

FOV a story board.

In Varanasi there are no beginnings and endings, only passages and transformations.

Indians have not cut ourselves off completely from the past. Consciously or unconsciously, our lives reflect the fact that we are links in an unbroken chain that goes back "to the dawn of history in the immemorial past of India". The sacred and the profane are meshed together in India and nowhere more so than in Kashi.

India, in comparison with most other cultures, is that it preserves and values that archaic element that continues to live in mythical time, the time before mundane time. Its citizens are continually acting in a sacred drama.



Varanasi is one of the oldest still-inhabited settlements on earth dating back more than 5000 years. It is incredible that the ancient Hindus built their City of Death in the exact middle of the Ganges, not in the end. A direct influence of Hinduism believes that Death is not the end. It is a mere stage in the journey of the aatma (the Hindu would for inner-self or soul) to the next life until it ultimately reaches Moksha (the Hindu Nirvana).

Varanasi grew as an important industrial centre, famous for its muslin and silk fabrics, perfumes, ivory works, and sculpture.



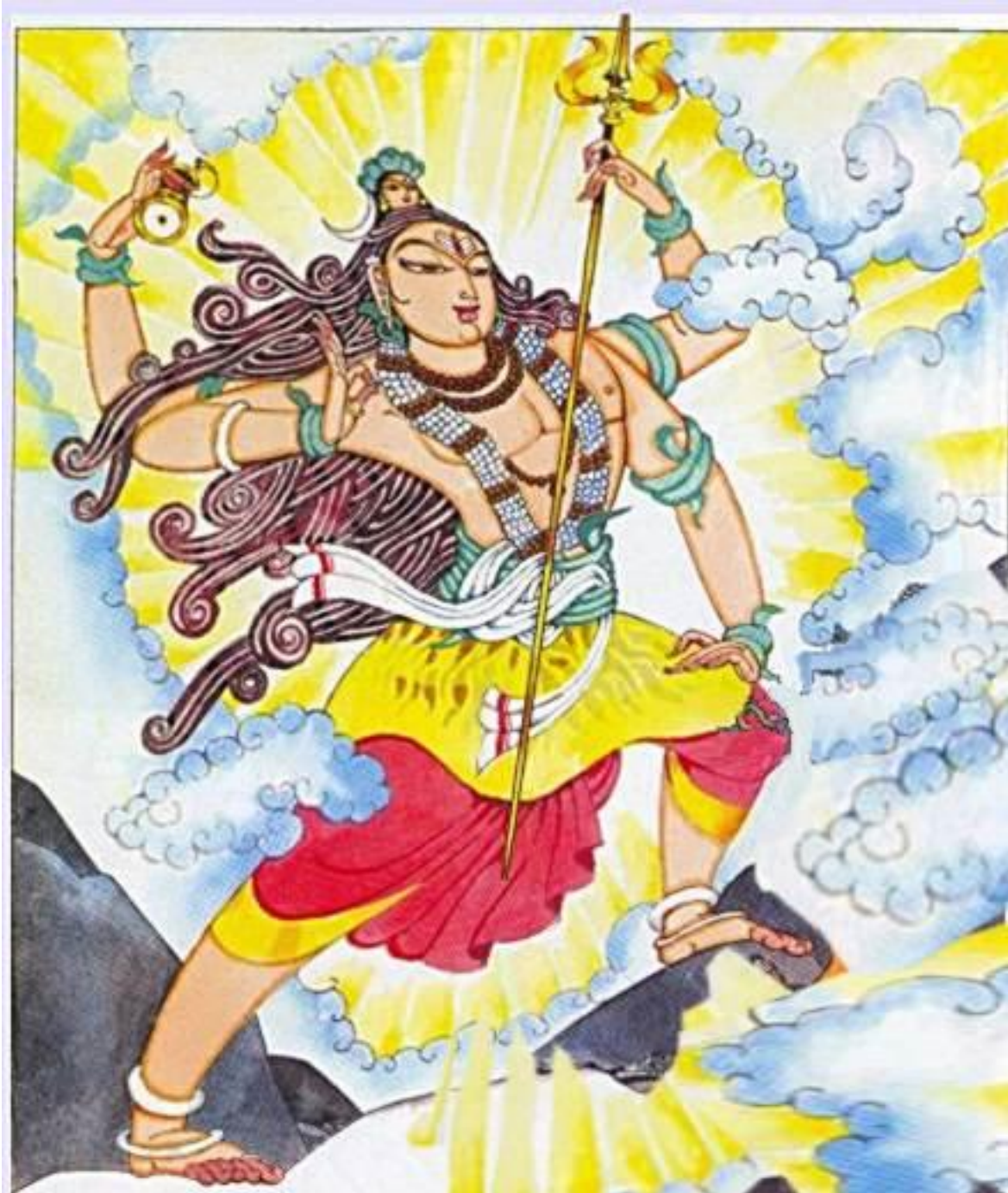
Buddha is believed to have founded Buddhism here around 528 BCE when he gave his first sermon, "The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Dharma", at nearby Sarnath.

