Visualizing Space in Banaras

Images, Maps, and the Practice of Representation

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Contents

Introduction 7

Sacred Topography

Hans Bakker
The Avimuktakṣetra in Vārāṇasī: Its Origin and Early Development 23

Ravi S. Singh and Rana P. B. Singh
Goddesses in Kāśī (Vārāṇasī): Spatial Patterns and Symbolic Orders 41

Annette Wilke
The Banarsī Navadurgā Cycle and its Spatial Orientation 69

Sunthar Visuvalingam and Elizabeth Chalier-Visuvalingam
Bhairava in Banaras: Negotiating Sacred Space and Religious Identity 95

Maps

Axel Michaels
Mapping the Religious and Religious Maps: Aspects of Transcendence and Translocality in Two Maps of Varanasi 131

Jörg Gengnagel
Maps and Processions in Banaras: The Debate Concerning the Pañcakrośīyātrā 145

Sumathi Ramaswamy
Enshrining the Map of India: Cartography, Nationalism, and the Politics of Deity in Varanasi 165

Images

Niels Gutschow
Panoramas of Banaras 191

Joachim K. Bautze
Examples of Unlicensed Copies and Versions of Views from Benares: Their Authorship and Identification 213

Sandria B. Freitag
Visualizing Cities by Modern Citizens: Banaras Compared to Jaipur and Lucknow 233

Social Practice and Everyday Life

Nita Kumar
The Space of the Child: The Nation, the Neighbourhood, and the Home 255

Stefan Schütte
The Social Landscape of the Washermen in Banaras 279

Martin Gaenszle (in collaboration with Nutandhar Sharma)
Nepali Places: Appropriations of Space in Banaras 303

Vasudha Dalmia
Visions of a New Banaras in the Early Twentieth Century 325

Contributors 349

Index 353

MARTIN GAENSZLE AND JÖRG GENGNAGEL

Introduction

The pilgrimage city of Banaras is widely known as an impressively unique and particularly ancient historical place. For many, however, it is above all a universal, cosmic, and in a sense timeless sacred space. Both of these seemingly contrasting images contribute to how the city is experienced by its inhabitants and visitors to it, and there is a great variety of sometimes competing views: Kāśī the Luminous, the ancient Crossing, the City of Death, the place of Hindu-Muslim encounter and syncretism, the cosmopolitan centre of learning, and the like.[1] The present volume deals with the multiple ways this urban site is visualized, imagined and culturally represented by different actors and groups.[2] The major focus will thus be on visual media, which are of special significance for the representation of space. But these cannot be divorced from other forms of expression which are part of the local "life-world" (Ger. *Lebenswelt*). All the contributions look at imaginative constructions–both local and exogenous–of the rich topography of Kāśī and show that such constructions are not static but always embedded in social and cultural practices of representation, often contested and never complete.

Banaras is unique: the city's location on the western bank of the holy Gaṅgā, which flows in a curve to the north and north-east at this point, the elevated riverfront where bathers face the rising morning sun above an empty landscape–these and similar geographical peculiarities contribute to the special character of the town. Historically, Banaras is often praised as one of the oldest continuously settled cities in the world. Whatever the truth, and the archeological research unearthing this complex history is still in its beginning stages, one can say that Kāśī has been an important crossroads for more than 1,500 years: it was at the junction of the east-west route along the Ganges and the north-south route coming from the Kathmandu Valley, and developed into a major trading centre at least as early as the Gupta period. Considering this strategic position on the South Asian subcontinent, it is not surprising that the city has come to be regarded as a centre of Hindu culture though this is a more recent historical development.

Banaras is universal: as Sanskrit eulogies point out again and again, Kāśī is the ultimate place of origins, a place created by Śiva "when there was neither the sphere of the earth nor the creation of water" (*Kāśīkhaṇḍa* 26.28). Kāśī, in this divine perspective, is nothing less than a "microcosm of the universe" where "creation is ... continually replayed" (Parry 1994: 11, 32). It is due to this link with cosmic origins that the city is seen as outside normal time and space, indestructible (*avināśa)* and thus eternal. One popular and vivid image expressive of this particular state of affairs is the

one which depicts Kāśī as "propped up on the tip of the trident of Shiva" (*Kāśīkhaṇḍa* 60.61): the city is "above" ordinary ground level. And because of this cosmic dimension of the site, it is not really restricted to a geographical location. Kāśī can be elsewhere: Uttarakāśī in the Himālaya, Dakṣiṇakāśī in South India, or else the Kāśī in one's heart. The city is therefore part of a more complex "imagined landscape" (Eck 1998) in which mythology and topography are intrinsically interlinked.

