents the key textual, epigraphic, and literary references that trace the evolution of *Purāṇika* literature. A staged timeline is discussed thereafter.

Table 5: Staged timeline of the puran

Timeline	Detail	Reference	Citation
1200–1000 BCE	mentions "Purana" alongside *Rik*, *Saman*, *Yajus*, and *Chhandas* as emanating from the *Uchchhishta* (residue of sacrifice)	*Atharvaveda*	
900–600 BCE	Purana is listed like *Itihasa*, *Kalpa*, and *Upanishad*	*Satapatha Brahmana* and *Gopatha Brahmana*	
800–600 BCE		*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*	
700 BCE	designates the *Itihāsa-Purāṇas* as the fifth Veda	Chāndogya Upaniṣad	Ježić, 1986
600–300 BCE	prescribe the study of *Itihasa-Purana* during periods of impurity	Grihyasutras	
400 BCE – 400 AD	*ity etan māstyakaṁ nāma purāṇaṁ parikīrtitam* ||- Mahābhārata 6.187.57–58	Mahābhārata	Art., 1897
3rd century BCE	Puranic economic principles, underscoring its role in statecraft and governance	Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra*	Pargiter, 1962

1st century AD	similarities between the Purāṇas and contemporary Buddhist Mahayana texts, such as the *Lalitavistara*	Moritz Winternitz	
7th-century	Banabhatta, who mentions attending a reading of the Vāyu Purāṇa in his native village,	*Harṣacarita*	Rocher, 1986; Winternitz, 1922
	"*puraṇeṣu vāyupralāpitam*	*Kadambarī*,	
7th–8th century AD	Kumarila Bhatta (7th–8th century AD, a Hindu philosopher and a scholar of Mimamsa school of philosophy) cites the Purāṇas as authoritative sources for legal matters		
	historical accounts of dynasties like the Mauryas and the Andhras	*Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and Matsya Purāṇa	
8th–9th century AD	Śankara (8th–9th century AD) and Ramanuja (11th–12th century AD) refer to them as ancient and sacred texts.		
11th century AD	Alberuni was familiar with the Purāṇas, listing the eighteen canonical texts and quot		
sixth-century	Podagadh inscription in present-day Odisha	King Skandavarman of the Nala dynasty dedicated a temple to Vishnu's footprints	Ardhendu, 2013, Hirananda Sastri, 1984
7th century	646 AD Samoli inscription from Rajasthan	temple for the goddess Aranyavasini in a tribal settlement	Hirananda Sastri, 1983
	the construction of Vishnu temples by King Vilasatunga in Rajim (Chhattisgarh)		Sharma, 2014
	Shiva temples by King Kukkureshwara in Chittor		
	inscriptions from Deogarh and Gandhar confirm temples built for goddesses like Devi and Dakini		Epigraphia Indica, 1911–12; Pathak, 1987

The determination of the timeline for the *Purāṇas* has been a subject of sustained scholarly debate. Drawing from textual references, epigraphic evidence, and philological analysis, a staged chronology has been proposed—tracing the organic development of *Purāṇika* literature from early oral traditions to complex sectarian and encyclopedic texts.

a) Early References and Origins (c. 1200 BCE – 500 BCE)

The earliest traces of *Paurāṇik* thought appear within the Vedic corpus, pointing to its origin in oral traditions. The *Atharvaveda* (c. 1200–1000 BCE) mentions "Purāṇa" alongside *Ṛk*, *Sāman*, *Yajus*, and *Chandas*, describing them as emerging from *Ucchiṣṭa* (the residue of sacrifice), signifying a distinct literary category. The term *Puranavid* (one versed in Purāṇas) suggests a recognized body of knowledge.

The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (c. 800–600 BCE) describes the *Purāṇas* as originating from the breath of the Supreme Soul, reinforcing their sacred origin. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (c. 700 BCE) even identifies the *Itihāsa–Purāṇa* as the "fifth Veda."

Texts like the *Śatapatha* and *Gopatha Brāhmaṇas* (c. 900–600 BCE) list *Purāṇa* among other sacred genres such as *Itihāsa* and *Kalpa*, further emphasizing their early significance. The *Gṛhyasūtras* (c. 600–300 BCE) recommend the recitation of *Itihāsa–Purāṇa* during periods of ritual impurity, indicating their integration into daily religious life.

Scholars such as Shivadatta Gyani identify an Akhyāna–Vaṃśa Stage (c. 1200–950 BCE), where genealogical and narrative traditions emerged post-*Mahābhārata*, followed by a Bifurcation Stage (c. 950–500 BCE), where *Paurāṇik* literature began to diverge from *Itihāsa*, incorporating cosmogonic and moral themes.

b) Development and Formalization (c. 500 BCE – 300 AD)

By the Pañcalakṣaṇa Stage (c. 500 BCE – 1 AD), the *Purāṇas* began to acquire a structured form, characterized by five defining themes: *sarga* (creation), *pratisarga* (dissolution), *vaṃśa* (genealogies), *manvantara* (cosmic cycles), and *vaṃśānucarita* (dynastic history).

Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra (c. 4th century BCE) includes *Purāṇa* within *Itihāsa* as a subject of royal instruction. Greek ambassador *Megasthenes* (c. 300 BCE) likely encountered *Paurāṇik* cosmogony at the Mauryan court.

The *Mahābhārata* (c. 400 BCE–400 AD) and *Harivaṃśa* reference the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, indicating its early existence. Buddhist texts like the *Milindapañha* (c. 2nd BCE–2nd AD) also mention *Purāṇas*, reflecting their influence beyond Brahmanical circles.

F.E. Pargiter (1922) suggests that significant compilation occurred during the Andhra period (c. 2nd century AD), with the early *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* compiled around 260 AD. The *Matsya Purāṇa*'s dynastic lists end with the *Andhras*, *Gardabhillas*, *Śakas*, and *Kīlakila* kings—indicating a post-Kuṣāṇa timeframe.

c) Crystallization During the Gupta Period (c. 300–500 AD)

The Gupta era marks a crucial phase in the final consolidation of many *Purāṇas*. Scholars like Bühler and Pargiter note that the dynastic narratives in the *Vāyu*, *Viṣṇu*, *Matsya*, and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇas* culminate with the reign of *Chandragupta I* (c. 319–330 AD), covering regions such as *Prayāga*, *Sāketa*, and *Magadha*. The absence of *Samudragupta*'s campaigns suggests a terminus ante quem around 335 AD.

Manuscript evidence from Bengal, written in Gupta script (7th century AD), confirms the textual presence of the *Skanda Purāṇa* during this time. *Bāṇabhaṭṭa's Harṣacarita* (c. 620 AD) refers to the *Vāyu*, *Agni*, *Bhāgavata*, and *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇas*, indicating their circulation in courtly and scholarly settings. *Al-Bīrūnī*'s list of the eighteen *Purāṇas* in 1030 AD, drawn from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, confirms the canon was largely fixed by the early 11th century.

d) Sectarian and Encyclopedic Expansion (c. 500–1200 AD)

Post-Gupta centuries witnessed a significant transformation, with *Purāṇas* evolving into encyclopedic and sectarian texts. R.C. Hazra (1962) attributes the addition of *Dharmashāstra* and ritualistic content to the *Mārkaṇḍeya*, *Vāyu*, *Brahmāṇḍa*, *Viṣṇu*, *Matsya*, and *Bhāgavata Purāṇas* between the 3rd–7th centuries AD.

The rise of devotional movements led to theological elaborations aligned with *Vaiṣṇavism*, *Śaivism*, and *Śāktism*. Thinkers like *Śaṅkarācārya* (8th c.), *Rāmānuja* (12th c.), *Madhvācārya* (13th c.), and *Vallabhācārya* (16th c.) influenced these expansions.

Horace Wilson noted that many *Purāṇas* crystallized into expressions of popular Hinduism between the 8th and 16th centuries. Yet earlier citations—such as *Kumārila Bhaṭṭa*'s (8th c.) use of *Paurāṇik* texts—indicate that the core content predates these developments. Gyani's Sectarian–Encyclopedic Stage (c. 1–700 AD) effectively captures this transitional phase, where *Purāṇas* became vast repositories of religious, cosmological, ethical, and legal knowledge.

8 Scholarly Debates and Methodological Challenges

Dating the *Purāṇas* is complicated by their layered composition and the scarcity of definitive manuscripts. Wilson's late dating (e.g., *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* c. 1045 AD) is contradicted by *Al-Bīrūnī's* reference in 1030 AD. While Pargiter emphasizes their historical content, he underplays their mythological and ritual layers. Macdonell's linkage to the *Vedas* and *Smṛtis* underlines their depth but lacks chronological clarity.

Despite these challenges, the cumulative evidence from Vedic texts, epics, Buddhist references, and post-Gupta manuscripts supports a multi-stage evolution. Based on secondary sources and primary references, the following figure (see Figure) maps the epistemological development of *Paurāṇik* literature across four major stages, illustrating its growth from sacred oral tradition to a formalized literary corpus central to Indian knowledge systems.

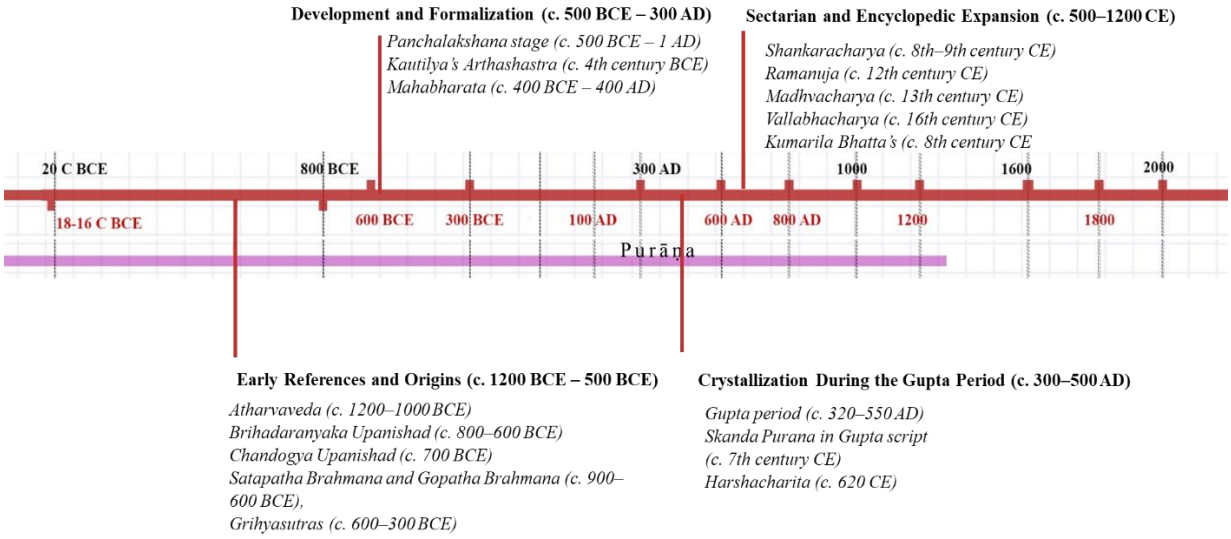


Figure 15: Timeline representation of the four stages of epistemelogical evolution of puran.

4.1.2. Reinterpreting the Skanda Purāṇa

The Skanda Purāṇa (SP), though named after the war god Skanda (Kārttikeya), devotes little attention to him, portraying him instead as *Senāpati*, the divine commander, while elevating Śiva and the Goddess as central deities. This shift reflects the 6th–7th century CE socio-political milieu—an era of warfare and rising Śaiva and Śākta prominence under dynasties like the Maukharis and Harṣavardhana (Bakker, 1998; Mann, 2012). Within this framework, *Vārāṇasī (Kāśī)* emerges as the spiritual axis of the text, with Śiva eternally manifest in *Avimukta Kṣetra*, granting direct liberation (*mokṣa*).

Composition and Setting: The SP likely originated in North India during the late 6th–early 7th century CE, amid political consolidation under the Maukharis and Harṣa's rule in Kannauj.

As Pāśupata-Śaiva institutions flourished, a learned *Māheśvara* Brahmin from Vārāṇasī compiled the SP, integrating *māhātmyas* of major *tīrthas*—Kāśī, Kurukṣetra, Prayāga, and Vindhyavāsinī—into a coherent Śaiva cosmology. The text received canonical recognition during Harṣa's royal assemblies at Prayāga and later spread to Nepal, where an 810 CE palm-leaf manuscript preserves the earliest recension.

Evolution and Recensions: Philological studies identify four main stages:

1. Initial Composition (c. 570–620 CE) under Maukhari–Harṣa patronage, emphasizing Śaiva theology.
2. Structured S-hyparchetype (c. 620–700 CE) expanding on *Pāśupata tīrthas*.
3. Divergence (c. 700–800 CE) into early Nepalese (S1) and later eastern versions (S2–S4).
4. Final Redaction (9th c. CE) into the RA recension under the Pālas, merging Śaiva and Śākta elements.

Through its extensive *tīrtha-māhātmya* sections, the SP shaped the ritual geography of pilgrimage cities like Kāśī, Ujjain, and Prayāga—mapping sacred cosmology onto urban form. The text thus stands as both a theological and urban charter, illustrating how devotion, polity, and narrative together forged India's enduring *tīrtha*-centric sacred landscapes.

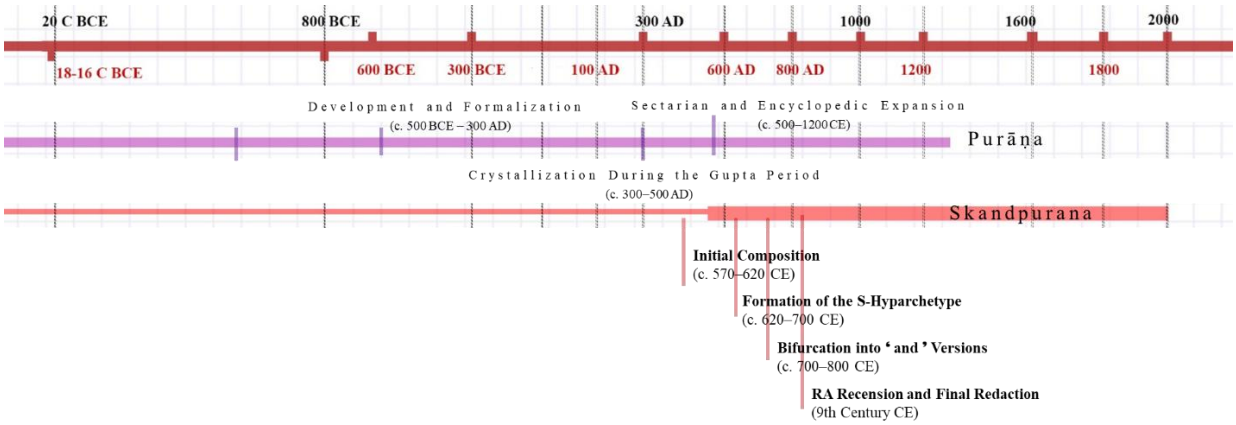


Figure 16: Timeline map for Evolution of Skandpuran.

4.1.2.1.Mapping from the study of skand puran.

The literature study presented in chapter 2 indicates that the *Skanda Purāṇa* is distinctly composed around a tīrtha-centric framework, wherein sacred geography is organized into thematic divisions known as *Khaṇḍas*. Each *Khaṇḍa* elaborates upon the spiritual significance of specific tīrtha sites, often through detailed *Māhātmya* narratives that elevate these locations as loci of cosmic and ritual power.

a) spatial mapping of the geographical features mentioned in the Skanda Purāṇa

Based on this understanding, the first analytical map developed for the study involves the spatial mapping of the geographical features mentioned in the *Skanda Purāṇa*. The seven principal *Khaṇḍas* and the *Paurāṇika* landscapes discussed therein are superimposed onto the tīrtha base map constructed in earlier sections. Each *Khaṇḍa* is represented using a distinct color code to demarcate its geographical spread and thematic focus. The index key and the

composite base map illustrating these *Skanda Purāṇa Kṣetras* are appended as Figure 5: Geographical Representation of *Skanda Purāṇa* Kṣetras.

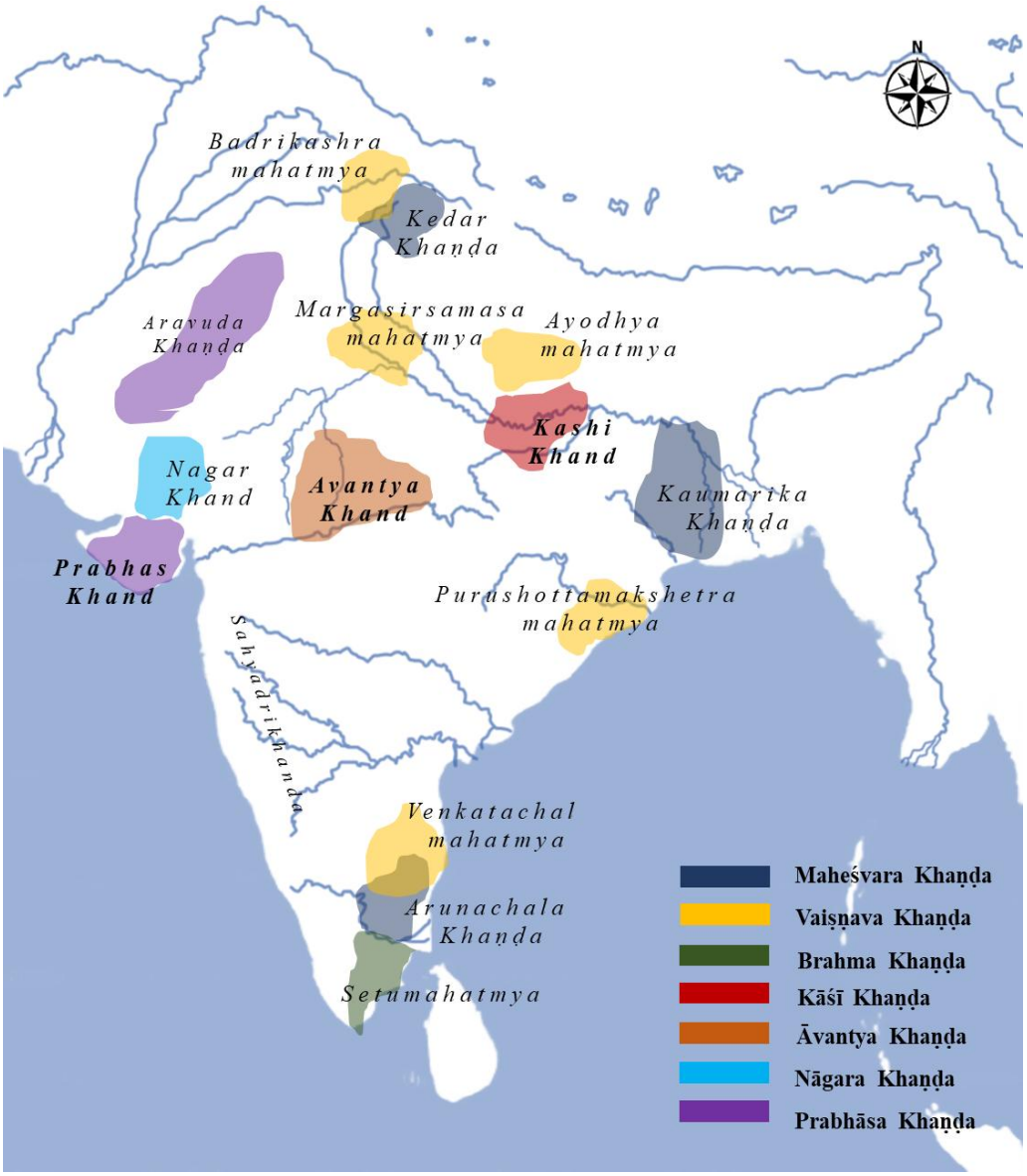


Figure 17: Geographical representation of skandapuran Kṣetra/Khaṇḍ.

b) socio-political and regional community

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the socio-political and regional community influences embedded within the composition and dissemination of the *Skanda Purāṇa*. To investigate this dimension, a socio-political overlay map has been developed. This map illustrates the historical context of community structures and ruling powers contemporaneous with the *Skanda Purāṇa's* formation, as inferred from textual references, historical sources, and experts consutations. The map is grounded in secondary historical research, supplemented by expert consultations in archaeology, geography, and cultural studies. The resulting socio-political landscape is rendered over the existing tīrtha base map and is included for reference in the subsequent figure.

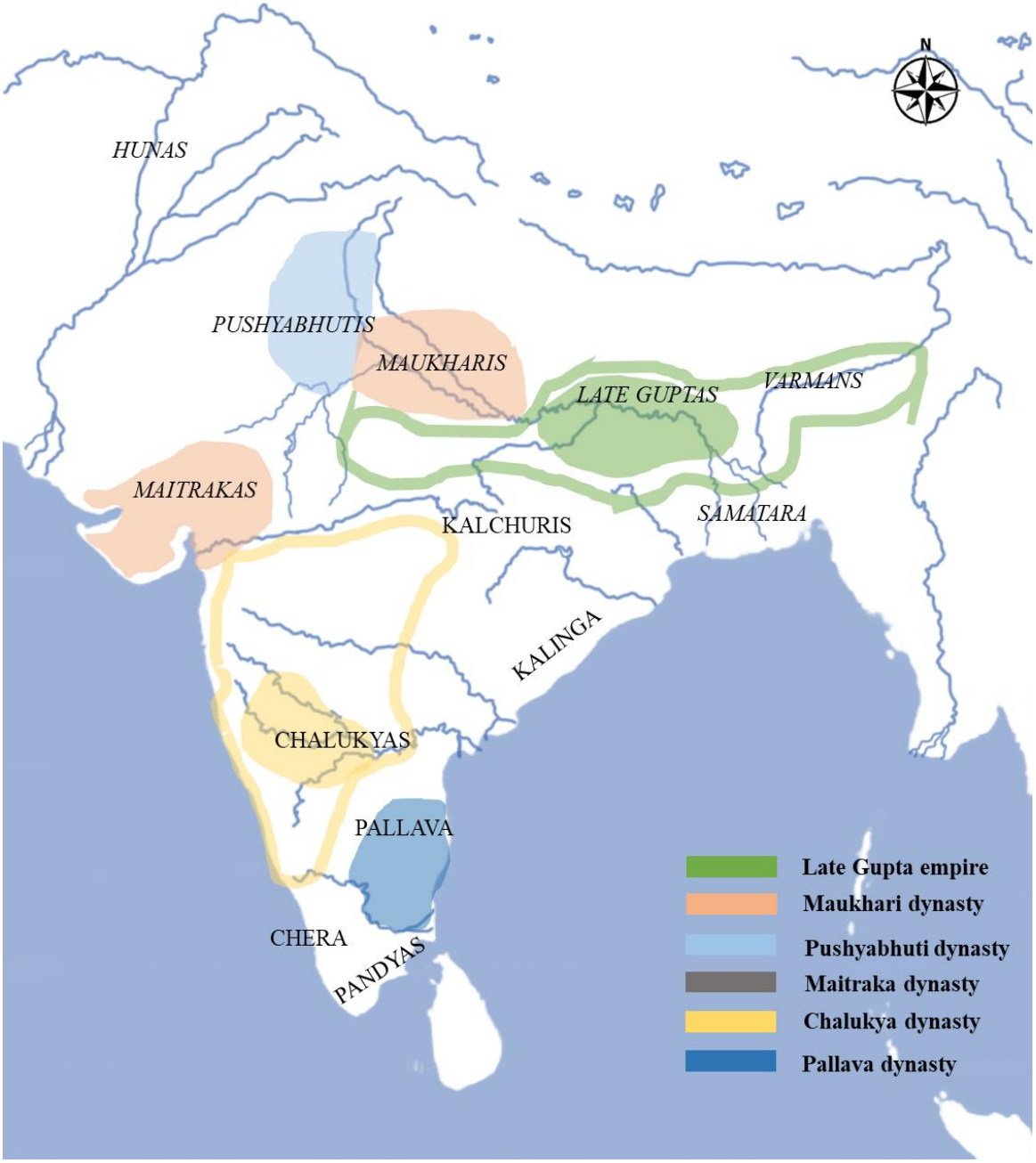


Figure 18: Socio-Political and community map os skandpuran Kṣetra.

4.1.1.1. Conclusion: A Living Śaiva Document

The *Skanda Purāṇa* is not a fixed composition but a dynamic textual tradition that evolved across centuries. From its early North Indian origins and transmission to Nepal, through to its 9th-century redactions and later sectarian expansions, the SP embodies the layered processes of *Paurāṇik* adaptation. The collaborative efforts of scholars such as Adriaensen, Bakker, Isaacson, Bisschop, Yokochi, and Törzsök have been instrumental in uncovering this complex history.

Far beyond myth, the SP offers a window into the interplay of narrative, devotion, polity, and place-making—central to the formation of sacred geographies and tīrtha urbanism in early medieval India.

4.2. To examine and evaluate the Paurāṇika influence on the establishment and urban development of Indian pilgrimage towns

The second task under this objective focuses on examining the influence of the *Purāṇas* on the development of Indian pilgrimage towns. This investigation is structured through the following key sub-tasks:

1. Preamble / Contextual Background – Establishes the historical and textual context of Paurāṇik narratives in relation to sacred geography and urban formation.
2. Tīrtha-Centric Case Studies – Conducts focused studies on selected Indian pilgrimage towns to understand how Paurāṇik literature shaped their spatial, ritual, and cultural frameworks.
3. Analysis and Key Observations – Synthesizes insights from the case studies to highlight patterns, narrative influences, and urban implications drawn from the Paurāṇik tradition.

4.2.1. Preamble/background for tīrtha studies

The *Purāṇas* present astonishing figures regarding the number of *tīrthas* (sacred pilgrimage sites) across India, highlighting a significant expansion of *tīrtha*-centric ritualism. Though often exaggerated and symbolic rather than literal, these numbers reflect the growing religious and cultural importance of *tīrthas* in *Paurāṇik* traditions. The intent behind such claims appears to be integrative—bringing diverse local shrines and cultic centers, particularly those outside the traditional Brahmanical heartland, into a cohesive Pan-Indian sacred geography.

One striking observation from this study is the geographic distribution of many *Paurāṇik tīrthas* outside the Indo-Gangetic core. Sites such as *Kamakhya* (Assam), *Jagannātha Puri* (Odisha), *Tirumala* (Tamil Nadu), and *Dwarka* (Gujarat) rose to prominence during the *Paurāṇik* period. Even older sacred sites like *Gaya*, which features prominently in the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*, fall outside the core Brahmanical region. This pattern is especially evident in texts such as the *Matsya*, *Brahma*, *Mārkaṇḍeya*, *Skanda*, *Brahmāṇḍa*, *Bhāgavata*, *Brahmavaivarta*, and *Padma Purāṇas*—many of which were composed or redacted in areas with strong tribal presence and where Sanskritization efforts were underway during the post-Gupta centuries.

The *Purāṇas* positioned *tīrthas* at the center of ritual life, often surpassing Vedic and Smārta traditions. Rituals such as *snāna* (ritual bathing), *dāna* (charity), *pūjā* (worship), *vrata* (vows), *piṇḍa-dāna* (ancestral offerings), and *kathā-śravaṇa* (listening to sacred narratives) became tied to the sacred geography of these sites. According to the *Matsya Purāṇa* (111.12–15), rites performed at *tīrthas* were considered vastly more potent than those performed at home.

Many *Purāṇas* include dedicated *Tīrtha Māhātmya* sections that extol the spiritual, miraculous, and cultic potency of specific sites. For instance, the *Skanda Purāṇa* contains elaborate *Māhātmyas* such as *Suleśvara*, *Siṃheśvara*, *Ekanāmśa*, and *Avantīkṣetra*, which function as detailed pilgrimage guides. Notably, even listening to these *Māhātmyas* is said to confer spiritual merit equivalent to physically visiting the site (*Skanda Purāṇa* V.1.43.60).

The *Skanda Purāṇa*—often dubbed a *Tīrtha Saṃhitā*—epitomizes this trend. Its *Revā Khaṇḍa* (chapters 230–232), styled as *Narmadā Caritam*, catalogues nearly 400 *tīrthas* along the Narmadā River. The *Matsya Purāṇa* (194.45) claims there are 10 crore sacred spots along this river; the *Agni Purāṇa* (113.2) and *Kūrma Purāṇa* (11.40.13) inflate this to 60 crore and 60,000, respectively. Similarly, the *Brahma Purāṇa* (77.8–9) asserts that three and a half crore *tīrthas* line the banks of the Godāvarī. Interestingly, neither river is mentioned as sacred in early Vedic texts, indicating the *Purāṇas'* role in elevating non-Vedic regional rivers into major sacred geographies.

This deliberate expansion of *tīrthas* into peripheral and tribal regions reflects an active process of Sanskritization, aimed at integrating diverse local traditions into the wider Brahmanical fold. Over time, these *tīrthas* evolved into not just religious hubs but also economic and cultural centers, facilitating trade, settlement growth, and regional identity formation.

In doing so, the *Purāṇas* did more than shape religious practices—they actively influenced the socio-economic and urban development of ancient India, establishing a sacred geography that continues to inform India's spiritual and cultural landscape.

4.2.2. To conduct Tīrtha-Centric studies of Indian pilgrimage towns

Indian pilgrimage towns, identified as *tīrthas*, are richly described in the *Purāṇas* and *Paurāṇika* literature. These narratives not only glorify such towns but also play a significant role in their conceptualization, establishment, and subsequent urban development. As explored in Chapters 2 and 3, the *Purāṇas* depict the urban form of *tīrtha*-centric towns as intricately woven around mythological events, thematic layers, and a spectrum of social castes and actors. These textual frameworks offer valuable insights into how sacred narratives influenced spatial planning and civic life in ancient Indian cities.

Building upon this contextual foundation, the present research adopts an organic, case study-based urban investigation to analyze the narrative content and its urban implications. The methodology was implemented in multiple steps:

1. Preparation of a semi-structured questionnaire and identification of key *tīrtha* towns for study
2. Conducting a pilot survey in *Mathura* and *Prayagraj*
3. Refinement of the research design based on pilot findings
4. Execution of the full-scale surveys and systematic data collection

This structured experiment aims to support the critical assessment on how *tīrtha*-centric narratives from the *Purāṇas* have shaped the historical and spatial development of Indian pilgrimage towns (in section 4.3).

4.2.2.1. To prepare a semi structured questionnaire guide and identifications of towns for study

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, a semi-structured questionnaire was developed to conduct a site-based survey experiment in Varanasi under Objective 2. While the primary aim of the questionnaire was to explore the *Paurāṇika* construct of Varanasi as a *tīrtha*—which would later inform interpretation and analysis in Chapter 6 (Objective 2)—one specific question

directed to visitors yielded an additional layer of insight. Respondents were asked to mention *tīrthas* they had recently visited or were planning to visit in the near future.

The responses generated a diverse list of pilgrimage sites, from which 51 towns across India were identified for further study. These towns reflect the contemporary pilgrimage circuits of visitors in Varanasi and provide a broader context for analyzing the Pan-Indian network of *tīrthas*.

4.2.2.2. To prepare a semi structured questionnaire guide and identifications of tīrtha towns for study

As elaborated in Chapters 3 and 4, a semi-structured questionnaire was developed to conduct a site-based survey at Varanasi under Objective 2. The primary focus of this tool was to investigate the *Paurāṇika* construction of Varanasi as a *tīrtha*, which would later inform deeper interpretative analysis under Chapter 6. Interestingly, one specific question in the survey—pertaining to the visitor's recent or planned *tīrtha* journeys—yielded valuable insights. From the responses collected during the public survey, a list of 51 pilgrimage towns across India was compiled for further study. These towns became the focal points for examining the broader influence of *Paurāṇik* narratives on sacred urbanism. The detailed questionnaire is included in the annexure IV.

4.2.2.3. Pilot Survey at Varanasi and Research Experiment Design

The overarching aim of the research was to explore how *Paurāṇik* and *Paurāṇika* literatures have influenced the spatial development and establishment of Indian pilgrimage towns. A pilot survey was therefore initiated in Varanasi to refine the research methodology and understand the city's evolution as a *tīrtha* centre through textual and spatial timelines.

As discussed in Chapter 4, Varanasi—also known as Kāśī or Avimukta Kṣetra—stands as one of the most ancient continuously inhabited cities and occupies a central place in India's sacred geography. The city is richly referenced in the *Skanda Purāṇa*, especially in its *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*, which glorifies its tīrthas, divine origin, and ritual topography. Varanasi is presented not merely as a historical settlement but as a cosmic microcosm where *mokṣa* (liberation) is assured to those who die within its bounds.

Its urban form—with a radial *ghāṭ* system, sacred routes like the *pañcakrośī yātrā*, temple clusters, water bodies, and residential enclaves—has evolved directly in response to *Paurāṇika* spatial prescriptions. This case demonstrates how scriptural narratives have shaped not only the spiritual but also the physical and civic layout of sacred cities in India, positioning Varanasi as a living *tīrtha* rather than a conventional urban settlement.

4.2.2.4. Modifications to Research Framework and Preparation of Base Map

Drawing from the Varanasi study, the selected 51 pilgrimage towns were subsequently surveyed and documented. Due to the heterogeneity of these towns, the research adopted a flexible, semi-structured approach tailored to the nature of available data. The goal was to identify and analyze *Paurāṇika* references and their influence on urban development across different regional contexts.

While Varanasi presents a well-documented and textually enriched case, many other towns lack comprehensive *Paurāṇik* documentation or have preserved their sanctity through oral

traditions, inscriptions, or regional *Mahātmya* interpolations. This diversity necessitated a context-sensitive methodology, one that integrates:

- *Paurāṇik*, *Mahātmya*, and *Sthalapurāṇa* literature;
- Regional folklore and oral history;
- Ethnographic observations and spatial mapping;
- Architectural and cultural analysis.

The data was synthesized into an analytical matrix (included in the annexure I) with parameters such as:

- Geographic location
- Sacrede features
- Textual mentions and references
- *Paurāṇika*/Spiritual context
- Architectural and physical features
- Cultural-historical notes

Recognizing the fluidity of sacred geography and the role of local agency in constructing *tīrtha* identity, this framework avoids a rigid template-based analysis and instead supports layered, region-specific interpretations. The customized research template is included in the annexure I.

4.2.2.5. Execution of Survey and Data Collection

The study of *tīrtha*-centric urban development in the selected 51 towns was conducted through a multi-pronged strategy combining:

- Textual Analysis: Primary focus on the *Skanda Purāṇa*, especially the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*, and other *Mahātmya* and *Sthalapurāṇa* texts.
- Secondary Research: Academic publications, archaeological reports, temple chronicles, and regional gazetteers.
- Selection Criteria: Towns were selected if they were:
    - Mention in *Skanda Purāṇa* or associated texts;
    - Mythologically or ritually linked to Kāśī;
    - Identified during the Varanasi pilot survey as part of contemporary sacred circuits.

The research process was validated through consultations with domain experts in Indian Knowledge Systems, *Paurāṇik* literature, urban history, and conservation architecture. These expert reviews helped affirm the textual interpretations and urban development patterns proposed in the study.

For spatial analysis, all 51 towns were mapped onto a custom-designed base map of India, highlighting:

- Major river systems (Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Krishna, Narmada, Kaveri, etc.)
- Geographical patterns of sacred settlement
- Sacred circuits and pilgrimage connectivity

This mapping forms a critical visual tool for identifying regional clusters, cultural continuities, and the sacred topography of pilgrimage towns. The final list of towns—ranging from *Amarnath* and *Vaishno Devi* in the north to *Rāmeśvaram* and *Chidambaram* in the south, and from *Kedarnath* in the Himalayas to *Udupi* in the west—is included in the annexure I, ensuring Pan-Indian representation and diversity.



Figure 19: Base map of Indian pilgrimage towns selected for Tīrtha study.

4.3. To investigate and establish the Tīrtha-Centric place making of Indian pilgrimage towns

The present task marks a crucial phase in advancing the investigation of Indian pilgrimage towns. Building upon the central hypothesis outlined in Chapter 1—which posits that the

foundational roots of establishment and urban development in these towns are deeply embedded in their characterization as *tīrthas*—this objective is addressed through a threefold literary-analytical approach:

1. Conducting a Tīrtha-Centric Urban Experiment *(Section 4.3.1)*- This phase involves the design and implementation of a case-based study to examine how *tīrtha* narratives influence the spatial and cultural frameworks of Indian pilgrimage towns.
2. Identifying and Establishing the Indicators of Tīrtha-Centric Place-Making *(Section 4.3.2)*- This stage seeks to define the key spatial, cultural, and textual identifiers that contribute to the sacred place-making processes in *tīrtha* towns.
3. Critical Analysis of the Tīrtha Study *(Section 4.3.3)*- The final phase engages in a critical review of the collected data and observations to synthesize findings and evaluate the relevance of *tīrtha*-based frameworks in shaping the urban and ritual landscapes of these towns.

4.3.1. To conduct a Tīrtha-Centric urban experiment

The present study undertakes the analytical and interpretive phase of the research experiment outlined in Section 4.2.2. It focuses on examining the establishment and evolution of the identified pilgrimage towns through the lens of their textual references and historical trajectories. This analytical framework is structured around two key sub-tasks:

1. To construct a chronological timeline of the evolution of the tīrtha towns, tracing their development as reflected in Paurāṇik literature and other textual sources.
2. To spatially map the tīrthas based on references from the Skanda Purāṇa, thereby visualizing the sacred geography and its influence on regional urban formation.

4.3.1.1. Timeline evolution of tīrtha study

The list of 51 tīrtha-centric pilgrimage towns identified in Section 4.2.2 forms the basis of the current experimental study. The information gathered for each site reveals multiple layers of evolution, many of which are explicitly referenced in the Purāṇas and other Paurāṇika texts. To fulfill the objectives of this task, it is essential first to construct a timeline evolution map that visually represents the developmental trajectories of these pilgrimage towns.

Aligned with the research hypothesis—which posits that *Purāṇa* and *Paurāṇika* literature significantly influenced the urban formation and growth of tīrthas—a critical visual timeline has been created. This timeline is informed by both historical antiquity and the nature of textual and archaeological references related to each town.

To achieve this, a five-shade color scale (ranging from light to dark) is used to denote distinct stages in the historical-urban evolution of these tīrtha towns:

1. Archaeological/Textual Mention (Minor) – Represented in the lightest shade; includes minor archaeological findings (e.g., isolated artifacts, inscriptions) and indirect or brief references in *Paurāṇik* texts.
2. Archaeological/Textual Mention (Major) – Includes significant archaeological evidence such as caves, structural ruins, or early urban remnants, along with substantial reflections in *Paurāṇik* narratives.

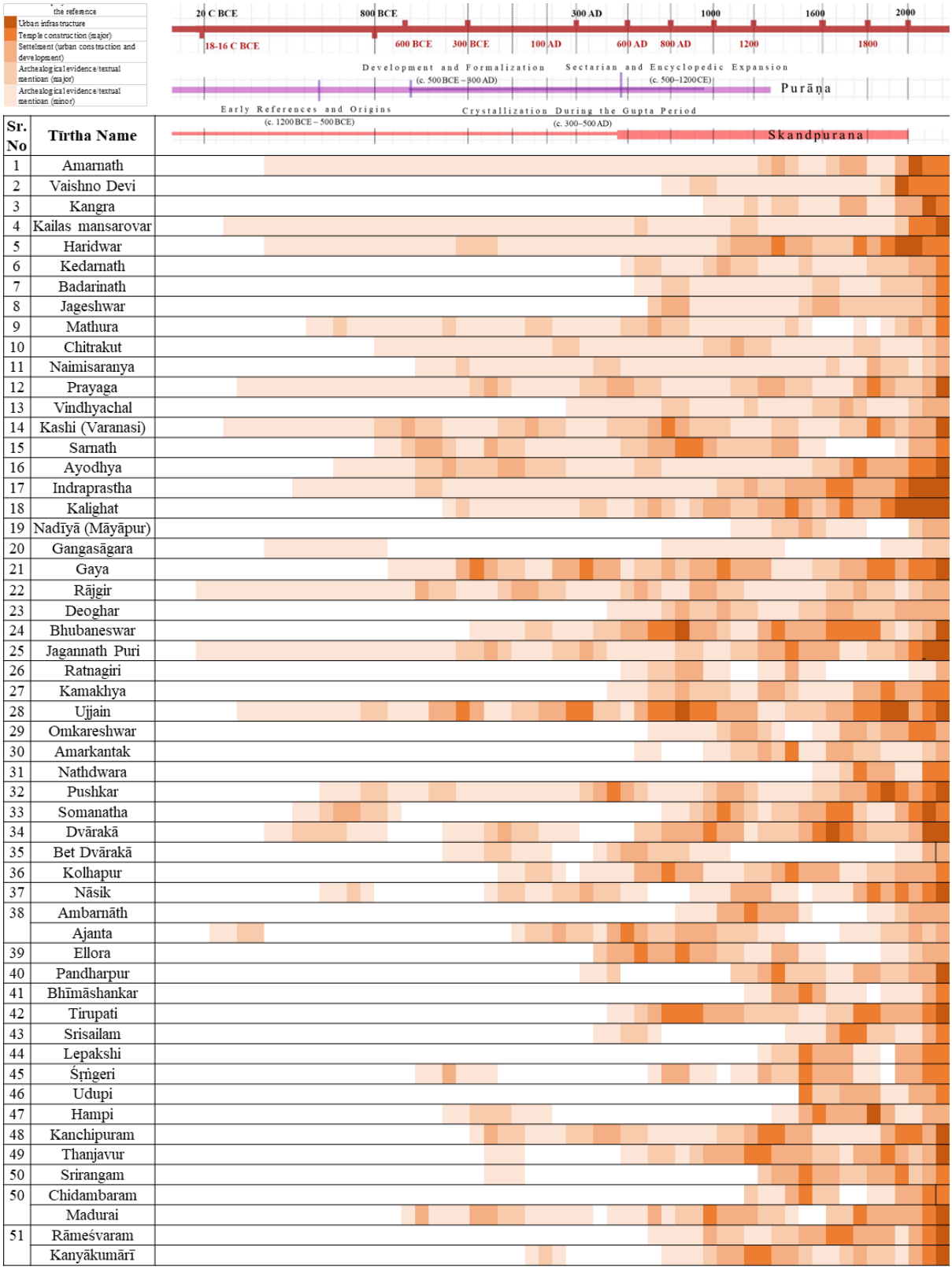
3. Settlement (Urban Construction and Development) – Denotes the emergence of an organized urban system, with references to built environments, urban planning, and construction activities.
4. Temple Construction (Major) – Marks the construction of major temples as focal points of the tīrtha town, supported by textual descriptions in *Purāṇas* and *Mahātmya* literature.
5. Urban Infrastructure (Mature Phase) – The darkest shade, indicating a developed and continuous urban system with sustained civic, economic, and religious functions.

The index table for the color scale and the timeline evolution table for the 51 tīrtha towns are appended in the annexure I to support this visual and analytical mapping.

Historic antiquity based on the nature of the reference
Urban infrastructure
Temple construction (major)
Settelment (urban construction and development)
Archealogical evidence/textual mentioan (major)
Archealogical evidence/textual mentioan (minor)

Figure 20: Table for index of the timeline evolution of the tīrtha study.

Timeline map of tirtha study



Sr. No	Tīrtha Name
1	Amarnath
2	Vaishno Devi
3	Kangra
4	Kailas mansarovar
5	Haridwar
6	Kedarnath
7	Badarinath
8	Jageshwar
9	Mathura
10	Chitrakut
11	Naimisaranya
12	Prayaga
13	Vindhyachal
14	Kashi (Varanasi)
15	Sarnath
16	Ayodhya
17	Indraprastha
18	Kalighat
19	Nadīyā (Māyāpur)
20	Gangasāgara
21	Gaya
22	Rājgir
23	Deoghar
24	Bhubaneswar
25	Jagannath Puri
26	Ratnagiri
27	Kamakhya
28	Ujjain
29	Omkareshwar
30	Amarkantak
31	Nathdwara
32	Pushkar
33	Somanatha
34	Dvārakā
35	Bet Dvārakā
36	Kolhapur
37	Nāsik
38	Ambarnāth
	Ajanta
39	Ellora
40	Pandharpur
41	Bhīmāshankar
42	Tirupati
43	Srisailam
44	Lepakshi
45	Śṛṅgeri
46	Udupi
47	Hampi
48	Kanchipuram
49	Thanjavur
50	Srirangam
50	Chidambaram
	Madurai
51	Rāmeśvaram
	Kanyākumārī

Figure 21: Timeline map of tīrtha study.

4.3.2. To conduct a critical analysis of tīrtha study

The tīrtha studies in this research adopt a multi-stage analytical framework combining literature review, textual mapping, and expert consultation to interpret how Paurāṇik narratives shaped India's pilgrimage towns. Three sub-tasks guide this phase: understanding the tīrtha-centric Paurāṇik construct, analyzing processes of sacred formation, and classifying tīrtha typologies from the *Skanda Purāṇa*.

4.3.2.1. Tīrtha-Centric Paurāṇik Construct and Pilgrimage Profilation

From the 4th century CE onward, tīrthas gained exceptional ritual prominence alongside the consolidation of Paurāṇik traditions (Nath, 2000). Textual evidence—such as the vast number of tīrtha-related verses in the *Matsya*, *Padma*, *Varāha*, and *Brahma Purāṇas*—and epigraphic records of temple patronage attest to their growing socio-religious importance. The *Skanda Purāṇa* alone mentions millions of tīrthas, symbolizing a unified sacred geography across India. This period marked a shift from Vedic sacrifice to public pilgrimage, integrating diverse local shrines into a Pan-Indian network. Sites like *Kāmākhyā*, *Jagannātha Purī*, *Tirumala*, and *Dvārakā* exemplify this spatial expansion, extending sacred geography beyond the Indo-Gangetic core. The proliferation of tīrthas paralleled the rise of regional polities and agrarian growth, while the codification of *vāstu-vidyā* and *prasāda-vidhi* within texts like the *Liṅga Purāṇa* reflected the architectural maturity of this sacred urbanism.

4.3.2.2. Paurāṇik Process of Tīrtha Formation

Tīrthas functioned as instruments of cultural integration and acculturation, embedding regional traditions into the Paurāṇik fold. Local deities, tribal shrines, and animistic rituals were reinterpreted through mythic frameworks to create shared sacred memory. Sites such as *Bhilla Tīrtha* or *Kurkurī Tīrtha* reveal tribal origins absorbed into broader Brahmanical cosmologies. This synthesis extended beyond religion—transforming tīrthas into social and ecological nodes that unified communities through shared rituals and stories.

Scholars like E. Alan Morinis and Diana Eck emphasize that tīrthas represent "crossing places"—liminal zones enabling transcendence and cultural exchange. Their exaggerated relationship with the divine transformed them into emotional and cognitive landscapes that shaped collective memory. The Paurāṇik tīrtha thus became both a spiritual and social construct, simultaneously embodying myth, ritual, and community.

4.3.2.3. Cultural Synthesis and Acculturation

Drawing on Victor Turner's concept of pilgrimage as "anti-structure," the tīrtha served as a site of *communitas*—where social hierarchies momentarily dissolved. Paurāṇik texts themselves acknowledge this permeability, allowing ritual inclusivity within sacred geographies. Sites like Jagannātha Purī, Kāmākhyā, and Amarkantaka exemplify such synthesis, blending tribal, folk, and Sanskritic traditions. The *rosaghara* kitchens, wooden icons, and *Navakalevara* rites at Puri preserve ancient tribal cosmologies within Brahmanical worship.

In essence, the tīrtha in Paurāṇik tradition is not merely a pilgrimage site—it is a dynamic cultural ecosystem, merging ecology, community, and spirituality. It embodies India's civilizational ability to assimilate diversity into continuity, shaping sustainable and inclusive models of sacred urban development.

4.3.3. To identify and establish the identifiers of Tīrtha-Centric place-making

The *Skanda Purāṇa*—the most voluminous among the eighteen *Mahāpurāṇas*—functions as an extensive pilgrimage compendium, mapping the sacred geography of South Asia in remarkable detail. It offers a nuanced classification of *tīrthas* (spiritual "fords" or gateways to the divine), categorizing them into three principal types: *Jangam Tīrtha* (mobile sacred presences, such as ascetics or gurus), *Sthāvar Tīrtha* (fixed sacred sites, including rivers, temples, or cities), and *Mānas Tīrtha* (mental pilgrimages attained through virtues like truth, compassion, and self-discipline).

While acknowledging all three, the *Skanda Purāṇa* primarily emphasizes *sthāvar tīrthas*—geographically rooted sacred locations—and systematically categorizes them according to topography, presiding deity, mythological significance, and the *phala* (spiritual merit) derived from visiting them.

Building upon this textual foundation, the current study first examines the typological framework of *tīrtha* classification (Section 4.3.3.1). This is followed by a critical analysis that identifies the fundamental markers of *tīrtha*-centric place-making—highlighting how myth, geography, ritual, and community memory converge to constitute the sacred landscape (Section 4.3.3.2).

4.3.3.1. Typology of tīrtha categorization

Drawing from the diverse range of pilgrimage sites across India, *tīrthas* can be classified based on their spiritual associations, mythological significance, and geographical contexts. This typology reflects both Purāṇika classifications and observed patterns across major pilgrimage centers:

a) Deity-Associated Tīrthas (Iṣṭa-Tīrtha / Deva-Tīrtha)

These tīrthas are directly associated with a specific deity or avatāra, forming the heart of devotional theism and temple worship. They are often organized around iconic temples and sacred images.

- *Śiva:* Amarnāth (Ice Liṅga), Kedāranāth, Ujjain (Mahākāla), Omkāreśvar, Rāmeśvaram, Bhīmāśankar, Chidambaram (Nāṭarāja), Srīśailam (Māllikārjuna)
- *Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa*: Badarīnāth (Nara-Nārāyaṇa), Mathurā, Dvārakā, Jagannātha Purī, Tirupati (Veṅkaṭeśvara), Nāthdwāra (Śrīnathjī), Paṇḍharpur (Viṭṭhala), Uḍupī
- *Devī:* Vaiṣṇo Devī, Kolhāpur (Mahālakṣmī)

These sites anchor the bhakti traditions and are key centers for sectarian identity.

b) Sage/Muni-Associated Tīrthas (Ṛṣi-Tīrtha / Muni-Tīrtha)

These are sacred places linked to the lives, penance, teachings, or spiritual experiments of great ṛṣis or ascetics.

- *Amarkantak* – Tapasya of Kapila, origin of Narmadā
- *Chitrakūṭa* – Associated with Vālmīki, Atri, and Rāma's exile
- *Naimiṣāraṇya* – Site of great yajñas by Vyāsa, Śaunaka
- *Rājgīr* – Center for spiritual debates (Hindu, Buddhist)

- *Sārnāth* – Site of Buddha's first sermon
- *Ajanta & Ellora* – Monastic caves tied to Buddhist and Jain ascetics

These sites emphasize spiritual knowledge (jñāna) and meditative austerities (tapas).

c) Geographical/Natural Tīrthas (Bhūta-Tīrtha / Prakṛti-Tīrtha)

Formed around significant natural elements—rivers, mountains, forests, lakes, and seas—these tīrthas are perceived as manifestations of elemental divinity.

- *Rivers*: Gaṅgādvāra (Haridwār), Amarkantak (Narmadā)
- *Mountains*: Vindhyācala (Vindhya range)
- *Seas & Confluences*: Rāmeśvaram, Gangāsāgar, Kanyākumāri
- *Hills/Yoni-Pīṭha*: Kāmākhyā (Nīlācala)
- *Sacred Lakes*: Puṣkara
- *Coastal Sites*: Somnāth

These highlight the sacred ecology and natural sanctity of the landscape itself.

d) City/Regional Tīrthas (Kṣetra-Tīrtha)

Ancient cities or cultural regions recognized for their continuous ritual activity, temple clusters, and theological importance.

- *Kāśī (Varanasi)* – Śiva's city; city of liberation (*mokṣa-kṣetra*)
- *Prayāga (Allahabad)* – Triveṇī Saṅgam (confluence of Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Sarasvatī)
- *Ayodhyā* – Birthplace of Rāma
- *Indraprastha (Delhi)* – Legendary city of the Pāṇḍavas
- *Kāñcīpuram* – Mokṣa-purī, Śiva & Viṣṇu traditions
- *Madurai, Bhubaneswar, Hampi, Tañjāvur* – Temple towns with deep ritual geographies

These locations serve as civilizational nodes of continuous urban sacredness.

e) Ancestral / Pitṛ Tīrthas (Pitṛ-Kṣetra)

These sites hold special significance for ancestral worship, *śrāddha* rituals, and post-death rites (*antyeṣṭi*).

- *Gayā* – Supreme Pitṛ-kṣetra
- *Prayāga* – Tarpana during *Kumbha Melā*
- *Puṣkara* – Linked to Gujjar-Brahmā myth of salvation
- *Haridwār, Amarkantak* – Riverbank rituals and immersion rites

They uphold the duty of honoring ancestors (pitṛdharma) and continuity of lineage.

f) Spiritual/Conceptual Tīrthas (Tattva-Tīrtha)

These tīrthas symbolize philosophical ideas, inner transformations, or cosmic principles, often integrated into mythology and ritual.

- *Kāśī* – Center of *jñāna* and *mokṣa*
- *Ujjain* – City of Kāla (time); metaphysical center
- *Mathurā* – Love and *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa (prema-bhakti)
- *Jagannātha Purī* – Darśana beyond caste and ritual limits
- *Rāmeśvaram* – Karma-yajña and harmony of Viṣṇu-Śiva
- *Kāmākhyā* – Śakti as cosmic creative principle

These deepen the experiential and symbolic layers of the sacred.

g) Mythical/Unique Tīrthas (Smṛti-Tīrtha / Samādhi-Sthala)

Marked by extraordinary myths, miraculous phenomena, or samādhis of great beings.

- *Vaiṣṇo Devī* – Cave shrine with trident-slaying myth
- *Jvālāmukhī* – Eternal flame (*śakti pīṭha*)
- *Lepākṣī* – Site of Jatāyu's sacrifice, Hanumān's footprint
- *Deoghar (Baidyanāth)* – Ravana's offering of Liṅga
- *Kālīghāṭ* – Śakti Pīṭha where Satī's toes fell
- *Ratnāgiri* – Former Buddhist Mahāvihāra

These places carry mythic intensity, often infused with miraculous or mystical associations.

4.3.3.2. Foundations of Tīrtha-Centric place making

The sacred geography of India—marked by thousands of pilgrimage towns and tīrthas (sacred fords)—is not a product of spontaneous emergence, but rather the result of a gradual and layered process shaped over centuries through cultural, religious, environmental, and social forces. At the heart of these pilgrimage settlements lies a tīrtha-centric foundation, deeply embedded in the Paurāṇika corpus—especially within the *Skanda Purāṇa* and its various *Māhātmyas*. These texts do more than sanctify locations; they construct comprehensive ritual, symbolic, and socio-cultural frameworks that define and sustain sacred space.

Through critical investigation, this section advances a funnel-down analytical framework that distills the complexities of tīrtha place-making into three interrelated core identifiers: Community, Resource, and Landscape. These axes are not independent components but interconnected dimensions that, together, constitute the structural triad upon which tīrtha-centric pilgrimage towns are built.

Despite the apparent diversity in typology and regional character, a closer examination reveals a unifying pattern—every tīrtha town fundamentally organizes itself around the synergy of these three elements. It is this triadic interplay that not only explains their origin and sacred function but also ensures their historical continuity and cultural sustainability.

a) Community: The Living Custodians of Sacred Space

At the heart of every tīrtha lies a community—often diverse in origin but unified in its role as the *living custodian* of the sacred. These communities include priestly lineages, devotees, ascetics, regional cult groups, indigenous tribes, and historical patrons such as kings and temple donors. Their participation ensures that sacred narratives are not merely remembered but enacted and reanimated through ritual, oral history, and public performance.

The social performance of myth plays a pivotal role in keeping tīrthas alive. For example, the *Gujar* myth in Pushkar is ritually enacted and localized by priests and devotees alike, integrating legend with lived experience. In tribal regions, *Paurāṇika* systems absorbed indigenous traditions through symbolic convergence, allowing a harmonious coexistence of Vedic and folk cosmologies. The toponymy of tīrthas like Bhilla Tīrtha, Ciccikā, Kurkurī, Mṛga, Hasti, Śaśapāda, and Kapoteśvara reflect this syncretism—deriving from animal totems and ancestral spirits.

Living traditions further illustrate the role of community as ritual mediators: feeding rodents as ancestral agents in Chamba, or propitiating yoni-deities at Kamakhya. These acts are not peripheral; they represent deep-rooted cultural mechanisms through which the sacred is accessed, remembered, and renewed.

b) Resource: Sacred Elements as Pilgrimage Catalysts

The second axis of tīrtha place-making is **resource**—not merely in the economic sense, but in the elemental and spiritual sense. Tīrthas are frequently situated at confluences of natural abundance: sacred rivers, oceans, lakes, springs, forests, or mountains. The *Skanda Purāṇa* and other texts refer to such sites as *puṇyatamaḥ uddeśaḥ*—the most meritorious and spiritually charged locations on Earth. These spaces are not chosen arbitrarily but are anchored in cosmological geography and ecological sanctity.

Examples of sacred resources include:

- Rivers and Confluences: The Ganga at Haridwar, the Triveṇī Saṅgam at Prayāga, the Narmadā source at Amarkantak.
- Mountains: Mount Kailāsa (Śiva's abode), the Vindhyas (center of Śākta worship), Venkatachala (Viṣṇu's hill).
- Forests and Sacred Groves: Naimiṣāraṇya (sacrificial forest), Chitrakoot (Rāma's exile), and Mahākāla forest in Ujjain.

These resources are not just passive backdrops but *spiritual agents* in their own right. They offer purification, healing, and transformation. The act of pilgrimage is not merely devotional—it is participatory and ecological. The river becomes the purifier, the forest a sanctuary, the mountain a symbol of transcendence. Through ritual engagement, these resources are spiritually activated, making them central to the experience and sanctity of a tīrtha.

c) Landscape: The Geographical and Symbolic Frame

The third axis is landscape—the physical, symbolic, and performative container that gives form to the tīrtha experience. In *Paurāṇika* cosmology, geography is never neutral; it is imbued

with *karmic*, *ritual*, and *cosmic* significance. The landscape is not merely seen, but ritually imagined and actively constructed through narrative and practice.

Three key modes of sacred landscape construction include:

- Mythic Localization: Sacred geography is anchored through divine acts—such as Rāma installing the Śiva-liṅga at Rāmeśvaram.
- Visual Symbolism: Spatial markers like the yoni-pīṭha at Kāmākhyā on Nīlācala Hill give architectural and symbolic form to feminine energy.
- Architectural Alignment: Temple layouts and city plans (Nāgara, Drāviḍa, Keśara forms) reflect cosmological principles, cardinal orientations, and geometric symbolism.

The *tīrtha* landscape includes not just natural terrain but *ritual topography*—circuits of pilgrimage, bathing ghāṭs, forested retreats, temple clusters, *samādhis*, and sacrificial grounds (*yajña-kṣetras*). It becomes a "sacred map that pilgrims walk upon," in Diana Eck's words, where movement through space becomes a spiritual journey across a metaphysical terrain.



Figure 22:fundamental identifiers of Tīrtha-Centric Paurāṇika place making in indian pilgrimage towns. (Source: Author)

When Community (as cultural memory and ritual agency), Resource (as elemental and spiritual catalyst), and Landscape (as symbolic and performative space) intersect, a *tīrtha-centric pilgrimage town* is born. Each axis reinforces and enriches the others:

- Communities ritualize resources through festivals, offerings, and memory.
- Resources sanctify landscapes through elemental presence and spiritual magnetism.
- Landscapes contain and sustain communities, shaping their identity and practices.

This triadic synergy produces a *holistic sacred ecosystem*—a site that is culturally resilient, ecologically sensitive, and spiritually alive. Far from being relics of the past, these towns thrive through *adaptive continuity*, offering dynamic models for urban development grounded in indigenous knowledge, environmental balance, and collective meaning.

In an age of rapid urbanization and cultural displacement, understanding this triad offers not only insights into India's sacred geography but also frameworks for sustainable, community-centered, and spiritually rooted urban futures.

4.4. Chapter conclusion

Chapter 4 presents a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the *tīrtha*-centric foundations underlying Indian pilgrimage towns, employing an interdisciplinary methodology that synthesizes textual, spatial, ethnographic, and historical approaches. Anchored initially in the sacred city of Varanasi, the study establishes a grounded experimental framework, which is then methodically extended to encompass 51 pilgrimage towns across the Indian subcontinent. This expansion is executed through a well-structured research design that includes semi-structured field surveys, pilot studies in select sites, textual mappings, expert validations, and spatial analyses—thereby creating a robust and scalable methodology for decoding the sacred urbanism of *tīrtha* settlements.

The findings reinforce the central thesis that *tīrthas* are far more than isolated religious sites; they are enduring civilizational constructs intricately shaped by the confluence of *Paurāṇika* imagination, local community agency, and ecological awareness. The evolution of these towns, when traced through a combination of archaeological data, textual references, temple architectures, and civic infrastructures, reveals a pattern of historical continuity in which mythology, ritual practice, and urban development are seamlessly intertwined. Sacred geography in India, as the chapter demonstrates, is both performative and material—where stories are not merely told but enacted, spatialized, and sustained over generations.

At the heart of this framework lies the *Skanda Purāṇa*, which serves not only as a textual anchor but also as a philosophical and structural guide. Its classification of *tīrthas* into three primary types—*Jangama* (living or mobile sacred presence), *Sthāvara* (fixed or immovable sacred sites), and *Mānasa* (mental or contemplative pilgrimage)—provides a critical lens to decode the diverse typologies and lived realities of sacred places across regions. These categorizations are not merely symbolic; they exert tangible influence on the morphology of towns, pilgrimage routes, temple typologies, and ritual behaviors. Through this lens, pilgrimage towns are revealed as dynamic and adaptive spaces, shaped by the continuous negotiation between text, terrain, and tradition.

A key insight of the chapter lies in its demonstration of how *tīrtha* towns historically functioned as liminal and integrative spaces, capable of absorbing tribal, regional, and folk traditions into the larger *Paurāṇika* cosmology. This integration was not achieved through erasure or domination, but rather through a sophisticated process of cultural layering and symbolic assimilation. Localized myths—such as the *Gujar* tale at Pushkar—regional ritual practices, and vernacular architectural forms were seamlessly woven into broader pan-Indian sacred narratives. This process of civilizational accretion allowed for a pluralistic sacred geography, where multiple belief systems, communities, and ecological features coexisted and co-evolved.

Culminating from this rich investigation is the articulation of a threefold foundational framework—Community, Resource, and Landscape—as the essential identifiers of *tīrtha*-centric place-making. These elements are not discrete; they function in a deeply synergistic and mutually reinforcing manner. Communities—through their rituals, oral traditions, and

custodianship—animate and sacralize natural resources; these resources, in turn, sanctify and define the landscape; and the landscape offers both the physical terrain and symbolic container that anchors communities in sacred continuity. This triadic model explains the sustainable endurance of pilgrimage towns as culturally vibrant, ecologically sensitive, and spiritually potent ecosystems.

Ultimately, the chapter positions Indian *tīrtha* towns not only as vital to the religious and urban history of the subcontinent but also as resilient models for sustainable, culturally integrated urbanism. Their ability to adapt to shifting political, social, and environmental conditions—while retaining their symbolic and spiritual essence—offers powerful insights for contemporary heritage management, place-making, and urban planning. Rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems, these pilgrimage towns exemplify a unique civilizational capability: the capacity to harmonize sacred narratives with spatial realities and communal life, making them not relics of the past but blueprints for a holistic urban future.

Chapter - 5: Objective Two: Tīrtha-Centric Paurāṇika investigation of Varanasi

This chapter presents the tīrtha-centric investigation of Varanasi, aligning with the second objective of the research: *To explore Varanasi as a Paurāṇika Tīrtha and to critically examine its tīrtha-centric urban system*. This objective is designed to address the second core research question: "How does a tīrtha-centric Paurāṇika study describe the process and framework of holistic urban development in Indian pilgrimage towns?"

Building upon the insights developed in Chapter 4 (Objective 1), which established the fundamental identifiers of tīrtha-centric place-making—Community, Resource, and Landscape—this chapter contextualizes those conceptual findings through a detailed, site-specific case study of Kāśī (Varanasi). By placing Varanasi under the analytical lens of tīrtha-centric urbanism, the study aims to extract, examine, and reinterpret the city's spatial, cultural, and ritual landscape as shaped by *Paurāṇika* narratives and traditions.

The methodological structure for this objective, as outlined in Chapter 3 (Research Methodology), follows a three-tiered approach: 1. Historical Contextualization- This phase situates the *Purāṇas* within the broader historical, socio-political, and religious evolution of Varanasi. The aim is to map the city's transformation across time and to understand how historical shifts were interpreted or reframed through sacred narratives.2. Interdisciplinary Evidence-Based Analysis- Here, the study critically engages with textual sources—particularly the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa* and the *Jātaka* literature—while integrating insights from archaeology, art history, historical geography, and ritual studies. This approach facilitates a holistic understanding of Varanasi's sacred urbanism as a lived and evolving phenomenon rooted in both literary and material culture.3. Cultural Interpretation and Tīrtha-Centric Place-Making- The final phase focuses on interpreting Varanasi through the lens of *Paurāṇika* place-making. This involves decoding the narrative symbolism, ritual patterns, and community dynamics that shape the city's identity as a tīrtha. Special attention is given to how the *Purāṇas* contribute to the formation of cultural constructs and collective memory, particularly through festivals, pilgrimages, and temple networks.

The chapter is organized into the following three core investigative sections:

Section 5.1: Revisiting Historic Varanasi- A diachronic study of Varanasi's early settlement, dynastic history, and socio-political shifts, aiming to establish the temporal and civilizational backdrop of the tīrtha town.

Section 5.2: Investigating the Tīrtha-Centric Paurāṇika Construct of Varanasi- A detailed textual-spatial analysis based on *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Jātaka* literature, examining how sacred narratives are mapped onto the physical and cultural landscape of Kāśī.

Section 5.3: Reinterpreting Varanasi as Tīrtha- This section synthesizes the findings to interpret Kāśī's spatial formation, ritual infrastructure, and community structure as expressions of tīrtha-centric urban planning and cultural continuity.

Finally, Section 5.4 reflects on the contribution of this second objective to the overarching aim of the research—developing a holistic, culturally rooted model of urban development for Indian pilgrimage towns. It also sets the stage for the next phase of inquiry in Objective 3,

which will evaluate the contemporary relevance and policy applications of tīrtha-centric urban frameworks.

5.1 To revisit the historic Varanasi

The first task under the second objective involves establishing the historical context for the study of Varanasi. To facilitate a comprehensive analysis and evaluation, a chronological timeline of Varanasi's evolution has been meticulously developed. This timeline is based on an extensive review of secondary literature, archaeological excavation reports, and consultations with subject-matter experts. The resulting detailed timeline map, illustrating the city's historical and urban progression, is provided in Annexure II. The subsequent sections of this chapter delve deeper into this historical framework and its implications through the following sub-sections:

5.1.1. Introduction to the Historicity of Varanasi

Varanasi—known in antiquity as *Kāśī*—is often celebrated as one of the world's oldest living cities and as the spiritual capital of India. For Indians, Kāśī is revered as the eternal city of Śiva; for the global community, it stands as one of the longest continually inhabited urban centres; and for scholars, it remains a profound repository of religious, philosophical, and cultural knowledge. Early authorities such as Havell (1905:141) identified Kāśī as the most ancient nucleus of Aryan culture, while P.V. Kane (1973:618) emphasized its unbroken tradition of spiritual and intellectual flourishing. From antiquity, Śiva has dominated the sacred imagination of Banarasis (the city's native inhabitants). Yet, Kāśī's sacredness transcends sectarian bounds: it has served as a significant locus for Buddhism, Jainism, and Vaiṣṇavism, and later absorbed influences from Islam. The coexistence of these traditions profoundly shaped its ideology, architecture, art, and spiritual landscape. Complementing this spiritual richness, Kāśī's indigenous craft traditions—renowned for their finesse—bolstered the city's position as a vibrant centre of trade and material culture. This enduring synthesis of sacred devotion and material innovation has rightfully earned Varanasi its reputation as both a "heritage city" and the cultural capital of India.

5.1.1.1. Integrating Mythology and Archaeology: Reconstructing the Sacred Landscape of Kāśī

Varanasi, historically revered as *Kāśī*, is widely acknowledged as one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. Its sacred geography is intricately woven with myth, ritual, and an unbroken thread of historical continuity. Central to its cultural memory are the enduring legends of Lord Śiva, the descent of the Ganga (Ganga-avatāraṇa), and revered tīrthas such as Avimukteśvara and Śūltāṅkeśvara, which collectively constitute the cognitive and ritual foundation of the city. This section examines how these mythological narratives—traditionally preserved as intangible dimensions of faith—may be critically engaged through disciplines such as archaeology, geology, and historical philology, thereby enabling a reconstruction of the settlement patterns and cultural evolution of *Kāśī-kṣetra*.

a) Archaeological Evidences and the Sacred Topography

Recent excavations at nine prominent sites—Sarnath, Rajghat, Śūltāṅkeśvara, Pakkā Mahal, Tilmanpur, Aktha, Asapur, Kotwa, and Ramnagar—have uncovered stratified layers of continuous habitation spanning from approximately 1800 BCE to the Gupta period. Peripheral centres such as Bhitari and Chunar further attest to a vast, interconnected cultural sphere with

Kāśī at its nucleus (Jayaswal, 1998; Tiwari et al., 2000). These findings not only illuminate the region's economic and political vitality but also reveal a sacralized landscape profoundly shaped by mythic imagination and ritual practice.

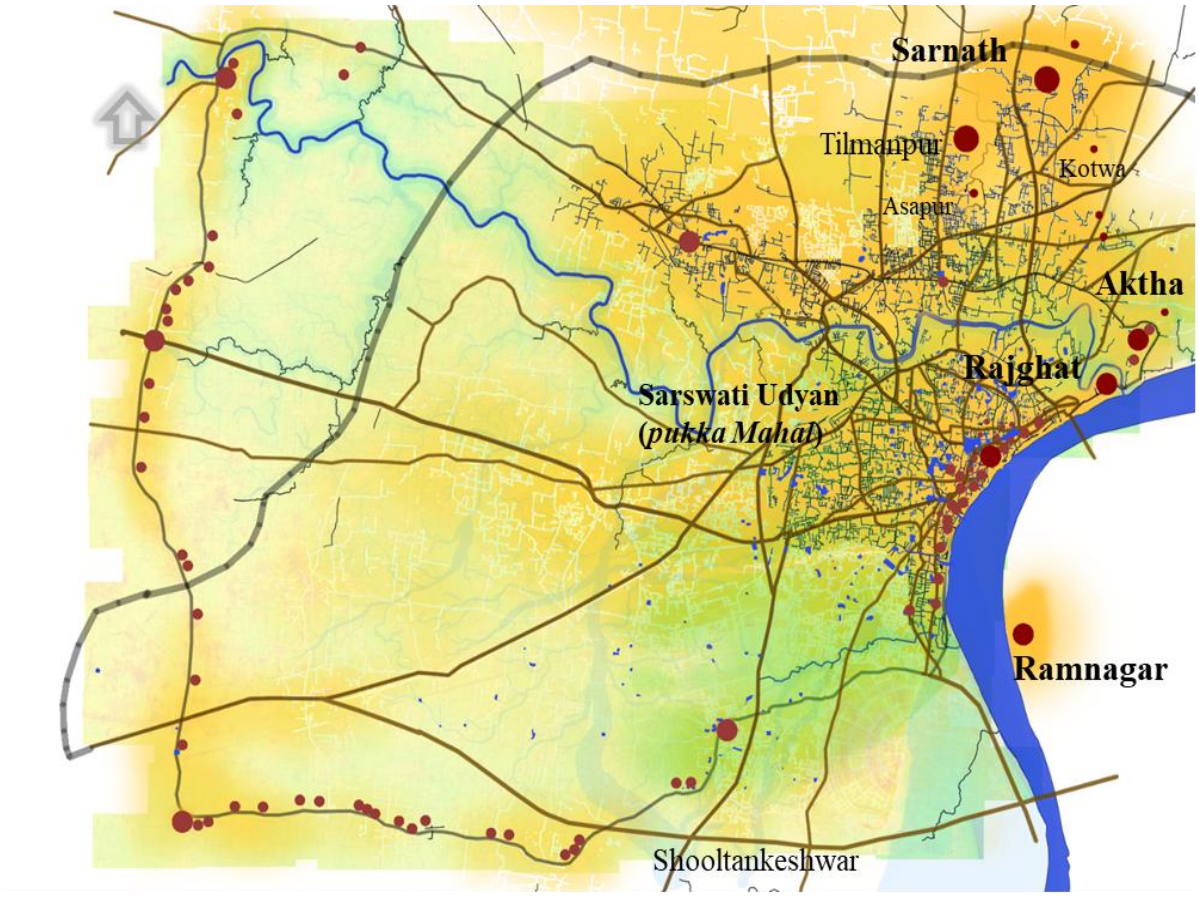


Figure 23: Base map of Varanasi showing recent archaeological sites.

The integration of archaeological and geological approaches with traditional narratives highlights the value of an interdisciplinary framework. Sacred sites such as Sarasvatī Udyān, Kardameśvara, Kapildhārā, and Ramnagar emerge as pivotal to understanding Kāśī's transformation into a Śaiva tīrtha landscape, where spiritual memory, ritual performance, and sacred geography converge in shaping the city's historical continuum.

b) Myth, Memory, and Scientific Epistemology

Indian myths—traditionally preserved as *ākhyānas* (narratives)—have long functioned as repositories of collective memory, metaphysical cosmology, and socio-ecological wisdom. However, the interpretive distance between indigenous hermeneutics and modern philological approaches, particularly since the colonial period, has often resulted in reductive readings. In the late eighteenth century, Sir William Jones' pioneering comparative philology linked Sanskrit with Indo-European languages, laying the foundation for historical philology in Europe. Yet this intellectual movement, while transformative, frequently marginalized native exegetical traditions such as those of Yāska, Śaunaka, and the *Vedāṅgas* (Coomaraswamy, 1977; Mishra, 1997).

Nineteenth-century Western scholarship often approached Vedic and Paurāṇik texts through Eurocentric frameworks, sidelining traditional Indian metaphysical paradigms. This created a

profound disjuncture between myth and its cultural interpretation. In response, Indian scholars such as Sri Aurobindo (1998), Kapila Vatsyayan (2001), and Vidya Niwas Mishra, along with Western Indologists like Heinrich Zimmer and Stella Kramrisch, underscored the symbolic, cosmological, and ecological substrata of Indian myths, calling for culturally rooted re-readings. Doniger (1995) observes that myths never exist in isolation but within a web of shared themes, locations, rituals, and beliefs. Diana Eck (1998) further elucidates how mythic narratives act as instruments of place-making, generating sacred topographies through ritual enactment and communal memory. These narratives not only sustain spatial and ritual norms but also encode environmental ethics and socio-religious obligations into the lived practices of communities and pilgrims.

c) Toward a Methodological Synthesis: Mytho-Scientific Analysis

A comprehensive reading of Indian *tīrtha-kṣetras* such as Kāśī necessitates a methodological synthesis of mythology and scientific inquiry. This approach may be structured around a triadic representation: mythic memory, environmental interaction, and ritual embodiment. For instance, the myth of Ganga's descent, when juxtaposed with geological findings and archaeological strata, reveals an intricate interplay of environmental memory and symbolic consciousness embedded within cultural narratives.

In this framework, the sacred geography of Kāśī is not a passive backdrop but a dynamic, lived landscape energized by mythic narratives and ritual practice. Sites such as Avimukteśvara derive significance not merely from devotional belief but from their convergence of scriptural testimony, mythic re-enactment, and ecological continuity.

Future scholarships must advance this interdisciplinary synergy—correlating Paurāṇik texts with geo-spatial mapping of sacred landscapes, deploying archaeological and geological methods to validate mytho-historical traditions, and engaging ethnographic fieldwork to recover layers of folk memory. Such a *mytho-scientific* approach promises a richer and more nuanced understanding of how Kāśī and other pilgrimage towns have evolved and sustained themselves as enduring *tīrthas* within India's civilizational landscape.

5.1.1.2. Timeline evolution of Varanasi

Varanasi, historically revered as ancient Kāśī-kṣetra, is widely recognized as one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. Its long and layered evolution reflects a dynamic interplay of religious sanctity, geographical pragmatism, and shifting political powers. The symbolic geography of Kāśī—framed between the rivers Varuṇā and Asī—embodies both metaphysical and ecological significance, reaffirming the sacred foundation of its spatial identity (Jayaswal, 2009; Kane, 1973).

This section traces the chronological evolution of Varanasi through archaeological and textual perspectives, spanning from the protohistoric period to the early modern era. A detailed timeline of Varanasi's development, compiled from archaeological reports, is provided in *Annexure II*.

Recent excavations at nine major sites within the Kāśī-kṣetra—Sarnath, Rajghat, Śūltāṅkeśvara, Pakkā Mahal, Tilmanpur, Aktha, Asapur, Kotwa, and Ramnagar—have revealed stratified evidence of continuous occupation from around 1800 BCE through the Gupta period. These findings are further corroborated by peripheral sites such as Bhitari and Chunar (Jayaswal, 1998; Tiwari et al., 2000), suggesting the presence of a vast and

interconnected cultural region in which sacred traditions, economic exchange, and political activity were deeply interwoven.

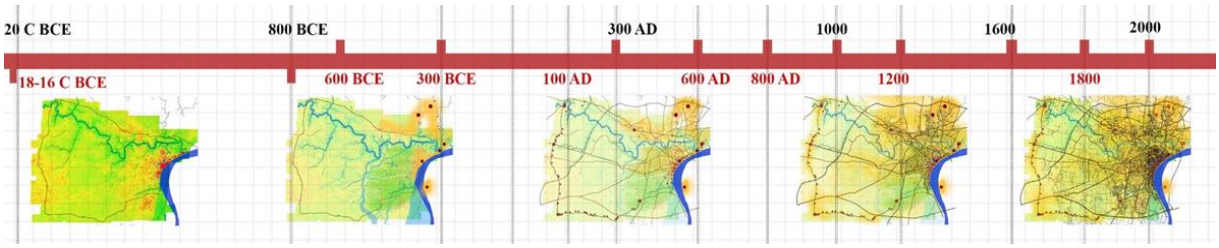


Figure 24: Timeline evolution of Varanasi.

5.1.2. Settlement and Geo-Historical Evolution of *Kāśī-Kṣetra*

Varanasi's (*Kāśī-kṣetra*) habitation stretches from prehistoric times to early history, shaped by a fertile Ganga plain bordered by Vindhya–Kaimur uplands. Unlike nearby Neolithic–Chalcolithic zones, its earliest secure occupations—Aktha (Varuṇā valley) and Ramnagar (right bank of the Ganga)—belong to the Later Vedic/Early Iron Age (c. 1800–1200 BCE). These small, perishable settlements used early iron, practiced subsistence agriculture, and show ritual traces consistent with Vedic practice (rammed floors, hearth ash, *kapāla*-like discs). Ceramics (BaRW, BSW, corded and hay-impressed wares) and toolkits point to localized traditions linked to early iron supply from Kaimur.

Through the Janapada–Mahājanapada phases (c. 800–200 BCE), Kāśī crystallized as a polity with its nucleus at Kāśī-Rajghat near the Ganga–Varuṇā confluence. Material culture advances track a proto-urban trajectory: BSW in the Janapada phase gives way to NBPW in the Mahājanapada phase; craft specialization, iron implements, coins, early Brahmi, embankments and moats, and organized workshops (e.g., Oriyaghat kilns) signal growing complexity. Rajghat emerges as the mūla-nagara, while Ramnagar functions as a nigama/mandi, and Aktha retains a hermitage-like character, within a wider three-tier settlement system.