During the time of Gautama Buddha, Varanasi was part of the Kingdom of Kashi.



KASI

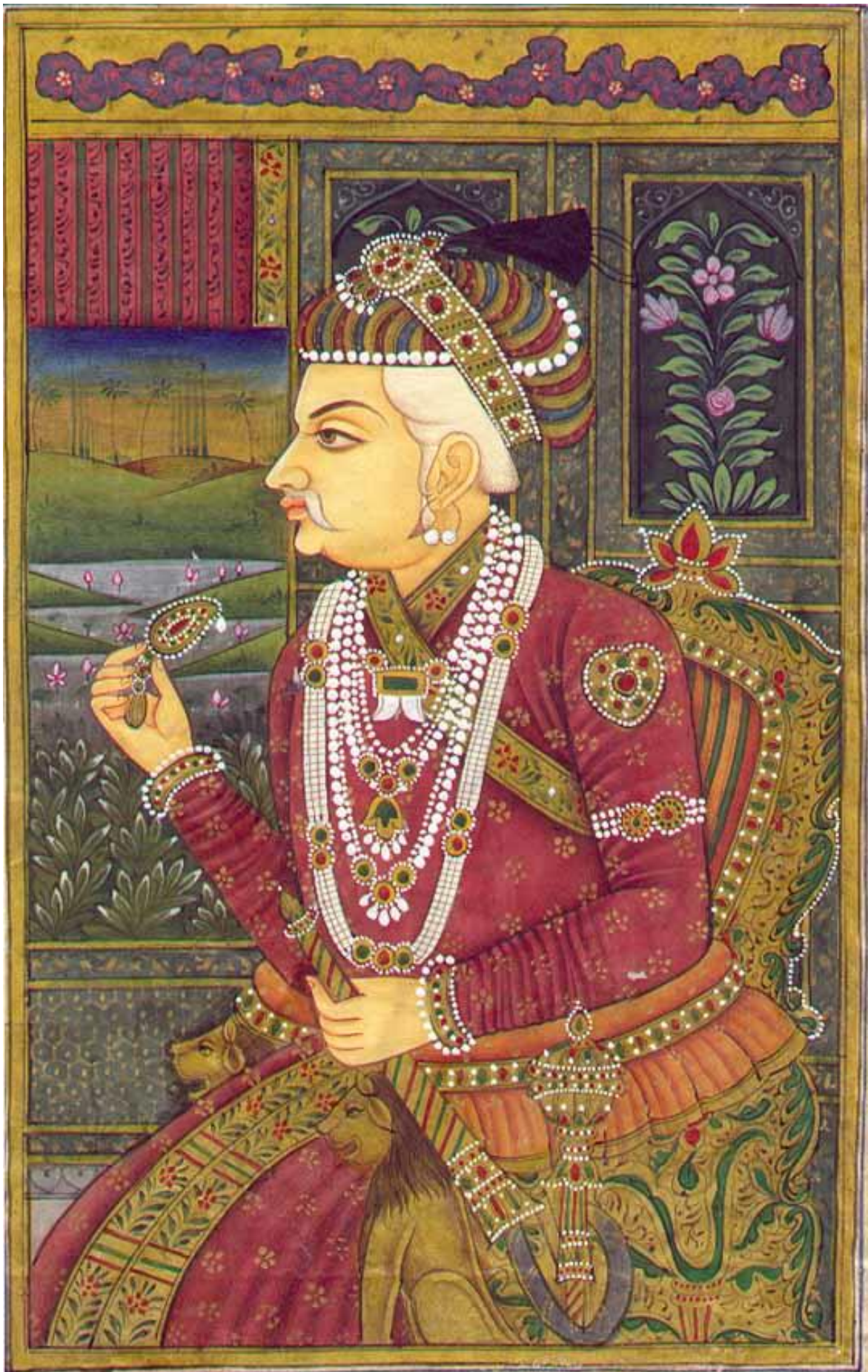
The city's religious importance continued to grow in the 8th century, when Adi Shankara established the worship of Shiva as an official sect of Varanasi.