Banaras, then, exemplifies a certain duality of space, often theorized in terms of concepts of space and place (e.g. Gutschow 1994), in a relation to one another as general to specific. Phenomenological approaches in geography, archeology and anthropology have stressed that place is what is directly experienced, as concrete, specific and foregrounded actuality, whereas space is more general, more abstract: the horizon of understanding, background potentiality (see Tuan 1977, Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995). While many philosophers have tended to regard space as primary and place as derivative, phenomenologists, on the contrary, stress the primacy of place: "Knowledge of place stems from human experiences, feeling and thought. Space is far more abstract than place. It provides a situational context for places, but derives its meaning from particular places." (Tilley 1994: 15; see also Casey 1996). A clear-cut separation of place and space seems impossible, but a fundamental polarity in human experience remains evident: the specific is always embedded in a larger conceptual frame.

The topic of this book, however, is the cultural representation of space, with space being understood as a general term inclusive of place, that is, the objectification of experience in cultural artefacts and practices. The rich literature of an anthropology of space and place has shown that there is great variety in the ways "sites" are culturally constructed, and that one and the same place may be seen rather differently by different actors. Keith Basso, for example, has pointed out the interconnection of places, place-names and moral narratives among the Western Apache, which makes up a "sense of place", "that close companion of heart and mind, often subdued, yet potentially overwhelming" (1996: 54). Working in a different region but with a similar approach, Steven Feld has explored an "acoustemology of place" (1996: 91), which reminds us that place is experienced through the different senses to varying degrees, and thus in the overall representation one sense may stand out more than another.[3]

Visualization, then, is not the only way to represent space, and one needs to be aware that a certain visualism is deeply rooted in the European tradition. Yet it is certainly true that visual representations of space, in buildings, artefacts, maps, images, icons and the like are found in more or less elaborate forms everywhere. South Asia has a particularly rich heritage which includes scholarly treatises and handbooks with practical advice (e.g. *vastu śāstra* knowledge) and the long tradition of *maṇḍala*-related concepts in both the political and religious sense, which is reflected in indigenous cartography. A place is generally sacralized by the presence of a divine being, local spirits, and goddesses and gods of different orders. Visual representation of space in shrines or other objects of divine presence thus implies some form of interaction with these divinities, be it visiting, "seeing" (*darśana*), offering gifts or receiving blessings. This is an important cultural practice which is embedded in other such practices (bodily movement, ritual, music, speech etc.), and as a social phenomenon it is subject to

change. The colonial encounter introduced new forms of visualization, new media and markets, different ways of seeing and treating space, which were variously appropriated, assimilated or rejected. The practice of visual representation has a history of its own.

As spaces can be constructed differently by different actors, there is bound to be conflict over the appropriate "handling" of a place. Brahmans and other high-caste experts of the written tradition tend to organize a complex and disparate reality according to holistic and encompassing patterns (see Gengnagel, this volume), whereas lower castes have their own set of ideas and are generally less concerned with such abstract models (Singh & Singh, this volume). Similarly, regional or ethnic backgrounds lead to diverging views: Maharashtrians attach great importance to Gaṇeśa and celebrate the Gaṇeśa Chaṭ festival in a particularly elaborate manner, while Nepalis revere Bhairava on an almost equal footing with Viśvanātha himself (see Gaenszle, this volume). And last but not least, it should be mentioned that Muslims, who represent about a quarter of the population, have had a significant influence on Vārāṇasī's urban culture, and maintain their own–but not entirely different–vision of cityspace (Visuvalingam & Chalier-Visuvalingam, this volume). Thus there are many perspectives on one and the same location, and though the residents of Banaras have a virtually common ethos, there has always been competition in the appropriation of space and its meaning.