Under the Mauryan–Śuṅga horizon (c. 3rd–1st cent. BCE), standardized bricks, drains, ring wells, street layouts, guild activity, and wootz-capable ironwork mark urban consolidation. In the Gupta–post-Gupta period (c. 300–700 CE), rather than simple de-urbanization, evidence indicates spatial reorganization: a westward shift of the core toward Pakka Mahal–Daśāśvamedha, integrating dense lanes, markets, and temple enclosures—echoed in Xuanzang's account of a populous, prosperous city. Across these phases, Kāśī's urbanism follows an indigenous, gradual, ritual-embedded model: sustained by riverine ecology, iron networks, pilgrimage economies, and sacred geography, continuously reinventing itself into the enduring urban-tīrtha seen today.

5.1.3. Tīrtha as a Foundation of Urban Identity

Varanasi's sacred identity rests on its conception as a tīrtha—a liminal "crossing place" where the temporal meets the divine and death itself is salvific. Early textual traces place Kāśī in the Atharvaveda (Paippalāda Saṁhitā) among frontier regions, likely reflecting a later-Vedic, lightly settled zone that would become the Kāśī polity. While Vedic references (c. 1400–1000 BCE) are late and ritual in tone, archaeology at Aktha and Ramnagar pushes habitation back to c. 1800 BCE, suggesting either pre-textual origins or the need to reconsider Vedic chronologies. Brāhmaṇa passages (e.g., *Śatapatha*, *Gopatha*) depict Kāśī participating in sacrificial culture yet politically marginal; epic notices in the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*

remember a prosperous city but blend early history with later Śaiva layers. It is the Paurāṇik tradition—especially the *Skanda Purāṇa*'s Kāśī Khaṇḍa—that fully codifies the city as mokṣa-purī, fixes its sacred bounds between Varuṇā and Asī, and multiplies its sub-tīrthas (Avimukteśvara, Ānandakānana, Mahāśmaśāna). Between the 7th–14th centuries CE, these narratives and practices consolidated Kāśī's enduring role as India's pre-eminent Śaiva pilgrimage city and cosmic centre of liberation.

Table 6: Literary reference of Varanasi.

	Source	**Theme**	**Mention of Kāśī/Varanasi**	**Description**	**Estimated Date**
1	Paippalada Samhita (Atharvaveda)	Vedic References	Earliest reference to Kasis as indigenous tribe	Kāśī mentioned as tribal zone, later inhabited by Vedic communities	1400–1000 BCE
2	Shatapatha Brahmana	Brahmanical Influence	Mentions Vedic rituals and political weakness of Kāśī	Brahmana texts refer to rituals, migrations, socio-political transitions	circa 800 BCE
3	Gopatha Brahmana	Political Structure	Kāśī as part of Kosal kingdom	Mention of republican structure in Panini; weaker political status earlier	circa 800 BCE
4	Panini's Ashtadhyayi	Urban Composition	Kāśī as gana (republic)	Mahabharata records vibrant economy, caste structure, Devodasa rule	600–300 BCE
5	Mahabharata (Anushasan Parva)	Shaiva Tīrtha Development	Rule of Devodasa, socio-economic details	Skanda Purana details Kāśī as divine Shaiva centre with sub-tīrthas	400 BCE–400 AD
6	Ramayana	Ganga-avatāraṇa Mythology	Ganga-avatāraṇa mythology without Kāśī reference	Absent in early texts like Ramayana, Mahabharata; added in later Puranas	400 BCE–400 AD
7	Skanda Purana (Kāśī Khaṇḍa)	Paurāṇik Amplification	Integration of Kāśī in Ganga-avatāraṇa; Shaiva Tīrtha	Purāṇas create extensive mythological narratives to glorify Kāśī	700–1050 AD (Kane), 700–1400 AD (Hazra)
8	Padma Purana		Brahma's gift to Rudra; city made holy with Ganga		700–1400 AD
9	Nardiya Purana		Defines geographic boundaries of Kāśī (Varuna–Asi)		Later medieval (post 800 AD)

The literary, ritual, and mythological history of Kāśī forms a layered tapestry of civilizational development, tracing its transformation from a tribal periphery in the Vedic era to a preeminent Śaiva pilgrimage centre in the medieval period. Both archaeological evidence and critical textual analysis demonstrate that Vārāṇasī's sacred identity was not static but evolved through successive phases, with new narratives continually emerging to address shifting spiritual aspirations and political contexts.

5.1.3.1. Kāśī-Varanasi in Buddhist Literature

Varanasi—ancient Kāśī—occupies a distinguished place in Buddhist literature as the sacred site where the Buddha delivered his first sermon at Mṛgadāya (Deer Park), later known as Sarnath. Canonical Buddhist texts, including the *Piṭakas*, *Jātaka* tales, and the travel accounts of Chinese pilgrims, collectively provide a rich cultural, geographical, and socio-political portrait of this revered region. These sources portray ancient Varanasi not only as a spiritual nucleus but also as a dynamic centre of commerce, craftsmanship, and education. The Buddhist narrative tradition skillfully integrated the Brahmanical heritage, artisanal traditions, and urban complexity of Kāśī, illustrating a layered coexistence of diverse traditions. When combined with archaeological evidence, these textual insights offer a robust interdisciplinary framework for reconstructing the historical and cultural landscape of ancient Varanasi.

a) Ṛṣipatana and Mṛgadāya in Early Texts

The *Mahāvastu*, a Sanskrit Buddhist text, records that five hundred Pratyeka-Buddhas (ṛṣis) once meditated in a forest about a yojana and a half from Benares. Upon attaining nirvāṇa, their bodies fell to the ground, giving the site the name Ṛṣipatana— "the place where the ṛṣis fell." Another tradition holds that the name derives from sages descending there during aerial journeys from the Himalayas (Jones 1949:37). Both accounts indicate that the area possessed sanctity even before the Buddha, likely when it remained a dense forest used for ascetic practices.

Buddhist texts identify Mṛgadāya as the peaceful grove near Vārāṇasī where the Buddha first "turned the wheel of Dharma." The Chinese pilgrim Fa Hien, visiting in the 4th century CE, described a sacred landscape comprising four stupas and two inhabited *vihāras*. His records specify shrines commemorating major events: the sermon site, Maitreya's prophecy, and the Buddha's meditation (Beal 1869). The stupas he noted correspond to Dhamekh, Dharmarajika, ChauKhaṇḍi, and a mound now beneath the modern Sarangnath Temple.

b) Xuanzang's 7th-Century Observations

In the 7th century, the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang began his Kāśī-kṣetra journey at Po-Lo-Ni-Ssi (Vārāṇasī), which he depicted as a prosperous, densely populated, and spiritually vibrant city—measuring 400 *li* in circuit, bounded by the Gaṅgā, and containing over 100 temples with about 10,000 Śaiva devotees. He also mentions a colossal 100-foot image of Maheśvara (Śiva), probably located near the Pukkā Mahal site (Beal 1884:291).

Proceeding northeast to Ṛṣipatana (identified with the Aktha–Paharai zone), he described Mṛgadāya in remarkable detail: The Lu-ye Saṅghārāma with divided compounds, richly adorned towers, and a central *vihāra* nearly 200 feet high, housing golden images. Nearby stood an Aśokan stone stūpa and a 70-foot column, likely corresponding to the Dhamekh Stūpa complex. Xuanzang further documented sacred water bodies associated with the Buddha's activities, including Sarang-tal and a paleo-channel (Narkhoh-nala) feeding the Varuṇā, providing valuable ecological clues for reconstructing the early sacred landscape.

c) Kāśī in the Jātakas: A Cosmopolitan Canvas

Varanasi (Kāśī) holds a prominent position in Buddhist literature as one of the most frequently cited and revered regions of ancient India. Beyond its role as the site of the Buddha's first sermon, it appears in canonical *Piṭaka* texts, *Jātakas*, and Chinese pilgrimage accounts as a major spiritual, cultural, and economic hub. The *Jātakas* consistently frame their narratives

with the refrain, "When Brahmadatta was king of Benares..." (e.g., Nos. 151, 152, 178, 480), presenting Kāśī as both an urban centre and a wider socio-economic zone encompassing forests, rivers, and artisanal settlements.

- *Crafts and Professions:* The *Kacchhapa-Jātaka* (No. 178) situates the Bodhisattva in a potter's family near a seasonal pond, a scene corroborated by pottery and clay extraction evidence from Ramnagar and Oriyaghat (NBPW levels, 6th–4th c. BCE).
- *Stone Carving:* In the *Babbu-Jātaka* (No. 137), the Bodhisattva appears as a stonecutter in a deserted village, reflecting the region's early stonecraft economy.
- *Brahminical Linkages:* The *Akitta-Jātaka* (No. 480) portrays the Bodhisattva as a Brahmin youth trained in Kāśī before renouncing wealth; the Aktha settlement may provide the archaeological backdrop.

Several *Jātakas* highlight Kāśī's reputation as a seat of learning:

- The *Musila-Jātaka* (No. 373) describes the Bodhisattva as a world-renowned teacher.
- The *Durajana-Jātaka* (No. 64) depicts a Benares master with 500 pupils, including foreigners.
- The *Labha-Jātaka* (No. 287) praises a scholar versed in the Vedas and eighteen disciplines, reflecting the intertwining of Brahmanical scholasticism with Buddhist pedagogy.

i. Toponymy in the Jātakas: Symbolic or Shifting Settlements

The *Jātakas* mention alternative place names such as Ramma, Sudassana, Surundhana, Brahmavaddhana, and Pupphavatī (e.g., Nos. 525, 458, 532, 120). While their exact correlation with present-day sites remains uncertain, these names may reflect symbolic designations or the layered memory of shifting settlement zones within the broader Kāśī region.

ii. Archaeological Correlates and Historical Deductions

Excavations at Sarnath, Aktha, and Ramnagar reveal cultural deposits spanning from the NBPW phase to the Gupta period. Industrial structures, pond-based settlements, and monastic remains corroborate the *Jātakas'* descriptions of artisanal and ritual life. The geomorphic references to ponds, mounds, and tank systems correspond with extant features such as Sarang-tal and the paleo-channel of Narkhoh-nala, grounding textual traditions in the physical landscape.

The *Mahāvastu*, Chinese travelogues, and *Jātaka* literature present Kāśī not simply as the backdrop for the Buddha's first sermon but as a deeply layered sacred and socio-economic landscape. Its portrayal as both a centre of ascetic sanctity and a thriving cosmopolitan hub demonstrates the adaptive coexistence of Buddhist, Brahmanical, and artisanal traditions, while archaeological evidence anchors these narratives in historical reality.

5.1.4. Religious Landscapes of *Kāśī*: Evolution and Coexistence

Kāśī's spiritual identity has long been defined by its role as a tīrtha, a sacred threshold between the human and divine. As P.V. Kane (1976) observed, no other Indian city evokes such deep religious emotion or embodies the full complexity of Hindu life. Kāśī evolved as a composite sacred landscape where Brahmanical, Buddhist, Jain, and folk traditions coexisted,

reflecting India's spiritual plurality. E.B. Havell (1905) aptly described it as the shared cradle of Brahminism and Buddhism—its layered evolution visible not only in texts but also in space: temples, stupas, kuṇḍas, and ritual circuits.

From the Later Vedic through Gupta periods, three overlapping religious landscapes emerged:

1. Vedic, establishing ritual order through household and public *yajñas* (evidenced by *kapālas* and fire-altars at Aktha and Ramnagar);
2. Folk, rooted in nature worship and Yakṣa–Yakṣiṇī cults (supported by terracotta votives and ritual platforms at Aktha and Oriyaghat);
3. Śaiva, rising in the early Common Era through the Bhāraśiva Nāgas' patronage and Gupta consolidation.

By the 3rd–4th century CE, Kāśī had become a major Śaiva centre, anchored around Avimukteśvara, with temples, myths, and processional routes defining its sacred geography. The continuous negotiation between Vedic, folk, and Śaiva layers created a dynamic religious landscape—an evolving dialogue between ritual, space, and memory—that still animates Kāśī's sacred topography today.

5.2 To investigate the Tīrtha-Centric Paurāṇika Construct of Varanasi

At the second stage of the second objective, the focus is on reconstructing the *Paurāṇika* vision of Varanasi. Drawing upon relevant urban references from the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, episode-based evidence is compiled to enable an interdisciplinary investigation into the *tīrtha*-centric *Paurāṇika* construct of the city.

5.2.1. Methodology of Textual Excavation and Mapping

Kāśī—venerated as one of India's most sacred *tīrthas*—has been celebrated by numerous names across *Paurāṇika* texts, including *Avimukta*, *Ānandakanana*, *Mahāśmaśāna*, *Rudrāvas*, *Ānandarūpa*, *Śaṅkarapurī*, *Śivapurī*, *Dharmakṣetra*, and *Vārāṇasī* (Chandramouli, 1995:6). Each name encapsulates a distinct historical or mythological episode, reflecting the city's layered sanctity and symbolic depth. Among these, *Avimukta* is especially significant—not merely as a title, but as a defined *kṣetra* (sacred field) within Kāśī, imbued with profound spiritual and mythological resonance.

This study focuses on select myths associated with the *Avimuktakṣetra*, interpreting them in relation to potential climatic phenomena (landscape), geomorphological processes (resources), and anthropogenic activities (community) that may have historically influenced the region. The *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa* serves as the principal textual foundation. Attributed to Skanda—the son of Śiva and commander of the celestial hosts—the *Skanda Purāṇa* is the most extensive Purāṇa, with the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* forming part of its Śāṅkarī Saṁhitā. This section elaborates the spiritual geography of Kāśī and details the network of Śiva temples that constitute its sacred landscape.

Supplementary references are occasionally drawn from the *Liṅga*, *Vāmana*, and *Padma Purāṇas*. Yet, two challenges persist: first, the interpretative complexity of *Paurāṇika* myths, and second, the absence of fixed chronological frameworks within these texts. Nevertheless, the exploration of such narratives remains indispensable. Far from being mere symbolic

allegories, these myths function as living repositories of collective memory, identity, and environmental consciousness, deeply embedded within India's cultural fabric.

Accordingly, a scientific and interdisciplinary reevaluation of these myths—especially those centered on the *Avimuktakṣetra*—is both timely and necessary. By integrating textual analysis with insights from environmental history, geomorphology, and cultural geography, this study seeks to illuminate Kāśī's *tīrtha*-centric sacred landscape and reaffirm its mytho-historical continuity.

5.2.2. *Kāśī* as a Paurāṇika *Tīrtha*

The *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa* serves as a vital textual repository for comprehending the sacred geography and spatial organization of Varanasi. Through its elaborate accounts of *kṣetras* (sacred zones), temples, *tīrthas*, and urban structures, it functions as a mytho-topographical document that encodes not only religious and spiritual meanings but also implicit insights into the urban morphology, ecological settings, and socio-spatial planning of ancient Kāśī.

5.2.2.1. Kāśī Kṣetra: Evolution of Kṣetra Concepts in Kāśī

The sacred city of Kāśī is referred to by multiple appellations in *Paurāṇik* literature—*Varanasi Kṣetra* (Vāmana Purāṇa 3.29), *Avimuktakṣetra* (Kāśīkhaṇḍa 26.31), and *Ānandavanakṣetra* (Kāśīkhaṇḍa 39.74)—each encapsulating a unique spiritual and spatial identity within the broader sacred landscape of Varanasi. Although often used interchangeably in *Paurāṇik* verses, close textual analysis suggests that these designations do not necessarily denote the exact same locality. Instead, they represent different sacred zones within the larger geography of Kāśī, reflecting chronological layering and evolving theological emphases in the city's spiritual development.

The *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* provides key insight into this evolution. Verses 26.24–27 describe *Avimuktakṣetra* as divinely created by Lord Śiva even before the manifestation of earth or water:

na yadā bhūmivalayaṃ na yadāpāṃ samudrabhavaḥ |
tadā vihartum īśena kṣetram etad vinirmitam || (*KKh* 26.28)
("When neither earth nor water existed, this kṣetra was created by the Lord for his divine play.")

This is reaffirmed in verse 26.31:

avimuktaṃ tadābhikhyaṃ kṣetram etad udīryate |
paryaṅkabhūte śivayor nirantarasukhāspadam || (*KKh* 26.31)
("Since then, this kṣetra has been known as Avimukta, the eternal resting abode of Śiva and Śakti.")

Yet the text also reveals overlapping identities. Verse 26.36 connects *Avimukta* with *Ānandavana*:

jñeyāni sarvāliṅgāni tāsminn ānandakānane |
avimuktaṃ abhīti khyātam āsīd itthaṃ ghaṭadbhavaḥ || (*KKh* 26.36)
("All the Liṅgas in this Ānandavana made the place known as Avimukta.")

Further complexity appears in Kāśīkhaṇḍa 39.74, which reverses the precedence:

purā ānandavana nāma kṣetram etat prakīrtitam |
avimuktaṃ tadārabhya nāma'sya prathitaṃ bhuvi || (*KKh* 39.74)
("In earlier times, this kṣetra was known as Ānandavana; thereafter, it became famous as Avimukta.")

The reason for this transition is clarified in verse 26.34:

asyānandahetutvād vimuktam anantaram |
ānandakanda bījānām aṅkurāṇi yataḥ tataḥ || (*KKh* 26.34)
("Because of its nature as the source of bliss, it was originally named Ānandavana; later, it became known as Avimukta.")

Taken together, these passages suggest a temporal evolution: *Ānandavana* appears as the earlier designation, later elevated to *Avimukta*, which became the more theologically exalted name. Importantly, the texts also integrate *Avimukta* within the wider identity of Kāśī and Vārāṇasī, underscoring its centrality in the sacred landscape.

Geographical specificity is provided by the *Vāmana Purāṇa* (3.27.30), which defines Vārāṇasī as the supremely sacred region between the Varuṇā and Asī rivers:

"The river Varuṇā issued from the Lord's right foot, and Asī from the left. The land between them is a supremely sacred kṣetra—the Yogic resting place of the Divine, the foremost tīrtha in all three worlds, liberating all beings from sin. This blessed city is known as Vārāṇasī."

This *Paurāṇik* conceptualization resonates with archaeological findings. Jayaswal (2009:213) identifies habitation sites such as Aktha, Rajghat, Ramnagar, and the Pukka Mahal area within this sacred zone, indicating that religious geography and settlement patterns evolved simultaneously.

Thus, the convergence of mythological narratives and archaeological evidence reveals a dynamic layering of Kāśī's sacred topography. Within this continuum, *Avimuktakṣetra* emerges as one of the most ancient and foundational expressions of the city's sanctity—deeply interwoven with its spiritual memory, urban evolution, and *tīrtha*-centric identity.

5.2.2.2. A drought condition in Kāśī

The *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* (39.26–42) of the *Skanda Purāṇa* narrates a prolonged ecological catastrophe in the region of Kāśī—then known as *Ānandavana*—during the Swayambhuva Manvantara of the last Padma Kalpa. It describes a devastating sixty-year drought that unsettled the entire ecosystem and disrupted human habitation:

pādame kalpe purāvṛtte manoḥ svāyambhuve'ntare ।
anāvṛṣṭirabhūd vipra sarvabhūtaprakampinī ॥ 26 ॥
tayā tu ṣaṣṭihāyinyā pīḍitāḥ prāṇino'khilāḥ ।
kecid ambudhitīraṣu giridroṇīṣu kecana ॥ 27 ॥
mahānimneṣu kaccheṣu munivṛttyā janāḥ sthitāḥ ।
araṇyāny avanirjātā grāmakharvaṭavarjitā ॥ 28 ॥ (*KKh* 39.26–28)

("In the Swayambhuva Manvantara of the last Padma Kalpa, there was no rain for sixty years everywhere. All living beings were afflicted. People sought refuge along seashores, in

mountain caves, and in riverine valleys, adopting ascetic modes of life. The entire earth became a forest, devoid of towns and villages.")

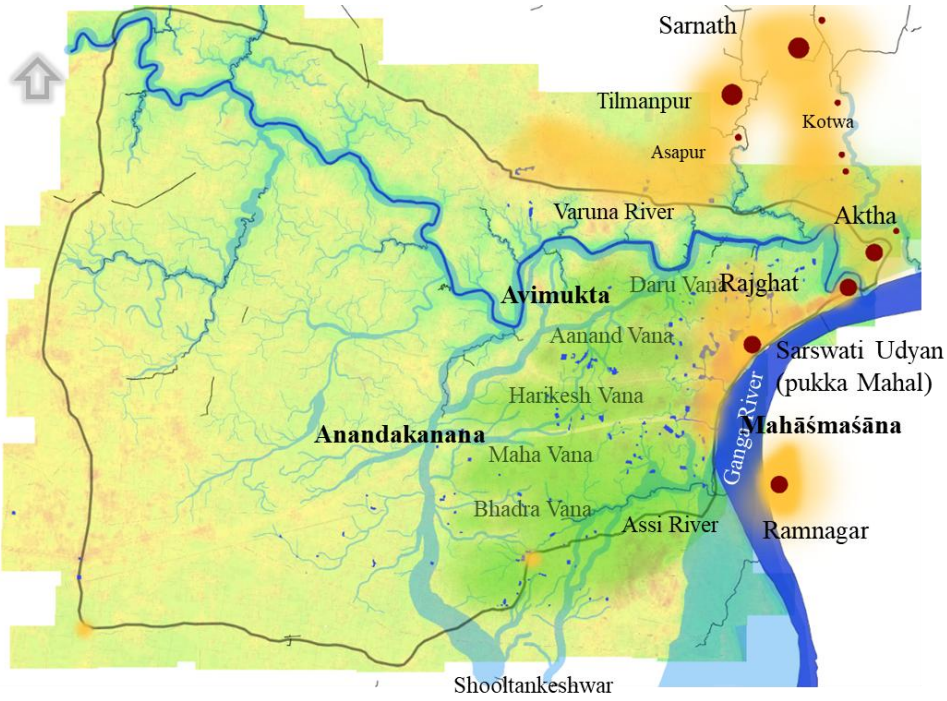


Figure 25: Paurāṇika map of Kāśī Kṣetra.

The text vividly portrays a total environmental collapse, wherein prolonged drought forced mass displacement of populations into marginal ecological zones. Cities and villages disappeared, leaving behind ascetic-like communities inhabiting forests and mountains. This mythological memory may encode recollections of an ancient ecological crisis with profound demographic consequences.

In response, Brahmā is said to have approached the sage-king Ripunjaya—engaged in penance within the sacred *Avimukta* region—urging him to accept kingship under the new name Divodāsa. Divodāsa, however, questioned the divine mandate:

tvayi rājyaṃ prakurvāṇe devo vṛṣṭi vidhāsyati ।
pāpaniṣṭhe ca vai rājñi na devo varṣate punaḥ ॥ (*KKh* 39.42)

("If you reign, there will be rain. But under an unrighteous king, the gods will never grant rain again.")

Brahmā affirmed that only under the rule of a righteous king would the heavens bestow rain. Divodāsa consented, but only on the condition that all deities vacate Kāśī prior to his coronation. Śiva, upon learning of the crisis, agreed and departed to Mandarachala. Yet, symbolically, he remained in Kāśī in the form of a *liṅga*, thus establishing the eternal sanctity of the *Avimuktakṣetra*:

mandaradri gatenāpi kṣetraṃ naitāt pināķinā ।
vimuktaṃ liṅgarūpeṇa avimuktam ataḥ smṛtam ॥
purā nandavanaṃ nāma kṣetram etat prakīrtitam ।
avimuktaṃ tadārabhya nāmāsya prathitaṃ bhuvi ॥ (*KKh* 39.73–74)

("Even after departing to Mandarachala, Pināpāṇi did not forsake this *kṣetra*. Remaining here in the form of a liṅga, it came to be known as Avimukta. Formerly called Ānandavana, it has since become renowned in the world as Avimukta.")

This narrative, stretching from ecological collapse to the establishment of Divodāsa's righteous reign, encodes more than a cosmological episode. It reflects symbolic memory of environmental stress, societal displacement, and political reorganization. Importantly, it also underpins the transition of Kāśī from a tribal–pastoral forested landscape (*vana*) to an enduring urban–sacred centre—the *Avimuktakṣetra*, "the land never abandoned."

Thus, the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa's* drought myth not only affirms Kāśī's theological status but also provides valuable insights into the interplay of ecological upheaval, sacred kingship, and urban–spiritual morphology in the city's *tīrtha*-centric evolution.

a) Reconstruction of Kāśī: Mythical Memory of Drought

The *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* records an extraordinary episode of ecological collapse, describing a sixty-year drought in *Ānandavana* during the last Padma Kalpa. Though placed within a mythic-cosmological framework, the account resonates with historical memory. The narrative emphasizes widespread environmental distress and forced migration, portraying a biosphere stripped of villages and towns and reduced to ascetic survival in forests, mountains, and river valleys.

While the precise chronology of the Padma Kalpa cannot be established, this mythic recollection may preserve echoes of a real historical event. Archaeological evidence indicates significant site desertions in the Varanasi region between the 3rd century BCE and 3rd century CE—a period marked by climatic stress, socio-political transition, and shifts in settlement patterns. The survival of this drought narrative, despite the medieval compilation of the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*, suggests that the memory of ecological crisis endured in oral and cultural traditions, maintaining its resonance among Kāśī's inhabitants across centuries.

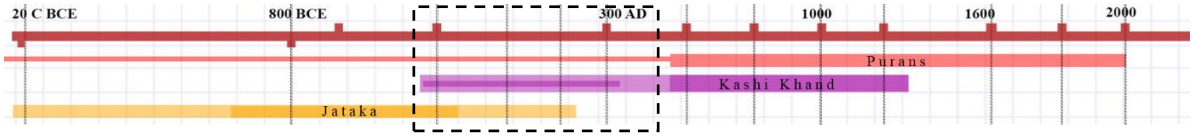


Figure 26: Timeline map showing the inferred chronology of the drought episode.

b) Migration and Shifts in Settlement

The severity of the crisis, as described in the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*, compelled the migration of people from the sacred region of *Avimukta* to more viable ecological niches. The text portrays populations relocating to riverbanks, highland retreats, and forested margins—imagery that may encode the memory of urban desertion or settlement transitions. Symbolically, the stewardship of the *pañcatattva* (five great elements) is attributed to King Divodāsa, marking a shift in both cosmic and civic governance.

Archaeological evidence supports this interpretation. Excavations documented by V. Jayaswal (2009) reveal that major centers such as Rajghat and Aktha show signs of decline or abandonment during the post-Kuṣāṇa period (c. 3rd century CE). These interruptions in occupation were followed by resettlement during the Gupta and post-Gupta phases, when new urban cores emerged. Such shifts likely reflected strategic adaptation to changing ecological conditions, water availability, and political frameworks. The emergence of smaller,

autonomous settlement units in this era further suggests advanced resource management and localized technological innovations designed to ensure resilience in times of crisis.

c) Emergence of Avimuktakṣetra as a Tīrtha Core and Holistic Urban System

In the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa's* account, Brahmā appoints King Divodāsa during the drought to restore balance to both cosmos and polity. Śiva, though withdrawing to Mandarachala, remains symbolically present in Kāśī as a *liṅga*, establishing the land as *Avimukta*— "never forsaken." This myth not only reinforces Kāśī's eternal sanctity but also encodes an early vision of tīrtha-centric urban resilience rooted in sacred geography.

Divodāsa is depicted as a ruler with profound ecological and spiritual understanding. Under his stewardship, resources, settlements, and ritual spaces were reorganized into a balanced, self-sustaining urban system. Later sections of the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* elaborate how water bodies, forests, sacred shrines, and community life were integrated to form a holistic and spiritually vibrant city.

Archaeological findings align with this textual vision. During the Gupta period, the urban revival of Varanasi centered around enduring ritual sites such as Avimukteśvara, Kedāreśvara, and Kāśī Viśvanātha—often situated on ancient mounds or zones of continuous sacred use. This pattern underscores that Varanasi's redevelopment followed a tīrtha-centric model of sacred geography, integrating ecological resources, ritual topography, and community structures into a cohesive and resilient urban fabric.

5.2.2.3. Water bodies: Resource Management in Mythical Governance

One of the most distinctive features of Varanasi's sacred urbanism is its intricate network of *kundas* (ritual tanks) and *vāpīs* (stepwells), seamlessly interwoven into its religious and ritual topography. The *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* (33.3–26) of the *Skanda Purāṇa* presents a mythological narrative that not only explains the origins of some of these sacred water bodies but also reflects an encoded memory of ecological crisis and its ritual–architectural response.

In the mythic era of *Satya Yuga*, the text describes a time when the heavens withheld rain, rivers ceased to flow, and even the most basic human needs for water in daily activities such as bathing and drinking went unmet:

"...na varṣanti yadā'bhrāṇi na prāvartanta nimnigāḥ |
jalābhilāśo na yadā snānapānādikarmaṇi..." (*KKh* 33.5)

Faced with this drought-like condition in *Ānandavana* (ancient Kāśī), Iśāna—the *Dikpāla* of the northeast—intervened. Witnessing a *liṅga* in the parched landscape, he invoked divine energy and, striking the ground with his trident, created a great *kunda*, releasing subterranean waters:

"...kundaṃ pracaṇḍavegena rūkḍro rūdravapurdharaḥ..." (*KKh* 33.17)

This act, both mythic and symbolic, is marked as the genesis of Kāśī's sacred water presence, giving rise to ritual bathing spaces that became integral to its spiritual geography. The subsequent bathing of the *liṅga* with thousands of *kalaśas* of water by Iśāna signifies more than devotion—it encodes a ritualized vision of ecological restoration, where sacred architecture and religious performance collectively ensured the resilience of the city's water-based ritual life.

a) Hydrological Strategies and Typology of Kundas

The *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* narrative reflects a sophisticated vision of water conservation and ritual utilization—mythologized through divine agency, yet firmly grounded in ecological necessity. Both textual traditions and material remains indicate that the *kundas* of Kāśī were not random features but part of a deliberate hydrological and spiritual design. From these sources, three primary typologies of *kundas* in Varanasi can be identified:

1. *Newly Dug Sacred Tanks* – exemplified by the legendary *Jñānavāpī*, whose origin is attributed to divine intervention and commemorated as acts of sacred creation.
2. *Kundas Utilizing Paleochannels* – tanks constructed by adapting earlier fluvial pathways for rainwater and groundwater retention.
3. *Modified Segments of Ancient Drainage Lines* – portions of natural drainage systems formalized into sacred *kundas* or *vāpīs*, serving both ritual and community functions.

Geomorphological mapping of ancient paleochannels and drainage lines, supported by recent GIS-based studies, demonstrates that the siting of many *kundas* corresponds closely with natural low-lying catchments. This alignment underscores the ritual-ecological logic behind their placement, where sacred water bodies simultaneously fulfilled religious, ecological, and civic needs in the historical landscape of Kāśī.

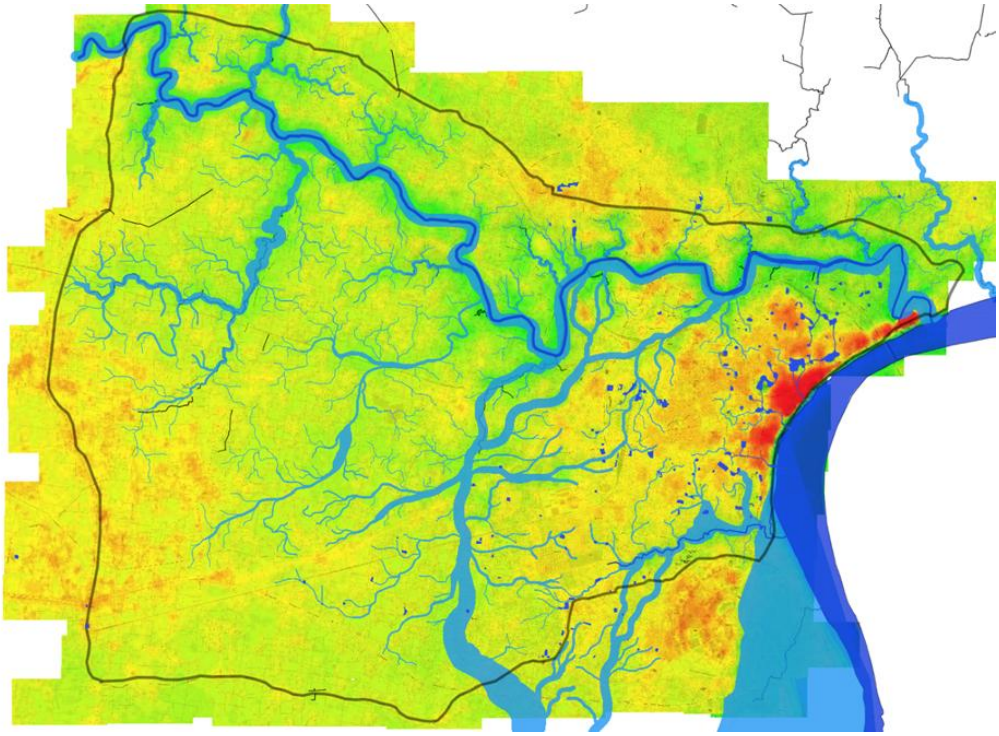


Figure 27:GIS-based map of Varanasi showing surface topography, paleochannels, and sacred water bodies in relation to the Paurāṇika constructs of ancient Kāśī.

The *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* (43.63) further records that during the reign of King Divodāsa, deliberate efforts were made to establish an extensive hydrological infrastructure, including *kundas*, *vāpīs*, wells, and gardens. This network comprised 88 *hradas* (sacred water bodies) and 62 associated *tīrthas*, integrating water management into Kāśī's ritual and civic framework.

Unlike other prominent pilgrimage centers—such as Prayāga, Haridvāra, Gayā, Nāśik, or Kāñcī—where water structures exist but are relatively sparse, Kāśī developed an exceptionally dense hydro-ritual network. Even Ayodhyā and Mathurā, though possessing notable *kundas*, lack the same scale and spatial integration. This distinction underscores that Varanasi's sacred landscape evolved with a unique emphasis on localized water structures, reinforcing both its *tīrtha*-centric spiritual identity and its capacity for ecological and urban resilience.

5.3 Reinterpreting Kāśī and Varanasi

This section of the research chapter seeks to reinterpret the urban constructs of Varanasi through an integrated lens of *Paurāṇika* narrations, archaeological evidence, and field-based investigation. Building upon the archaeological analysis presented in Section 5.1 and the *Paurāṇika* study outlined in Section 5.2, the present discussion examines Kāśī across three interrelated dimensions—*Kāśī Vāsī* (community), *Kāśī Nagar* (urban form), and *Kāśī Yoga* (sacred-spiritual integration). These correspond to the foundational pillars of *tīrtha-centric* place-making in Indian pilgrimage towns: community, resource, and landscape**.**

Sections 5.1 and 5.2 collectively highlight the central role of resident communities in shaping the spiritual and urban landscape of Kāśī from antiquity to the present. Through a synthesis of archaeological records, epigraphic evidence, and *Paurāṇika* textual traditions, the study demonstrates that Kāśī's development cannot be understood merely as a product of royal patronage or divine myth, but rather as the outcome of sustained community participation embedded within sacred geographies and ritual cycles.

Archaeological excavations and early inscriptions confirm that local communities were active agents in both constructing and sustaining Kāśī's *tīrtha*-scape. Their contributions included the establishment and continuous upkeep of temples, *kuṇḍas* (sacred tanks), shrines, and ritual routes—features that together defined the city's distinctive urban morphology. Community guilds, caste-based occupational groups, and ritual specialists played a critical role in maintaining and revitalizing this sacred infrastructure across generations. In doing so, they reinforced not only Kāśī's urban continuity but also its enduring spiritual ecology, ensuring that the city remained a living *tīrtha* sustained by both myth and practice.

5.3.1. Field Investigation

Based on the central narrations of the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*, a comprehensive field investigation was undertaken to correlate the sacred, textualized spatialities of Kāśī with their present realities. Employing an ethnographic approach, this study combined direct field visits, temple inspections, and community interactions with systematic photo documentation. The objective was to reinterpret the *tīrtha*-centric urban construct of Kāśī as envisioned in the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*.

A total of 286 tīrtha sites were surveyed in and around Kāśī, including those along the sacred circuit of the Pañcakrośī Yātrā, which continues to embody ritual and spatial continuity within the city's sacred geography. Each site was examined in relation to its textual reference in the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*, with particular focus on its mythological associations, deity linkages, and role in the formation of the ritual landscape.

The temples and associated sacred sites were evaluated against their Purāṇika descriptions, assessing both continuities and divergences in terms of architectural form, spatial context, and

ritual practices. In addition, the survey documented the present physical condition of the sites, their degree of accessibility, and their integration within the contemporary urban fabric.

Complementing this documentation, a public perception survey was conducted with local devotees, priests, caretakers, and residents at each site. The survey gathered insights on key development indicators, including civic infrastructure, accessibility, conservation measures, ritual continuity, and community engagement. These data form the basis for analysis in the subsequent chapter.

Findings from the field study indicate that a *tīrtha* in Kāśī is not defined merely by its physical or architectural form. Rather, its enduring sanctity is rooted in the deity's association with the kṣetra**,** the living memory of the site within the community, and its embeddedness within the broader ritual and cultural landscape. This underscores the essence of *tīrtha*-centric urbanism in Indian pilgrimage towns, where sacred geography, community recollection, and daily practices coalesce to sustain the sanctity of space beyond its material constructs.

A detailed tabulation of the surveyed sites—including their textual references, physical observations, and classifications—is provided in Annexure VI. An accompanying map graphically represents the surveyed locations. The observations and their interpretative analysis are discussed in the following subsections.

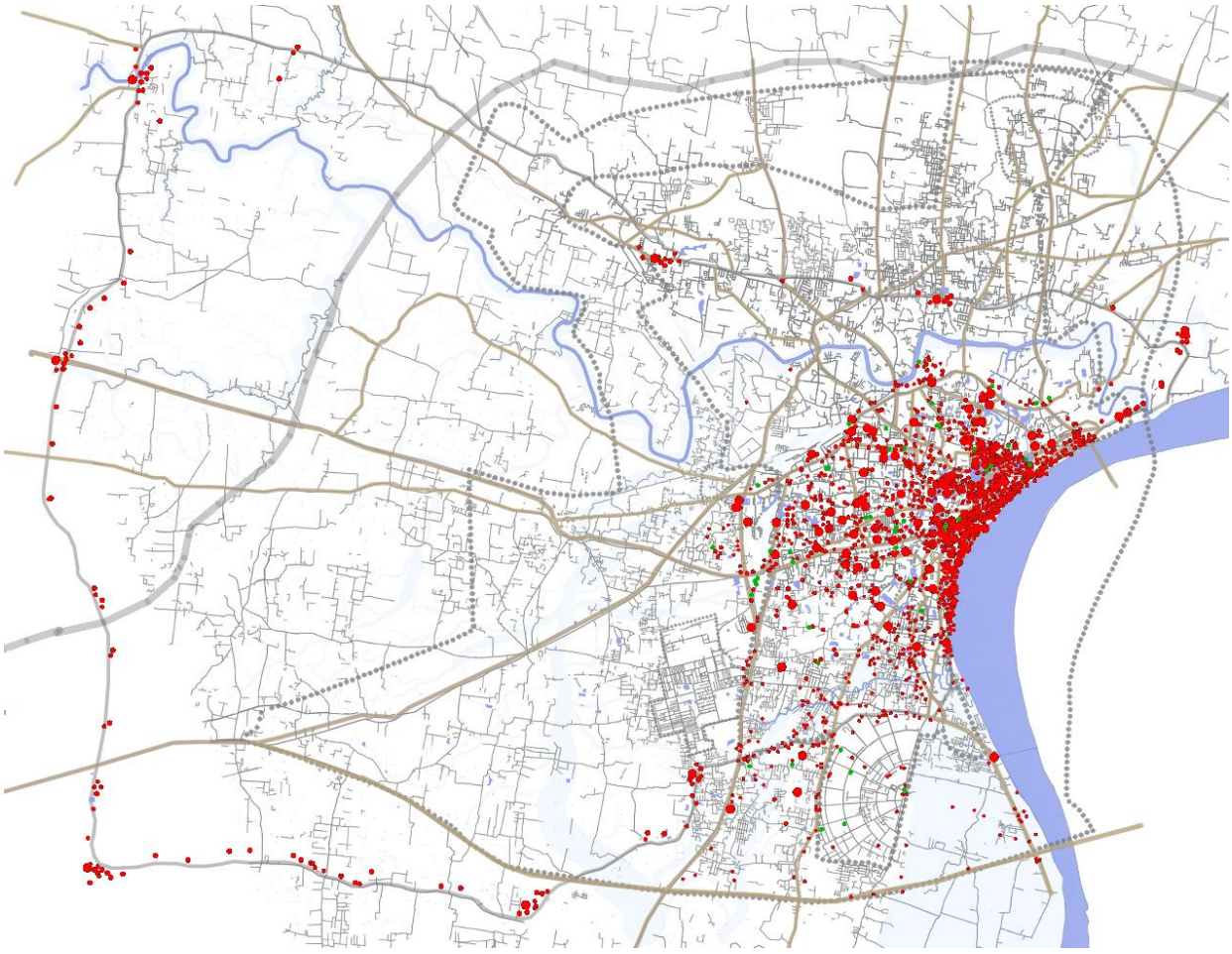


Figure 28:map highlighting the locations of field survey with observed tīrtha site.

5.3.2. Tīrtha-Centric Urban Density and the Divodāsa Paradigm

The field investigations presented in Section 5.3.1 examine the spatial distribution and religious significance of *tīrtha* sites as described in the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*. The findings reveal a remarkable concentration of sacred shrines, many embedded within the densely inhabited neighborhoods and residential quarters of present-day Varanasi.

This sacred clustering resonates with the *Paurāṇika* narrative of Śiva's exile from Kāśī by King Divodāsa, a pivotal episode symbolizing the reorganization of the city's divine order. According to the account, Śiva's repeated attempts to re-enter Kāśī led to the gradual arrival of numerous deities, each establishing residence at different *tīrthas* across the city. This mythic reconfiguration sanctified Kāśī's entire spatial fabric, transforming it into a cosmic urban system, where every ghat, street, and *gali* became infused with sacred energy.

Beyond its metaphysical symbolism, the legend encodes profound socio-spatial meanings. It reflects the collective participation of community groups, ritual specialists, tradespeople, and spiritual agents under the dhārmic governance of King Divodāsa in shaping Kāśī's autonomous sacred urbanism. Chapter 44 of the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* elaborates on this collective structure through the allegorical arrival of the 64 Yoginīs. Representing cosmic energies and spiritual guardianship, the Yoginīs embody the convergence of feminine divinity, community agency, and sacred spatial organization, reinforcing Kāśī's identity as a spiritually charged and socially integrated city.

The survey encompassed 286 tīrtha sites across Kāśī and its extended sacred circuit of the Pañcakrośī Yātrā, using a systematic documentation framework. Each site was recorded under key parameters, including:

- *Location*: Identified using contemporary urban addresses (ghats, *galis*, *mohallās*, or plot references), often overlapping with residential and commercial structures.
- *Associated Deity or Tattva*: The presiding deity or cosmological principle tied to the site.
- *Narrative Reference*: The mythological episode from the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*.
- *Current Condition*: Classified as *well-preserved* (actively maintained and ritually vibrant), *modest* (structurally intact with limited ritual activity), or *neglected* (dilapidated or endangered due to urban encroachment).
- *Architectural and Ritual Remains*: Ranging from ancient *liṅgas*, *yonis*, and *pīṭhas* to later structural shrines, reflecting centuries of ritual continuity and adaptive reuse.
- *Cultural Significance and Ritual Practices*: Observations on the role of each site in sustaining Kāśī's living spiritual traditions.

The findings affirm that Kāśī's sacredness is not confined to its temple architecture but derives fundamentally from the enduring deity–narrative–space relationship, deeply embedded in community memory and ritual life. Even modest or neglected sites retain profound spiritual significance, sustained through daily practices and cultural recollection.

Thus, Kāśī emerges as a unique model of tīrtha-centric urbanism, where sacred geography, community participation, and spatial continuity converge to sustain a dynamic spiritual ecosystem. Here, architectural vestiges—whether monumental or minimal—are not static relics but living components of Kāśī's uninterrupted ritual ecology, ensuring its identity as a perennial *tīrtha*.

5.3.2.1. Textual Foundation and Narrative Mapping: Community/people - Kāśī -vāsī

The sacred landscape of Kāśī finds its most elaborate textual articulation in the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*. Here, each tīrtha is not merely described as a shrine or site but envisioned as a living node in a vast spiritual *maṇḍala*. Every sacred space is linked to specific deities—Śiva, Viṣṇu, Gaṇeśa, Śakti, Āditya, Bhairava, and others—as well as to *tattvas* (cosmic principle elements), narrative episodes, and ritual injunctions. This mapping transforms Kāśī into a cosmological city, where divine presence, human settlement, and ritual activity form an inseparable whole.

a) The Episode of the Yoginīs and King Divodāsa

One of the most remarkable textual narratives, presented in Chapters 44–45 of the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*, recounts the arrival of the sixty-four Yoginīs during the reign of King Divodāsa. Following Śiva's exile from Kāśī, he, filled with sorrow, sought a means of re-entry. He dispatched the Yoginīs to Kāśī, instructing them to uncover flaws in Divodāsa's governance. The verses (KK 44.61–63) frame their mission:

satvaraṁ yāta yoginyo mama vārāṇasīṁ purīm |
yatra rājā divodāso rājyaṁ dharmeṇa śāsty alam || *61* ||
svadharmaś cyutaḥ kāśīṁ yathātupanty ajed nṛpaḥ |
tathopañcarataprājñā yogamāyābalānvitāḥ || *62* ||
yathāpunarmīkṛtya purīṁ vārāṇasīm aham |
itaḥ prayāmiyoginyas tathākṣipravidhīyatām || *63* || (KK 44.61–63)

Here, the Yoginīs were exhorted to proceed swiftly to Kāśī, observe the dhārmic rule of Divodāsa, and determine whether any lapse existed through which Śiva might reclaim his place.

Concealing their divinity with *māyā*, the Yoginīs entered Kāśī in manifold human forms: as ascetics, maidservants, midwives, artisans, dancers, musicians, rope-walkers, healers, courtesans, and tradeswomen (KK 45.4–6). The Purāṇa provides a vivid description:

kācij jñātā tapasvinī |
kācid u babhūva sairandhrī kācin māsopavāsinī || *5* ||
mālākāravadhūḥ kācit kācin āpitasundarī |
sūtikarmavicārajñā 'parā bhaiṣajyakovidā || *6* || (KK 45.4–6)

These Yoginīs, embodying every profession and social stratum, roamed the streets, ghāṭs, and courtyards for a year, scrutinizing every facet of civic and spiritual life. Yet, as the narrative emphasizes, they found no deficiency: Divodāsa's governance had instituted a complete and sustainable urban order.

b) The Yoginīs' Resolution and the Sacredness of Kāśī

Unable to return to Śiva with accusations and unwilling to face his wrath, the Yoginīs resolved to remain permanently in Kāśī. Their deliberation culminated in a profound realization:

kāṣī hi puruṣārthānāṁ caturṇāṁ nidhir ucyate |
tyajaty asmād yaḥ kāṣīṁ sa tyajyate caturbhyaḥ || (KK 45.24–28)

They declared that Kāśī is the very treasure of the four *puruṣārthas*—dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa—and that one who abandons Kāśī is abandoned by these aims of life themselves. Thus, the Yoginīs chose to sanctify Kāśī by their continuous presence, weaving divine energy into its social and occupational fabric.

This narrative encodes a deeper urban principle: that Kāśī's sacrality is not restricted to temples and ghāṭs but is diffused into every occupation, lane, and household. The Yoginīs' varied disguises ensured that all dimensions of daily life—ritual, economic, artistic, and domestic—became integral to the tīrtha-mandala.

c) The Role of Āditya and Continuity of Presence

Following the Yoginīs, Śiva sent other deities to Kāśī, among them Āditya (the Sun). The *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* (KK 46.15–31) narrates how the Sun assumed roles as guest, beggar, ascetic, and renunciate, experiencing the full spectrum of worldly conditions. Finally, Āditya resolved to stay eternally in Kāśī, proclaiming:

anyāny api ca pāpāni mahānty alpāni yāni ca |
kṣayanti tāni sarvāṇi kāśiṁ praviśatāṁ satām || 31 ||

"All sins, whether great or small, are destroyed for the virtuous who enter Kāśī."

This episode integrates the solar cult into Kāśī's living landscape, most prominently at Lolārk Kuṇḍ, where fertility and purification rituals continue to be practiced, linking cosmic worship with folk ritual.

d) Integration of Folk Deities and Local Guardians

The Yoginī principle of embodied divinity continues through Kāśī's folk traditions. Shrines of *dih bābās* or *bīr bābās*—ancestral guardians such as Karmanbīr Bābā—dot the lanes, often located at crossroads. Localized goddesses like Śāyarī Mātā and Saṭṭī Devī serve as protectors of gallīs, while the unseen Chaura Mātā is believed to sit at road intersections, silently commanding respect from passersby. These localized presences maintain Kāśī's spiritual ecology beyond monumental temples.

e) Continuity and residents of Kāśī: Kāśī -vāsī

The Yoginī disguises symbolically mirror the occupational and social diversity of Kāśī, many of whose communities still thrive in their ancestral neighborhoods. Pañcagaṅgā remains associated with mercantile Gujaratis; Ṭhatherī Bāzār continues its brass-working legacy; Kedār Ghāṭ gallīs preserve South Indian religious affiliations; and Assi and Tulsi Ghāṭ embody Kāśī's intellectual and youthful spirit. Communities such as the Mālīs and Prajāpatis sustain rituals at Kardameśvara and Lahartārā; Mallāhs and Dhobīs maintain river-centric devotions. Even within the BHU campus, original villagers uphold ancestral deity worship, evidencing an unbroken sacred geography.

f) Kāśī as a Living Mandala

The Yoginī and Āditya narratives culminate in Kāśī's identity as a self-sustaining spiritual mandala. Here, cosmological forces, folk guardians, ritual specialists, and resident communities coalesce, ensuring the perpetuation of both sacred continuity and urban identity. The ghāṭ zones embody not only tangible advantages—ritual bathing, thriving markets, microclimatic relief—but also intangible qualities such as *Lavanya* (the beauty of life) and

Madhurya (the melody of life), which residents associate with the cultural ethos of Pakka Mahal.

In this way, Kāśī emerges from the Kāśī Khaṇḍa as not merely a pilgrimage town but a holistic urban cosmos—a karmabhūmi and mokṣabhūmi—where the Yoginīs' eternal presence continues to sanctify its people, spaces, and stories.

5.3.2.2. Sacred Geography and Spatial Networks: Kāśī nagar as karma- bhūmi

The Kāśī Khaṇḍa of the Skanda Purāṇa presents Kāśī nagar not merely as a geographical settlement but as a karma-bhūmi and punya-bhumi—a land where righteous deeds transcend temporal limits. The verses (KK 52.44–45) glorify Kāśī under King Divodāsa's righteous rule, proclaiming:

"tvayā rājanvatī veṣa'vaniḥ sarvādhi-bhājanam |
ahaṃ cāsti-dhano rājan! nyāyopātta-mahādhanaḥ || 44 ||

iyañca rājanadhānī te karmabhūmāvanuttamā |
yasyāṃ kṛtānāṃ kāryāṇāṃ saṃvarte'pi na saṃkṣayaḥ || 45 ||(KK 52.44–45)*"*

"O king, this Earth, adorned by you, has become the receptacle of all prosperities. I, too, O king, possess wealth acquired through righteous means. And this capital city of yours is indeed the supreme karma-bhūmi, where righteous deeds never perish, even at the time of cosmic dissolution."

These verses emphasize Kāśī's uniqueness: the fruits of actions performed here do not decay even in pralaya (cosmic dissolution), making the city an eternal treasury of *puruṣārthas* (dharma, artha, kāma, mokṣa). This metaphysical assurance is reflected in Kāśī's urban-sacred fabric, where tīrthas are meticulously embedded in sacred circuits rather than randomly dispersed.

a) Sacred Circuits as Mandalic Frameworks

The tīrthas of Kāśī form an intricate mandala woven through sacred yātrās and ritual routes:

- *Antargṛhi Yātrā*: The inner sanctum circuit centered around Viśveśvara, reinforcing the spiritual core of Kāśī.
- *Pañcakrośī Yātrā*: The outer sacred boundary of five krośas (~15 km), encircling the city and sanctifying its perimeter.
- *Ekādaśa Rudra Yātrā*: A Shaiva circuit invoking the eleven Rudras, integrating multiple ghats and shrines.
- *Āditya Yātrā*: Solar tīrthas, such as Lolārk Kuṇḍ, commemorating Āditya's vow to remain in Kāśī (KK 46.31).
- *Śaktipeetha Circuits*: Anchored around goddesses like Viśālākṣī and Annapūrṇā, reinforcing feminine divine presence.

Many of these tīrthas align with natural landmarks such as river confluences (Assi-Gaṅgā, Varuṇā-Saṅgam), ghats, kundas, and cremation grounds. Ritual pathways through ghats, galis, and kunds ensure that spiritual practice is inseparable from Kāśī's ecological and urban systems.

b) Sacred Ecological Consciousness

The design of Kāśī's tīrthas reflects an integrated sacred ecological consciousness. Rivers, water tanks (*kundas*), sacred trees, and cremation sites were not auxiliary but central to tīrtha identity. For instance, Lolārk Kuṇḍ remains a fertility site tied to solar worship, while Pañcagaṅgā Ghat epitomizes the merging of multiple spiritual currents. Cremation sites like Harishchandra Ghat and Manikarnika Ghat embody Kāśī's promise of mokṣa.

This ecological embedding echoes the assurance of the Purāṇa that Kāśī sustains dharmic actions eternally—its geography itself sanctifies karma.

c) Tīrtha as Local Landscape and Resource Mapping

Kāśī's tīrthas were not abstract symbols but deeply rooted in local landscapes and communities. A striking example is the reuse of sacred materials and layered construction practices recorded in contemporary field surveys:

- A house temple of Yogmāyā in the Assi zone evolved from a single residence into a dharmaśālā and homestay, reusing older carved fragments and materials.
- The restoration ślokas in Kāśī Khaṇḍa emphasize the merit of reviving older tīrthas, inspiring continuous rebuilding and reuse.
- Local artisans and communities—Mālīs, Prajāpatis, and metal-workers in zones like Ṭhatherī Bāzār—have historically contributed to this layered landscape, echoing the Yoginīs' disguises (KK 45.4–17) as midwives, artisans, musicians, and healers.

Thus, resource mapping and sacred reuse became tools of sustaining Kāśī's sacred urban system.

d) Reconstruct–Relocate: Continuity Through Place-Making

Kāśī demonstrates a unique resilience in reconstructing and relocating shrines while preserving their cultural integrity:

- The Bindumadhava Temple and Viśvanātha Temple exemplify relocation and reconstruction, where community faith preserved sanctity despite political and urban disruptions.
- Local street shrines and Pañcakrośī tīrthas at Naria illustrate how reconstructed temples continue to thrive through community memory, oral narratives, and ritual practice.
- This adaptive practice ensures that even when physical structures shift, the mandalic integrity of Kāśī's tīrthas remains intact.

5.3.3. Research Significance and Implications

5.3.3.1. Urbanism and Sacred Placemaking

The field findings affirm that Kāśī's urbanism is not simply a product of historical evolution but is profoundly tīrtha-centric, shaped through what may be termed mytho-spatial logic. The interweaving of farmlands with early settlements reflected a harmonious balance between agrarian sustainability and sacred habitation, strengthening Kāśī's position as a thriving center in the fertile Indo-Gangetic plain. Over centuries, as clusters of mohallas expanded tīrthas

continued to anchor community life, ensuring that the rhythm of daily activity, from farming to trade, remained linked to spiritual practices.

Tīrthas thus serve not only as sacred nodes but as cultural anchors, guiding built form, community interaction, and socio-religious cohesion. The Hindu-Muslim mosaic of Varanasi further testifies to this urbanism: distinct neighborhoods coexist yet remain interconnected through shared markets, festivals, and trade networks. Such pluralism strengthens Kāśī's identity as a Pan-Indian sacred city, where sacred placemaking accommodates multiple communities while preserving its dhārmic core.

5.3.3.2. Continuity of Intangible Heritage

The Paurāṇika traditions, preserved in the Kāśī Khaṇḍa of the Skanda Purāṇa, continue to animate Kāśī's public memory and collective identity. Rituals associated with tīrthas still frame aspirations for mokṣa, freedom from fear, fertility, and prosperity. Even in modest shrines, often located within dense galis or neighborhood courtyards, cultural vitality thrives. The **Banārasī spirit—Banārsīpan and Banāras kī masti—**embodies this intangible heritage, weaving together ritual, folklore, humor, and sociality into everyday life. As the Paurāṇik narratives of Yoginīs, Ādityas, and Bhairavas illustrate, divinity is present not only in monumental temples but also in the everyday vocations and households of Kāśī-vāsīs. Communities such as Gwalpalli (milkmen), the Ahirs of Chemeshwar Ghat, or the Mallāh and Dhobī groups along the riverbanks maintain ritual ties to local tīrthas, sustaining living traditions. This intangible fabric, passed through oral traditions, seasonal festivals, and collective memories, positions Kāśī as a living sacred city, where cultural continuity coexists with urban change.

5.3.3.3. Need for Preservation and Integration

Despite the resilience of Kāśī's sacred geography, many tīrthas—particularly those embedded in dense mohallas or less-recognized neighborhoods—remain vulnerable to neglect or encroachment. As urbanization continues, heritage mapping, community-based conservation, and culturally sensitive planning are essential to safeguard these sites. A sacred geography-based urban policy could provide an integrated framework, aligning Smart Heritage initiatives with the lived realities of Kāśī-vāsīs.

Such a policy must prioritize:

- Community involvement in heritage management and ritual continuity.
- Signage and mapping of tīrthas to educate both residents and pilgrims.
- Recognition of small shrines and street temples, which function as vital nodes in tīrtha-circuits like Pañcakrośī Yātrā and Antargṛhī Yātrā.
- Integration of intangible heritage—such as Banārsī oral traditions, local deity worship, and communal rituals—into modern planning processes.

In doing so, Kāśī can continue to thrive as both a sacred landscape and an urban center, where the Genus Loci—its unique spirit of place—remains rooted in dharma, cultural plurality, and the pursuit of mokṣa.

5.4 Chapter conclusion

The historical, archaeological, and Paurāṇika exploration of Kāśī (Varanasi) demonstrates that its emergence as one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities was not the outcome of political dominance or material prosperity alone, but the result of its enduring identity as a tīrtha—a sacred threshold where temporal existence meets the divine. Unlike other ancient cities whose urban continuity was often disrupted by invasions, ecological crises, or political decline, Kāśī endured through its deep-rooted spiritual ecology and its ability to regenerate as a mokṣa-purī, a city of liberation.

From the early Iron Age settlements at Aktha and Ramnagar (c. 1800–1200 BCE), through the Janapada and Mahājanapada phases at Rajghat, and into the urban consolidations of the Mauryan, Kushan, and Gupta periods, Kāśī evolved as both a civic center and a sacred landscape. Archaeological evidence reveals that while early Vedic communities anchored their settlements around ritual materiality—kapālas, agni-kuṇḍas, and yajña paraphernalia—the Janapada period witnessed the growth of proto-urban settlements shaped by ritual cycles, craft guilds, and trade networks. The Mauryan and Kushan phases mark an urban climax with fortified civic planning and transregional commerce, while the Gupta period and Bharashiva Nagas re-centered Kāśī as a preeminent Śaiva tīrtha, shifting the nucleus from Rajghat to the Avimukteśvara–Pakka Mahal zone.

Yet, this trajectory of material development cannot be understood in isolation. The Kāśīkhaṇḍa of the Skanda Purāṇa and related Paurāṇik traditions encoded the city's sacred geography in narratives that functioned not merely as myth but as cultural memory and spatial blueprints. The myth of Avimuktakṣetra—declared by Śiva to be the eternal abode "never forsaken"—transcends chronological time, situating Kāśī in a cosmic continuum. The episode of the sixty-year drought during the Swayambhuva Manvantara, while framed mythologically, reflects ecological memory of settlement stress and population migrations, corroborated by archaeological evidence of occupational decline in sites like Rajghat and Aktha during the post-Kuṣāṇa period. King Divodāsa's dhārmic governance, portrayed as restoring both cosmic and civic balance, emerges as an early paradigm of tīrtha-centric governance, fusing ecological resilience, resource stewardship, and ritual sanctity.

The field investigation of 286 tīrtha sites, including the Pañcakrośī Yātrā circuit, reinforced the textual narratives. The dense clustering of shrines, liṅgas, and kuṇḍas within Kāśī's mohallas, galīs, and ghāts mirrors the Paurāṇik account of Śiva dispatching deities and Yoginīs to sanctify every corner of the city during his exile. The Yoginī narrative, in which they assume the roles of artisans, healers, courtesans, traders, and householders, encodes a civic-spiritual principle: that Kāśī's sacrality is woven into the very fabric of everyday life. Their decision to remain in Kāśī permanently affirms the city as the living embodiment of the four puruṣārthas—dharma, artha, kāma, mokṣa—and situates urban sustainability in community participation and dhārmic order.

This tīrtha-centric identity is equally expressed through Kāśī's hydro-ritual landscape. The Paurāṇik descriptions of kundas and vāpīs, created by divine intervention, correspond with geomorphological evidence of paleochannels and catchments. The ritual-hydrological network of 88 hradas and 62 tīrthas, emphasized in the Kāśīkhaṇḍa, demonstrates a sophisticated ecological consciousness, ensuring both spiritual purification and practical resilience against

climatic fluctuations. Unlike other pilgrimage centers such as Prayāga or Gayā, Kāśī evolved as a hydraulic mandala, embedding water conservation within sacred geography.

Despite centuries of urban change, including colonial interventions and modern development pressures, Kāśī's ritual continuity and cultural vitality remain unparalleled. Daily worship at shrines, seasonal pilgrimages, folk guardian traditions (Dih Bābās, Chaura Mātā, Śāyarī Mātā), and community-based tīrtha circuits like the Pañcakrośī Yātrā reaffirm the resilience of its sacred ecosystem. Even reconstructed or relocated temples, such as Bindumādhava and Kāśī Viśvanātha, continue to hold sanctity through collective memory and ritual practice, showing that Kāśī's sacredness resides not merely in built form but in the cognitive and cultural continuity of its people.

The Kāśīkhaṇḍa's proclamations—declaring Kāśī to be both karma-bhūmi and mokṣa-bhūmi, where righteous deeds never perish even at pralaya (cosmic dissolution)—find living resonance in practices like Kāśī-Yoga. The verses equating a mere walk through Kāśī's streets with the Khecarī Mudrā (KK 41.178–179), or extolling Kāśī-Yoga as the highest path (KK 41.184), articulate the city itself as a yogic mandala, where pravṛtti (worldly life) and nivṛtti (renunciation) converge. Thus, Kāśī becomes not just a city but a cosmic laboratory of liberation, where ritual action, ecological adaptation, and spiritual aspiration are seamlessly fused.

In conclusion, Kāśī emerges as a self-sustaining tīrtha-centric urban cosmos, an adaptive and living city whose resilience lies in the integration of community (Kāśī-vāsī), sacred landscape (Kāśī-nagar), and spiritual practice (Kāśī-Yoga). Its urbanism is neither static nor relic-like, but dynamic—constantly reshaped through myth, memory, ecological adaptation, and community devotion. This reinterpretation positions Varanasi not merely as a historical city of antiquity, but as a perennial Avimuktakṣetra—the city never forsaken—where material life and spiritual transcendence coalesce in a unique Indic model of urbanism.

Chapter - 6: Objective Three: To Identify and Position the Indicators for Holistic Urban Development.

The present chapter presents the results and interpretations of the third objective of this research. This objective addresses the third research question of the study: *How can the Tīrtha-based tradition be used to plan and develop Indian pilgrimage towns in a more holistic and comprehensive manner?* The aim is to extract, analyze, and establish indicators for a holistic, tīrtha-centric model of urban development.

The objective is pursued through three sequential tasks, culminating in a conclusion that identifies and positions the key policy considerations necessary for tīrtha-centric holistic urban development (illustrated in the accompanying figure).

Methodologically, the chapter unfolds in three subtasks. The first subtask is to identify the indicators for contemporary urban development at tīrtha sites. This involves analyzing public opinions gathered at the tīrtha locations discussed earlier in Section 5.4 through semi-structured interviews. The purpose is to uncover the underlying structures and indicators that shape current urban development trends in Varanasi.

The second subtask is to investigate the identified development indicators in the context of urban policy-making. This stage employs an interpretative perspective to critically analyze the indicators through the Delphi method, engaging a selected panel of experts. Multiple rounds of the Delphi experiment are conducted, recording expert responses in light of the narrated and presented site studies, to refine and validate the identified indicators.

The third and final subtask is to examine and analyze the levels of intervention of development indicators. Here, the research adopts the method of Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) to study the hierarchical interrelationships among the identified indicators. This expert-based analysis provides an interpretative conclusion aimed at framing a holistic and comprehensive approach to urban development in India's tīrtha landscapes.

In summary, the three core tasks are:

1. To identify the indicators for contemporary urban development at tīrtha sites.
2. To investigate these development indicators in the framework of urban policy-making.
3. To examine and analyze the hierarchical levels of intervention of the development indicators.

6.1 To identify the indicators for contemporary urban development at tīrtha sites.

To identify the indicators for contemporary urban development, a public survey was undertaken alongside the field investigation of 286 tīrtha sites in Varanasi, as discussed in the previous chapter. This survey engaged a diverse group of participants, including local residents, visitors, and both domestic and international tourists. The primary aim of this first task under the third objective was to examine the underlying structures and indicators shaping current urban development trends in Varanasi, with a specific focus on public opinion regarding development at tīrtha sites.

Since local resident communities and stakeholders play a pivotal role in tīrtha-centric place-making in Varanasi, their perspectives on tīrtha heritage and urban development were considered central to this research. Accordingly, the task was structured into two subtasks. The first subtask involved conducting a public survey using a semi-structured questionnaire at the

tīrtha sites of Varanasi, as detailed in Section 6.1.1. The second subtask focused on analyzing the 150 recorded responses from the survey, drawn from across the 286 tīrtha sites, to identify the key urban development indicators emerging from the field data.

6.1.1 To conduct field survey with semi structured questionnaire

A semi-structured questionnaire–based public survey was conducted alongside the tīrtha studies at 286 tīrtha sites across the Varanasi/Kāśī Kṣetra and along the Pañcakrośī Yātrā route. Both these landscapes are deeply rooted in the Purāṇika tradition, reflecting the origin, evolution, and tīrtha-centric continuity of the city. Over a period of 2.5 years, 150 responses were collected from these 286 tīrtha sites. This extensive exercise provided a comprehensive understanding of how local residents, communities, stakeholders, and visitors perceive and respond to the current trends of development.

Through this study, we were able to recognize and establish the significant contributions of communities in shaping tīrtha-centric urban constructs in Varanasi and other Indian pilgrimage towns. These communities, therefore, emerged as the most authentic source for investigating the deeper causes and effects of urban transformation in sacred landscapes.

The findings reveal that both the tīrtha heritage structures documented during the site studies and the perspectives gathered from the public survey were guided by a common underlying force—the Purāṇika narrations. The composers of the Purāṇas had carefully and holistically embedded local communities and residents within the tīrtha lore, which in turn inspired and legitimized the urban constructs of pilgrimage landscapes and the very origin of tīrtha sites. This same Purāṇika motivation continues to resonate among visitors and residents today, encouraging their patronage of tīrtha traditions and their engagement with sacred spaces. Structurally, this understanding demonstrates that a holistic model of urban development in pilgrimage towns must acknowledge and integrate the enduring influence of Purāṇika narratives and community participation.

6.1.1.1 Semi structured questionnaire

The semi-structured questionnaire was meticulously designed to elicit nuanced insights into tīrtha-centric urban development trends across the tīrtha sites of Varanasi and the Pañcakrośī region. It engaged a diverse spectrum of stakeholders—including local residents, pilgrims, priests, business owners, and visitors—ensuring a comprehensive representation of perspectives. The questionnaire is thematically organized into six sections, each addressing a distinct dimension of the lived urban and spiritual experience.

- Section A documents the demographic and associational profiles of respondents, providing essential context for interpreting their perspectives.
- Sections B and C investigate respondents' awareness of Purāṇika narratives and their degree of cultural participation, thereby revealing patterns of continuity and transformation within traditional practices.
- Section D focuses on local perceptions of recent development interventions, capturing opinions on priorities, responsible stakeholders, and aspirations for heritage-sensitive growth.
- Section E is specifically tailored for visitors and pilgrims, exploring their spiritual experiences and their engagement with local traditions.

- Section F invites reflective responses on the interconnections between sacred narratives, community dynamics, and spatial identity, encouraging participants to articulate deeper cultural meanings.

The semi-structured questionnaire was designed with a layered structure to progressively capture the multiple dimensions of tīrtha-centric urban life and development in the Kāśī region. It begins with demographic foundation, advances through cultural and ritual understanding, moves into community and developmental perspectives, and concludes with experiential and reflective insights. This holistic structure enables the questionnaire to uncover patterns of cultural memory, urban engagement, and community aspirations, thereby offering a grounded, bottom-up understanding of tīrtha-centric development. The full questionnaire is included in the annexure IV, with detailed discussions of its subsections presented below.

a) Section A: Respondent Profile

Section A: Respondent Profile establishes a socio-demographic and contextual background for each participant. It collects personal information such as age, gender, occupation, and type of engagement with the tīrtha—whether as a resident, pilgrim, priest, or business owner—along with the duration of their association with the site and their awareness of its Purāṇika significance. These details enable responses to be categorized and analyzed in relation to the respondent's familiarity, role, and perception, highlighting differences between locals, visitors, and other stakeholders.

b) Section B: Paurāṇika Awareness & Cultural Association

Section B: Purāṇika Awareness and Cultural Association investigates the depth of respondents' knowledge of local tīrthas, their engagement in rituals, and their understanding of the sacred stories associated with them. It also probes the modes of transmission of this knowledge, whether through oral histories, textual traditions, priests, or personal exploration. In doing so, it assesses the continuity of belief in the sanctity of tīrthas while tracing transformations in traditional practices.

c) Section C: Community Involvement and Heritage Role

Section C: Community Involvement and Heritage Role focuses on the role of local communities in the preservation and continuity of tīrtha heritage. It documents their contributions to physical upkeep, ritual practices, and social-cultural activities, while examining intergenerational participation. The section highlights how locals perceive their responsibility in maintaining sacred landscapes and whether younger generations are sustaining or drifting away from these traditions.

d) Section D: Development Perception and Expectations

Section D: Development Perceptions and Expectations addresses public views on recent developmental interventions in tīrtha areas, including infrastructure upgrades, beautification efforts, and heritage restoration. It asks respondents to prioritize development needs such as cleanliness, ritual preservation, and heritage architecture, while also exploring opinions on who should be responsible—whether the community, government, temple trusts, or collaborative efforts. This section further gauges' public support for integrating modern development with traditional significance, thus reflecting readiness for hybrid development models.

e) Section E: Pilgrimage Experience (For Visitors/Pilgrims)

Section E: Pilgrimage Experience, directed at non-local visitors and pilgrims, explores their motivations for undertaking pilgrimage, participation in yatras such as the Pañcakrośī or Antargṛhī, and perceptions of the spiritual ambience. It also examines whether local traditions and narratives enrich their experience, thereby validating the intangible heritage sustained by the resident community.

f) Section F: Reflective Questions (Open-Ended)

Finally, Section F: Reflective Questions encourages respondents to share deeper insights on the relationship between sacred narratives, community life, and urban space. It invites reflection on whether tīrthas can contribute to building a sustainable, value-based urban future, and how. This section also gathers constructive suggestions for improving preservation, integration, and development, thus bridging grassroots knowledge with urban planning frameworks.

Together, these six sections provide a comprehensive ethnographic and participatory documentation of tīrtha-centric urbanism in Kāśī. Moving from demographic foundations to narrative, communal, developmental, experiential, and reflective dimensions, the questionnaire not only maps how tīrtha traditions are perceived and practiced but also reveals how they continue to shape and inspire holistic urban development in the sacred landscape of Varanasi.

6.1.1.2 Identification of participants

The participants for the survey were selected using a purposive sampling approach, carefully targeting individuals with direct or sustained engagement in the tīrtha sites of Varanasi and the Pañcakrośī Yātrā region. This method was chosen to ensure that the voices included were those most intimately connected with the sacred and urban fabric of Kāśī. The sampling emphasized diversity of representation, bringing together multiple stakeholder groups such as local residents, long-term settlers, priests (sevāits), temple caretakers, and ritual functionaries, as well as shopkeepers, business owners, pilgrims, and occasional visitors. By including both permanent and temporary participants in the tīrtha ecosystem, the study sought to balance perspectives from those rooted in the daily ritual and civic life of Varanasi with those who engage through episodic spiritual journeys.

Over a span of 2.5 years, sites were systematically visited to ensure thorough coverage of the sacred landscape, encompassing 286 tīrthas referenced in the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*. At each site, participants were approached based on their visibility, willingness, and relevance to the tīrtha environment, with careful attention to maintaining gender balance and intergenerational representation. This allowed the study to capture insights not only from community elders and custodians of tradition but also from younger generations whose attitudes reflect contemporary continuities and shifts in cultural practice.

The purposive selection further ensured that varied dimensions of tīrtha life were included: from ritual performance and temple management to commerce, hospitality, and spiritual tourism. Such a layered representation was critical for developing a holistic understanding of how sacred heritage is lived, maintained, and negotiated within an evolving urban context. The diversity of perspectives also allowed the research to trace patterns of cultural memory, ritual continuity, economic dependence, and urban change as perceived by different stakeholder groups.

This methodological rigor ensured that the responses provide a grounded and nuanced account of community engagement, perceptions of sacred heritage, and the dynamics of urban development within a tīrtha-centric cultural landscape. By embedding the survey within both the textual framework of the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* and the lived practices of the city, the study not only validates the Purāṇika narratives but also situates them in dialogue with contemporary urban realities, making the findings both historically anchored and socially relevant.

6.1.1.3 Sample survey and Revision in public survey approach and recording of data

With the questionnaire framework established, the first round of the pilot survey was conducted at Daśāśvamedha Ghat, a site highlighted in the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* as one of the *parama tīrthas* (supreme sacred sites) of Varanasi. Chosen for its ritual centrality, continuous human activity, and symbolic prominence, the ghat served as an ideal setting to initiate data collection. As one of the most vibrant nodes of Kāśī's tīrtha landscape, it attracts a steady confluence of pilgrims, tourists, priests, and local practitioners, making it a representative microcosm of the city's sacred life.

Initially, data collection was attempted through printed questionnaires and digital survey links (Google Forms), which participants were invited to complete voluntarily. However, this formal method soon revealed significant limitations. Responses tended to be overly structured, superficial, and occasionally biased—suggesting that many participants either provided socially desirable answers or lacked the time and focus to engage deeply. The bustling environment of the ghat, with its constant ritual performances, darśana queues, and active marketplaces, left most participants in a state of urgency, reducing their willingness to carefully read, reflect upon, and respond to written forms.

These limitations underscored the inadequacy of conventional survey techniques in capturing the lived, experiential, and nuanced perspectives necessary for a study rooted in a spiritual and performative context. The tīrtha landscape of Kāśī, being deeply embedded in oral tradition and communal interaction, demanded a methodology more attuned to its cultural fabric. In response, the research design was restructured to adopt an ethnographic and conversational approach, aligning closely with the storytelling mode characteristic of *Purāṇika* narratives.

Rather than distributing written forms, the research team initiated informal, organic conversations with participants around the thematic concerns of the questionnaire—such as sacred narratives, personal associations with the site, ritual involvement, perceptions of development, and the role of community engagement. These dialogues were held in natural, comfortable settings, often on the ghat steps, at temple thresholds, or in shaded courtyards, fostering an environment conducive to open and genuine sharing.

With informed consent, these conversations were audio-recorded on mobile devices, allowing participants to speak freely and fluidly without the constraints of a rigid question-and-answer format. The recordings were later transcribed and systematically analyzed to align the responses with the thematic framework of the questionnaire. This methodological shift not only enriched the depth and authenticity of the responses but also preserved the narrative texture of lived experiences, echoing the oral-dialogical traditions through which the *Purāṇas* themselves were composed and transmitted.

In essence, the survey evolved into a narrative ethnography, foregrounding authentic, community-rooted expressions of tīrtha consciousness and development aspirations. This adaptive approach bridged the gap between formal research tools and the cultural rhythms of Kāśī, enabling the study to capture not merely opinions, but the lived spirit of a tīrtha-centric urban landscape.

6.1.2 To conduct the content analysis on 150 responses collected from semi structured interviews to understand the urban development indicators.

The semi-structured interviews conducted during the public survey at the tīrtha sites of Varanasi formed the basis for identifying indicators of holistic urban development. In total, more than 500 public interviews were recorded; however, a significant portion had to be discarded due to technical limitations such as unclear audio, incomplete recordings, excessive background noise, and other quality issues. Ultimately, 150 recordings were deemed usable and were selected for detailed analysis, representing responses from the identified groups of participants.

From this refined dataset, a total of 64 distinct indicators were identified and presented in following subsections into three categories as 1. Heritage assessment and development indicators, 2. Policy development indicators, and 3. Indicators for tīrtha upgradation. These indicators spanned a wide spectrum, ranging from very specific unit-level interventions—such as the provision of signage, street lighting, and seating benches—to broader, policy-level visions concerning heritage-sensitive development and governance frameworks.

One of the most striking observations from the study was the high level of awareness demonstrated by participants. Visitors and local stakeholders alike showed a deep understanding of urban development needs and aspirations. This widespread awareness can, in part, be attributed to the growing influence of multimedia and social platforms, which have played a significant role in disseminating knowledge and shaping public consciousness across diverse sections of society.

6.1.2.1 Heritage assessment and development indicators

Based on extensive public interviews conducted across tīrtha sites in Varanasi, a layered understanding of heritage assessment and development indicators emerged, reflecting both deeply rooted perceptions and pressing community concerns. Respondents consistently emphasized the historical significance of these tīrthas, acknowledging their enduring role in shaping the spiritual identity and socio-political fabric of Kāśī over the centuries. The cultural relevance of these sites remains profound, as local traditions, rituals, and festivals are intricately interwoven with their presence, thereby reinforcing collective memory and sustaining regional identity.

From an architectural and artistic standpoint, participants expressed both admiration and apprehension. While the craftsmanship, symbolic ornamentation, and aesthetic intricacies of temples and ghats continue to inspire reverence, growing anxiety was voiced about unsympathetic renovations, structural encroachments, and the gradual erosion of traditional styles. The symbolic dimension of tīrthas remains equally powerful, with respondents frequently citing narratives from the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* and other Paurāṇik texts that highlight the philosophical and ideological resonance of these sacred landscapes in daily life.

The social value of tīrtha sites was strongly recognized, as they serve as hubs of community interaction, collective rituals, and social bonding, particularly during festivals and major religious observances. Economically, respondents acknowledged their significance in sustaining pilgrim-driven tourism, artisanal trades, and service-oriented livelihoods. However, concerns were raised regarding the delicate balance between spiritual sanctity and commercial pressures, with some fearing a drift toward commodification.

Environmental value also emerged as a recurrent theme, especially in relation to sacred kunds, groves, and riverfronts, where participants stressed the urgent need for ecological sensitivity in developmental interventions. Similarly, their educational value was highlighted, particularly in the role played by local priests, guides, and community elders in transmitting stories, heritage knowledge, and ritual pedagogy across generations.