During the three centuries of Muslim occupation, beginning in 1194, Many of the city's Hindu temples were destroyed during the period of Muslim rule, and learned scholars fled to other parts of the country.

The Mughal emperor Akbar in the 16th century brought some relief to the city's religious and cultural activities.

Varanasi experienced a cultural revival under the emperor Akbar who patronised the city, and built two large temples dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu.



Emperor Akbar.

During the Muslim rule through Middle Ages, the city continued as an important centre of Hindu devotion, pilgrimage, mysticism and poetry which further contributed to its reputation as a centre of cultural importance and religious education.

Much of modern Varanasi was built during the 18th century. Varanasi became an independent kingdom in the 18th century, and under subsequent British rule it remained a commercial and religious centre.



FAMOUS PEOPLE

Tulsidas wrote his epic poem on Rama's life called *Ram Charit Manas* in Varanasi. Several other major figures of the Bhakti movement were born in Varanasi, including Kabir and Ravidas. Guru Nanak visited Varanasi for Maha Shivaratri in 1507, a trip that played a large role in the founding of Sikhism.

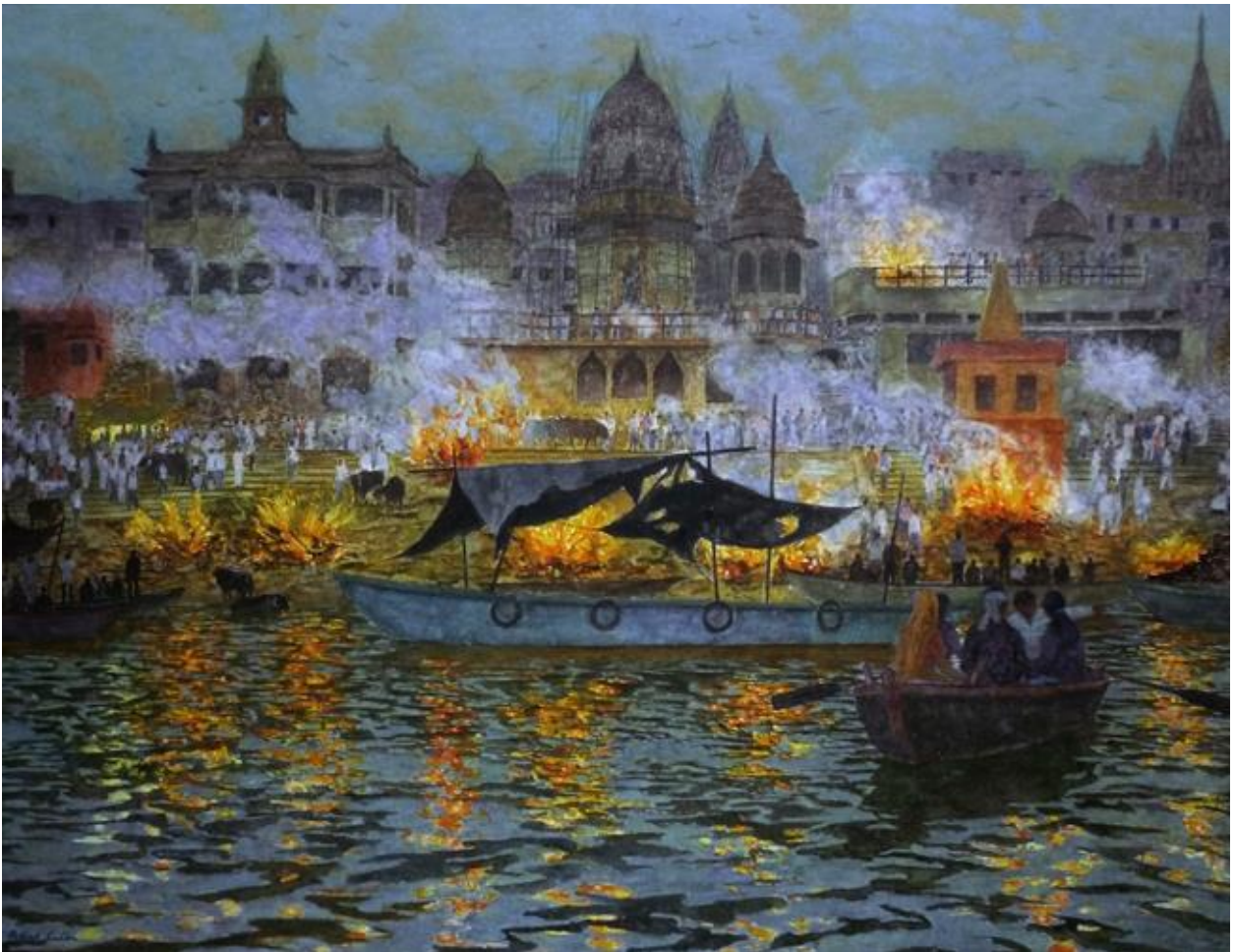
Aarti.