With these general observations in mind, we will now turn to a brief outline of the structure of this book. The first section deals with aspects of the sacred topography of Kāśī. As is well known and has often been described, Banaras is a place with an extreme density of shrines, above all Śiva *liṅgams*, which are grouped in complex *maṇḍala*-ic patterns. Place is inhabited as well as structured by divine forces. In this section, the focus is on the built environment (icons, temples, wells, graves etc.), their interrelationship, and their role in historically changing ritual practice. In the following section, papers discuss the representation of this sacred topography in maps, i.e. in general, two-dimensional schemas, often combined with illustrative images and texts, which bring out the features seen as most significant. While this depiction of sacred space is at least partly a continuation of traditional techniques, the third section, on pictures and images, moves toward a form of representation which is largely a Western, colonial tradition: frontal views, veduta, panoramas and postcard photography. The last section takes a broader look at everyday spaces, more profane sites, little known social spaces and the processes of appropriation, negotiation and contestation which are involved in the construction of meaning. Thus the last section delves into the "unconscious" dimensions of space, which are usually covered over by the "official", idealized self-conscious representations by elites. Spaces are never just there; they are subject to social processes.

Sacred Topography

The section on the sacred topography focuses both on the "classical" textual description of sacred space in Banaras and on the spatial practices of ritual actors in particular

performances, such as processions. It will become obvious that conceptions of sacred space are highly varied and incongruous, depending not only on the historical context and the social groups and actors involved (e.g. the pandit and the pilgrim), but also on the interpretive context of one and the same actor. The tradition characterized as *śāstrik* (scriptural) as opposed to *laukik* (popular) is cited as proof whenever something is believed to be authoritative, whether there is indeed textual evidence for it or not; but when it comes to practice even Brahmans often follow local customs which are not sanctioned by the scriptures (Parry 1989). Thus tensions which exist between "high" and "low", or the orthodox and the heterodox, may become visible and be played out among actors in the social arena, but they are also evident on the individual level, and there resolved in ordinary practice.

Hans Bakker's contribution deals with the origin and early developments of the Avimuktakṣetra. He focuses on a visualization of this *kṣetra* as given in the Vārāṇasī-Māhātmya of the *Skandapurāṇa*, tentatively dated to the 6th century. Situated in the ideal centre of this holy field, which extends from the Varāṇa river in the north to the Gaṅgā in the south, lies Madhyameśvara, once a hub for renouncers, who practised the Pāśupata observance (see Bakker Fig. 1). Regarding the localization of the Avimukta-kṣetra, Bakker points out the paradoxical nature of the cremation ground. On the one hand, pilgrims once kept the present Śmaśāna Ghāṭ Maṇikarṇikā on their left-hand side during their circumambulations. On the other, the cremation ground by virtue of its polluting force played an important role in the Pāśupata religion and attracted Pāśupata ascetics to it, thus contributing to the holiness of Banaras. This highlights a constant tension between heterodox, often tantric practices and orthodox ideals, which, as shown in several contributions in the present volume, seems to be of great significance in the construction of the sacred spaces of Banaras.

The paper by Ravi S. and Rana P. B. Singh deals with the cultural, symbolic, mythical and spatial significance of goddesses in Kāśī. Though their number is more than three hundred in the *Purāṇas*, their importance in Śiva's city has often been neglected by scholars. Historically, the veneration of goddesses such as the Yoginīs is linked with ancient folk traditions, which gradually were incorporated into the Brahmanic tradition through the establishment of shrines, temples and temple complexes, and also through the introduction of new images. The present spatial pattern of goddesses in Kāśī is the outcome of a complex acculturation process and the maintenance and continuity of tradition. The physical network of locations evinces an underlying order of patterning, which closely conforms to the symbolic description in mythology.

Annette Wilke's contribution on the Banarsī Navadurgā cycle shows that the concept of the Nine Durgās is localized within the landscape of Banaras, thus lending a local topography and a local bias to the pan-Hindu superstructure. We find a short reference to the Banarsī Navadurgā cycle already in the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*, which mentions the names of the sites of the nine goddesses, but not their spatial configuration. Nowadays some of the nine temples are among the most famous Devī shrines of the city, while others are hardly known and not visited during other times of the year, or else are confined to non-Banarsī ethnic groups and arouse public communal interest only during Navarātrī. There is a clash between the textual tradition on the one hand

and the actual religious life and diversity of rituals on the other. The traditional Māhātmya known as the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* and the modern local Hindi Newspaper *Āj* (quoting verses from the *Devīpurāṇa*) both present a uniform picture of the Navadurgā in portraying the nine manifestations as equals. The living tradition, however, presents a rather variegated picture. The textual tradition tends to blur such individuality. The paper suggests that the unifying principles which provide a sense of an unfragmented whole are specific to Banaras: the spatial configuration of the sites in a triangular scheme, which replaced an older circular pilgrimage route. The mental map, according to this interpretation, is the *yoni* of the goddess, which is projected onto the cityspace of Varanasi.