The interpretive value of tīrthas was deemed profound. Conversational interviews often included layered narratives of divine episodes, saintly deeds, and community histories, underscoring the role of tīrthas in preserving and transmitting intangible cultural heritage. Concerns, however, were raised regarding authenticity and integrity, with some participants noting that modern additions, structural replacements, and commercialization threaten the spiritual continuity and historical essence of these sacred spaces.

On an emotional level, the spiritual value of tīrthas was perhaps the most emphatic. Many respondents described them as sanctuaries of peace, divine presence, karmic purification, and transcendental contact. Regarding legal and regulatory frameworks, awareness was mixed: while some acknowledged oversight by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) or municipal bodies, others were either uncertain or uninformed about the protections in place.

In terms of material and spatial attributes, respondents frequently referenced temples, shrines, and ghats, describing them in relation to form, scale, materiality, and symbolic alignment. Traditional building materials such as stone, brick, lime plaster, and timber were noted with nostalgia, especially in contrast with contemporary substitutions. The geographical siting of tīrthas—on riverfronts, hillocks, or within inner-city courtyards—was seen as integral to their sanctity. Spatial organization, including clustering along the Pañcakrośī Yātrā route, alignments with cardinal directions, and proximity to the Ganga, was recognized as a key aspect of their sacredness.

Respondents also reflected on interconnections among tīrthas, deity traditions, and the broader urban environment, linking them to mythological narratives and pilgrimage circuits. Visual relationships were highlighted, such as sightlines toward the Ganga, the prominence of *śikharas* (spires), and symbolic axes that enhance sacred experience. The uses and functions of tīrthas remain dynamic, ranging from daily worship and festivals to marriages and, in some cases, integration with residential and commercial activities. Finally, intangible aspects—such as faith in healing powers, dreams associated with particular tīrthas, and oral traditions maintained by priests and local custodians—remain central in shaping how these sacred spaces are experienced, remembered, and valued.

Table 7: List of Heritage assessment and development indicators observed in public survey.

	Development indicator	**Details**
1	Historical Significance	Importance of the tīrtha site in shaping local, regional, or national history.
2	Cultural Significance	Cultural value attached to the site by communities, traditions, or ethnic groups.
3	Architectural or Artistic Value	Aesthetic merit including design, craftsmanship, and artistic expression.
4	Symbolic Value	Symbolic meaning reflecting religious, ideological, or philosophical associations.
5	Social Value	Role in community identity, cohesion, and social belonging.
6	Economic Value	Economic contribution through tourism, crafts, or related livelihoods.
7	Environmental Value	Ecological importance including biodiversity or sacred natural landscapes.
8	Educational Value	Potential for learning, cultural education, and research dissemination.
9	Interpretive Value	Ability to convey stories, traditions, and narratives of the past and present.
10	Authenticity and Integrity	Originality, completeness, and preservation status of heritage elements.
11	Emotional or Spiritual Value	Spiritual connection and emotional resonance for devotees and communities.
12	Legal and Regulatory Status	Presence of legal protections or policy frameworks for safeguarding heritage.
13	Built Structures	Documentation of temples, shrines, ghats, and other heritage buildings.
14	Form and Extent	Physical dimensions such as height, width, spatial footprint, and density.
15	Materials	Construction materials and traditional building technologies used.
16	Geographical Location	Physical location and environmental features of the tīrtha site.
17	Spatial Organization	Urban layout, sacred zoning, and spatial clustering of tīrthas.
18	Connection and Relationship	Cultural and ecological relationships among tīrthas and surrounding areas.

19	Visual Relationships	Viewsheds, sightlines, and visual linkages with sacred geography.
20	Uses and Functions	Present-day use, ritual function, and integration with local economy and society.
21	Intangible Aspects	Perceptions, beliefs, and community associations with the site.

6.1.2.2 Policy development indicators

In evaluating the policy development indicators through public interviews conducted across tīrtha sites in Varanasi and its extended sacred geography, several core aspects emerged that reveal both community priorities and heritage planning imperatives. The identification of historic urban areas was consistently grounded in their geographical and cultural attributes—such as the riverine ghats, temple wards, and pilgrimage circuits embedded within the urban morphology of Kāśī. Respondents repeatedly emphasized the city's unique topographical and geographical setting: its position on the convex bank of the Ganga, its elevated mounds, and its sacred orientation—all of which together underscore the natural sacrality of Varanasi's landscape.

The built structures and urban fabric—narrow gullies, traditional courtyard houses, temples, dharamshalas, and clustered sacred precincts—were regarded as defining features of the heritage zone. Interviewees described the city's spatial organization as a form of sacred clustering, wherein tīrthas are not randomly distributed but integrated into a cosmic and ritual geography, aligned with pilgrimage routes, festivals, and processional paths.

Connections with the environment were also emphasized, as participants spoke of the interplay between sacred rivers, kunds (ritual ponds), trees, and mounds, all of which function as both physical landmarks and symbolic anchors of place identity. Visual relationships, such as sightlines to temple *śikharas* and panoramic views from elevated ghats, were noted as central to the city's skyline and spiritual ambiance.

Social and cultural practices—ritual bathing, daily pūjās, community feasts, and festival processions—were consistently cited as crucial for sustaining heritage continuity. These practices, deeply tied to collective memory and oral traditions, reinforce the sanctity and spiritual identity of the sacred landscape. Respondents also reflected on landscape topography, highlighting the rise-and-fall terrain of the Ganga valley, mounds like Bhelupur and Karnaghat, and the symbolic structuring of the Pañcakrośī path. Such landscape features were understood as interwoven layers of ecology, geology, and sacred symbolism, where banyan trees, sacred groves, and kunds serve not only ecological but also ritual roles.

The spatial organization of the landscape was seen as deliberate and spiritually charged, with radial pilgrimage routes, ghat connections, and temple groupings forming a cohesive sacred network. Observations on landscape relationships emphasized the cultural-ecological synergy—for example, goddess shrines associated with water bodies, or seasonal changes that align with ritual calendars.

Concerns were expressed regarding land-use patterns, particularly the threats posed by commercialization and encroachment near ghats and temples, which risk undermining heritage integrity. At the same time, respondents pointed to rural and peri-urban zones along the

Pañcakrośī route, where traditional agricultural practices continue to sustain local economies and provide ritual offerings, thereby reinforcing cultural continuity.

Religious ceremonies such as Kārtika Pūrṇimā, Nag Nathaiyā, and the Rāmnagar Dussehra were noted as pivotal in shaping both the physical space and the cohesion of the community. Specific landmarks—including the Viśveśvara (Vishwanath) Temple, Dhundhirāj Gaṇeś, and Manikarnikā Ghat—were frequently mentioned as spiritual and spatial anchors of the tīrtha landscape. Traditional economic activities such as garland making, brass idol crafting, and manuscript preservation were recognized as integral to the spiritual economy, contributing to the sustenance of both livelihood and heritage.

The visual aesthetics of Kāśī—its play of light and shadow across the Ganga, the silhouette of temple *śikharas*, the reflections on the water, and the organic composition of streetscapes—were deeply appreciated as heritage elements worthy of preservation. Spiritual connections were understood not only in metaphysical terms but also through their physical manifestation in pilgrimage journeys and local lore. For instance, sites such as Pañcagaṅgā Ghat, where multiple rivers are believed to converge spiritually, were cited as natural world heritage properties for their cultural and ecological uniqueness.

The presence of natural features—such as the Ganga River, riverside mounds, and sacred kunds—as well as natural phenomena like the misty Ganga sunrise or seasonal floods, were described as spiritually imbued and aesthetically significant. Natural sites such as Assi and Lolark Kund, known for their unique biodiversity and ritual importance, were also highlighted as vital intersections of ecology and sacred heritage.

Table 8: List of Policy indicators observed during public survey.

	Development indicator	**Details**
22	Historic Urban Areas	Geographical and cultural characteristics of traditional urban settings.
23	Geographical Location and Topography	Topographical placement and geographic setting of urban areas.
24	Built Structures and Urban Fabric	Architectural components and spatial characteristics that define the heritage zone.
25	Urban Layout and Spatial Organization	Street patterns, block layouts, and spatial organization of buildings.
26	Connection with Environment	Physical and symbolic linkages between the urban area and its natural surroundings.
27	Visual Relationships	Sightlines, silhouettes, skylines, and other visually aesthetic attributes.
28	Social and Cultural Practices	Ongoing or historic community rituals, activities, and traditions.
29	Perceptions and Associations	Collective memory, identity, and intangible associations with the place.

30	Landscape Topography	Form and relief features of the surrounding landscape.
31	Landscape Characteristics	Defining ecological, geological, or cultural features of the landscape.
32	Landscape Spatial Organization	Roads, settlement patterns, and distribution of heritage elements in the landscape.
33	Landscape Relationships	Interrelationships between natural and cultural elements in the landscape.
34	Land Use Patterns	Distribution and types of land use within the urban or rural heritage area.
35	Agricultural Processes	Farming and land cultivation practices shaping the heritage landscape.
36	Religious Ceremonies	Rituals and religious events that structure community and space usage.
37	Landmarks	Prominent natural or built features with cultural or spiritual importance.
38	Traditional Economic Activities	Culturally embedded economic practices such as mining, weaving, etc.
39	Visual Aesthetics	Vistas, panoramic views, and scenic elements enhancing landscape appreciation.
40	Spiritual Connections	Sacred associations and spiritual beliefs tied to the place or landscape.
41	Natural World Heritage Properties	Recognition of natural landscapes for their universal cultural and ecological value.
42	Natural Features	Mountains, glaciers, lakes, and other physical formations.
43	Natural Phenomena	Areas with exceptional natural beauty or rare phenomena.
44	Natural Sites and Areas	Habitats and biologically important landscapes under protection.
45	Biodiversity and Specific Species	Ecological richness including notable species and critical habitats.

6.1.2.3 Tīrtha upgradation

The public interview responses and field observations at various tīrtha sites in Varanasi offer vital insights into the upgradation needs of these sacred places, not merely through physical infrastructure but through holistic restoration of ecological, cultural, and symbolic significance. The following policy indicators, derived from grassroots observations and landscape-based understandings, form the foundation for meaningful tīrtha upgradation:

The scale and integrity of habitats surrounding tīrtha sites—including kunds, sacred groves, and ghats—must be preserved to maintain ecological balance and spiritual ambiance.

Respondents repeatedly mentioned deteriorating conditions of such habitats, stressing the need for rejuvenation. Wildlife population viability, though often overlooked in urban sacred sites, was noted in peri-urban locations (e.g., Panchakroshi Yatra path) where biodiversity such as local bird species is still sustained.

Environmental quality is a recurrent concern—sacred ponds polluted by waste, neglected ghats, and encroached temple tanks were highlighted as threats to both ecological and ritual purity. There is an urgent need to protect key species habitat sites, especially for aquatic and avian species in sacred water bodies.

Community narratives frequently emphasized lost or blocked migratory routes—not just for species, but metaphorically for pilgrims and rituals—calling for revived sacred corridors and restored spatial relationships of features, such as the alignment of shrines with kunds, ghats, and procession paths.

Recognition of ecosystems—as integrated systems of water, vegetation, deities, and devotees—forms a fundamental layer for development, where both living and non-living factors must be respected. Interviewees mentioned lost sacred groves and dried ponds, emphasizing broken ecological links that once sustained cultural ecology.

Human-made attributes in nature, such as chabutras (ritual platforms), ghats, and sacred wells, when harmoniously integrated, enhance the sanctity of natural features. Participants noted the degradation or concrete replacement of these elements, suggesting the need for culturally sensitive reconstruction.

The living religious heritage of tīrtha sites—rituals, daily pūjās, sacred fairs, and priestly traditions—must be supported alongside material preservation. Locals called for infrastructural support for traditional festivals and recognition of their spirit of place, described as a sacred aura or emotional presence tied to memories and beliefs.

Interviewees stressed the importance of memory, identity, and belonging—reflected in ancestral narratives, personal pilgrimages, and devotional histories of tīrthas—urging that upgradation must preserve these intangible dimensions. Reviving nomenclature and references like original Sanskrit names, Purāṇika associations, or traditional knowledge systems was also a shared desire.

The hierarchy of tīrthas—whether Mahā-tīrthas or minor local shrines—plays a crucial role in spatial rituals and social organization. Local communities expressed concerns about neglect of smaller or less famous shrines, calling for inclusive upgradation policies.

The adaptability of sacred sites to modern needs while maintaining cultural essence was a repeated theme. Respondents advocated for adaptive reuse of spaces for community gatherings, eco-sanitation, and visitor amenities without compromising sanctity.

Livelihoods tied to tīrthas—including flower sellers, ritual performers, artisans, and boatmen—require integration into heritage development, ensuring that sacred economy thrives with dignity and continuity.

The deep emotional belonging felt by Kāśī-vāsīs (residents) and pilgrims alike was often expressed through metaphors, dreams, and devotional storytelling—pointing to the imitative, personified, and symbolic character of these landscapes. Interviewees likened the Ganga to a

mother, the tīrtha-kunds to eyes of the sacred body, and the yatra path to a cosmic mandala—expressing a deep ecological-cultural consciousness embedded in local cosmology.

Table 9: List of indicators observed for tīrtha urgradation in public survey.

	Development indicator	**Details**
46	Scale and Integrity of Habitats	Inclusion of all relevant environmental conditions and ecological integrity.
47	Wildlife Population Viability	Naturalness, size, and sustainability of wildlife populations.
48	Environmental Quality	Intactness and pristine condition of environmental features.
49	Key Species Habitat Sites	Critical areas in species' life cycles such as breeding or foraging grounds.
50	Migratory Routes	Movement corridors for birds, marine mammals, and other species.
51	Spatial Relationships of Features	Interactions and connections between key ecological site components.
52	Ecosystems	Integration of living and non-living factors in systems like mountains or lagoons.
53	Ecological Links	Connectivity and interactions between biological elements across the landscape.
54	Human-made Attributes in Nature	Cultural or functional elements associated with or enhancing natural features.
55	Living Religious Heritage	Practices, traditions, and material culture actively maintained in sacred landscapes.
56	Spirit of Place	Emotive and symbolic essence perceived in a location’s cultural-natural context.
57	Memory	Collective memory, historical continuity, and ancestral links to place.
58	Identity	Cultural identity shaped and expressed through natural and sacred sites.
59	Nomenclature & References	Traditional place names, mythological references, and associated knowledge systems.
60	Hierarchy	Social, functional, or ritual ranking of spaces and places.
61	Adaptability	Capacity of cultural-natural systems to evolve with time or circumstance.
62	Livelihood	Economic dependence of local populations on natural or sacred landscapes.

63	Belonging	Sense of rootedness and emotional attachment to a place.
64	Imitate, Personified, Imagined, Mimic	Cultural metaphors and personifications of natural phenomena and landscapes.

6.2 To investigate the aforementioned development indicators in urban policy making.

The second objective of this research is to develop interpretative perspectives based on recorded observations of users at the tīrtha landscapes of Varanasi. By analyzing development indicators as reflected in contemporary practices, the study seeks to construct a comprehensive framework for holistic urban development rooted in the sacred settings of Kāśī.

To reinforce the validity of the findings through expert engagement, a Delphi experiment was designed and conducted over a period of 18 months. The primary aim of this Delphi process was to critically assess and validate the observed development indicators within the context of tīrtha-centric Paurāṇika constructs, particularly as they manifest in Varanasi's sacred urban landscape. Given the distinctive focus of this study on Indian pilgrimage towns—where mythological narratives, cultural traditions, and spatial continuities intersect—the Delphi method was adapted to encourage reflective, iterative, and multidisciplinary engagement with subject matter experts.

A carefully selected panel of ten experts was assembled, representing a diverse range of professional and experiential backgrounds to ensure a multidimensional understanding of Varanasi's heritage. The panel included archaeologists, geographers, urban historians, senior local residents with generational knowledge, administrative experts such as IAS officers and policy advisors, diplomats, and eminent scholars associated with heritage governance and urban development. Their combined perspectives provided a rich and layered set of insights that bridged textual traditions, lived experiences, administrative policy, and planning praxis.

The Delphi experiment was conducted in three iterative stages, each aligned with the phased investigation of the thesis. Thematic focus was placed on interpreting urban development through the lens of tīrtha-centric narratives, as described in the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, and their material manifestations in the contemporary sacred landscape. For contextual grounding, three case-study sites were selected, each representing distinct urban typologies and evolutionary timelines:

- Avimukteśvara – the mytho-spiritual urban core of Kāśī, representing a mixed historic and tīrtha category.
- Kardameśvara – a transitional sacred-agrarian zone with deep mythological associations, exemplifying tīrtha-centric Paurāṇika foundations as discussed under Objective 1.
- Rāmnagar – a ritual-peripheral landscape, historically shaped as a royal-sacred territory, reflecting the character of non-tīrtha urban evolution.

These sites were chosen not only for their prominence in the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* but also for their contrasting urban forms, symbolic functions, and evolving spatial narratives. Secondary literature—including historical accounts, cartographic evidence, and textual exegesis—was employed to support the contextual framing of each site.

A total of 64 development indicators—identified through prior field surveys and public interviews across 286 tīrtha sites in Varanasi—were presented to the expert panel. These indicators spanned both tangible and intangible heritage components, including spatial organization, visual relationships, ecological linkages, ritual continuity, social values, and economic functions.

The Delphi process combined institutional discussions with a significant emphasis on on-site expert engagements. This methodological choice allowed experts to directly experience the spatial, visual, and ritual atmospheres of the sites, thereby situating their reflections within the living sacred landscape. Each session followed a structured yet flexible format: experts were introduced to the site's Paurāṇika background, presented with observed developmental changes, and then prompted to reflect on the continuity, deviation, or transformation of each indicator. This approach transformed the Delphi exercise into a reflective dialogue between traditional narratives and contemporary urban development trajectories.

Data collection was carried out with informed consent through audio recordings and field notes, later transcribed and thematically analyzed. In keeping with the Delphi model, insights from initial rounds were refined and re-evaluated in subsequent stages, fostering convergence of perspectives through reflective consensus.

The findings and synthesized expert insights from this Delphi experiment are presented in the subsequent section. These outcomes form a critical foundation for the thesis's proposed framework of a tīrtha-centric heritage development model—one that harmonizes traditional wisdom with contemporary developmental imperatives.

6.2.1 Structuring of delphie experiment

As discussed above, the Delphi experiment in this research was structured in sequential steps, with each stage contextualized through the background narratives of the three selected sites. These narratives were integrated into the process of revisiting and critically evaluating the 64 identified development indicators across various tīrtha sites of Varanasi.

6.2.1.1 Step 1- Revisiting avimukteshwar and inspection of the development indicators identified

The historic and spiritual core of Varanasi, known as Avimukteshwara Kṣetra, holds unparalleled importance in the religious and cultural imagination of India. As extensively described in the Kāśīkhaṇḍa of the Skanda Purāṇa and other Paurāṇika texts, this sacred geography is regarded as the land never forsaken (avimukta) by Lord Śiva. It forms the spiritual nucleus of Kāśī, revered as a mokṣa-dāyini kṣetra (liberating field), where the divine presence is eternally manifest. In the earlier sections of this research, a comprehensive textual, historical, and ethnographic investigation of the Avimukteshwara precinct was undertaken, highlighting its sacred landscape, temple clustering, ritual practices, and its continued relevance in the everyday lives of residents and pilgrims.

In continuation of this inquiry, and as part of the Delphi experiment, the research team conducted an in-depth deliberation involving expert consultation from multiple domains—including archaeology, cultural geography, heritage conservation, and local stakeholder representation. A total of 64 development indicators were initially identified from the public perception survey, which was carried out at multiple tīrtha locations in and around the

Avimukta Kṣetra. These indicators were reflective of tangible and intangible heritage assets, infrastructure conditions, cultural vitality, and community participation.

To ensure a more contextually sensitive and manageable assessment framework, the list of 64 indicators was carefully reviewed in light of the historical-paurāṇika narratives and spatial observations around Avimukteshwara. Through successive rounds of expert discussion under the Delphi methodology, the original set was consolidated and refined into 29 core indicators. These indicators were selected based on their relevance to sacred urbanism, ritual ecology, heritage preservation, and sustainable development, all while respecting the unique organic fabric and religious significance of the Avimukta zone.

A detailed contextualization of each of these 29 development indicators—mapped with the ground realities and sacred functions of the Avimukta precinct—is provided in the accompanying table 10.

Table 10: List of Indicators after first step of Delphie experiment.

S.No.	Indicator	Avimukta-Specific Explanation
1	Cultural assets	Includes Avimukteshwara temple, minor shrines, kunds (e.g., Jnanavapi), mathas, sacred wells, and lingas mentioned in Kāśīkhaṇḍa.
2	Accessibility of cultural assets	Measured by access routes to temples, pedestrian pathways, and public reach to ritual spaces like Jnanavapi or Kāśī Vishwanath.
3	Value of cultural assets	Ritual significance and spiritual hierarchy of Avimukta temples; their association with liberation (*mokṣa*).
4	Preservation of historical buildings	Status of original shrines, stone plinths, old dharamshalas, inscriptions, and temple gateways in the Avimukta core.
5	Number of adjacent temples	Clustered temples like Dhundhi Vinayak, Mrityunjay Mahadev, Ganesha shrines around Avimukteshwara mark sacred density.
6	Convenience of external transport	Ease of arrival via road, boat, and public modes (rickshaw/e-rickshaw) to reach the Avimukta circuit.
7	Having a Parking area	Limited but essential near entry points (e.g., Godowlia, Maidagin) without harming pedestrian spiritual routes.
8	Having a Footpath	Defined *parikrama* path or *pradakshiṇā mārga* within Avimukta zone and lanes connecting shrines.
9	Cultural facilities	Yatri niwas, dharamshalas, pilgrim shelters, vedic schools, and satsang halls within or near temple areas.
10	Special concern for preserving the organic character	Maintaining the integrity of narrow lanes, residential-sacred interface, courtyards, and open sacred spaces.
11	Local cuisine	Temple-related food traditions: annadāna, sattvic meals, prasadam distribution during yātrās or *māhātmya* celebrations.
12	Festival activities	Observance of Śivarātri, Saavan, Trayodaśī, and other localized rituals in Avimukteshwara Mahotsava.
13	Business districts	Ritual economy zones: shops selling rudraksha, puja items, spiritual literature, herbal products near temple lanes.

14	Community linkages	Involvement of local families (e.g., Panda communities, temple sevaks) in ritual services and temple maintenance.
15	Spiritual knowledge dissemination and augmentation	Vedic teachings, discourse sessions, scriptural study in mathas and traditional institutions within Avimukta region.
16	Route continuity	Unbroken ritual routes like Jnanavapi–Avimukta–Manikarnika path as mentioned in Kāśīkhaṇḍa.
17	Route connectivity	Connectivity between internal shrines and outer sacred markers (e.g., to Kalabhairava, Panchakroshi yatra start points).
18	Place identity	Sacred identity as Avimukta Kṣetra—never forsaken by Shiva, central to Kāśī's religious imagination.
19	Street furniture	Presence of sacred rest points, platforms for shraddha, dharma-stambha (ethics poles), water stands, and seating nodes.
20	Plant density	Sacred trees (bilva, peepal, banyan) and groves preserved as part of temple-scape and ritual symbolism.
21	Integration with surrounding attractions	Linkages to Vishwanath corridor, Manikarnika, Annapurna, Dashashwamedha Ghats forming a sacred landscape continuum.
22	Tourism service facilities	Pilgrim-friendly services such as spiritual guides, interpretation boards, sanitation, and Ganga access points.
23	Government investment	Investments made through corridor development, temple renovation, heritage signage, infrastructure support.
24	Tourism capacity	Capacity of Avimukteshwara precinct to handle ritual gatherings during Śivarātri, Makar Saṅkrānti, etc.
25	Density of transportation system	Number and reach of modes (e-rickshaw, boat service, pedestrian lane systems) within the sacred precinct.
26	Accessibility to Information and Communication	Digital QR codes, pilgrim mobile apps, signage with puranic narratives at Avimukta-linked shrines.
27	Regional economy and Community capital	Role of temple-based livelihoods, local crafts, heritage businesses in sustaining community well-being.
28	Accessibility to technology	Use of technology for heritage conservation, digital archive of pūjā paddhati, Vedic recitation, online darshan.
29	Civic participation and Participatory development	Involvement of local temple trusts, pandit sabhās, stakeholders in preservation, heritage planning, and governance.

6.2.1.2 Step 2- Introduction of Kardameshwar tīrtha site and discussing the development indicators

At the second stage of the Delphi experiment, the sacred site of Kardameśvara—identified as *Kardama Tīrtha* in the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* and other Purāṇika texts—was presented to the panel of experts for focused discussion. Revered for its profound historical, ritualistic, and

community-based significance, Kardameśvara also serves as a prominent node on the Pañcakrośī Yātrā route of Kāśī. Richly detailed in the Purāṇika corpus, the site exemplifies the tīrtha-centric place-making model, where sacred geography evolves through layered mythological narratives, ritual associations, and organic community stewardship.

Building upon the first round of Delphi assessment—in which 29 indicators had been shortlisted—this stage contextualized those indicators against Kardameśvara's ritual ecology, architectural evolution, and the mounting pressures of contemporary urban development. The deliberations underscored the necessity of developing an interdisciplinary and policy-relevant framework capable of bridging traditional sacred values with present-day urban planning and heritage governance models.

As an outcome of this rigorous consultation and narrative-based re-evaluation, a revised list of 32 development indicators was formulated. These indicators were systematically organized into seven thematic fields, each aligned with both heritage conservation imperatives and contemporary urban policy frameworks, thereby providing a more holistic and actionable foundation for tīrtha-centric development in Kāśī.

Table 11: Tīrtha-Centric indicators of second step of delphie experiment.

	Category	Code	Indicator
1	Historical Preservation	HP1	Rejuvenation of heritage sites, pilgrimage revival, and spiritual augmentation
2		HP2	Reviving past glory through conservation and heritage promotion
3		HP3	Protection of cultural and traditional environments
4		HP4	Redevelopment of cultural features: ghats, kunds, streets, and steps
5		HP5	Cultural upliftment and safeguarding of traditional practices
6		HP6	Conservation and structural preservation of heritage sites
7		HP7	Development of approach roads to heritage nodes
8	Urban Beautification	UB1	Beautification and treatment of overhead water tanks
9		UB2	Traditional-style signage along heritage corridors
10		UB3	Streetscaping with landscaping along ritual routes and crossings
11	City Regeneration	CR1	Façade improvement and revival of ghats
12		CR2	Restoration of degraded or endangered heritage structures
13		CR3	Park development and green open space enhancement
14		CR4	Rejuvenation of sacred water bodies such as kunds and ponds

15		CR5	River, street, and ghat cleaning initiatives
16		CR6	Efficient land use and zoning respecting sacred geography
17	Recreational/Tourism	RT1	Tourism enhancement and livelihood generation
18		RT2	Creation of eco-friendly, inclusive recreational spaces
19		RT3	Development of public convention and community engagement centers
20		RT4	Adaptive reuse of neglected precincts for community use
21		RT5	Area-based development models tailored to heritage regions
22	Services & Amenities	SA1	Reliable urban utilities and infrastructure provisioning
23		SA2	Sanitation improvements and waste management systems
24		SA3	Road hierarchy, traffic flow, and parking regulation
25		SA4	Installation of street furniture: benches, dustbins, shelters
26		SA5	Establishment of tourist information and facility centers
27		SA6	Standardized and narrative-rich heritage signage
28	Smart Innovation	SI1	Cultural integration of vending zones, parking, and public spaces
29		SI2	Activation of under-flyover urban voids for community and creative use
30		SI3	Smart parking solutions for high-footfall heritage areas
31		SI4	Smart schools and cultural skill training facilities
32		SI5	Installation of LED streetlights
33		SI6	Surveillance and traffic control through smart technology
34	Cognitive/Memory Value	CM1	Recognition of living religious heritage and embodied spirituality
35		CM2	Reinforcement of “spirit of place,” emotional connection, and memoryscapes

6.2.1.3 Step 3- Introduction to Ramnagar cultural site and discussing the development indicators

In the third phase of the Delphi experiment, the heritage site of Rāmnagar Fort was presented to the panel of experts and stakeholders for discussion. Unlike Avimukteśvara and Kardameśvara—both tīrtha-centric sites rooted in Purāṇika cosmology—Rāmnagar represents a non-tīrtha typology. Its evolution as a satellite town of Varanasi in the 18th century reflects a markedly different cultural trajectory, shaped primarily by royal patronage, regional trade, and the imprint of colonial-era urban planning.

The architectural, geological, and ritual complexity of Rāmnagar, as elaborated in earlier sections of this study, provides an instructive counterpoint for comparative analysis. While it shares geographical proximity and historical layering with Varanasi, Rāmnagar never attained recognition as a sacred tīrtha within Kāśī's spiritual geography. Instead, it flourished as the seat of the Kāśī Naresh, a hub of cultural performance (most notably the celebrated *Rām Līlā*), a center for museum preservation, and a node of regional commerce.

This distinctive identity was carefully examined with the expert panel to analyze the non-tīrtha character of urban heritage landscapes. Participants noted that although Rāmnagar retains elements of spiritual significance—such as associations with Vyas Mandir and rituals performed during Ashwin Purnima—its developmental indicators diverge significantly from those of tīrtha-centric sites. This distinction allowed the formulation of a non-tīrtha characterization model, designed to be juxtaposed with the tīrtha-based frameworks of Avimukta and Kardama.

Drawing upon interdisciplinary insights and critical feedback from this stage, a new set of 32 development indicators was developed specifically for non-tīrtha urban heritage contexts. These indicators were systematically grouped into seven policy-oriented thematic clusters, capturing priorities in architecture, environmental stewardship, recreational-cultural activities, and infrastructural development. Together, they provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and guiding heritage planning in non-tīrtha heritage towns such as Rāmnagar.

	Category	Code	Indicator
1	Historical Preservation	HP1	Rejuvenation of heritage forts, royal sites, and ceremonial landscapes
2		HP2	Conservation of colonial-era and princely architectural styles
3		HP3	Safeguarding traditional crafts and trade-based cultural memory
4		HP4	Revitalization of ghats and kunds associated with royal patronage
5		HP5	Public awareness for heritage education in non-tīrtha settings
6		HP6	Structural preservation of sandstone and historic building materials
7		HP7	Approach road enhancement respecting topography and defense design
8	Urban Beautification	UB1	Overhead tank and public utility beautification
9		UB2	Culturally themed signage and shop fronts along historic trails
10		UB3	Integrated urban landscaping along access roads and parade routes

11	City Regeneration	CR1	Restoration of ceremonial façades and entry gates (e.g., Lal Darwaza)
12		CR2	Museum-oriented regeneration of palace interiors and exhibition zones
13		CR3	Creation of green pockets and community gardens in low-density areas
14		CR4	Rejuvenation of fort-adjacent water bodies and ghats
15		CR5	Clean-up and environmental management of peripheral zones
16		CR6	Land-use zoning to accommodate heritage tourism, museum areas, and events
17	Recreational/Tourist	RT1	Festival tourism linked to Ramlila, Rajmangal Boat Procession
18		RT2	Eco-cultural tourism along Ganga trails opposite city ghats
19		RT3	Multipurpose community halls and performance spaces
20		RT4	Adaptive reuse of abandoned fort areas for tourism and learning
21		RT5	Area-based redevelopment with heritage-tourism synergy
22	Services & Amenities	SA1	Improved access to public infrastructure and emergency response systems
23		SA2	Sanitation upgrades around high-footfall areas
24		SA3	Traffic and parking flow management during festivals and events
25		SA4	Public seating, signage, water booths for heritage walks
26		SA5	Tourism helpdesks, interpretation panels, and guided route mapping
27		SA6	Digitally enriched heritage signage with multilingual support
28	Smart Innovation	SI1	Integrated vending, crafts bazaar, and performance zones
29		SI2	Reviving underutilized fort interiors for learning labs and digital museums
30		SI3	Smart parking at key entry points (e.g., near Jhanda Dwar)
31		SI4	Community education and vocational training centers
32		SI5	Sustainable lighting and solar integration for event spaces
33		SI6	CCTV and smart surveillance at high-security zones

6.2.2 Extraction of the identified attributes and Heritage values for the development indicators

The indicators of urban development outlined in this study were identified through extensive public surveys across the tīrtha sites of Varanasi and further refined through a three-stepped Delphi experiment involving experts from diverse fields. These indicators were grouped under seven major thematic domains that represent the multidimensional values inherent in both general historic cities and tīrtha towns like Varanasi.

The Historical Preservation (HP) domain encompasses indicators such as rejuvenation of heritage sites (HP1), revival of cultural glory (HP2), protection of traditional environments (HP3), and redevelopment of cultural attributes like ghats, kunds, and sacred streets (HP4). These indicators reflect the importance of preserving not only the physical structures but also

the ritual, cultural, and symbolic significance associated with them. The domain also includes cultural upliftment (HP5), safeguarding heritage sites (HP6), and enhancing access through development of approach roads (HP7), which were consistently echoed by both the community and expert responses.

The Urban Beautification (UB) indicators focus on improving the visual and functional quality of urban space through initiatives such as beautification of overhead tanks (UB1), heritage-styled shop signage (UB2), and urban landscaping along roads and crossings (UB3). These elements contribute to the aesthetic coherence and cultural branding of the heritage zones.

The City Regeneration (CR) domain involves active interventions aimed at revitalizing deteriorated urban spaces. Indicators such as facade restoration and ghat revitalization (CR1), restoration of heritage structures (CR2), park landscaping (CR3), rejuvenation of water bodies (CR4), cleaning of rivers and streets (CR5), and efficient land use (CR6) reflect a shared desire to revive urban vitality while retaining spiritual and environmental values, particularly in the sacred geography of Varanasi.

The Recreational and Tourist (RT) indicators emphasize community-centered and eco-conscious tourism infrastructure. These include boosting tourism and employment (RT1), creation of eco-friendly leisure zones (RT2), community convention and cooperation centers (RT3), adaptive reuse of neglected spaces (RT4), and area-based development approaches (RT5), which facilitate holistic engagement between locals and visitors while respecting the sacred character of place.

In the Services and Amenities (SA) category, indicators address the fundamental infrastructural needs crucial to both residents and pilgrims. These include quality public services (SA1), sanitation improvements (SA2), road and traffic management (SA3), provision of benches and dustbins (SA4), tourist facility centers (SA5), and heritage signage (SA6), all of which were considered essential by survey participants to enhance comfort, safety, and orientation in pilgrimage landscapes.

The Smart Innovation (SI) indicators reflect a forward-looking approach that blends technology and heritage sensitivity. These include integrating vending zones and cultural spaces (SI1), creative reuse of urban voids (SI2), smart parking systems (SI3), development of smart schools and skill centers (SI4), installation of LED street lighting (SI5), and deployment of surveillance technologies (SI6). These innovations aim to create a modern yet culturally respectful urban environment.

Lastly, the Cognitive/Memory (CM) indicators—unique to tīrtha towns—highlight the intangible dimensions of place, including living religious heritage (CM1) and the spirit of place, identity, and emotional memory (CM2). These indicators emerged strongly in both public narratives and expert opinions, capturing the layered meanings, mythologies, and lived experiences that define a sacred urban landscape like Varanasi.

Together, these indicators have been coded (e.g., HP1, UB2, CR3, CM1) and will form the analytical foundation for the subsequent sections of this study. They enable both qualitative narrative analysis and quantitative trend evaluation, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the developmental trajectory and policy priorities in heritage-rich pilgrimage towns.

Heritage values in urban policy	**Identifiers**	**Indicators for 'urban development' - General historic city -non-tīrtha town**	**Indicators for 'urban development' - tīrtha town, Varanasi**
Historical Preservation	HP1	Rejuvenation of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation	Rejuvenation of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation
	HP2	Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage	Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage
	HP3	Protecting cultural and traditional environs	Protecting cultural and traditional environs
	HP4	Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.	Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.
	HP5	Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage	Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage
	HP6	Preservation of heritage sites	Preservation of heritage sites
	HP7	Development of approach roads to Heritage sites	Development of approach roads to Heritage sites
Urban Beautification	UB1	Beautification of overhead tanks	Beautification of overhead tanks
	UB2	Heritage-designed shop signages along the heritage trail of the city	Heritage-designed shop signages along the heritage trail of the city
	UB3	Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings	Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings
City Regeneration	CR1	Facade restoration and ghat revitalization	Facade restoration and ghat revitalization
	CR2	Restoration of Heritage structures	Restoration of Heritage structures
	CR3	Landscaping of parks	Landscaping of parks
	CR4	Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies	Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies
	CR5	Cleaning of rivers, ghats, streets	Cleaning of rivers, ghats, streets
	CR6	Efficient land use	Efficient land use
Recreational/Tourist	RT1	Boost tourism and employment	Boost tourism and employment
	RT2	Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike	Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike

	RT3	Community and public Convention and Cooperation Centre	Community and public Convention and Cooperation Centre
	RT4	Reusing previously neglected spaces, fostering community engagement	Reusing previously neglected spaces, fostering community engagement
	RT5	Adoption of area-based development	Adoption of area-based development
Services and Amenities	SA1	Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure	Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure
	SA2	Work on sanitation	Work on sanitation
	SA3	Road and traffic management	Road and traffic management
	SA4	Concrete benches and dustbins	Concrete benches and dustbins
	SA5	Tourists facility centers	Tourists facility centers
	SA6	Heritage Signage	Heritage Signage
Smart Innovation	SI1	Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.	Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.
	SI2	Transformation of urban voids beneath flyovers into creative spaces.	Transformation of urban voids beneath flyovers into creative spaces.
	SI3	Smart parking	Smart parking
	SI4	Smart schools and skill development centres	Smart schools and skill development centres
	SI5	LED street lights	LED street lights
	SI6	Traffic cameras and surveillance technologies	Traffic cameras and surveillance technologies
Cognitive/Memory	CM1		Living Religious Heritage, Spiritual
	CM2		Spirit of place, identity, and emotions survived in memory

6.3 To examine and analyze the levels of interventions of development indicators.

This section presents the application of Interpretative Structural Modelling (ISM) to analyze and interpret the interrelationships among a selected set of development indicators. The primary aim of this modelling exercise is to assess the relative importance and hierarchical influence of these indicators within the context of policy-making for heritage-led urban development. ISM provides a structured methodology for mapping complex interdependencies, enabling the identification of foundational indicators and clarifying their role in shaping higher-order planning decisions.

For the operationalization of this method, the software SmartISM (Ahmad, 2021; Yu, Chiang, Le, & Lin, 2022) was employed. To ensure both manageability and analytical precision, the original set of urban development indicators—collected in earlier stages of this research—was streamlined to a focused list of 15 indicators. Each was carefully chosen to represent one of the broader heritage value domains identified in the heritage-policy framework. The rationale for this reduction, along with the coding scheme adopted for ISM, is detailed in Subsection 6.3.1.

A panel of three domain experts, previously engaged in the Delphi experiment (see Section 6.2), participated in this interpretative exercise. With multidisciplinary expertise in heritage conservation, urban planning, and policy formulation, the experts were well-positioned to evaluate the indicators. Each expert independently interacted with the SmartISM interface, installed on a digital workstation, while their inputs were digitally recorded for subsequent analysis.

The experiment was conducted as a time-bound task, with each expert allocated 20 minutes to assess the directional relationships among the 15 selected indicators. To strengthen interpretative consensus, discussions were encouraged, particularly to distinguish between on-site (field-based) observations and off-site (policy-oriented) implications for tīrtha landscapes.

From the experts' combined assessments, a Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM) was developed, capturing pairwise contextual relationships among indicators. Predefined interpretative symbols were used to denote the nature of influence—whether one indicator leads to, is led by, or is independent of another. The SSIM was subsequently transformed into a Reachability Matrix, which was subjected to logical transitivity checks. From this matrix, level partitions were derived, enabling the hierarchical structuring of indicators according to their levels of influence. This systematic process of generating the SSIM, Reachability Matrix, and Level Partitions is explained in detail in Subsection 6.3.2.

The outcomes of the ISM modelling exercise culminated in the construction of a directed graph (digraph) that visually represents the multilevel relationships among the selected indicators. The ISM-based digraph provides a policy-oriented interpretation of systemic interdependencies within the heritage-linked development framework. Its results and implications are comprehensively discussed in Section 6.3.3.

6.3.1 To set the indicators for ISM Experiment

For the Interpretative Structural Modelling (ISM) study, conducted with the three selected experts from the earlier Delphi experiment, a refined set of 15 development indicators was finalized. These indicators were chosen to represent the diverse domains of heritage value and urban development relevant to the tīrtha-centric context of Varanasi. Each indicator was carefully selected to reflect a distinct dimension of heritage-led development and was assigned a unique code for systematic analysis within the SmartISM software framework.

From the Heritage Preservation (HP) category, six key indicators were identified:

- **HP1**: Rejuvenation of heritage sites, alongside pilgrimage revitalization and spiritual augmentation.
- **HP2**: Reviving cultural glory through the conservation and promotion of heritage assets.

- **HP3**: Protection and continuity of traditional cultural environments.
- **HP4**: Redevelopment of culturally significant urban features, including ghats, streets, steps, and kunds.
- **HP5**: Cultural upliftment and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.
- **HP6**: General preservation of heritage sites as a central urban development objective.

From the domains of Urban Beautification (UB) and City Regeneration (CR), two indicators were selected:

- **UB3**: Urban landscaping along roads, pathways, and junctions to enhance aesthetic and cultural coherence.
- **CR4**: Rejuvenation of water bodies and traditional kunds, reflecting the sacred ecological networks of tīrtha towns.

From the domain of Recreational and Tourism Development (RT), two indicators were included:

- **RT1**: Enhancement of local tourism and employment opportunities linked to pilgrimage and cultural heritage.
- **RT2**: Development of accessible and eco-friendly leisure spaces for both residents and pilgrims.

Within the spectrum of Service Accessibility (SA) and Infrastructure (SI), three indicators were chosen:

- **SA1**: Provision of quality urban services and public infrastructure.
- **SA6**: Installation and enhancement of heritage signage systems to support navigation and heritage appreciation.
- **SI1**: Innovative urban interventions such as integrated vending zones, organized parking facilities, and multipurpose cultural venues.

Finally, from the domain of Community Memory and Spiritual Values (CM), two indicators were included:

- **CM1**: Recognition of the significance of living religious heritage and the continuity of spiritual practices.
- **CM2**: Emphasis on the ‘spirit of place’—including identity, emotional attachment, and cultural memory sustained across generations.

Together, these 15 indicators—spanning heritage preservation, urban design, tourism, infrastructure, and cultural-spiritual memory—formed the core analytical set for the ISM exercise. The three experts collaboratively evaluated the directional relationships among these indicators, enabling the construction of a hierarchical structural model. The detailed process and results of this analysis are discussed in the following subsections.

Table 12:List of Selected indicators for ISM Study.

Selected indicators for ISM Study		
HP1	Rejuvenation of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation	1
HP2	Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage	2
HP3	Protecting cultural and traditional environs	3
HP4	Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.	4
HP5	Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage	5
HP6	Preservation of heritage sites	6
UB3	Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings	7
CR4	Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies	8
RT1	Boost tourism and employment	9
RT2	Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike	10
SA1	Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure	11
SA6	Heritage Signage	12
SI1	Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.	13
CM1	Living Religious Heritage, Spiritual	14
CM2	Spirit of place, identity, and emotions survived in memory	15

6.3.2 To operate an Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) operation with experts to obtain the level

As discussed earlier, the three experts who had previously participated in the Delphi experiment were also engaged in the Interpretative Structural Modelling (ISM) exercise. This modelling technique was employed to structure and interpret the complex interrelationships among the identified development indicators—13 for non-tīrtha towns and 15 for tīrtha-based heritage towns such as Varanasi.

Interpretative Structural Modelling (ISM) is a systematic methodology designed to identify and synthesize the relationships among specific variables that define a problem or system. It

enables the development of a hierarchical structure by drawing on expert knowledge to determine both the direction and strength of influence between variables. Rooted in graph theory and matrix algebra, ISM translates qualitative judgments into a structured, policy-relevant model.

For the operationalization of the ISM process, SmartISM software was employed, which streamlined the construction of interaction matrices and the derivation of hierarchy-level models. To maintain focus and minimize potential bias arising from extended deliberations, each expert was allotted a 20-minute time frame to record their judgments and inputs into the system. This approach ensured a concentrated decision-making environment while preserving methodological rigor.

The step-by-step process adopted for the ISM exercise is outlined in the following subsections.

6.3.2.1 ISM data entry and Developing Structural Self-Interaction matrix (SSIM)

To operationalize the Interpretative Structural Modelling (ISM) experiment, the expert participants were requested to digitally complete the exercise using the SmartISM software platform. This structured methodology enabled the directional mapping of contextual interrelationships among the identified variables (also referred to as *elements* or *constructs*) relevant to the urban development indicators of both pilgrimage and non-pilgrimage towns.

In the ISM structuring process, the selected variables are placed along both the horizontal (X-axis) and vertical (Y-axis) of a square matrix. Each expert, referred to as a Decision Maker (DM), was tasked with evaluating the contextual relationship between every pair of elements—comparing the element on the X-axis with its corresponding element on the Y-axis. These pairwise assessments were guided by the qualitative inquiry:

"Does element i influence element j?"

For each comparison, the experts assigned one of four standard symbols to indicate the direction and nature of influence:

- **V**: Element *i* influences element *j*
- **A**: Element *j* influences element *i*
- **X**: Elements *i* and *j* influence each other (mutual relationship)
- **O**: No relationship exists between element *i* and element *j*

These entries collectively formed the Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM). The total number of pairwise comparisons required in the SSIM is determined using the combination formula nC2, where *n* represents the total number of elements (indicators) being studied. Thus, for a system of *n* variables, the SSIM constitutes a square matrix of order $n \times n$, with *nC2* comparative cells populated by the symbols V, A, X, or O, while the remaining cells are either left blank or used for software-generated consistency checks.

For the purpose of this study, two separate ISM experiments were conducted, corresponding to the two domains of interest:

1. *Tīrtha towns* (drawing specifically from the context of Varanasi), where 15 development indicators were assessed.
2. *Non-Tīrtha historic towns*, where 13 development indicators were evaluated.

The SmartISM interface facilitated a time-bound response session (approximately 20 minutes per experiment), ensuring focused decision-making and minimizing potential cognitive biases from prolonged deliberation. Upon completion, the responses were processed by the software to generate the Structural Self-Interaction Matrices (SSIMs), which served as the foundational inputs for subsequent stages of ISM analysis—namely the Reachability Matrix, level partitions, and the development of the final hierarchical model.

The resulting SSIMs for both sets of indicators are presented in the corresponding figures.

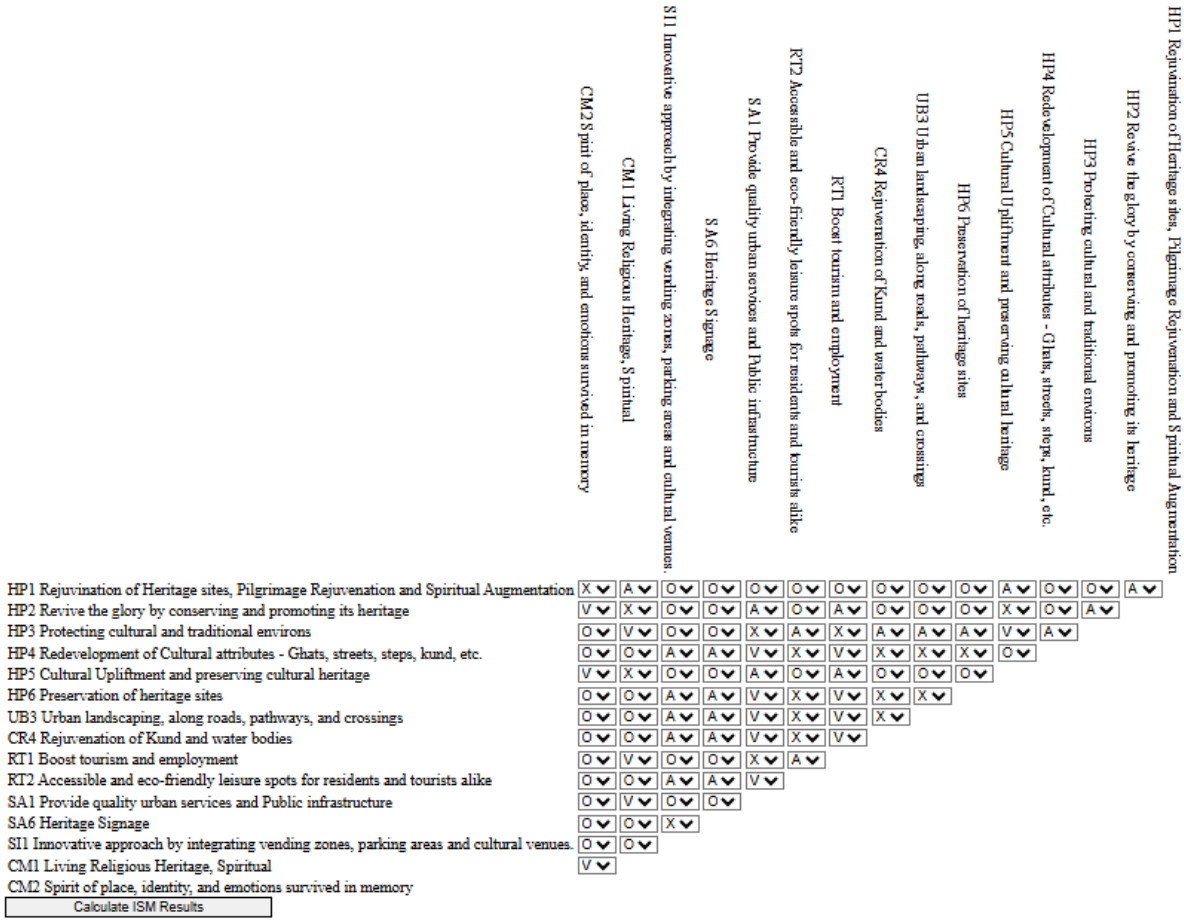


Figure 29: ISM Dataentry for development indicators Tīrtha site/town.

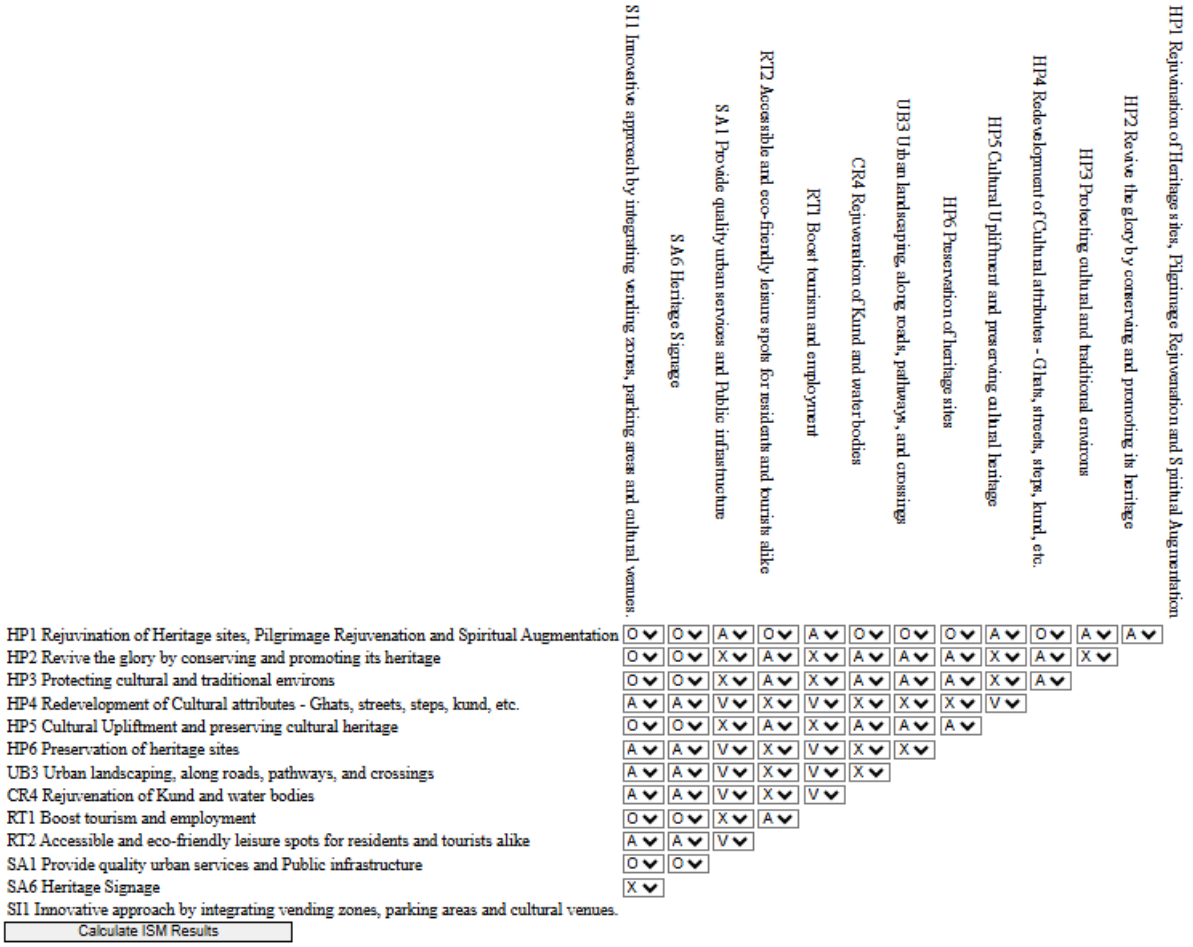


Figure 30: Dataentry for development indicators non-Tīrtha site/town.

Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
HP1 Rejuvination of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation		A	A	O	A	O	O	O	A	O	A	O	O
HP2 Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage			X	A	X	A	A	A	X	A	X	O	O
HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs				A	X	A	A	A	X	A	X	O	O
HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.					V	X	X	X	V	X	V	A	A
HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage						A	A	A	X	A	X	O	O
HP6 Preservation of heritage sites							X	X	V	X	V	A	A
UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings								X	V	X	V	A	A
CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies									V	X	V	A	A
RT1 Boost tourism and employment										A	X	O	O
RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike											V	A	A
SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure												O	O
SA6 Heritage Signage													X
SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.													

Figure 31: Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM) developed for ISM study.

6.3.2.2 Final Reachability Matrix and Level Partitions

Following the development of the Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM) through expert inputs using the SmartISM software, the next critical stage in the Interpretative Structural Modelling (ISM) process involves the derivation of the Reachability Matrix (RM) and the

subsequent hierarchical level partitioning, which together form the foundation for constructing the directed graph (digraph).

a) Conversion of SSIM to Reachability Matrix (RM)

The symbolic entries in the SSIM—'V', 'A', 'X', and 'O'—representing the contextual relationships among variables, are systematically converted into binary values to generate the RM. The conversion rules are as follows:

- 'V' (i influences j) → RM(i, j) = 1 and RM(j, i) = 0
- 'A' (j influences i) → RM(i, j) = 0 and RM(j, i) = 1
- 'X' (i and j influence each other) → RM(i, j) = 1 and RM(j, i) = 1
- 'O' (no influence) → RM(i, j) = 0 and RM(j, i) = 0

Additionally, the diagonal elements of the RM are assigned a value of **1**, reflecting the methodological assumption that each variable exerts an influence upon itself.

b) Transitivity Check and Formation of Final Reachability Matrix (FRM)

ISM rests on the principle of transitivity, which posits that if element A Influences B and B Influences C, then A necessarily influences C. This principle is applied to the RM to derive the Final Reachability Matrix (FRM). The transitivity computation is carried out using the Warshall Algorithm (Ahmad, 2021), a widely recognized computational method that systematically identifies all transitive relationships within a matrix.

In the FRM:

- Direct influences carried over from the original RM are retained as '1'.
- Indirect (transitive) influences are denoted as *'1'**, distinguishing them from direct relationships.

The FRM further provides the analytical basis for calculating two critical measures:

- Driving Power: The total number of 1s (including 1*) in a row, indicating the extent to which a variable influences other elements in the system.
- Dependence Power: The total number of 1s (including 1*) in a column, reflecting the degree to which a variable is influenced by other elements.

Final Reachability Matrix(FRM)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Driving Power
HP1 Rejuvination of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
HP2 Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	6
HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	6
HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11
HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	6
HP6 Preservation of heritage sites	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11
UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11
CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11
RT1 Boost tourism and employment	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	6
RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11
SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	6
SA6 Heritage Signage	1*	1*	1*	1	1*	1	1	1	1*	1	1*	1	1	13
SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.	1*	1*	1*	1	1*	1	1	1	1*	1	1*	1	1	13
Dependence Power	13	12	12	7	12	7	7	7	12	7	12	2	2	

Figure 32: Final Reachability Matrix (FRM) for non-tīrtha sites/town.

Final Reachability Matrix(FRM)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Driving Power
HP1 Rejuvination of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
HP2 Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs	1*	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1*	8
HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.	1*	1*	1	1	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1*	1*	13
HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
HP6 Preservation of heritage sites	1*	1*	1	1	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1*	1*	13
UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings	1*	1*	1	1	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1*	1*	13
CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies	1*	1*	1	1	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1*	1*	13
RT1 Boost tourism and employment	1*	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1*	8
RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike	1*	1*	1	1	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1*	1*	13
SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure	1*	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1*	8
SA6 Heritage Signage	1*	1*	1*	1	1*	1	1	1	1*	1	1*	1	1	1*	1*	15
SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.	1*	1*	1*	1	1*	1	1	1	1*	1	1*	1	1	1*	1*	15
CM1 Living Religious Heritage, Spiritual	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
CM2 Spirit of place, identity, and emotions survived in memory	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Dependence Power	15	13	10	7	13	7	7	7	10	7	10	2	2	13	15	

Figure 33: Final Reachability Matrix (FRM) for tīrtha sites/town.

c) Level Partitioning

With the Final Reachability Matrix (FRM) established, level partitioning is undertaken through iterative comparisons of three sets for each variable:

- Reachability Set (R): The variable itself, along with all other variables it can influence (i.e., those marked with '1' or '1*' in the same row).
- Antecedent Set (A): The variable itself, along with all other variables that influence it (i.e., those marked with '1' or '1*' in the same column).
- Intersection Set (R ∩ A): The common elements shared by the reachability and antecedent sets.

During each iteration of the partitioning process:

- Variables for which the reachability set and intersection set are identical are assigned to the topmost hierarchical level.
- These variables are then removed from subsequent iterations.
- The process is repeated with the remaining variables until all variables are assigned a level, thereby generating a complete hierarchical structure that progresses from the most dependent variables at the top to the most influential variables at the base.

d) Generation of the Digraph

Once the levels are finalized, a directed graph (digraph) is constructed to visually represent the interrelationships:

- Each variable is placed within a box corresponding to its assigned hierarchical level.
- Arrows are drawn to indicate the direction of influence, as determined from the FRM.
- To preserve clarity of interpretation, only direct relationships (represented by '1' in the RM) are included, while indirect (transitive) influences ('1*') are omitted from the visual representation.

This hierarchical ISM model provides a systematic understanding of the causal structure among variables, making it a critical tool for strategic planning, decision-making, and policy formulation in the context of heritage-led urban development.

The resulting level partition table and the final ISM digraph are presented in the following figures. A comprehensive ISM output sheet, summarizing the entire modelling process, is appended as Annexure V for reference

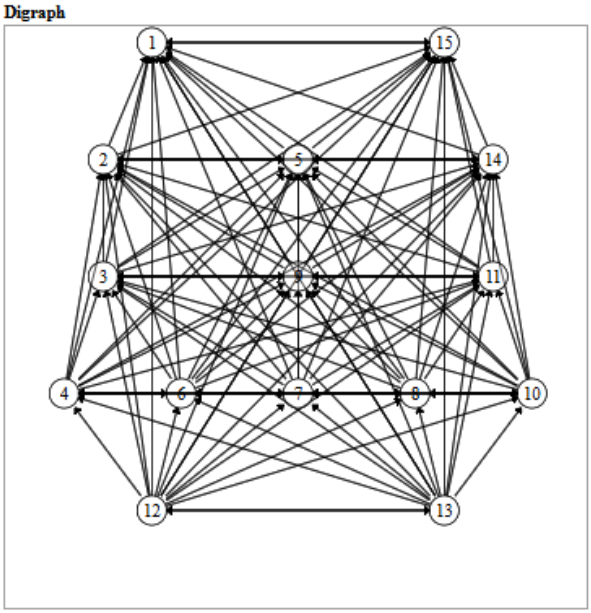


Figure 34: ISM Diagraph for Tīrtha site/town.

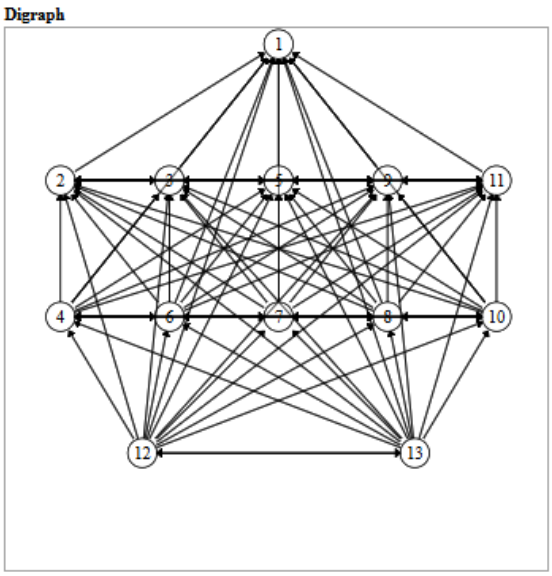


Figure 35: ISM diagraph for non-tīrtha site/town.

6.3.3 Towards Analysis and Discussion

The Interpretative Structural Modelling (ISM) experiment was conducted using two distinct sets of development indicators: one for a tīrtha (pilgrimage) site, comprising 15 variables, and another for a non-tīrtha (general historic city) site, comprising 13 variables. These indicators

were identified through earlier Delphi experiments and systematically structured using the SmartISM software. The ISM process was facilitated by three domain experts selected from the Delphi panel, whose multidisciplinary expertise and contextual familiarity enabled the identification of relational hierarchies among the variables.

Through level partitioning and the construction of hierarchical digraphs, the ISM model produced a clear visualization of the interdependencies and influence pathways among the selected indicators. These structured outputs serve as a strategic tool for understanding policy priorities and layered development needs specific to both tīrtha and non-tīrtha urban contexts.

1. Dominant Indicators for Heritage Development- Across both site typologies, the indicator HP1 – "Rejuvenation of Heritage Sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation, and Spiritual Augmentation" consistently emerged as a foundational driver. Positioned at a lower (more influential) level in the hierarchy, HP1 demonstrated strong driving power, underscoring its pivotal role in initiating heritage-led development processes.

2. Contextual Importance of Intangible Values in Tīrtha Sites- In tīrtha sites, the indicator CM2 – "Spirit of Place, Identity, and Emotions Survived in Memory" was found to hold equal significance with HP1. This finding highlights the essential role of intangible heritage values—including cultural memory, spiritual identity, and emotional bonds—in shaping developmental priorities. Rooted in mythological narratives, ritual traditions, and lived experiences, these values must be integrated into smart heritage policies for pilgrimage towns to ensure culturally sensitive and spiritually authentic urban development.

3. Differentiated Role of Tourism Across Sites- The indicator RT1 – "Boost Tourism and Employment" emerged as a higher-level goal in non-tīrtha sites, suggesting that tourism is perceived primarily as an outcome of heritage revitalization, rather than a driving force. In contrast, at tīrtha sites, tourism is embedded within a wider nexus of spiritually significant indicators such as CM1 – "Spiritual and Living Heritage." This distinction indicates that economic objectives like tourism in pilgrimage towns must remain aligned with their sacred character and ritual ecology, avoiding commodification that could undermine spiritual integrity.

4. Urban Services as Interconnected, Not Isolated Needs in Tīrtha Sites- The indicator SA1 – "Provision of Quality Urban Services and Public Infrastructure" was found to be significant in both site contexts. However, in tīrtha towns, SA1 was not positioned as a stand-alone priority but was closely interlinked with CM1 (Living Religious Heritage) and HP1 (Heritage Rejuvenation). This interdependence reflects the insight that urban service delivery in pilgrimage towns must be context-sensitive, culturally informed, and spiritually aligned—supporting the sacred and living heritage systems rather than disrupting them with generic infrastructure models.

The comparative ISM results clearly emphasize the necessity of site-specific heritage development frameworks. While non-tīrtha urban development strategies may prioritize infrastructure and tourism outcomes, tīrtha-centric urbanism demands an integrated approach, embedding spiritual values, cultural memory, and identity at the very core of policymaking.

Chapter - 7: Conclusion and Discussion

The present chapter concludes the research undertaken under the title *"A Tīrtha-Centric Investigation of Indian Pilgrimage Towns for Holistic Urban Development: A study of Varanasi."* It systematically brings together the findings, strategies, contributions, limitations, and recommendations that have emerged from the course of the study. Building upon the three core objectives, the chapter demonstrates how pilgrimage towns, and Kāśī in particular, embody a holistic tīrtha-centric model of urbanism, where community custodianship, ecological sanctity, and spiritual practice converge to sustain urban identity amidst the challenges of modern development.

The chapter comprises seven interrelated sections that collectively synthesize the outcomes of the research. Section 7.1 presents the key findings and offers a consolidated discussion of the three research objectives along with their broader implications. Section 7.2 outlines the strategies and recommendations formulated from these findings, proposing actionable pathways for heritage-led and tīrtha-centric urban development. Section 7.3 delineates the research contributions to the wider fields of urban studies, Indian Knowledge Systems, and heritage conservation. Section 7.4 discusses the limitations encountered during the study, acknowledging the boundaries of scope and methodological constraints. Section 7.5 articulates the overall significance of the research, underscoring its relevance for planners, policymakers, and scholars concerned with the sustainable development of pilgrimage towns. Section 7.6 presents recommendations for future research, identifying potential directions for extending and refining the present study. Finally, Section 7.7 provides the concluding remarks, reaffirming the thesis that integrating tīrtha-centric frameworks into contemporary planning and heritage policy offers a culturally grounded, ecologically resilient, and community-oriented model for the holistic development of Indian pilgrimage towns. The conclusion has been structured to clearly distinguish between:

- Major empirical findings: Findings emerging from the research tasks undertaken under each of the three objectives, including the field investigation of Kāśī and the identification of tīrtha-centric development indicators.
- Theoretical/Conceptual contribution: The Community–Resource–Landscape framework and the conceptualisation of Kāśī as a tīrtha-centric urban system.
- Methodological contribution: An Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)-based multidisciplinary approach, integrating textual, archaeological, GIS, ethnographic, Delphi, and ISM methods.
- Planning implications: Policy and planning recommendations for heritage rejuvenation, sacred-ecology-based urban services, community stewardship, and tīrtha-centric development.

7.1 Research Discussion and Findings

This section presents a consolidated discussion of the research findings derived from the three objectives. The outcomes progress from understanding tīrtha, Purāṇas, and pilgrimage towns (Objective 1), to examining their lived manifestation in Kāśī (Varanasi) (Objective 2), and finally to identifying tīrtha-centric indicators for holistic urban development (Objective 3). Together, these findings establish a unified framework for reinterpreting pilgrimage towns as culturally rooted, ecologically resilient, and community-driven urban systems.

7.1.1 Findings from Objective One: Understanding Tīrtha, Purāṇa, and Indian Pilgrimage Towns

The first objective establishes that Purāṇas are dynamic, adaptive cultural texts rather than static mythology. Their evolution reflects changing sectarian, ecological, and sociocultural contexts, as demonstrated through the Skanda Purāṇa and the Kāśī Khaṇḍa. The Purāṇas played a foundational role in shaping sacred geography and early urbanism by integrating local cults, tribal traditions, and ecological features into broader Pan-Indian sacred networks.

Key findings include:

- Purāṇas as agents of sacred geography and proto-urban foundations, supported by inscriptions such as Podagadh and Samoli. Natural features—rivers, hills, forests—were sacralized into tīrthas, embedding ecological awareness within settlement formation. Sthalapurāṇas and Māhātmyas localized these sacred narratives, strengthening ritual practice and urban identity.
- The Skanda Purāṇa as a living tīrtha document. Its redactional history—from the Maukhari and Harṣa periods to the Nepalese recension—reveals its evolving Śaiva–Śākta framework and its functioning as a proto-planning manual sustaining tīrtha-based urbanism.
- Tīrtha proliferation as a Pan-Indian integration process, incorporating peripheral tribal traditions (e.g., Kāmākhyā, Purī, Tirumala, Dvārakā) into Brahmanical sacred geography through narrative adaptation and ritual sacralization.
- Tīrthas as sites of cultural integration and communitas, where tribal, folk, and Brahmanical traditions coexisted. Examples such as Bhilla, Kukkuteśvara, and Marjāra tīrthas preserve totemic memories, while Jagannātha Purī exemplifies vernacular assimilation into Paurāṇik orthodoxy.
- A triadic model of tīrtha-centric place-making was identified:
    - Community: ritual custodianship and cultural memory
    - Resource: sacred rivers, forests, hills as spiritual-ecological anchors
    - Landscape: symbolic and performative space shaping urban morphology
- Tīrtha-centric urbanism as a sustainable civilizational model, balancing ecological resources, sacred cosmology, and community identity.

In summary, Objective One provides the conceptual foundations of tīrtha-centric place-making and establishes Purāṇas as the epistemic and cultural basis for understanding pilgrimage towns.

7.1.2 Findings from Objective Two: Tīrtha-Centric Investigation of Kāśī (Varanasi)

Building on the textual insights of Objective One, the second objective demonstrates that Kāśī's making as a tīrtha is a continuous process rooted in Paurāṇik epistemology and sustained through sacred geography. The findings are based on literary analysis of the Kāśī Khaṇḍa and a detailed field study of 286 tīrtha sites across Kāśī and the Pañcakrośī Yātrā circuit, supplemented by comparative analysis of 51 pilgrimage towns.

Key findings include:

- Kāśī's uninterrupted habitation results from its sacred continuity rather than political stability. Ritual cycles and sacred ecology enabled continual regeneration.
- Layered sacred landscapes, ranging from Vedic ritual sites (Aktha, Ramnagar) to folk, Buddhist, and later Śaiva traditions. This plural landscape mirrors the inclusive milieu of the Skanda Purāṇa's compilation.
- The Avimuktakṣetra construct, articulating Kāśī as "never forsaken," evolves through the identities of Ānandavana → Avimukta → Vārāṇasī. Narratives of ecological crisis (e.g., the 60-year drought) parallel archaeological evidence and illustrate dhārmic ecological stewardship.
- Water-ritual infrastructure is revealed as a sacred-ecological system: 88 documented water bodies, 62 tīrtha sites aligned with paleochannels, and kunda traditions reflecting ritualized geomorphology.
- Community-centric sacred urbanism, where priests, artisans, caretakers, and guilds sustain Kāśī's sanctity. Yoginī narratives encode occupational diversity, demonstrating spirituality embedded in everyday life.
- Ritual circuits and mandalas—Antargṛhī, Pañcakrośī, Ekādaśa Rudra, Āditya yatras—integrate cosmology, ecology, and urban form. Temple relocations (e.g., Bindumādhava, Viśvanātha) illustrate adaptive resilience anchored in collective memory.
- Kāśī as a Yogic Mandala (Kāśī-Yoga), where movement, bathing, and ritual practice are mapped onto yogic processes, integrating worldly and renunciatory paths.
- Intangible heritage and cultural vitality, sustained through Banārsī lifestyle, humor traditions, Panchpalli guilds, and caste-based custodianship.
- Contemporary challenges—neglect of minor shrines, encroachments, and loss of ritual spaces—highlight the need for community-led heritage management.

In essence, Objective Two demonstrates that Kāśī is a tīrtha-centric urban cosmos sustained by Community (Kāśī-Vāsī), Sacred Landscape (Kāśī-Nagar), and Spiritual Practice (Kāśī-Yoga), reaffirming its identity as an enduring Avimuktakṣetra.

7.1.3 Findings from Objective Three: Tīrtha-Centric Indicators for Holistic Urban Development

The third objective operationalizes the insights from Objectives One and Two into a development framework using Delphi assessments and Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) to identify key indicators for tīrtha-centric planning.

Key findings include:

- A dual-framework approach distinguishing tīrtha towns from non-tīrtha heritage towns:
    1. In tīrtha towns, heritage rejuvenation (HP1) and spirit of place (CM2) are primary drivers that shape urban services and tourism.

2. In non-tīrtha towns, infrastructure and beautification dominate, with cultural-spiritual elements secondary.

- Purāṇika narratives function as enduring developmental drivers. Indicators like memory (CM2), living heritage (CM1), ritual continuity, and ecological stewardship closely align with Paurāṇik constructs and remain relevant for community and policy aspirations.
- Community custodianship is central, with priests, artisans, caretakers, and residents identified as the most authentic stakeholders—supporting a bottom-up governance model essential for sustainable development.

The final conclusion of Objective Three establishes that tīrtha-centric development requires:

- Heritage rejuvenation and spirit of place as the foundational layer
- Urban services aligned with sacred ecologies
- Tourism treated as a secondary outcome, not a driver
- Community stewardship and Purāṇika continuity guiding planning and policy

7.2 Strategies Recommended

The strategies and recommendations developed through this research draw from the findings of all three objectives and propose a unified approach for the heritage-led, tīrtha-centric development of Indian pilgrimage towns.

The study affirms that the Purāṇas—particularly the *Skanda Purāṇa* and the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*—function as adaptive cultural blueprints that articulate sacred geographies, ritual ecologies, and community-based urban forms. Their insights, together with archaeological and ethnographic evidence, support the adoption of the Community–Resource–Landscape triadic framework as a foundational model for sustainable urban planning.

Pilgrimage towns should integrate textual, spatial, and cultural knowledge to guide settlement evolution, preserve ritual topographies, and maintain the sacralization of urban spaces. Tīrthas must be recognized as inclusive social spaces that strengthen social cohesion, while oral traditions and folk practices should be systematically documented to sustain cultural memory.

For Kāśī and similar towns, tīrtha-centric urbanism must be revitalized through sacred-geography-based, community-centered, and ecologically sensitive planning. Temples, kundas, ghāts, shrines, and ritual circuits should be treated as civic infrastructure, integrated into master plans, and supported through GIS-based mapping of water and heritage systems. Empowering Kāśī-Vāsīs—priests, artisans, guilds, and residents—as custodians of both tangible and intangible heritage is essential.

Modern interventions such as Smart Cities and HRIDAY must align with sacred ecologies, prioritizing smaller shrines, folk spaces, and ritual mandalas over large-scale monumentalization. The tīrtha-centric indicator framework developed in this research offers a structured method for recognizing sacred, cultural, and ecological layers in pilgrimage towns. It positions heritage rejuvenation and cultural memory as foundational, encourages context-

sensitive urban services, and reframes tourism as a secondary outcome of spiritual and cultural vitality.

Overall, the framework provides a replicable, culturally rooted approach to urban development that preserves Kāśī's identity as a living tīrtha while offering practical guidance for other Indian pilgrimage towns.

This positions tīrtha-centric indicators as replicable tools for pilgrimage towns across India.

7.3 Research Contribution

As highlighted in the Literature Review, numerous parallel studies across different academic disciplines have explored varied dimensions of the challenges facing Indian pilgrimage towns. While policymakers and urban planners are seeking holistic solutions for heritage conservation and urban development, these towns are simultaneously celebrated for their living traditions and cultural continuity. This research seeks to bridge that gap by establishing a holistic Purāṇika perspective for understanding and guiding urban development. It positions the Purāṇas as vital resource documents for tīrtha-centric urban studies and frames the inquiry within an Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) approach, offering a culturally rooted framework for holistic and sustainable urban development in Indian pilgrimage towns.

This research makes several integrated contributions to the study of tīrtha-centric urbanism, drawing from the three objectives and presenting a unified understanding of Purāṇika traditions, Kāśī's sacred urban system, and the indicator-based framework for pilgrimage-town development.

The study establishes a *multidisciplinary methodology, an IKS approach* that reinterprets Purāṇas not as static mythologies but as dynamic cultural archives containing ecological, spatial, and civic knowledge relevant for urban studies. By integrating textual analysis with archaeological, epigraphic, GIS-based, and ethnographic evidence, the research introduces a robust approach for understanding and comparing pilgrimage towns across regions and time periods.

A key contribution is the advancement of the *Community–Resource–Landscape* triadic framework as a foundational analytical and planning model for tīrtha-centric place-making. This model is further demonstrated through the reinterpretation of Kāśī as an Avimuktakṣetra, a living tīrtha ecosystem where community life, sacred geography, and spiritual practices form an inseparable whole. The formal articulation of Kāśī-Vāsī (community), Kāśī-Nagar (sacred landscape), and Kāśī-Yoga (spiritual practice) offers a replicable structure for managing pilgrimage towns.

The research positions the *Skanda Purāṇa*—especially the *Kāśī Khaṇḍa*—as a proto-urban manual that encodes settlement morphology, ritual geography, and civic-spatial relationships. It highlights tīrthas as integrative social spaces that foster communitas, shared identity, and cultural cohesion. By documenting oral traditions, folk narratives, Yoginī lore, and ritual practices, the study underscores the importance of intangible heritage as an essential component of urban continuity.

The field-based examination of 286 tīrthas and the mapping of ritual circuits, kundas, ghāts, and paleochannels demonstrate how sacred geography functions as civic infrastructure. This finding expands heritage studies by showing that ritual networks directly inform spatial

planning, mobility systems, and ecological frameworks. The research also validates community-centered governance, identifying priests, guilds, artisans, and residents as authentic custodians of heritage and advocating for participatory management models.

Building on these insights, the study advances a *tīrtha-centric indicator framework* that integrates heritage rejuvenation, cultural memory, and community participation as the foundational drivers of sustainable development. It redefines urban services—water, sanitation, mobility, and public space—within sacred-ecological contexts rather than standardized templates. Tourism is repositioned as an outcome of cultural-spiritual vitality rather than a primary driver.

Finally, the research contributes practical tools for planning, including GIS-based sacred geography mapping, longitudinal documentation of intangible heritage, and curriculum integration to institutionalize tīrtha studies in academia. By presenting Kāśī as a benchmark for sacred-embedded, community-driven, and ecologically aligned urbanism, the study offers a scalable and replicable model for pilgrimage-town development across India.

7.4 Limitations of the research

The present research has made an assumption that the evolution of pilgrimage towns, in the present case Kāśī (Varanasi), is deeply rooted in its tīrtha-centric Paurāṇika continuity rather than in abrupt, top-down policy interventions. Large-scale urban schemes that can radically transform the sacred urban grain are considered exogenous to the scope of this study. The research emphasizes continuity over discontinuity, with careful extrapolation of missing historical interpretation through textual and archaeological interpretation. Based on these assumptions, the following limitations have been observed in the research:

- Though the present research has attempted to reconstruct the epistemological and spatial evolution of tīrtha-centric urbanism, its basis has been centered primarily on Kāśī as the benchmark case. The findings may therefore require contextual adaptation before being applied to other pilgrimage towns.
- The study has concentrated largely on public and sacred realms — temples, ghāts, kundas, shrines, and ritual circuits — while the more private or peripheral areas within the Kāśī Kṣetra could not be explored in equal depth due to time and resource constraints.
- The field survey was limited to 286 tīrtha sites, with only 150 usable interviews out of over 500 recordings because of audio clarity and environmental disturbances. This may have affected the representativeness of the findings.
- The temporal scope of fieldwork, conducted over 2.5 years, did not encompass the full cycle of seasonal pilgrimages, festivals, and ritual variations, leaving certain dynamic aspects of Kāśī's ritual calendar underrepresented.
- The reliance on *Skanda Purāṇa* and *Kāśī Khaṇḍa* as primary textual sources, though justified for depth, led to a selective textual focus. Other Purāṇas and Itihāsa traditions were not explored in equal detail.
- Additionally, the use of English and Hindi translations alongside Sanskrit originals interpreted by batuk Sanskrit scholars may have introduced interpretive biases in layered concepts.