Holding large brass fire lamps, young Hindu priests pay tribute to the 2,500 km long Himalayan river which is the lifeline for over 200 million people living along the Gangetic plain before it merges into the Bay of Bengal. Their faces gleaming in the light of the brass lamps as Vedic mantras are chanted in praise of the river, a water body at the centre of Hinduism.

Kashi epitomizes both ends of the Hindu spectrum. You come here to enjoy the pleasures of this world, ranging from music, art, food and love. You also come here to renounce the world and be an ascetic subsisting on alms collected in a begging bowl—like Shiva did.

Close by is the burning pyres at Manikarnika Ghat, a centuries-old river front where Hindus seek Moksh or escape from the cycle of life and death.



Aarti is an essential component of Hindu rituals. Lamps are waved before the image of the deity enabling the devotee to gaze upon the deity better.

Aarti facilitates the devotee to do better darshan (seeing) of the deity. The ceremony draws attention to the philosophy of 'looking' that is key to Hinduism. We need to see people, and not just expect them to see us. the deity desires to be seen in the 'lamp of wisdom' that burns in the heart of the devotee.

The music and bells of a hundred temples strike the ear with magic melody from the distance, amidst the buzz of human voices;

Then, as night steals on, the scene changes, and the twinkling of lamps along the water's edge, and the funeral fires and white curling smoke, and the stone buildings lit up by the moon, present features of variety and blended images of animation, which it is out of the artist's power to embody.