Sacred space is often dense with meaning deriving from different historical layers and different social groups. This is shown in the paper by Elizabeth Chalier-Visuvalingam and Sunthar Visuvalingam which deals with Bhairava, the guardian of Banaras, and more particularly the ritual enactment of the marriage of Lāṭ Bhairõ to the adjacent "maternal" well. This fertility ritual, featuring a procession through the cityspace, used to be celebrated with "lower-caste" Muslim participation, even as the Hindus used to participate in the marriage of the "decapitated" martyr Ghāzī Miyā̃. It is argued that the pillar of Lāṭ Bhairõ, itself an appropriation of an earlier Buddhist icon, has been assimilated to Muslim ritual symbolism in a syncretic manner, and vice versa. Despite a century of more or less peaceful coexistence, the contestation at the sacred ground around the shrine of Lāṭ Bhairõ erupted into the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1809, which event provided the conceptual model for understanding subsequent communalism on the Indian subcontinent. Even today the site of Lāṭ Bhairõ is a paradigmatic case of both syncretic harmony and violent conflict.

Maps

The history of South Asian cartography has long been interpreted based on Western cartographic traditions. Maps of the South Asian subcontinent were assumed to be produced by foreigners, not by South Asians themselves. Maps produced in South Asia proper were neglected as a category in its own right, thereby supporting the assertion made in 1992 by Joseph E. Schwartzberg that "the study of the history of [South Asian] cartography is still in its infancy" (Schwartzberg 1992: 509). The first monograph on South Asian cartography was published by Susan Gole in 1989. Besides a brief introduction to the subject, the book contains many maps that have never previously been reproduced. Then Joseph E. Schwartzberg came out with an *Introduction to South Asian Cartography*, which is partly based on Susan Gole's collections and forms part of *The History of Cartography Project*, headed by the late J. B. Harley and David Woodward (1992). Since then a brief historical overview has been published by P. L. Madan (1997). During the last decades the commonly held view that no independent indigenous traditions of South Asian cartography exist has therefore been called into question (Raj 2003).

The geographical and cartographical construction of British India in the context of colonialism has been studied by M. H. Edney (1997). Aiming at a "deconstruction of

the map", J. B. Harley (1988) has greatly influenced and broadened our perspective on cartography in general and non-Western cartography in particular. Within the field of critical human geography, the theory of geographic visualization has shown the need not only to identify accurate topographical maps but to realize the importance of multiple perspectives and multiple maps–in other words, to perceive and study maps as social constructions (Crampton 2001). In spite of this broadened interest in research on cartography, the available data on South Asian cartography remain scarce, and even when cartographic material is available, its study has generally been neglected by the relevant academic disciplines. The visual elements on maps have not been of much artistic interest for the art historian, the geographer seeks in vain for geographical similitude and topographical exactness, while for the Indologist inscribed texts are few in number and lack originality. To study religious maps depicting the sacred space of Banaras, it is necessary to look at both ritual practice, as reflected in processions, and the use of texts with spatial reference.

Taking a more theoretical stance, Axel Michaels demonstrates that in certain religious maps different principles of mapping, which represent different kinds of space, may occur in combination. He compares religious and scientific concepts of space and stresses that religious spaces are omni- and translocal, absolute, more felt than perceived, and represent the idea of an identity of inner and outer space. In the Euclidean concept of space, individual objects are placed in a homogeneous and abstract order defined by three-dimensional coordinates and linked with metric concepts. Space thus becomes equated with the methods of measurement and observation. Michaels shows that in pilgrimage maps there often exist no clear-cut distinctions between religious and scientific concepts of space. Religious maps can to a certain extent integrate scientific topographical representations without difficulty.

The contribution by Jörg Gengnagel presents a case study of a public controversy in the latter half of the 19th century concerning the "correct" performance of the Pañcakrośīyātrā, the circumambulation of Kāśī's holy field. The debate (*śāstrārtha*) is based on religious texts dealing with the sacred topography of Banaras, and most likely influenced the making of lithographic maps. It is shown that the references to authoritative spatial texts, the utilization of surveying techniques and topographical mapping were important tools in the attempt of the local elite to change the route of the Pañcakrośīyātrā. Although the Dharma Sabhā of Banaras, the Mahārāja, the District Magistrate and the famous playwright Bhāratendu Hariścandra were involved in this conflict, the endeavour finally did not succeed. The attempt to reconstruct an ideal practice had to be reconciled with the persistence of pilgrims' everyday pilgrimage practices.