- The methodological framework employing Delphi surveys and Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) was effective but remains dependent on expert judgment, limiting possibilities for purely empirical validation. The narrative-style survey approach, though authentic, made quantitative comparison across sites more challenging.
- While the sacred hydro-ritual infrastructure of Kāśī — including kundas, ghāts, and paleochannels — was documented, detailed hydrological and ecological impact assessments were beyond the present scope.
- The research emphasized Kāśī's organically evolved identity sustained through ritual continuity and community custodianship. However, large-scale infrastructure projects such as road widening, riverfront redevelopment, or tabula rasa urban schemes — which may drastically affect Kāśī's sacred fabric — were considered external to this study. A rigorous impact analysis of such projects remains an area for future work.

7.5 Overall significance of the research

- The present research has developed an understanding of tīrtha-centric urbanism through a rediscovery of the Purāṇika construct, using Varanasi as a key exemplar. It attempted to fill the gap in the body of knowledge by combining textual, archaeological, ethnographic, and systemic approaches into one whole framework, thereby offering a holistic representation of pilgrimage towns.
- The intent of the research has been to bring to light the embedding of tīrtha-centric frameworks — derived from Purāṇika traditions, community practices, and ecological sanctity — into the lived urban fabric of a traditional city like Kāśī. It traces the paths of continuity and regeneration, connecting the sacred geographies of the past to contemporary processes of heritage and urban development.
- The case of Varanasi has been specifically used to comprehend the generic syntax of tīrtha-centric frameworks, and their semantics, i.e., the ways in which community, landscape, and spiritual practice coalesce into enduring urban forms. These dynamics, sustained through ritual, cultural memory, and ecological consciousness, constitute the very principles of sacred urban systems that have survived long passages of time with resilience and dignity.
- The present research has made a modest attempt to explore this truth: that pilgrimage towns are not static relics but living city systems, whose continuity lies in the integration of Purāṇika wisdom, community custodianship, and sacred ecologies. By embedding these principles into contemporary policy and planning, the study forwards a replicable model for the holistic development of Indian pilgrimage towns.

7.6 Recommendation for future research

The present research is of major relevance to urban planners, urban designers, architects, policymakers, and authorities engaged in the spatial planning and development of Indian pilgrimage towns. The tīrtha-centric approach holds particular importance for pilgrimage towns in the current phase of rapid urbanization and expansion. By embedding Purāṇika wisdom, ritual geography, and community custodianship into development frameworks, this research attempts to bring more coherence and sustainability in regenerating or generating sacred urban forms, thereby aiding in the retention and reclamation of cultural identity. On the same lines, the following recommendations for future research have been suggested:

- The present research primarily explores the epistemological and spatial frameworks of tīrtha-centric development with strong embeddedness of cultural and ritual dynamics. A deeper exploration of the economic dimensions of pilgrimage towns — such as livelihood systems, pilgrimage economies, and resource-based community sustenance — can further enrich the analysis.
- At present, the study forwards a repository of tīrtha-centric indicators and patterns. These can be further analyzed using advanced analytical procedures like generative algorithms, simulation models, or AI-based decision-support systems, to explore more complex and dynamic models of urban development.
- The triadic model of Community–Resource–Landscape developed in this research can be expanded into a more holistic framework by incorporating additional links such as governance dynamics and technological interfaces, providing a broader basis for tīrtha-centric urbanism.
- The GIS-based mapping and longitudinal studies of intangible heritage proposed in this research may be further developed into a digital heritage-ecology atlas, integrating ritual geography, ecological networks, and community narratives for long-term planning and policy.
- Finally, while Kāśī serves as the central case study, the methodology can be extended to other pilgrimage towns such as Prayāga, Jagannātha Purī, Rāmeśvaram, and Tirumala, and further applied in traditional contexts across South and Southeast Asia and the Middle East, allowing for comparative insights and broader applicability.

7.7 A final Conclusion

The present research has been able to forward a systematic methodology to understand and prepare for the holistic development of pilgrimage towns, with Kāśī (Varanasi) as its exemplar, based on combining epistemological, spatial, and cultural dimensions through a tīrtha-centric framework. The research hopes that its findings will assist future generations of researchers, urban planners, and policymakers in comprehending the complex picture of pilgrimage towns in a comprehensive and sensitive manner.

Overall, the research has attempted to understand the role of tīrtha-centric principles, which may be seen as microsystems within the city, catalyzed by deeper epistemological traditions, ritual geographies, and cultural memory. They foster the evolution, generation, and regeneration of identity within a city system. In other words, the surface realities of ritual practices and urban forms are continually embedded within the deeper thresholds of timeless Paurāṇika wisdom, creating a continuum that sustains Kāśī as a living tīrtha.

In the present research, two major levels of gaps and challenges have emerged:

- First, there remains a gap in comprehending the whole picture that combines short-term, visible frameworks of development with the long-term, deeper constructs of sacred urbanism as a single system. The need, therefore, is for a holistic probe that recognizes both layers in tandem. The combinatorial approach employed in this study — integrating textual analysis, archaeological interpretation, field surveys, and structural modeling — demonstrates how such a fold can generate multi-layered urban entities more coherent with the original city's identity and sustainable for its future trajectory.

- Secondly, the challenge of linking the regeneration of past frameworks with the generation of present patterns for the future remains enormous, as it involves a wide spectrum of causal factors — from ecological and cultural to socio-economic and governance-related. These complexities are often obscured by the dominance of highly structured algorithmic or technocratic approaches. This research, however, has sought a paradigm shift by turning to the Indic epistemological roots of tīrtha-centric place-making, offering a simplified yet profound IKS approach that remains culturally grounded.

Therefore, the core conclusion of the present study is that Kāśī endures not through policy-driven interventions alone but through its tīrtha-centric resilience — a synergy of community custodianship, ecological sanctity, and spiritual practice. By reconnecting the regeneration of past tīrtha-centric traditions with the generation of present urban needs, the study affirms that pilgrimage towns can cultivate more livable, resilient, and identity-rich futures.

On the whole, it may finally be said that the regeneration of Kāśī's sacred urban traditions from the past, combined with their contextual generation in the present, offers a pathway to sustain the future identity of pilgrimage towns in India. This truth is perhaps best echoed in the words of Mark Twain:

> "Benares is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend,
> and looks twice as old as all of them put together."

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Annexure I

List of Pilgrimage Towns for Tirtha Study.

Sr. No	Tīrtha Name	Location	Sacred Features	Textual Reference & Timeline	Pauranika/Spiritual Context	Architectural / Physical Details	Cultural-Historic Notes
1	Amarnath	Jammu & Kashmir, Himalayas (12,929 ft.)	Snow-linga (Rasa-linga / Amaresvara-linga), Seshnag Lake, Panchatarni, Amaraganga stream	Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī* I.267–268 (12th c.), *Śrī Amareśvara Māhātmya*, Katha Upaniṣad (1st millennium BCE), Ain-i-Akbari (16th c.), Modern writings (Dr. Karan Singh, etc.)	Shiva manifests as congealed divine juice (*Rasa-linga*) to grant *paramagati* (liberation); internal pilgrimage represents involution of 23 tattvas	Natural gypsum cave (15×17×14 m), glacier-fed lakes, sacred confluences (e.g., Liddar & Seshnag), Martand Sun Temple (8th c. AD), routes via Pahalgam, Chandanwadi, Wavjan	Mentioned by Kalhaṇa; worshipped by Adi Śaṅkara, Vivekananda, Ram Tirtha; syncretic co-participation (Batkut Muslims), pilgrimage traditions still active
2	Vaishno Devi	Trikuta Hill, near Katra, District Jammu, J&K	Natural cave shrine at 5,200 ft on Trikuta Bhagawati hill; three pindis (Mahasaraswati, Mahalakshmi, Mahakali); Charan Ganga stream inside the cave	Pushpendra Kumar (1974), *Sakti Cult in Ancient India*; Puranic references to Shakti Peethas (52/51/108); Shivacharitra, Devi Bhagavata	Left arm of Sati fell here (Shakti Peetha); Goddess manifests to maintain cosmic order and destroy evil; embodiment of dynamic Absolute (Sakti)	Cave with narrow passage (Garb-yoni); crystal stream; raised rock platform with pindis; shrine with spacious platform outside (Mata ka Darbar)	Associated with Guru Nanak, Sant Namdev; steeped in folk belief of wish-fulfillment; massive rise in pilgrims since partition; integral to regional Shakta tradition
3	Kangra, Jvalamukhi, Chamba, Brahmaur, Manimahesh Kailas	Kangra, Chamba, and Brahmaur districts, Himachal Pradesh, India	Vajreshwari (Kangra), Jvalaji (Jvalamukhi), Chamunda Devi, Baijnath, 84 temples of Brahmaur, Manimahesh Lake, Kailash peak, Gauri-kund	MahÄ□bhÄ□rata, ÅšÄ□kta and Åšaiva PurÄ□á¹‡as; 7thâ€“12th c. inscriptions and temple records; 1905 earthquake; Mughal and Sikh period references	Satiâ€™s body fell here (tongue, breast); Ravanaâ€™s penance; Åšiva-Parvatiâ€™s mountain journey; Pandavasâ€™ exile; Åšivaâ€™s presence at Manimahesh	Rock-cut Masrur temples; ashtadhÄ□tu images by Gugga; wooden temples (Lakshana, Sakti Devi); bronze Vaikuntha Vishnu; Chamba school of painting	Oldest Rajput dynasties (Katoch); visited by Mahmud of Ghazni, Akbar, Ranjit Singh; Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang; Pahari painting tradition

4	KailÄ□s and MÄ□nasarovar	Tibet Autonomous Region, north of Uttarakhand, India; near Parkha Plains	Mount KailÄ□s (22,028 ft), Lake MÄ□nasarovar (14,950 ft), Rakshas Tal, Gurla-Mandhata, Gauri-kund, Lha Chhu River	Skanda Purāṇa (Mānasa Khaṇḍa), Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa, Vāyu Purāṇa and Padma Purāṇa, Buddhist references; reopened post-1981 after Indo-China war and Cultural Revolution	Åšiva-Parvatiâ€™s playground; BrahmÄ□â€™s creation of MÄ□nasarovar; RÄ□vaá¹‡aâ€™s penance at Rakshas Tal; Jain tirthankar á¹šá¹£abhadevaâ€™s nirvÄ□á¹‡a; Buddhist Kang Rimpoche	Ancient gompas (monasteries) around KailÄ□s and MÄ□nasarovar, mostly destroyed during Cultural Revolution; few ruins and rebuilt gompas like Darchen	Historic Indo-Tibetan ties; Bhotia trade communities; Tibetan Thankas illustrating KailÄ□s geography; revived pilgrim routes; ecological-spiritual nexus
5	GangÄ□dvÄ□ra (Hardwar / Haridwar)	Right bank of the Ganga where it enters the plains from the Siwalik hills, Uttarakhand	Gaá¹…gÄ□'s emergence from the Himalayas, NakuleÅ›vara MahÄ□deva, Gangadwar Temple, Hari-ki-Pairi, Bhimgoda Tank, Brahma-kund, Maya Devi Temple, Daksha Temple	Skanda PurÄ□á¹‡a, MahÄ□bhÄ□rata (Ä€diparva, Vanaparva), Padma PurÄ□á¹‡a; Hiuen Tsang's travelogue (7th c. AD), Akbarâ€™s era, 1857 Revolt, Gazetteer of Saharanpur (1981)	Descent of Gaá¹…gÄ□ by Bhagiratha; Åšiva as Gaá¹…gÄ□dhara; JÄ□hnavÄ« legend; Gaá¹…gÄ□ from Viá¹£á¹‡u's toe (Vaiá¹£á¹‡ava view); stories of PratÄ«pa, ÅšÄ□ntanu, BhÄ«á¹£ma, Karttikeya, Drona, Arjuna	Stone-built Maya Devi Temple (10thâ€“11th c.); Hari-ki-Pairi (60 steps, 100 ft wide); ruins at Mayapur; ancient temples to Bhairava, Narayana; Daksha Temple	Visited by Timur, Akbar, Jahangir; British developed Ganga canal; role in freedom movement; Bahis used by art historians; Pandas as traditional record-keepers
6	Kedarnath (Pancha Kedar)	Kedarnath, Rudra Himalaya Range, Chamoli District, Uttarakhand, India	Kedarnath Temple (Jyotirlinga), Mahapanth Peak, Pancha Parvata, Mandakini River, Hanskund, Amritkund, Retaskund, Adi Shankaracharya Samadhi	MahÄ□bhÄ□rata, Åšiva PurÄ□á¹‡a (Kotirudra SamhitÄ□), Kedarakhanda; references to Pandavas, Adi Åšaá¹…karÄ□cÄ□rya; historic routes and connections with Gaurikund, Ukhimath, and Badrinath	Åšiva fled as buffalo to avoid Pandavas; hind part worshipped at Kedarnath; remaining parts worshipped at four other Himalayan shrines (Pancha Kedar); sages Nara-NÄ□rÄ□yaá¹‡aâ€™s penance	Stone-built temple with grey tower and gilded pinnacle; constructed by Pandavas, designed by sages; surrounded by accommodation for pandas and pujaris; adjacent shrines and kunds	Jyotirlinga site tied to national consciousness; references in Rigveda; Adi Åšaá¹…karÄ□cÄ□ryaâ€™s influence; pilgrimage interlinked with Gangotri, Yamunotri, and Badrinath in the Char Dham circuit
7	Badarinath	Paenkhanda Pargana, Chamoli, Uttarakhand; Right bank of Alaknanda River; 10,284 ft elevation	Tapta Kunda, Brahma Kapal, Panch Badaris, Panch Shilas, Alaknanda confluence	Mahābhārata (Śānti Parva - Nārāyaṇīya); Skanda Purāṇa; Adi Śaṅkara (5th cent. BCE–9th cent. AD, debated)	Visit of Nārada to Nara-Nārāyaṇa; origin of Pañcarātra doctrine; Atmopāsanā; Vyāsa dictating Mahābhārata at Mana	East-facing temple, 45 ft high; icon in Padmāsana, black śālagrāma stone; golden kalasa; surrounded by sacred kundas and valleys	Re-erected by Adi Śaṅkara; sacred site for all varṇas; origin of Uttaramnaya Jyotirmath; Vaishnava center of pan-India devotion

8	Jageshwar	Left bank of Jataganga, 35 km from Almora, Almora district, Uttarakhand	Manasa-khanda region; cluster of 125 temples; Deodar forests; Burha Jageshwar; Himalayan ridges and valleys	Mentioned in Skanda PurÄ□á¹‡a (Manasa-khanda); temples date from 8th to 18th century AD	Shiva performed penance after Satiâ€™s death; cursed by á¹šá¹£is; liá¹…ga broken by Viá¹£á¹‡u; sanctified by Åšaá¹…karÄ□cÄ□rya	Stone temples in Nagara style; prominent shrines include Tarun Jageshwar, Dandeshwar, Mrityunjaya, Vaidyanath, goddess temples	Supported by Katyuri and Chand Rajas; revived by Adi Åšaá¹…karÄ□cÄ□rya; culturally part of ancient Kumaon sacred geography
9	Mathura	Right bank of YamunÄ□, 140 km from Delhi, Uttar Pradesh	JanmabhÅ«mi of Krishna, 12 bans, 24 upabans, 24 ghÄ□ts, Govardhan hill, Radha-Kund, Potara-Kund, YamunÄ□ river	Referenced in MahÄ□bhÄ□rata, VarÄ□ha PurÄ□á¹‡a, ChÄ□ndogya Upaniá¹£ad, Jain and Buddhist texts (5th c. BCEâ€“11th c. AD)	Satrughna founded MadhupurÄ«; Krishna born to DevakÄ« and Vasudeva; lÄ«lÄ□s across Braj region; praised in MahÄ□tmya texts	Temples of Govind Devji, Radha Vallabh, Madan Mohan; JanmabhÅ«mi Mandir; ancient temple ruins; Kesava Deva temple plinths; ghats, kunds, and parikrama trails	Mathura art school; Buddhist and Jain centers; visited by Fa-Hien & Xuanzang; damaged by Ghazni and Aurangzeb; resurgence in modern times
10	Chitrakut	Karwi tehsil, Banda district, Uttar Pradesh; near Mandakini River; ~120 km southwest of Prayagraj	Mandakini River; Kamta Nath Hill; Lakshman Pahari; 33 shrines; 24 ghats in Sitapur; Tulsi Dasâ€™s vision site	Ramayana (Valmiki, Tulsidas); referenced by Kalidasa in Meghaduta as Ramagiri; Tulsi Das began Ramcharitmanas here in 1574 AD	Site of Sri Ramaâ€™s vows and exile stay; vision of Rama to Tulsi Das; Anasuya brings Mandakini; Bharat takes Ramaâ€™s Padukas	Temples at Kamta Nath, Lakshman Pahari; ghats like Ragho Prayag, Rama Ghat; stepped path to Hanuman Dhara; Sphatik Shila rocks	Linked to Tulsi Dasâ€™s life; reconstructed in 18th century by Rani Chandra Kunwar; site of cultural memory and Ramayana devotion
11	Naimisaranya (Nimsar)	Near Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh; left bank of Gomati river; ~72 km NW of Lucknow	Chakra Tirtha, Gomati River, Lalita Devi temple, Dadichi Kund, Hatyaharana Tirtha, ancient forest	Vayu, Brahmanda, Varaha, Devi Bhagavata, Kurma Puranas; Mahabharata; Ramayana; Ain-i-Akbari (~16th c. AD)	Brahmaâ€™s wheel shattered here; destruction of Danavas in a â€˜nimeshaâ€™; Romaharshanaâ€™s narration of Puranas; sacrifice of Dadichi	Hexagonal Chakra Tirtha (12 ft dia), fort ruins (1100x300-400 ft), gateway built of Hindu materials, tanks named after holy rivers	Associated with narrative origins of Puranas and Itihasa tradition; site visited by Balarama; fort rebuilt by Hahajal in 1305 AD
12	PrayÄ□ga (Allahabad)	Confluence of Ganga, Yamuna, and Sarasvati, Uttar Pradesh	Triveni Sangam; Ganga (white), Yamuna (dark), Sarasvati (invisible); Akshaya Vata; Patalpuri Temple	á¹šgveda Khila, Kalidasa's Raghuvamsha (13:58), Vishnu PurÄ□á¹‡a, Ramayana; historical mentions since Vedic era	Site of Brahma's Ashvamedha; sanctified by RÄ□ma-SÄ«tÄ□; Yamunaâ€™s confluence journey signifies moksha	Akbarâ€™s Fort (1584); Patalpuri Temple; no stone ghats due to river shiftsâ€”mud banks with temporary steps	Center of Indian freedom struggle (Nehru-Gandhi family); religious-political confluence; referenced by Xuanzang

13	Vindhyachal	Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh; between PrayÄ□ga and KÄ□Å›Ä«; Vindhya mountain region along the Ganga	VindhyavasinÄ« Temple; KÄ□lÄ« Khoh; AstabhujÄ□ DevÄ«; sacred triangle pilgrimage (Tri-koá¹‡a YÄ□trÄ□); Vindhya range	Vindhya MÄ□hÄ□tmya (~2,000 verses); integration of regional goddess into PurÄ□á¹‡ic and Tantric traditions; 19th century rituals documented	YogamÄ□yÄ□ (DevakÄ«â€™s daughter) escaped Kaá¹□sa and settled in Vindhya; goddess worshipped as MahÄ□devÄ« and YoginÄ«	Temple with brass enclosure; image with silver eyes and ornaments; animal sacrifice pit nearby; vernacular style idol	Originally a non-Sanskritic tribal deity integrated into Brahmanical traditions; site of continued Tantric and folk worship
14	Kashi (Varanasi)	Uttar Pradesh; along the crescent bend of northward-flowing Ganga, between rivers Varuna and Asi	Uttaravahini Ganga; Vishvanatha Jyotirlinga; Avimukteshvara; Annapurna and other Devi pithas; Manikarnika Ghat; Jnana Vapi	Kashi Khanda of Skanda Purana (~15,000 verses); mentions in Vedas, Upanishads, Epics; continuous urban habitation since 800 BCE	Chosen by Shiva over Kailasa; site of eternal light and liberation; origin of Vishvanatha and Avimukteshvara lingas	Temple-spotted ghats along Ganga; Vishvanatha Temple (rebuilt in 1783); remnants of ancient temples; Rajghat excavations (1957â€“65)	Oldest living city; cradle of Sanskrit learning; home to Kabir, Tulsidas; site of Buddhaâ€™s first sermon; renowned for silk, arts, Ramlila
15	Sarnath	Near Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh	Site of Buddha's first sermon (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta), symbolizing the turning of the Wheel of Dharma	Early Buddhist texts like Vinaya Pitaka, Dhammapada; Historical event c. 6th century BCE (First Sermon after Enlightenment)			
16	Ayodhya	Faizabad district, Uttar Pradesh	Located on banks of Sarayu; Janmasthan (birthplace of Rama), sacred ghats, Hanuman Garhi, ancient Vaishnava temples	Skanda Purana â€“ Ayodhya Mahatmya; Govinda Chandra reign (AD 1114â€“1154); 12th century inscription, Ramayana traditions	Rama as Vishnu's avatar; Ayodhya founded by Manu; site of Rama Rajya; Sarayu grants moksha	12th century Vaishnava temple with golden shikhara; black stone pillars (Kasauti); Digambara Jain temples; reconstructed Rama Janmabhoomi Mandir	Disputed site with historical claims, demolished mosque in 1992; archaeological findings confirm pre-existing Hindu temple

17	Indraprastha	Delhi (Yamuna riverbank, Purana Qila region)	Yamuna river, Nigambodh Ghat, sacred sabhamandapa by Mayasura, Nila Chhatri temple, Painted Grey Ware settlements	Mahābhārata (Udyogaparva), Purāṇas, archaeology (PGW 1100–600 BCE); Delhi Sultanate, Mughal, and Sikh era	Founded by Yudhishthira in Khandavaprastha; site of sabhamandapa by Mayasura; Arjuna guarded from this city with Gandiva	Sabhamandapa illusion by Mayasura, Purana Qila site, Iron Pillar (Gupta era), Yogmaya temple, Kalkaji shrine, Sher Shah palace, Ashokan pillars, Lal Kot	Historical capital of Pāṇḍavas, renovated by Humayun; strong Jaina, Sufi, Sikh presence; site of execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur; rise of modern Delhi on ancient tirtha base
18	Kalighat	Kolkata (West Bengal)	Śakti Pīṭha (toe of Goddess); associated with Bhairava Nakuleśa	*Matsya Purāṇa*, *Devī Māhātmya*, *Mahākāla Saṁhitā*, *Tantrāloka*, *Yoginī Tantra* (6th–12th c.)	Kali as devourer of time (*kāla*), destroyer of ego, giver of liberation; stands on Śiva (symbolic of male–female energy unity)	Modest temple; idol of Kali with long tongue, adorned with garland of heads, blood-smeared; cremation-ground symbolism	Important centre for Tantric practice; not associated with human sacrifice like other Śākta sites; elevated by Sri Ramakrishna's devotion; linked with Dakshineswar
19	Nadīyā (Māyāpur)	Navadvīpa, West Bengal	Janmasthān of Śrī Caitanya; sacred Bhūmi from Gaṅgā's descent; Navadvīpa as "nine islands"	*Nadīyā Māhātmya* (11th c.), *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, biographies by Krishnananda Agamavāgīśa, Caitanya Caritāmṛta	Caitanya as embodiment of Rādhā–Kṛṣṇa; led Bhakti renaissance; turned many from Śākta/Tāntrika to Vaiṣṇava	Caitanya Janmasthān, Ballāl-digī tank, ISKCON's global temple complex; traditional bamboo-hut pāṭhaśālās	Cultural transition from Śākta royal centre to Vaiṣṇava bhakti centre; renowned centre of logic and devotion in medieval Bengal; associated with poets like Jayadeva, Vidyāpati
20	Gangasāgara	Sāgar Island, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal	Confluence of Ganga with Bay of Bengal; site of Makara Saṅkrānti; Kalpavṛkṣa (wishing tree); Kapila Muni temple	*Mahābhārata*, local legends of Kapila Muni and Bhagiratha; 15th c. Kapila temple rebuilt after destruction	Site where King Sagara's sons were liberated; descent of Gaṅgā; Kapila's curse and sagehood; symbolism of river-ocean-soul union	New Kapila Muni temple (post-19th century); temporary shrines built by pilgrims; changing coastline and river course	Referenced by Mangsambad and explorers like Edmund Hillary; maritime links; ecological fragility; part of Uttarāyaṇa tradition; cultural ties to Sankrānti across India
21	Bodh Gaya and Gaya	Gaya District, Bihar	Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhi Tree, Vajrasana (diamond throne), Vishnupada Temple, Phalgu River	Mahaparinibbana Sutta, Mahabharata, Vayu Purana; visited by Fa-Hien and Xuanzang	Place of Enlightenment of Gautama Buddha; presence of previous and future Buddhas	Pyramidal Mahabodhi Temple, Asokan Pillar, stucco figures, Burmese restorations	Cultural centre since Buddha's time; deeply revered in Mahayana and Theravāda traditions

22	Rājgir	Rajgir, Bihar, India	Gridhrakuta (Vulture's Peak), hot springs, Tapodārāma, ancient tanks, Jivaka's mango grove, Maniyar Math, Sonbhandar caves, Suraj Kund.	Mahābhārata, Rāmāyaṇa, Aṅguttara Nikāya, Hiuen Tsang's travelogue; 6th century BCE to present.	Associated with King Jarāsandha, Lord Krishna, Buddha and Mahāvīra. First Buddhist Council convened here. Sacred to all three dharmic traditions.	Remnants of ancient city walls (40–48 km), hot springs, Maniyar Math (Gupta period stucco), Saptaparni hall site, Sonbhandar caves, chaumukhi Jaina idols, extensive archaeological remains.	Capital of ancient Magadha; links with Bimbisāra, Ajātaśatru, Udayin; Buddhist-Jain interactions; important archaeological excavations by Cunningham, Bloch, Ghosh; preserved traditions and ruins.
23	Deoghar (Baba Dham)	Deoghar, Jharkhand	One of the 12 Jyotirlingas; sacred water well (Chandrakupa); sacred tank (Shivaganga); sacred hill (Trikuta); Bilva leaves.	Shiva Purāṇa, Brihad Dharma Purāṇa, 12th–14th century pilgrimage texts; believed active since Treta Yuga.	Ravana's penance and failed attempt to take Jyotirlinga to Lanka; site tied to descent of Sati's heart (Shaktipeeth tradition); Shiva's 12 divine manifestations.	Main temple has 72-ft tower; red cloth canopy over Jyotirlinga; Chandrakupa sacred well; temples of Parvati, Ganesa, Surya, Lakshmi-Narayan, etc.	Ancient religious site; inscriptions from 7th century; debated architectural continuity; revered since early Hindu and pre-Hindu (Harappan) times.
24	Bhubaneswar (Ekamra Kshetra)	Odisha, India	Bindu Sagar, Eight Tīrthas, Ekamra Forest	Brahma Purāṇa; Lingaraja temple from 7th–11th century AD	Śiva's preferred abode over Kāśī; Bindu Sagar formed by divine rivers	Lingaraja Temple (55 m tall), Kalinga style, four components: deul, jagamohana, nata mandir, bhoga mandapa	Śaiva royal patronage; visited by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu; city of temples
25	Jagannath Puri (Purushottama Kshetra)	Odisha, India	Ratna Simhasana, Sri Yantra, Daru Devata, Five Sacred Tīrthas	Brahma Purāṇa, Vishnudharma; Temple built 1130–1142 AD	Worshipped by Shabara tribe as Nila Madhava; fraternal deity	Main temple on Nila Parvata, Kalinga style; 120+ shrines in complex	Vedantic, tribal and Vaishnava fusion; ISKCON globalized Ratha Yatra
26	Ratnagiri Mahavihara	Cuttack District, Odisha, India	Main stupa, votive stupas, Mahayana-Vajrayana symbolism	Seals dated from 5th to 13th c. AD; activity continued till 16th century	Linked with Vajrayana pantheon and ritual traditions	Two monasteries, 8 temples, large central stupa, multi-storeyed structures	Second only to Nālandā; excavated by ASI under Debala Mitra

27	Kamakhya (Kāmarūpa)	Nilachal Hill, Guwahati, Assam, India	Yoni-pīṭha, Saubhāgya Kund, Nilachal Hill, Tantric landscape	Kalika Purāṇa, Yoginī Tantra, Pīṭha Nirṇaya; temple rebuilt by Nara Narayan in 1665 AD	Yoni of Satī fell here; associated with Narakasura legend; considered a primordial Śakti Pīṭha	Ahom-period lakhori brickwork; dome shrine; scattered ancillary temples; weathered by neglect	One of the 4/5 original Śakti Pīṭhas; centre of Tantric spread to Tibet; conflict between conservation and tourism
28	Ujjain (Ujjayini)	Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh	Mahākāla Jyotirlinga; River Śiprā; Northward river flow (uttaravāhinī)	Skanda Purāṇa (Avantyakhanda); Kālidāsa's Meghadūta & Raghuvaṃśa; Jahāngīr's Tuzuk	Mahādeva's victory over Tripura; Śiva's abode; Mahāvīra's penance	Mahākāla Temple; palace ruins; temples of Chandēśvara, Bhavānī, Kārttikeya	Capital of Avanti; seat of Vikramāditya; center of astronomy (Varāhamihira)
29	Omkareshwar Mandhata	Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh	Jyotirlinga of Omkareshwar; Narmada and Cauvery confluence; Island shaped like 'Om'	Śiva Purāṇa; Lata inscription (11th–12th c.); temple dated to 17th c.	Vindhya's penance; appearance of Śiva as Jyotirlinga	Island temples; hilltop remains; Amaleshwar and Chaubis Avatar temples	Connected to Mandhāta king; blend of Śaiva-Vaiṣṇava shrines; site of annual fairs
30	Amarkantak	Shahdol District, Madhya Pradesh	Source of Narmada, Son, Mahanadi; Maikala plateau	Skanda Purāṇa (Reva-khaṇḍa); Kurma Purāṇa; J.H. Dave, R.D. Banerji	Tears of Brahmā formed rivers; gods, sages did penance here	Karan Mandir (triple shrine); ancient and modern temple groups	Ruled by Haihaya dynasty; mentioned in Matsya Purāṇa; sacred geography
31	Nathdwara	Rajasthan, 48 km NE of Udaipur	Svayambhu image of Śrīnāthjī (Kṛṣṇa lifting Govardhan)	Vallabhācārya tradition, 15th–16th century AD; deity brought during Aurangzeb's reign	Form of Kṛṣṇa subduing Indra; Pushti Mārga teachings of self-surrender and bhakti	Simple exterior, ornate inner sanctum; sacred Sudarshan Chakra on roof	Associated with Mirabai; arts include pichhvai painting, temple patronage of music
32	Pushkar	11 km west of Ajmer, Rajasthan	Pushkar Lake, three Pushkars (Jyestha, Madhya, Kanishta), Sarasvati emergence	Padma Purāṇa, Skanda Purāṇa, medieval and modern records	Brahma's yajña, curse of Savitri, Sarasvati's underground flow	Five key temples; Brahma, Savitri, Varaha, Atmateshwar, modern restoration	Destroyed/rebuilt under Mughals; fair includes religious and trade activities
33	Somanatha	Prabhāsa, Saurashtra coast, Gujarat	Jyotirliṅga of Śiva, Sparśa Liṅga, Sarasvatī's sacred flow	Skanda Purāṇa – Prabhāsa Khaṇḍa; Mahābhārata (Mausala Parva)	Śiva as Chandraśekhara; site of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's last moments	155 ft temple built on Brahmasila without iron/cement; Gwalior stone	Destroyed 17 times; rebuilt by Bhima, Kumarpal, Ahilyabai, Sardar Patel
34	Dvārakā	Saurāṣṭra peninsula, Gujarat; on Arabian Sea	Sacred city of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Gomati river ghats, sea fortress legend	Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Harivaṁśa, Mahābhārata, Skanda Purāṇa	Built by Viśvakarma; Śrī Kṛṣṇa's capital after leaving Mathurā	Seven temple layers; main temple with 60-pillared sanctum	Repeated destruction; referenced by Tavernier; Śaṅkarācārya's baithak

35	Bet Dvārakā (Śankhodhāra)	Island near Okha, 30 km from Dvārakā, Gujarat	Submerged settlement; Śankhodhāra Tīrtha; śaṅkha remains	Mahābhārata, Harivaṁśa, Bhāgavatam; Excavations (1979–80)	Linked with Muṣṭisthala/Revataka legends and early Kṛṣṇa lore	Submerged walls, prismatic pillars, stone anchors; temple hall remains	Protohistoric pottery (1400–1500 BCE); debated chronology; port city evidence
36	Kolhapur	Kolhapur, Maharashtra	Śrī Mahālakṣmī temple; considered one of the 18 Śakti-pīṭhas	Dated to 2nd century AD; references in Mahābhārata and Śaṅkarācārya traditions	Mahālakṣmī's slaying of Mahīṣāsura; associated with Gārgya, Garuḍa, Śaṅkara	Cross-shaped shrine; stone lions; Śuṅga yantra; old stone levels 15 feet deep	Ruled by Satavāhanas, Kādambas, Silāhāras; later fortified during Marāṭhā and Bahmani rule
37	Nāsik	Nāsik, Maharashtra	Godāvarī river; Rāma Kuṇḍ, Sītā Kuṇḍ; Tryambakeśvara jyotirliṅga	References from 200 BCE (Brahmi inscriptions); Rāṣṭrakūṭa, Cālukya and Mughal periods	Associated with Rāmāyaṇa: Pañcavatī, Tapovan, Śītā's cave	200 temples across riverbanks; Buddhist Paṇḍav Leni caves; forts and ancient hillocks	Important trade center; known as Padmanāgar and Janasthāna; Kumbha Melā destination
38	Ambarnāth	Ambarnāth, Thane district, Maharashtra	Star-shaped shrine; sacred to Śiva	Inscription dated Saka 982 (AD 1060); Śilāhāra patronage	Śiva as dancer in trance; spiritual ecstasy	Star-shaped shrine, 13 feet below ground; basalt; sculptural friezes; 12-pillared dome	Unique Śilāhāra temple in North Konkan; noted for sculptural plasticity
	Ajanta	Ajanta, Aurangabad district, Maharashtra	30 Buddhist caves in Sahyādri hills; monsoon retreat	2nd century BCE to 6th century AD; Gupta & post-Gupta patronage	Bodhisattva narratives, Jātakas, moral teachings	Rock-cut chaityas and vihāras; tempera murals; narrative ceilings	UNESCO World Heritage; epitome of ancient Indian painting
39	Ellora	Ellora (Verul), Aurangabad district, Maharashtra	34 caves (Buddhist, Brahmanical, Jain); monolithic Kailāsa temple	5th to 10th century AD; Rashtrakūṭa era (c. 740–756 AD)	Śiva-Pārvatī marriage, Rāvaṇa lifting Kailāsa, Jain tīrthaṅkaras	Monolithic rock-cut temple; triple-religious cave system	Masterpiece of Indian rock-cut architecture; symbolizes religious pluralism
40	Pandharpur Vithoba	Pandharpur, Solapur district, Maharashtra	Vithoba temple on Chandrabhaga River	Vārkarī literature; 13th–17th century saints	Puṇḍalika's devotion, Viṣṇu's descent, nirguṇa bhakti	Stone temple, black idol on brick, 3.5 ft high	Linked with Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram, Nāmdev; Ahilyabai Holkar patronage
41	Bhīmāshankar Jyotirlinga	Bhorgiri near Khed, Pune district, Maharashtra	Jyotirlinga of Śiva; origin of Bhīma River	Śiva Purāṇa – Koti Rudra Saṃhitā; 1st millennium AD	Tripurāsura battle; emergence of Bhīmā from Śiva's sweat	Black stone temple, conical shikhara, forested Sahyādri	Alternative identifications in Kāmarūpa and Ujjainaka; sacred ecology

42	Tirupati	Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh	Vēṅkaṭādri Hill, Śrīnivāsa icon, Vaikuntha Dvāra	Bhaviṣyottara Purāṇa; shrine known from 9th century AD	Linked to Rāmānuja's transformation of site; Harihara image symbolism	Ancient icon in Garbhagṛha, gopurams, gold-plated śikhara	Ṭīrtha contested by Śaivas, Jains; transformed into Vaiṣṇava stronghold
43	Srisailam	Srisailam, Andhra Pradesh	Mallikārjuna Jyotirliṅga, Pātāla Gaṅgā	Mahābhārata, Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa; Śātavāhana & Vijayanagara patronage	Devi slays Mahāsura, Chenchu Śiva legend, Śiva as hunter	Walled complex, river-fed cisterns, Vijayanagara maṇḍapas	Blend of tribal and classical Hindu worship; inscriptions and legends of royal patronage
44	Lepakshi	Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh	Śiva as Vīrabhadra, Nāga shelter, 108 Śaiva Kṣetras	Built during reign of Achyutadevarāya (c. AD 1538); linked to Agastya and Vijayanagara inscriptions	Sage Agastya consecration; Virūpanna legend of self-blinding; Śiva testing devotees	Extensive murals, Kirātārjunīya panel, large Nāga sculpture, ceiling frescoes, Kalyāṇa Maṇḍapa	Major center of Vijayanagara art; declared protected by ASI; exemplar of integrated sculpture-painting tradition
45	Udupi	Udupi, Karnataka	Śāligrāma Kṛṣṇa idol, Chandramauleśvara temple	Madhva Vijaya; 13th century AD origin	Shipwreck legend, Rukmiṇī's idol, dual reality theology	North-facing garbhagṛha, Kanakana Kiṇḍi, monastic complexes	Centre of Dvaita Vedānta, musical and cultural life, silk & bhakti aesthetics
46	Vijayanagara (Hampi)	Hampi, Karnataka	Virupākṣa temple, Tungabhadra river, Hazāra Rāma carvings	14th–16th century AD; traveller accounts: Paes, Razzak, Barbosa	Virupākṣa as Śiva, Pampā myth, Vijayanagara as sacred capital	Stone chariot, musical pillars, water tanks, gopurams	Fusion of religion, empire, economy; post-1565 destruction and rediscovery
47	Kanchipuram	Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu	Palar River, Prithvi Lingam, Vishnu Divya Desams	References in Kalidasa, Hiuen Tsang, South Indian Inscriptions; peak during Pallava period (6th–8th c. AD)	Associated with Adi Shankara, Ramanuja; Buddhist and Jain heritage	Kailasanatha, Vaikuntha Perumal temples; apsidal and pyramidal vimanas, inscriptions	Seat of Pallava power, site of Bhakti movement; confluence of Tamil-Sanskrit traditions
48	Thanjavur (Brihadisvara Temple)	Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu	Śiva temple dedicated to Bṛhadīśvara; symbol of cosmic Śiva as Dakṣiṇa-Meru	Built by Rajaraja Chola I (AD 1010); referenced by Nilakanta Sastri, inscriptions, and Chola records	Śiva worshiped as Adavallan (divine dancer); linked with Dakṣiṇa-Meru and cosmic mountain symbolism	Vimāna 216 ft tall, 96 ft square base, monolithic Nandī, 14-tiered śikhara, Chola murals	Masterpiece of Chola architecture and statecraft; murals of Nāṭarāja, Rājarāja, and Bhakti saints
49	Srirangam	Tiruchirappalli district, Tamil Nadu	Island temple on Cauveri, Raṅganātha in reclining posture, 21 gopurams	Referenced in Rāmāyaṇa, Divya Prabandham, Śrībhāṣya tradition; historical expansion by Cholas	Gifted by Rāma to Vibhīṣaṇa, stayed on island by divine will, linked to Dharma Varma's penance	236 ft Rājagopura, temple tank, inner shrine (tiruvālaṭṭu), 7 prākāras	Seat of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, Rāmānuja's reforms, Āḻvārs' devotional heritage

50	Chidambaram	Cuddalore district (South Arcot), Tamil Nadu	Ākāśa Liṅga, Natarāja shrine, Chidambara Rahasya (Secret of Space)	Umapati Vilākam, Tamil hymns, inscriptions from Chola period; expanded until 1355 AD	Nāṭarāja's cosmic dance witnessed by sages Patañjali and Vyāghrapāda	1000-pillared hall, inner and outer prākāras, Govindarāja shrine, gopuras	Patronized by Cholas and Nāṭṭukottai Chettis; center of Śaiva philosophy and Bhakti
	Madurai	Madurai district, Tamil Nadu	Śrī Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara Temple, Golden Lily Tank, Thousand Pillar Hall	Tiruvilayadal Purāṇam, Tevaram hymns; rebuilt by Nāyakas post-Muslim invasions	Śiva appears as Sundareśvara to wed Mīnākṣī and perform sacred acts	Nine gopurams, lamp towers, sanctums, ornate maṇḍapas, sculpture-rich walls	Center of Tamil Śaivism, Sangam tradition, revived by Vijayanagara-Nāyaka patrons
51	Rāmeśvaram	Ramanathapuram district, Tamil Nadu	Jyotirliṅga, 22 tīrthas including Agni Tīrtha, Hanūmat-liṅga and Rāmeśvara liṅga	Mentioned in Purāṇas and Rāmāyaṇa; temple expanded from 3rd century BCE, Nāyaka additions in 1600 AD	Śrī Rāma installs liṅga after Laṅkā victory; Hanumān brings śilā-liṅga from Kailāsa	4,000 ft corridor with 1,212 granite pillars, Rājagopura 126 ft, temple 865x657 ft	Built by Setumādhava rulers, expanded by Nāyakas and Kerala Rāya; rich in myth and pilgrimage lore
	Kanyākumārī	Kanniyakumari district, Tamil Nadu	Virgin goddess shrine, sea confluence, Āmbu Tīrtha, sacred rock memorial	Mentioned in Purāṇas, Mahābhārata, Śākta texts; temple rebuilt in 18th c by Travancore kings	Marriage postponed due to Nārada's trick; goddess awaits Śiva in eternal penance	Sanctum with Viṣṇu image, limestone-plastered walls, high gopura and enclosed prākāra	Śaṅkarācārya traditions, Tamil Sangam lore, geological uniqueness (Lemuria, uranium deposits)

Annexure II
Historical Overview of Kashi-kshetra – Tangible History

The history of Kashi-kshetra, till recently, was based on traditional accounts and literally sources, including a few epigraphs and legends on coins, seals, etc. Historians like Motichandra, while reconstructing the political and religious history of Kashi, felt that a number of hidden historical issues of Kashi can be resolved only by archaeological investigations (Motichandra, 1985 (2nd edn.)): 21, 25 & 47). In the subsequent decades to the publication of Motichandra's famous book, *Kashi ka Itihas* (Hindi), particularly in the last two decades of the present century, a good number of small and large sites have been exposed in Kashi-kshetra.

To understand the inherent characteristics of a religious place like Kashi, an in-depth

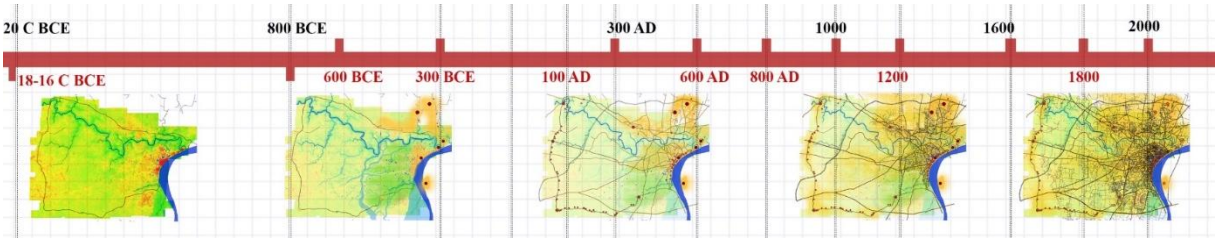

Figure 36: Timeline Evolution of Varanasi.(Source: Author)

study of folklore and pauranika mythology is essential. this source of history is not only deep rooted in the minds of people, but also has some truth behind their acceptance. The original event, of course, would get altered, elaborated, borrowed and receive religious tone, but it would have some elements of real happening. A myth, thus, evaluated with scientific way, like by application of archaeology or geology, could be a useful way to know our past.

Thus, besides determining the settlement pattern of ancient Varanasi, the objective of our studies was also focused on the historicity of such sites which have a strong mythological bias. The information collected in the process helped me frame the hypothesis of shifting settlement pattern, as well as the origin and growth of the religious landscapes in Varanasi.

The Proto-historical Period: The Early Rural Ambience

Among other rich findings from rajghat, the excavations revealed seals engraved with legend Varanasi nagar (the city of Varanasi), which helped in identifying this place as the ancient city area. The nine excavated sites-Sarnath, Aktha, Rajghat, Ramnagar, Tilmanpur, Kotwa, Asapur, Shooltankeshwar and Sarswati Udyan- have brought to light all the historical Stages-Later Vedic to the modern times, of Kashi-kshetra. Besides chronological succession, hierarchy in the settlements in terms of early villages of immigrants, the affluent villages of pre-urban stage, the cosmopolitan city, the supporting rural setups like mandi-grama, the parava-grama and the shilpi-grama, have also been identified in the excavated remains. This has certainly clarified the historical format of the region.

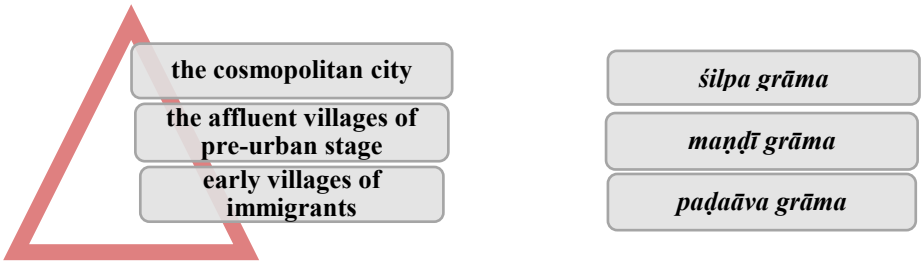

Figure 37: Characterization and settlement pattern observed in ancient Kashi.

All of these were important many ways-one that almost all the types of settlements of ancient Varanasi came into light. Significantly, in nature and hierarchy each one of these differed from the other. Also a definite successive pattern of occupation, from Varuna valley to the banks of Ganga, could be traced. Time to time shift of the nucleus of the settlement was glaring in archaeological records of Varanasi. But a fractional part-beginning and expansion of the present nucleus of the city, Pukka Mahal-remained as a 'probability' in the hypothesis explaining the settlement history of Varanasi. Excavations at Saraswati Udyan have changed this 'probability' into a 'factual happening'. Thus, it has fulfilled a much awaited historical gap. It was therefore deemed necessary to present an overview of the history of Kashi-kshetra in the light of so far excavated sites.

The archaeological records of Kashi suggest that its virgin land was occupied at least by two groups of immigrants in the second millennium BCE. Aktha and Ramnagar stand side by side as far as their antiquity is concerned (1750-1450 BCE and 1800– 1580 BCE, respectively). But the two sites differ from each other in the use of earthenwares and nature of dwellings. The Hay Impressed and Black-and-Red pottery at Ramnagar were absent. These two ceramic traditions, however, were the hallmark of Pre-NBPW horizon at Aktha. Similarly, the Black Slipped Ware, the characteristic pottery of Period I of Ramnagar, is very restricted in the contemporary remains at Aktha. Moreover, at Aktha at least remains of three floors were exposed in Period I, while at Ramnagar one thick mud wall or platform was traced in the lowest layer. The two sites, therefore, appear to represent diverse cultural communities, residing contemporary to one another in Kashi-kshetra.

The factors governing the above cultural diversity are explained by some Vedic references, pertaining to the administrative setup of villages. "The grama was probably made of little knots of houses ... of several branches of one family (kula)"., with kulapa, as the guardian governing the administration. Practically self-contained/Autonomus, the gramas were "rural in conception" ((Apte, 1996 (6th edn.)): 359), and also appear to be self-contained/Autonomus administrative units. The Pre-NBPW stage of the Middle Ganga plain in general and Kashi-kshetra in particular was characterized by diverse rural cultures. Each of these village settlements, gramas, perhaps was a small self-sufficient administrative and economic unit

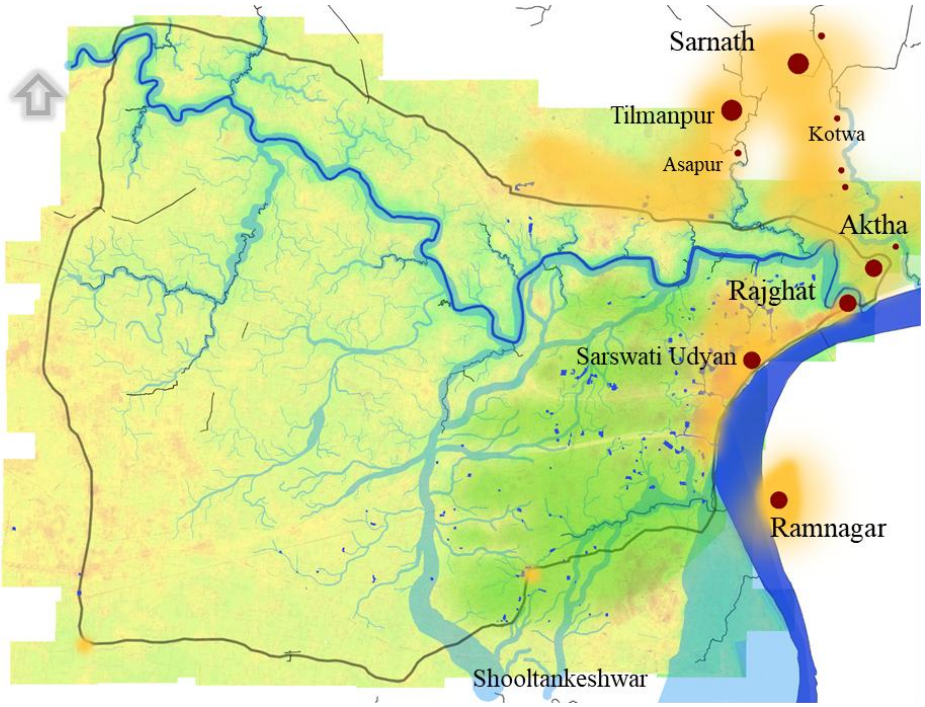

Figure 38: Map of Kashi Kshetra demarking al the excavated sites.(Source: Author)

utilizing different pots, pans and dwelling in different types of shelters.

The colonization of eastern region, between the Saraswati and the Sadanira rivers, is suggested by the story of Videgha-Mathava of the Satapatha-Brahman ((Eggeling J., 1990): 104-6), which has been used by historians as well as archaeologists. Without going into the details of this story, the plausible historical indications may be recalled here. The first and the most common application of it is to argue in favor of Aryanization of the eastern region (Uttar Pradesh and Bihar). The proposed hypothesis by Pusalkar, for instance, is that Aryan Colonization of Vindhyan-Ganga region is suggested by the above ((Pusalkar, 1996 (6th edn.)): 318). Ghosh has also quoted this story and has stated that ... "This gives a glimpse into the origin of the janapadas from their founders, conquerors and colonizers" ((Ghosh A. , 1990): 33). A change from the tribalism to the territorial rule is viewed in this example. Ghosh further states that, "It was by this process, in addition to conquests, that the chiefs of the ruling tribes organized their janapadas in the Indus-Ganga plains during the later Vedic times" ((Ghosh A. , 1990): 32). These inferences certainly accept existence of more than one tribal community in the plains of North India prior to Janapada period.

The location and archaeological findings of Aktha indicate that this was a settlement contemporary to the eastward migration of Vedic people, who were expanding habitat in the eastern plain of the river Ganga. It has been repeatedly mentioned by me that Aktha has revealed evidence for Vedic way of life in the form of routine performance of yajna-rituals and nature of shelters ((Jayaswal V. , Ancient Varanasi: An Archaeological Perspective (Excavations at Aktha), 2009) (Jayaswal V. , 2017)). Though the first settlers of Oriyaghat, Ramnagar had also migrated in Kashi- kshetra, it is not possible to identify their homeland with certainty. However, similarities in the pots of pre-NBPW phase of Atanjikhera and Ramnagar suggest the possibility of settlers of Ramnagar also coming from the west. If it was so then this migration route, perhaps, was following major river courses such as Yamuna and Ganga. And in comparison to Aktha, it was the dwellers of Oriyaghat, Ramnagar, who had greater impact on the early city of Varanasi in the following centuries.



Figure 39:Recent Excavations and findings at various Archealogical sites in-and-around Varanasi.

The early dates obtained for occupation of Aktha and Ramnagar are significant for the antiquity of Varanasi. The proposed antiquity of Varanasi before these dates was ascertained to be circa 800 BCE ((Narain, 1976): 5). But the 14C dated deposits of the earliest settlers of Varuna valley pushed back the occupational history of Kashi-kshetra to the third quarter of second millennium BCE. Almost at the same time, or perhaps a little later, the right bank of Ganga at Ramnagar too was inhabited. Therefore, the generally accepted view that the pious banks of the river Ganga witnessed the rise and growth of Varanasi city had to be altered. The findings at Aktha showed that it was not only the banks of the river Ganga, but also the valley of the river Varuna which was occupied by the first dwellers in Kashi-kshetra. If one goes by the recommendations in the literary records, the valley of the river Varuna was perhaps a more suitable habitat than the sides of the river Ganga. The reference for Varuna valley in early Vedic literature is the arogya (free of illness) region. The archaeological findings confirm this preposition.

According to the findings at Aktha, the confluence of river Varuna and Narkhoh- nala, a tributary of Varuna ((Jayaswal V. , 2001): 213), was the first colonization of Kashi- kshetra. It is further attested that the settlement history of Kashi distinctly marks shifting and expansion from the banks of Varuna to the confluence of Varuna and Ganga, and then along the left bank of Ganga between the rivers Varuna and Asi.

The Early Historical Period: Territorial Governance and Formation of City

Archeologist Amalananda Ghosh, who has stated that the "early historic period" may be taken to have commenced in around sixth century BCE. He takes this time as "the turning point for north India" as "it was dominated by royal personages and religious teachers whose historicity is not in doubt" ((Ghosh A. a., 1983): 13). The time also witnessed consolidation of political and administrative systems. The scholar- archaeologist writes, "Politically, janapadas, with fairly well-defined boundaries, had been formed, and soon a few of them grew into maha-janapadas." This was also the time for the makeup of cities, which according to him was "a major innovation of the early historical period". And Varanasi is recorded to be listed among the six great cities mentioned in the Buddhist literature ((Ghosh A. , 1990): 15-16).

The traditional historical accounts suggest two chrono-political divisions of Early Historical Period. Following the Bharat War, the states of Janapada period date between 13th/12th and seventh centuries BCE, while the age for Maha-janapadas is assessed to be seventh-fourth/third centuries BCE. The proposed time-brackets, when applied on the archaeological cultures, coincides with the remains of Pre-NBPW and NBPW periods. It may not be a mere coincidence that the existing time span of around thousand years, which is suggested by traditional historical calculations for Janapadas and Maha-janapadas, is corroborated by time-bracket assigned to the archaeological culture NBPW.

Early Period: Kashi Janapada

The Janapada and Maha-janapada horizons of Kashi-ksketra are late Pre-NBPW and NBPW culture periods (Jayaswal V. , 2018). This division would exclude the recently acquired very early dates from Period I of Aktha and Ramnagar (second millennium BCE), which were accepted to be contemporary to the Later Vedic times, and discussed above. But, the Pre-NBPW horizon of Rajghat, which is dated to 800-600 BCE, can be assigned to Janapada times. Accordingly, the recent early dates from Ayodhya and Ramnagar-1000 BCE and 1200 BCE, respectively ((Mani, 2011): 234 & (Jayaswal V. a., 2016): 67)—may also be accommodated within the proposed time-bracket of the Janapadas. It is important to note that Period I of Rajghat (800-600 BCE) marks the beginning of the culture traits of Early Historical period in the area of our study. Since no hiatus has been noticed in the horizons dated between Later Vedic and Janapada times, at Aktha and Ramnagar, and also with paucity of genetic connections of the earlier sites and the Period I of Rajghat, the occupation of the Janapada times in Kashi-kshetra appears to be an independent habitation event.

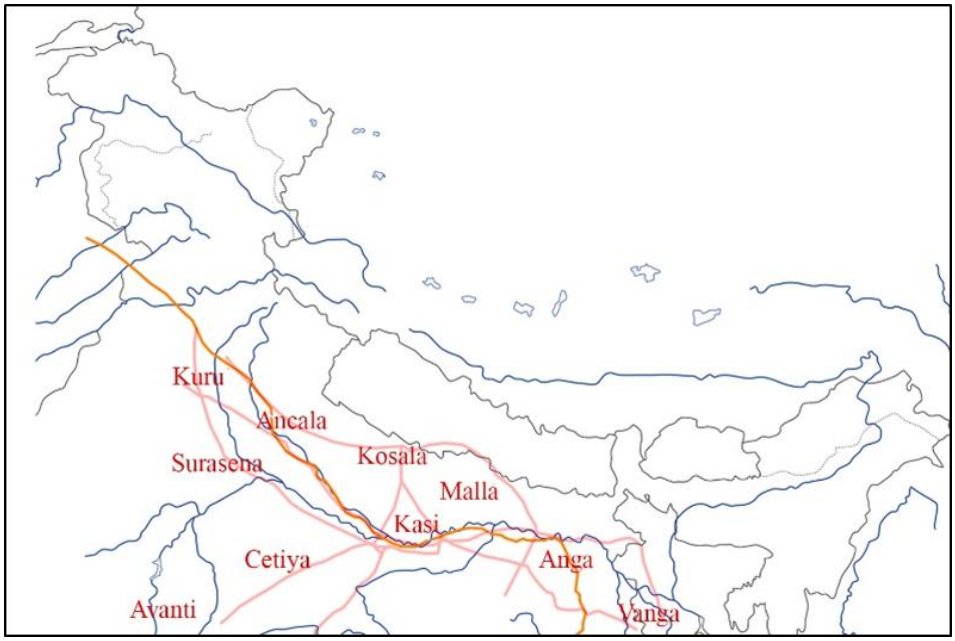

Figure 40: Map of political assimilation around middle Ganga Plain.

The first occupants of the Rajghat cleared the swampy natural surface of the triangular confluence area of Ganga and Varuna rivers in around 800 BCE ((Narain, 1976): 22), and made it habitable. They were practising advanced potting technologies, which were not utilized by their neighbours. The three main ceramic traditions-Black-and-Red, Black Slipped and Black-over-Red Wares-which they produced involved well-prepared clay, fine wheel modelling and controlled firing ((Jayaswal V. a., 2016): 21-35). The other material remains show a combination of advanced technological knowledge and simplicity in the daily utility items. As, "They used iron implements, tools of bones and large number of terracotta objects like pottery-discs (both unperforated and with single perforation), wheels, balls, ear ornaments, skin-rubber and stoppers. Among stone object, "the main categories were, balls of different sizes. Beads of terracotta, paste and bone were the other reported forms" ((Narain, 1976): 22). However, due to paucity of structural remains, the sign of established settlement in Period I of Rajghat is difficult to explain. The rural ambience established by the early settlers at this site continued for about 200 years (circa 800-600 BCE).

Urbanization: Origin of Continuum

The change from the Janapada to the Maha-janapada periods in archaeological records of Kashi-kshetra suggests continuity. The Northern Black Polished Ware, which coincides with the later socio-political stage of the Early Historical period, was characterized by the deluxe pottery NBPW. The cultural remains of this phase revealed traits of continuity with rural bias, along with urban sophistication in a few items of utility. Even then this phase did not meet most of the parameters of urbanism, which have been prescribed by the archaeologists ((Ghosh A. , 1990): 5). I have discussed this issue in my earlier publications ((Jayaswal V. , 2017) & 2018), and would like to mention that the NBPW stage of Kashi-kshetra, Period II A and II B of Rajghat (Jayaswal V. a., 2016), like other parts of Ganga plain, at most be addressed as 'proto-urban' or the affluent rural stage. This situation outlines a contrary picture, which is known from the

ancient texts. Varanasi, according to the ancient literature, for instance is described as a flourishing city during the time of Buddha and Mahavir, who were the spiritual leaders of the time of Maha-janapadas. But, this narration is not corroborated by the archaeological findings, and is difficult to resolve in the present state. After about a thousand years of colonization of Varuna valley, another village settlement was established, on the virgin left bank of the river Ganga. This was brought to light by the excavations of the site, near Kashi-station.

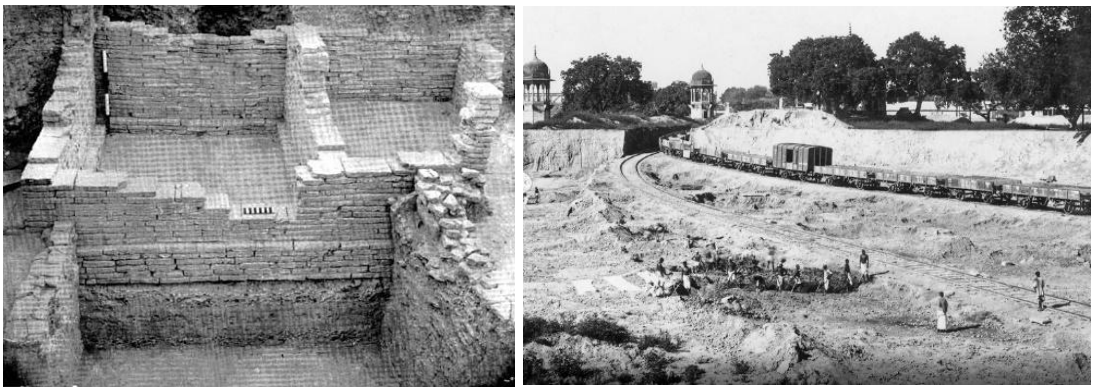

Figure 41: Early Excavations at Rajghat Varanasi.

Aktha, Rajghat and Ramnagar survived contemporary to each other for more than a thousand years (ninth century BCE-third century CE). Aktha and Ramnagar were deserted around second century CE and were finally abandoned in around third century CE. But, Rajghat continued. Chronologically and spatially this was the second stage of settlement of Kashi-kshetra, which is represented by Rajghat, Ramnagar and Aktha. The new settlement of Rajghat, which was located in a strategically selected geo- morphological unit, at the confluence of Varuna and Ganga rivers, had water channel protection at three sides and high alluvium fertile plateau like composition. It, in course of time, became the nucleus of an affluent cosmopolitan city.

Interestingly, all the three sites of the second stage underwent different historical processes. Aktha continued as a small resort and hermitage settlement and was marked by intense ritual performance of Vedic tradition. It practically had very meagre expansion of the settlement in the later period. The status of Ramnagar had changed from a small rural to an affluent craft settlement, which had excelled in potting technology and lapidary (Jayaswal V. a., 2016). Through the river Ganga it was maintaining trade relations with other settlements. Contrary to the two, Rajghat was progressing from rural to urban settlement. Destined to develop into the capital city and a trade centre, in the later times, this settlement diverted from the other two by imbibing quite a few civic traits.

Urban Ambience and Dynastic Governance: The Maurya-Sunga Period

The Post-NBPW levels are well demarcated in Kashi-kshetra. All the three major sites-Rajghat (Period III), Aktha (Period III) and Ramnagar (Period III)-where Maurya-Sunga remains have been unearthed, are dated between circa third century BCE and beginning of the CE (Jayaswal and Mani 2016: 19; Jayaswal 2009: 57 & Jayaswal et al. 2016: 68). Besides, at Sarnath and Chunar, monuments and sandstone quarries were discovered, respectively, supporting large-

scale constructions of buildings in this period (Jayaswal 1998). In archaeological findings, elements of urbanism emerge distinctively at this stage. The cosmopolitan nature of Rajghat becomes prominent around third century BCE. Inflow of population from the surrounding areas to the city has been noted by Birendra Pratap Singh, who has concluded that people from Mound 2 and Mound 3 migrated to Mound 1 during the period under consideration (Singh 1985: 35). This would suggest growth of population and expansion of the city area, which was located on Mound 1. The growth of population and extension of the settlement have been accepted as one of the important archaeological characteristics of urbanization.

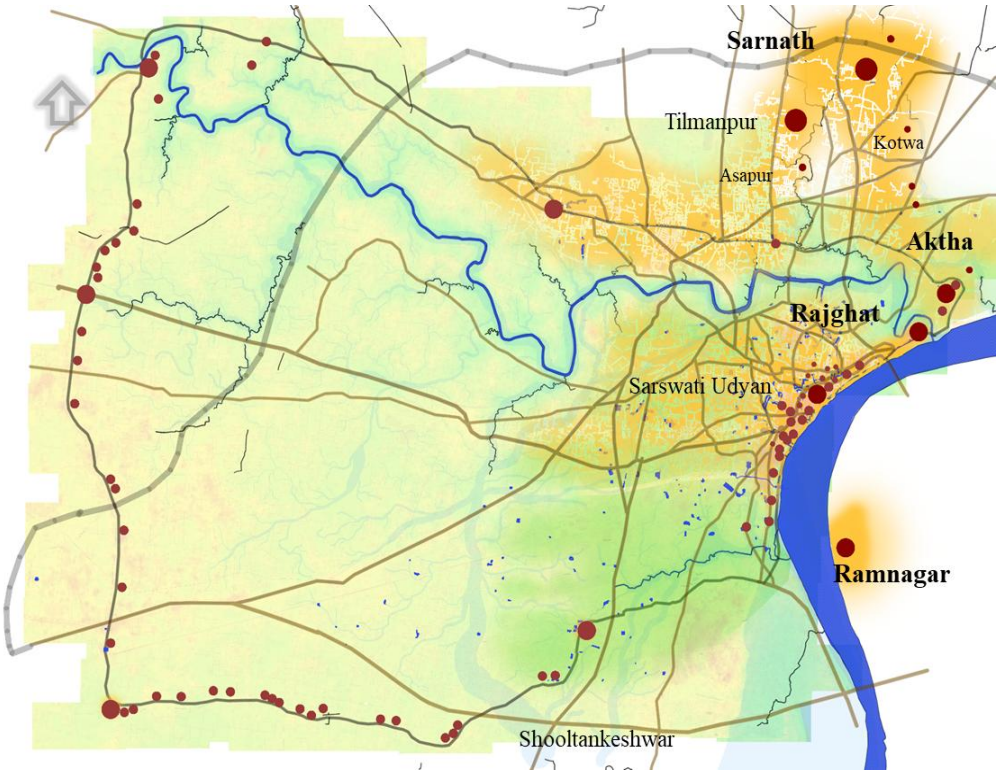

Figure 42: Map of Kashi, highlighting the important sites of Excavation.

Increase in economic affluence can also be gleaned in the satellite settlements of Kashi-kshetra during Maurya and Sunga times. As besides increase in counts, the artefacts found from Period III at Ramnagar are marked by technological improvement and craft skills. Besides, imposing construction of platforms/ embankment, along the periphery of Oriyaghat and Golaghat localities, was significant. Composed of rammed stone and burnt clay, these were overlain by compact clay heap (about 60 cm thick) and have been identified by us as protective device from the annual floods (Jayaswal et al. 2016: 213). Though much smaller in size in comparison to the fortification of the Early Historic city-sites of the Ganga plain (Jayaswal and Kumar 2012), on account of the textual references, these small settlements and villages were also fenced (Ghosh 1973: 62-63; Pande 2001: 267–8). We have, therefore, identified it as a fortification.

The Urban Peak: The Kushan Period

The most glorious period of Early Historical Kashi-kshetra in terms of material affluence and urban traits was the Kushan period. Excavations at Rajghat revealed dense cluster of

structures, small and large residences with profuse use of bricks in Period IV (Jayaswal and Mani 2016: 19). This horizon, therefore, is to be accepted as fulfilling one of the parameters of the city, which is said to be composed of dwellings of permanent nature. But the other feature of an urban centre, the well-planned layout, however, was lacking in the Kushan city of Kashi. Predominated by linear alignment, the houses flanked the lanes and the central drain of Rajghat (Singh 1985: 51). The main alignment of the city was south-north, which governed the location of the dwellings and the main drain.

In spite of strong urban bias, the planning of the settlement and architectural perfection were lacking in the ancient city of Varanasi. It was noted that the structures of the period lacked perfect right-angled corners and equal-sized arms in case of square and rectangular structures. The bricks also likewise were not uniform in size. The author had noticed this feature also at other Kushan sites (Jayaswal and Kumar 2012: 306-308). The reason for imperfect geometry was the method of measurement of the time, i.e. parts of human body were taken to be measuring scale during Kushan times as has been suggested by Lal (Lal 1993: 41-43). This system was also followed subsequently in the Gupta period.

River Ganga had played a vital role in the trade activities of Kushan period. As a result of which, the Pre-Kushan settlements received boost and new settlements were also established. This scenario of Ganga plain may be gleaned clearly in Kashi- kshetra. At Ramnagar, Kushan deposits are marked by brick structures. As was mentioned earlier, this settlement had the status of a mandi-grama in Maurya-Sunga times. In Kushan period it was the production centre of semi-precious beads, and was also an active centre of weaving, as is indicated by a large number of springer whorls (areca-nut shaped terracotta beads). Ramnagar during Kushan times was perhaps exporting stone beads and textiles, and was importing "objects of shell (conch- shell), copper and glass" (Jayaswal et al. 2016: 291).

The marked increase in the river route trade during Kushan times is also attested by establishment of new parava-settlements on its bank. One of it was located on the right bank of the river Ganga at Shooltankeshwar. While describing the findings from this site, it was mentioned above that Shooltankeshwar was a single culture Occupation on the river side. It co-existed with the intensive water route trade of Kushan times. After Kushan period, when long-distance trade received a setback, small resort settlements like Shooltankeshwar were abandoned.

Decline in trade was perhaps one of the strongest reasons for the desertion of flourishing trade centres like Rajghat. Along with the cosmopolitan, some of its supporting settlements, particularly the ones on the trade routes like Aktha, Tilmanpur and Ramnagar also lost their significance and were ultimately abandoned, before Gupta period.

Shift of the City and the New Locality: Late-Post Kushan Period

The break in the continuity of settlements of Kashi-kshetra between Kushan and Gupta periods is glaring. As was also mentioned above, the non-urban settlements of this region were abandoned. In the city area also, paucity of structural activities was recorded. The exception to this situation was Sarnath and its peripheral supporting crafts villages, which flourished between Kushan and Medieval periods (Jayaswal 2016). The north-east of Ganga, which nurtured

Buddhist landscape from Maha- janapada times to the 12th century, had different socio-political parameters than that of the other parts of Kashi-kshetra. The later had direct influence of changing politico- economic systems. The stages in the growth of settlements and the urbanization of the Early Historical times discussed above clearly suggest this tendency. The growth of the city of Varanasi from the Mauryan period and its becoming an important trade centre during Kushan times suggests hand-glove relationship of imperial governance and growth of Early Historical cities and trade centres. The de- urbanization, if there was one, in Kashi-kshetra, thus has to be viewed in the light of socio-political background of Post-Kushan and Early Gupta times.

Among the Naga lineage, the Bharashiva Nagas are though less known, they appear to have contributed significantly to the religious and cultural history of Varanasi. Residents of Padmavati, the Bharashiva Nagas, are recorded to have sprinkled water of Bhagirathi after obtaining the region by their valour. Vakataka inscriptions, which record socio-political status of Bharashivas, mention that the king of Bharashiva dynasty was created by Shiva, "who was greatly pleased by (their) carrying the linga of Siva like a load placed on (their) shoulder" (Mirashi 1963: 13- 14). On account of Bhavanaga being the maternal grandfather of Rudrasena I, a contemporary to the Gupta king Chandragupta I (376-414 CE), he has been placed in the end of the fourth or the beginning of the fifth century CE. Accordingly, the Bharashiva rule in Kashi could also perhaps be pushed back by a century or so. Bharashiva Naga, preceding the imperial Gupta rulers, of fourth century CE onwards, in Varanasi can also be felt in the culture of this old city as this date can logically be found corroborating the abandoned archaeological horizons of the Post-Kushan times. Being staunch Shiva devotee, it was patronage of Bharashivas which paved the floor for Shaivism in this holy city (Jayaswal 2011: 130-132). Desertion of such sites like Aktha (identified as Rishipattan earlier), around the same time (third century CE) may indicate that the small settlements near the Buddhist pilgrimage had also lost their identity around the same time.

The third shift of the nucleus of Varanasi settlement from Rajghat to Pukka Mahal provided space for expansion of the old city. The east of the old city had the barrier of river Varuna, which had stopped its extension to further east of Rajghat. Thus, the west of the old city along the bank of the river Ganga was the preferred space for extension. The area for Varanasi city specified in ancient texts, such as the Jatakas, is the left bank of river Ganga lying between the rivers Varuna (east) and Asi (west). Needless to mention that even if one goes by this specification, it may not be logical to accept that the city area after shifting towards Dashashvmedha-ghat kept expanding up to the side of Asi river, in one go.

The New City: Gupta-Post-Gupta Times

Empowerment of Kashi under the Gupta period may clearly be seen from the time of Kumargupta (413-45 CE) and Skandhagupta (455-467 CE), when monumental constructions and icons were donated at Sarnath (Jayaswal 2016: 136–142). Motichandra and other historians also include Bhitari, the Gupta temple site of Gazipur under Kashi (Motichandra 1962: 83). The peaceful reign of Kumargupta contributed to the development of temple architecture, as well as iconography of Buddha and other deities. Traces of destruction to monuments by Huna invasion

(456 CE) were noticed in the ruins of Sarnath (Jayaswal 2015: 114). What impact of destruction was received by the city of Varanasi is difficult to assess, as the debris of buildings were reused subsequently, from time to time in succession, particularly in the Pukka Mahal area. The main events and the archaeological recordings shall be mentioned below. But the rule of Skandhagupta witnessed rebuilding of temples, as is clear at Bhitari. After Skandhagupta, the power of the Gupta dynasty went down the hills, but Kashi was under its sway. Epigraphs of Kumargupta II (473–477 CE) and Buddhagupta (477-500 CE) found from the region are testimony to this. Lastly, the rule of Vaingupta and Bhanugupta in Kashi suggests Gupta governance in this province up to 544 CE (Motichandra 1985: 83-84). It is known from the donation records that the Gupta kings had contributed to more than one religions of Kashi as they had made offerings of structures and icons to Buddhist settlements at Sarnath. Seeing their faith in Vaishnavism and Shaivism, it is logical to assume that some Shaiva and Vaishnava temples were also made here. Today no distinct monument of the time is identifiable, but fragments of carvings in Gupta idiom are found in various parts of Pukka Mahal.

At Pukka Mahal, Gupta and Post-Gupta horizons were identified in the deposits of Period III, which was divided into two phases, A and B. The early phase, Period III A, which was associated with Layers 13 and 12, was characterized by classical Gupta features. While, the Pala-Pratihar living floors (Layers 10 and 9) of Period III superimposing Layer 11, in which there was scarcity of artefacts. It was mentioned in this report, earlier, that remains of Structure Complex-2 were traced in Layer 12, which was lying over the large masonry of Period II. The nature of this masonry was close to the Gupta structures of Bhitari. Floor-XIV was the first occupation level of Period III, which was large and 10 cm thick. It was constructed after levelling the earlier structure. This appears to be a large structure complex, as its enclosure walls were located beyond the area of our excavated trenches. Reminiscent of this structure (Structure Complex-2) is datable to Gupta period. Also the fragments of earthen utensils buried in the deposits of Period III A were marked by classical Gupta features and compared closely with pottery from Bhitari. The main forms noted were steep-sided bowls (parai), carinated vase (handi), surahi and other storage vessels.

In seventh century CE when the Chinese traveller visited the city, it was almost like the Pukka Mahal locality of today. From there he went to Mrigadaya (Sarnath). I am inclined to accept that the modern nucleus of the city of Varanasi had not changed much from the Gupta times. The general layout of the area with numerous narrow and broad lanes strewed with shops of crafts, handloom and utility items, along with dwellings of merchants, traders and inhabitants does have resemblance with the Gupta city. The foundation of Varanasi in and around Pukka Mahal was laid during the post-Kushan/Gupta period (after the shift from Rajghat), which developed over the centuries more or less on the same pattern, each lane famous for one category of utility items, and a number of deities in worship in shrines.

Expansion of Varanasi: The Pala-Pratihar Times

Kashi region experienced governance of a number of dynasties during eighth to 10th centuries. Deter with political changes, the nucleus of the city area became dense and also expanded. Most of the cultural features which the city imbibed from the diverse administrative

systems remain indistinct in the archaeological records of today. For example, the Later Gupta and Maukhari rule neither is culturally nor archaeologically well demarcated in Kashi. So was the case of political history of the region after the Maukharies. Altekar has concluded that after the decline of Later Gupta power, Varanasi was ruled for some time by Yashovarma of Kanauj (Altekar 1935: 65-66). He has further stated that the "History of Benares during the interval between the overthrow of Yashovarman (c. 735 A.D.) and the rise of Dharmapala of Bengal (c. 760 A.D.) is obscure". Kashi was perhaps part of Pala kingdom in the last quarter of eighth century CE. While around middle of the ninth to the end of 10th centuries CE, Kashi was governed by Pratihara dynasty. Also for a brief s 950 and 1000 CE, it was empowered by the Chandel king Dhang (Motichandra 1985: span, between 84). The Pala-Pratihar period though was a time of struggle for supremacy between the main dynasties of north and Deccan, yet it is known to have contributed to the contemporary culture in terms of building religious monuments and stone craft.

Despite change of governance from one to the other ruler of eighth to 10th centuries, the density and format of Pukka-Mahal area appear to have intensified on the lines of the Gupta and Post-Gupta settlement. The possibility of expansion of the city area though cannot be ascertained on firmer grounds, it is suggestive by the literary accounts of construction of temples, and existence of rich markets in the city.

Varanasi of The Medieval Times

The 11th and 12th centuries of our Common Era were eventful for the city of Varanasi. Passing from one to the other prominent rulers of north India, the city was attracting invaders and at the same time builders, who were eager to restore its glory and religious reputation. The Kalchuris of Tripura are recorded to be ruling the city, after subjugating it in the 11th century. Gangeyadeva of the dynasty had issued coins especially for circulation in Varanasi, as is suggested from the legend Varanasi pdyankit dramma on his gold coins (Motichandra 1985: 102). Significantly, an in situ gold coin with the name of the same king and date prior to 1034 CE was found from the Layer- 6 of Trench B1, lying over a bari-plastered floor (FL-X) at Saraswati Udyan (Pl. CXVIII). The dense format of the city was archaeologically intact during his rule. But, the later part of his regime was disturbed by Turk invasion. Ahmad Niyal Tigan is recorded to invade this city in 1033, and his soldiers looted rich markets of jewellery, perfume and textile. Karna, his son, ascended the throne of Tripuri after him (1038– 1041 CE), whose rule over Varanasi was of a long duration (till 1072 CE). Prabandhachintamani refers to him as Varanasi adhipati (Motichandra 1985: 107), and also endorses the recording of Jabalpur copper plate inscription, that he had constructed temple of Karnameru in Varanasi. He appears to have lost his hold on Varanasi in the later part of his reign.

By 12th century, the political stability of north India was disturbed considerably by invasions of Mohammad of Ghazni, and later by Mohammad of Ghor. Gahadawal king Chandradeva tried to restore the political stability in Gangetic plain by expanding his empire. With Kanauj, Varanasi was also subjugated into the Gahadawal empire. Altekar has noted, "Benares, however, continued to be the secondary capital of the Gahadwalas throughout their rule; ... Being the favourite place of residence of the Gahadwal kings Benares must have

prospered immensely in the 12th century A.D." (Altekar 1937: 22). But, in 1194 CE, after Kanuaj, the capital of Gahadawal kingdom, was conquered by Mohammad of Ghor, his general Kutub-ud-din Aibak captured the city of Varanasi. It is said that he destroyed "... a thousand temples of Benares..., and over their ruins masjids were built" (Altekar 1937: 22). Altekar categorically states that "... Hindu rule over Benares came to an end practically from 1194 A.D." (Altekar 1937: 23).