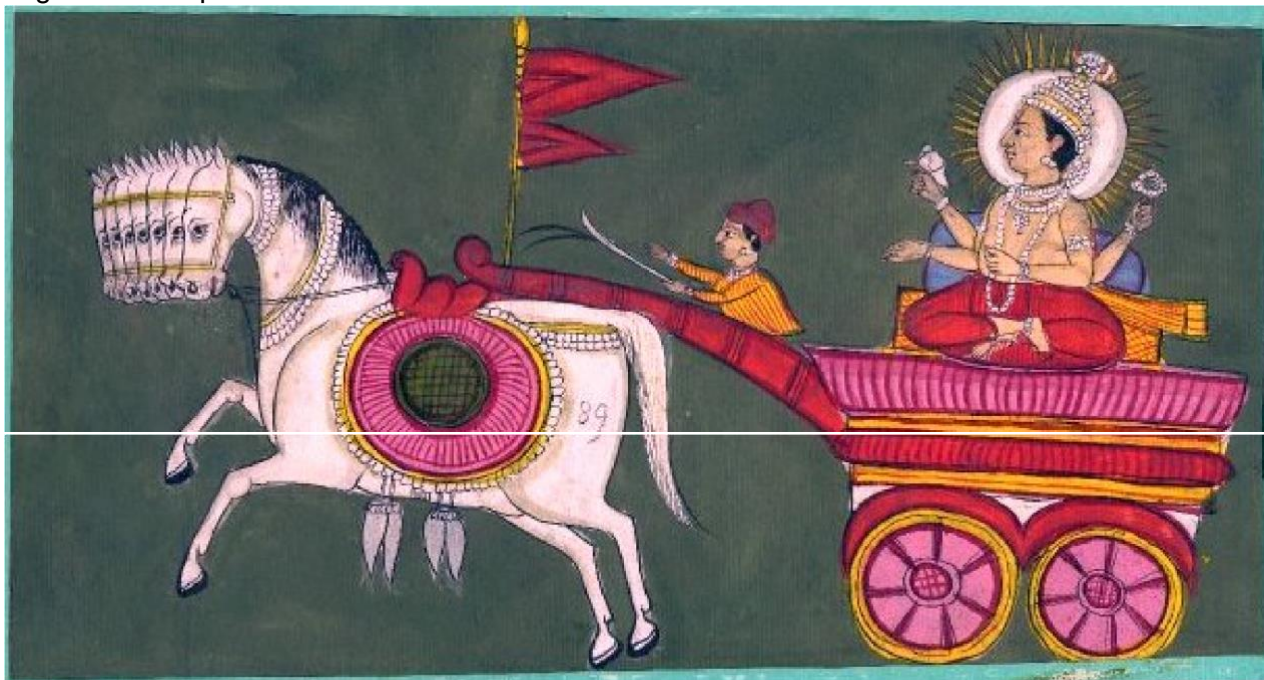
Sun rise



The ghats of the Ganga becomes the alter to worship of the sun every morning bringing light and life , an end to the actual and metaphoric darkness.

The eye rests on the vivid colours of the different groups of male and female bathers with sparking brass water vessels.

Pilgrims worship the sun .



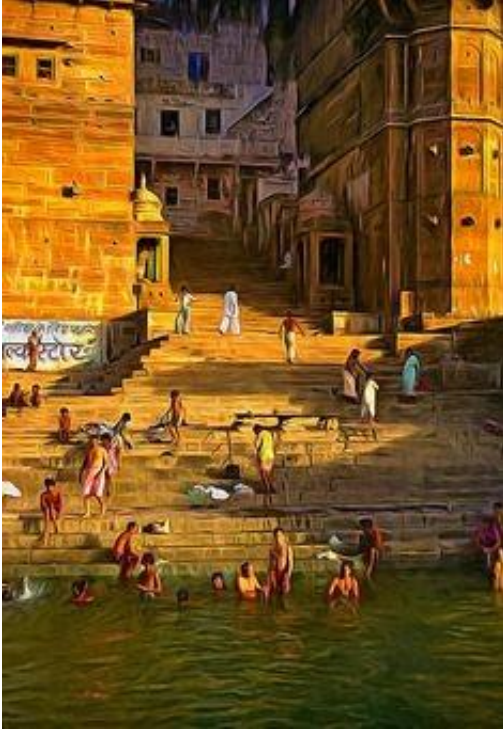
the Hymn to the Dawn of the Rig Veda "Arise! The breath of life hath back to us — the darkness is gone, the light approacheth!"

We meditate on that most adored Supreme Lord, the creator, whose effulgence (divine light) illumines all realms (physical, mental and spiritual). May this divine light illumine our intellect.

At last, Surya, the Sun, appears, glowing with opal fire above the cloudy bars of night. The miasmatic mists, shrink and shrivel and vanish into thin air, as he pierces them through and through and flings his victorious rays across the river, lighting up the recesses of the cave-like shrines, flashing on the brass and copper vessels of the bathers and on the gilded metal flags and crescents which surmount the temples of Shiva.

It seems, at first, as if the while amphitheatre, about two miles (in fact four miles) in circuit, glittering in the sunlight, were one vast sun-temple: the priests, the Brahmins who are muttering the holiest of their mantras, the mysterious sun-invocation from the vedas.