That mapping is not a value-free practice but can serve consequential political agendas is brought out in the paper by Sumathi Ramaswamy dealing with Bharat Mata ("Mother India"), worshipped in Banaras in the form of a map. Ramaswamy examines the complex cultural and political configurations that led to the "enshrining" of the map of India in the Bharat Mata Mandir in 1936 in Banaras. In the context of the "Temple of Mother India", the map of India has become, literally as well as metaphorically, a deity. Ramaswamy argues that the map of India enshrined in the Bharat Mata Mandir

metonymically represents the image of Mother India at a time when the latter's visual presence had become a political and cultural embarrassment. In the process, the map, which through a quarter century of ideological work had come to be associated with Mother India, sacralizes the nation's soil, turning it from an abstract territory into a "motherland", an entity worth living and dying for. The article suggests that the map of India, that colonial artefact produced to represent and control Indian space in secular and scientific terms, has been subversively appropriated by India's nationalists, in their quest to create a new "religion", the religion of nationalism. Within this new religion, the map of India occupies the place of a deity, even as the territory of "India" that it represents is re-presented as sacred land.

Images

While all the contributions in this volume deal with images in the larger sense, that is, visual representations of the imagination, this section includes contributions on images in the narrower sense, that is, external images, or pictures, such as paintings, drawings and photographs. These images all show Banaras as an urban landscape, yet there are considerable differences in perspective, the "ways of seeing" they express. For a pilgrim pictures of the city serve not only as souvenirs in the ordinary sense, they also are a physical reflection of the sacred place; they possess agency of their own (Gell 1998). Sellers of postcards and maps (see Fig. 1) often advertise their trade by stressing that putting the images on walls and then visualizing the sacred sites is to have *darśan* similar to that of visiting the real place. Such images do not simply depict a location; rather, they somehow embody its sacred qualities. They show a landscape of a different kind, a place "somewhere else", a heterotopia (Foucault 1986). For the foreign visitors, too, Banaras was such a heterotopia, the oriental city of the Hindus, but seen with eyes trained in their own tradition.

Since early on in the Western encounter with India European travellers have been particularly impressed by the city of Banaras. The unique riverfront as seen from a boat or from the opposite bank has been a favourite vista. Considering that many travellers came up from Calcutta by ship and thus encountered the city in this manner, this is perhaps not surprising. But as will become clear in this section, the frontal view of these early veduta was a peculiar Western form of representation. Soon this perspective and the accompanying techniques were adopted locally, and incorporated into the traditional modes of representation (e.g. maps), and new kinds of images emerged. Thus the colonial situation had a deep impact on the ways the city was perceived, not only by outsiders but also by the inhabitants themselves.

The paper by Niels Gutschow focuses on the genre of panoramas, the unique view of a place which purports to include "everything", that is, all the surroundings as seen in a circular view of 360 degrees. Gutschow traces the history of panoramic views of Banaras from the missionary Joseph Tieffenthaler's early image from across the Ganges (published in 1786) through early colonial paintings and photographs to present-day imageries on pilgrimage maps. It is of particular interest to see that in the course of

Fig. 1: Map sellers at Maṇikarṇikā Ghāṭ (photo by Martin Gaenszle).

the 19th century the idea of an extended horizontal view was adopted by Indian painters and map-makers alike. A new tradition of local panoramic painting developed (probably the painters were trained by Western experts), apparently to serve a growing market in colonial India and outside. At the same time, traditional pilgrimage maps incorporated elements of these panoramas, such as the stylized riverfront with the skyline of temples, roofs and minarets, and depictions of particular buildings–for example, the Town Hall or the new bridge across the river. Thus new ways of seeing are acknowledged, without, however, totally giving up older forms of representation.

Probably no other Indian city appears more often in illustrated Western travel reports than Banaras. The *ghāṭs* are for Banaras what the Taj Mahal is for Agra and the Qutb Minar for Delhi. Joachim Karl Bautze focuses in his paper on the history of Western views of Banaras (paintings and photographs) and shows how artistic representations were strongly reliant on earlier depictions, often directly copying them. The reportedly earliest shoreline view of the city is based on a copper engraving published in 1786 in Berlin by the previously mentioned Joseph Tieffenthaler. Other views, photographs (salt and albumen prints) in particular, were copied again and again with only slight variations. The precise dating of such views is extremely difficult, inasmuch as some may be considerably earlier than the date mentioned on the title page of the publication in which they are contained. What is more important, any non-photographic view fell victim to prevailing Western aesthetics and tastes, so that even a

precise date may prove useless for reconstructing how exactly the *ghāṭs* were used and what they looked like between 100 and 220 years ago.