Varanasi of The Mughal Times

The recording of the historians that "... Hindu rule over Benares came to an end practically from 1194" (Altekar 1937: 69) suggests a severe blow to the growth of Varanasi city. After Jaychandra, the Gahadawal glory in Varanasi declined. Reused parts of earlier temples may be seen in many masjids of the city even today (Motichandra 1985: 149).

This stage of destruction, however, was well represented in the excavations of Pukka Mahal, remains of floors or structures, in the deposits of Period V, post 12th century. In the antiquity, occurrence of two copper coins of Akbar I indicates that after the destruction of religious buildings, which might have been in very large quantity in this locality, the debris were used for filling the digs and levelling the grounds. As a result, a large amount of stone blocks, carved and dressed, was found from Layers 3 and 2. As mentioned above, embedded in these were carvings of all the preceding periods-Gupta to the Gahadawala times.

But even after this devastating stage of destruction, the locality does not seem to be under occupation of Mohammadan population as no utility item associated with them was found in the excavations. Glazed Ware, which was found at Rajghat in good number, and use of lakhauri bricks were conspicuous by their absence in Pukka Mahal. However, circulation of damri, the copper coin of Akbar, does suggest acceptance of Mughal socio-economic systems by the inhabitants of Varanasi city in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The uppermost constructional activities at Pukka Mahal could be assigned to the British period. In the structures of this time, earlier material stone blocks were re- used. Also noteworthy were bricks (marked with English alphabet) and concrete floors.

Annexure III

Avimukta-Kṣetra of Kāśī (Varanasi): A Sacred Geocultural Landscape

The term 'Avimukta-Kṣetra' occupies a central place in the religious, mythological, and urban-cultural identity of the ancient city of Kāśī (Varanasi). Literally meaning "the region that is never forsaken," *Avimukta* implies a perpetual divine presence—a spiritual geography where Śiva eternally resides, refusing to abandon the sacred landscape even during cosmic dissolution (*pralaya*). This theological premise elevates Kāśī not only as a religious center but also as a symbol of immortality, sacred continuity, and divine urbanity.

Paurāṇika References and Sacred Boundaries

The concept of Avimukta-Kṣetra finds its earliest and most profound mention in Paurāṇika texts, including the *Matsya Purāṇa*, *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, and *Vāmana Purāṇa*. According to *Matsya Purāṇa* (Varanasi Māhātmya, CLXXX.54), Lord Śiva proclaims that he has never left and will never abandon Kāśī, establishing it as his permanent abode. Further, in CLXXXIII.7-9, Śiva explicitly states his presence in the form of the liṅga at this site, affirming the spatial sanctity of the region through the presence of numerous Śiva-liṅgas radiating around the central *Maha-liṅga*—the one enshrined in the sanctum of the Viśvanātha Temple, situated in the heart of the Avimukta region.

According to the *Matsya Purāṇa*, the geographical extent of Avimukta-Kṣetra is given as half a yojana (approximately 4–5 miles / 6.5–8 km) north–south and two yojanas (8–10 miles / 12.8–16 km) east–west, running parallel along the Ganga River. This roughly corresponds to the area between the Asi and Varuṇā rivers, forming the traditional sacred boundary of Varanasi, also cited in *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* and inferred by early scholars like Sherring (1990) and Singh (1997).

Diana Eck's mapping of sacred zones in Varanasi further affirms this cosmogram. She places Avimukta-Kṣetra centrally between Daśāśvamedha Ghat and Maṇikarṇikā Ghat, with the Viśvanātha temple complex (Gyanvapi area) at its core. This mapping not only coincides with the Paurāṇika descriptions but also reflects the deep integration of myth, topography, and ritual praxis in the spatial consciousness of Kāśī.

Gyanvapi and the Myth of the Sacred Pond

At the spiritual epicenter of Avimukta-Kṣetra lies Gyanvapi (lit. 'Well of Knowledge'), a site that epitomizes the intersection of myth, geomorphology, and urban memory. As narrated in *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* (Tripathi 1992: 263–269), during a great drought in Satya Yuga, the guardian deity Iśāna, seeking to bathe the *Maha-liṅga*, dug a pond with his trident, thereby releasing abundant water. Pleased with this act, Śiva bestowed upon the site the title of Jñāna-Vāpi—a symbolic synthesis of divine knowledge (*jñāna*) and the sacred waterbody (*vāpi*). This myth serves as an allegorical narrative layered upon geomorphic realities.

Geo-Mythological and Geomorphological Foundations

Scientific studies in geomorphology and paleo-hydrology support the possibility of a large natural water body existing in the Gyanvapi region. The word 'vāpi', as noted, denotes an artificial or natural pond, and the low-lying topography of the present-day Viśvanātha temple precincts—almost 10 meters below its surroundings—points to a former depression or water catchment area.

Scholars like Shukla (2013) and Raju & Pandey (2013) have demonstrated that Varanasi developed on older Ganga floodplains, punctuated with numerous palaeo-channels, ponds, and natural tanks, formed as the Ganga meandered and shifted over millennia (between 40,000 and 7,000 years BP).

The gradual stabilization of the Ganga's channel, after levee formations around 7000 BP, led to a phase of vertical incision and the abandonment of previous channels—leaving behind a landscape embedded with residual ponds and nalas, many of which persisted into historical times. Sites such as Ramnagar, Oriyaghat, and Saraswati Udyan (where Gyanvapi is located) fall into this category. Archaeological findings at Oriyaghat (Jayaswal et al. 2016) demonstrate settlements developing over dried-up pond beds dating to around 1750 BCE, suggesting that Gyanvapi may have undergone a similar trajectory of natural formation, desiccation, and eventual habitation.

Drought Narratives and Historical Corroboration

The myth of Iśāna digging the vapi during a drought aligns with geological and historical evidence of climatic variability in the Ganga plains. *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* (39:26–42) describes a sixty-year drought that forced migration from Kāśī to caves and coasts. Corroborative epigraphic evidence from the Sahgaura copper plate and Mahasthan stone inscription documents administrative measures for famine relief during Mauryan or pre-Mauryan times (c. 300–200 BCE). Further, Indra Bir Singh's (2005) paleoenvironmental studies identify a significant dry phase between 200 BCE and 200 CE, coinciding with the decline of monsoon intensity and shrinking of lakes in the region.

Thus, it is plausible that the original natural pond at Gyanvapi dried up during these droughts, and was manually deepened or re-excavated, later being sacralized through Paurāṇika narratives in the Kushan or Gupta period, when mythic codification of sacred geographies flourished.

Synthesis of Sacred Geography and Archaeological Record

In the Avimukta-Kṣetra, the convergence of natural topography, hydrological features, and mythic imagination has yielded a deeply symbolic sacred geography. The presence of numerous Śiva-liṅgas, the dominance of Viśvanātha as the Maha-liṅga, the existence of Jñāna-Vāpi, and the centrality of Gyanvapi-Saraswati Udyan in the sacred cartography of Kāśī reflect a tīrtha-centric urban system—one where cosmology, ecology, and community memory are intricately entwined.

Moreover, the scientific validation of many mythological motifs—like the creation of vapis during drought, movement of the Ganga, and formation of elevated ridges—gives credence to the hypothesis that Paurāṇika narratives encode ecological memory, offering resilient cultural responses to environmental change.

Kardameshwar Mahadev Temple, Varanasi: A Holistic Study of Sacred Heritage, Landscape, and Community Traditions

Varanasi, or Kashi, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, often described as "older than history." The Kardameshwar Mahadev Temple, located near Kandwa, holds a significant place in the sacred geography of Kashi Mandala. It is among the few surviving pre-Mughal temples in Varanasi, believed to date back to the 10th century CE under the Gurjara-Pratihara rule, with earlier iconographic remains suggesting even older origins (Sherring, 1868; Singh R.P., 2018).

The temple's location along the sacred Panchkroshi Yatra route and its mythological association with Sage Kardama, Devahuti, and Kapila Muni make it both a pilgrimage destination and a site of cosmological importance. Its ecological surroundings, including Kardam Kunda and Kandawa Pokhara, support the local Prajapati (potter) and Yadav (cattle-rearing) communities, who have historically sustained and been sustained by the temple.

2. Mythological and Cosmological Significance

According to the Bhagavata Purana, Kardama Muni was one of the mind-born sons (manasaputra) of Lord Brahma, associated with the propagation of life on earth. His story with Devahuti and their son Kapila Muni—incarnation of Lord Vishnu and founder of the Sankhya philosophy—is central to the temple's religious significance. The Bindu Sarovar (Kardam Kunda) is believed to have formed from Kardama's tear of joy upon receiving Vishnu's blessing.

The temple, by its location and tradition, represents the Pṛthvī Tattva (Earth Element) of the Paṃcatattva system—reflecting the philosophical correspondence between cosmic elements and sacred geography in Hindu cosmology (KR, 1957).

3. Sacred Geography and Pilgrimage: The Panchkroshi Yatra

The Panchkroshi Yatra, an 83.5 km circumambulatory pilgrimage route around Varanasi, includes Kardameshwar as its first halt. Pilgrims begin the journey from Kashi Vishvanath, taking a vow (sankalpa) and proceeding to five sacred halts—Kardameshwar, Bhīmchandi, Rameshwaram, Shivpur, and Kapildhara—each with associated temples, kundas, and dharmashalas (Singh R.P., 2002; Goyal, 2016). The Yatra symbolizes a cosmic mandala and spiritual purification process, often equated with liberation from sins (Singh & Haigh, 2015).

4. Architectural History and Conservation Layers

The existing structure of Kardameshwar Mahadev Temple presents a mosaic of architectural layers:

- Gupta to Pratihara Period: Early fragments (CE 4th–6th centuries) suggest the region's ritual significance.
- Gahadavala Dynasty (12th Century CE): The main shikhara and mandapa were constructed or reconstructed.
- 18th Century: Repairs under local patrons, including Rani Bhawani of Bengal.
- Later Additions: Ardhamandapa (porch) and other structural components added using reused temple fragments (Tripathi, 1962–63).

The lingam is unique—flatter in form, with suggestions of a Hari-Hara symbolism, combining Shiva and Vishnu iconography. The temple also features carvings of multiple deities and Jain symbols, indicating an inclusive sacred space (Singh R.P., 2018).

5. Ecological Setting and Settlement Evolution

The temple is situated on a natural high mound surrounded by low-lying water catchments forming Kardam Kunda, Kandawa Pokhara, and associated streams—part of the Assi river system. The alluvial soil here, rich in fine silt and iron, supports pottery-making, providing essential livelihood resources to the Prajapati community.

However, recent urban development, including elevated roads and residential encroachments, has disrupted the natural hydrological connectivity between the kundas, causing stagnation, waterlogging, and ecological stress.

6. Interdependent Traditional Practices and Communities

Four primary communities have historically coexisted around the temple:

- Brahmins: Custodians and priests of the temple; perform rituals and manage temple duties in a rotational system.
- Prajapatis (Kumhars): Traditional potters who depend on the temple's sacred ponds for clay and produce ritual vessels.
- Yadavs (Gujjars): Cattle-rearers who provide cow dung cakes for pottery baking and use the ponds for cattle maintenance.
- Malis: Flower sellers who provide garlands and offerings for temple rituals.

This mutual dependency between temple, resource, and livelihood constitutes a resilient, community-driven model of cultural sustainability.

7. Contemporary Threats and Sustainability Challenges

While the temple continues to thrive as a pilgrimage center, several challenges have emerged:

- Disrupted Water Flow: Urban embankments have blocked traditional stream paths.
- Encroachment: Settlement expansion into the low-lying water-fed areas.
- Heritage Dilution: Community rituals and skills are being commodified or marginalized.
- Cultural Erosion: Younger generations are migrating away from traditional crafts and seva traditions.

8. Realizing a Sustainability Perspective

The Kardameshwar precinct offers a model for integrated heritage conservation:

- Temple and Community must be seen as a single living heritage unit.
- Sacred Landscape planning must be prioritized, ensuring ecological restoration of kundas and streams.

- Traditional Knowledge Systems should be documented and revived via educational and training initiatives.
- Cultural Economy can be sustained by empowering local craftspeople—not by tourism alone, but by heritage-linked livelihoods and policies.

The temple's cognitive image—as preserved in the beliefs, rituals, and memories of the community—is its most powerful asset for future planning. Reviving this sacred ecosystem with a cosmic vision of human-nature-spirit interconnectedness is imperative for authentic and inclusive heritage development.

The Kardameshwar Mahadev Temple is not just a religious monument—it is a living, evolving ecosystem where sacred geography, myth, community livelihood, and environmental balance intersect. Its intangible heritage—rituals, community practices, and belief systems—is inseparable from its tangible architecture and ecology. Preserving this heritage demands a holistic, participatory, and place-based approach that bridges ancient wisdom with contemporary sustainable planning. The temple offers not only spiritual insight but also a template for resilience, deeply rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems and dhārmika ecology.

Ramnagar Fort, Varanasi: An Integrated Study of History, Architecture, Landscape, and Cultural Heritage

Ramnagar Fort, situated on the eastern bank of the River Ganga opposite the Ghats of Varanasi, was built by Kashi Naresh Raja Balwant Singh in 1750 CE. Although an inscription suggests an earlier 17th-century presence, the fort represents the later consolidation of regional Hindu princely power in response to shifting political and cultural currents. Located approximately 14 km from central Varanasi and 2 km from Banaras Hindu University, the fort stands on a naturally elevated Kaimur sandstone mound, ensuring protection from floodwaters and offering strategic defense potential. It continues to serve as the official residence of the Kashi Naresh—the hereditary religious and cultural head of Kashi (Varanasi).

2. Geographical Setting and Geological Foundations

Location and Topography

Ramnagar lies at an elevation of ~64 meters AMSL, with Varanasi proper on the opposite western bank standing about 16 meters higher. The town occupies the eastern segment of the Ganga floodplain and is influenced by Vindhyan geological formations. The general slope of the region trends west to east, facilitating the flow and meandering of the Ganga and development of palaeochannels, backswamps, and fluvial landforms.

Lithology and Stratigraphy

Ramnagar sits on the Upper Proterozoic Vindhyan Supergroup, specifically the Kaimur Group—comprising grey-to-white buff sandstone often capped by laterite or bauxite. These hard, compact sandstones provided a stable foundation for the fort. Overlying this base are Quaternary alluviums (older and newer) that form the Indo-Gangetic alluvial plain. Table I summarizes the geological succession of the Varanasi region.

3. Architectural Typology and Colonial Influence

Fortification and Construction

Built from cream-colored Chunar sandstone, the Ramnagar Fort exhibits a hybrid architectural vocabulary blending Rajput militaristic planning with colonial-style aesthetic elements. The layout includes:

- **High fortified walls**
- **Carved balconies and jharokhas**
- **Multi-storied pavilions**
- **Open courtyards and ceremonial gateways**

Its **Panch Ratna-style entrance** (Lal Darwaza) and colonial design motifs (seen in two white towers) reflect the evolving artistic patronage of the Kashi royalty. The fort occupies ~6 km × 3.5 km area on the flood-resistant rock outcrop. Fig II(b) & (d) highlight the strategic importance of this location, with natural protection from the Ganga on the west and south.

Gateways and Insignia

- **Lal Darwaza (East)**: Principal entrance

- **Jhanda Dwar**: Flag gateway where the royal flag is hoisted in the presence of the Kashi Naresh
- **Western Gateway**: Faces the Ganga
- **Inscription Panels**: One wall mentions the 17th-century fortification; another describes the "fortified house of Raja of Benaras with his state boat."

4. Religious, Cultural, and Educational Significance

Temples and Ritual Spaces

Within the fort premises lie several temples of deep religious value:

- **Vyas Temple**: Associated with Sage Ved Vyasa, it is believed to be the site where the Mahābhārata was composed.
- **Hanuman Temple**: Opens to the public during Ashwin Purnima.
- **Vishnu and Durga Temples**: Located in the north and central precincts.

These sacred sites are open to public pilgrimage only on specific occasions and represent a unique continuity of ritual space within a fortified political domain.

Festivals and Ritual Events

Under the royal patronage of the Kashi Naresh, several culturally significant events are conducted:

- **Ramlila of Ramnagar**: A month-long re-enactment of the Ramayana performed across the township, culminating at the fort.
- **Rajmangal Boat Procession**: From Assi Ghat to the fort, celebrated in grand style.
- **Vyas Temple Rituals**: Celebrated during the Māgha month (Jan–Feb).

5. Museum and Manuscript Collections: Saraswati Bhawan

The **Saraswati Bhawan**, once the Darbar Hall, now functions as a museum and library showcasing an extensive collection of royal, religious, and cultural artifacts. Key objects include:

- **Manuscripts**: Including a rare original copy of the *Ramcharitmanas* by Tulsidas
- **Armory**: Swords, guns from Africa, Burma, and Japan
- **Palanquins**: Ornate royal palkis, some shaped like lotus flowers
- **Astronomical Clock**: Built by court astrologer Mulchand Sharma in 1872 CE
- **Vintage Cars and Costumes**: Reflecting colonial and regal lifestyle

This museum is not merely a display space but a repository of the historical memory of the Kashi royal lineage and Hindu scholasticism.

6. Archaeological Significance and Urban Continuity

Archaeological investigations at Ramnagar and nearby Aktha have uncovered evidence of continuous settlement since 1800 BCE, predating even the early urban phase of Kashi. Artifacts

include terracotta figurines, pottery shards, and early iron tools. These finds reinforce Ramnagar's importance not only as a cultural extension of Kashi but as an ancient settlement in its own right.

7. Urban Relationship with Varanasi and the Ganga River

Ramnagar's position on the right bank of the Ganga—opposite the sacred ghats of Varanasi—establishes a cosmic duality: the spiritual sacredness of Kashi and the royal-cultural sanctity of Ramnagar. The fort, aligned with geomorphological features like river meanders and flood basins, forms a natural amphitheater for cultural performances and pilgrimage spectacles, especially during festivals.

8. Conclusion: Heritage Management and Preservation Needs

Ramnagar Fort is a living heritage precinct, integrating fortification, ritual, education, and cultural patronage. Its archaeological substratum, architectural layers, and religious functions make it a unique typology of fortified Hindu princely residence. However, there is an urgent need for:

- Conservation of fragile sandstone masonry
- Hydrological studies to manage rising flood threats
- Digital documentation of manuscripts and museum artifacts
- Heritage-sensitive tourism policies that center the local community and Kashi Naresh traditions

This heritage landscape must not be reduced to a tourist spectacle but should be preserved as a functional sacred-cultural system, reflective of India's plural history and dhārmika continuity.

Annexure IV

Questionnaire for Public Survey

Title:

Public Perception and Community Engagement in Tīrtha-Centric Urban Development in Varanasi and Pañcakrośī Region

Type:

Semi-Structured Public Survey Questionnaire

Purpose:

To assess the lived understanding, involvement, and perception of local residents, communities, stakeholders, and pilgrims concerning the tīrtha sites in Varanasi and their role in heritage sustenance, inspired by the Paurāṇika narratives.

SECTION A: RESPONDENT PROFILE

1. **Name (optional):**
2. **Age:**
3. **Gender:**
4. **Occupation:**
5. **Residential status:**
    - ☐ Local resident
    - ☐ Temporary resident
    - ☐ Visitor/Pilgrim
    - ☐ Shopkeeper/Business Owner
    - ☐ Temple Sevā / Priest
6. **Years of association with this tīrtha/locality:**
7. **Are you aware of the Paurāṇika narrative associated with this tīrtha?**
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ Somewhat

SECTION B: PAURĀṆIKA AWARENESS & CULTURAL ASSOCIATION

8. **What name do you locally use for this tīrtha site?**
9. **Do you or your family participate in rituals at this site?**
    - ☐ Regularly
    - ☐ Occasionally
    - ☐ During festivals only
    - ☐ Never

10. **Can you share the story or significance you've heard about this place?** *(Open-ended)*
11. **How did you first learn about the tīrtha's Paurāṇika relevance?**
    - ☐ Oral traditions (elders, community)
    - ☐ Religious texts
    - ☐ Priests / Temple custodians
    - ☐ Tourist/Pilgrim guides
    - ☐ Personal exploration
12. **Do you believe these tīrthas still hold spiritual power and importance today?** Why or why not? *(Open-ended)*

SECTION C: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND HERITAGE ROLE

13. **Have you or your community ever contributed to the upkeep or development of this tīrtha?**
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
    - If yes, in what ways? *(Open-ended)*
14. **Are there any community-led traditions or festivals connected to this tīrtha?**
15. **How do you see the role of your community in maintaining these sacred spaces?** *(Open-ended)*
16. **Do you think the present generation is aware of and involved in tīrtha-based traditions?**
    - ☐ Actively
    - ☐ Passively
    - ☐ Not much
    - ☐ Losing interest

SECTION D: DEVELOPMENT PERCEPTION AND EXPECTATIONS

17. **Have there been recent changes or developments around this tīrtha site (infrastructure, beautification, access, etc.)?**
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ Not Sure
18. **Do you feel these developments are in harmony with the sacred and historical nature of this site?** *(Open-ended)*
19. **What do you think should be the priority for developing tīrtha sites?**
    - ☐ Better infrastructure
    - ☐ Cleanliness and maintenance
    - ☐ Community participation
    - ☐ Promotion of local rituals
    - ☐ Preservation of heritage architecture

20. **Who, in your opinion, should be primarily responsible for the upkeep of these tīrthas?**
    - ☐ Local residents/community
    - ☐ Government authorities
    - ☐ Religious trusts
    - ☐ Joint efforts
21. **Do you support initiatives that integrate ancient Paurāṇika significance with modern urban development?** Why or why not? *(Open-ended)*

SECTION E: PILGRIMAGE EXPERIENCE (For Visitors/Pilgrims)

22. What inspired you to visit this tīrtha site?
23. Do you visit during any specific yātrā (e.g., Pañcakrośī, Antargṛhī)?
24. How do you perceive the spiritual atmosphere of this site? *(Open-ended)*
25. Which tīrtha place you have visited any recent (previous or next planned)?
26. Do you think your pilgrimage experience is enhanced by the presence of local traditions and stories?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ Not sure

SECTION F: REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS (Open-ended)

26. In your opinion, how are the sacred narratives, community life, and space connected in Varanasi?
27. Do you think these sacred sites can help build a sustainable and value-based urban future? How?
28. Any suggestions you'd like to share for better preservation and integration of tīrtha heritage in today's time?

29.

Annexure V-A
SmartISM Report for non-Tirtha site

SmartISM: Smart Interpretive Structural Modeling

	SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.	SA6 Heritage Signage	SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure	RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike	RT1 Boost tourism and employment	CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies	UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings	HP6 Preservation of heritage sites	HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage	HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.	HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs	HP2 Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage	HP1 Rejuvination of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation
HP1 Rejuvination of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation	O	O	A	O	A	O	O	O	A	O	A	A	
HP2 Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage	O	O	X	A	X	A	A	A	X	A	X		
HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs	O	O	X	A	X	A	A	A	X	A			
HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.	A	A	V	X	V	X	X	X	V				
HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage	O	O	X	A	X	A	A	A					
HP6 Preservation of heritage sites	A	A	V	X	V	X	X						
UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings	A	A	V	X	V	X							
CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies	A	A	V	X	V								
RT1 Boost tourism and employment	O	O	X	A									
RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike	A	A	V										
SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure	O	O											
SA6 Heritage Signage	X												
SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.													

Calculate ISM Results

Symbols to define relationships:

V → row variable influences corresponding column variable
A → row variable is influenced by corresponding column variable
X → row and correspnding column variable infulence each other
O → row and correspnding column variable have no relationship

Note: Session will expire in 20 minutes so define relationships in 20 minutes or keep backup

Results computed successfully

Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
HP1 Rejuvination of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation		A	A	O	A	O	O	O	A	O	A	O	O
HP2 Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage			X	A	X	A	A	A	X	A	X	O	O
HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs				A	X	A	A	A	X	A	X	O	O
HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.					V	X	X	X	V	X	V	A	A
HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage						A	A	A	X	A	X	O	O
HP6 Preservation of heritage sites							X	X	V	X	V	A	A

Reachability Matrix(RM)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
HP1 Rejuvination of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HP2 Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
HP6 Preservation of heritage sites	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings							X	V	X	V	A	A
CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies								V	X	V	A	A
RT1 Boost tourism and employment									A	X	O	O
RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike										V	A	A
SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure											O	O
SA6 Heritage Signage												X
SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.												

UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
RT1 Boost tourism and employment	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1
SA6 Heritage Signage	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0
Dependence Power	6	10	10	7	10	7	7	7	10	7	10

Final Reachability Matrix(FRM)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Driving Power
HP1 Rejuvination of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
HP2 Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	6
HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	6
HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11
HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	6
HP6 Preservation of heritage sites	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11
UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11
CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11
RT1 Boost tourism and employment	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	6
RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11
SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	6
SA6 Heritage Signage	1*	1*	1*	1	1*	1	1	1	1*	1	1*	1	1	13
SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.	1*	1*	1*	1	1*	1	1	1	1*	1	1*	1	1	13
Dependence Power	13	12	12	7	12	7	7	7	12	7	12	2	2	

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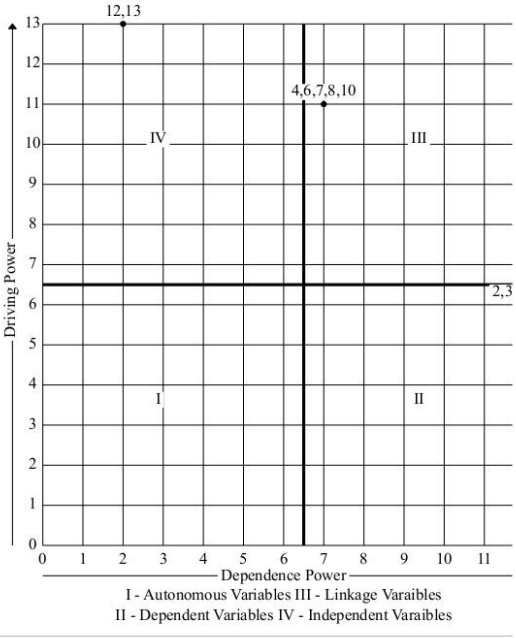

Level Partitioning(LP)

Elements(Mi)	Reachability Set R(Mi)	Antecedent Set A(Ni)	Intersection Set R(Mi)∩A(Ni)	Level
1	1,	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	1,	1
2	2, 3, 5, 9, 11,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	2, 3, 5, 9, 11,	2

Level Partitioning Iterations

Elements(Mi)	Reachability Set R(Mi)	Antecedent Set A(Ni)	Intersec R(Mi)/
1	1,	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	1,
2	1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 11,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	2, 3, 5, 9, 11

3	2, 3, 5, 9, 11,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	2, 3, 5, 9, 11,	2
4	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	3
5	2, 3, 5, 9, 11,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	2, 3, 5, 9, 11,	2
6	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	3
7	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	3
8	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	3
9	2, 3, 5, 9, 11,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	2, 3, 5, 9, 11,	2
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12	12, 13,	12, 13,	12, 13,	4
13	12, 13,	12, 13,	12, 13,	4

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5	1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 11,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	2, 3, 5, 9, 11
6	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10
7	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10
8	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10
9	1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 11,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	2, 3, 5, 9, 11
10	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10
11	1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 11,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	2, 3, 5, 9, 11
12	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	12, 13,	12, 13,
13	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	12, 13,	12, 13,

1 2 3 4

Conical Matrix(CM)

Variables	1	2	3	5	9	11	4	6	7	8	10	12	13	Driving Power	Level
1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2
3	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2
5	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2
9	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2
11	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2
4	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11	3
6	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11	3
7	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11	3
8	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11	3
10	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11	3
12	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	13	4
13	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	13	4
Dependence Power	13	12	12	12	12	12	7	7	7	7	7	2	2		
Level	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	4	4		

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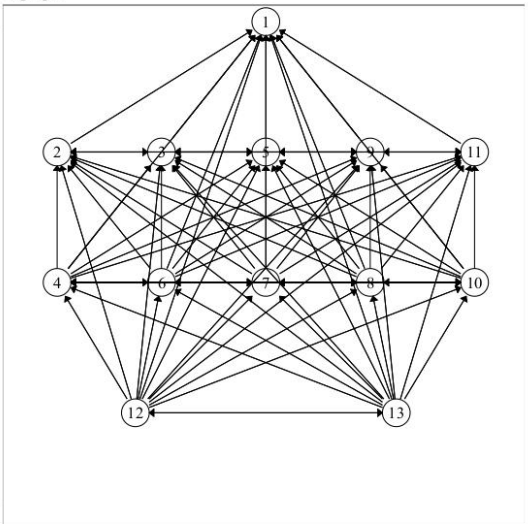
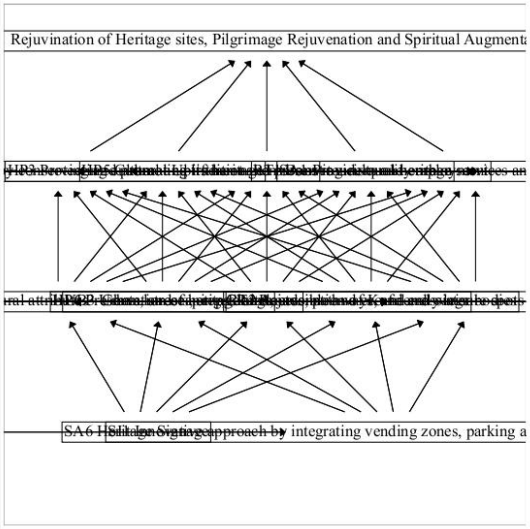


Reduced Conical Matrix(CM)

Variables	1	2	3	5	9	11	4	6	7	8	10	12	13	Driving Power	Level
HP1 Rejuvination of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
HP2 Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2
HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2
HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2

Final Model*

cultural heritage														
RT1 Boost tourism and employment	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2
SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	2
HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11	3
HP6 Preservation of heritage sites	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11	3
UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11	3
CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11	3
RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	11	3
SA6 Heritage Signage	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	13	4
SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	13	4
Dependence Power	13	12	12	12	12	12	7	7	7	7	2	2		
Level	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4		



*The final model may be redrawn more creatively using some image editors.

Cite:

Chicago/Turabian Style

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BibTex

Annexure V-B
SmartISM Report for Tirtha site

SmartISM: Smart Interpretive Structural Modeling

	CM2 Spirit of place, identity, and emotions survived in memory	CM1 Living Religious Heritage, Spiritual	SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.	SA6 Heritage Signage	SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure	RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike	RT1 Boost tourism and employment	CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies	UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings	HP6 Preservation of heritage sites	HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage	HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.	HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs
HP1 Rejuvination of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation	X	A	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	A	O	O
HP2 Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage	V	X	O	O	A	O	A	O	O	O	X	O	A
HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs	O	V	O	O	X	A	X	A	A	A	V	A	
HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.	O	O	A	A	V	X	V	X	X	X	O		
HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage	V	X	O	O	A	O	A	O	O	O			
HP6 Preservation of heritage sites	O	O	A	A	V	X	V	X	X				
UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings	O	O	A	A	V	X	V	X					
CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies	O	O	A	A	V	X	V						
RT1 Boost tourism and employment	O	V	O	O	X	A							
RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike	O	O	A	A	V								
SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure	O	V	O	O									
SA6 Heritage Signage	O	O	X										
SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.	O	O											
CM1 Living Religious Heritage, Spiritual	V												
CM2 Spirit of place, identity, and emotions survived in memory													

Calculate ISM Results

Symbols to define relationships:

V → row variable influences corresponding column variable
A → row variable is influenced by corresponding column variable
X → row and correspnding column variable infulence each other
O → row and correspnding column variable have no relationship

Note: Session will expire in 20 minutes so define relationships in 20 minutes or keep backup

Results computed successfully

Structural Self-Interaction Matrix (SSIM)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
HP1 Rejuvination of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation		A	O	O	A	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	A	X
HP2 Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage			A	O	X	O	O	O	A	O	A	O	O	X	V
HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs				A	V	A	A	A	X	A	X	O	O	V	O
HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.					O	X	X	X	V	X	V	A	A	O	O
HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage						O	O	O	A	O	A	O	O	X	V

Reachability Matrix(RM)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
HP1 Rejuvination of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HP2 Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

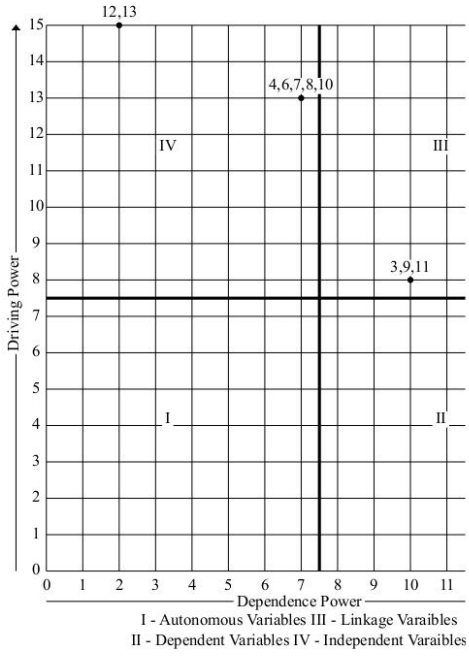
HP6 Preservation of heritage sites						X	X	V	X	V	A	A	O	O
UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings							X	V	X	V	A	A	O	O
CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies								V	X	V	A	A	O	O
RT1 Boost tourism and employment									A	X	O	O	V	O
RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike										V	A	A	O	O
SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure											O	O	V	O
SA6 Heritage Signage												X	O	O
SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.													O	O
CM1 Living Religious Heritage, Spiritual														V
CM2 Spirit of place, identity, and emotions survived in memory														

HP6 Preservation of heritage sites	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
RT1 Boost tourism and employment	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
SA6 Heritage Signage	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1
SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1
CM1 Living Religious Heritage, Spiritual	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
CM2 Spirit of place, identity, and emotions survived in memory	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dependence Power	5	6	8	7	6	7	7	7	8	7

Final Reachability Matrix(FRM)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Driving Power
HP1 Rejuvination of Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
HP2 Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs	1*	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1*	8
HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.	1*	1*	1	1	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1*	1*	13
HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
HP6 Preservation of heritage sites	1*	1*	1	1	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1*	1*	13
UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings	1*	1*	1	1	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1*	1*	13
CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies	1*	1*	1	1	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1*	1*	13
RT1 Boost tourism and employment	1*	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1*	8
RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike	1*	1*	1	1	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1*	1*	13
SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure	1*	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1*	8
SA6 Heritage Signage	1*	1*	1*	1	1*	1	1	1	1*	1	1*	1	1	1*	1*	15
SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.	1*	1*	1*	1	1*	1	1	1	1*	1	1*	1	1	1*	1*	15
CM1 Living Religious Heritage, Spiritual	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5

MICMAC



CM2 Spirit of place, identity, and emotions survived in memory	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Dependence Power	15	13	10	7	13	7	7	7	10	7	10	2	2	13	15		

Level Partitioning(LP)

Elements(Mi)	Reachability Set R(Mi)	Antecedent Set A(Ni)	Intersection Set R(Mi)∩A(Ni)	Level
1	1, 15,	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,	1, 15,	1
2	2, 5, 14,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,	2, 5, 14,	2
3	3, 9, 11,	3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	3, 9, 11,	3
4	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	4
5	2, 5, 14,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,	2, 5, 14,	2
6	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	4
7	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	4
8	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	4
9	3, 9, 11,	3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	3, 9, 11,	3
10	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10,	4
11	3, 9, 11,	3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,	3, 9, 11,	3
12	12, 13,	12, 13,	12, 13,	5
13	12, 13,	12, 13,	12, 13,	5
14	2, 5, 14,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,	2, 5, 14,	2
15	1, 15,	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,	1, 15,	1

Level Partitioning Iterations

Elements(Mi)	Reachability Set R(Mi)	Antecedent Set A(Ni)
1	1, 15,	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,
2	1, 2, 5, 14, 15,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,
3	1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 11, 14, 15,	3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,
4	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,
5	1, 2, 5, 14, 15,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,
6	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,
7	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,
8	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,
9	1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 11, 14, 15,	3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,
10	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15,	4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13,
11	1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 11, 14, 15,	3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,
12	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,	12, 13,
13	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,	12, 13,
14	1, 2, 5, 14, 15,	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,
15	1, 15,	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,

1 2 3 4 5

Conical Matrix(CM)

Variables	1	15	2	5	14	3	9	11	4	6	7	8	10	12	13	Driving Power	Level
1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
15	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	2
5	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	2
14	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	2
3	1*	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	3
9	1*	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	3
11	1*	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	3
4	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	13	4
6	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	13	4
7	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	13	4
8	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	13	4
10	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	13	4
12	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	15	5
13	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	15	5
Dependence Power	15	15	13	13	13	10	10	10	7	7	7	7	7	2	2		
Level	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	5		

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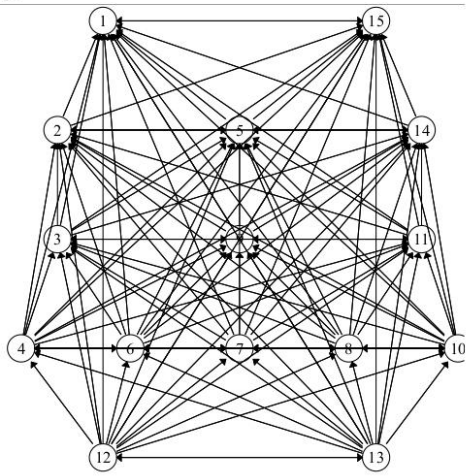
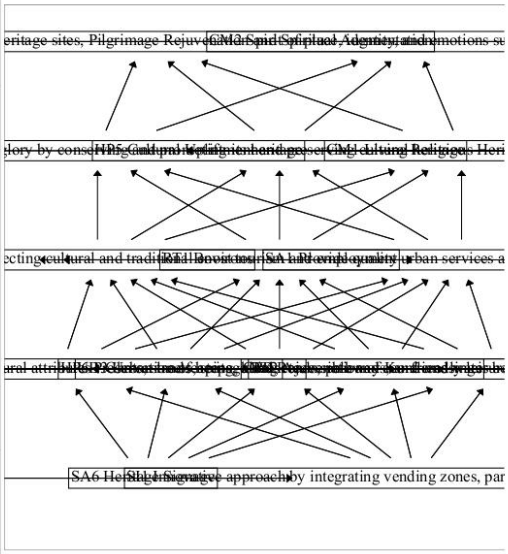


Reduced Conical Matrix(CM)

Variables	1	15	2	5	14	3	9	11	4	6	7	8	10	12	13	Driving Power	Level
HP1 Rejuvination of	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1

Final Model*

Heritage sites, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation																	
CM2 Spirit of place, identity, and emotions survived in memory	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
HP2 Revive the glory by conserving and promoting its heritage	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	2
HP5 Cultural Upliftment and preserving cultural heritage	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	2
CM1 Living Religious Heritage, Spiritual	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	2
HP3 Protecting cultural and traditional environs	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	3
RT1 Boost tourism and employment	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	3
SA1 Provide quality urban services and Public infrastructure	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	3
HP4 Redevelopment of Cultural attributes - Ghats, streets, steps, kund, etc.	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	13	4
HP6 Preservation of heritage sites	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	13	4
UB3 Urban landscaping, along roads, pathways, and crossings	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	13	4
CR4 Rejuvenation of Kund and water bodies	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	13	4
RT2 Accessible and eco-friendly leisure spots for residents and tourists alike	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	13	4
SA6 Heritage Signage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	15	5
SI1 Innovative approach by integrating vending zones, parking areas and cultural venues.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	15	5
Dependence Power	15	15	13	13	13	10	10	10	7	7	7	7	7	2	2		
Level	1	1	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	5		



*The final model may be redrawn more creatively using some image editors.

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Annexure VI

S.No.	Tīrtha / Sacred Site Name	Paurāṇika Reference	Associated Deity / Tattva	Narrative / Episode	Location in Present-Day Varanasi	Cultural Significance	Ritual Practices (Past/Present)	Sacred Geography Context	Architectural / Archaeological Remains	Current Condition / Preservation Status	Remarks / Interpretation
1	Assi Sangam (Assi Ganga Confluence)	*Kāśī Khaṇḍa*, Ch. 30 & 46	Yama, Indra, Agni, and symbolic *Mukti* Kṣetra	Creation of Assi River by gods to protect Kāśī from falsehood; bathing at Sangam brings merit of multiple tīrthas and serves ancestors	Assi Ghat, southern tip of Varanasi city	Considered the gateway to Kāśī; start point of pilgrim circuit; part of Vārāṇasī name (Varuṇā–Assi)	Snāna, Tarpana, Śrāddha, Sandhyā Ārti, Ganga Ārti, Pilgrim entry point	Confluence of (now-streamlike) Assi and Gaṅgā; forms sacred southern boundary of Kāśī-mandala	Modern ghat structure; no ancient visible architectural remains; symbolically restored	Good maintenance; wide area for rituals; vehicular access available; Ganga Ārti held regularly	Needs recognition in official sacred ma
2	Aadi Mahadev (Mahadev Ling)	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 88, Shloka 36	Shiva (as Aadi Mahadev)	In Satya Yuga, in response to prayers by Devas and Rishis, a Ling emerged from the ground near Trilochan. It came to be called Aadi Mahadev Ling, signifying Shiva's eternal and primal form. A person who worships this Ling with devotion and offers the sacred thread (Yagyopaveetam) on Shravana Shukla Chaturdashi gains punya equal to all the Lings in the world and avoids rebirth.	No. A-3/92, behind Trilochan Temple, near Trilochan Ghat	Signifies the primal emergence of Shiva in Kashi. Offers the reward of no rebirth and the punya of universal Shiva worship. Highly potent during Shravana month rituals.	Daily worship; special significance on Shravana Shukla Chaturdashi when offering of Yagyopaveetam is made. Devotees pray for liberation and longevity. Also linked to child blessing rituals (cradle ceremony).	Located near Trilochan Mahadev and Bhim Aadeshwar temples. Part of ancient sacred terrain representing earliest Shiva manifestations in Kashi.	Traditional Ling with embedded sanctum; surrounded by a stone enclosure. Maintained by local temple caretakers.	Active temple visited regularly; connected through Trilochan temple pilgrim circuit.	Aadi Mahadev represents the eternal presence of Shiva in Kashi. Especially worshipped during key ritual periods for moksha and divine blessings.
3	Aadi VaraHeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 100	Shiva (as Aadi VaraHeshwar Ling)	Kashi Khanda advises devotees to undertake the Antargrihi Yatra, worshipping various deities including Aadi VaraHeshwar. This deity is said to remove all fear and instill courage. The Ling is located near Dashaswamedh Ghat and connected with the inner sacred geography of Kashi.	D.17/111, inside Ram Mandir, Dashaswamedh Ghat, Varanasi	Believed to provide inner strength and fearlessness. A key stop in the Antargrihi Yatra – an internal pilgrimage within core Kashi.	Worshipped daily from 5:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Aartis and personal rituals performed by devotees throughout the day.	Located near Dashaswamedh Ghat, within the Ram Lakhan Block. Part of core tīrtha circuit that defines Kashi's inner sanctum worship (Antargrihi Yatra).	Installed in a traditional garbhagriha within Ram Mandir premises. Ritual platform and enshrined Shiva Ling.	Actively maintained and accessible to pilgrims via main and ghat entrances.	Important Shiva shrine within the Antargrihi pilgrimage. Symbol of psychological and spiritual strength in core Kashi mandala.

4	Aapa Stambeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Shiva (as Aapa Stambeshwar Ling)	In the vicinity of Madhyameshwar lies the Aapa Stambeshwar Ling. Worshipping this Ling is associated with gaining Brahma Jñāna (ultimate knowledge). In contemporary terms, it is considered beneficial for education and wisdom-related pursuits.	K-53/56, Dara Nagar, near Bhikshuwarganj/GPO, Varanasi	Symbolizes knowledge and spiritual illumination. Recommended for students and seekers of truth; linked to higher wisdom and learning.	Daily worship with Ganga water and flowers. Devotees visit as per convenience to seek blessings for learning and intellect.	Located in the sacred zone near Madhyameshwar, in the dense tīrtha region of north-central Kashi.	Traditional Shiva Ling enshrined within a local temple complex. Small but active sacred site.	Maintained and accessible; modest in scale but actively revered.	This shrine promotes spiritual and educational advancement. Ideal for those pursuing studies, teaching, and inner reflection.
5	Abhay Vinayak	No specific śloka mentioned; located inside Shool Tankeshwar Mahadev temple premises	Ganesha (Vinayaka)	Believed to remove fear; devotees worship this form to become fearless.	Inside the premises of Shooltankeshwar Mahadev temple, D-17/111, near Dasaswamedh Ghat	Believed to protect devotees from all kinds of fear and dangers	Worship open throughout the day; devotees can perform personal prayers and offerings; special pooja by appointed priest if needed	Located in the central tīrtha zone near Dasaswamedh Ghat and Shooltankeshwar Mahadev—important spiritual junction	Flat embedded murti form, coated with sindoor; traditional sacred stone form within the temple wall	Actively maintained and accessible to devotees	Represents the fearless aspect of Vinayaka and his association with protection in a high-energy ritual space
6	Adi Keshav	Kashi Khand, Chapter 87, Shloka 15	Lord Vishnu (Keshav)	By worshipping Adi Keshav located in the north of Vedeswar, one derives the merit of worshipping all the three worlds. It is believed to remove sadness and confer bliss.	Built at A-37/51, Rajghat Fort	Highly revered as a Moksha-giving Tirtha; Adi Keshav is believed to have installed Bhu-Varaha and granted liberation to devotees.	Daily poojas from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 4:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.	Located at the confluence of Ganga and Varuna (Ganga-Varuna Sangam); considered an energy center and Shakti Peeth.	Historic temple structure with deity image installed; image decorated with garlands and offerings.	Functional and preserved; open to public with regular worship.	Temple is situated at a powerful confluence (sangam) point; symbol of Vishnu's protective energy in Kashi's sacred geography.

7	Agasthyeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 26	Shiva (as Agasthyeshwar Ling); Sage Agastya's association	Sage Narad found Vindhya Mountain growing excessively due to ego. To control this, Narad instigated Vindhya to challenge Mount Sumeru, leading to Vindhya's growth. The gods were troubled and sought Sage Agastya's help. Agastya asked Vindhya to stop growing and moved to the south, staying in Kashi. Pleased, Lord Shiva manifested as Agasthyeshwar. Performing rituals to ancestors at Agastya Kund and worshipping Agasthyeshwar Ling ensures liberation from ancestral debts and grants moksha.	K-31/81, Agastya Kund Mohalla, near Godowlia, southern Kashi	Deeply associated with Pitru Karma and ancestor rites. Said to clear ancestral karmas and ensure blessings for progeny and spiritual upliftment.	Devotees bathe in Agastya Kund, perform Shraddha karma, and worship Agasthyeshwar Ling. Open from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. for pooja.	Located near Southern Kashi's spiritual node, part of important shrines tied to ancestor veneration and southern gate of Kashi.	Traditional Lingam shrine with attached Kund. Revered locally and maintained for ritual practices.	Maintained and active; known for regular Shraddha rituals and annual observances.	Strong connection to southern cosmology of Kashi. Integrates myths of Vindhya, Agastya, and Shiva's protective manifestations in the city.
8	Agneeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 11, Shloka 158–159	Shiva (as Agneeshwar Ling); associated with Fire (Agni) element	A devout Brahmin Vishwanar and his wife Sushilata were blessed with a prodigious child, Vishwajeet. When Sage Narad revealed that the child was fated to die by lightning at age 12, they were devastated. Graheshwar (Shiva in this form) intervened, protected the child, and instructed installation of a Ling. The Ling would ensure success, salvation, and protection from early death. The Ling was named Agneeshwar, residing in Agni Lok if	House No. Ck-2/11, Patani Tola, Bhosala Ghat, Varanasi	Believed to offer success, longevity, and honor even if one dies elsewhere. Highly auspicious for protection against untimely death and fulfillment of desires.	Daily pooja from 7:00–9:00 a.m. and 6:00–8:00 p.m. Special significance on Ekadashi, Shravan, and Kartik rituals. Offerings include sacred fire, Ganga water, and deepam.	Located near Bhosala Ghat in central Kashi. Accessed from Sankata Devi temple or Patani Tola chowk; part of traditional spiritual circuit.	Enshrined in a small shrine near Bhosala Ghat. Traditional layout with Shiva Ling pedestal and tiled enclosure.	Modest temple; locally maintained, active during major tithis and festivals.	Linked with Agni Tattva and divine intervention for protection. Agneeshwar is symbolic of transformative fire and a divine path to Agni Loka.

				worshipped faithfully in Kashi.							
9	Agni Dhruveshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 100 (Ekadasha Rudra Yatra)	Shiva (as Agni Dhruveshwar Ling)	Agni Dhruveshwar is the first Ling in the Ekadasha Rudra Yatra, a pilgrimage of eleven sacred Shiva Lings. Worshipping this Ling grants Rudra Padavi (status of Lord Rudra). It is believed to be an ancient Ling radiating energy, appearing reddish due to its inner spiritual heat. The Ling is also referred to as Jageshwar Mahadev.	J 6/64, Ishwar Gangi, near Jageshwar Mahadev, Varanasi	Initiatory Ling of the Ekadasha Rudra Yatra. Offers Rudra Padavi to sincere devotees. Deep spiritual aura, linked to fire element and inner transformation.	Daily worship with Mangala Aarti at 5:00 a.m., Bhog Aarti at 12:00 noon, Sandhya Aarti at 7:00 p.m. Timings: 4:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon, 4:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.	Part of the Ekadasha Rudra Yatra circuit, situated in the Ishwar Gangi region of Kashi. Key spiritual node on the Rudra pilgrimage path.	Ancient Ling within traditional temple structure. Ling has distinct reddish hue, symbolizing Agni and dhruva (fixed spiritual radiance).	Well-preserved temple with daily rituals and traditional observances. Popular during Rudra Yatra festivals.	Symbol of steadfast devotion and fiery transformation. Gateway Ling of the Ekadasha Yatra representing the inner journey to divine realization.
10	Amareshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 88, Shloka 118	Shiva (as Amareshwar Ling); symbolic of Amarnath Shivling	After killing Gajasur, Shiva stayed in Kashi as Krithi Vaseshwar. As he blessed the gods, various Lings were brought from sacred places. One such Ling came from Ganga Sagar Teerth and became known as Amareshwar. It grants a long life, freedom from untimely death, and spiritual merit equal to pilgrimage to Amarnath. Thus, those	B-2/20, behind Lakkar Kund, Bhadsari, Kashi	Equivalent to worshipping the Amarnath Shiv Ling. Bestows longevity, removes fear of untimely death, and grants spiritual fulfillment.	Darshan available throughout the day. Devotees perform pooja as per convenience with traditional offerings.	Located near Lakkar Kund in southern Kashi. Connected to Ganga Sagar Teerth migration legend and Rudra Vaasa tradition.	Simple enshrined Shiva Ling within small temple structure. Maintained by local devotees.	Active site for darshan; modest but regularly visited and ritually maintained.	Represents divine presence of Amarnath in Kashi. Important for those seeking long life and symbolic pilgrimage substitution.

				unable to travel to Amarnath can worship here for the same benefit.							
11	Amriteshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapters 34, 73, 84	Shiva Lingam (Symbol of Immortality / Amritattva)	Grhastha Rishi Sadananda Kumar, while playing in mud, discovers a divine Lingam glowing with golden light. It revives a dead ant, leading him to worship it as Amriteshwar. Shiva describes it as conferring immortality.	Kal Bhairav Ward, near Kashi Karvat, Bacha Maharaj Ganga Putra School, House No. CK.33/28	Believed to grant immortality; one who touches it will not be reborn; deeply revered in Shiva tradition	Daily worship, Lingam abhisheka, devotees touch the Lingam for blessings; especially visited for attaining moksha or freedom from rebirth	Lies in the sacred Kashi area, close to the Kashi Karvat and Kal Bhairav region, central to Kashi's tīrtha-māṇḍala	Simple shrine with Shiva Lingam embedded in stone with water around it (as per image)	Preserved and actively worshipped; mentioned in contemporary and textual sources; maintained by local devotees	Identified with the concept of *amṛtatva*; illustrates the divine grace of Shiva present in ordinary surroundings; emphasizes accessibility of divinity to householders
12	Angeerayeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 18, Shloka 20	Shiva Lingam (Tejas/Brilliance, Radiant Energy)	Sage Angeeras installed this Lingam in the divine Harakesh forest; those who behold it (darshan) attain brilliance and reach heaven	D-3/277, Jangambari Mutt, Jangambari, Varanasi	Worship of this Ling grants *Tejas* (radiance/energy), and leads to heavenly abode; associated with sage lineage	Performed by priests of Jangambari Mutt; visitors can worship during open hours (6:00 am–8:00 pm); regular abhisheka and puja performed	Associated with the ancient Harakesh forest, a sacred region of Kashi tied to sage worship and forest hermitages	Lingam shrine with Nāga (serpent) motifs; traditional architectural form within a Mutt complex	Maintained and worshipped regularly; accessible to devotees and pilgrims	Embodies sage-worship traditions of Kashi; reflects ascetic energy (tapas) and divine brilliance (*Tejas*) gained by sages through austerity and devotion

13	Annapurna Devi Temple	Skanda Purāṇa – Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 61	Goddess Annapūrṇā (form of Bhavānī / Pārvatī)	Lord Viṣṇu describes her as a chief deity among tīrthas to Sage Bindu; she grants nourishment and prosperity; once withheld food from the world until Śiva acknowledged her supremacy	D.9/1, Annapurna Temple, near Vishwanath Gully, Varanasi	Considered the goddess of food and nourishment; an embodiment of compassionate motherly energy; worshipped for abundance and sustenance	Daily pūjā from 5:00 AM to 10:00 PM; ārtis in morning and				
14	Ark Vinayak	No specific śloka mentioned; traditional local belief	Ganesha (Vinayaka)	Believed to fulfill the desires of devotees. Special importance is given to Sunday worship; devotees cross the Ganga and pass Lolark Kund to reach this deity.	Located at D-17/7, near Lolark Kund, Varanasi	Held in high local reverence; associated with personal wish-fulfillment and Sunday observances	No formal pooja system; local people worship individually; no specific priest service is attached to this shrine	Located near the important Lolark Kund in the southern sacred geography of Kashi, often accessed via Ganga crossing	Traditional sindoor-coated embedded murti form set in a wall structure	Accessible and visited regularly; modest shrine structure, locally maintained	Represents a personal and non-institutionalized form of Vinayaka worship with organic local devotion
15	Arun Āditya	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 51, Shloka 28	Sūrya / Arun (Charioteer of Sun), Vinatā, Lord Skanda	Story of Vinatā (mother of Garuḍa and Aruṇa), her enslavement to Kaśyapa's other wife Kadrū, and Aruṇa's divine birth. Aruṇa was blessed to become the charioteer of the Sun and his presence in Kashi purifies sorrow.	Present-day shrine of Arun Āditya in Kāśī; part of the Āditya temple circuit (exact location mentioned in sacred circuits near Godowlia)	Symbolic of dawn, clarity, and removal of grief and disease; worshipped to overcome sorrow, disease, and bondage	Daily darshan; Māṅgalā Aarti (6:30 a.m.) and Śayana Aarti (11:00 p.m.); worship to overcome obstacles and sorrow	One of the 12 Āditya temples in Kāśī; associated with solar energy and healing; connected with Vinatā's liberation	Sacred image of Arun Āditya (depicted in reddish-orange hue); inner sanctum preserved	Open for worship; daily rituals performed; temple operational from 5:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.	Devotees believe worship here ensures victory over sorrow, smoothens obstacles, and prevents illness
16	Asha Vinayak	No specific śloka mentioned; local tradition of wish-fulfillment	Ganesha (Vinayaka)	Devotees believe their desires will be fulfilled by offering prayers to Asha Vinayak; located near Vishalakshi Devi Temple and Bare Hanuman Temple	Located at D-3/71, Mir Ghat, near Bare Hanuman Temple and Vishalakshi Temple, Varanasi	Highly revered as a deity who fulfills hopes and aspirations; part of the wish-fulfillment tīrtha cluster of southern Kashi	Regular worship; aartis held in the morning and evening; offerings made for personal wishes	Located in the sacred Vishalakshi–Mir Ghat axis of southern Kashi; accessible by boat and narrow gully paths	Well-maintained murti with bright sindoor and decorated ornaments in a small shrine chamber	Actively worshipped with regular timings and rituals; in good condition	Represents the "wish-fulfilling" form of Ganesha, closely linked to the śakti-peetha circuit and local devotional faith

17	Ashadeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 66, Shloka 27	Shiva Lingam (Purification from Sin)	On Goddess Parvati's request, Lord Shiva described tīrthas in Kashi. This Lingam was installed by Ashadh Shiv Gana on Ashadh Purnima. Devotees become sinless by seeing this Ling.	CK63/3, Kashipura, Varanasi (near Maidagin, easily accessible via local transport)	Believed to purify the devotee of all sins; strong local belief in its spiritual potency	Daily worship; temple open from 5:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and again from 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.; morning and evening ārtis are held regularly	Located in the sacred Kashipura region, which holds historical spiritual relevance and is home to multiple Shiva shrines	A clean and well-maintained temple structure with a sanctum housing two Shiva Lingas	Good preservation; actively maintained and frequented by local devotees	Associated with Ashadh rituals and Gana tradition; highlights seasonal spiritual practices; dual Lingam symbolism reflects cosmic duality
18	Asitang Bhairav	Referenced in local tradition; connected with Bhairava worship and Kṛttivāsas Kṣetra	Asitang Bhairava (fierce form of Rudra)	A protective Bhairava form associated with the Kṛttivāsas Peeth (sacred cremation space). This deity grants multifold benefits to those who worship him and undertake any kind of sādhanā or vow in the vicinity.	K.52/39, near Maha Mrityunjay Mandir, close to Vriddh Kaleshwar, Varanasi	Considered a powerful guardian in the cremation-based worship zones of Kāśī; blessings for success in sādhanā and removal of fear	Daily darśana; devotees perform japa, silent offerings, and circumambulation; active worship throughout the day	Located within the sacred Kṛttivāsas zone of Kāśī, where death and liberation intersect spiritually	Painted stone murti of Bhairava smeared with sindūra; niche shrine; located near Maha Mrityunjay Mandir	Maintained through local devotion; easily accessible via lanes near Bisheswarganj GPO; shrine preserved	A potent śakti-sthala for resolving inner fears, removing obstacles, and spiritual fortification in the cremation-kṣetra of Kāśī
19	Aswani Kumareshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapters 17, 97	Two Shiva Lingas installed by Aswani Kumars (Blessing-giving aspect of Shiva)	The story of Surya's wife Sanjna and her sons Yama and Yami; Sanjna gave birth to the Ashvini Kumars in the form of a mare; later the divine twins installed two Shiva Lingas named Aswani Kumareshwar to atone for and mark their lineage's devotion	House No. CK.2/26, Opp. Ganga Mahal, Bhosala Ghat, Varanasi	Worshippers of these Lingas receive all types of blessings; tied to the divine physicians, the Ashvini Kumars	Temple open from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.; devotees perform personal poojas at their convenience	Situated close to the sacred Bhosala Ghat along the Ganga; accessible via boat or Chowk by rickshaw	Twin Shiva Lingas installed on a shared platform; modest shrine set-up, venerated by local devotees	Maintained and accessible, with daily visitors; presence of surrounding traditional homes adds cultural depth	Reflects the celestial and healing symbolism of Ashvini Kumars; integrates Vedic deities into Kashi's Shaiva tīrtha landscape

20	Atma Veereshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 82; Chapter 88, Shloka 112; Chapter 88, Shloka 117	Shiva (as Atma Veereshwar)	King Amritraj was a devotee of Vishnu and welcomed Narad Rishi respectfully. Narad instructed the king to worship Shiva. The Ling appeared and is believed to bestow benefits equivalent to pooja of three Lingas at night.	Kashi, near Sindhiya Ghat, near Dashashwamedh Ghat	Highly auspicious site, especially for nighttime worship and Chaudas nights. Mentioned to yield blessings equal to multiple other poojas. Described in Kashi Khanda.	Night pooja yields punya of worshipping three lingas. Offerings include milk, curd, honey, sugar, ghee. Specific rituals on Chaudas nights; daily pooja timings also listed.	Located in sacred landscape of Kashi, among other prominent shrines near Dashashwamedh Ghat.	Lingam enshrined with silver yoni-patta, with floral and ritual decorations.	Well-maintained, active place of worship.	Linked with deep pauranic significance and equivalence of worship. Referenced multiple times in Kashi Khanda, considered very potent for spiritual merit.
21	Atyugra Narsimha	Kashi Khand, Chapter 81, Shloka 198	Lord Vishnu in Narsimha form	Lord Vishnu says: “To the west of Kalabhairava I am called Atyugra Narsimha. If I am worshipped with devotion, I destroy even the group of Atyugra (terrible) sins.”	Located at CK-8/21, Gomathi (near Chowk)	Highly significant for the removal of sins and extreme purification through the fierce form of Narsimha.	Temple open for daily worship: 6.00 a.m. to 10.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m.	Located to the north of Kamleshwar Shiva and west of Kalabhairava; situated in sacred city core of Varanasi.	Small shrine housing the deity of Atyugra Narsimha.	Simple and functional; easily accessible to pilgrims and worshippers.	Associated with intense spiritual power; believed to destroy even the gravest sins if worshipped with devotion.
22	Avadhootes hwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Shiva Lingam (associated with Avadhootas and renunciates)	Located north of Vishweshwar, near Pasupateshwar Ling, this shrine is tied to ascetic energies; mentioned among Lings bearing tīrtha powers; associated with Avadhootas (renunciants)	CK.13/85, Opp. Pasupateshwar, Pasupateshwar Galli, near Chowk, Varanasi	Strong link to ascetic traditions; site believed to grant punya (spiritual merit) and purification	Temple remains closed; darshan possible through a grill window; personal offerings made externally	Located near Pasupateshwar in Chowk region, a dense sacred quarter of Varanasi	Simple Shiva Ling in a walled enclosure; modest traditional structure	Closed to public entry; darshan allowed through a grill; protected condition	Highlights the invisible spiritual presence of renunciant energies (Avadhoota tradition); integrates into larger tīrtha cluster of Pasupateshwar

23	Avi Mukta Vinayak	According to Kashi Khand; no specific śloka cited	Ganesha (Vinayaka)	Believed to relieve all difficulties for devotees staying in Avi Mukta Kshetra (Kashi); the original idol is said to have disappeared, and two places are now claimed to house this deity	Near Gyanvapi Masjid, in and around old Vishwanath temple premises, Varanasi	Associated with the spiritual geography of Avimukta Kshetra; symbolic protector of those who dwell permanently in Kashi	No formal pooja allowed; devotees can only offer prayers silently at the site	Located within the core Avimukta Kshetra near Gyanvapi—sacred central zone of Kashi	No known physical remains of the original idol; only current worship spaces exist informally in the area	No structured shrine or rituals; open space with limited access and recognition	Symbolic presence of Vinayaka in Avimukta Kshetra; represents ancient belief in divine protection for Kashi vāsīs (residents)
24	Avimuktes hwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 89, Shloka 88; also mentioned in Ling Purana, Brahma Vaivarta Purana	Shiva Lingam (Moksha-bestowing form of Shiva)	Varanasi is Avimukta Kṣetra—one who dies here attains Moksha. Lord Shiva resides eternally here. Avimukteshwar is the form of Shiva who never abandons the sacred land; Lingam is inside the sanctum of Kashi Vishwanath temple complex	Presently within Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple premises, near Gyanvapi, Chowk, Varanasi	Considered one of the most sacred Lings; worshipper is freed from the cycle of rebirth and becomes virtuous	Daily worship and ārtis conducted; devotees perform pūjā throughout the day; deepārdhana offered regularly	Central to the Avimukta Mahākṣetra, core of sacred Kashi; represents metaphysical axis of liberation (moksha)	Historic references of a separate temple exist; Lingam now housed within Vishwanath premises	Maintained under the District Administration since 1983; older structures removed to accommodate more devotees	Central to Kashi's spiritual geography; symbol of eternal divine presence; ties closely with moksha theology and Avimukta tradition
25	Balmikesh war	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 75 (in the context of Trilochan Ling)	Shiva Lingam (Freedom from worry and despair)	In the vicinity of the great Trilochan Ling, multiple Shiva Lingas are mentioned; Balmikeshwar is one of them. Worshipping it grants peace of mind and freedom from despair	Inside Trilochan Temple premises, A2/80 Trilochan Ghat, and also inside Heramba Vinayak temple nearby	Worship of Balmikeshwar is believed to remove mental distress and grant serenity; especially powerful when worshipped near Trilochan	Regular pūjā offered: Morning and evening ārtis, special rituals on Akṣaya Tṛtīya and other holy days; devotees advised to consult pujari before special offerings	Located in Panchakroshi region and near Trilochan, a spiritually potent area of North Kashi associated with tīrtha cluster and Shiva devotion	Ancient Lingas housed inside traditional temple structures with active shrine worship	Well-preserved and regularly maintained; actively visited by pilgrims; traditional rituals continue	Associated with sage Valmiki by name; integrates Ramayana-era symbolism into Kashi Shaiva tīrtha network; proximity to Trilochan enhances its sanctity

26	Bandi Devi	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 70, Shloka 60	Goddess Bandi Devi (Liberator)	Devotees who bathe at Prayag Tirtha (Dashashwamedh Ghat) and worship Bandi Devi are freed from bondage and punishment. Worship believed to free even imprisoned persons (or their relatives) from chains or unjust suffering.	No. D.17/100, near Dashashwamedh Ghat, Varanasi	Believed to relieve spiritual and literal bondage; worshipped for protection from punishment and imprisonment; rare form of śakti associated with liberation	Darśan through grilled door; flexible timing; small-scale worship by locals; no specific ārtis mentioned	Located close to Dashashwamedh Ghat, one of the holiest ghats; integrated into the liberating geography of Kāśī	Small sanctum with grilled access; deity enshrined and decorated with flowers and garlands	Functional but low-profile; accessed through local gully; maintained by neighborhood devotees	A rare śakti shrine addressing the karmic consequences of bondage and legal punishment; highlights Kāśī's spiritual inclusivity and protective traditions
27	Bhadreshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Shiva Lingam; Kund (Cow's Milk Symbolism, Papamochana)	Near Aswineyeshwar lies Bhadrahrathtirth with a cow-milk-filled *Kund*. Bathing in the *Kund* and worshipping Bhadreshwar grants punya equal to donating 1000 cows; however, the *Kund* no longer exists physically	House No. CK.2/64, Patani Tola, Bhosala Ghat, Varanasi	Worship grants immense punya; believed to absolve major sins and grant higher rebirth; traditionally very sacred	Temple open 6:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m.; regular poojas performed; special rituals on Mondays and Ekadashi; aarti performed thrice daily	Located near Bhosala Ghat, close to major tīrtha clusters like Aswineyeshwar; mentioned alongside purificatory *Kund* sites	Original *Kund* is reportedly not in existence; Shiva Ling worship continues in shrine form	Shrine remains preserved; ritual practices are active though original *Kund* is lost	Emphasizes *papamochana* (sin-removal) through symbolic bathing and devotion; reflects transition from water-ritual site to lingam-worship
28	Bhagirathes hwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 61	Shiva Lingam (Ancestral Liberation and Punya)	Lord Vishnu recounts this tīrtha where devotees should bathe and perform rituals for ancestors. Bathing and worship here is believed to cleanse sins and liberate forefathers.	CK.11/11, near Brahmanal, close to Vishwanath Gali and Manikarnika	Strongly associated with *pitṛkārya* (ancestral rituals) and purification; mentioned by Vishnu in sacred texts	Pooja conducted regularly; bathing in nearby Bhagirath Tirtha (now absent) was traditionally part of the practice	Originally part of the Brahmanal area, which includes sites associated with *śrāddha*, Manikarnika Ghat, and purification	Shiva Lingam located in a shrine near what was once the *tirtha* pond or site	Well-preserved and actively worshipped; nearby sacred sites still serve ritual function	Represents the merging of Vishnu and Shiva traditions in promoting ancestral moksha; physical *tirtha* lost, but symbolic power endures

29	Bharabhoot eshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 66, Shloka 13	Shiva Lingam (Mukti & Liberation from Burden of Sins)	While Lord Shiva was in Mandarachal, he sent batches of Shiv Gaṇas to disrupt King Divodasa's rule. One such Gaṇa, Bhara Bhoot, installed this Lingam. Those not worshipping it are said to reincarnate as a barren tree.	CK.5/44, Pataak Tola, near Chowk, Darwaja; north of Antargrih	Symbolizes spiritual burden removal and mukti; warns of karmic barrenness if neglected	Open from 6:00–9:00 a.m.; devotees offer puja via grill; rituals offered from outside	Located north of Antargrih, in an old locality linked with early Shaiva narratives	Shiva Ling in enclosed sanctum; visible through iron grill; no entry inside	Worshipped daily; shrine preserved with traditional setup; access limited to visual darshan	Narrative reflects tension during King Divodasa's reign; emphasizes importance of worshipping hidden yet powerful lingas in the tīrtha landscape of Kashi
30	Bhavani Gauri	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 100	Goddess Gaurī (Śakti form of Parvati)	Devotees are advised to take a ritual bath at Bhavani Tirtha and worship Bhavani Gauri for happiness and prosperity; part of a Gauri Yatra undertaken on *Tritīya* after *Amāvasyā*	D.8/38, Ram Mandir premises, near Bhavani Ghat, Varanasi	Worshipped as a bestower of happiness, prosperity, and feminine grace; significant in Navarātri and Gauri Yatra contexts	Pūjā timings: 5:30 AM – 11:30 AM and 5:00 PM – 9:30 PM; visited on special days like *Chaitra Navarātri* and *Tritīya* after Amāvasyā	Located near Bhavani Ghat on the Ganga, closely tied to Gaurī Tirtha and Śiva temples, including nearby Viśveśvara Mandir	Traditional shrine structure located within temple premises; idol richly decorated	Active shrine, well-preserved and visited during key festivals; accessible to local and Yatra devotees	Reinforces the role of feminine divine energy in Kāśī; the Gauri circuit is part of Kāśī's ritual landscape tied to fertility, protection, and śakti-upāsanā
31	Bheemesh war	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 69	Shiva Lingam (Forgiveness of Heinous Sins)	Installed by Nandi after Lord Shiva bathed in Rudra Vāsam following the slaying of Gajasur. Among the 68 tīrtha-lingas, it is powerful for cleansing grievous sins; those who worship Bheemeswar and Nakuleshwar together are especially blessed.	CK.31/12, Kashi Karvat temple, near Manikarnika	Believed to forgive even the most heinous sins; part of the 68 sacred Lingas of Kashi; strong karmic cleansing association	Ling worshipped daily; darshan available from above, as the Ling is located below floor level	Located near Vishveshwar temple and Manikarnika, core of Shaiva tīrtha cluster	Ancient Lingam, built below ground level; traditional floral worship visible	Shrine maintained and actively worshipped; accessed visually from above	One of the Jyotirlings of Kashi; deeply symbolic of post-slaying purification, divine grace, and karmic redemption

32	Bheeshma Keshav	Kashi Khand, Chapter 81, Shloka 24	Lord Vishnu (Keshav) in the form of Bheeshma Keshav	Lord Vishnu says: "By stationing myself as Bheeshma Keshav towards the west of Vriddh Kaleshwar, I remove the dangerous disturbances of devotees who worship me with devotion."	Located in the temple premises of Mrityunjay Mahadev at K.52/39, near Vriddha Kaleshwar.	Highly revered as a remover of obstacles and difficult karmic disturbances.	Worship rituals as per Vishnu traditions; specific timings not mentioned but temple is active.	Situated near Vriddha Kaleshwar, associated with Shaiva-Vaishnava sacred geography blend.	Installed image of Lord Vishnu as Bheeshma Keshav.	Well-preserved and maintained within existing temple premises.	Combines protective Vaishnava energy with the Shaiva spiritual zone; ideal for those seeking deliverance from afflictions.
33	Bhimchandi Vinayak	No specific śloka mentioned; local tradition	Ganesha (Vinayaka)	Believed to remove all fears from the devotee's mind; associated with protection and inner strength	Located on the outskirts of Varanasi, along the Panchkosi Yatra route	Part of the sacred outer pilgrimage circuit (Panchkosi); important for those doing parikrama of Kashi	Devotees can perform their own pooja at any time; open worship space	Located on the Bhimchandi–Panchkosi route, an important outer tīrtha ring around Kashi	Flat murti form with sindoor, embedded in temple wall structure	Modestly maintained; accessible to pilgrims on the Panchkosi Yatra route	Signifies protection and fearlessness during spiritual journeys; tied to Kashi's extended sacred geography
34	Bhoor Bhuva Suva Ling	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 89, Shloka 143	Shiva Lingam (Connection to Three Divine Realms)	After slaying Gajasur, Lord Shiva bathed in Rudra Vāsam; this Lingam is one of 68 installed by Nandi across Kashi. Worshippers are said to attain divine abodes like Bholoka, Svarloka, and Maharloka.	K.63/25, Bhoot Bhairav locality, near Bhoot Bhairav temple, Varanasi	Grants access to celestial realms (heavenly merit); part of the cosmic spiritual geography	Worship possible throughout the day; darshan available anytime; devotees may perform personal pūjā	Located in the Bhoot Bhairav area, associated with tantric and yogic Shaiva traditions; spiritually potent sector	Shiva Lingam enshrined and maintained; accessed via nearby temple network	Shrine well-maintained; daily visitation by locals; tradition continues actively	Lingam represents the cosmic triloka (Bhoor–Bhuva–Suva); powerful for aspirants seeking higher worlds or rebirth in divine realms
35	Bhooteshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 57	Shiva Lingam (Protector of Beings, Bhoota Tattva)	Lord Shiva narrates this as one of the sacred Shiva Lingas among tīrthas in Kashi; said to bestow health and wealth on worshippers. Mentioned alongside other tīrthas in Chapter 57.	Bhooteshwar Gully, Dasaswamedh, near Balla Bina Shop area, Varanasi	Bestows all types of wealth (*artha*) and health (*ārogya*); invoked for protection and prosperity	Temple open 6:00–11:00 a.m. and 5:00–9:30 p.m.; ārtis in morning and evening; special Rudrābhiṣeka and personal pujas performed on request	Located near Dasaswamedh Ghat, one of the most sacred sites of Kashi, with high ritual and spiritual activity	Shiva Ling inside a colorful, highly adorned shrine; image shows decorative wall painting with Sanskrit signage	Actively maintained, with named pujari (Shri Ashok Joshi) available for special rituals; good public access	Represents Shiva as protector of all beings (*bhoota*); integrated into the bustling Dasaswamedh tīrtha circuit, symbolic of active divine guardianship

36	Bhrigu Keshav	Reference to Bhrigu Tirtha in Lord Vishnu's dialogue with Bindu Rishi	Lord Vishnu in the form worshipped by Bhrigu Rishi	Vishnu told Bindu Rishi that Bhrigu Teerth is where He resides in the form of Bhrigu Keshav. Worshippers at this site will receive all blessings of Vishnu.	Bhela Ghat on the steps along the River Ganga; accessible from Prabhughat Ghat or via boat.	Highly auspicious for blessings, desire fulfillment, and pilgrimage merit.	Open for personal worship; devotees often perform their own pooja.	Situated at a now-obscure Bhargava Tirtha location on the Ganga banks; related to ancient sage Bhrigu.	Deity image installed in shrine; bright and colorful decorations.	Maintained and accessible; not formally part of a large temple complex.	Important Vaishnava site linked to sage Bhrigu and river pilgrimage tradition; independent devotion encouraged.
37	Bindu Madhav	Kashi Khand, Chapter 80, Shloka 128	Lord Vishnu as Madhav	Lord Vishnu manifested as Bindu Madhav at the sacred Bindu Teerth (Panchganga Ghat) after accomplishing the divine mission of making King Divodasa leave Kashi. Bindu Madhav is also known as Adi Madhav (Satya Yuga), Sankha Madhav (Treta Yuga), and Shesha Madhav (Dvapara Yuga).	Located at K.22/37, Panchganga Ghat, near Bindu Teerth	Highly sacred as a Moksha-giving Teerth; especially revered during Kartik month. Lord Vishweshwar himself is said to bathe here during Kartik.	Daily pooja performed from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Special poojas, aarti, and Bhog regularly conducted; Mangala Aarti at 6:00 a.m.	Situated at the confluence of five rivers (Panch-Ganga), making it a powerful sacred confluence and traditional pilgrimage stop.	Temple structure intact with central deity image of Bindu Madhav.	Preserved, accessible to devotees; managed and maintained by temple priest and trust.	Highly symbolic of the harmony between Vaishnava and Shaiva traditions in Kashi; considered the holiest among Madhav shrines; key site during Kartik pilgrimage.
38	Brahma Charini Devi	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 70	Brahmacharini (second form of Navadurga, a form of Goddess Parvati)	In her previous birth as Himavat's daughter, she undertook severe tapas to please Lord Śiva. Here, she is in penance mode holding a kamandalu and japamālā. Worship bestows austerity, strength, and divine wisdom.	K-22/17, Durga Ghat, near Brahmeshwar Mandir, Varanasi	Worshipped during Navaratri as the second aspect of Durgā; grants inner discipline and path of self-realization; major stop in Durga Navaratri Yatra	Temple open daily 6:00 AM – 1:30 PM & 4:00 PM – 11:00 PM; multiple daily ārtis; temple priest Shri Rajesh Satyarthi performs regular rituals	Situated near Durga Ghat, along the banks of the Ganga; part of the Brahmeshwar-Bhāskar circuit of Śakti Tirthas	Traditional shrine with idol richly decorated in red; holds japa mālā and water pot (kamandalu)	Well-maintained; accessible to devotees; active participation during Navarātri	Emphasizes the penance and purity aspect of the goddess; blends mythic narrative with sacred topography of Kāśī, representing tapas and yogic path