The Morning scene and the Images

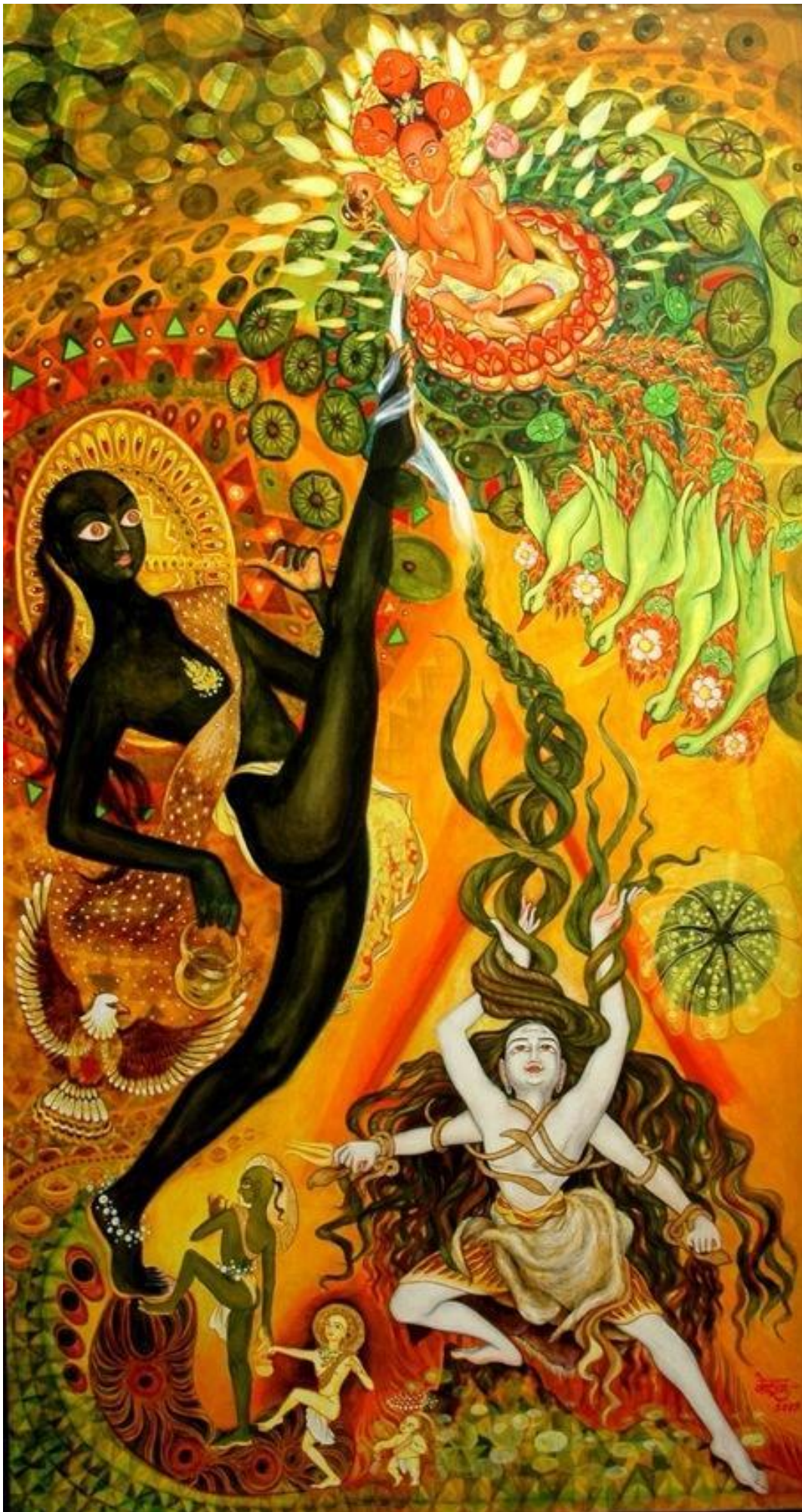


The first rays of sunrise reaching upon the water current of the Gaṅgā and their reflection on the magnificent buildings along the ghats.

Now the details of ghats can be more clearly distinguished – the colossal flights of stone steps, great stone piers and wooden platforms jutting out into the sacred stream, dotted river with palm-leaf umbrellas, like gigantic toad-stools, under which the priests are sitting to render various services to the bathers the countless spires of Hindu temples, dominated by the lofty minarets of Aurangzeb's mosque.