Sandria Freitag in her contribution approaches the local understanding of what it means to belong to Varanasi by examining both images of the city exported and entertained by others, and the activities in which residents themselves engage. As such cultural activities tend to occur repeatedly over time, creating and perpetuating identity of place, the author conceives of them as acts of cultural production. Comparing this production of regional identities in Varanasi, Jaipur and Lucknow, Freitag shows that they have their roots mainly in royal patronage which supported individual artisans, crafts, activities, festivals and the like. Thus the image which residents of a city have of themselves is closely bound up with certain products and practices accorded public recognition and support by the ruling elites. The paper further demonstrates how particular historical circumstances brought about an often syncretic variety of identities and products considered emblematic of the locality. Cultural artefacts are powerful images, metonymically representative of place, but not necessarily uniform and coherent throughout all sections of society.

Social Practice and Everyday Life

The final section covers various representations of everyday space, not so much the conscious, self-reflective and identity-shaping ones, but rather the ordinary, scarcely articulated but nevertheless fundamental imaginings of the lived world, usually less noted. The experience of place and the concomitant visualization of it derives from the use of one's habitat: flats, houses, courtyards, the neighbourhood, the *ghāṭs*, tanks, places of work and leisure, shrines of regular worship and the like. Here cultural representations in the form of images, maps and other artefacts are less elaborate, and visualizations have to be reconstructed on the basis of an intimate understanding of people's habitus and verbal expressions. Therefore the maps in this section are mainly those drafted by the researcher in an attempt to represent what otherwise would remain implicit. How space is organized in everyday practice is a fluid process, dependent on networks of actors (action space), pathways of habitual movement, and the interaction of users who appropriate space in the pursuit of private intentions. Banaras is not one space for all uniformly; rather it is constituted by numerous "mini-spaces", to use a term coined by Freitag in her paper. Above all, these everyday spaces, which may include imaginary boundaries, are never entirely fixed and determined but tend to be subject to negotiations and often contestations.

The paper by Nita Kumar examines the experience of space from the perspective of the child: how does a young person learn to get around–at home, in the neighbourhood, in the city? Kumar's study shows how the very design of a house imposes a certain discipline on its inhabitants, contributing among other things to the socialization of children, their interiorization of a disposition imbued with values. Spatial practices and images are an instrument of education by means of which ideas about gender, generation, the local and the translocal are transmitted. The author presents a lucid phenomenology of spatial experience based on interviews with children in their schools

or at home. A special focus of the paper is the construction of the nation's space–which Kumar sees as flawed: images of the nation displayed at school in such forms as photographs of landscapes or historical figures remain pale, distant and little understood. More important for the child are the images of the local milieu encountered on the outside: in *mohallās*, markets, at work and during festivals. In spite of the differences due to class, education and particularly gender, on the level of emotion there is much common ground.

The issue of everyday space is also the topic of Stefan Schütte's paper, which deals with the Dhobīs (washermen) of Banaras. By the very nature of their work, washermen (and -women) have a considerable network of interpersonal relations within the city's space: residences, working places and customers are often spread over a vast area, so that daily activities require a high degree of mobility. Combining a geographical and a social-anthropological approach, Schütte delineates the multiple layers of the Dhobīs' social organisation–which enable them to cope with the fact that this small caste group is dispersed in numerous localities all over the city. There are various groupings for collective action, the most important one of which is called Ṭāṭ, a kind of translocal caste organisation, which not only regulates occupational matters but is also a major reference point for identity–more important than residence. Thus the paper illustrates in an exemplary manner what has been stressed with regard mainly to postmodern conditions: that social space is not necessarily continuous but may be constituted by disjunct places (cf. Appadurai 1996). Spatial coherence is largely a matter of the imagination.