39	Brahmeshwar	Kashi Khanda (Aswa Medha episode); linked to Dasaswamedh context	Shiva Lingam (Blessings of Brahma, fulfillment of yajña)	When King Divodasa refused Brahma permission for Aswa Medha Yajña, Brahma with Shiva's help performed it at Dasaswamedh. Brahma later installed this Lingam to ensure Lord Shiva's presence and favor.	D.33/86, 67, Khalispura (near Dasaswamedh), close to Panch Ganga Ghat, Varanasi	Worship of Brahmeshwar grants the blessings of Brahma and Shiva; ensures divine alignment for yajñas and rituals	Temple open from 6:00–1:30 p.m. and 4:00–11:00 p.m.; daily ārtis at 6:00 a.m., 4:00 p.m., and 11:00 p.m.	Located near sacred ghats—Dasaswamedh and Panch Ganga—linking it to powerful tīrtha sites	Lingam housed in two sites: one inside Vishwanath galli (Vipulāshraya), another at Khalispura; both traditional shrines	Well-preserved and actively worshipped; daily rituals and public access maintained	Highlights the cooperation of Brahma and Shiva in sustaining Varanasi's sanctity; affirms the importance of ritual legitimacy in Kashi through Brahma's installation
40	Brihaspateeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 17, Shlokas 80 & following	Shiva Lingam (Linked to Guru/Brihaspati and success)	Brihaspati, son of Angira, came to Kashi and installed a Lingam after praising Lord Shiva. Shiva blessed him to become the Guru of Devas (Vachaspati), and the Ling was named Brihaspateeshwar. Worship on Thursdays and Pushya Nakshatra is especially meritorious.	CK.7/133, Scindia Ghat, near Atma Veereshwar Temple, Varanasi	Grants success in endeavors, especially if worshipped on Pushya Nakshatra Thursdays; associated with wisdom and guidance	Temple open 6:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m.; daily aartis at 6:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m., 4:00 p.m., and 11:00 p.m.; special offerings on Thursdays and Ekadashis	Located near Scindia Ghat and Atma Veereshwar in the sacred riverfront zone; strong alignment with planetary deity worship	Lingam installed in temple shrine with regular rituals and puja services	Well-maintained; actively worshipped; visible and accessible for pilgrims	Reflects confluence of planetary (*navagraha*) and Shaiva traditions; reinforces the cosmological dimension of Kashi's sacred geography
41	Budheshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 16, Shloka 87	Shiva Lingam (Linked to Planet Budha/Mercury; Wisdom and Intellect)	Budha (Mercury), son of Chandra and Tara, was born after a cosmic conflict. After learning of his origin, Budha came to Kashi, installed a Shiva Ling, and worshipped for forgiveness and wisdom. Lord Shiva appeared and blessed him with eternal intellect.	CK.7/158, Scindia Ghat, inside Atma Veereshwar Temple, Varanasi	Grants devotees wisdom and prevents intellectual decline; powerful for those seeking clarity, learning, and divine intelligence	Temple open from 5:00–11:30 a.m. and 12:30–3:30 p.m.; special ārtis from 7:00–8:30 p.m.; consult pujari for special pujas	Located within Atma Veereshwar Temple complex, Scindia Ghat—a major site within the sacred geography of southern Kashi ghats	Ancient Lingam embedded in a traditional sanctum, worshipped along with other planetary-linked Lingas	Well-preserved and maintained; rituals performed regularly; accessible by both road and river	Reflects Kashi's integration of *Navagraha* (planetary) deities into Shaiva tīrtha framework; narrative of redemption and enlightenment central to spiritual healing

42	Chakreshwar (Yantreshwar)	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 37	Shiva Lingam (Linked with Chakra Tirth and Tantric energy)	Kashi Khanda describes Chakra Tirth as a powerful tīrtha. This Shiva Ling, known as Chakreshwar or Yantreshwar, is associated with ritualistic worship requiring sanctity, teacher-guidance, and precision. Bathing in Chakra Tirth and worshipping Chakreshwar grants liberation.	Behind Annapurna Mandir, accessed via Vishwanath Galli or Ram Mandir Road, Varanasi	Symbol of mystic energies, tantric worship, and liberation; emphasizes purity, sanctity, and correct ritual conduct	Worship allowed at personal convenience; tantric poojas and strict ritual protocols practiced by initiated devotees	Located near Chakra Tirth (now a dry Gully); part of a cluster of spiritually potent ritual spots near Annapurna Temple	Ancient Shiva Lingam with circular yoni base; regularly decorated with flowers and vibhuti	Maintained shrine; open access; guidance by local priests available for tantric rituals	Emphasizes secretive, inner spiritual practices (*yantra*, *mantra*, *tantra*) integrated into the tīrtha tradition of Kashi; symbolic of discipline and esoteric wisdom
43	Chamunda Devi	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 70	Chamunda (a fierce form of Goddess Durgā)	Chamunda, along with Chhama Munda and Maha Munda, is described as Kṣetra Rakṣikā (protector of the region). Worship grants agricultural prosperity, offspring, and family growth.	Near Mahishasura Mardini Mandir, north of Lolark Kund, Varanasi	Regarded as a regional guardian (Kṣetra Rakṣikā); protects Kāśī's sacred geography and devotees' welfare	Temple open 5:30–11:30 AM and 5:00–9:00 PM; daily ārtis; evening ārtī at 7:00–7:30 PM is especially important	Located in Hayagrīva Tīrtha zone, near sacred Lolark Kund; key part of Kāśī's śakti circuit	Traditional shrine wi		
44	Chand Bhairav	Local Shaiva tradition, associated with the protective Bhairava circuit	Chand Bhairava – fierce guardian form of Lord Śiva	Revered form of Bhairava associated with Durga Devi's energy and protection of sacred feminine power; worshipped as a guardian and destroyer of negative forces in the Durga Kunda region.	B.27/2, Durga Kunda premises, near the famous Durga Mandir, Southern Kāśī	Acts as kṣetrapāla (protector) of the Durga Kunda precinct; devotees seek blessings for protection, fearlessness, and strength	Open daily for worship; offerings of flowers, sindoor, lamps; no fixed timings; devotees offer worship as per convenience	Southern Kāśī, near Durga Kund – a site deeply rooted in Śakti worship and Navarātri circuits	Traditional black-stone Bhairava idol decked with garlands and sacred ash; shrine maintained within Durga Devi complex	Fully functional and accessible; integrated within the temple precinct; maintained by the Durga Mandir administration	Represents Shaiva-Śākta syncretism, highlighting Bhairava as the fierce but benevolent guardian of sacred śakti spaces in Kāśī

45	Chandeeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 89, Shloka 67; also mentioned in Chapter 73	Shiva Lingam (Protective Power, Moksha Dīpa)	Described as the eleventh Ling from Marutgana Tīrtha, Chandeeshwar bestows divine powers and removes dangers and worries. Lighting a lamp (Moksha Dīpa) before this Ling is believed to liberate one's ancestors and grant freedom from fear. Shiva declared he will always be present in the Ling.	Sadar Bazar, Cantonment area, near Varanasi Junction Railway Station	Worshippers receive blessings of protection, removal of fear, and moksha for ancestors; powerful for group devotion	Worship open daily; devotees perform pūjā at their convenience; lighting lamps for ancestors is especially significant	Linked with the Kashi moksha narrative and Marutgana Tīrtha series of Lings	Shiva Lingam placed in an accessible shrine; traditional layout for lighting dīpa	Publicly accessible and maintained; open shrine near a major transport hub	Emphasizes collective merit (*sāṅghika*) and ancestral liberation; unique blend of public ritual and personal salvation; suitable for mass pūjā and individual devotion alike
46	Chandi Devi	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 83 (also mentioned in Chapter 70)	Chandi (a fierce and Siddhi-giving form of the Divine Mother)	One of the Saptamātrikās, Chandi Devi is the last mentioned and grants siddhis to devotees. She was instrumental in reviving life in a young boy (Veereshwar narrative). Mentioned as extremely powerful and protecting sacred geography of Kāśī.	Kalika Gali, near Sadar Bazaar, Varanasi (near the Cantonment area)	Known as a powerful Śakti Pīṭha; visited heavily during Chaitra Navarātri, Vijayā Daśamī, and ritualistic Devī worship; guards sacred geography	Pūjā from 5:00 AM – 10:00				
47	Chandreshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 89, Shloka 67; also mentioned in Chapter 73	Shiva Lingam (Installed by Chandra; Associated with Prosperity and Lunar Worship)	Chandra (Moon) installed this Lingam and worshipped Lord Shiva to atone for his sin of abducting Tara. Worship on full moon (Purnima) and new moon (Amavasya) is especially beneficial. Worshippers attain prosperity, happiness, and are freed from sins.	CK.7/124, Siddheshwari, Chowk, Varanasi; inside Biddhe Shwari Temple	Grants prosperity, peace, freedom from sins; ideal for rituals on Purnima, Amavasya, and monthly observances tied to the moon	Temple open from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.; ārtis at 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.; special poojas conducted on Shivratri, Ekadashi, and lunar tithis	Located inside Siddheshwari Temple, close to the sacred Chandrakup (Moon well), reinforcing lunar connections in Kashi's tīrtha lore	Well-maintained traditional shrine; temple includes multiple shrines and sacred features	Regularly worshipped with public access; priest-led rituals and special observances maintained	Emphasizes lunar cycles, purification from transgressions, and Chandra's association with the Shaiva tradition; links Kashi's cosmic symbolism with personal karmic liberation

48	Charma Munda Devi & Maha Munda Devi	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 70	Fierce Forms of Devī (Protective Śakti)	Charma Munda is a massive goddess figure said to hold a skull and knife, with a thousand shoulders, visualized as swallowing the galaxy. She destroys evil forces and enemies of dharma. Maha Munda Devi is described as chewing evil in her mouth—invoked for protection in religious life.	Charma Munda Devi: B-2/62, Bhadaini (near Mata An						
49	Chatur Dant Vinayak	No specific śloka mentioned; local belief tradition	Ganesha (Vinayaka)	Believed to remove all obstacles just by darshan (sight); invoked for overcoming difficulties	Located at D-48/10, Sanatan Dharm School, Nai Sarak, Varanasi	Considered effective in eliminating hurdles and promoting success in endeavors	Devotees can perform their own worship; place is open practically throughout	Located within the urban core near Nai Sarak—close to daily activity routes and traditional school settings	Flat murti coated in sindoor, adorned with a garland; embedded in shrine wall	Simple shrine maintained for open worship; good accessibility	Embodies the remover of obstacles form of Ganesha, highly approachable and revered in the heart of the city
50	Chatur Mukheshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 56, Shloka 10; also linked to Chatur Mukha Prayāg	Shiva Lingam (Four-faced Form, associated with Brahma Loka)	Installed by Lord Chatur Mukha Brahma near Varuna-Sangameshwar. Worshipping this Ling grants the devotee heavenly pleasures and divine reverence, akin to attaining Brahma Loka.	A7/151, Rajghat, in front of Varuna Sangameshwar Ling, near Adi Keshav Temple, Varanasi	Grants bliss and honor in heavenly realms; revered as a gateway to Brahmaloka; worshipped by all gods	Temple open 6:00 a.m.–12:00 noon and 4:00–10:00 p.m.; timings flexible; devotees offer worship as per convenience	Situated at the confluence region of Varuna and Ganga, linked to Adi Keshav and other major tīrthas in northern Kashi	Four-faced Shiva Lingam; traditional sanctum; site marked and referenced in various Kashi pilgrim guides	Shrine preserved and active; accessible for public worship and pilgrim visits	Symbolically powerful due to four faces (*chatur mukha*), indicating omnipresence and all-directional grace; merges Vedic Brahma symbolism with Shaiva devotion

51	Chintamani Vinayak	No specific śloka mentioned; traditional local reverence	Ganesha (Vinayaka)	Believed to fulfill all good desires of the devotees; worship removes anxieties and grants blessings	Located at K-56/42, East of Ishwar Gangi Talab, Babu Bazar, Varanasi	Considered a wish-fulfilling form of Ganesha; associated with peace of mind and prosperity	Devotees can offer their own prayers; pooja can be performed freely throughout the day	Located near Ishwar Gangi Talab, accessible through Laburnabir area—part of local sacred geography cluster	Three murti forms including main Vinayaka murti richly adorned with cloth and garlands	Well-maintained, active shrine; vibrant decorations indicate regular worship and community upkeep	Represents the "remover of worries" form of Vinayaka; deeply embedded in daily devotional life of nearby residents
52	Chitra Ghanta Devi	Kāśī Khaṇḍa (Chitra Koop and Chitragupta context)	Chitra Ghanta (a form of Goddess Durga, associated with valor and karma purification)	Worship at Chitra Koop followed by pūjā to Chitra Ghanta Devi is said to cleanse all sins (known or unknown) and ensure Chitragupta does not record their misdeeds. Described as lion-riding with various weapons, she protects devotees from evil and blesses them with courage and victory.	Ck. 23/4A, Chitra Ghanta Gali, near Chitra Koop,						
53	Chitra Ghanta Vinayak	Chitra Ghanta Devi	Vinayak (Ganesha)	Guards Kashi against evil forces; temple established as guardian form	Near Chowk, opp. UCO Bank, CK-23/4	Protective deity of Kashi; worshipped for removal of obstacles and protection	Public darshan through grill gate; daily worship continues	Located in inner Chowk region, linked with Devi Chitra Ghanta of Durgā tradition	Simple shrine; deity image marked with sindoor and pearls	Open to public; darshan allowed through grilled window gate	Situated on a narrow alley; connected with local Devi tradition; functions as guardian deity of Kashi's inner zones
54	Chitrangadeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 77 (near Kedāreshwar reference)	Shiva Lingam (Joy, Daily Worship, Gateway to Heaven)	Located to the north of Kedāreshwar; believed that those who worship this Lingam daily attain heavenly joy after death; associated with happiness and liberation	B-14/118, near Kedar Ghat Post Office, Kedar Ghat, Varanasi	Symbol of fulfillment, joy in life, and assurance of heavenly abode after death; revered in local oral traditions	Open daily for self-worship; devotees may perform pūjā as per personal ritual practice	Falls in the sacred tīrtha zone of southern Kashi near Kedāreshwar, a cluster of high Shaiva significance	Traditional Shiva Lingam placed within a public-accessible shrine; includes nearby reference to Chitrangadevi	Accessible and preserved; not heavily frequented, but respected by local devotees	Represents the localized devotion culture of Kashi; reflects the layered tīrtha ecosystem where even lesser-known Lingams hold

											immense esoteric value
55	Daksheshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Shiva Lingam (Sin-cleansing and Healing Waters)	Located near Mrityunjayeshwar Ling, this Shiva Ling is associated with Kālodaak Koop (Well), whose water is believed to cure diseases and absolve sins (intentional or unintentional)	K-52/39, within Mrityunjay Mahadev temple premises, Varanasi	Devotees worship here for health, healing, and sin-cleansing; associated with sacred healing springs	Temple open 4:00 a.m. to midnight; devotees offer flowers and Ganga water; personal pūjā permitted	Located near Mrityunjayeshwar, a prominent Shaiva healing and protection site; part of sacred well cluster	Shiva Lingam beside sacred well; traditional sanctum setup within temple precincts	Well-preserved and daily visited; active worship site for healing-related prayers	Illustrates the Kashi tradition of tīrthas with curative power; integrates elements of nature worship (well, water) with Lingam-centered Shaivism
56	Dandapani	Kashi Khanda (narrative connected with Harikesh and Ratnabhadra lineage)	Bhairava form (Protector Deity, Justice, and Discipline)	Story of Harikesh, born to Ratnabhadra and Kanaka Kundala. After renouncing worldly life, Harikesh came to Kashi for spiritual realization. Lord Shiva blessed him and appeared as **Dandapani**, the lord who punishes evil and protects devotees.	CK.36/10, Dhundiraj Galli, behind Gyan Vapi, Varanasi	A powerful form of Bhairava associated with justice, destruction of obstacles, and discipline; invoked for liberation and household protection	Shrine open for darshan through a grill; worship by devotees and ascetics; associated with vows and protection rituals	Located near Gyan Vapi, close to sacred water bodies and Akhadas; part of Bhairava's protective tīrtha landscape	Traditional shrine; two murtis shown—one black-faced Dandapani and another garlanded Bhairava; minimalistic enclosure	Preserved and respected; accessed by traditional route; notable among Jains and Nathpanthis	Dandapani here is a distinct Bhairava form—not to be confused with other Dandapani shrines; highly revered for dissolving karmic obstacles and fulfilling spiritual discipline in Varanasi

57	Dant Hast Vinayak	Traditional Guardian Deity	Vinayak (Ganesha)	Protects Kashi from evil people and blesses devotees	Near Bara Ganesh Temple, K-58/101, Lohatia	Protective deity granting blessings to the region	Regular worship; Aarti from 4:45 a.m.–10:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.–8:45 p.m.; Special pooja on Wednesdays and Chaturthi	Located near Bara Ganesh, within sacred Lohatia region of Kashi	Small stone temple with vermilion-covered murti	Well-maintained, daily worship by priest Subhash Chandra Tiwari	Acts as spiritual guardian; connected with broader Ganesha worship tradition in inner Kashi
58	Daśāśvamedha Ghat	Kashi Khanda, Ch. 62, Shloka 89 & Ch. 81, Shloka 31	Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva	King Divodāsa performed ten Ashvamedha Yajñas here to establish Dharma. Later praised for punya and liberation. Also visited by Lord Brahmā and Viṣṇu.	Central Ghat on the Ganga river in Varanasi (Dashashwamedh Road)	Considered the most sacred and vibrant ghat; spiritually central to Kashi	Daily Ganga Snān, Brahman Bhoj, Yajña, Deep Dān, especially on Amāvasyā and Dussehra; Ganga Aarti in the evening	At the confluence of major ritual spaces—Ganga (uttarvahini), Vishwanath temple route, Annapurna circuit	Riverfront stone steps, shrine remains, temporary ritual platforms; de		
59	Dasaswamedheshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 52	Shiva Lingam (Liberation and Austerity Reward)	Lord Brahma was sent by Shiva to Kashi to disturb King Divodasa's rule. Unable to find fault, Brahma performed ten Ashvamedha yajñas and installed this Lingam, named Dasaswamedheshwar. Worshippers are freed from sins and granted the fruits of ten Ashvamedhas.	D.18/15, Dasaswamedh Ghat, within Shiva Mandir, Varanasi	Powerful tīrtha associated with yajña merit and moksha; especially auspicious during the month of Ashadha (June–July)	Temple remains open throughout the day; morning and evening ārtis conducted; special significance during Ashadha	Located at the iconic Dasaswamedh Ghat, one of Kashi's most spiritually potent riverfronts	Ancient Shiva Lingam in active worship within traditional temple setting on ghat	Actively maintained and daily worshipped; part of high-traffic pilgrim route	Symbolizes merger of ritualistic yajña and Shaiva devotion; demonstrates how royal-sacrificial rites were integrated into Kashi's ascetic and tīrtha traditions
60	Dehli Vinayak	Threshold Deity Concept	Vinayak (Ganesha)	Removes all obstacles from the path of devotees	Village ~20 km from Varanasi city; outer threshold region	Acts as symbolic and protective threshold guardian of Kashi	Open for all; devotees perform worship themselves anytime	Located at periphery of sacred Kashi region, linked with liminal protection	Simple shrine structure, covered in sindoor	Accessible to devotees; self-service worship area maintained	"Dehli" means threshold—symbolizes the outer spiritual boundary of Kashi; protective Vinayak deity on the margins

61	Dhanvantar eeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97, Shloka 127	Shiva Lingam (Healing and Eternal Merit)	Worshipping this Ling near Kālodaak Koop cures diseases and grants spiritual merit that survives even Maha Pralaya. Lingam is associated with Dhanvantari, the divine physician, and merged with sacred water from the Kālodaak (black nectar) well.	K.52/39, within Mrityunjay Mahadev Temple premises, Varanasi	Grants healing, long-lasting merit, and spiritual purification; linked with Dhanvantari and eternal donation benefits	Temple open 4:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.; pūjā offered with Ganga water and flowers; self-offering allowed	Located in the healing tīrtha zone of Mrityunjay Mahadev, associated with longevity and health rituals	Traditional Shiva Ling with floral offerings; sacred well nearby; ritual water association evident	Maintained in good condition; part of active temple complex; visited regularly by healing seekers	Integrates Ayurvedic and Shaiva traditions; ideal for health-related vows and rituals; emphasizes permanence of meritorious acts
62	Dharmeshw ar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 78, Shloka 48	Shiva (as Dharmeshwar)	Yam Raj approached Shiva to solve the problem of sinners not being judged properly due to their devotion. Lord Shiva installed the Dharmeshwar Ling to provide moksha to such souls. Yam Raj was overwhelmed with joy and took the initiative to perform prayers and pooja as advised by Shiva. A Ling appeared and the place was sanctified.	Mir Ghat, near Dashashwam edh Ghat, Kashi	Believed that those who live in Kashi and perform regular poojas at this shrine are cleansed of all sins. Offers liberation and divine protection from sin.	Daily worship; special prayers during Kartik month, particularly on Shukla Paksha Ashtami, and Amavasya. Known for 'Dharma Koopa' rituals and Shraddha Karma.	Part of sacred Kashi circuit near Mir Ghat, connected with Dharma Koop, Vishalakshi temple, and other tīrthas.	Traditional Shiva Lingam setup; near ancient wells and shrines. Located within active temple compound.	Functional and visited regularly by devotees.	Strong association with Dharma, sin-cleansing, and Yam Raj narrative. The site is a key example of how ethical and spiritual liberation themes are merged in Kashi.
63	Dhruveshw ar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 142	Shiva Lingam (Steadfast Devotion and Moksha)	Prince Dhruva, insulted by his stepmother and ignored by his father, left the kingdom in search of divine support. After receiving blessings from Vishnu, he traveled to Kashi, built a temple, and started worshipping Shiva as Dhruveshwar. Lord Shiva assured that worshippers here will attain steadfast spiritual merit and moksha.	Premises of Sanatan Dharm College, Nai Sarak, Varanasi	Associated with unwavering devotion and perseverance; devotees are believed to attain moksha and peace	Open daily from 6:00–10:00 a.m. and 6:00–8:00 p.m.; timings may be flexible	Located in central Varanasi, close to major educational and spiritual zones, integrating the myth of Dhruva with Kashi's moksha tīrtha circuit	Traditional shrine with Shiva Lingam; simple yet revered structure with floral offerings	Active shrine maintained by local community; open for regular pūjā	Embodies the legendary steadfastness of Dhruva; connects Vedic devotional ideals with Shaiva tīrtha tradition; a symbolic marker of determination , purity, and liberation in Kashi

64	Dhundhi Vinayak	Kashi Khand, Chapter 63, Shloka 98	Ganesha (Vinayaka)	Lord Shiva praises Vinayak here, declaring him the fulfiller of all wishes. Lord Shiva declared that devotees worshipping Dhundhi Vinayak will be blessed with wealth and liberation; especially important on Chaturthi (4th day) after Amavasya.	Entry point of Annapurna Temple via Gate No. 1, near Vishwanath Gali	Considered as the Adya Vinayaka of Kashi and protector of wealth and moksha; invoked in last rites to bless the deceased	Daily worship; highly significant on Chaturthi; ritual chanting during Bahu Bandhan (final rites) for blessing souls	Located in sacred Vishwanath-Kshetra; situated near key shrine cluster including Annapurna, Vishwanath, and Kala Bhairava	Traditional shrine form with Ganesha murti; heritage temple setting	Actively worshipped and maintained, good condition	Highly revered as the first Ganapati of Kashi and a vital part of the city's tīrtha circuits and moksha rituals
65	Divodasesh war	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 88	Shiva Lingam (Righteous Governance and Royal Devotion)	King Divodasa, a pious ruler of Kashi, was tasked by Lord Brahma to maintain a pure, dharma-based society. Despite disturbances by divine agents, he stayed devoted to Shiva. Eventually, Shiva blessed him, and a Lingam was installed in his name to commemorate his unwavering governance and faith.	D.2/13, Vishnu Bhujan Ghar, near Bansphatak, Varanasi	Symbol of righteous rule, victory, and steadfast faith; considered powerful for rulers, leaders, and dharmic living	Open daily; devotees perform personal pūjā and offer prayers for victory and clarity in decision-making	Situated near Vishwanath and Bansphatak areas, within the heart of Kashi's sacred administrative and spiritual zones	Shiva Lingam enshrined in a modest temple; regularly worshipped by devotees	Maintained well; open access; part of Vishwanath-Bansphatak tīrtha zone	Reflects the integration of dharmic kingship with Shaiva devotion; ideal for those seeking success in leadership, justice, and moral challenges
66	Draupad Āditya	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 48, Shloka 17	Surya (Sun God), Draupadī	During exile, Draupadī performed penance to Sun God (Āditya) for food. Lord Surya granted her the divine vessel Akṣaya Pātra. Later, Surya promised that no devotee worshipping him here (in Kashi) would ever remain hungry.	Located off Dashashwamedh Road near Vishweshwar Temple area, inside Vishwanath Galli	Symbol of divine sustenance; devotees pray for removal of hunger, suffering, sorrow	Daily worship; no fixed timing; open throughout the day; personal pūjā and darśana encouraged	Part of the 12 Āditya shrines of Kashi; located close to core pilgrimage route of Vishweshwar Jyotirlinga	Small shrine image; niche-style altar; older form preserved with devotional updates	Active shrine, though small and tucked away in narrow lane (Gully); requires guidance to locate	Strongly linked to feminine devotion and power; symbolic of divine provision and inner strength during adversity

67	Durg Vinayak	Associated with Durgā Kunda region	Vinayak (Ganesha)	Protective deity worshipped for success and obstacle removal; closely linked with Durgā worship	No. 27/1, behind Durgā Kunda, Varanasi	Central to ritual offerings and local devotional circuits	Regular Mangala Aarti, Bhog, Sandhya Aarti, Shayan Aarti; Wednesday is special day	Located near sacred Durgā Kunda, key tīrtha node in Kashi's inner circuit	Well-embellished shrine with idol in silver covering and traditional ornaments	Fully functional and maintained temple; open 8 a.m.–12 p.m. and 4–10 p.m.	Widely revered Vinayak; considered especially potent before or after visiting nearby Durgā temple
68	Durga Devi (Kooshmanda Durga) & Durga Kund	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 71–72, Shloka 82	Durgā (Kooshmāṇḍā form), Goddess of victory and protector from evil	Lord Kartikeya narrates how the fierce demon Durgāsur oppressed sages and celestial realms; Goddess Durga annihilated him and liberated the three worlds. Worshipping her and taking ritual baths in Durga Kund removes sins and obstacles; especially emphasized during Ashtami, Chaturdashi, and Navarātri.	Durga Kund, Bhelupur, Varanasi – iconic red-shikhara temple beside a large water tank	Major Śakti Pīṭha of Kāśī; pilgrims flock here during Navarātri, Durgāṣṭamī, and Tuesday fasts; associated with fe					
69	Durmukh Vinayak	Traditional Vinayak Form	Vinayak (Ganesha)	One of the guardian deities of Kashi; relocated during Kashi Vishwanath Corridor expansion	Originally at CK-34/60 near Kashi Karvat Temple; now in extended Kashi Vishwanath Corridor	Part of Vinayak network protecting sacred core of Kashi	Open for public darshan; devotees can perform self-worship	Located in inner sacred geography near Vishwanath temple axis	Simple shrine smeared with sindoor and adorned with garlands	Relocated and preserved within corridor; publicly accessible shrine	Represents adaptive preservation of sacred guardians within urban redevelopment efforts
70	Dwar Vinayak	Kashi Khand – Guardian at the gate	Vinayak (Ganesha)	Guards Kashi from evil forces; mentioned in Kashi Khand as threshold protector	Near Swargdwameshwar (Brahmanal Chauraha), close to Jau Vinayak and Manikarnika Ghat	Important as gateway protector of sacred Kashi, especially near cremation ghat	Open to devotees for self-worship throughout the day	Located on sacred steps near Manikarnika Ghat; part of the liminal sacred boundary network	Stone-carved image coated in sindoor; integrated in wall niche	Well-preserved; open for darshan and rituals by devotees	Marks spiritual boundary zone at cremation ghat; connects life-death-liberation journey in sacred Kashi

71	Dwareshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Shiva Lingam (Gateway Protection and Moksha Granting)	Described by Lord Shiva along with Dwareshwari Devi; worship of this Ling grants full benefits of living in Kashi and bestows *Siddhi* and *Moksha*. Believed to be the divine guardian at the southern entrance to Kashi.	B-27/1, near Durg Vinayak temple, South entrance of Kashi	Grants protection, success (*Siddhi*), and final liberation (*Moksha*); especially venerated as a guardian deity	Devotees perform pūjā personally throughout the day; shrine is open for worship anytime	Located in the southern entrance zone of sacred Kashi, near Durg Vinayak; functions as a spiritual *dvara* or gateway	Lingam located inside a small temple-like structure beside Dwareshwari shrine	Well-maintained; publicly accessible; lesser-known yet spiritually potent	Symbolizes the protective boundary of Kashi; holds spatial-theological importance as the southern *dvara-pālaka* (gatekeeper) of the sacred city
72	Dwi Mukh Vinayak	Kashi Khand, Chapter 57, Shloka 101	Vinayak (Ganesha with two faces)	Grants all forms of prosperity; mentioned as being east of Kshipra Prasadan Ganesha	D-51/150, West of Saambas Ashraya, Suraj Kund area	Highly auspicious; worship believed to bring total prosperity	Open to public; devotees can perform pooja by themselves	Situated near Suraj Kund, part of southern sacred extension of Kashi	Simple shrine; dressed murti with sindoor, decorated with cloths and ornaments	Well-preserved in temple premises; accessible via rickshaw	One of the rarer forms (two-faced Vinayak); significant placement near Suraj Kund, a spiritually vibrant locale
73	Eeshanesh war	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 14 & Chapter 88, Shloka 84	Shiva Lingam (Direction of Isha—North East; Moksha-granting)	Located at the ancient Eeshan Fort area where Lord Shiva's devotees resided. Devotees who bathe in the Ganga at Uttara-Vahini and worship this Ling on Chaturdashi night are granted Moksha and happiness.	Deepak Cinema compound at Bansphatak, behind Gadauliya Mall, Varanasi	Powerful for granting Moksha, particularly when worshipped during Chaturdashi or special lunar observances; linked with the Ishan direction of Lord Shiva	Darshan generally through the wall from nearby shop; pūjā by arrangement; worship possible early morning to evening	Situated near the Uttara-Vahini Ganga flow and spiritually aligned with directional guardianship (Ishan kona)	Traditional Lingam inside a shrine embedded within commercial complex wall	Preserved inside the mall; darshan enabled through wall; worship conditions adapted to modern environment	Connects directional deity worship (*Ishan*) with Shaiva moksha tradition; significant for its mention in both Chapter 14 and 88; integrates modern urban space with deep tīrtha heritage
74	Eka Danta Vinayak	Traditional Vinayak Form with One Tusk	Vinayak (Eka Danta – One-Tusked Ganesha)	Guards Anand Van (sacred forest of Kashi) from evil forces	D-32/102, Pushpa Danteshwar, Bengali Tola, Varanasi	Protector of sacred Anand Van; symbolic guardian of Kashi's spiritual realm	Open for darshan and self-performed pooja by devotees	Located within Bengali Tola, near Pushpa Danteshwar, part o			

75	Gabhastees hwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 48, Shloka 77	Shiva (as Gabhasteesh war), installed by Surya (Sun God)	Lord Surya installed this Shiva Ling at Panchanad Teerth. His prayers began to reflect in the material life of living beings. Eventually, the energy became stable, and the activities of all beings continued with balance. Lord Shiva, pleased with Surya's prayers, blessed him with fulfillment of desires. The Ling came to be known as Gabhasteeshwar, representing Surya's radiant energy.	K-24/34, Mangala Gauri Temple, near Panchganga Ghat, Kashi	Associated with Sun God. Believed to grant all accomplishments and fulfillments. The Ling symbolizes stability of energy and cosmic harmony.	Worship is done in morning and evening hours. Special offerings during Ratha Saptami and other solar festivals. Considered highly beneficial for material and spiritual goals.	Located near Panchganga Ghat, a highly sacred confluence in Kashi. Part of the solar-energy centric sacred geography.	Lingam installed in Mangala Gauri Temple complex. Traditional structure with regular worship.	Actively worshipped, maintained with support of temple priests.	A rare example of a Sun-God-installed Shiva Ling. Emphasizes solar symbolism and fulfillment through divine radiance.
76	Gaja Karna Vinayak	Traditional form of Ganesha with elephantine ears	Vinayak (Ganesha – "Elephant-Eared")	Grants happiness and prosperity to devotees; protects the sacred city	Originally at CK-37/43, Kotwalpura, Ishaneswar; now near Aad Vishweshwar Temple, Flower Market, Bansphatak	Prominent guardian deity associated with fertility, well-being, and local prosperity	Open for self-performed worship throughout the day	Pilgrim route near Bansphatak; sacred vicinity of Aad Vishweshwar and local shrines	Icon covered in sindoor, seated in niche behind white fence	Well-maintained; moved to current location within sacred core of Kashi	Form with large ears (Gaja Karna) symbolizes divine hearing of prayers; now integrated with the Flower Market pilgrimage zone
77	Gaja Vinayak	Traditional Symbolism of Wealth and Strength	Vinayak (Ganesha)	Devotees who worship with devotion are blessed with wealth (symbolized as being able to buy an elephant)	CK-54/44, Raja Darwaja, near Bhara Bhuteshwar Temple, Varanasi	Associated with wealth, abundance, and material prosperity	Open to public; self-performed pooja allowed throughout the day	Situated near Bhara Bhuteshwar, part of inner Chowk sacred geography	Simple image covered in sindoor, embedded in stone wall shrine	Well-preserved; public darshan accessible throughout the day	"Gaja" symbolizes not only elephantine strength but also wealth and grandeur—worship ensures both spiritual and material gain

78	Gana Nath Vinayak	Associated with Kashi's guardian deities	Vinayak (Ganesha – Lord of the Ganas)	Grants success and happiness; one must first visit Dhundhi Raj Vinayak before this deity	CK-37/1, Dhundhi Raj Galli, near Vishweshwar Gynpīr, Varanasi	Important sequence in sacred route; protects and blesses devotees on pilgrimage path	Open throughout the day; self-worship by devotees permitted	Located near Dhundhi Raj Vinayak and Manikarnika zone; significant in Varanasi's sacred geometry	Red-stone shrine image covered with sindoor and adorned with fresh flower garlands	Well-preserved and actively visited; maintained by local priests and devotees	A key Vinayak in the ritual path after Dhundhi Raj; part of layered Vinayak pilgrimage pattern in sacred Kashi
79	Ganeshwar (Rameshwar)	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Shiva Lingam (Happiness and Prosperity)	Ganeshwar is one of the 12 Jyotirlingas in Kashi and mentioned in connection with Ganeshwar Ling. Worshippers gain prosperity and joy. Also called **Rameshwar**, connecting it to the Southern Jyotirlinga tradition.	D.16/34, near Manmandir Ghat, close to Varahi Devi temple, Varanasi	Brings happiness and prosperity; important Jyotirlinga in the Kashi Shaiva tradition; revered as a local counterpart to Rameshwaram (Tamil Nadu)	Temple open from 6:00 a.m.–12:00 noon and 5:00–8:00 p.m.; pūjā performed by devotees personally	Situated near Manmandir Ghat, a prominent riverfront ghat and near Varahi Devi temple—important nodal point in sacred geography	Ancient Shiva Lingam in active shrine; surrounded by floral and water offerings	Maintained well; shrine accessible and worshipped regularly	Represents both the unity and multiplicity of Jyotirlinga tradition; integrates regional names (Rameshwar) with Kashi's tīrtha landscape; symbol of divine grace and household welfare
80	Ganga Āditya	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 51, Shloka 104	Āditya (Sun God), Ganga Devī	Lord Sūrya stationed himself at this spot to offer prayers to Ganga Devī, reciting her stotras and blessing devotees with radiant energy and protection from ailments.	Near Nepali Mandir / Lalita Ghat, on the riverfront of Varanasi	Worship at this site is believed to protect from disease and misfortune; invokes blessings of both Surya and Ganga	Daily darśana; individual pūjā; darśana timings are open nearly all day	Located on sacred Ganga riverbank; aligns with solar-tīrtha tradition and flows into Pancha Tīrtha circuits	Temple iconography and framed deity image with symbolic placement at Ghat; traditional elements retained	Site is active and accessible; maintained through temple and community support	One of the 12 Āditya shrines in Kāśī; convergence of solar and river worship; ideal for devotees seeking bodily and mental health

81	Ganga Keshav	Kashi Khand mentions Ganga Keshav Tirtha	Lord Vishnu in the form of Ganga Keshav	Devotees who worship Ganga Keshav are respected and glorified in Vaikuntha (Vishnu Lok). The Tirtha was once very active for Shraaddha rituals and Tarpana ceremonies. Though the Tirtha is no longer distinctly marked, it likely merged with the river.	Located at B-1/67, Lalita Ghat (above the steps, near Manikarnika)	Important for ancestral offerings (Shraddha) and liberation rituals. Highly respected among Vaishnava devotees.	Worship and darshan are open throughout the day; self-offered rituals performed.	Lies above Lalita Ghat near Panchganga confluence, part of the sacred riverfront of Varanasi.	Deity image of Lord Vishnu (Ganga Keshav) installed in shrine.	Present and accessible; the exact original tīrtha site may be merged with Ganga.	Represents river-centric Vaishnava devotion in Kashi; integrates Vishnu worship into Ganga rituals and Shaiva context at Lalita and Manikarnika Ghats.
82	Gangeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 91	Shiva Lingam (Installed by Goddess Ganga; Moksha through Ganga)	According to Skanda Purana, Ganga Devi herself installed this Lingam while entering Kashi and praying to Lord Shiva. Worshipping this Lingam and bathing in the Ganga fulfills wishes and leads to moksha.	CK.13/78, near Kuberkeshwar and Vriddh Kaleshwar, Chowk area, Varanasi	Tied directly to the sanctity of the Ganga; fulfills wishes and grants liberation (moksha) to worshippers	No specific pūjā or assigned pujari; darshan possible through external placement of Lingam	Located near Kashi's sacred riverfront, close to multiple Gangā-related tīrthas; symbolically powerful	Lingam installed in an external wall niche with no shrine enclosure; accessible from the street	Remains accessible and preserved; informal public worship continues	Signifies the meeting of two sacred forces—Ganga and Shiva; reflects tīrtha-initiating power of deities themselves in Kashi's sacred landscape
83	Garudeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 88	Shiva Lingam (Liberation and Devotion of Garuda)	After rescuing his mother Vinata, Garuda came to Kashi to worship Lord Shiva. He installed this Lingam and prayed for liberation. Lord Vishnu granted him the role of his *vahana* (vehicle) as a result.	D.31/43, Jangambari Teliana, near Bhikharipur and Gurudham crossing, Varanasi	Worship of Garudeshwar grants ultimate knowledge (*Viveka*) and liberation; linked with Vishnu's divine narrative	Temple open from 7:00–7:30 p.m.; special pūjā by consultation with the pujari	Located near Jangambari, a spiritually dense region close to Bhikharipur and Durga Kund	Traditional Shiva Lingam in enclosed shrine; actively maintained	Shrine is preserved; public access with time-specific window; requires planning for darshan	Unique among tīrthas for connecting Garuda's bhakti with Shaiva worship; reflects harmony of Vaishnava and Shaiva traditions in Kashi

84	Gautamesh war	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Shiva Lingam (Installed by Sage Gautama; Moksha-granting)	This Lingam was installed by Sage Gautama near the Mukhdeshwar area. Worshipping this Lingam grants all happiness and ultimately Moksha. It is associated with the Vedic sage tradition and purity.	D.7/333, Kashisanchal an Shivala, Godowlia, Varanasi	Grants happiness and Moksha; strongly tied to the legacy of Sage Gautama and the Rishi lineage in Kashi	Temple open from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 4:00–10:00 p.m.; ārtis performed morning, evening, and at closing (Shayan Ārti)	Located in Godowlia-Shivala zone, a prominent religious neighborhood in Kashi	Traditional Shiva Lingam housed in an enclosed shrine; actively worshipped	Well-preserved temple; structured worship schedule; visited by regular devotees	Highlights the spiritual contributions of sages like Gautama to Kashi's tīrtha system; exemplifies the Rishi–Shaiva connection in sacred city-building
85	Gopi Govind	Kashi Khand; Gopi Govind Teerth mentioned	Lord Vishnu as Gopi Govind	Worshippers of Gopi Govind are always blessed by Lord Vishnu. Though the Teertha itself is no longer extant, the temple maintains devotional continuity.	Located at K.4/24, Lal Ghat, near Birla Sanskrit Vidyalaya and Birla House	Continues to be a site of Vaishnava devotion despite the physical tīrtha no longer being identifiable. Daily worship sustains its sacred role.	Temple is open from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.; daily aartis in the morning.	Located above Lal Ghat, near the sacred riverfront, historically associated with Gopi Govind Teerth.	The temple houses images of Gopi Govind and Narayani Devi.	Maintained and functional; the tīrtha site has merged with urban surroundings.	Symbolizes continuity of sacred memory even in the absence of a visible tīrtha; closely linked to devotional and feminine divine aspects (Lakshmi).
86	Goprekshes hwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 87, Shloka 10; Chapter 2, Shloka 81	Shiva Lingam (East of Mahadev Ling)	Worshipping this Lingam grants the full merit of **Godāna** (cow donation) and **Goprādakṣiṇā**. It is also said to confer the merit of circumambulating the Earth.	K.4/42, Lal Ghat area near Gauri Shankar temple, Varanasi	Grants rewards of great dharmic acts like cow donation and symbolic global circumambulation; connects to traditional agrarian and Vedic values	Open from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.; daily ārtis are held	Located east of Mahadev Lingam, near Lal Ghat; close to Gauri Shankar	Traditional Shiva Lingam with visible worship activity	Temple is active and maintained with regular rituals and footfall	A unique Tīrtha integrating the symbolism of Vedic rituals like Godāna and cow protection into urban Kashi's sacred topography

87	Gyan Keshav	Kashi Khand mentions Sweṭ Dweep Teerth and Gyan Keshav	Lord Vishnu as Gyan Keshav	Those who take bath in Sweṭ Dweep and worship Gyan Keshav gain ultimate knowledge. Although the Teerth is not visible today, worship of Gyan Keshav is linked to spiritual education and learning.	Located at A-37/51, Adi Keshav Temple, Rajghat Fort	Highly regarded for blessings of knowledge and wisdom; associated with river-based sacred learning traditions.	Temple open for darshan from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 4:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.	Located on the banks of the Ganga at Rajghat, near confluence zone of Adi Keshav and sacred bathing sites.	Deity of Gyan Keshav housed in Adi Keshav Temple structure.	Preserved and functional; integrated within the larger Adi Keshav temple complex.	Represents the knowledge-bestowing aspect of Lord Vishnu; aligns with Kashi's identity as a center of learning and sacred wisdom.
88	Gyan Madhav	Implicitly from Kashi Khand traditions near Gyan Vapi	Lord Vishnu as Gyan Madhav	Worshipping this form of Vishnu is said to grant ultimate knowledge in all fields.	Located at CK.35/21, within Vishwanath Temple compound near Akshay Vat; accessible through Vishwanath Gully.	Connected to the pursuit of knowledge; significant among devotees seeking spiritual and worldly wisdom.	No fixed rituals; devotees may pray at their own convenience.	In the core sacred geography of Kashi, in front of Gyan Vapi and near Vishwanath Temple.	Small shrine within the Vishwanath Temple compound.	Active and accessible to devotees; integrated in one of the most sacred temple zones.	Represents the union of Shiva and Vishnu energies in Kashi; highlights the city's legacy as a seat of knowledge and liberation.
89	Gyan Vapi (Jñāna Vāpī)	Kashi Khanda, Ch. 33, 34	Lord Shiva, Dipgal Rishi, Princess Kalavati	Dipgal Rishi created a Vapi (well) with Trishul and worshipped Shiva. Princess Kalavati touched water and recalled her past life.	Located near the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Varanasi	Considered the fountain of divine knowledge (Jñāna). Source of spiritual memory and liberation.	Devotees once bathed in the well water for purification; now water is sprinkled or consumed as Prasāda due to restrictions	Central spiritual node of sacred city, beside Vishwanath Temple; symbolic source of divine wisdom	Ancient stone well; part of the old temple complex architecture	Access restricted due to security; ritual usage adapted	A metaphysical center of knowledge and liberation; represents jñāna-tattva in the Kashi sacred landscape
90	Gyan Vinayak	Kashi Khand – Guardian of Knowledge and Protection	Vinayak (Ganesha – Embodiment of Wisdom)	Protects Kashi against evil forces; associated with knowledge and spiritual defense	CK-28/4, Langlishwar, Khowa Gulli Chowk, near Khatti Medical Hall, Varanasi	Spiritual guardian and symbol of wisdom in sacred city circuits	Daily worship with morning and evening ārti; temple open 8–10 a.m. & 6–8 p.m.	Located in core city area, part of sacred grid of Chowk locality	Smeared in sindoor; adorned with flower garland in a niche temple	Actively maintained with regular worship and darshan hours	Highlights the spiritual role of wisdom (gyān) as a shield for sacred Kashi; integrates philosophical and protective dimensions

91	Gyaneshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 73	Shiva Lingam (One of the 14 powerful Lings)	Lord Shiva revealed that among thousands of Lingas in Kashi, 14 are particularly potent. Gyaneshwar is one of these and has the power to absolve all sins, knowingly or unknowingly committed, and grants Moksha and supreme knowledge.	Not specifically mentioned in this excerpt	Highly revered as part of the "Fourteen Maha-Lingas"; associated with ultimate knowledge and liberation	Reciting the names of these 14 Lingas is meritorious; devotion to Gyaneshwar grants Moksha and wisdom	Symbolically represents spiritual wisdom and liberation through Jñāna (knowledge)	Presumed ancient site; architectural status not specified	Actively venerated as one of the 14 Lingas; likely maintained with ritual practice	Gyaneshwar connects the physical tīrtha of Kashi with the metaphysical path of Jñāna Yoga; ideal for seekers of wisdom and liberation
92	Hareshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 69	Shiva (in form of Kriti Vishweshwar)	After killing Gajasur, Lord Shiva bathed in Rudra Vasan and manifested as Hareshwar. Goddess Uma Devi offered flowers and praised the site where Shivalingas from heaven manifested due to Lord Shiva's divine presence.	K-37/51, Keshav Temple, Rajghat Fort, near Gyan Keshav	Believed to be a divine manifestation of Shiva post Gajasur slaying; sacred for absolution and divine blessings	Daily worship and regular aartis in the morning and evening; devotees visit for darshan and rituals	Symbolic site linked to purification, post-victory divine manifestation	Presumed old sacred site; structural details not elaborated	Active place of worship; accessible by e-rickshaw or cycle rickshaw	Associated with post-war purification and divine calmness of Shiva; connects tīrtha to metaphysical transition of Rudra to Vishweshwar
93	Harikeshes hwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 100	Shiva	Mentioned as part of daily Antargruhi Yatra (inner circuit pilgrimage) covering sacred deities within Kashi. Associated with Agastyeshwar region.	Platform near House No. 35/273, Khari Kuan, near Vimal Aditya area	Believed to fulfill all desires and grant Moksha to devotees	Devotees perform pooja as per their convenience throughout the day	Linked to the innermost tīrtha zone of Kashi; part of inner sacred geography	Not specifically mentioned	Functional; known locally; accessible via Sonarpura and Godowlia	Important inner sanctum tīrtha of Kashi; associated with Antargruhi Yatra and spiritual inward journey
94	Harishchan dreshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97, Shlok 248	Shiva	Linked to King Harishchandra, renowned for truthfulness and sacrifice; one who worships here is said to gain kingdom (interpreted today as political or social success)	Located inside a private house at CK-71/66, Sanka Ghat; near Harishchandra Ghat, Varanasi	Symbol of satya (truth), renunciation, and dharma	Worship inside a private house; darshan possible through grilled door	Situated at sacred cremation zone (smashāna) near Harishchandra Ghat	Not detailed; shrine exists in private residential setting	Active; accessible from ghat side and also by road	Highly symbolic of truth and renunciation; associated with Vedic ideal of Raja Harishchandra

95	Hasti Paleshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 87, Shlok 128	Shiva	Worship of this Ling grants the full benefits of donating an elephant; believed to provide wealth and household prosperity	Within Mrityunjay Mahadev premises, at K-52/39, Daranagar, south of Mahashewata r Ling	Symbol of affluence and pious merit, especially *hastidāna phala*	Devotees perform self-pooja; darshan from 04:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon	Located within the wider tīrtha context of Mrityunjay campus	Installed within a sacred inner room with many other śiva-liṅgas	In good condition; accessible during temple hours	Reputed to bestow the rarest punyas (virtues); part of complex cluster of Lingas in Mrityunjay precinct
96	Hatkeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 100	Shiva	Mentioned among the deities of the Antargṛihi Yatra; worship grants Mukti	At Ck-43/189, Harha Sarai, near Tulsi Market (behind Raja Darwaja), Kashi	Part of the sacred Antargṛihi Yatra route in the inner divine plane of Kashi	Open worship from 07:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.; darshan through grills during rest of the day	Inner sanctum of Kashi; Antargṛihi Yatra covers inner circle of sacred sites	Temple structure with shrine accessed through gate grills	Functioning shrine with limited darshan hours	Highly potent site in the esoteric Yatra; grants Mokṣa upon sincere worship
97	Hayagreeva Keshav	Kashi Khand, Chapter 81, Shloka 23	Lord Vishnu as Hayagreeva (horse-headed form)	Lord Vishnu says: "I am called present in the form of Hayagriva Keshava at Hayagriva Tirtha. By simply worshipping me, a devotee surely attains the supreme position of Vishnu."	Located at B.3/25 near Anandmayee Hospital, Bhadaeni	Highly revered for attaining supreme spiritual knowledge and closeness to Vishnu's divine form.	Open for general worship; individual offerings and prayers practiced.	Site linked with the now-nonexistent Hayagriva Tirtha; closely connected to Hayagriva Yogini tradition in Kashi.	Deity of Hayagreeva Keshav installed and maintained.	Accessible and maintained within a localized temple setting.	Represents the knowledge-bestowing and salvation-granting form of Vishnu; preserves a rare Vaishnava tradition in Kashi's sacred ecology.
98	Hayakanti Devi	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 70	Hayakanti Devi (Obstacle-Remover Form of Śakti)	Described as a fierce goddess who removes obstacles from devotees' paths just as weeds and thorns are cleared by a sickle. Symbolically powerful for removing life's barriers.	D.52/31, Kautiliya Tola, near Lakshmi Kund, Varanasi	Worshipped for removal of obstacles and life's hindrances; revered locally for spiritual protection and success	Daily worship from 5:00–11:30 AM and 5:30–9:30 PM; morning and evening ā				

99	Heramba Vinayak	Traditional Form of Ganesha (Five-faced form in some traditions)	Vinayak (Ganesha – Fulfiller of Desires)	Grants fulfillment of desires to devotees; formerly in open shrine, now housed in shopping complex	C-21/14, Maldahiya, second floor of TSM Complex, Varanasi	Transitioned from traditional to urban temple space; continuity of faith despite commercialization	Daily worship; temple open 8:00 a.m.–12:00 noon & 6:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m.; ārti held morning and evening	Urban commercial zone; re-established shrine maintaining sacred presence in a modern setting	Image covered in sindoor and decorated with flower garlands	Housed in small temple on second floor; well-maintained for public access	Shows adaptive relocation of sacred spaces within urban development; example of living tradition in changing contexts
100	Hiranya Garbheshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 100	Shiva	Worshipping Hiranya Garbheshwar after taking a dip at the confluence of the two Ganga currents (Trilochan Ghat) removes all spiritual obstacles and grants Moksha	Alongside Trilochan Ghat in Trilochaneshwar Mahadev premises, near Birla Hospital, Varanasi	Part of the Antargṛihi Yatra and confluence bathing ritual in sacred Kashi Ganga	Worship open from 05:00 a.m. to 02:00 p.m. and 04:00 p.m. to 09:00 p.m.	Situated at the sacred confluence point of Uttara Ganga and Dakshina Ganga, near Trilochan Tīrtha	Ancient shrine built along the riverbank; maintained with floral offerings	Functional temple with daily pooja and public access	Ritual bathing before worship is emphasized; site linked to overcoming life's obstacles
101	Jambukeshwar	Kashi Khanda	Shiva	Mentioned among various Lings; a devotee who sincerely worships this Ling is freed from all sins and attains heaven	Located in premises of Bara Ganesh temple, K-58/101, Lohatia area	Considered spiritually potent for liberation from sins	Temple is open from 04:45 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.; Mangal Aarti at 04:45 a.m., Bhog Aarti at 10:30 a.m., Shayan Aarti at 10:30 p.m.	Embedded within the sacred geography of Kashi's dense religious topography	Shrine installed in a traditional setup within larger temple complex	Active and maintained temple with regular daily poojas	Often included in broader pilgrim circuits related to sacred Lings of Varanasi
102	Janakeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Shiva	Located in the vicinity of Malteshwar; worshipping the Ling leads to ultimate Moksha. The well near it (Kalodak Koop) is said to cure diseases	Located at K-52/39, Mrityunjay Mahadev at Daranagar	Considered spiritually potent for granting Moksha and good health	Open for worship from 04:00 a.m. to 12:00 midnight; devotees can perform pooja as per convenience	Associated with Kalodak Koop, a well believed to have curative powers	Traditional sacred site within a major temple complex	Well-maintained and active temple with consistent worship	A significant Ling connected to Malteshwar and Kalodak Koop in the healing geography of Kashi
103	Jateeshwar (Pataleshwar)	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 69	Shiva	One of the 6B Lings established by the Lord himself during his Krittivaseshwar form; appeared from Ramnashwar area; grants all wishes of the devotees.	House No. D.32/118, Bengali Tola, near Godowlia, South Indian area of Varanasi	Grants fulfillment of desires and is considered spiritually potent; connected with the Daksina Bhairava tradition	Open for darshan throughout the day via grill opening	Associated with the Southern (Dakshina) zone of Kashi	Located in a built sacred enclosure	Maintained and accessible for darshan via grill view	A powerful shrine from South Kashi zone, aligns with Dakshina Shiva tradition and linked to

											Patala loka energies
104	Jaygeeshye shwar	Kashi Khand (Episode of Sage Jaygeesh)	Shiva	Sage Jaygeesh undertook intense penance in Mandarachal, became emaciated, and was guided by Lord Shiva to install a divine Ling in Kashi. The Ling was established by the sage at a sacred spot and blessed by Lord Shiva, making it a site of powerful spiritual merit and fulfillment.	Located at CK.27/7, near Jyestha Gauri temple, Jyeshtha Gauri Bhairav locality	Worship here is said to relieve devotees of sins and grant boons; associated with great austerities of sages	Open for darshan throughout the day; devotees may perform worship at their convenience	Located near Jyeshtha Gauri Bhairav, within a heritage-rich zone	Shrine with traditional built structure	Accessible and maintained; images show clear presence of sacred Ling	Emphasizes sage-led Shiva worship and the power of self-installed (Svayambhu) Lingas; combines yogic austerity and pilgrimage
105	Jwara Hareshwar	Kashi Khand, Chapter 87, Shloka 13	Shiva	Lord Shiva narrated this Ling's importance to Goddess Parvati. Worshipping this Ling helps in curing Jwara (fever) immediately. The Ling is associated with medicinal power and was revered at a time when illnesses like fever were beyond treatment. It holds significance especially in the pre-modern era when spiritual remedies were sought for diseases.	Located at J8/85, Jaitpura, on the way to Skanda Mata Mandir, accessible via Jaitpura main road	Believed to provide immediate relief from fever and ailments when worshipped sincerely	Worship throughout the day, with aartis at 6:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m., and 8:00 p.m.	Located near the sacred geography of Gopreksha and Jaitpura	Ling shrine in traditional form, with clear platform	Well-maintained; appears actively worshipped	Highlights a disease-specific healing site from antiquity; shows integration of spiritual and medical approaches in traditional Kashi

106	Jyeshṭhā Gaurī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 83, Shloka 20	Jyeshṭhā Gaurī (Form of Gaurī worshipped for seniority and social upliftment)	Lord Śiva advised that devotees who are socially or karmically troubled should worship Jyeshṭhā Gaurī to attain prominence and well-being. Especially venerated on the 8th day of Jyeshṭha month (Shukla Paksha Ashtamī).	K-63/24, Sapt Sagar Mohalla, near Maidagin, Varanasi	Regarded as one of the Nine Gaurī temples of Kāśī; especially significant during Vasantha Navarātri; believed to provide spiritual upliftment, seniority, and freedom from misfortune	Daily worship throughout the day; ārtis in morning and evening; special darśan during Navarātri Gaurī Yātrās and on auspicious tithis in Jyeshṭha month	Close to Kāśī Devī Mandir; forms part of the Gaurī temple network signifying feminine divinity across Kāśī	Traditional small shrine with dressed idol; mandapa often used for singing bhajans and spiritual gatherings	Functionally active; regular pūjā and bhajan groups gather; community-run temple with traditional upkeep	Jyeshṭhā Gaurī marks the spiritual-social healing function of Devī worship in Kāśī; promotes social harmony and karmic redemption for those facing hardship or societal neglect
107	Jyeshtha Vinayak	Kashi Khand, Chapter 77 – Eldest among the 56 Vinayaks	Vinayak (Ganesha – as Jyeshtha, the eldest)	Eldest of the Vinayaks; holds special importance on Chaturthi after Amavasya	Kal-21/44, Sapt Sagar Mohalla, Jyeshtheshwar Ling premises, near Maidagin, Varanasi	Highly revered as senior-most among Vinayaks; believed to grant success in rituals and prosperity	Worship open from 5:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. and 4:00–8:00 p.m.; ārti held morning & evening; timings flexible based on rituals	Situated within Sapt Sagar area; spiritually aligned with Jyeshtheshwar Mahadev, forming a sacred cluster	Colorful idol seated with distinctive features; housed in temple setting	Well-preserved, actively worshipped; important local shrine with high ritual value	Highly auspicious for Chaturthi vratas; recognized as the first among the Vinayak pantheon of Kashi
108	Jyeshthesh war	Kashi Khand, Chapter 89, Shloka 84	Shiva	Worshipping Jyeshtheshwar Ling in the month of Jyeshtha (May–June), especially on Chaturdashi or Amavasya, brings great punya (spiritual merit). A devotee feeding a single poor person while doing pūjā of this Ling earns merits equivalent to feeding a crore people. This site is associated with merit accumulation and dispelling accumulated sins, likened to the disappearance of darkness with sunrise.	K-62/144, Sagar Mohalla, near Kashi Devi Temple	Believed to grant immense spiritual merit, especially when food is offered to the needy during pūjā	Daily worship from 05:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.; aartis in morning and evening	Located near Kashi Devi Temple in sacred Sagar Mohalla	Traditional Ling shrine in an active locality	Well-preserved, actively visited for special pūjās	Promotes charity, seva, and dharmic actions tied to lunar calendar observances; significant for socio-religious merit (puṇya) consciousness in Hindu thought

109	Jyoti Rupeshwar	Kashi Khand, Chapter 94	Shiva (Jyoti – Light, Siddhi)	Lord Vishnu was undergoing penance at Chakra Pushkarini (Mani Karnika), and Lord Shiva appeared there as a Jyoti (divine light) in Ling form. Worshipping this Ling grants Siddhi (divine powers), and the devotee becomes as radiant as light.	CK-8/10, Gomath, near Abhay Sanyas Ashram	Grants spiritual radiance and siddhi through regular worship	Private worship; details limited due to its location on private property	Located near Gomath and Chakrapushkarini	Basic Ling installation in private premises	Restricted access; located on private land	A spiritually potent yet lesser-known shrine; association with light (jyoti) symbolism underscores its importance in meditative sādhanā traditions
110	Kaal Vinayak	Traditional Form – Time Protector	Vinayak (Ganesha – Lord of Time/Death)	Worship protects devotees from untimely death and grants fearlessness	K-24/10, Ram Ghat, on the steps below peepal tree, Varanasi	Associated with overcoming fear of death and ensuring longevity	Open worship; devotees perform pooja by themselves anytime	Located at Ram Ghat; part of the riverside sacred network of Kashi	Murti embedded on ghat wall under peepal tree; smeared with sindoor	Well-preserved; accessible by foot or boat; public shrine maintained	Strong symbolic role in sacred city—defender against kāla (death/time); blends riverfront tīrtha with protective deity function
111	Kacheshwar	Kashi Khand, Chapter 97	Shiva (associated with Ashwa Medh Yajna)	A Shiv Ling worshipped in front of Shukreshwar, near Shukra Koop (a well sacred to planet Venus). Worshipping Kacheshwar grants success and fulfillment. Worship near the Shukra Koop yields results equivalent to performing the Ashwa Medh Yajna.	D-8/30, Kakka Galli (lane adjacent to Shukreshwar in front of Shukra Koop)	Grants happiness and success; linked to planetary significance (Shukra) and yajna symbolism	Open for daily worship throughout the day; pūjā as per convenience	Near Shukreshwar Ling and Shukra Koop	Shiv Ling set in traditional stone structure	In active use for public worship	Tied to Vedic ritual ideals and planetary influences; invokes the fruit of Ashwa Medh Yajna—very rare and potent outcome for householders and seekers

112	Kaholeshwar	Kashi Khand, Chapter 97	Shiva (Kaholeshwar form)	Lord Shiva narrates about Kaholeshwar Ling to Goddess Parvati; it is one of the sacred Lings that bestows Siddhi and Moksha upon the devotee.	Inside Batuk Bhairav Temple (K-63/22) and near Kamachha locality	Grants Siddhi and Moksha to devotees living in or visiting Kashi	Worship timings from 05:00 a.m.–12:00 noon and 04:00 p.m.–11:30 p.m.; ārtī rituals held	Near sacred Bhairava kṣetra	Shiv Ling in sanctum, part of Batuk Bhairav complex	Well-preserved, regularly worshipped	Associated with yogic and tantric powers of Bhairava-kṣetra; strong Shaiva-siddhi link in inner core of Kashi
113	Kālabhairav Tīrtha	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 31, Shlokas 146–148	Kālabhairava, Rudra, Śiva	During a divine debate among sages and deities on who is supreme, Lord Śiva manifested as Kālabhairava and severed one head of Lord Brahmā for his arrogance. He later wandered until freed from the sin at Kashi, where he was established as the kṣetrapāla (guardian deity). He was blessed by Lord Viṣṇu and deified by all deities as the protector of Kāśī.	K-32/22, Bhairavānand, Bhairav Chowk, Varanasi	Known as the Kotwāl (chief guardian) of Kāśī; all devotees must seek his permission before leaving the city; grants protection, clears sins, and destroys fear	Śaṅkarābhishek a, oil offering, black cloth/rosary offerings; 8-pradakṣiṇā on Kāl Bhairav Jayantī (Kṛṣṇa Aṣṭamī of Mārgaśīrṣa); special pūjā on Sundays, Tuesdays, Aṣṭamī, and Chaturdaśī	Located within central Kāśī; one of the most visited sites; sacred to both lay pilgrims and sādhakas	Ancient murti of fierce Rudra form, adorned in cloth, trident, and garland; surrounded by vibrant spiritual market	Fully maintained temple; heavily visited; strong ritual continuity and community support	Kāl Bhairav is essential to spiritual authority and protection in Kāśī; no devotee can leave Kāśī without metaphoricall y taking his permission
114	Kālarātri Devi	Kāśī Khaṇḍa (in context of Śakti Pīṭhas and Durgā narrative)	Kālarātri – Fierce form of Durgā (Shakti of Destruction and Protection)	Kālarātri was created by Goddess Durgā to destroy the demon Durgāsur. With black complexion, fiery hair, and weaponry, she destroys evil while simultaneously protecting the devout.	D.8/17, Kalika Galli, Varanasi – near Annapurna and Vishweshwar Mandir, accessible from Dashashwam edh via Kalika Galli	One of the Nine Durgā forms (Navadurga); worshipped for removal of deep-seated fears, protection from enemies, and inner awakening; venerated during Navarātri	Daily pūjā: 6:00–12:30 PM and 4:00–10:30 PM; morning and evening ārtis; especially crowded during Navarātri and Ashtamī	Part of Kāśī's Śakti Pīṭha network, located close to major shrines of Viśvanātha and Annapūrṇā; Kalika Galli is known for goddess shrines	Traditional shrine with fierce red-faced idol and black backdrop; part of tantric and śakti traditions	Well-preserved and revered; locals and e	

115	Kaleshwar	Kashi Khand, Chapter 97	Shiva (Kaleshwar form)	Lord Shiva tells Goddess Parvati about Kaleshwar who generates faith and purity of mind in the devotee who merely looks at the Ling.	In premises of Dandapani Temple (K-31/49), near Bhadaini	Instills faith and purifies thoughts of the devotee	Darshan from 05:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. and 03:00 p.m. – 08:00 p.m.; ārtī at 07:30 a.m. and 09:00 p.m.	Located near Pañcha Gaṅgā tirtha ghat	Installed Shiv Ling in temple premises	Active worship site, maintained well	Associated with purification of thought and mental clarity; symbol of internal śuddhi (purity) and spiritual discipline
116	Kali Priya Vinayak	Kashi Khand, Chapter 57, Shlok 99	Vinayak (Ganesha – "Dear to Kali")	Associated with creating obstacles for enemies of sincere devotees; protects pilgrims from malevolent forces	D-10/50, behind Sakshi Vinayak, Manikarnika Mahadev temple, near Dashashwamedh-Vishwanath Gully, Varanasi	Spiritual guardian who eliminates external threats and hidden enmities	Open for public worship; devotees perform pooja by themselves	Located near Dashashwamedh Ghat, in dense tīrtha zone near Sakshi Vinayak	Icon coated in sindoor with silver eyes, embedded in shrine wall	Well-preserved; active shrine in crowded sacred path	Described in Kashi Khand as disruptive to insincere pilgrims and enemies—reflects fierce protective energy within Vinayak tradition
117	Kamakhya Devi (Kamakshi Devi)	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 72 & 45	Kamakhya / Kamakshi – Yoginī and Śakti form (associated with desire, will, and wisdom)	Lord Śiva narrates that Kamakhya was one of the Yoginīs sent by Goddess Durgā to protect Kāśī and test King Divodāsa's dedication. Worship of Kamakhya bestows peace, victory, wisdom, and success in endeavors.	B.21/123, Kamachha, Varanasi – near BHU; famous śakti temple and part of Kamachha temple cluster	Revered for fulfilling desires, giving knowledge and victory; part of Yoginī circuit and spiritual network sent by Śiva-Durgā to Kāśī	Daily worship: 3:00 AM–12:00 PM & 4:00 PM–10:00 PM; ārtis at 5:30 AM & 7:30 AM; peak crowds on Tuesdays, Fridays, and during Navarātri	Located in the sacred Kamachha region; part of Kāśī's Yoginī and śakti protection mandala; referenced in tantric lore and Śākta traditions	Prominent shrine with decorated idol; elaborate floral and ritual adornment; part of Kamachha temple cluster	Highly active temple; regular pūjā by Shri Digambar Visheshwar Puri; accessible and well-known to locals	Represents the integration of Kāśī with broader Yoginī traditions; sacred feminine power blended with urban governance narrative (King Divodāsa) and tantric empowerment themes

118	Kameshwar & Durvaresh war	Kashi Khand, Chapter 85	Shiva (as Kameshwar & Durvareshwar)	Sage Durvasa installed the Ling and requested the King of Kashi to name it **Kameshwar**, while he himself bathed and worshipped at a second Ling named **Durvareshwar**. Worship on Chaturdashi and Saturdays is considered highly auspicious. Bathing at the associated pond (now dry) was considered spiritually purifying.	A-2/9 North of Trilochan Temple, near Kameshwar Ghat	Durvareshwar Ling symbolizes the sage's tapas; Kameshwar Ling symbolizes his desirelessness (vairāgya)	Temple open 05:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon & 05:00 p.m. – 10:30 p.m. Mangala ārtī at 05:30 a.m., Shayān ārtī at 10:30 p.m.	Near Trilochan & Bhairav zones	Two Shiva Lings in temple premises	Active temple, renovated; old pond dried up	Symbolizes the dual principles of intense tapas (Durvareshwar) and renunciation of desire (Kameshwar); site also connected to Kashi's old bathing tradition at now-vanished Kamkund
119	Kandukesh war	Kashi Khand, Chapters 65–66	Shiva (as Kandukeshwar)	While Goddess Parvati was playing ball, she was attacked by demons. Enraged, she threw the ball with divine force which destroyed the demons. The ball then touched the ground and transformed into a Shiv Ling — Kandukeshwar. Both Shiva and Parvati bless devotees at this sacred site.	K.28/93, near Bhooth Bhairav locality	Associated with Goddess Parvati's leelā; signifies divine intervention and protection	Temple open 06:00–10:00 a.m. & 05:00–09:00 p.m.; devotees may offer individual pūjās or worship with the temple priest	Close to Bhooth Bhairav, Lohatia area	Lingam established at event site	Actively visited; maintained shrine	Reflects mythic playfulness and power of Shakti; embodies divine protection and spontaneous emergence of sacredness through play (krīḍā).
120	Kapāl Bhairav (Laṭ Bhairav)	Local Śaiva tradition and Bhairava Tantras; symbol of rudra-tattva	Kapāl Bhairava (fiercest aspect of Rudra)	This Bhairava form is believed to represent the severed skull-bearing aspect of Śiva. Located at the northern limit of Kāśī, Kapāl Bhairava marks the boundary between worldly existence and spiritual transcendence. The location is associated with esoteric worship and is feared as well as revered.	A-11/23, Alaipur (northeastern fringe of Varanasi city); approx. 2 km beyond Ashapur Chauraha, toward Samath road	Considered the northern guardian of Kāśī; represents fierce protectiveness and severance from worldly bondage; revered for fearlessness and deep transformation	Daily darśana; offerings of red cloth, sindoor, and alcohol by tantric practitioners; devotees come during special Bhairava days, especially Aṣṭamī and Kālāṣṭamī	Northeastern outpost of Kāśī; boundary deity (Laṭ Bhairava = 'standing Bhairava'); de			

121	Kapardeesh war	Kashi Khand, Chapters 51, 55	Shiva (Kapardeesh war)	A Kapardi Gana installed the Ling at Vimal Kund, near the cremation site of a sinner named Vimal who repented for his sins. Lord Shiva appeared pleased and blessed him. The Ling is praised for protecting devotees from untimely death and sin. The name "Kapardeeshwar" is derived from the devotee.	C-21/40, Pishachmoch an locality	Associated with Vimal Kund and liberation from deadly sins, wrath (krodh), and untimely death	Temple open throughout the day. For special pūjās, it is advisable to consult the Pujari beforehand.	Near famous Pishachmochan Tirtha	Lingam at cremation site turned sacred	Actively worshipped; sacred annual rituals	Worshipping this Ling gives relief from fear and krodh. Especially auspicious during Shukla Chaturdashi before Kartik Amavasya (prior to Dev Deepawali).
122	Kardhames hwar	Kashi Khand, Chapter 97	Shiva (Kardhamesh war)	Mentioned as being located between Ark Vinayak (Lolak) and Durgadevi; associated with blessings from Lord Shiva to fulfill the wishes of devotees.	No. B.2/17, Kashi Karvat – Khushkibagh	Located in a significant pilgrimage belt with many important shrines like Kardmeshwar, Kardameshwar Mahadev, and Panchkroshi yatra markers	Temple open from 5:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. Morning and evening ārtis are held; evening ārtī at ~7:00–7:30 p.m.	Between Ark Vinayak and Durgadevi; close to Panchakroshi pilgrimage circuit	Present temple with structured sanctum	Actively worshipped and maintained	Site plays a major role in the Panchkroshi Yatra. Devotees visit for blessings and to complete the sacred pilgrimage route.
123	Karkotak Nageshwar	Kashi Khand, Chapter 66	Shiva (as Nageshwar)	This Ling is submerged in the well of Karkotak Kund, visible only on Nāga Panchamī when the water is drained. Associated with the Nāga (serpent) legend, and is known to prevent snake bites or poison. A second visible Nageshwar Ling is also worshipped at the entrance.	J4/250, Nāg Kūān, near Godowlia	Believed to protect from effects of sarpa (serpent) dosha; important for devotees seeking remedies from snake afflictions	Pooja offered between 5:30 a.m.–12:00 noon and 4:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m.; Special worship on Nāga Panchamī, Sapārā Dosha nivārana pooja offered	Located near Godowlia; central location in sacred urban core	Well structure with submerged Ling; external shrine also present	Functioning temple with regular and special worship	Only visible on Nāga Panchamī; strong association with snake deities; also a unique submerged tīrtha.

124	Karuneshwar	Kashi Khand, Chapter 94	Shiva (Karuneshwar)	Located near Moksha Dwareshwar. Worship brings happiness and fulfillment of wishes. Bathing in Manikarnika and worshipping Karuneshwar ensures all wishes are fulfilled.	Ck.34/10, Lahouri Tola (near Phoota Ganesh)	Worshipping this Ling ensures peace, happiness, and fulfillment of desires	Traditionally worshipped on Mondays; Ling located inside a house; darshan allowed	Near Manikarnika Ghat; important liberation zone	House shrine (no formal temple structure)	Possibly displaced during Kashi Vishwanath Corridor expansion	Site might have been lost or altered due to development; Ling revered through oral tradition and limited physical access
125	Karvireshwar	Kashi Khand, Chapter 97	Shiva (Karvireshwar)	Located near Mahalakshmishwar Ling. Worshipping Karvireshwar helps free one from diseases and ailments. The region is rich in Shakti Peeths.	D-52/41, outside Mahalakshmi Temple premises	Known as a Shakti Peeth-rich region; enhances healing and spiritual power	Open from 6:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.; flexible worship	Mahalakshmi Temple area, with association to Shakti Peeths	Traditional Ling in temple enclosure	Well-maintained; accessible to public; active for pooja	One of the sacred Lings of healing and restoration; also important in context of surrounding Shakti spiritual ecosystem
126	Kashyapeshwar	Kashi Khand, Chapter 100	Shiva (Kashyapeshwar)	Mentioned in the Antargrihi Yatra; believed to be installed by Sage Kashyap. Devotees attain Mukti by worshipping this Ling.	D.35/70, near Jangambari Mutt, Varanasi	Considered a powerful Ling installed by Sage Kashyap; associated with deep spiritual attainment	Worship timings: 7:30–9:00 a.m. and 6:00–7:00 p.m.; Aartis conducted in the morning	Vicinity of Harikesheshwar area	Traditional Ling within temple complex	Active worship; well-visited; easily accessible by rickshaw	A revered spiritual site along the Antargrihi Yatra path, embodying sage-based tīrtha tradition in Kashi heritage
127	Kātyāyanī Devī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 82	Kātyāyanī (Form of Durgā / Navadurga; destroyer of Mahīṣāsura)	Born of collective divine energies to slay Mahīṣāsura. A parallel legend from Kāśī tells of King Amritjit whose daughter was born under inauspicious stars; the Yoginīs saved her and consecrated her as Kātyāyanī Devī. Also associated with Mahādevi's victory and women's protection.	Atma Veereshwar Temple, Ck-71/58, Sidh Ghat, Varanasi – in the vicinity of Pancha Mudra Mahā Peeth	Worshipped as one of the Navadurga, esp. on the 6th day of Navarātri; invoked for protection from disease, obstacles, and suffering	Daily worship: 5:00–11:30 AM and 12:30–3:00 PM; special pūjā timings during Navarātri; consultation with puj				

128	Kedareshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 77, Shloka 46 and 6	Shiva (as Kedareshwar Jyotirlinga)	Vashisht performed intense prayers to Kedarnath Ling in Himalayas. Lord Shiva, pleased, granted a boon that those who worship Kedareshwar Ling in Kashi would receive seven times the merit (punya) of Kedarnath worship. Vashisht requested Lord Shiva to stay permanently in Kashi. Shiva appeared as Kedareshwar Ling there.	B-6/102, Kedar Ghat, near Kedar Gauri Mandir, Kashi	One of the twelve Jyotirlingas; grants punya greater than Kedarnath. Considered highly auspicious. Believed to wash away sins of two bir					
129	Keshava Āditya	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 51, Shloka 74	Sūrya, Lord Viṣṇu (Keshava), Lord Śiva	Lord Sūrya saw Lord Keshava (Viṣṇu) worshipping a Śiva Liṅga at Kāśī. Curious, he descended to inquire, and was told that in Kāśī, Śiva is to be worshipped by all—even Viṣṇu. Sūrya then worshipped Śiva and was enlightened, becoming known here as Keshava Āditya.	Near Adi Keshava Temple, Rajghat Fort, northern end of Kāśī	Worship of Keshava Āditya leads to jñāna (spiritual wisdom) and mokṣa (salvation); symbolizes divine unity	Pooja timings: 6:00–12:00 and 4:00–10:00; special visits on Sundays, Magha month, and after Amāvasyā	Located near confluence of Varuṇa-Ganga; sacred zone of Adi Keshava, Padodak, and Ganga-tīrtha circuits	Sacred image of Sūrya in reddish hue (often marked with white tilak); shrine integrated within temple complex	Well-preserved; actively worshipped; maintained with support from Adi Keshava temple trust	Symbol of Viṣṇu-Śiva unity in Kāśī; shows transcendence of sectarian devotion in city of Śiva; one of the key Āditya shrines
130	Khakholkh Āditya	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 60, Shloka 160	Āditya (Sūrya), Garuḍa, Vinatā, Kadrū	The site is linked to the epic tale of Vinatā and Kadrū, co-wives of Sage Kaśyapa. Kadrū tricked Vinatā, making her a slave, but later, her son Garuḍa vowed to free her. As Garuḍa performed intense tapas for Amṛta, Lord Viṣṇu blessed him. Lord Sūrya, pleased by this devotion, appeared as Khakholkh Āditya and	Kamleshwar Temple, Machhodari area, near Trilochan Mahadev (Piplā Tīrtha), North Kāśī	Symbol of freedom from bondage, removal of sorrow and diseases, and divine willpower; linked with liberation of Vinatā and Garuḍa's rise	Darśana, pūjā at fixed timings; special Aartis: Māṅgalā Aarti (5:30 a.m.), Śayana Aarti (8:30 p.m.); believed to heal chronic suffering	Located near sacred Koop (well) in northern Kāśī pilgrimage zone; part of the Aditya circuit and linked to the Piplā Tīrtha region	Stone-carved solar icon in radiant form; maintained within temple; solar rays carved in circular form with face of Sūrya	Fully functional shrine; timings 6:00–12:00 and 5:00–10:00; maintained by temple priest Sri Rajesh Giri	Represents divine intervention for liberation and devotional reward; an important solar shrine embedded in the liberation narrative of Garuḍa

				blessed both Garuḍa and Vinatā.							
131	Kharva Vinayak	Traditional Guardian Deity	Vinayak (Ganesha – Blessing All Devotees)	Blesses all who worship him sincerely; situated within Rajghat Fort near Adi Keshav Temple	Inside Rajghat Fort, near Adi Keshav Temple, Varanasi (Google map linked)	Located at northern edge of Kashi; spiritually significant for transition zone and protection	Daily ārti at 7:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.; darshan allowed through grill; self-worship permitted when main gate is closed	Situated in Adi Keshav–Rajghat zone, ancient threshold of sacred Varanasi	Murti covered in sindoor with silver eyes and ornaments, housed inside fort structure	Well-preserved; accessible via autorickshaw/cycle rickshaw; inside heritage precinct	Functions as protector of Kashi's sacred boundary at Rajghat; represents merging of historical and spiritual guardianship
132	Kirateshwar	Kashi Khand, Chapter 55, 56	Shiva (Kirateshwar)	Shiva Gan named Kirat installed the Ling as part of a batch sent by Lord Shiva to disrupt King Divodasa. Devotees worshipping Kirateshwar will not have rebirth.	Ck.52/15, near Bharabhuteshwar, Varanasi	Promises liberation from rebirth; associated with the divine narrative of Shiva Ganas and King Divodasa	Temple open from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; devotees perform pooja as per convenience	Near Bharabhuteshwar	Traditional Shiva Ling	Active temple; well-maintained and accessible	Symbolic of Shiva's divine plan to reestablish Kashi's sacred geography; one of the tīrthas installed by Shiva Ganas
133	Kolahala Narsimha	Related to the vicinity of Atyugra Narsimha; Kashi Khand implied	Lord Vishnu as Narsimha (fierce form)	Worshipping this form of Narsimha will uproot sins and ultimately lead to liberation. Symbolically, it destroys confusion and brings clarity.	Located at Ck.8/181 above Siddhi Vinayak, inside Narsimha Mutt (near Chowk)	Known for its fierce yet protective spiritual energy; worshipped for sin destruction and protection.	Daily worship from 4:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.; aartis held both morning and evening.	Located in the sacred core of Varanasi near Siddhi Vinayak and Atyugra Narsimha shrines.	Deity of Kolahala Narsimha installed in a shrine within Narsimha Mutt.	Well-preserved and actively worshipped; accessible to devotees.	Represents the purificatory and protective aspect of Vishnu's Narsimha form; complements Atyugra Narsimha in

											sacred geography.
134	Koonitaksh Vinayak	Traditional Vinayak Form – "Bent-Eyed" Symbolism	Vinayak (Ganesha – Protector from Evil Designs)	Guards Kashi from evil intentions and ill-willed thoughts of others	D-52/38, inside old Lakshmi Temple premises, near Mahalakshmi Gauri temple, Lakshmi Kund locality, Varanasi	Spiritually significant as guardian of mental purity and moral clarity	Open for darshan and self-worship by devotees throughout the day	Located in sacred Lakshmi Kund area, associated with feminine energy and prosperity	Murti covered in sindoor, silver eyes, housed inside temple wall niche	Well-preserved shrine inside established temple setting	'Koonitaksh' suggests divine vigilance over subtle evil—represents Ganesha's power to shield the mind from destructive thought
135	Kooshmanda Vinayak	Traditional Form – Auspicious Vinayak	Vinayak (Ganesha – Bringer of Happiness)	Worship is believed to bring happiness and contentment to devotees	Phoolwaria area (earlier a village, now urban part of Varanasi)	Associated with joy, well-being, and emotional fulfillment	Open for darshan; devotees can perform worship independently	Located in former village zone, now absorbed into Varanasi's city fabric	Image smeared with sindoor, dressed in yellow cloth; placed in a wall niche shrine	Well-maintained and accessible for worship throughout the day	Represents Vinayak's association with joy and auspiciousness; reflects urban assimilation of older village deity traditions
136	Kooshmandeshwar	Kashi Khand, Chapter 57	Shiva (Kooshmandeshwar)	Mentioned in relation to Manikarnika and Pita Maheshwar; Lord Shiva was pleased to grant the request of Goddess Parvati to describe these tīrthas.	Ck.10/16, Brahmanal, near Swarg Dwarasthaan	Grants blessings of Lord Shiva to devotees who worship sincerely	Temple open from 07:00 a.m. to 09:00 p.m.; individual pooja allowed	Near Manikarnika, tied to sacred cremation geography	Shiva Ling in small shrine	Ling may have been displaced due to Kashi Vishwanath Corridor expansion	Symbolically important for its link with cremation tīrthas and divine boon narratives

137	Koot Dant Vinayak	Traditional Fierce Form of Ganesha	Vinayak (Ganesha – "Sharp-Tusked" Form)	Removes even the toughest obstacles; protects the Kashi area	B-3/335, Kina Ram Ashram, Krim Kund, Shivala, Varanasi	Spiritual guardian with strong protective energy; associated with obstacle-clearing	Darshan open from 5:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m.; no specific priest; devotees perform pooja independently	Located in Krim Kund region near prominent Nāth and Aghora centers	Deity enshrined in public ashram space; minimalistic but spiritually potent setup	Well-maintained and publicly accessible within Ashram premises	Represents intense obstacle-clearing force of Vinayak; location near Kina Ram Ashram adds esoteric significance
138	Koteeshwar (Koti Ling)	Kashi Khand, Chapter 87, Shlok 85	Shiva (Koteeshwar)	After slaying the demon Gajasura, Shiva wandered and bathed in ponds; at various locations, the drops of sacred water formed Shiv Lings. This one is at Koti Tirtha. Bathing here gives merit equal to donating one crore cows (Go-dāna).	Dasaswamedh Vishwanath Gully, near Sashtri Ghat	Considered extremely meritorious; especially associated with moksha and Go-dāna equivalent virtue	Temple open for darshan; bathing in pond considered highly sacred	Near Dasaswamedh Tirtha and Manikarnika	Natural rock form worshipped as Ling	Functional shrine; active pilgrimage site	Symbolically powerful tīrtha representing the concept of infinite merit; major destination during darshan of Kashi Vishwanath.
139	Krishneshwar	Kashi Khand, Chapter 97	Shiva (Krishneshwar)	Devotees who worship Krishneshwar will attain Vishnu Lok after death. Vishnu Lok is the divine abode of Lord Vishnu, the ultimate realm of salvation.	Under wall of Sankata Devi Temple, near Ck.7/158, Sankata Ghat	Believed to grant moksha or Vishnu Lok after death—unity of Shaiva-Vaishnava devotion	Open throughout the day; devotees can perform pūjā independently	Near Sankata Ghat, close to Vashishtheshwar	Ancient shrine close to riverbank	Functional shrine; accessible via boat and steps	This tīrtha highlights the devotional synthesis of Shiva and Vishnu worship, offering both Shaiva and Vaishnava benefits in one practice.
140	Krithi Vaseshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 88, Shloka 43	Shiva (as Krithi Vaseshwar Ling)	Gajasur, son of Mahishasur, was attacking and disturbing pilgrimage in Kashi. Lord Shiva appeared at Krithi Vaseshwar and vanquished Gajasur. Gajasur expressed his desire to worship Shiva eternally in Kashi. Lord Shiva blessed him, installed the Ling, and stated	K-6/23, West of Harit Trith Pond, in Krithi Vaseshwar locality, near Hanuman Ghat	Believed to absolve sins of previous births. Conside					

				that he would remain in Krithi Vaseshwar for the benefit of mankind.							
141	Krodhan Bhairav (Ä€di Bhairav)	Associated with Kashi Khanda; guardian aspect of Bhairava	Bhairava (form of Shiva)	Krodhan Bhairav is believed to be one of the earliest forms of Bhairava. Situated at Batuk Bhairav temple, near Kamachha, he is worshipped for warding off evil and seeking protection. Devotees also believe he assists in removal of planetary doshas.	Batuk Bhairav Temple, B 31/118, Kamachha, Varanasi	Considered one of the most important Bhairava shrines in Kashi, symbolic of the protective and fierce energy of Shiva. Frequently visited for tantra-based rituals and astrological remedies.	Aartis conducted in morning and evening. Temple open 5:00 AMâ€“12:00 Noon, 4:00 PMâ€“12:00 Midnight. Special worship for Rahu-Shani dosha, Kaal Sarp dosha nivaran, and Tantra Japams performed.	Situated in the protective quadrant near Kamachha Devi, this Bhairava is considered a guardian deity within the sacred geography of Varanasi, related to the Bhairava circuit.	The shrine has a simple architectural frame with floral garland decoration and icon placed in sanctum. Appears to be a continuous site of worship rather than a monumental structure.	Active worship site; well-maintained; presence of Mahant and daily pooja practices.	Krodhan Bhairav is worshipped as a fierce but benevolent protector. The continuity of tradition suggests its deep-rooted presence in Varanasi's tantric and spiritual landscape. Offers insight into localized forms of Bhairava worship.
142	Kshemesh war	Kashi Khand, Chapter 55	Shiva (Kshemeshwa r)	After early batches of Shiv Gans failed to return from Kashi, Lord Shiva sent another group from Mandarachal. One of them, named Kshemeshwar, installed the Ling and stayed back. Worshipping this Ling purifies all sins and brings happiness and prosperity.	House No. B-14/14, Manasarovar Ghat	Devotees who worship Kshemeshwar attain happiness and prosperity and are cleansed of all sins	Devotees perform darshan through a grill gate	Located in a house near Kshemeshwar Ghat	Small domestic shrine	Preserved in private premises; grill-access only	The story links Kshemeshwar to divine deputation, symbolizing Shiva's emissaries staying in Kashi and integrating into its sacred fabric.