Whereas the construction of "mini-spaces" may be determined by caste, as in the case of the Dhobīs above, it may also be linked with an ethnic or national identity. The paper by Martin Gaenszle (in collaboration with Nutandhar Sharma) focuses on the places which are manifestations of the special significance which Kāśī has had for the people of Nepal. For a long time Himalayan visitors have been coming as pilgrims, students, merchants or refugees. This chapter looks into the ways Nepalis have appropriated particular locations by imposing on them their own visions of the sacred city. Most prominent is the so-called Nepali Mandir at Lalitā Ghāṭ, the well-known pagoda-style temple built in 1843. Today this temple is a contested place: it has become a national symbol of Nepali culture on Indian territory, and thus it may be seen as the result of "Nepalization". Another focus of Nepali identity is the traditional residential area of the Nepali community around Dūdh Vināyak. This area is also known as "*choṭā Nepāl*" ("Little Nepal"), and indeed may be termed the Nepali quarter. Today this neighbourhood is marked by four pilgrimage hostels (*dharmaśālās*), meant especially for Nepali pilgrims and run by an organispation which oversees an expatriate network for the Nepali community in Banaras. Though these two places are quite separate in spatial terms, it is argued in this paper that there have been numerous links, interactions and contestations among actors who have tried to exert control over these places, including their meanings and representations.

The last contribution, by Vasudha Dalmia, leads us into a more ambivalent locality of Banaras. It deals with the long-standing tradition of dancing girls, courtesans and prostitution associated with the quarter of Dalmandi, a *mohallā* right in the centre of the

city, near the Chauk. Until the end of the 19th century these women, who were singers and musicians performing in public places on certain occasions, were an integral part of society and held in respect by much of the city's elite. In her reading of Premchand's novel *Sevasadan* (1918), which narrates the story of a wife turned courtesan, Dalmia shows that when this tradition of music and other pleasures was increasingly attacked by reformist activists after the turn of the 20th century the political leadership of the municipality split along various ideological lines, and this led to a heated debate about proper morality and life-styles in the city. Though the reformists eventually won out, the continuing popularity of the novel indicates the significance of the less holy, seamier aspects of life in Banaras.

Space, Place and the Practice of Representation

The perspectives on space in the city of Banaras are not only highly varied and multivocal, they are also often ambiguous or contradictory; marked by tension and sometimes conflict. One is tempted to say that it is precisely this character, a form of liminality, which constitutes the city's continuing appeal and fascination, and ultimately its sacredness. Given that it is a place of transition, a city of both death and the regeneration of life, a place on the threshold to the beyond, located between earth and sky, it is not surprising that it spans a wide range of differences–different emotions, different traditions, different languages, different ethnic cultures–and that people see this as a positive trait. As one resident of the Nepali quarter said: "This is religious cosmopolitanism". And indeed, one could argue that the city represents one of the oldest forms of cosmopolitan culture.

It becomes evident in many of the contributions that a basic tension exists between normative space on the one hand–that is, the idealized, standard and textually sanctioned model of space–and the lived-in place of ordinary experience and everyday activity on the other. Normative space is the subject of exegesis and largely defined by members of the upper castes, in particular the Brahmans. But such norms, even if it is claimed that they exist from time immemorial, continually change, old models are modified and new models are adopted, so that there are layers and layers of meaning which never completely erase the earlier ones. This has often been likened to a palimpsest, which retains a trace of the past.

Although normative space is holistic, always claiming inclusiveness and a consistent order, there is in fact an intractable multitude of life-worlds and mini-spaces which elude this totalizing model. The contributions of this volume present a rich phenomenology of lived-in places defined, for example, by regular worship at local shrines, the use of public spaces in neighbourhoods, movements in translocal action-spaces, processions, festivals and many other activities. Communities are not constituted by spatial boundaries but by spatial practices. And these practices are charged with emotion–for example, feelings of solidarity, longing for the familiar, experience of the divine. Larger spaces abstracted from daily experience–such as the mythical or the national–are visualized only in a mediated manner and require special techniques and strategies of representational practice.

Such visualizations of space as maps, images and photos can be seen as various means of getting a hold on and controlling the multitude of spaces. Power struggles occur over control of the imagination–conflicting claims made by competing groups and individuals. And given the demand and diversity, there is a market for these representations. The ordinary map-seller on the *ghāṭs* knows this and profits from the trade in images of the city used for private consumption. In this he perpetuates a tradition which has absorbed generations of visions and counter-visions, even when depicting them as the timeless truth.

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Notes

1 For an introduction into the religious significance and sacred topography of Banaras see Eck (1982), Gutschow & Michaels (1993), Gutschow (2006) and Singh (1993). An extensive bibliography on Banaras by Axel Michaels and Jörg Gengnagel is available on the Internet (*www.sai.uni-heidelberg.de/abt/IND/publikation/bibbanaras/bibbanaras.htm*).