143	Kshipra Prasad Vinayak	Kashi Khand, Chapter 57, Shloka 92	Vinayak (Ganesha – Bestower of Quick Blessings)	Protects the city and grants swift success and fulfillment of wishes	C-18/47, near Pitar Kund, Pitreshwar Temple, Varanasi	Highly auspicious for fast-acting blessings and successful completion of goals	Open worship throughout the day; devotees perform pooja independently; Shri Ganesh Prasad is the temple's main sevak	Located in sacred Pitar Kund area, linked with ancestral rituals and spiritual protection	Murti smeared with sindoor, adorned with sacred threads and floral offerings	Well-maintained and publicly accessible for darshan and offerings	Positioned east of Panchnmukh Ganesh; highly revered for fulfilling desires quickly as per textual reference
144	Kubereswh ar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 13, Shlok 185	Kubereswhar Ling (Kubera, aspect of Wealth and Siddhi)	Story of Guna Nidhi's transformation from sinful life to attaining divine grace through devotion to Kubereswhar; eventually becomes King Daman and is blessed by Shiva and Goddess Annapurna.	South of Vishweshwar, near Annapurna Devi Temple, D.9/1	Devotees attain all sorts of Siddhi, wealth and are freed from sins and sorrow. Particularly beneficial for spiritual upliftment and prosperity.	Lighting ghee lamps in front of Kubereswhar Ling; rituals observed during early morning hours (5:00 AM to 10:00 AM).	Situated to the south of Vishweshwar, aligned with Annapurna Kshetra's spiritual landscape.	Lingam shrine within temple premises.	Well maintained temple, regular rituals performed.	Signifies the importance of spiritual transformatio n and wealth through devotion; central to the Annapurna-Vishwanath sacred geography.
145	Kukkutesh war	Kashi Khanda (story of King Divodasa and Lord Shiva's descent as Kukkut)	Kukkuteshwa r Ling (Aspect of Shiva associated with the Kukkut or Rooster form)	Shiva arrives in Kashi as a Brahmin named Kukkut to test King Divodasa's devotion and principles. After being neglected, Shiva manifests as a Lingam named Kukkuteshwar. This site marks Shiva's hidden presence in the city before full reestablishment.	Just outside the door opening to the southern side of Dipta Kunda, near Dipa Kunda.	Marks Shiva's return to Kashi in a disguised form during Divodasa's reign; emphasizes hidden divinity and the permanence of sacred presence in Kashi.	Worship and pooja are performed regularly; pilgrims visit especially during ritual circuits.	Southern side of Dipta Kunda; part of the subtle Shaiva grid around Avimukta Kshetra.	Lingam in a shrine structure beside Dipta Kunda.	Maintained shrine, accessible for worship.	Symbolic of Lord Shiva's continued spiritual presence in Kashi despite political exile; ties into narrative of Kashi's spiritual invincibility.
146	Lakshmi Narsimha	Kashi Khand mentions Lakshmi Narsimha Tirtha	Lord Vishnu in the form of Lakshmi Narsimha	Devotees worshipping this form attain prosperity, release from rebirth, and all-round happiness. The original Tirtha is no longer traceable.	Located at K.20/159, Raj Mandir, inside Dakshin Mukhi (south-facing) Manmandir lane, near Kashi Vidyapeeth/G ai Ghat region	Highly significant for devotees seeking both spiritual liberation and worldly prosperity.	Temple open from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and from 2:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.; aartis in morning and evening.	Situated in the southern sacred zone of Varanasi; integrated into Vaishnava tradition near Manmandir and Gai Ghat.	Deity of Lakshmi Narsimha enshrined in Raj Mandir complex.	Maintained and actively worshipped; easily accessible to devotees.	Combines fierce protection of Narsimha with the benevolence of Lakshmi; ideal for holistic blessings in the sacred city.

147	Lalitā Gaurī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 70	Lalitā Gaurī (Form of the Goddess of Prosperity and Beauty)	Worshipping Lalitā Gaurī with sincerity is said to bring wealth and prosperity. Especially auspicious on *Aṣṭamī*, *Avani Māsa*, *Pūrṇimā*, and Krishna Pakṣa Dwiteeyā.	Ck-1/67, Lalitā Ghat, near Nepali Mandir, Varanasi	Associated with wealth, prosperity, and feminine grace; part of the Gaurī Navarātri circuit; daily darśan and pūjā by women	Daily worship: 5:00–10:00 AM & 5:00–9:00 PM; special pūjā on Krishna Pakṣa Dwiteeyā and festivals; simple ritual offerings	Located at Lalitā Ghat, one of the sacred ghats associated with Gaurī worship and feminine tīrtha circuit in Kāśī	Ancient small shrine in a gully behind Nepali Mandir; simple sanctum with seated idol dressed in red cloth	Active but small	
148	Lambodara Vinayak	Known locally as Chintamani Ganesh	Vinayak (Ganesha – Remover of Obstacles)	Grants Shakti (energy) to devotees, removes all obstacles; especially invoked by bathers of Kedar Ghat	B-7/205, Kedarghat Road, Varanasi, near Kedar Ghat	Famous among local devotees for fulfilling wishes and removing difficulties	Temple open 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.; darshan through grill door; regular chants of **Ganesha Sahasranam**	Located near Kedar Ghat, an important sacred bathing and temple zone of Kashi	Idol adorned with flowers, garlands, ornaments; vibrant worship space	Well-maintained shrine; managed by community devotees and regular sevaks	Strong community association; closely linked with rituals at Kedar Ghat and regarded as highly responsive to sincere prayers
149	Langlishwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 56, Shlok 20	Langlishwar Ling (associated with the devotee Langli Shiv Gan)	When initial batches of Shiv Gans failed to return after being sent to Kashi, Lord Shiva sent more, including one named Langli who stayed and began worshiping Lord Shiva there. The Ling established by Langli came to be known as Langlishwar.	North of Vishweshwar, near CK-28/4, Kashi Chull Chouraha; accessible via Khatri Medical Hall.	Devotees who worship Langlishwar Ling are said to never fall sick and remain mentally and physically healthy.	Worship and regular aartis performed in the morning and evening (8:00–10:00 AM and 6:00–8:00 PM).	Northern extension of Vishweshwar axis; embedded in residential lanes, reflecting living pilgrimage culture.	Lingam shrine maintained within a small shrine enclosure.	Preserved and accessible; rituals are regularly maintained.	Represents the devotion of Shiva's attendants and the anchoring of divine presence through their bhakti in different parts of Kashi.
150	Lolark Āditya	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 46	Āditya (Sun God), connected to fertility and healing	The sacred pond (Lolark Kund) associated with Sun God; historically, believed to be fed underground by Ganga; rituals performed here especially for fertility, progeny, and health.	Near Tulsi Ghat, Southern Kāśī (close to Assi-Ganga Saṅgam)	Strong fertility cult; women bathe here to be blessed with children; powerful healing tīrtha	Daily darśana; special bathing and rituals on Sundays, especially in Magha, Shukla Saptamī, and Shukla Pakṣa Ṣaṣṭhī; self-service worship and offering of clothes, fruits, etc.	Southern edge of Kāśī; near Assi-Ganga Saṅgam; part of solar tīrtha circuit (Āditya Māla)	Ancient kund with stone steps; sacred image of Sun God; preserved in temple niche above the kund	Well-preserved; very popular on Sundays and Magha month; seasonal crowd control needed	Strongly associated with Sun worship, fertility, and healing; remains an active and relevant living tīrtha in Kāśī

151	Lolark Kund	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 48, Shloka 66	Lord Surya (Lolark Āditya)	Described in Kashi Khanda; taking bath here on Sundays is said to remove sins and prevent rebirth as a crow. Linked with fertility and progeny blessings.	Near Tulsi Ghat, approximately 1 km from Durga Kund, Varanasi	One of the most sacred Surya-related sites in Kashi; especially important during Magha, Margashirsha Sundays	Bathing rituals for progeny; special Sunday observances (especially Magha Saptami, Shashti, Margashirsha Sundays); women seek blessings for children	Located in Southern Kashi near Tulsi Ghat; part of solar tīrthas of Kashi's sacred topography	Stepwell (kund) in rectangular shape, approached via three paths; ancient steps and layout preserved	Fair condition; not used daily but attracts crowds during special Sundays and festival times	Important for fertility rites and Surya worship; part of Kashi's seasonal and solar ritual circuits
152	Madalasesh war	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97 (mentioned by Lord Shiva at Parvati's request)	Madalaseshw ar Ling (Aspect of Lord Shiva)	Listed among the tīrthas described by Lord Shiva to Goddess Parvati as part of the sacred geography of Kashi. Worship of Madalaseshwar is said to bring the blessings of Lord Shiva.	D.5/133, Kalika Galli, east of Shukreshwar Ling; approached via Vishwanath Temple and Kalika Temple route.	Those who worship Madalaseshwar will always have the blessings of Lord Shiva.	Darshan and pooja conducted daily from 6:00 AM to 8:00 PM.	Part of sacred spatial web surrounding Vishwanath and Shukreshwar regions in central Kashi.	Lingam shrine placed within the corridor of a small temple.	Well-preserved and accessible shrine; regular footfall of devotees.	Represents one of the discreet but powerful tīrthas revealed in response to divine request; reflects the layered sacrality of Kashi.
153	Madhyame shwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 87, Shlok 165	Madhyamesh war Ling (Aspect of Shiva connected with Mandakini Tīrtha)	Kashi Khanda states that those who bathe in Mandakini Tirth and worship Madhyameshwar Ling will not be reborn in lower realms and will benefit their ancestors across 21 generations. Tied to ancient funeral and śrāddha traditions for Moksha.	K-3/63, Daranagar, near Mandakini Tirth and Krittivaseshw ar temple area.	Closely associated with Śrāddha rituals and ancestral offerings. Believed to grant Moksha and relieve Pitṛṛs (ancestors) from cycles of rebirth.	Darshan and pooja daily from 6:00 AM–12:00 PM and 3:00 PM–8:30 PM; especially associated with bathing at Mandakini Tirth and śrāddha karma.	Located near Mandakini Tirth and within the Siddha Kshetra region of northern Kashi; part of a Pitṛtīrtha and Moksha-related spatial zone.	Well-maintained Lingam shrine, renovated over time.	Preserved and maintained; regularly visited especially during Pitṛpaksha.	Strong Pitṛtīrtha significance; serves as a bridge between funeral rites, sacred geography, and Moksha-centered pilgrimage traditions in Kashi.

154	Maha Siddheshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 91	Maha Siddheshwar Ling (Aspect of Shiva bestowing Siddhi/Shakti)	Lord Shiva narrates to Goddess Parvati about Siddheshwar Ling in the vicinity of Siddha Kund. Worship of this Ling grants various Siddhis (divine powers) and fulfills spiritual aspirations.	Govindpura near Abhay Cinema, Jaitpura; within the Jwara Harsheshwar temple premises near Durgakund via Lathi Road.	Known for bestowing all kinds of Siddhis; revered by devotees seeking spiritual powers or inner realization. Mentioned in association with Siddha Kund.	Daily worship from 6:30 AM to 12:00 PM and 3:00 PM to 9:00 PM; aartis at 8:00 AM and 6:00 PM; includes Japa, offerings, and ritual repetition of mantras.	Situated in Siddha Kshetra near Siddha Koop; connected with yogic practices and attainments, part of inner spiritual geography of Kashi.	Lingam in shrine with adjacent Siddha Koop (well); premises show signs of spiritual antiquity.	Well-maintained temple and worship site.	Represents the siddha tradition of Kashi; linked to yogic attainments and spiritual fulfillment through Shaiva practices.
155	Mahabal Narsimha	Referenced in Kashi Khand, associated with Omkareshwar zone	Lord Vishnu as Mahabal Narsimha	Worshippers of Mahabal Narsimha are said to never see Yamdoot (messengers of death), and will attain heaven after death.	Located at A-2/9 North of Trilochan, near Kameshwar temple, accessible via Machhodari or Maidagin routes	Considered a powerful site for protection from death and attaining higher lokas; linked to post-death liberation.	Temple open from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.; Mangala Aarti at 5:30 a.m., Shayan Aarti at 8:30 p.m.; special poojas by request.	Located in Trilochan zone near Omkareshwar; part of Vaishnava sacred network in the northern Kashi region.	Deity of Mahabal Narsimha enshrined in a temple structure.	Well-preserved and actively maintained; priest contact provided for rituals.	Symbolizes ultimate liberation and divine protection; strongly associated with removal of fear of death and securing of heavenly realms.
156	Mahakaleshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Mahakaleshwar Ling (Aspect of Shiva symbolizing liberation from time and death)	On Parvati's request, Lord Shiva described Mahakaleshwar Ling located to the east of Daksheshwar. Worship of this Ling grants the devotee blessings equivalent to visiting the famed Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga in Ujjain.	K-52/39, Mrityunjay Mahadev Temple campus, via Bisheshwarganj/GPO.	Equated spiritually with Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga of Ujjain. Grants freedom from time-bound existence and leads to salvation.	Worship daily from 4:00 AM to 12:00 noon; flowers and Ganga water used in offerings; devotees conduct their poojas conveniently with temple priests.	Located within the Mrityunjay Mahadev complex, east of Daksheshwar; forms part of the inner sacred Shaiva ring of Kashi.	Lingam shrine inside a maintained temple structure.	Well-maintained temple, easily accessible, daily rituals observed.	Represents Shiva's timeless aspect and equivalence with Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga; anchors liberation-oriented worship in Kashi.

157	Mahalakshmeeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Mahalakshmeeshwar Ling (Aspect of Shiva associated with Mahalakshmi Shakti)	In the narration by Lord Shiva to Goddess Parvati, he mentions the Mahalakshmeeshwar Ling in the vicinity of Lakshmi Kund. Devotees who worship this Ling with devotion will be flanked by divine attendants and will enjoy bliss in heaven. It is a major Shakti Peeth within Kashi.	D.52/44, just above Lakshmi Kund, opposite a crossing near Bauliya Pokhri (Lakshmi Kund), close to the Krishnamurthi Math temple area.	Recognized as one of the important Shakti Peeths in Kashi; worship brings blessings of both Shiva and Lakshmi, symbolizing prosperity and spiritual liberation.	Open for worship from 6:00 AM to 1:00 PM and 5:00 PM to 10:00 PM; timings flexible; devotees perform pooja as per personal convenience.	Located above Lakshmi Kund; integrated into the Shakti–Shaiva sacred landscape of central Kashi.	Lingam shrine in active temple premises above the kund.	Well-maintained shrine, regular access and worship maintained.	Combines Shaiva and Shakta symbolism in one site; reflects the unity of divine energy and liberation-oriented sacred geography.
158	Mahalakṣmī Gaurī (with Bhikhī Chandī & Mayūrī Devī)	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 70, Śloka 80	Mahalakṣmī – Gaurī form of abundance and siddhi; Bhikhī Chandī and Mayūrī as attendant or sub-forms	Mahalakṣmī is praised as the most powerful Śakti among all in Kāśī for granting ultimate prosperity, siddhi, and residence of abundance. Rituals performed for ancestors and giving alms to the needy at Lakṣmī Kund are considered especially meritorious.	D.52/40, Lakṣmī Kund, Varanasi – accessible via Luxa and rickshaw routes	Ninth Gaurī in the Nav Gaurī Yātrā; extremely revered for wealth, siddhi, and fulfillment; worship brings permanent blessings to the home	Daily pūjā from 6:00 AM–1:00 PM & 5:00 PM–10:00 PM; special rituals on Fridays, Navarātri (esp. 9th day), and during Gaurī Yātrā; collective darśan includes Bhikhī Chandī and Mayūrī	Located in Lakṣmī Kund sacred region; major śakti pilgrimage circuit; Mayūrī			
159	Malteeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 91, Shlok 160	Malteeshwar Ling (Aspect of Shiva linked to Pitru Tarpan and Kalodak Koop)	Lord Shiva narrates about sacred tīrthas including Malteeshwar Ling situated near Kalodak Koop (well). Worship at this site, along with bathing in the Kalodak Tīrtha and offering tarpan, is believed to liberate one's forefathers from Naraka (Hell) and grant blessings of Pitru Moksha.	K-52/39, inside Mrityunjay Mahadev Temple campus; accessible via rickshaw from Bisheshwarganj/GPO.	Liberates ancestors from the cycle of rebirth; tied to funeral and śrāddha rites in Kashi; associated with Pitru Doṣa removal and healing waters of Kalodak Koop.	Darshan and pooja from 4:00 AM to 12:00 noon; offerings include Ganga water and flowers; devotees perform Pitru rites as per convenience.	Located near Kalodak Koop in Mrityunjay Mahadev complex; integrated with Pitṛtīrtha network of Kashi.	Lingam shrine near Kalodak well inside temple premises.	Well-maintained shrine, daily worship conducted.	Deeply tied to ancestral liberation traditions; water from Kalodak Koop believed to cure ailments; integrates healing, śrāddha, and salvation.

160	Mangal Vinayak	Traditional Form – Auspicious Protector	Vinayak (Ganesha – Bestower of Auspiciousness)	Protects Kashi against evil forces and grants blessings to devotees	K-24/4, Mangal Gauri Temple, near Bala Ghat, Varanasi	Highly revered as a guardian of peace and auspiciousness in sacred Kashi	Temple open from 5:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m.; evening ārti performed daily; special poojas arranged with prior contact	Located near Bala Ghat and Panchganga Ghat, key zones in Varanasi's riverfront tīrtha circuit	Icon covered in sindoor, placed within arched niche, ornamented with garlands	Well-preserved shrine within Mangal Gauri Temple; easily accessible by boat or on foot	Represents the benefic and protective aspect of Ganesha worship; Mangal (auspiciousness) emphasizes his positive influence on pilgrim journeys
161	Maṅgala Gaurī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 87, Śloka 187	Maṅgala Gaurī (Auspicious form of Devī, associated with prosperity and marital harmony)	Lord Sūrya's intense austerities dried up rivers and threatened life. On advice from Śiva, he worshipped Gaurī. Goddesses Parvatī and Lakṣmī appeared, blessing him with coolness and peace. As a result, Lord Sūrya's anguish ended. Lord Śiva declared that Maṅgala Gaurī will grant fruits of entire world circumambulation (parikramā) to devotees.	K-24/34, Pañchaganga Ghāṭ, Varanasi – accessible from Bhairo Nath area or via boat ride to the ghat	One of the Nav Gaurīs of Kāśī; worshipped for marital bliss, beauty, health, and removal of hardships; highly revered by unmarried girls	Temple open: 6:00 AM–1:00 PM & 3:00 PM–10:00 PM; morning and evening ārtis; especially worshipped during Navarātri and Śukla Pakṣa Tṛtīyā (3rd day) of Chaitra Māsa	Located at Pañchagaṅgā Ghāṭ, one of the most sacred confluences in Kāśī; site combines solar, śakti, and tīrtha elements	Ancient mandir on the ghāṭ, small sanctum with deeply venerated idol dressed in garlands	Well-maintained shrine; receives steady footfall, especially from women and unmarried girls; priest-guided pūjā available	Integrates solar austerity narrative with feminine grace; blessing of auspiciousness (maṅgala) through Devī worship; important stop in the riverfront pilgrimage network of Kāśī
162	Mangaleshwar (also called Angaaraneshwar)	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 17, Shlok 15	Mangaleshwar Ling (Aspect of Shiva related to Mars – Mangala and planetary afflictions)	Born out of a divine incident involving Shiva, Bhūmi, and a sacred teardrop, the Ling is associated with the calming of planetary doshas and especially Mangala (Mars) related afflictions. Lord Shiva appeared in the form of Angarak and settled in Kashi in this place, providing protection from astrological troubles.	Ck-7/158, Sidhha Ghat, in the premises of Atma Veereshwar temple; can be reached through Godowlia and Dhondi Raj Ganesh crossing.	Offers relief from Mangala dosha and other planetary afflictions. Worship on Tuesdays is especially meritorious; linked to Graha Shānti traditions in Varanasi.	Pooja conducted daily from 5:00 AM to 11:30 AM and 12:30 PM to 9:00 PM; Tuesdays are special with high footfall; special arati held at 8:30 AM.	Located at Siddha Ghat near Atma Veereshwar; part of astrological and remedial tīrtha circuit in Kashi.	Shrine within temple premises at Siddha Ghat.	Well-maintained temple with regular worship, especially on Tuesdays.	Symbolizes Shaiva intervention in planetary afflictions; integrates astrological relief practices into sacred geography of Kashi.

163	Manikarnika	Kashi Khanda: Ch. 26 (Shloka 117), Ch. 34 (Shloka 83), Ch. 81 (Shloka 68), Ch. 85 (Shloka 117)	Lord Viṣṇu, Lord Śiva, Devī Pārvatī	Originated from the moment when Viṣṇu created a pit and Śiva arrived; Viṣṇu's earring (mani + karṇika) fell into the pit—thus named. Site of cosmic preservation after pralaya.	Central Kashi, banks of Ganga near Vishwanath Temple; also known as Mahāśmaśāna	Most sacred cremation ground; gateway to mokṣa; called City of Light (Avimukta Kṣetra)	Pinda-dāna, Pitṛtarpaṇa, bathing, recitation of Gāyatrī mantra, dāna; final rites (antyeṣṭi) for liberation of souls	Integral to Kashi's sacred geography; connected with Svargadvāra (gateway to liberation)	Old ghat structures, cremation platforms; Viṣṇu-pāda footprint shrine; Adi Manikarnika well nearby	Active cremation site; religiously active, highly revered, preserved through ritual continuity	Mokṣa-kshetra par excellence; convergence of Viṣṇu-Śiva energies; cited across Purāṇas as Tīrtha of final liberation
164	Manikarnikā Devī	Skanda Purāṇa – Kāśī Khaṇḍa (in the context of Chakra Pushkariṇī and Lord Viṣṇu's discourse to Sage Bindu)	Manikarnikā Devī – Form of Śakti residing at the cosmic cremation center of Kāśī	Lord Viṣṇu explains that Manikarnikā Devī resides above Chakra Pushkariṇī Tīrtha, near Manikarnikā Ghāṭ. She grants Mokṣa and rules over the cremation and rebirth cycle. Associated with Śakti as Mṛtyujit, she helps liberate the soul.	Ck-71/30, Sondhia Ghat area, near Atma Veereshwar Temple, Varanasi	Worshipped for attaining mokṣa, liberation from rebirth; central to the metaphysical geography of Kāśī where Śiva grants liberation through Taraka Mantra	Open for darśan 6:00–11:30 AM and 3:30–9:30 PM; timings flexible; rituals associated with ancestral salvation	Located in the vicinity of Manikarnikā Ghāṭ, the holiest c			
165	Manikarnika Vinayak	Kashi Khand – Guardian near cremation site	Vinayak (Ganesha – Guardian at Manikarnika Ghat)	Protects Manikarnika area; ensures blessings and safe spiritual passage for devotees and ancestors	Located at Manikarnika Ghat, opposite the main gate of Sahu Baba Ashram, Varanasi	Associated with moksha kṣetra; key guardian deity at the sacred cremation ground	Open to public; devotees perform pooja by themselves throughout the day	Situated at one of Kashi's holiest ghats – Manikarnika, near path to liberation	Smeared in sindoor; adorned with crown and embedded in ghat wall	Well-maintained; open for darshan; constantly visited by pilgrims and ritual performers	Functions as spiritual sentinel of the cremation ground; plays vital role in life-death-transcendence rituals of Varanasi
166	Markandeyshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 61	Markandeyshwar Ling (associated with ancestral rituals and atonement)	Described by Lord Vishnu to Sage Bindu; devotees are advised to bathe in Markandey Tīrtha and perform śrāddha to cleanse sins of forefathers and their own. The tīrtha itself is lost but the Ling still remains as a focal site of worship.	Ck.3/61, inside the bazaar behind Gyan Vapi, near Gyan Vapi (Nepali Tola crossing); approach from Gate No. 1 of Vishwanath Corridor.	Atonement-oriented worship; ancestral salvation linked to the site even in absence of the tīrtha. Considered spiritually potent for Pitru Śānti.	Worship open from 6:00 AM to 9:00 AM and 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM; darshan available throughout the day. Śrāddha offerings made.	Located behind Gyan Vapi in spiritual core of Kashi; part of a network of sites linked to Pitru and Moksha-related rituals.	Lingam shrine preserved inside a small temple setting.	Functional shrine; tīrtha not in existence now but worship continues.	Represents memory of a lost tīrtha retained through the presence of the Ling; reflects importance of intangible continuity of worship.

167	Mayūkha Āditya	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 49, Shloka 84	Āditya (Sun God), Parvati, Lord Śiva	When Lord Sūrya installed a Śiva Liṅga as Gabhastīśvara and the goddess Māṅgalā Gaurī at Pañcagaṅgā Ghat, his radiance grew unbearable for beings on Earth. Goddess Pārvatī and Lord Śiva appeared to pacify him. Sūrya resumed worship with deep humility and was known here as Mayūkha Āditya, the radiant one.	Mangalā Gaurī Temple, near Pañcagaṅgā Ghat, Varanasi	Worship of Mayūkha Āditya relieves ailments and ensures peace and health; associated with the cooling of excessive spiritual or physical heat	Poojas on Sundays for healing and spiritual clarity; darśana from 5:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m. & 3:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m.; Aartis in evening	Located in core Pañcagaṅgā tīrtha zone; sacred solar-nodal site; near major śakti and śiva shrines like Dhūpādevī and Gabhastīśvara	Framed image of Mayūkha Āditya with copper/brass hue; housed in temple alongside other śakti-ādhāra icons	Well-maintained; accessible via labyrinthine lanes or boat ride from Lalita Ghat; maintained by traditional temple priests	Symbolizes regulated spiritual energy, humility in power, and cosmic harmony; part of Kāśī's healing and enlightenment solar tradition
168	Mitra Vinayak	Traditional Auspicious Form	Vinayak (Ganesha – Bestower of Success and Prosperity)	Grants success, happiness, and prosperity to devotees	CK-71/58, Scindia Ghat, within Atma Veereshwar Temple, Varanasi	Closely associated with Scindia Ghat sacred circuit and temple networks	Worship from 5:00 a.m.–11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.–8:30 p.m.; special poojas on request; consult pujari beforehand	Located in Atma Veereshwar premises, part of spiritual fabric of Scindia Ghat	Smeared in sindoor, with silver embellishments; wall-niche style shrine	Well-maintained; accessible both by ghat route and city lanes	Auspicious guardian of Scindia Ghat temple complex; "Mitra" symbolizes friendly, prosperous divine intervention in one's life
169	Moda Vinayak	Traditional Form of Obstacle-Remover	Vinayak (Ganesha – Joyful Remover of Obstacles)	Removes all obstacles in life; grants peace and ease in endeavors	CK-31/12, Kashi Karvat Temple, Naipali Khapra, Varanasi	Known locally as a powerful remover of impediments and negativity	Open worship throughout the day; devotees perform pooja by themselves	Located near the Kashi Karvat Temple, a sacred spot associated with moksha traditions	Simple sindoor-coated murti with floral offerings; niche shrine setup	Well-maintained and accessible by foot from Chowk area	"Moda" suggests joy and delight—this form of Vinayak aids devotees joyfully in overcoming trials, situated in spiritually potent locale

170	Modak Priya Vinayak	Traditional Form – Beloved of Modak (Sweet)	Vinayak (Ganesha – Bestower of Success and Contentment)	Worship brings all-round success; beloved form of Vinayak associated with sweetness and prosperity	A-3/92, Aadi Mahadev Temple, Trilochan, Varanasi	Highly revered form bringing material and spiritual joy; linked to Aadi Mahadev complex	Mangala Aarti at 5:00 a.m., Shringaar at 5:30 a.m., Aarti at 12:00 noon; temple open till 9:00 p.m.	Located near Trilochan Ghat, part of important tīrtha cluster with Aadi Mahadev and sacred ghats	Icon smeared in sindoor, embedded in temple wall; modest shrine setting	Well-maintained; daily worship and festive rituals observed	"Modak Priya" reflects Ganesha's symbolic love for offerings of joy and fulfillment—devotees seek blessings for sweetness in life
171	Moksha Dwareshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 94	Moksha Dwareshwar Ling (Aspect of Shiva granting liberation)	According to Kashi Khanda, worship of Moksha Dwareshwar Ling grants release from the cycle of rebirth. It is revered as a spiritual gateway to liberation, consistent with Kashi's sacred promise of Moksha.	Ck.34/10, Lahouri Tola, near Phoota Ganesh. As of 2017, possibly displaced due to Vishwanath Corridor expansion.	Highly significant for those seeking Moksha; associated with rites and rituals that ensure liberation from the cycle of birth and death.	Ling located inside a house; no formal pooja details documented; darshan allowed by local residents.	Inner sacred zone of Kashi, near Vishwanath axis; possibly part of Moksha-linked tīrtha tradition.	No formal temple structure; shrine was inside a residential building.	Possibly displaced or relocated due to Vishwanath Corridor redevelopment (as of 2017).	Symbolizes Kashi's promise of Moksha; reflects the existence of many hidden sacred sites within residential layers.
172	Mrityunjay eshwar (Mrityunjay Mahadev)	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 77	Shiva (as Mrityunjay Mahadev)	Described among sacred places of worship by Lord Shiva in Kashi Khanda. Mrityunjayeshwar is believed to protect from untimely death. The Kalodak Koop (well) near the shrine is believed to have medicinal water that cures diseases. Worshipped as 'Aap Mrityu Har' (one who removes premature death).	K-52/39, Vrinda Kall, near Kal Bhairav, Kashi	Highly revered as a place for protection from premature death and disease. Believed to grant longevity and health benefits through Kalodak water.	Daily poojas, special Mrityunjay Japa performed at this site. Water from Kalodak well is used ritually and medicinally. The temple remains open from 4:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 5:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.	Located near Kal Bhairav in Kashi's protective circuit. Linked with themes of longevity, protection, and overcoming death.	Active temple with Mrityunjay Ling and sacred well (Kalodak Koop). Daily rituals observed by local priests.	Fully functional, maintained, and visited by locals and pilgrims for health and longevity rituals.	Among the most powerful shrines for relief from disease and untimely death. Part of Kashi's system of life-protection and spiritual wellbeing.

173	Muchkunde shwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Muchkundesh war Ling (Installed by Sage Muchukunda, aspect of Moksha and happiness)	This Ling is believed to have been established by Sage Muchukunda. Worship of this Ling grants happiness and Moksha. Revered for its association with ancient sages and liberation-oriented worship.	Near Jaipuria Bhavan (Godowlia area), turning road leading to Kodai Chowki, locality formerly known as Baradeo.	Associated with sage traditions; worship at this Ling is believed to fulfill desires and ensure liberation (Moksha).	Temple open from 6:00 AM to 11:00 AM and 5:00 PM to 9:00 PM; aartis held in morning and evening.	Near Baradeo, in the central Kashi region; part of the network of sage-established tīrthas.	Lingam shrine located in a modest temple structure.	Maintained temple with daily rituals.	Signifies the role of sages in establishing tīrthas; symbolizes a tradition of Moksha-oriented worship in Kashi.
174	Mukhnirma likā Gaurī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 100 (Gaurī Yātrā context)	Gaurī (Śakti form associated with marital blessings and desire-fulfillment)	Mentioned in the Gaurī Yātrā circuit; devotees advised to bathe in Goprekṣa Tīrtha and worship Mukhnirmalikā for happiness and prosperity. Special pūjā is offered for resolution of marriage delays caused by Mangal Doṣa.	K-34/2, Hanumān Jī Temple area, near Gai Ghāṭ, Varanasi – accessible via rickshaw through Machhodari or Gai Ghāṭ road	Revered particularly by women; believed to remove astrological obstacles (like Mangal Graha) causing delay in marriage; brings harmony and good fortune	Temple open: 5:00–8:00 AM and 5:00–8:00 PM; morning and evening ārtis; special pūjās performed for Mangalik doṣa; visited especially on the 1st day of Chaitra Navarātri				
175	Munda Vinayak	Shakti Tradition Reference – Omnipotent Form	Vinayak (Ganesha – Headless Form, associated with Shakti Peeth)	Highly potent form; only the head of the deity is visible above ground, considered extremely powerful	Sadar Bazaar, inside Chandi Devi Temple, near JHV Mall/Hotel Clarks, Varanasi	Regarded as an extremely powerful and mysterious Vinayak form, connected with Shakti worship and protective energy	Open from 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.; devotees perform pooja themselves; considered a Shakti Peeth by local belief	Located in Chandi Devi Temple premises; part of Cantonment area's lesser-known sacred geography	Only the head of the murti is visible above ground, coated with sindoor; wall shrine	Well-preserved, lesser-known but potent shrine, maintained by local devotees and temple trust	"Munda" means head—yet only the head is visible here, making it symbolically inverse; spiritually intense site of Shakti-Ganesh integration

176	Nagesh Vinayak	Kashi Khand, Chapter 57, Shloka 108	Vinayak (Ganesha – Lord of Nagas/Serpents)	Bestows prosperity in this world and a respectful place in the afterlife (Nāgaloka); situated south of Uddandamukh Ganesh	House No. CK-11/21, Patani Tola, Bhosala Ghat area, Varanasi	Closely associated with esoteric Nāga symbolism; said to protect from untimely death and offer higher realms of rebirth	Temple open from 7:00 a.m.–9:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m.; devotees perform their own worship	Located in the Nāgeshwar temple premises, accessible by Chowk or via Bhosala Ghat steps	Image coated in sindoor with sacred grass offerings (durvā); niche shrine in domestic-style setting	Modestly preserved; accessible and respected locally; integrated into everyday religious life	Highly symbolic shrine offering blessings for protection, long life, and spiritual elevation; Nāgaloka association makes it unique
177	Nageshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 100	Nageshwar Jyotirlinga (One of the 12 Jyotirlingas of Shiva)	Among the deities to be worshipped in the prescribed Antargriha Yatra in Kashi is Nageshwar. This is one of the 12 Jyotirlingas, symbolizing Lord Shiva's omnipresence. Worship here is equated with the merit of worship at other Jyotirlinga sites in India.	Ck.1/21, Patel Tolia, Bhosala Ghat, near Lahori Tola Chowk; accessible from Godowlia or Bisheshwarganj side.	As one of the 12 Jyotirlingas, worship of Nageshwar Ling cleanses the devotee of sins and grants spiritual elevation. Believed to be powerful against afflictions caused by Rahu and Kaal Sarp Dosh.	Pooja from 7:00 AM to 9:00 AM and 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM; includes abhishekam, aarti, and personal offerings; remedies advised for astrological doshas.	Located near Mrityunjay Temple zone in central Kashi; part of Jyotirlinga pilgrimage grid and Antargriha Yatra circuit.	Lingam enshrined in temple premises with continuous ritual worship.	Well-maintained Jyotirlinga shrine; active worship and footfall maintained daily.	Anchors the Jyotirlinga tradition within Kashi; reflects the integration of national Shaiva pilgrimage ideals into the sacred city.
178	Nakshatreshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 16, Shlok 18	Nakshatreshwar Ling (Aspect of Shiva associated with planetary affliction and Nakshatra dosha removal)	When celestial girls including Rohini came to Kashi to worship Shiva, Varuna gifted them a space where they worshipped and established a Ling named Nakshatreshwar. Worship of this Ling is said to grant freedom from adverse effects of planetary doshas and ensure a celestial abode in the afterlife.	A.3/1581, Raj Ghat Fort, near Adi Keshav Temple; accessible via cycle rickshaw or local transport.	Remedial worship site to counteract Nakshatra, Graha, and Rāśi doshas in horoscopes; ensures peace and divine blessings.	Open for darshan from 6:00 AM to 12:00 noon and 4:00 PM to 9:00 PM; rituals through temple priests or across the grill gate when closed.	Situated near Adi Keshav in Raj Ghat region; part of cosmic healing tīrtha circuit within northern Kashi.	Lingam within enclosed shrine, open to devotees daily.	Accessible and maintained; daily darshan continues through the grill when inner garbhagriha is closed.	Functions as astrological remedy center; integrates celestial mythology with Kashi's healing geography.

179	Nal Koopeshwar (Nal Kubershwar)	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Nal Koopeshwar Ling (Aspect of Shiva associated with prosperity, grains, and agricultural well-being)	Described by Lord Shiva to Parvati, Nal Koopeshwar Ling lies to the east of Kameshwar Tirth. The Ling is associated with a sacred well (Nal Koop), bathing in which and worshipping the Ling ensures abundance in food crops and wealth.	F-30/6, Panchakroshi Tola, near Bhairo Nath; accessible by rickshaw and foot via narrow lanes.	Traditionally important for agricultural prosperity; worshipped for good crops and material wealth; linked to community agrarian rituals.	Ling is worshipped daily; some locals perform rituals in private homes. Darshan usually conducted outdoors, and bathing in Nal Koop is practiced during specific occasions.	Located in east Kashi; part of agricultural-cosmic ritual system connected to Kubera traditions and Nal Koop.	Lingam near a well in an open enclosure; no large temple structure.	Open and accessible; rituals continue, though less publicly recognized today.	Reflects agrarian foundations of Kashi's sacred ecology; represents prosperity-oriented tīrtha integrated with well (koop) traditions.
180	Nar Narayan (Badri Narayan)	Kashi Khand mentions Narayan Tīrtha	Lord Vishnu as Narayan (dual form of Nara and Narayana)	Devotees who worship Nar Narayan become equivalent to Lord Vishnu. Though the original tīrtha is not visible today, the temple continues the tradition.	Located at A.1/72, Badri Narayan Temple near Gai Ghat	Highly sacred for attaining equality with the divine and for spiritual elevation.	Open for worship from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon; darshan available through window outside these hours.	Situated near Gai Ghat, part of the extended Vaishnava pilgrimage circuit in Varanasi.	Deity image of Nar Narayan installed in shrine; known locally as Badri Narayan.	Maintained and worshipped daily; priest details available for special rituals.	Represents the connection between Kashi and Badarikashrama traditions; symbolizes the dual energies of tapasya (Nara) and divine presence (Narayana).
181	Narad Keshav	Kashi Khand mentions Narad Tirtha and worship of Lord Vishnu as Narad Keshav	Lord Vishnu as Narad Keshav	Worshippers at Narad Tirtha are said to gain divine blessings and supreme knowledge. Although the original tīrtha may no longer exist, its worship and associated sanctity are retained at the temple site.	Located at A-10/80 Prahlad Ghat, inside Shiva Mandir near Prahlad Ghat Chowki.	Connected to gaining divine wisdom and moksha; associated with river-based tīrtha tradition.	Open for darshan throughout the day; self-conducted worship is encouraged.	Situated at Prahlad Ghat on the Ganga; part of sacred geography connected to multiple ancient tīrthas.	Stone sculpture/image of Narad Keshav preserved in shrine.	Functionally preserved and accessible to devotees.	Represents preservation of sacred memory in the form of deity worship even when the exact tīrtha site has faded from physical prominence.

182	Narmadesh war	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 92	Narmadeshwa r Ling (Symbolizing the unity of sacred rivers and devotion)	In a debate among rivers, Ganga was declared supreme, but Yamuna and Saraswati also presented their divine significance. Narmada, born of Lord Shiva, appeared in Kashi to prove her devotion and established a Ling near Trilochareshwar. Lord Shiva blessed the Ling to be worshipped as Narmadeshwar, granting Moksha to devotees.	K.62/14, near Trilocharesh war, behind Trilochan; accessible by foot or rickshaw via Machhodari.	Linked to river goddess Narmada; symbolizes devotion, sanctity of pilgrimage, and spiritual liberation (Moksha) granted by Shiva himself.	Daily worship from 6:00 AM to 9:30 AM and 6:00 PM to 10:00 PM; aarti held in the evening.	Located near Pishachmochan Tirtha and Trilochareshwar , part of Moksha-linked tīrtha circuit in northern Kashi.	Standalone Ling placed on a wooden base; integrated in active temple shrine.	Well-maintained temple with daily rituals and local priest (Shri Kashinathji).	Represents harmony among sacred rivers; emphasizes role of feminine devotion in establishing sacred geography of Kashi.
183	Neelkanthe shwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 88, Shlok 80	Neelkanthesh war Ling (Form of Shiva as Neelkantha – the poison-holder)	Originating from Kalinjar mountains, this Ling was brought and installed in Kashi by Nandi. Worshipping this Ling grants one equivalence with Lord Neelkanth and Chandrabhuṣaṇa. It symbolizes absorption of suffering and divine transformation.	Ck.33/23, Neelkanth Mohalla, inside Kedare Bhwar Temple, near Vishwanath Corridor (not inside official premises).	Devotees attain the spiritual stature of Neelkanth; associated with themes of devotion, suffering, and divine upliftment.	Temple open from 6:30 AM to 12:30 PM and 4:00 PM to 10:00 PM; aartis in morning and evening.	Located on the slopes toward Ganga near Kedare Bhwar; connected to the extended Vishwanath sacred geography.	Lingam within traditional shrine architecture at Kedare Bhwar.	Well-preserved and accessible; worshipped regularly with religious fervor.	Represents the spread of sacred Lings from other tīrthas into Kashi; illustrates Kashi's role as a confluence of pan-Indian Shaiva traditions.
184	Nikumbesh war	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Nikumbeshw ar Ling (Guardian deity of southern Kashi, associated with protection and watchfulness)	According to Kashi Khanda, Nikumbeshwar Ling is located to the south of Vishweshwar and is known for its protective role. Lord Shiva mentions that this deity keeps a watchful eye over Kashi, blessing devotees who worship sincerely.	Inside Panavlay temple, in the premises of Vishweshwar temple complex, Ck.35/19.	Acts as a protective deity for the region; part of the southern sacred belt of Vishwanath axis.	No special pooja permitted due to police regulations; darshan possible throughout the day within Vishweshwar temple premises.	Guardian deity on southern threshold of Vishwanath sacred territory; formerly marked the old Vishweshwar complex limit.	Lingam located inside the Vishweshwar Panavlay temple structure.	Under administration; open to darshan but not to elaborate ritual activity.	Signifies the protective energy embedded in Kashi's spatial layout; reflects importance of directional deities in sacred city structure.

185	Omkareshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 73; Shlokas 168, 171	Shiva (as Omkareshwar Ling); associated with Panchakshara mantra and cosmic elements	Lord Brahma performed intense penance, invoking Shiva with devotion. Shiva appeared and manifested as Omkareshwar Ling representing Akār, Ukār, Makār, Nāda, and Bindu. Lord Shiva blessed him and stated that the Ling embodies all groups of Shiva Lings and grants great punya equivalent to reciting one lakh Rudra Japams.	A-33/23, Pathani Tola, North of Machhodari, near Matsyodari Teerth	Embodies the cosmic syllables of AUM; grants mukti and punya equivalent to worshipping all Shiva Lings. Important for universal and elemental worship.	Daily worship, special offerings during Shivratri, Chaturdashi, and Ashtami. Pilgrims perform Rudrabhishek, Panchamrit, and chant Omkar mantra. Devotees also visit nearby Akāreshwar and Makāreshwar shrines.	Located near Matsyodari Teerth, an important spot in Kashi's northern sacred zone. One of the cosmic Lings along with Bhimashankar and Baijnatheshwar in the same cluster.	Traditional temple complex with three symbolic Lings (Omkareshwar, Akāreshwar, Makāreshwar). Worshipped daily by appointed priests.	Well-preserved, actively visited, and revered for its pan-Shiva significance.	Represents universal Shiva tattva and is spiritually potent for comprehensive Shiva worship. Key site for abstract, cosmological worship in Kashi.
186	Paas Pani Vinayak	Kashi Khand, Chapter 57, Shloka 84	Vinayak (Ganesha – Remover of Troubles in Northern Kashi)	Removes obstacles and smoothens devotees' lives; protects northern quarter of the sacred city	Sadar Bazaar, Cantonment area, near JHV Mall, Radisson, and Chandi Devi Temple, Varanasi	Mentioned as *Paaschimni Vinayak* (Western Vinayak); revered for removing troubles of residents and devotees	Open for darshan throughout the day; devotees perform pooja independently	Located in the northern (urban) expansion zone of Varanasi, yet connected with traditional pilgrimage routes	Well-adorned murti with ornaments and vibrant decoration; modern temple setup	Well-maintained shrine with clear wayfinding and integration in urban Cantonment area	Acts as boundary guardian and protector in northern Kashi; signifies the adaptation of sacred geography into modern cityscapes
187	Padodak Tīrtha	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 88, Shloka 67	Lord Viṣṇu, Śiva, Yoginīs	Originated when Lord Viṣṇu washed his feet in the Ganga after restoring balance in Kāśī by defeating Yoginīs sent by Śiva. The site where Viṣṇu's Charan Paduka is venerated is called Padodak.	Present-day Trilochaneshwar area (Padodak Koop / Viṣṇupāda), near Trilochan Mahadev Temple	Considered Charan Āmṛta of Viṣṇu; grants relief from sins, bestows blessings on ancestors, and purifies devotees	Ritual bathing, Pitṛtarpaṇa, consumption or sprinkling of water as Āmṛta (Charanāmṛta); offerings on Ekādaśī, Amāvasyā, and Aṣṭamī	Adjacent to sacred Trilochaneshwar, near river and tīrtha circuits; aligns with Viṣṇupāda traditions	Ancient stepwell-like structure (Padodak Koop); traces of earlier sacred water architecture	Currently not active for open public bathing; narrow and dry except in special seasons; ritual use maintained during key festival days	Represents Viṣṇu's role in restoring dharma in Kāśī; symbolic site of cosmic cleansing; one of Kāśī's Viṣṇu-tīrthas

188	Panch Gangeshwar (Panchnadeshwar)	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Panch Gangeshwar Ling (Aspect of Shiva associated with the five sacred flows of Ganga)	Described by Lord Shiva in response to Parvati's request, this Ling is located near Mangala Gauri and is believed to bless devotees with prosperity and happiness. It is called Panch Gangeshwar by locals, symbolizing the fivefold blessing of Ganga.	K.22/11, below Tailang Swamy Mutt, accessible via Bhaironath by rickshaw or via Panch Ganga Ghat steps; boat access also possible.	Blesses devotees with happiness and wealth; located near sacred Ganga confluence zone and holds deep local reverence.	Open for worship throughout the day; Ling is inside a room, darshan from the entrance possible.	Located in southern sacred Ganga-facing cluster; aligned with spiritual axis of Panch Ganga Ghat.	Ling placed within room below Tailang Swamy premises; discreet but actively worshipped.	Maintained and respected; continuous darshan and offerings by local devotees.	Represents synthesis of local Ganga devotion and Shaiva worship; part of southern confluence-focused tīrtha layout.
189	Pancha Ganga (Panchanada Tīrtha)	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 68: Ślokas 111, 128, 137	Ganga, Saraswati, Yamuna, Dhutapapa, Kirana Nadi	Site where five sacred rivers (Ganga, Yamuna, Sarasvati, Dhutapapa, Kirana) merged; also linked to Sage Vedasar and Suchi's penance. Viṣṇu blessed the site after witnessing sage's devotion.	Located near Pancha Ganga Ghat, north of Manikarnika, Varanasi	Celebrated site for ancestral rituals and deep tapas; especially powerful during Kārtika month	Dīpa-dāna, Snāna (holy bathing), Śrāddha Karma, donation of wealth, Kartik Snāna, suspended lamps lighting (Divya Dīpāvali); yearly river rituals	Sacred confluence point; part of Kāśī's tīrtha-yātrā; believed to be the northern tīrtha terminus of Viśveśvara Mandala	Ancient ghat steps; visible signs of suspended lamps (floating baskets), sacred well and bathing platform	Still active; popular during Kartika; supported by ongoing pilgrimage traffic and local puja activities	Symbol of cosmic unity (5 rivers); known for bestowing eternal punya and relief from sins; especially potent for those who cannot reach Prayāga
190	Pancha Krosha Temple	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 26; Avimukta Mahatmya and other Purāṇas	Pancha Krosha Ling (Symbol of Avimukta Kshetra and micro-representation of circumambulatory tīrtha yatra)	Pancha Krosha Yatra is a sacred circumambulatory pilgrimage around Kashi covering ~25 km. For those unable to undertake it, worship at Pancha Krosha Temple (Gola Gully) is said to grant the same merit. The temple Ling is a symbolic microcosm of the greater pilgrimage and is connected with deep spiritual traditions.	Ck.5/32, Gola Gully, behind Kashmiri Mal Haveli, near Vishwanath Corridor.	One of the Poojaris says this temple has existed for centuries; believed to be equivalent in merit to undertaking Pancha Krosha Yatra; revered by those unable to physically do the full yatra.	Open 6:00 AM to 11:00 AM and 4:30 PM to 8:00 PM; aartis performed in morning and evening.	Located inside Avimukta Kshetra and part of Vishwanath sacred belt; represents core of extended tīrtha circuit (Pancha Krosha).	Small Lingam shrine within narrow lane temple; old structural elements preserved.	Well-maintained and locally revered; serves as active site for pilgrims unable to complete larger pilgrimage.	Embodies concept of sacred compression —spatially condensed pilgrimage offering access to larger cosmic geography of Kashi.

191	Pancha Sya Vinayak	Kashi Khand – Identified as Pancha Mukha Vinayak (Five-Faced Ganesha)	Vinayak (Ganesha – Five-Faced Form)	Guards the western side of Kashi; embodies multiform vigilance and protection	C-21/40, Pishachmochan area, Varanasi	Highly revered as the five-faced guardian deity watching over the sacred city's western periphery	Open to public; devotees can perform pooja independently throughout the day	Located near Pishachmochan Tīrtha—one of the highly sanctified sites associated with liberation and absolution	Image marked in relief with five faces, coated in sindoor; embedded in temple wall	Well-maintained; shrine is intact and accessible in the Pishachmochan precinct	Pancha-mukha form symbolizes Ganesha's multifaceted guardianship; western direction adds to its role in balancing Kashi's sacred spatial alignment
192	Panchakṣheśhwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 55	Panchakṣheśhwar Ling (a form of Rudra, established by Śiva Gaṇas)	After multiple Śiva Gaṇas failed to return from Kāshi, Lord Śiva deputed another group, who finally settled in Kāshi and established this Ling near Trilochaneshwar. It is said that these Gaṇas were instructed to settle permanently and worship Śiva; hence the Ling was installed and revered as Panchakṣheśhwar.	Near Trilochan Ghat, adjacent to Trilochaneshwar Temple and Rudrakṣheśhwar.	This temple marks the divine settlement of Śiva Gaṇas and is associated with deep esoteric significance in Shaiva worship.	Open daily from 05:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 05:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.	Worshipped as part of the broader Trilochan Ghat sacred geography and Shaiva tīrtha circuit.	Ancient shrine, well-maintained in the Trilochan precinct, a major Shaiva hub in Kāshi.	Good condition and actively visited by pilgrims and sādhakas.	Linked with the esoteric Shaiva worship tradition and believed to be a powerful Rudra energy centre established by Gaṇas of Śiva.
193	Parvateeshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 80, Shloka 22	Parvateeshwar Ling (Form of Mahadev installed by Goddess Parvati)	To ensure happiness in all directions and after hearing about the benefits of tīrthas in Kāshi, Goddess Pārvatī expressed her desire to install a Shiv Ling. With Lord Shiva's permission, she established a Ling known as Parvateeshwar in the Anandavana region. This Ling purifies devotees from sins related to planetary afflictions and brings auspicious results.	A.31/32, near Madadev, Trilochan, close to Krittivaseshwar Mandir.	It is worshipped as a Śānti Tīrtha (remover of afflictions) and is associated with fulfillment of desires and peace in family life.	Popular during Chaitra month, especially on Bhuktika Paksha Tritiya. Aartis held at 06:00 a.m. and 07:00 a.m.	Worshipped within the larger tīrtha zone of Trilochan and adjacent sacred sites.	Small, well-maintained shrine with steady footfall of local devotees.	Highly beneficial during Bhuktika Paksha Tritiya. Specially worshipped for planetary peace and domestic happiness.	

194	Parvateśhwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 100	Parvateśhwar Ling (Form of Śiva)	After completing Antargṛhi Yātrā and the worship of Vāsukeśhwar, devotees are advised to worship Parvateśhwar to attain happiness. This Ling is part of the concluding sequence of this inner pilgrimage.	K.7/115E, Scindia Ghat, Kāśī	Connected with the Antargṛhi Yātrā sequence; offers blessing of happiness and peace.	Open for worship 05:30–11:00 a.m. and 06:00–09:00 p.m.	Linked to Siddha Devī and Scindia Ghat tīrthas.	Located in a small shrine near riverfront, popular among locals.	Important for completion of Antargṛhi Yātrā; reinforces ritual cycle.	
195	Pāśupateśhwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 79, Shloka 33	Pāśupateśhwar Ling (form of Śiva linked with twilight-time Śiva-worship)	This large Svayambhu Ling, located in the area of Marnikarnika, is especially associated with the twilight worship of Śiva (Sandhyā-Bandhya Pūjā). It is stated in the Kashi Khanda that Lord Śiva Himself performs rituals here during this time, and devotees visiting at this hour are freed from worldly bondages.	A.1/36C, Pāśupateśhwar Galli, near Marnikarnika.	The Ling is considered extremely powerful during twilight hours and is visited by sādhakas and spiritual seekers seeking liberation (mokṣa).	The temple is open throughout the day. Special significance on Rang Bhari Ekādashī and day before Purnima.	Tīrtha linked with Śiva's divine activities at Marnikarnika; also integrated in Śaiva-śakti tīrtha network.	Moderate-sized temple, revered and known locally; area identified by the Ling.	One of the sacred twilight tīrthas of Kāśī; said to offer direct release from bondage.	
196	Pawaneshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 97	Pawaneshwar Ling (Form of Śiva)	Lord Shiva described this Ling to Goddess Pārvatī among the many sacred tīrthas of Kāśī. It is known for granting **Siddhi** (spiritual accomplishments) and many powers to devotees.	K.6/314, Bhoot Bhairav Mohalla, Kāśī	This site holds esoteric value for sādhakas seeking Siddhi and yogic perfection.	Open for worship 06:00–10:00 a.m. and 06:00–10:00 p.m.	Tīrtha lies under ground level, near Bhoot Bhairav, connected to tantric circuits.	Ling is enshrined within a protected pit; accessed with care.	Powerful spiritual node for seekers; Siddhi-granting site in the śaiva tradition.	

197	Pichandil Vinayak	Traditional Guardian Deity	Vinayak (Ganesha – Day and Night Protector)	Guards Kashi continuously—both day and night—and blesses devotees with all success	A-10/80, below Vat Vriksha, Prahlad Ghat, Varanasi	Highly regarded for its uninterrupted protective energy over the sacred city	Open for darshan throughout the day; devotees may perform worship themselves	Located near Prahlad Ghat on the riverfront, beneath sacred fig tree (Vat Vriksha)	Icon in relief, coated in sindoor, placed in a temple wall niche with decorative arch	Well-maintained shrine, accessible by ghat steps or by boat	Signifies round-the-clock divine vigilance—integrated with ghat culture and Vat Vriksha, symbolizing continuity and shelter
198	Pingaleshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 53	Pingaleshwar Ling (Form of Shiva)	One of the Shiv Ganas named Pingal visited Kashi, was attracted by the divinity and settled there worshipping Lord Shiva. The Ling installed came to be known as Pingaleshwar.	C-21/40, near Kapardeeshwar in the Phatahanachatti area, Kashi	The site is revered as a place of purification, where sins are said to be cleansed. Daily rituals and pind-daan are performed.	Worship is open practically throughout the day. Special poojas require prior consultation with the pujari.	Near Kapardeeshwar and Faatmaan road, access through Chetganj or Maidagin.	Basic shrine setup, preserved by local community.	Popular among locals for Shraddha rituals; strong continuity of belief in its sin-cleansing power.	
199	Pita Maheshwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 88, Śloka 33	Swayambhū Śiva Liṅga (Self-manifested)	Lord Kārttikeya mentions Pita Maheshwar among significant Śiva Liṅgas; worship of this liṅga grants liberation to twenty generations of ancestors (including the devotee).	C.K.7/92, Mohalla Sheetla Gali, accessible from Chowk by auto or cycle rickshaw	Believed to bestow mokṣa and ancestral liberation; regarded as one of Kāśī's most powerful Śiva shrines	Pūjā, abhiṣeka, and śṛṅgāra especially on Mahaśivarātri, Śrāvaṇ Somvārs, Śrāvaṇī, Rāṇī Bhari Ekādaśī and other Ekādaśīs; regular darśana throughout the year	Part of the salvation-linked tīrtha network of Kāśī, noted in Kāśī Khaṇḍa for its pitṛ-tarpaṇa significance	Simple shrine housing Śiva Liṅga; decorated with traditional offerings during rituals	Well-preserved and actively maintained by local devotees	One of the few tīrthas specifically credited with liberating ancestors; key site in pitṛ and śiva-tattva worship within Kāśī
200	Pitreśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 87	Pitṛ Tattva (ancestral aspect of Śiva Linga)	Goddess Pārvatī inquires about tīrthas related to forefathers; Kaśī Khaṇḍa mentions Pitreśhwar Linga near Pitṛkund where offerings to forefathers are made. Worship pleases ancestors and grants their blessings.	C.K.18/47, Pitṛ Kund, Varanasi (near Mahātmā Lodhe Mandir, close to Phishach Mochan)	Highly significant for rituals related to Pitṛs (ancestors); strengthens ancestral connections and spiritual lineage	Daily pūjā; special rituals during Pitṛ Pakṣa; lighting of lamps, abhiṣeka and floral offerings performed at Pitṛkund, especially in Ashwin (Sept–Oct) and Kartik months	Located beside Pitṛkund, a sacred pond linked with ancestral worship; part of broader network of Śiva tīrthas in Kāśī	Traditional shrine with stone Śiva Linga set within sacred water channel at Pitṛkund	Well-preserved and active worship site during Pitṛ-related occasions	Important site for ancestral rituals (śrāddha); reinforces Kāśī's reputation as mokṣadāyī (liberation-granting) for the entire lineage

201	Prachand Narsimha	Kashi Khand, Chapter 81, Shloka 180	Lord Vishnu as Prachand (Fierce) Narsimha	Lord Vishnu says, "Towards the east of Chanda Bhairava, I am available as Prachand Narsimha. By worshipping this deity, the devotee will become sinless even after committing the gravest of sins."	Located at B.1/151, Jagannath Temple, Assi Ghat	Highly revered as a purifier from the gravest sins; intense spiritual power.	Worship from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.; aartis held morning and evening.	Situated near Assi Ghat, in the southern sacred geography of Kashi.	Deity of Prachand Narsimha enshrined in vibrant temple space.	Well-maintained, actively worshipped and publicly accessible.	Represents the fierce, protective, and redemptive aspect of Vishnu in Narsimha form; counterbalances Chanda Bhairava in sacred spatial layout.
202	Prahlad Keshav	Kashi Khand mentions Prahlad Tirtha where Lord Vishnu exists as Prahlad Keshav	Lord Vishnu in the form of Prahlad Keshav	Lord Vishnu told Bindu Rishi that worshipping at Prahlad Tirtha brings all sorts of divine blessings. Though the original tīrtha may not be extant, the deity continues to be worshipped.	Located at A-10/80 Prahlad Ghat, near the bank of River Ganga; inside Prahladeshwar Temple	Highly regarded for obtaining divine blessings and spiritual merit through devotion.	Temple open from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.; morning aarti is held.	Situated along the Ganga, connected with Prahlad Ghat, a prominent tīrtha site.	Stone image of Prahlad Keshav preserved within the temple complex.	Maintained and publicly accessible; continues as an active site of devotion.	Reflects the blend of Vaishnava and Shaiva worship traditions in Kashi; important node in Ganga-side tīrtha network.
203	Prahlādeśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 97	Swayambhū Śiva Liṅga (Self-manifested)	As per Lord Śiva's narration, Prahlādeśhwar is located near Vishṇu's devotee Prahlāda's site (Prahlāda Ghat). Worshipping this Liṅga brings divine blessings from Śiva and is infused with the power of tīrthas.	C.K.18/108, near Prahlāda Ghat, Varanasi; accessible via cycle rickshaw from Prahlāda Ghat Chowk or stairs from riverbank	A tīrtha linked to bhakti of Prahlāda and divine blessing of Śiva; a spiritually potent shrine blending Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva traditions	Daily pūjā; shrine open for darśana from 6:00 a.m.–10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m.; worship includes abhiṣeka and offerings by devotees	Close to sacred Ganga ghāṭ, near sites associated with Prahlāda; part of a network of tīrthas associated with bhakti and divine union	Small shrine with golden enclosure and traditional Śiva Liṅga installation	Well-maintained and visited regularly by devotees seeking spiritual grace	Blends Vaiṣṇava devotion and Śaiva power in Kāśī's tīrtha landscape; highly revered for bhakti-based blessings and protection

204	Pramoda Vinayak	Traditional Form – Joyful Vinayak	Vinayak (Ganesha – Source of Joy and Delight)	Now part of the sacred landscape of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor; associated with inner joy and well-being	Inside the extended Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, Varanasi	Integrated into the newly redeveloped sacred circuit of Vishwanath Mandir; symbol of divine joy and fulfillment	Open throughout the day; devotees perform pooja independently	Located within the corridor near key Shaiva temples and shrines of Kashi	Simple murti coated in sindoor and decorated with garlands in recessed wall shrine	Well-preserved and maintained as part of the corridor's revitalized sacred infrastructure	Represents continuation of ancient Vinayak tradition within modernized sacred urban space; embodies bliss and positive energy
205	Pranav Vinayak	Kashi Khand, Chapter 57, Shlok 77	Vinayak (Ganesha – Embodiment of Pranava/Om)	Mentioned as a sacred form west of Raja Putra Ganesha; mere worship is said to grant heaven	Hiranya Garbheshwar Temple, near Trilochan Ghat, Varanasi; west of Raja Putra Ganesh temple	Deeply symbolic form associated with "Pranava" (Om); worshipped for liberation and heavenly abode	Open for darshan; devotees perform pooja independently as per personal vow or tīrtha circuit	Situated along the west bank of the Ganga, near Mokshadayini tīrthas like Trilochan and Hiranyagarbha	Carved icon in wall, coated with sindoor; set into a sacred stone slab with inscription	Well-maintained; part of Trilochan sacred cluster; accessible by foot and boat	Represents metaphysical unity (Om/Pranava) in Ganesha form; direct promise of Svarga (heaven) on worship underscores spiritual potency
206	Prayag Madhav	Kashi Khand mentions Prayag Tirtha associated with Dashashwamedh area and Madhav worship	Lord Vishnu as Madhav	A devotee worshipping Prayag Madhav is said to be freed of all sins. Though the exact tīrtha is not extant, it was traditionally part of the Dashashwamedh sacred area.	Located at D.17/111, inside Ram Mandir premises at Dashashwamedh Ghat	Highly revered for its purificatory and redemptive powers; draws significance from Prayag symbolism in Kashi.	Temple open for darshan from 5:00 p.m. to 12:00 noon and from 2:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.; flexible aarti timings in morning and evening.	Located in the symbolic confluence zone of Kashi near Dashashwamedh Ghat, echoing Prayag's energy of confluence.	Deity of Madhav enshrined within Ram Mandir at Dashashwamedh.	Preserved and in active worship; integrated with broader temple complex.	Represents the thematic transposition of Prayag (Allahabad) in Kashi; sacred confluence-based worship of Vishnu continues at Dashashwamedh under Prayag Madhav identity.

207	Prayāgeśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 61	Śiva Liṅga associated with Tīrtha of Prayāga (Trivenī)	Described in the context of Prayāga Tīrtha (Daśāśvamedh); worship of Prayāgeśhwar in Māgha month (during holy bath) grants wealth, food grains, children, and ultimately mokṣa.	The shrine is located at D.17/108 (Daśāśvamedh Gali), in the premises of Sandhī Devi temple, Varanasi	Highly revered especially in Māgha month during the symbolic recreation of Prayāga at Kāśī; associated with blessings of prosperity and liberation	Special pūjā during Māgha Māsa; regular darśana from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.; through grilled door at other times; offerings and floral decorations practiced regularly	Linked with symbolic presence of Prayāga within Kāśī; integrated into Daśāśvamedh Tīrtha landscape and seasonal pilgrimage flow	Traditional Śiva Liṅga installation within temple compound; adorned with flowers and water channel for rituals	Well-maintained; access restricted during non-pūjā hours but open for darśana	Important for devotees unable to travel to Prayāga; spiritually equated with Trivenī Saṅgama and part of Kāśī's integrated tīrtha concept
208	Pulaheshwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 18, Śloka 19	Swayambhū Śiva Liṅga associated with Sage Pulastya	This Liṅga, located north of Svarga Dvār, was installed by Sage Pulastya. Worshippers attain residence in Prajāpati Loka (abode of learned beings). It is said to be a tīrtha of sages where intense prayers have led to divine realization.	C.K.13/43, Thakurdas Surekha Bhavan, Brahmanāl Chowrahā, near Manikarnika Ghat, Varanasi	Associated with ancient sage tradition; especially tied to intellectual and spiritual seekers aiming for higher lokas (like Prajāpati Loka)	Installed in a private premise; pūjā is self-performed by devotees; darśana possible throughout the day, no fixed pūjārī	Pulaheshwar lies to the west of Svarga Dvār, connecting it to the tīrtha system of Kāśī related to mokṣa and sage lineage	Traditional liṅga shrine inside residential courtyard; sacred but with minimal public temple structure	Well-preserved within private premises; limited public access but clean and respected site	One of the key sage-associated tīrthas of Kāśī; venerated for blessings related to intellect, learning, and access to higher lokas
209	Raj Putra Vinayak	Kashi Khand, Chapter 57, Shloka 78	Vinayak (Ganesha – Restorer of Lost Power)	Even a deposed king can regain his kingdom by worshipping; symbolic of regaining lost fortune and position	A-37/48, Raj Ghat Fort Road, near Adi Keshav Temple, Varanasi	Invoked for restoration of status, lost authority, and re-establishment of fortune; spiritually potent for life revival	Temple open 6:00 a.m.–7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m.; ārti held daily; darshan through grill door throughout the day	Southwest of Kharva Vinayak, located within sacred precinct of Raj Ghat near Adi Keshav	Icon smeared in sindoor, adorned with cloth and garlands; set in shrine structure in Raj Ghat Fort	Well-maintained with limited access hours; allows daily darshan via grill gate	Represents divine potential for reversal of misfortune and renewal of authority—especially revered in royal and guardian contexts of Kashi

210	Ratneśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 67	Śiva Liṅga formed by the merging of Ratnas (gems), associated with Giri Rāj (father of Goddess Pārvatī)	According to the narrative, Giri Rāj (father of Goddess Pārvatī) formed the Liṅga from precious gems out of devotion to Śiva. Later, Lord Viśveśhwar appeared and blessed the place, naming the Liṅga as "Ratneśhwar." Devotees reciting one crore Rudra Japa here are said to be liberated.	K.53/40, near Vṛddha Kāśīśhwar/Mṛtyunjayeshwar, road towards Bhīshashwarganj/GPO, Varanasi	Associated with wealth, prosperity, and divine grace of Śiva; venerated as a site where spiritual merit is magnified by the origin of the Liṅga from sacred Ratnas	Pūjā and darśana from 6:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m.; special ārti timings at 10:30 a.m. and 8:00 p.m.; recitation of Rudra Japa emphasized	A sacred site spiritually linked with Giri Rāj, Viśveśhwar, and Ratnas; part of the wider tīrtha network around Bhīshashwarganj	Well-structured shrine with circular stone base, traditional Śiva Liṅga; surrounded by water channel and flower offerings	Well-preserved, actively worshipped, and easily accessible by road	Deep symbolic connection between gems (ratna), devotion, and divine blessing; powerful tīrtha for material and spiritual prosperity
211	Rudreśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 69 & 87, Śloka 91	Śiva in the form of Rudra, linked to Gajasura-vadha and Rudra Mahālaya	Associated with the site where Lord Śiva wore the skin of Gajasura after slaying him (Rudra Vasam). Later known as Rudreśhwar, linked with Rudra Mahālaya. Worship here grants liberation to Rudra Loka and recognition as "Rudra" both in life and after death.	D.51/21, near Tripura Bhairavi, Varanasi; accessible via Tripura Bhairavi lane from Vishwanath Gali or Nandī Chowk (Rudrachaturdashi route)	One of the 68 Rudra sites in Kāśī; holds special power on Rudrachaturdashi and Pañchaka days; considered essential for attaining Rudra-loka and merging with Rudra Tattva	No regular public pūjā; Liṅga is located inside a private house; residents permit devotees to perform darśana and pūjā individually	A key tīrtha associated with Rudra Mahālaya and linked to the Krithivāseśhwar tradition; one of few sites ensuring spiritual identity with Rudra after death	Large Nandī and Śiva Liṅga located inside a traditional household premise; no public temple structure	Preserved inside residential premise; not a public shrine but accessible for private devotion	Spiritually potent tīrtha for advanced sādhakas seeking Rudra-sāyujya; timing of darśana on specific tithis increases merit manifold
212	Ruru Bhairav (Anand Bhairav)	Skanda Purāṇa – Kāśī Khaṇḍa (implied under Bhairava worship traditions)	Bhairava (a fierce form of Śiva)	Ruru Bhairav is one of the Aṣṭa Bhairavas and protector of the region. Associated with Hanuman Ghat area and the protective energy of the southern direction.	B41/16, near Hanuman Ghat, Varanasi	Regarded as a guardian deity; protects the sacred space; invoked for safety and victory over fear.	Daily pūjā from 5:00–10:00 AM and 5:00–9:30 PM; morning and evening ārtis; devotees visit via rickshaw or on foot via Hanuman Ghat road.	Situated in the sacred Kṣetra of Kāśī, near Hanuman Ghat, marking the southern boundary of spiritual protection.	Traditional shrine structure; stone idol decorated with cloth and garlands	Active worship site; maintained shrine; visited by locals and devotees regularly	Demonstrates continuity of local Bhairava worship; an example of guardian deities defining the protective mandala of Kāśī.