2 It is for this reason that we have not always standardized the spellings of the city's various names: Though we favour the transliteration from common Hindi "Banaras", other connotations are better expressed by the Anglo-Indian "Benares", or the Sanskritic and official "Vārāṇasī".

3 The Bosavi (Papua New Guinea) studied by Feld (1996) have a complex poetics of place-names which mimetically represent the acoustic uniqueness of particular places in the forest through a complex soundscape enacted in songs.

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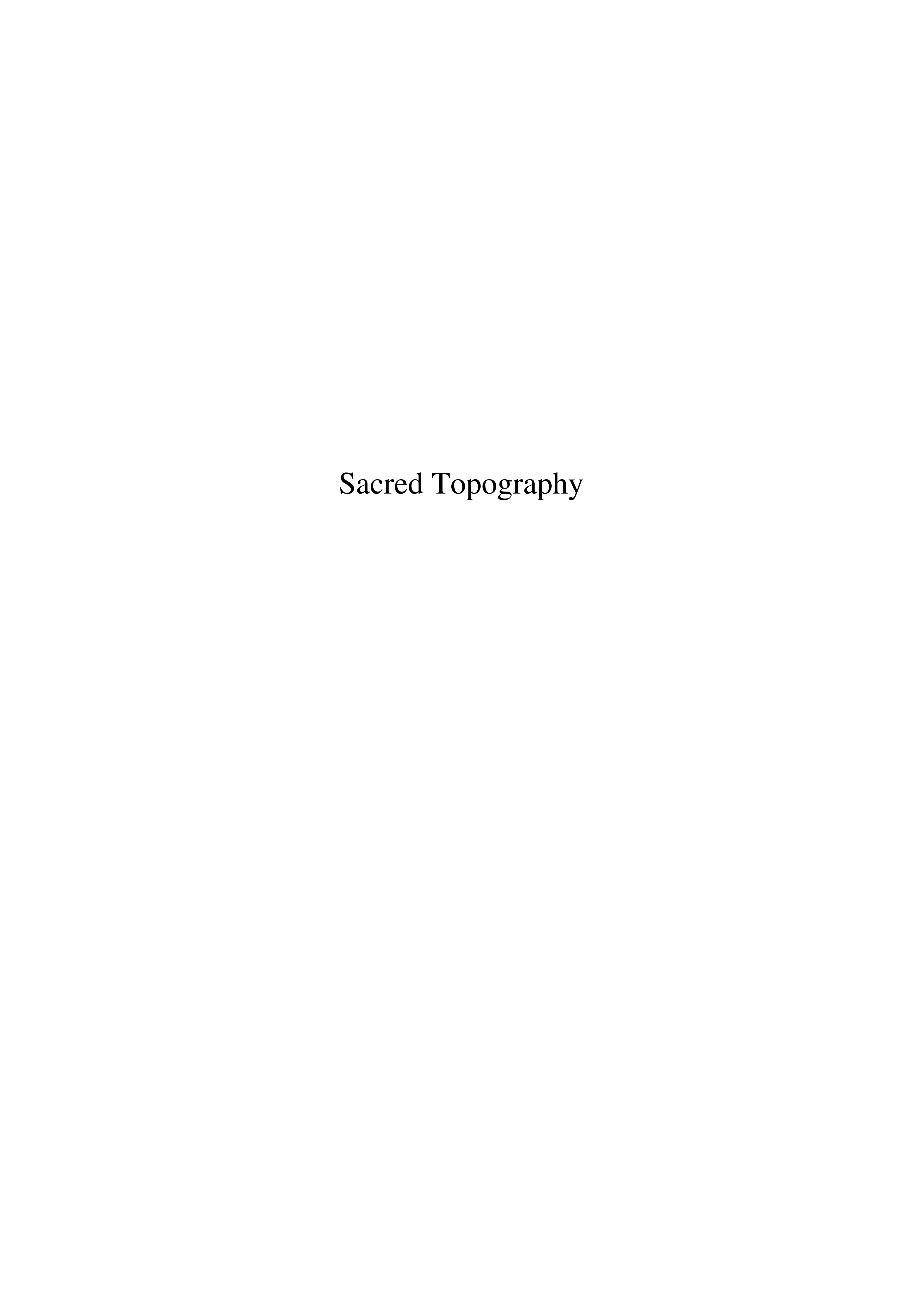

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