213	Saamba Āditya	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 48, Shloka 48	Āditya (Sun God), Saamba (son of Lord Krishna)	Sage Nārada visited Dvārakā. Saamba, son of Lord Kṛṣṇa, initially disrespected him and was cursed with leprosy. He later repented and performed penance to Sūrya (Sun God) at Kāśī. Pleased, Sūrya appeared, cured Saamba, and blessed the site as Saamba Āditya.	Saamba Kund (now Surya Kund), D-5/190, Varanasi	Strong healing tradition, especially for skin diseases and infertility; associated with Saamba's redemption	Worship on Sundays, particularly during Chaitra, Navarātri, Magha, and Amāvasyā; bathing in the Kund, lighting lamps, and pūjā	Part of the southern solar tīrthas of Kāśī; near major kund zone; aligned with fertility and healing traditions	Saamba Kund (Surya Kund) is a large water tank; sacred solar murti placed within shrine; lamps often floated	Fully functional; darśana from 6 a.m.–1 p.m. and 3 p.m.–9 p.m.; continues to attract women seeking fertility blessings	A redemption-based solar tīrtha; crucial for healing and purification; Śaiva-Vaiṣṇava integration through Kṛṣṇa lineage and Sun worship
214	Sahasrakṣh eśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 69	Swayambhū Śiva Liṅga associated with ritual purification	One of the 68 Liṅgas established by Śiva in the form of Krithivāseśhwar after the Gajasura episode. This Liṅga, located to the south of Śiva's main body in Kāśī, is believed to absolve even the sins of a hundred births. Those who worship here with devotion are purified completely.	A-40/41, Marhia Ghat, Shivpurī, Varanasi; accessible via Godowlia through Bhonsale Ghat; 400 meters walk from Ghat via stairway	Highly sacred site for deep spiritual cleansing; especially associated with washing away sins of past births as per purāṇic texts	Pūjā timings are 5:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.; ārti performed in morning and evening; accessible for darśana throughout the day	Part of Krithivāseśhwar tīrtha system; located near Svargadvāra axis, contributing to Kāśī's body-like tīrtha map symbolizing cosmic Śiva	Stone Śiva Liṅga installed in a traditional circular base, located inside a small shrine by the riverside stairs	Well-maintained and publicly accessible; timings observed strictly for darśana and pūjā	One of the most powerful tīrthas for karmic cleansing and spiritual purification; important stop in pilgrim tīrtha-yātrā
215	Samhar Bhairav	Skanda Purāṇa – Kāśī Khaṇḍa (Chapter 69)	Bhairava (Annihilating Form of Śiva)	Samhar Bhairav has come from Bhairav Kṣetra and is believed to destroy the sins of devotees who worship him.	A1/82, Patan Darwaja, near Gai Ghat, Varanasi (northern side of Kāśī)	Worshipped for destruction of sins and removal of severe obstacles; located near the edge of sacred geography	Daily pūjā from 5:00–11:00 AM and 5:00–9:30 PM; timings flexible for devotees; ārtis are conducted	Located on the northern threshold of Kāśī, marking a protective and purifying boundary near Gai Ghat	Small traditional shrine structure with idol enshrined and covered in cloth; steps lead up to shrine	Actively worshipped; shrine is well-preserved and accessible via steps or boat	Symbolizes Kāśī's layered protection system – Bhairavas placed at strategic directions; Samhar Bhairav marks the purificatory gateway from the north

216	Samudreśh war	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 97	Śiva Liṅga in the vicinity of Eśhāneśhwar and Kaṅkālīśhwar	Described as one of the Liṅgas that grants Siddhi and Mokṣa. Though spiritually potent, it is not widely regarded by locals as extraordinary, being venerated in a more localized devotional context.	Main road at Bansphatak, Varanasi; near Bansphatak Vishwanath Gali; accessible from Godowlia or Chowk via the side lane	Part of the network of sacred Liṅgas mentioned in Kāśī Khaṇḍa; provides liberation and siddhi benefits to devotees	Simple pūjā practice from 6:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m.; timings flexible; devotees worship as per their convenience	Located near other minor tīrthas like Eśhāneśhwar; part of Kāśī's distributed sacred geography network	Presumed to be housed in a small shrine structure; not elaborately described or ornamented in available record	Maintained as a functioning place of worship; regularly visited by local devotees despite being lesser-known	Lesser-known but spiritually effective tīrtha, especially for household devotees; connected to broader śiva-tattva presence in Kāśī
217	Śaneśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 17, Śloka 127	Śani Dev (Saturn aspect of Śiva)	Located within Viśvanāth Temple premises, Śaneśhwar is associated with the son of Sūrya (Śani) born of Chāyā. Due to misunderstandings and karma, Śani became feared, but ultimately worshipped Lord Śiva and was blessed. Worshipping this Liṅga on Saturdays removes sufferings due to Śani (Saturn).	C.K.35/19, inside Viśvanāth Temple at southern entrance, newly constructed corridor area, Varanasi	Important for devotees affected by Saturn's influence; worship here on Saturdays is believed to nullify malefic effects of Śani Graha	Pūjā may be performed individually by devotees; most common on Saturdays; temple is under administration, so formal pūjā is limited unless permitted	Situated among nine linearly arranged Śiva Liṅgas in Viśvanāth precinct; Śaneśhwar is identified as the flat-shaped Śiva Liṅga within the row	Flat Śiva Liṅga located on southern side of Viśvanāth corridor; minimalistic but maintained	Well-preserved; under management of temple authorities; open for individual darśana and worship	Highly sought-after site for planetary relief (navagraha remedy); integrates Graha-pūjā tradition with core Śaiva worship in Kāśī
218	Sankatā Devī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa (Durga Devī Yātrā context)	Sankatā Devī – Form of Durgā; goddess who removes dangers and hardships	Worshipped especially on the eighth day (Aṣṭamī) of Navarātri; Sankatā Devī is venerated for protection from crises (*sankat*) and fear; helps devotees overcome distress and spiritual obstacles.	Ck. 7/155, Sankatā Devī Mandir, near Chowk, Varanasi	Highly venerated as the reliever of sufferings; large female devotee base; invoked for protection, relief from sorrow, and welfare of children and family	Open daily 5:00 AM–1:00 PM & 4:00–10:00 PM; most crowded on Fridays and during Navarātri; special pūjās performed during Aṣṭamī; Śṛṅgār and bhog offerings are popular	Located in Kāśī's Chowk region near sacred Pīṭhas like Pañcha Mudrā, Ātmā Veereshwar, and Siddhi Pīṭha (Siddheshwar Mahādev); part of powerful śakti circuit	Traditional garland-adorned idol with bright face, lion symbolism, and temple mandapa; richly decorated in festive seasons	Well-preserved; very active shrine; frequen	

219	Satiśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 93	Śiva as Rudra fulfilling the wishes of Sati (Pārvatī)	Lord Brahmā prayed to Śiva to be born as his son; Śiva appeared as Rudra. Sati, daughter of Dakṣa, worshipped Rudra to marry him. After her wishes were fulfilled and she was reborn as Pārvatī, Lord Śiva disappeared into this Liṅga. The Liṅga thus symbolizes wish-fulfillment and divine union.	K.45/42, road leading to Vṛddha Kāśīśhwar/Mṛtyunjayeshwar, Varanasi; accessible from Bhīshashwarganj/GPO	Important site for devotees, especially women, praying for marriage and wish fulfillment; associated with divine love and tapasya (penance)	Pūjā timings: 6:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.–10:00 p.m.; ārti performed morning and evening; devotees visit with personal sankalpas	Part of the Śiva-tīrtha circuit near Vṛddha Kāśīśhwar; linked with the narrative of Rudra and Sati's divine union and marriage symbolism	Temple with pink façade; housing a Śiva Liṅga within shrine chamber; traditional rural-style temple architecture	Well-maintained and regularly visited by devotees, especially women with personal vows (sankalpa)	Deeply symbolic tīrtha for marital harmony and wish-fulfillment; merges myth of Sati and Rudra with Kāśī's sacred geography
220	Śatkaleśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 97	Śiva Liṅga for ease of darśana and fulfilling wishes	Goddess Pārvatī requested Lord Śiva to make darśana easy for devotees. Lord Śiva stayed in Kāśī as Śatkaleśhwar to fulfill this. It is believed that those who worship Śatkaleśhwar will live happily and have their desires fulfilled.	C.K.17/24, underground in Thatērī Bāzār, near Petāhī Shrine and C.K.18/6, Varanasi	Powerful local tīrtha known for fulfilling wishes; considered spiritually potent and easily accessible to common devotees	Open for darśana from morning to evening; only worship by individuals is permitted; no formal temple pūjārī present	Underground shrine; part of lesser-known but potent tīrthas integrated into local sacred topography	Enshrined Śiva Liṅga in underground chamber; simple and unornamented	Well-maintained by local community; known among traditional devotees despite lesser public visibility	A hidden gem among Kāśī's tīrthas; notable for its accessibility, wish-fulfilling nature, and strong local reverence
221	Shailaputrī Devī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 70	Shailaputrī – First among the Navadurga (daughter of the mountains)	In her past birth as Satī (daughter of Dakṣa), she married Lord Śiva. After being reborn as Pārvatī, she became known as Shailaputrī, the daughter of the Himalayas. Worshipping her removes emotional and mental blockages and ensures stability and spiritual strength. She holds a trident and lotus, and rides a bull.	A-40/11, Marhia Ghāṭ, Varanasi – approx. 2 km from Varanasi Junction, accessible by rickshaw	Worshipped on 1st day of Navarātri, symbolizing new beginnings, inner strength, and purity; part of Navadurga circuit in Kāśī	Temple open: 5:00 AM–12:00 Noon and 3:00 PM–10:00 PM; morning and evening ārtis; major footfall during Navarātri	Located near Marhia Ghāṭ, on the periphery of Kāśī's sacred geography; symbolically marks the beginning of the Navadurga Yātrā	Modest temple adorned with flower garlands and trident symbols; traditional iconography of goddess enshrined	Well-maintained and known to locals and devotees; high attendance during Navarātri; darśan arranged with local directions	Represents spiritual grounding and initiation of śakti worship in Kāśī; her worship sets the tone for the rest of the Navadurga observances and is deeply rooted in metaphysical balance and strength

222	Shaileśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa (narrative of Giri Rāj, not shloka-specific)	Śiva Liṅga installed by Giri Rāj (Himālaya), father of Goddess Pārvatī	Giri Rāj (Himālaya), father of Pārvatī, visited Kāśī to construct a temple in honor of Lord Viśveśhwar and to demonstrate devotion. He instructed his workers to build a temple using stones from the Himalayas. After bathing in Pañcha Nadī and worshipping Kāla Bhairava, he installed the Shaileśhwar Liṅga. Devotees worshipping here with faith will not be unhappy in life and are considered like children of the Goddess.	A-40/41, Marhia Ghat, Shaulpurī, Varanasi; near Varanasi City Station; about 2.5 km from the station; accessible by auto or cycle rickshaw	Associated with royal devotion (Giri Rāj) and divine grace of Lord Śiva; especially significant for devotees seeking maternal protection of Pārvatī and blessings from Śiva for peace and mokṣa	Pūjā timings: 5:00 a.m.–12:00 noon and 3:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m.; ārti in morning and evening; darśana possible throughout the day	Located near Varuṇa River; part of the tīrtha cluster of Marhia Ghat; sacred site symbolizing Śiva's blessing on mountain-born devotion	Śiva Liṅga housed in a small shrine structure; surrounded by flower offerings and water channel for ritual use	Well-preserved and functional temple; open daily to devotees for darśana and pūjā; known to local pilgrims	One of the few tīrthas founded by a divine king (Giri Rāj); important for those seeking divine parental blessings and śiva-pārvatī grace
223	Shrishti Vinayak	Traditional Form – Blessing Creator	Vinayak (Ganesha – Bestower of Prosperity and Initiator of Creation)	Always blesses devotees with prosperity and successful beginnings	D-8/3, Kalika Galli, opposite Shukreshwar, Varanasi	Invoked for initiating auspicious undertakings; seen as a benevolent form for creation and blessings	Open for darshan at all times; devotees perform pooja by themselves	Situated on a wall in Kalika Galli, opposite Shukreshwar, in central sacred geography	Small image embedded in wall, smeared with sindoor, modest floral decorations	Modestly preserved; visible and accessible on street for daily devotion	"Shrishti" symbolizes initiation and creation—positioned in a narrow alley, the shrine reflects how sacredness is embedded in everyday spatial layers of Kashi
224	Shwet Madhav	Kashi Khand mentions Lord Vishnu in the form of Shwet Madhav near Vishalakshi Devi	Lord Vishnu as Shwet Madhav	Worship of Shwet Madhav is said to grant the status equivalent to Lord Vishnu. Devotees attain divine merit and liberation.	Located at D.3/71, Big Hanuman Temple area, near Mir Ghat	Important for attaining divine status and spiritual elevation; associated with Vishnu's white (shwet) form.	Temple open from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.; aartis performed in morning and evening.	Situated near Mir Ghat, in the spiritual vicinity of Dashashwamedh and Vishalakshi Devi temples.	Deity installed within a shrine facing Hanuman idol in Big Hanuman temple area.	Well-preserved and actively worshipped; managed by local priest Shri Rajeshwar Prasad.	Highlights Vaishnava presence in Shakti-dominant zone of Kashi; reinforces the composite sacred geography of the city.

225	Siddha Lakṣmī Devī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 70 (List of Śaktis in Kāśī)	Lakṣmī (Siddha form – the one who grants supernatural accomplishments and abundance)	Resides in the sacred region near Pīta Māheśvar (Jagannātha), considered to bestow all siddhis (divine powers) and ensure fulfillment and happiness to her devotees.	Back of the wall at Ck-8/11, opposite Siddhi Vināyaka Mandir, near Manikarnikā Ghat	Considered a powerful śakti who grants siddhis and ensures spiritual and material well-being; revered by sādhakas and pilgrims alike	Temple open 6:00–11:30 AM and 4:30–9:00 PM; ārtis conducted in morning and evening; visited during Navarātri and by those seeking siddhis	Located near Pīta Māheśvara and Manikarnikā Tīrtha, part of a high-energy śakti-vātāvaraṇa in Kāśī; connects cremation-liberation axis with spiritual attainment	Modest shrine structure, the idol clothed in bright pink/red garments, worshipped in a recessed niche along the pathway	Actively worshipped, though modest in scale; known to sādhakas and informed devotees; maintained by local caretakers	Represents a sacred link between liberation (mokṣa) and worldly success (siddhi) within Kāśī's śakti topography; important for tantra-oriented pilgrims and seekers
226	Siddheshwarī Devī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 14, Śloka 88	Siddheshwarī (also known as Siddhi Dhātrī) – Form of Devī who grants siddhis and liberation	Worshipped on the 9th day of Navarātri. Siddheshwarī gives all kinds of siddhis to her devotees. Mentioned in Purāṇas as Siddhi Dhātrī. Lord Śiva assumed this form during his Ardhanārīśvara manifestation. The deity sits on a lion and lotus, holds weapons and grants spiritual success.	Ck. 7/124, Siddheshwarī Mohalla, near Kal Bhairav, Varanasi	Considered the supreme seat of siddhi in Kāśī; revered especially on Navamī (9th Navarātri day) and on Fridays; part of Durgā Navarātri circuit	Open daily: 5:00–10:00 AM & 4:00–10:00 PM; ārtis in morning and evening; darśan through grilled door; significant rush on Fridays and Navarātri	Located in Siddheshwarī Mohalla near Kal Bhairav and Dandapāṇi Kshetra; considered one of the most siddhi-giving śakti peethas in Kāśī	Well-maintained shrine; image of Devī richly adorned; described with four arms, trident, chakra, mace, and lotus; lion vehicle and mudrā pose	Accessible shrine with organized entry; crowd management during Navarātri and special Fridays; clean and active temple site	Siddheshwarī represents the culmination of Navarātri śakti worship, integrating knowledge, liberation, and yogic accomplishment; her name and power symbolize the fulfillment of all aspirations through divine grace

227	Siddhi Aṣṭakeśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 87	Śiva Liṅga associated with eight types of Siddhis (spiritual attainments) and prosperity	Towards the north of Maṇḍākinī Tīrtha lies Siddhi Aṣṭakeśhwar. Worshipping this Liṅga bestows eight kinds of siddhi and divine powers. It is also associated with a sacred water source (Aṣṭaka Kund). Performing rituals here ensures the removal of all forms of suffering.	K.58/101, Lohatiya, in the premises of Bāra Gaṇeśh Mandir, near Khaṛī Kūān, Varanasi	Highly auspicious site linked with spiritual success, wealth, and protection; one of the sacred tīrthas for sādhakas and seekers of siddhi	Temple is open from 4:45 a.m.–10:30 p.m.; special Maṅgala Ārti at 4:45 a.m.; Sandhyā Ārti at 6:45 p.m.; special Ārti on Wednesdays at 11:30 p.m.; worship includes abhiṣeka and chanting	Located near Maṇḍākinī Tīrtha; sacred Kund nearby adds to its ritual sanctity; part of the deeper tīrtha grid of Kāśī for siddhi seekers	Śiva Liṅga enshrined in white marble platform; small temple complex with clearly marked tīrtha boundary	Well-maintained, regular pūjā schedule; ac	
228	Siddhi Vinayak	Traditional Form – Giver of Siddhi (Spiritual Attainment)	Vinayak (Ganesha – Granter of Success and Perfection)	Grants *siddhi* or attainment to sincere devotees; situated near sacred kund	CK-9/1, near Mani Karnika Kund, Varanasi	Highly revered for spiritual and material achievements; linked to the moksha-oriented region of Kashi	Open for darshan throughout; self-performed worship permitted	Located on the steps near Manikarnika Ghat; associated with cremation rituals and liberation pathways	Wall-embedded shrine near the kund; no elaborate temple structure	Modestly preserved; open to public and marked on local pilgrimage routes	"Sidhi Vinayak" signifies divine acco
229	Singh Tund Vinayak	Traditional Form – Absorber of Sins	Vinayak (Ganesha – Forgiver of Known and Unknown Transgressions)	Prayers offered here absolve devotees from all kinds of sins—intentional or unintentional	D-33/56, Khalsipura, near Dashashwamedh, Varanasi	Associated with purification and repentance; protects spiritual seekers on the path to liberation	Self-performed worship permitted anytime; open for darshan throughout the day	Located near Dashashwamedh—one of the holiest and busiest ghats in Kashi	Simple icon coated in sindoor; set in wall niche along traditional pathway	Well-preserved and accessible; part of everyday religious landscape of locals and pilgrims alike	"Singh Tund" form is deeply symbolic—remover of karmic burdens, offering direct access to redemption in a sacred geography of forgiveness

230	Skanda Mātā	Kāśī Khaṇḍa (Narrative under Durgā Devī)	Skanda Mātā (Mother of Skanda/Kārttikeya); fifth form of Navadurga	After slaying the demon, Durgā took the form of Skanda Mātā in Kāśī. She holds the infant Skanda in her lap, has four arms and rides a lion. She blesses devotees with peace, strength, and radiance, like the Sun itself. According to Paṇḍits, she is also identified with Vāgīśwarī Devī (Aśwa Roohā).	J-6/33, Jaitpura, Varanasi – near Jaitpura Police Station, accessible via rickshaw	Fifth Devī in the Navadurga Yātrā; associated with motherhood, prosperity, and inner radiance; worshipped primarily during Navarātri	Worship allowed during Navarātri (esp. 5th day); temple open from 5:00 AM–12:00 Noon and 4:00–7:00 PM; otherwise, darśan through the closed door	Located on the upper floor of a building in Jaitpura; the ground floor shrine (Vāgīśwarī) is worshipped only twice a year, adding to the sacred layering of the site	No visible mūrti throughout the year except on select dates; traditional sacred door and inner sanctum for worship	Partially accessible shrine; devotees offer prayers outside most of the year; darśan inside is restricted except during Navarātri	Embodies the sacred duality of mother and warrior; also reflects the layered spatial symbolism of Kāśī's sacred buildings, where divinity resides both seen and unseen depending on time and ritual cycle
231	Someśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 100	Śiva Liṅga symbolizing Saurāṣṭra Jyotirliṅga, associated with religious yātrā	Someśhwar represents the Saurāṣṭra Jyotirliṅga and is an essential stop on the Kāśī Yātrā circuit mentioned in Kaśī Khaṇḍa. This pilgrimage is known as the "Aṣṭavyāghra Yātrā." Worshippers are blessed with happiness and prosperity, and it is believed that darśana here fulfills the merit of Saurāṣṭra Jyotirliṅga darśana.	D.1/34, Mamandīr Ghaṭ, near Viśvānātha Ghaṭ, Varanasi; accessible via cycle rickshaw; further walk through narrow lanes with local guidance	Part of symbolic representation of Dvādaśa Jyotirliṅgas in Kāśī; spiritually linked with Gujarat's Someśhwar; grants happiness and well-being	Pūjā timings: 6:00 a.m.–9:00 a.m.; darśana open throughout the day; simple pūjā can be performed individually by devotees	Part of the Aṣṭavyāghra and Jyotirliṅga circuit in Kāśī; integrated within the sacred landscape mimicking pan-India tīrthas	Śiva Liṅga housed in a simple, traditional shrine structure within residential locality; adorned with water channel and flowers	Maintained by locals; clean and accessible; timings slightly restricted for pūjā but open for darśana	Acts as Kāśī's representation of Saurāṣṭra Jyotirliṅga; essential stop for tīrtha-mārgī devotees and those unable to travel to original sites
232	Sowbhāgya Gaurī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 100 (Navadurgā Yātrā during Navarātri)	Sowbhāgya Gaurī – bestower of fortune and happiness	Worshipped on the third day of Chaitra Navarātri, especially for well-being and prosperity. Devotees are advised to take bath in Gyan Vāpī and then perform worship here for happiness and peace.	Ck.38/8, Adī Vishwanāth Temple, near Bansphatak	Symbol of marital bliss and happiness; associated with auspiciousness and welfare of family life	Worshipped on Chaitra Navarātri (March-April), 3rd day; open from 6:00–11:00 a.m. and 5:00–10:00 p.m.; darśan through grilled gate; ārti held in morning and evening	Situated in the Gyan Vāpī region, forming part of the Navadurga tīrtha yātra; often visited along with Vishwanāth temple area	Shrine behind a grilled gate; small sanctum within a traditional complex	In functional state; darśan is through grills; timings flexible during Navarātri	Emphasizes domestic harmony, prosperity, and fertility; site reflects syncretic sacred mapping between Śaiva and Śākta

											traditions in central Kāśī
233	Śṛṅgāra Gaurī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 100 (Gaurī Yātrā context)	Gaurī – Form of Devī associated with beauty, fortune, and auspiciousness	After worshipping Svābhāgya Gaurī, devotees are advised to visit Śṛṅgāra Gaurī for blessings of happiness and prosperity in life. She is especially honored by married women seeking protection and family welfare.	Inside Gyanvāpī Masjid premises, adjacent to Viśveśvara Mandir, Varanasi	Highly significant for married women; worshipped for Saubhāgya (marital bliss); darśan allowed only once a year on the 4th day of Chaitra Navarātri (March-April)	Annual darśan on Chaitra Navarātri Caturthī; otherwise restricted due to location; heavy footfall and security arrangements in place	Located adjacent to the Viśvanātha Temple; historically one of the core śakti sthalas of Kāśī; part of the Nav Gaurī circuit	The mūrti is located within mosque premises; visible only on one annual occasion; adorned with sindūr and floral offerings	Restricted access except on annual darśan day; maintained under tight security; devotees gather in large numbers during Chaitra Navarātri	A crucial and emotionally significant śakti shrine symbolizing the tension between sacred continuity and modern contestation in Kāśī's spiritual geography; Śṛṅgāra Gaurī stands for enduring feminine resilience and sacred memory in a contested space
234	Śruteeśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 33	Śiva Liṅga symbolizing the "head" among anthropomorphic representations of Śiva	Śiva Liṅgas are symbolically compared to human anatomy in Kāśī Kṣetra. Śruteeśhwar is considered the "head" of this divine form. Devotees who worship Śruteeśhwar are believed to attain happiness and mokṣa.	K.53/40, near Ratneśhwar, on the road leading to Vṛddha Kāśīśhwar/Mṛtyunjayeshwar, Varanasi; accessible from Bhīshashwarganj/GPO	Highly symbolic tīrtha representing Śiva's head; central to anthropomorphic interpretation of Kāśī's sacred geography	Pūjā timings: 6:00 a.m.–12:00 noon and 5:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m.; ārti in morning and evening; special pūjā may be consulted with the pūjārī	Located in the sacred vicinity of Ratneśhwar, Satiśhwar, Vṛddha Kāśīśhwar; part of the symbolic Śiva-body tīrtha system of Kāśī	Traditional Liṅga shrine with decorative floral adornments; housed in temple setting with simple sanctum	Well-maintained and actively worshipped; accessible for general darśana and special pūjā arrangements	Integral site in Kāśī's symbolic sacred body; Śruteeśhwar as "head" holds central metaphysical and spiritual significance

235	Sthool Dant Vinayak	Traditional Form – "Large-Tusked" Ganesha	Vinayak (Ganesha – Granter of Siddhi / Supernatural Accomplishments)	Bestows siddhi (spiritual powers and accomplishments); revered in tantric and devotional traditions	A-16/34, Man Mandir, near Someshwar, close to Dashashwamedh, Varanasi	Associated with attainment of siddhi and success in sādhanā and life goals	Self-performed pooja by devotees; shrine open for darshan at all hours	Located near Man Mandir Ghat, a zone of deep spiritual resonance in Varanasi	Stone-carved icon adorned with sindoor and fresh floral offerings; modest shrine setup	Modestly preserved but actively worshipped; located along a sacred ghat route	"Sthool Dant" emphasizes strength and the power to overcome major obstacles—represents material and spiritual empowerment through devotion
236	Śukreśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 18, Śloka 124 & Chapter 87, Śloka 228	Śiva Liṅga established by Śukra (Venus deity) for auspiciousness and siddhi	Śukra (Venus deity) came to Kāśī, installed a Śiva Liṅga, and performed penance. Despite his devotion, he was unsuccessful until he received secret knowledge from Sāñjñī and performed proper pūjā. He ultimately attained siddhi, and Śiva gave him the boon that those who worship this Liṅga will receive success everywhere. The Liṅga later came to be known as Śukreśhwar.	Located in a lane parallel to the lane of Annapurna Temple and Viśveśhwar Temple, near B-3/20, Kalika Gali, Varanasi	Auspicious for those seeking material and spiritual success; also linked with Śukra's divine association with Mahāyajña and siddhi attainment	Open for darśana throughout the day; no specific pūjā routines; devotees may perform pūjā on their own; contact for special pūjā is provided	Śukreśhwar is part of a divine cluster that includes Kāśeśhwar and Kaśī Koop; close to significant sites like Annapurna Mandir and Viśveśhwar	Golden-hued Śiva Liṅga installed in temple premise; Śukra Koop (sacred well) located nearby with divine healing associations	Well-maintained, accessible to all; limited structured pūjā but active devotional presence throughout the day	Śukreśhwar is highly revered for granting siddhi (success); ideal for those performing sādhana, studying Jyotiṣa, or facing afflictions related to Venus (Śukra)
237	Sūkṣhmeśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 69	Śiva as Sūkṣhma (subtle) form, associated with removal of difficulties	This Liṅga has manifested in Kāśī from Aamrathkāśhwara Kṣetra and is located near Dhoop Chaandi Devi Mandir. Worshipping Sūkṣhmeśhwar grants clarity, removes all sorts of problems, and offers spiritual refinement.	It is located in the back side of Dhoop Chaandi Devi temple, Varanasi; near the Vinayaka Dvaja Vināyaka shrine	Spiritually potent site for subtle purification and removal of deep-rooted obstacles; known to help devotees progress inwardly and resolve karma-based problems	Pūjā timings: 6:00 a.m.–1:30 p.m. and 5:00 p.m.–11:00 p.m.; ārti performed morning and evening; darśana open throughout the day	Located near Dhoop Chaandi, a major śakti shrine in Kāśī; Sūkṣhmeśhwar is associated with this śakti axis; subtle form of Śiva integrated in divine geography	Traditional Śiva Liṅga with serpent imagery; set in a modest shrine near śakti complex; floral and water-based offerings common	Well-maintained shrine within a popular temple complex; regularly visited, especially by those seeking resolution to personal and spiritual challenges	A unique site for deep internal transformation and karmic relief; revered for its sūkṣhma (subtle) śiva-tattva benefits

238	Śūla Ṭankeśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 69	Śiva as Śūla (trident-bearing) deity, purifier and mokṣa-granting	Śūla Ṭankeśhwar is located near Prayāga Tīrtha at Daśāśvamedha Ghaṭ. A devotee who bathes in Prayāga Teerth and worships Śūla Ṭankeśhwar with devotion attains happiness, liberation, and fulfillment. It is believed that those who died in battle at Prayāga (including Bhīṣma) gained mokṣa due to Śiva's presence here.	It is located at Daśāśvamedha Ghaṭ steps, Varanasi; can be reached by rickshaw and climbing down the steps or via Bada Liṅga path from Daśāśvamedh Chowk	Highly revered for connecting sacred geography of Prayāga with Kāśī; site of purification, valor, and salvation through Śiva's grace	Pūjā timings: 8:00 a.m.–12:00 noon and 5:30 p.m.–10:00 p.m.; flexible timings; devotees perform pūjā on their own	Located within the Daśāśvamedha Tīrtha zone; spiritually integrates Prayāga and Kāśī tīrtha circuits; emphasizes the Śūla (trident) as purifier	Ancient-looking Bada Liṅga housed in a prominent shrine structure; adorned with trident and surrounded by wooden platform and nāga imagery	Well-maintained; frequently visited by pilgrims and locals for darśana and trident-related rituals	Powerful tīrtha linking war valor, purification, and liberation; blends symbolic geography of Prayāga within the core of Kāśī
239	Sumukh Vinayak	Traditional Form – Auspicious-Faced Ganesha	Vinayak (Ganesha – Giver of Happiness and Prosperity)	Worshipping this Vinayak grants all kinds of happiness to devotees	Inside the extended Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, Varanasi	Represents beauty, happiness, and prosperity; part of corridor's revitalized sacred ecosystem	Open to all devotees throughout the day; self-performed worship is encouraged	Integrated into the central sacred geography of Vishwanath Mandir area	Image adorned with sindoor and silver decorations, placed in recessed shrine niche	Well-preserved and prominently maintained as part of corridor beautification and restoration	"Sumukh" means one with a beautiful or auspicious face—this form reflects Ganesha's grace and joy within a modern spiritual infrastructure
240	Tamra Varaha	Reference to Tamra Dweep and Lord Vishnu in Varaha form	Lord Vishnu as Tamra Varaha (boar incarnation)	Devotees who worship Tamra Varaha will have their wishes and desires fulfilled. The deity is believed to have come from Tamra Dweep.	Located outside House No.Ck.33/67, Neelkanth Mohalla, near Chowk in a niche in the wall	Highly revered for wish fulfillment and protection; important aspect of Varaha incarnation.	Open for darshan throughout the day; individual worship and offerings encouraged.	Located near Chowk in the sacred residential quarters; closely tied with local devotional circuits.	Image of Tamra Varaha embedded in wall niche, worshipped regularly.	Well-maintained and publicly accessible; forms part of daily devotional route.	Represents localized and intimate Vaishnava worship in residential zones of Kashi; echoes the sacred power of Varaha in a humble yet potent form.

241	Tri Lokya Sundarī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 70 (during battle with Durgāsur)	Śakti – Tri Lokya Sundarī (Beautiful One of the Three Worlds)	Manifested from Goddess' form during the war with Durgāsur; released intense energy (fireball) to destroy the demon's army; considered among the nine forms of Śakti	Ck.7/92, Mohalla Kashmiri Mill ki Haveli, near Pita Maheshwar	Embodiment of prosperity, grace, and cosmic energy; identified with Śiva's consort – Śakti as Trilokya Sundarī	Temple open throughout the day; special poojas can be arranged through designated pūjārīs (contact details provided)	Situated near Naḷ Koṭeshwar and Kubjāṁśhwar Liṅg, part of a sacred Śaiva-Śākta zone in inner Kāśī	Traditional temple setup near old havelis, integrated in residential urban fabric	Temple is functional; priestly lineages (Yagnik family) continue to maintain worship	Highlights the continuity of warrior Śakti cult integrated into urban temples; worshipped for prosperity, protection, and victory over obstacles
242	Tri Mukh Vinayak	Kashi Khand – Unique Form with Three Trunks	Vinayak (Ganesha – Three-Trunked Form)	Capable of removing all fears; described as having lion's mane and elephant form symbolizing strength, wisdom, and courage	D-5/94, Sigra area, near Tripurāntakeshwar, Varanasi	Invoked for fearlessness and spiritual strength; symbolically powerful form integrating lion and elephant features	Self-performed worship permitted anytime; shrine is open throughout the day	Located in Sigra near Tripurantakeshwar—part of extended tīrtha zone beyond traditional Chowk	Decorated idol with three trunks (tri-mukh), adorned with garlands and ornaments in modern shrine structure	Well-maintained temple; actively visited; visible iconography makes it distinct among Vinayak forms	Tri Mukh Vinayak's unusual iconography symbolizes trifold protection—over mind, body, and soul; an empowering deity for those seeking inner courage
243	Triambakeśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 69	Śiva as Triambaka, representing the Triambakeśhwar Jyotirliṅga (from Trimbak, Maharashtra)	From Triśandhyām Teerth, a Liṅga of Triambakeśhwar has appeared in Kāśī. This form of Śiva is associated with three eyes and represents the Triambakeśhwar Jyotirliṅga among the Dvādaśa Jyotirliṅgas. Worshipping this Liṅga grants liberation and spiritual upliftment, similar to visiting the original site in Maharashtra.	B.38/21, Hauz Kātorā, near Khaṛī Kūān and Koṭwāl Pūrokshala, Varanasi; near Koṭ temple and Khaṛī Kūān crossing	Part of the symbolic Dvādaśa Jyotirliṅga tīrthas in Kāśī; revered for granting similar benefits as the original site at Trimbakeshwar (Maharashtra); aids in liberation and removal of sins	Pūjā timings: 6:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m.; ārti in morning and evening; devotees can perform pūjā freely or consult priests	A spiritually significant site forming part of pan-Indian Jyotirliṅga replication in Kāśī; closely aligned with Mokṣa-mārga (path to liberation)	Traditional Śiva Liṅga with three eyes depicted through symbolic decoration; housed in a temple within residential zone	Well-maintained shrine; receives regular footfall of devotees; timings respected and pūjā system organized with local participation	Acts as Kāśī's representative of Triambakeśhwar Jyotirliṅga; ideal for those unable to visit Maharashtra; powerful site for purification and mokṣa

244	Tribhuwan Keshav	Kashi Khand, Chapter 81, Shloka 28	Lord Vishnu as Tribhuwan Keshav (form in South Kashi)	Lord Vishnu says: "In Kashi, to the south of Trilokya Sundari Bandi Devi, I am famous as Tribhuwan Keshav. The devotee who worships me here does not get rebirth. That means he gets salvation."	Located at D.17/100, Bandi Devi, Dashashwamedh Ghat	Highly revered as a Moksha-granting deity; ensures freedom from rebirth.	Worship hours: 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.; darshan also possible through grilled door outside this time.	Located in the Dashashwamedh sacred cluster near Prayagvasini and Muktikshetra of Kashi.	Housed in shrine within Bandi Devi complex; associated with ancient Prayagvasini tradition.	Actively maintained; part of living temple premises.	Represents the southern extension of Kashi's tīrtha system; integrates Vaishnava salvation themes within broader śaktic and tīrtha traditions of Dashashwamedh.
245	Trilocaneśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 75, Ślokas 67 & 72	Śiva as Trilocana (three-eyed), Swayambhū form associated with Pipilā Tīrtha and river confluence	Trilocana Liṅga is said to have emerged where the three sacred rivers – Sarasvatī, Yamunā, and Gaṅgā – unite in subtle form near Pipilā Tīrtha. Bathing here and worshipping this Swayambhū Liṅga removes sins and grants mokṣa. Performing seven circumambulations during twilight yields the merit of parikramā of the entire world.	A-2/80, Trilocan Ghaṭ, near Madanpura and Maṭha, Varanasi; accessible by auto or rickshaw; also reachable via boat from Adikeśhava Ghaṭ	One of the most spiritually charged tīrthas of Kāśī; pilgrims believe this site brings liberation, especially on Akṣaya Tṛtīyā and Śivaratri; sacred for parikramā and tīrtha-snāna rites	Pūjā timings: 5:30 a.m.–12:00 noon and 5:00 p.m.–11:00 p.m.; special ārti on Śayan and Śṛṅgār times; parikramā especially performed at twilight; Śayan ārti includes performance of pādukā pūjā and snāna of Śiva Liṅga	Located in Pipilā Tīrtha zone; associated with Pādukā Koop (well) and subtle convergence of three rivers; one of Kāśī's most ancient and mokṣa-granting śrines	Ancient Śiva Liṅga venerated as Sarasvateśhwar; temple houses Vāṇīśwar (Sarasvatī) and Tripurā Devī idols; traditional Kāśī-style shrine maintained	Well-managed temple with daily rituals, boat access, and local administration support; significant site for parikramā and snāna-based sādhanā	One of the holiest tīrthas of Kāśī; Trilocaneśhwar Liṅga offers divine merit equivalent to circumambulating the world, with strong liberation symbolism
246	Tripurā Bhairavī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 72	Śakti – Tripurā Bhairavī (Fiery form of Goddess during battle against Durgāsur)	Manifested from energy fireballs released by the Goddess during the fierce war with Durgāsur and his army; symbolizes destructive energy to eliminate adharma	D.52/54, Mir Ghat (near Chowk area); accessible via Dashashwamedh Road → first right turn at Bisheshwarganj	Represents the fierce and protective aspect of the Divine Mother; among the 91 Śakti Pīṭhas mentioned in Kāśī Khaṇḍa	Temple is open from 5:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.; ārtis are held in morning and evening; devotees can worship through a grill gate	Situated near Tīrtharāja Śiva Liṅga; region is dotted with Śaiva and Śākta shrines forming part of inner Kāśī's sacred defense network	Traditional shrine setup with image of the deity and Śiva Liṅga nearby; grill gate structure to manage flow and safety	Active temple, though access is controlled through a grill; devotion continues especially on Navarātri days	Part of the network of Śākta-Tantric sacred spaces in Kāśī; worshipped for power, protection, and removal of obstructions

247	Tripurāntakeśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 69 & Chapter 89, Śloka 73	Śiva as Tripurāntaka (Destroyer of Tripura), symbolic Jyotirliṅga of Māllikārjuna (Śrīśailam, Andhra Pradesh)	Tripurāntakeśhwar represents the symbolic presence of Māllikārjuna Jyotirliṅga within Kāśī. Worshipping this Liṅga grants the same merit as visiting Śrīśaila and ensures mokṣa. It removes the fear of rebirth and cleanses one's karmas. The Liṅga is self-manifested (Swayambhū) and revered as one of the twelve symbolic Jyotirliṅgas in Kāśī.	D.58/35, Śiṅgā Tīlā (Mount of Mud), near Narsingh temple and Union Bank of India, Sigra, Varanasi; about 200 yards from Sigra Tīlā	Forms part of Kāśī's symbolic representation of the twelve Dvādaśa Jyotirliṅgas; deeply revered for mokṣa-giving power and equivalence to Śrīśaila darśana	Open for darśana from 6:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.; ārti in morning and evening; worship is silent and pollution-free; no bell usage in the temple	Located at Śiṅgā Tīlā along with symbolic representations of Grīṣṇeśhwar and Bājranāth (Baijnāth); significant tīrtha for replication of pan-India Jyotirliṅga sites	Three distinct Śiva Liṅgas in the same premises; Tripurāntakeśhwar Liṅga in unique round and vertical form set in a simple sanctum with white backdrop	Well-maintained, peaceful atmosphere; darśana performed in silence; temple environment kept free from noise and visual distractions	Tripurāntakeśhwar completes Kāśī's role as a symbolic host of the Dvādaśa Jyotirliṅgas; a mokṣa-dāyaka tīrtha for those unable to undertake national pilgrimages
248	Triṣandhyeśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 61	Śiva Liṅga associated with Sandhyā Vandana (Triṣandhyā ritual) and Trisandhyā Tīrtha	Triṣandhyeśhwar is worshipped by those performing Triṣandhyā (morning, noon, evening) Sandhyā Vandana. A devotee who bathes in Triṣandhyā Tīrtha and performs this sacred daily ritual will be blessed with the results of scriptural knowledge and vedic sacrifices. The site is sanctified for those adhering to vaidika dharma and self-discipline.	C.K.34/10, Lahore Tola, Phoote Gaṇeśh, near Vīravad Mahādev and Śītalā Mandir, Varanasi; accessible from Vishwanath Corridor or Godowlia	Deeply revered for sustaining traditional vedic practices; ideal tīrtha for Brahmacharīs, Gṛhasthas, and students of the Vedas performing daily rituals	Pūjā timings are flexible; darśana and personal pūjā allowed anytime; most devotees bathe in nearby Ganga before Sandhyā rituals and perform Anushṭhāna or japa at the Liṅga	A key tīrtha for Sandhyā-practicing devotees; associated with purity, vedic lifestyle, and the tri-dināćāra (three-time daily practice) tradition	Traditional Śiva Liṅga placed within an open shrine; white stone base surrounded by floral offerings and japa beads	Well-preserved and respected by ritual-practicing devotees; not crowded, ideal for quiet spiritual practice	A vital tīrtha for those living by dharma and vedic sandhyā observances; Śiva as Triṣandhyeśhwar supports seekers on the disciplined path of inner purification

249	Trivikrama	Kashi Khand, Chapter 81, Shloka 200	Lord Vishnu as Trivikrama (Vāmana's cosmic form)	Vishnu says: "I am positioned in the form of Trivikrama in north of Trilochan. I grant Lakshmi (prosperity) to devotees who worship me there and destroy their sins."	Located at A.2/80, Trilochanesh war Temple, above the idol	Grants wealth, prosperity, and removal of sins; deeply associated with Vaamana's cosmic stride and divine protection.	Worship timings: 5:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.; Mangala Aarti at 5:30 a.m., Shayan Aarti at 10:00 p.m.; special poojas by request.	Located near Trilochan Mahadev, a key Shaiva-Vaishnava confluence in northern Kashi.	Installed deity of Trivikrama worshipped above Shaiva temple space.	Well-preserved and managed by dedicated priest; open to devotees.	Represents cosmic Vishnu energy balancing the Shaiva axis; worship ensures divine grace through Vaamana's expansive stride, symbolizing liberation and abundance.
250	Uddand Mund Vinayak	Traditional Fierce Form – Uddand (Unrestrained)	Vinayak (Ganesha – Protector and Destroyer of Evil Forces)	Grants protection, prosperity, and fearlessness; closely associated with the fierce energy of Kashi's tīrthas	A-2/80, Trilochan Temple, Varanasi; present murti atop a Koopa (well)	Highly revered for shielding devotees from evil and ensuring spiritual strength; near the sacred Flipla Tīrth	Temple open 5:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m. and 5:00 p.m.–11:00 p.m.; Mangala Aarti at 5:30 a.m., Shayan Aarti at 11:00 p.m.	Located in Trilochan tīrtha cluster, a spiritually potent region of Kashi	Icon set atop a sacred well, adorned with sindoor and cloth, located in an alcove-like shrine structure	Well-preserved and actively worshipped; part of the daily tīrtha circuit in this area	"Uddand" signifies fierce energy, suggesting this Vinayak safeguards Kashi from unseen spiritual dangers; proximity to Flipla Tīrth enhances its significance
251	Uddand Vinayak	Traditional – Uddand (Unrestrained Strength)	Vinayak (Ganesha – Remover of Obstacles)	Removes immense day-to-day obstacles in devotees' lives; revered for strength and power	Located in a village near Rameshwar, ~20 km from central Varanasi	Highly revered by rural devotees as a guardian of daily prosperity and protector from unseen troubles	Pooja open throughout the day; devotees perform pooja themselves	Peripherally located, symbolically guarding the outskirts of Kashi region	Not specified	Active worship continues; m	

252	Unmat Bhairav	Skanda Purāṇa – Kāśī Khaṇḍa (associated with the Bhairava Mandala)	Bhairava (Frenzied/Elevated Form of Śiva)	Unmat Bhairav is situated on the traditional Panchakroshi Mārga, protecting the outer sacred circuit of Kāśī.	Deora Village, ~15 km from main Varanasi, on the Panchakroshi route	Marks the outer spiritual boundary of Kāśī; revered by devotees completing the Panchakroshi Yatra	Worship is open throughout the day; regular pūjās by local priest; recently renovated by devotee	Located on the sacred outer circular path of Kāśī (Panchakroshi); serves as one of the directional guardians	Brick-red shrine structure; adorned idol with garlands and sacred offerings	Recently renovated; functional shrine; priest: Shri Akhilesh Pandey (Contact: 9118460531)	Represents extended sacred geography; essential for pilgrimage rituals like Panchakroshi Yatra; rarely visited due to remote location
253	Up Śhānteśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 97	Śiva Liṅga as Up-Śhānta form, remover of sins accumulated over a long period	Located towards the northeast direction of Bhadreśhwar Tīrtha, Up Śhānteśhwar Liṅga purifies devotees from long-term karmic sins. Worshipping this Liṅga is considered highly meritorious, especially on Ekādaśī days. Pronounced as "U" in "put".	C.K.2/4, Patani Tola, Bhosala Ghaṭ, Varanasi; accessible via cycle rickshaw from Chowk, or by boat via Bhosala Ghaṭ	Associated with spiritual purification and inner peace; a continuation of the Śhānteśhwar tīrtha system; important for those seeking relief from deep-rooted karmic burdens	Pūjā timings: 6:00 a.m. – 9:00 p.m.; daily ārti at morning, afternoon, and night; special pūjā on Ekādaśīs and during holy months like Kārttika and Śrāvaṇa	Part of a tīrtha network near Bhadreśhwar, Gangamahāl and Ghaṭ areas; recognized for its śuddhi (purificatory) potential	Śiva Liṅga in a modest shrine with flower offerings; minimalistic sanctum allowing personal pūjā and reflection	Well-preserved and open to devotees daily; managed by local priest; regular pūjā maintained	Ideal for those seeking inner calm and long-term karmic resolution; powerfully linked with tīrtha-based sin-cleansing tradition in Kāśī
254	Uttarark Āditya	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 47	Āditya (Sun God), Sukeshananda n, Lord Śiva, Goddess Pārvatī	Brahmin Briyavrat's son Sukeshanandan, born under auspicious signs (Moola star, Chaturthi), faced mysterious disappearance. Lord Śiva revealed that Sukeshanandan would receive daily darśana of Āditya from the Uttarark Kund, bathe, and return home. Years later, the boy reappeared enlightened and self-realized.	Alipur, near Bakaria Kund, near Varanasi City Station	Tīrtha of divine disappearance, mysticism, and return; symbolizes cosmic cycles and self-realization through solar grace	Worship and Aarti at 8:00 a.m.; darśana from 5:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. & 5:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m.; sacred for daily solar observance	Located in northern Kāśī, aligned with celestial and mysterious solar traditions (Uttarāyaṇa region)	Sun disc image with face; associated sacred water body (Uttarark Kund) historically linked with Bakaria Kund	Open and functional; priest-led pūjā services offered; popular for visitors seeking peace and revelation	Deeply symbolic tīrtha of mystic solar worship and divine realization; aligns with stories of disappearance and return across Purāṇic traditions

255	Vaikunth Madhav	Kashi Khand mentions worship of Lord Vishnu in the form of Vaikunth Madhav	Lord Vishnu as Vaikunth Madhav	Worshipping Vaikunth Madhav with devotion grants access to Vaikuntha (abode of Vishnu) after death. It ensures liberation and divine proximity.	Located at CK.7/165, near Harishchandreshwar, Sindha Ghat	Highly revered for Moksha; associated with the transition to Vishnu's divine abode after death.	Open daily for darshan; devotees perform personal pooja.	Located east of Vairochaneshwar in sacred Kashi geography near cremation and liberation-related sites.	Stone idol of Vaikunth Madhav enshrined within shrine.	Actively worshipped; temple is accessible and integrated into local devotional network.	Embodies the ultimate goal of Vaishnava devotion—liberation to Vaikuntha; set near cremation zone, reinforcing its salvific significance.
256	Vakra Tund Vinayak (Bada Ganesh)	Traditional – Vakra Tund ("Curved Trunk")	Vinayak (Ganesha – Remover of Karma and Bestower of Bliss)	Removes effects of pāpa karma (sins), grants wisdom and bestows happiness	Lohatia, K-58/101 – popular as Bada Ganesh, reachable via rickshaw or on foot	A large and widely worshipped form of Ganesha revered for karmic cleansing and prosperity	Temple is open from 04:45 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. with special aartis (Mangala, Bhog, Sandhya, Shayan) and crowd on Wednesdays	Culturally significant as a major Vinayak shrine near Lohatia	Standalone modern temple with large idol	Maintained in good condition; heavy footfall of devotees	Vakra Tund form symbolizes the powerful remover of karmic obstructions; Bada Ganesh holds local prominence for quick blessings
257	Vāmadeveśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 100, Śloka 37	Śiva in the Vāmadeva aspect; associated with Vasiṣṭha and Vāmadeva ṛṣis	Kaśī Khaṇḍa describes the importance of Antargṛhi Yātrā for devotees, during which they worship deities like Vāmadeveśhwar. Vasiṣṭha and Vāmadeva ṛṣis are said to have assumed liṅga forms to worship Śiva, making this shrine highly sacred. Devotees visiting this shrine during their yātrā are said to attain blessings and spiritual merit.	C.K.7/161, Saṅkaṭa Ghaṭ, Varanasi; accessible by rickshaw or on foot via Saṅkaṭā Devī temple lane or Sankata Ghaṭ stairs	Important shrine for Antargṛhi Yātrā; spiritually significant for tapasvīs and seekers of Vedic ṛṣi lineage blessings; enhances spiritual awareness and clarity	Open for darśana throughout the day; individual pūjā can be performed; no fixed timings mentioned for special rituals or ārti	Part of the inner sacred pilgrimage circuit (Antargṛhi Yātrā); associated with ṛṣi energy and tapasya within Kāśī's core zone	Śiva Liṅga placed in simple shrine structure, often surrounded by flowers, water, and symbolic ṛṣi elements	Well-maintained and accessible shrine; visited by sādhakas and pilgrims undertaking traditional yātrās in Kāśī	A sacred site venerating Śiva's Vāmadeva form; important stop for inner spiritual yātrā; ideal for those following sāttvic or vedic practices

258	Vaman Keshav	Kashi Khand mentions Vaman Tirtha where Lord exists as Vaman Keshav	Lord Vishnu as Vamana (Dwarf Incarnation)	Devotees who bathe in Vaman Tirtha and worship Vaman Keshav receive blessings of all-round happiness. Though the Tirtha no longer exists, the deity continues to be worshipped.	Located at A.2/29, Trilochan (also known as Madhusudan Temple)	Highly significant for happiness, fulfillment, and symbolic association with Vamana's divine descent.	Temple open from 5:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.; devotees offer butter to the deity.	Located in Trilochan zone, connected with Shaiva and Vaishnava sacred geography.	Deity of Vaman Keshav enshrined within a functioning temple.	Well-maintained and actively worshipped; especially popular on Thursdays and Dwadashi.	Embodies the humility and divine authority of Vamana; symbolically connected to the removal of ego and restoration of dharma.
259	Varad Vinayak	Traditional – Varad ("Bestower of Boons")	Vinayak (Ganesha – Bestower of Divine Wishes)	Grants divine wishes and blessings to devotees	A-13/19, near Naya Mahadev Kali Mandir, Prahlad Ghat; accessible via Prahlad Ghat Chauraha by rickshaw and on foot	Invoked for wish-fulfillment; associated with divine grace and blessings	Pooja is open throughout; devotees can perform rituals on their own	Located near Prahlad Ghat, a sacred spot near the river	Simple shrine structure with a niche; brightly painted and maintained	Good condition; active place of worship with modest footfall	The form of Varad Vinayak is revered for granting devotees' heartfelt desires and divine favor
260	Vārāhī Devī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 70 and Chapter 45	Śakti – Vārāhī (One of the Yoginīs sent by Śiva to disturb King Divodāsa's reign; settled in Kāśī)	Sent by Lord Śiva along with 63 other Yoginīs to disrupt King Divodāsa's rule, but became enamored by the sanctity of Kāśī and decided to reside there	D.16/84, Manmandir Ghat area; accessible via cycle rickshaw or walking from Vishwanath Gali	Worshipped for protection against dangers, legal troubles, and enemies; venerated by scholars, litigants, and court practitioners	Daily darshan possible 5:30–7:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m., and 6:00–8:00 p.m.; only regular worship allowed; special rituals only by request	One of the Yoginī points forming a hidden grid of Śākta power in Kāśī, tied with the legend of Yoginīs sent by Śiva	Small shrine with underground garbhagṛha; Amba gate (shutter) used for darshan; access limited to protect sanctity	Maintained shrine, but no special pooja generally allowed; strictly regulated darshan	Part of the esoteric Yoginī network; worshipped for legal protection, resolving disputes, and mystical benefits; her residence symbolizes acceptance of Kāśī's spiritual power

261	Varuna Sangam (Varuna-Ganga Sangama)	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 30	Lord Śiva, Varuṇa, Agni, Indra, Viṣṇu	Sacred confluence where Varuṇa joins Ganga. Mythically witnessed by Devatās; Śiva's charaṇa-pāda established here (referred to also as Padodak Tīrtha in some texts).	Northern tip of Kashi near Adi Keshava Ghat, where Varuna meets Ganga	Marks the traditional northern boundary of Kashi (Kashi-Kṣetra); spiritually significant as the entry point into the sacred city	Ritual bathing, Śrāddha rituals, Tarpana; darśana of Varuṇa Saṅgameśvara and Adi Keshava during pilgrimage circuits	Important cosmic nodal point (Uttara-sīmā) of Kāśī sacred geography; paired with Assi (Dakṣiṇa-sīmā)	Riverbank ghats and natural confluence site; nearby shrines including Adi Keshava Temple	Natural environment with some built ghats; relatively quiet and serene; ritual continuity maintained	Gateway tīrtha into sacred Kāśī; integrally connected with Viṣṇu-pāda and Padodak concepts; ideal for beginning pilgrimages
262	Varuṇa Saṅgameśh war	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapters 61, 77, and supplement ary texts (Chapter 1, Ślokas 6–10)	Śiva as Saṅgameśhwa r, presiding deity of river confluence (Varuṇa-Saṅgama)	Located at the holy confluence (saṅgama) of the Varuṇa River and Gaṅgā, this Liṅga is installed by Bhagavān Śiva himself. Devotees who worship this Liṅga are granted the merit of worshipping all other tīrthas of Kāśī. Donating for Rudrābhiṣeka here is equivalent to performing a thousand yajñas.	C.K.37/51, near Keshava Temple at Keshava Peṭh, Varanasi; accessible from Aurangābād or by auto/cycle rickshaw or boat from the Ghaṭ area	Exceptionally powerful tīrtha located at Varuṇa-Gaṅgā confluence; offers spiritual benefit equal to all other tīrthas; important for those performing Rudrābhiṣeka, śrāddha, and śivārādhanā	Pūjā timings: 6:00 a.m.–12:00 noon and 4:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m.; flexible darśana timings; regular abhiṣeka and flower offerings performed	Part of Kāśī's pancha-tīrtha confluence zones; especially revered as a mokṣa-dāyaka site linked with Varuṇa and Gaṅgā śuddhi traditions	Śiva Liṅga housed in a polished shrine structure with traditional abhiṣeka trough and floral decor; often shown in golden or brass-tinted setting	Well-maintained shrine with steady inflow of pilgrims and rituals; abhiṣeka bookings and guided worship available on request	A prime tīrtha in Kāśī for attaining holistic tīrtha-phala; ideal for advanced sādhakas, ritualists, and pilgrims seeking composite tīrtha benefits
263	Varuṇeśhw ar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 12	Śiva as Varuṇeśhwar, linked with the legend of Sage Kardama and his son Śucikṣema	According to the narrative, Sage Kardama's son Śucikṣema was taken by an aquatic creature. After praying to Śiva, the Sage saw Śiva with a trident slaying the creature and saving the boy. Śiva then manifested as a Liṅga, installed by the sage, and promised that the Liṅga would bless the land with good taste (rasa) and fertility. The shrine was established near the location where this divine incident occurred.	C.K.8/8, Gomaṭh, near Jyoti Rupeśhwar, Varanasi; accessible via rickshaw from Chowk and walking route towards Gomaṭh	Revered for fertility, sweetness of speech, and divine protection; invoked by devotees for calmness, clarity, and balanced sensory experiences	Open throughout the day; pūjā can be performed personally; devotees offer Bilva leaves, water, and petals; placing Bilva leaves over the Liṅga is considered especially meritorious	Located near Gomaṭh and Jyoti Rupeśhwar, part of a sacred tīrtha zone near the northern corridor of Kāśī; associated with sages and elemental forces	Stone Liṅga installed in open shrine; surrounded by water trough; devotees often offer Bilva and petals directly without formal priestly mediation	Maintained by local devotees and accessible daily; considered sacred for natural harmony and elemental blessings	A unique site rooted in the legend of divine rescue and the elemental grace of Śiva; ideal for those seeking peace, eloquence, and environmenta l balance

264	Vasiṣṭheśh war	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 100, Śloka 37	Śiva as Vasiṣṭheśhwa r, installed by Sage Vasiṣṭha in Śuklāvan forest	Vasiṣṭha and Vāmadeva ṛṣis are believed to have assumed the form of Śiva Liṅgas to remove major obstacles. Worshipping Vasiṣṭheśhwar in the Śuklāvan forest is said to grant access to Prajāpati Loka after death, the highest realm of learned beings. Kaśī Khaṇḍa also mentions Varuṇa River in connection to this tīrtha.	C.K.7/161, Saṅkaṭa Ghaṭ, Varanasi; near the southern door of the Viśvanātha corridor and Sankata Devī Mandir; accessible via boat or rickshaw	Deeply spiritual tīrtha tied to ṛṣi traditions and sage meditation zones; ideal for those seeking knowledge, release from obstacles, and higher lokas	Worship can be done individually by devotees throughout the day; simple offerings of water, flowers, and japa are performed without strict time constraints	Associated with the sacred Śuklāvan forest and ancient sage sites; tied to Varuṇa River's purificatory symbolism and ṛṣi-kṣetra energy	Simple Śiva Liṅga placed in a traditional brass setting with serpent motifs; often surrounded by floral decorations and sacred ash	Open for darśana; well-maintained by locals; respected shrine for those pursuing introspection and spiritual insight	A sacred tīrtha connected to the path of knowledge and ṛṣi-tattva; ideal for yogīs, seekers, and those pursuing mental clarity and liberation
265	Vāsukeśhw ar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 66	Śiva as Vāsukeśhwar, associated with the Nāga deity Vāsuki and serpent-related dosha relief	This Liṅga is revered in connection with Vāsuki Nāga. Worship at this shrine, especially on Nāga Pañcamī, is said to eliminate fear of snakes and remove Kāl Sarp Doṣa. Devotees are advised to offer pūjā, alms, and abhiṣeka here for relief from serpent-related afflictions. A pond known as Vāsuki Kuṇḍ is also associated with this shrine.	C.K.7/155, near Sindhiyā Ghaṭ, Varanasi; accessible by rickshaw or walk from Vāmana Veśhwar or via stairs near Sindhiā Ghaṭ by boat	Highly revered for serpent pacification rituals; especially important for those suffering from Kāl Sarp Doṣa or fear of snakes; also important on Nāga Pañcamī and Ekādaśī	Temple open 6:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.; ārti at 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.; pūjā performed by Mahant; special rituals on Nāga Pañcamī and Ekādaśīs; devotees may contact Mahant for specific rituals	Associated with Vāsuki Nāga and Kāśī's serpent traditions; presence of Vāsuki Kuṇḍ reinforces sacred Nāga-tīrtha context	Śiva Liṅga installed in a tiled sanctum; ritual setting includes śeṣa imagery and flower offerings; surrounded by symbolic Nāga motifs	Well-managed shrine with dedicated Mahant (priest); contact available for special pūjās; premises neat and respected by devotees	Crucial tīrtha for devotees seeking relief from snake afflictions and doshas; part of Kāśī's wider integration of nāga and śiva worship traditions
266	Veer Madhav	Referenced near Veereshwar and Kashi Khanda Lord Vishnu in the form of Veer Madhav	Lord Vishnu as Veer Madhav	A devotee who regularly performs pooja and fast for Veer Madhav will not face the torments of Yama and will attain liberation. The Tirtha is symbolically present through the deity.	Two shrines: One at CK.7/158 (near Atma Veereshwar) and another at CK.7/30 (near Hanuman idol)	Highly sacred for removal of fear of death and protection from Yama; associated with devotion and self-discipline.	Darshan and worship open throughout the day; devotees perform pooja on their own.	Located north of Veereshwar in a spiritually potent section of Kashi's inner core.	Deity of Veer Madhav enshrined at both sites; modest shrines with active worship.	Well-preserved; part of local devotional circuits and accessible to pilgrims.	Represents protective and valorous aspect of Vishnu; rooted in spiritual courage and promise of Moksha beyond fear.

267	Vidar Narsimha	Kashi Khand reference; originally had a tīrtha named after Vidar Narsimha	Lord Vishnu as Vidar Narsimha	Worshipping Vidar Narsimha removes all obstacles and hindrances; devotees are protected from fears and granted smooth progress. The original tīrtha is no longer extant.	Located at A-10/82, Prahlad Ghat, near the riverbank	Highly revered as a remover of obstacles and protector deity; popular during Narsimha Jayanti.	Temple open from 4:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon and 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.; special celebrations on Vaishakh Shukla Trayodashi (Narsimha Jayanti).	Situated near Prahlad Ghat, part of sacred geography linked with Narsimha and Prahlad narratives.	Deity of Vidar Narsimha enshrined in temple; richly decorated and actively worshipped.	Well-preserved and operational; draws special attention during annual festivals.	Represents fierce yet benevolent form of Vishnu ensuring spiritual and worldly protection; legacy of the tīrtha continues through devotional practice.
268	Vighna Raja Vinayak	Traditional – Vighna Rāja ("King of Obstacles")	Vinayak (Ganesha – Remover of Obstacles and Bestower of Siddhi)	Worshipped for attainment of Siddhi (supernatural powers), success, and prosperity	A-1/122, Chittarakoot Talab (near Ram Lila Ground, from where Ram Lila starts)	Highly significant for success in endeavors and removal of all obstacles	Temple open from 6:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.; Aartis in morning and evening; flexible timings	Associated with Ram Lila spiritual geography; sacred performance site	Simple idol worshipped in a modest shrine within a private compound	Private place of worship; maintained by local caretakers or families	The sacred connection with Ram Lila processions enhances its local spiritual value as a guardian of success
269	Vikata Dwija Vinayak	Traditional – Vikata ("Ferocious"), Dwija ("Twice-born")	Vinayak (Ganesha – Granter of Elevated Status)	Worshipping this Vinayak grants the highest position in life to the devotee	Dhoop Chandi locality, behind Dhoomavati Devi Temple, near Hanuman idol	Grants elevated status in life and is associated with wisdom and auspiciousness	Temple open from 6:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and 5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.; Aartis in morning and evening	Located near Dhoomavati Devi, an esoteric Śākta site, adding ritual and tantric significance	Idol embedded in wall with floral offerings and traditional decoration	Actively worshipped and preserved in a neighborhood shrine	The juxtaposition of Ganesha and Śākta deity (Dhoomavati) makes it a unique site of blended worship
270	Vimal Āditya	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 51, Shloka 87	Āditya (Sun God), Vimal (devotee)	A devotee named Vimal, suffering from leprosy due to past karma, came to Kāśī, performed austerities and devotion to Sūrya. Pleased, the Sun God cured him and declared that this deity would be known as Vimal Āditya, who would cleanse all sins	D.35/273, Gully behind Khari Kuan, Jangambari, near Godowlia, Varanasi	Strong association with healing, especially skin diseases; symbolic of purity and self-redemption	Open for daily darśana; individual pūjā and japa; guided worship possible; priest available on contact	Located within inner Kāśī lanes; part of healing tīrtha circuit, linked with similar solar shrines like Saamba Āditya	Framed deity image with solar floral decoration; shrine maintained in compact space	Fully operational; open access; maintained by temple priest (Shri Rohit Kapooria)	Reflects the purificatory role of solar grace in Kāśī; known as a disease-cleansing Aditya shrine

				and ailments of devotees.							
271	Vimal Tīrtha (Pisāchmochan Kund)	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 64, Shloka 84	Vimal Devatā, Kapardishvara, Lord Śiva	Sage Vimal performed penance here to rid a Pisācha (ghost) who had taken shelter in his body due to past sins. After intense tapas and the grace of Kapardīśvara, the Pisācha was liberated.	Pisāchmochan Talab area, Varanasi; currently known as Pisāchmochan Kund	Considered one of the most sacred ponds; believed to liberate souls from ghostly states and cleanse past sins	Śrāddha, Pinda Dāna, Brahman Bhoj; especially on Amāvasyā, Ekādaśī, Shukla Chaturdaśī; bathing believed to remove afflictions from preta or pisācha dosha	Located between Karaundi and Manduwadih; south of Kashi core; part of ancillary tīrtha circuits	Ancient kund still exists; large water tank with surrounding steps	Preserved and ritually active, especially during annual observances; relatively calm and sacred space	A liberation tīrtha; especially important for Śrāddha and rituals for ancestral peace; only tīrtha associated with removal of pisācha-dosha
272	Vimaleśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 69	Śiva as Vimaleśhwar, granter of Siddhi and remover of challenges	Located near Svargadvāreśhwar, Vimaleśhwar is one of the sacred liṅgas that grants siddhis and divine strength. Devotees who worship this Liṅga with devotion will overcome worldly obstacles and attain spiritual elevation. Especially beneficial for those struggling with mental or karmic challenges.	T.10/47, Naya Mahādeo, Prahlād Ghaṭ, Varanasi; near Chaurāhā road; accessible by rickshaw or a short walk from Prahlād Ghaṭ lane	Spiritually potent tīrtha for overcoming challenges and achieving siddhi; popular among sādhakas and householders seeking clarity and power	Pūjā timings: 6:00 a.m.–10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m.; for darśana, devotees may need to open the shrine door flap gently or coordinate with locals for pūjā	Near Svargadvāra tīrtha cluster; part of sacred geography linked to Krithivāseśhwar's spread across Kāśī	Small shrine with circular brass-adorned Śiva Liṅga; worshipped with flowers and bilva leaves; traditionally styled offering vessel present	Well-maintained, managed locally; devotees ensure upkeep and allow access during darśana hours	Highly beneficial tīrtha for mental clarity, inner strength, and resolution of difficult situations; venerated by locals for practical spiritual gains

273	Vindhya Devī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 70	Śakti – Vindhya Vāsinī (Powerful Devī among many Śaktis in Kāśī)	Revered as a powerful goddess; grants siddhis to sincere devotees	Ck.2/33, Sankat Mochan locality, near Sankata Devī Temple, accessible from Godowlia or Chowk via cycle rickshaw	Considered a powerful Tīrtha for attaining Siddhi (spiritual accomplishments); associated with strength and protection	Open from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.; darshan timings are flexible and devotees may visit as per convenience	Connected with the network of Śakti Peethas around Kāśī; linked spiritually with nearby Sankata Devī shrine	Small shrine, no large architectural elements visible	Functioning temple with accessible darshan hours; maintained and regularly visited	Less commonly known, but represents the vibrational power of Kāśī's Śākta energy field; part of the Navadurga traditions
274	Viśālākṣī Gaurī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapters 70, 100 (Śakti Peeth narrative and Navagaurī Yātrā)	Śakti – Viśālākṣī Devī (one of the Navagaurīs and 51 Śakti Peethas)	Lord Kārttikeya narrates to Sage Agastya the glory of Viśālākṣī; Devī blesses devotees with fulfillment of desires, especially unmarried girls and those performing Navarātri Kanyā Pūjā; regarded as Śakti Peeth where Satī's earring fell	D.3/85, Mīr Ghat (near Viśveśvara and Annapūrṇā temples), accessible via Godowlia-Chowk	Highly revered Śakti Peeth; considered one of the three major Śakti Peethas in India along with Kāmākhyā and Meenākṣī; devotees seek blessings for marriage, childbirth, and wealth	Darshan from 04:30 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and 05:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.; special Śakti Rohan on Dharmāṣṭamī day; major worship during Navarātri	Located in Śakti Peeth cluster near Annapūrṇā, Śṛṅgāra Gaurī, and Viśveśvara; strong Paurāṇika connection to tīrtha circuit	Small temple structure, sacred images, idol of Adiviśālākṣī also installed	Well-maintained, active with regular daily worship and seasonal Navarātri celebrations	Central Śakti Peeth of Kāśī; Viśālākṣī symbolizes "the one with vast vision," aligning with Kāśī's spiritual symbolism as a place of ultimate realization
275	Viśālākṣīśh war	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 97	Śiva as Viśālākṣīśhw ar, Liṅga near Viśālākṣī Devī shrine	Viśālākṣīśhwar is the Śiva Liṅga situated in the vicinity of the famous Viśālākṣī Devī temple. Worship of this Liṅga grants happiness, prosperity, and fulfillment of desires. The site is also revered as a śakti pīṭha (seat of divine feminine energy), enhancing the power of the śiva-tattva present here.	D.3/85, premises of Viśālākṣī Devī Temple at Mir Ghat, Varanasi; accessible via Bansphatak–Viśvanāth Gali by rickshaw or walking	Highly auspicious site for prosperity and happiness; combined presence of Viśālākṣī Devī and Śiva makes it a rare śiva-śakti composite shrine in Kāśī	Pūjā timings: 4:30 a.m.–11:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m.; ārti is held both morning and evening; timings may slightly vary by season	Part of the śakti pīṭha complex of Kāśī; situated near Dharmakoṭī and Annapūrṇā precincts; integrates śakti and śiva traditions in a single sacred landscape	Śiva Liṅga installed in sanctum with white and black stone structure; frequently adorned with flowers and bilva leaves; housed within temple premises of Viśālākṣī	Maintained within the larger temple complex; regular pūjā and darśana available to all devotees daily	Powerful śiva-śakti tīrtha symbolizing harmony and material-spiritual fulfillment; ideal for householders, sādhakas, and pilgrims seeking joy and completeness

276	Vishweshwar (Vishwanath Temple)	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 99, Shlokas 26–27	Shiva (as Vishweshwar Jyotirlinga)	Lord Shiva described the great merit of worshipping the Vishweshwar Ling, equal to thousands of yajnas. Offering water and flowers at this Ling is considered supremely auspicious. The temple is considered one of the twelve Jyotirlingas and central to Kashi's sanctity.	Ck-35/19, Chowk, inside Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, Varanasi	One of the most sacred Jyotirlingas; central to Kashi's identity. Believed to grant moksha. Mentioned in multiple scriptures including Kashi Khanda, Linga Purana, etc.	Mangala Aarti at 3:00 a.m.; several Aartis throughout the day. Abhishek, Bhog, Rudrabhishek, and Sahasra Rudra Japam performed. Online and in-person darshan. High devotee footfall year-round.	Located in the sacred heart of Kashi. Connected with the Panchkroshi Yatra and multiple tīrthas. Surrounded by historical shrines within the Vishwanath Corridor.	Ancient garbhagriha and sanctum reconstructed over time. Current structure is expanded under Vishwanath Corridor Project with traditional temple architecture.	Fully active and highly protected by state administration. Newly restored corridor enhances pilgrimage experience.	Spiritual nucleus of Kashi. Its darshan is believed to absolve lifetimes of sins and ensure liberation. Symbolizes Shiva's eternal presence in Avimukta Kshetra.
277	Viśva Bhujā Gaurī	Kāśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 70	Śakti – Viśva Bhujā Devī	Removes obstacles in the lives of devotees; grants fulfillment of desires, especially during Navarātri; worshipped as one of the Navagaurīs	D.2/15, near Dharma Kūpa (Dharmeshwar), close to Viśālākṣī Gaurī temple	Revered among local women for wish-fulfillment; considered a form of the Divine Mother worshipped by the entire world	Open throughout the day for darśana; commonly worshipped during Navarātri	Located close to Viśālākṣī Gaurī and Annapūrṇā-Visveśvara axis; part of Navagaurī circuit	Small shrine structure with decorated idol of the goddess	Actively maintained with regular visitation, especially during festivals	The name "Viśva Bhujā" signifies "She who is worshipped by the entire universe," indicating the cosmic nurturing force of the Devī
278	Viśvakarmeśhwar	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 81	Śiva as Viśvakarmeśhwar, worshipped by the divine architect Viśvakarmā	This tīrtha is associated with the legend of Viśvakarmā, the celestial architect, who was blessed by Śiva for his devotion and service to his Guru. Śiva appeared as a Liṅga and granted Viśvakarmā immense skill and recognition. This Liṅga symbolizes honor for one's Guru, skill in craftsmanship, and the Śiva aspect of creation.	Worshipped at C.K.7/158, inside the premises of Ātmā Veereśhwar Mandir, near Chowk, Varanasi; accessible via rickshaw or on foot; located at the top of temple stairs near Ghaṭs	Highly revered by artisans, engineers, and workers in tools, metals, architecture, and construction; visited especially on Viśvakarmā Jayantī	Pūjā timings: 5:00 a.m.–11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.–3:30 p.m.; special ārti at 7:00 p.m.–8:30 p.m.; for special pūjā, consultation with the temple priest is advised	Located in the sacred cluster of Ātmā Veereśhwar temple; also associated with the teachings of Pt. Kuber Nāth; part of Kāśī's traditional artisan worship culture	Twin Śiva Liṅgas installed in polished white-stone enclosures; symbolically associated with Viśvakarmā's dual aspects of knowledge and action	Well-maintained temple complex; visited daily by craftsmen and devotees; special rituals on Jayantī and other auspicious days	An important sacred site for architects, artisans, and students of technical and spiritual craftsmanship; honors Guru-śiṣya tradition and divine creation

279	Vitank Narsimha	Kashi Khand, Chapter 61	Lord Vishnu as Vitank Narsimha	Devotees who worship this deity are blessed with courage and mental strength, aiding important decision-making.	B.6/102, just outside the eastern door of Kedareshwar Temple at Kedar Ghat	Valued for its empowering and strength-giving qualities; invokes inner resolve and clarity.	Open for darshan throughout the day; devotees perform personal worship.	Located near Kedar Ghat, a major sacred and ritual bathing site in Varanasi.	Deity housed in niche near Kedareshwar Temple, on the banks of Ganga.	Preserved and accessible; visited regularly by pilgrims at Kedar Ghat.	Reflects the localized form of Narsimha worship associated with empowerment, integrated into the Shaiva-Vaishnava sacred scape.
280	Vriddh Āditya	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 61, Shloka 43	Āditya (Sun God), Vṛiddha Harī, Tapas	Aged devotee Harī, deeply devoted to Lord Sūrya and Vīśālākṣī Devī, lamented his inability to perform penance due to old age. Lord Sūrya appeared and blessed him, declaring that worship of Vriddh Āditya would grant strength, fulfillment, and youth-like vigor to the devotee.	D-31/5, near Bare Hanumanjī and Mrityunjay Mahadev, off Dasaswamedh-Vishwanath Gully, Varanasi	Tīrtha of spiritual fulfillment, vitality, and reversal of decay; grants energy to elderly and aspirants	Worship on Sundays; darśana open daily from 6:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.; pūjā done individually at Surya Chakra (outer) and deity (inner)	Southern Kāśī, near Mrityunjay Mandir, part of Surya mandala and local tīrtha circuits	Red-hued shrine image; outer Surya Chakra platform; inner sanctum houses central deity	Functional; open access with space for darśana; maintained by local devotees and traditional caretakers	Symbolic of youthful energy, sādhanā fulfillment, and spiritual accomplishment; especially revered by elderly aspirants and seekers
281	Vridh Kaleshwar	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 24, Shloka 78, 80	Shiva (as Vridh Kaleshwar Ling)	A devout brahmin named Nand was worshipping the Holy city of Kashi. He performed penance and the Ling was revealed to him. He built a temple which came to be known as Vridh Kaleshwar. Seeing, touching, and worshipping the Ling fulfills all worldly desires, and protects from poverty, illness, and bad reputation.	K-52/39, in the premises of Mrityunjay Mahadev Temple, near Vrinda Kall, Varanasi	Revered for fulfilling all desires and granting freedom from worldly miseries. One of the spiritually potent Lings mentioned in Kashi Khanda and Brahma Vaivarta Purana.	Worship throughout the day; offerings, pooja and archana by devotees. Especially sought for blessings of health, wealth, and peace. Close access to Kalodak Well with curative water.	Located within the sacred temple cluster of Mrityunjay Mahadev, closely integrated with the healing and moksha circuits of Kashi.	Installed inside the Mrityunjay Mahadev temple premises; traditional setup with dedicated altar and maintained ritual space.	Well-preserved within a major temple compound; maintained and accessible for pooja.	Fulfills all desires and grants relief from all kinds of misfortune. Symbolic of the compassion of Shiva in his benevolent vridh (aged) form.

282	Vṛṣabheśh war	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 69	Śiva as Vṛṣabheśhwar, associated with the tīrtha of Vṛṣabhadvīpa	Vṛṣabheśhwar Liṅga is connected to Vṛṣabhadvīpa Tīrtha. It is believed that devotees who worship this Liṅga are blessed with bodily and spiritual peace. It is one of the 68 sacred liṅgas placed by Nandi on Śiva's command across Kāśī for universal benefit.	K.58/78, Gorakhnāth Maidānganj, Varanasi; near Vāl Rajāsthān; accessible via rickshaw or on foot	Respected for its purificatory and calming effects; associated with health, peace of mind, and strength; beneficial for seekers of physical well-being	Pūjā timings: 7:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.; devotees can offer flowers, bilva leaves, and water during darśana; timings may be flexible	Located in a traditional neighborhood with local temple complexes; tied to tīrthas emerging from Vṛṣabhadvīpa zone of Kāśī's sacred geography	Śiva Liṅga in circular shrine structure with water channel and floral decor; appears frequently adorned with bilva leaves and tulasī	Well-kept and functional local temple; accessible throughout the day to devotees and pilgrims	A site especially revered for health, strength, and spiritual steadiness; part of Kāśī's grid of 68 Rudra sites installed for protection and upliftment
283	Vyāghreśh war	Kaśī Khaṇḍa, Chapter 86, Shloka 33	Śiva as Vyāghreśhwar – 'Tiger Lord'; invoked by warriors and devotees seeking strength and protection	During a time of ritual distress, Brahmins prayed to Śiva to protect them from dangers, particularly in battle or conflict. Śiva appeared as Vyāghreśhwar, assuring that those who worship Him would overcome all fear and succeed in their pursuits.	Located at K.63/158, Bhoot Bhairav Mohalla, near Bhoot Bhairav temple; accessible via rickshaw or on foot through Chowk and Jaitpura	Known as the warrior's liṅga, Vyāghreśhwar is revered by those facing adversities, invoking Śiva's fierce protective aspect; associated with courage and removal of obstacles	Pūjā can be performed anytime; devotees can offer prayers independently or consult local priests; ideal for those seeking victory and fearlessness	The temple is in an old locality of Kāśī, near Bhairava shrines; sacred geography links it with protective and fierce aspects of the city's Shaiva energy	Small shrine with central liṅga draped in red cloth (symbol of valor), placed on platform; reflects simplicity and potency	Modest temple; maintained by local trust or priesthood; available to all devotees throughout the day	Powerful tīrtha for warriors and those in distress; even Yamdūtas (messengers of death) fear devotees of Vyāghreśhwar, symbolizing ultimate protection
284	Yagya Varaha	Kashi Khand, Chapter 81, Shloka 17	Lord Vishnu as Yagya Varaha (Boar incarnation, yajña aspect)	Lord Vishnu says: "I am present in the form of Yagya Varaha at Yagya Varaha Tirth. Devotees desirous of getting fruits of performing various Yagyas should worship me in that form."	Ward H.18/40, near Swarleenesh war at Panch Agni Akhada Ghat (near Bhelupur)	Highly auspicious for those desiring success in Vedic rituals and yajñas; said to bestow results equivalent to actual ritual performance.	Open for worship from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.; aarti performed at 7:00 p.m.	Situated near Swarleeneshwar and Panch Agni Akhada Ghat on the Ganga.	Carved image of Yagya Varaha in temple niche; worshipped regularly.	Well-preserved and accessible; maintained by temple pujari Shri Shankaranand.	Represents Vishnu's yajñic aspect; spiritually reinforces Kashi's sacred role in Vedic and ritual traditions beyond physical performance.

285	Yakṣa Vinayak	Traditional – Yakṣa as guardian deity	Vinayak (Ganesha – Remover of Obstacles)	Yakṣa Vinayak removes all obstacles and smoothens the lives of devotees	Ck.37/23, Rudra Prayag, Kotwalpura, near Bansphatak Vishwanath Gully	Invoked for protection and well-being in household paths and narrow alleyways	Worship within residential space; informal or self-performed rituals	Located deep in a residential gully; significance as guardian within domestic and urban fabric	Idol enshrined within a house; partially clothed and adorned	Access may be difficult due to location; maintained with care by residents	Represents Vinayak as a household guardian deity in Varanasi's sacred residential maze
286	Yama Āditya	Kashi Khanda, Chapter 61, Shloka 108	Āditya (Sun God), Yama (Lord of Dharma), Yameśvara (Śiva)	Yama installed a Śiva Liṅga (Yameśvara) and an image of Sūrya (Yama Āditya) at Yama Tīrtha near Sankatha Ghat, where he performed rigorous penance. Sūrya became known as Yama Āditya. Bathing here and worshipping the deities ensures one escapes Yamaloka (hell) and gains spiritual protection after death.	Ck.7/135, Sankatha Ghat area, on steps leading to the Ganga; near Yameśvara shrine, Varanasi	Liberation-centric tīrtha; associated with overcoming fear of death, karmic bondage, and Yama's judgment	Darśana open daily; bathing and pūjā especially on Bharanī Nakṣatra, Chaturdaśī, Amāvasyā, and Pūrṇimā; major observance for ancestral relief	Ganga-facing shrine in eastern Kāśī; western side of Yameśvara and eastern of Ātma Veerēśvara; part of Yamātīrtha zone	Carved sun deity with reddish hue; adjacent to Śiva Liṅga (Yameśvara); maintained near stairwell	Fully functional; accessible by ghat steps or local rickshaw; darśana active	Tīrtha of afterlife liberation, fearlessness, and post-death spiritual merit; critical for karmic resolution and ancestral redemption