Legend of Ganga

Vishnupadi



The Hindu text Bhagawata Purana, depicts the birth of the Ganga. According to the text, Vishnu in one of his incarnations measured the universe, by extending his left foot to the end of the universe and pierced a hole in its covering with the nail of his big toe. Through the hole, the pure water of the Causal Ocean (Divine Brahm-Water) entered this universe as the Ganges River. Having washed the lotus feet of the Lord, which are covered with reddish saffron, the water of the Ganga acquired a very beautiful pink colour. Because the Ganges directly touches the lotus feet of Lord Vishnu (Narayana) before descending within this universe, it is known as *Bhagavat-Padi* or *Vishnupadi* which means *Emanating from the lotus feet of Bhagavan (God)*.

Descent to Earth



Ganga River



It finally settles in the abode of Lord Brahma before descending to planet Earth at the request of saint Bhagiratha and held safely by Lord Shiva on his head to prevent destruction of Bhumi Devi (Mother Earth).

Then, Ganga was released from Lord Shiva's hair to meet the needs of the country according to Hinduism.

In Hinduism, the river Ganga is considered sacred and is personified as the goddess **Gangā**. She is worshiped by Hindus and Buddhists who believe that bathing in the river causes the remission of sins and facilitates Moksha (liberation from the cycle of life and death), and that the water of the Ganges is considered very pure. Pilgrims immerse the ashes of their kin in the river Ganga, which is considered by them to bring the spirits closer to moksha.

Gaṅgā as Gaṅgeya, which means the “giver of all sorts of prosperity and peace”— the liquid spirit of sustainability

The “wash away sins” quality of water is endowed with the power of sanctity and has many cosmological connotations in various mythologies. The Gaṅgā is called the ‘Primordial Divine Energy’, and symbolized as the river of the water of life, immortality, and healing from the very presence of God. The Gaṅgā, the patron deity Shiva, and the sacred territory of Kashi together form the Cosmic Trinity of this great city, Varanasi. The people of Banaras as well as Hindus all over India have a sense of rootedness and connectedness to the Gaṅgā.

Its manifestive form reaches to perceive her as goddess resulting to evoke special emotions among the devotees.

The Gaṅgā is always accepted by Hindus as “mother” having life-force vital energy. Like that of the five gross elements of an organic entity (earth/land, water, fire, air, and ether/sky), the river too constituted by these elements. These parallels call for a re-sacralized relationship with nature.

The Gaṅgā does have a deep sense of place because it has a history of divine attachment since ancient past as eulogized in mythological literature.

Its manifestive form reaches to perceive her as goddess resulting to evoke special emotions among the devotees.

The Gaṅgā riverfront catches up the historically developed socio-religious ideals, values, place consciousness of pilgrims and their faith — altogether help to form a unique faithscape. This provides the hope for belonging, the firm belief among the residents; and pilgrims, or visitors’ thought and feeling to realise the cultural milieu of Hinduism.

Ganga is the *shakti* or the moving, restless, rolling energy in the form of which the otherwise recluse and unapproachable Shiva appears on earth, showing how life on earth is always moving forward, never in the same place. As water, this moving energy can be felt, tasted, and absorbed.

The Ganges is a sacred river to Hindus along every fragment of its length. All along its course, Hindus bathe in its waters, paying homage to their ancestors and to their gods by cupping the water in their hands, lifting it and letting it fall back into the river; they offer flowers and rose petals and float shallow clay dishes filled with oil and lit with wicks (*diyas*).

On the journey back home from the Ganges, they carry small quantities of river water with them for use in rituals (Ganga jal, literally water of the Ganges).

Rivers and sacred





Goddess Ganga Devi once said that if anyone while bathing utter these 12 of her names then she will grace the water body by her presence. So, by means of this sloka anyone can effectively bath in Ganges.

In this water, I invoke the presence of divine waters from the rivers Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri. These rivers are considered as goddesses and I pray to them for considering me for their blessings.

It is said that whoever recites this prayer before their daily bath in any water body Gangaji immediately obliges and comes into that water body making that water most pure by her grace.

Shiva



Shiva is a god of contradictions: a family man, a hermit, a warlike king, a teacher... and when he is dancing, he embodies both creation and destruction.

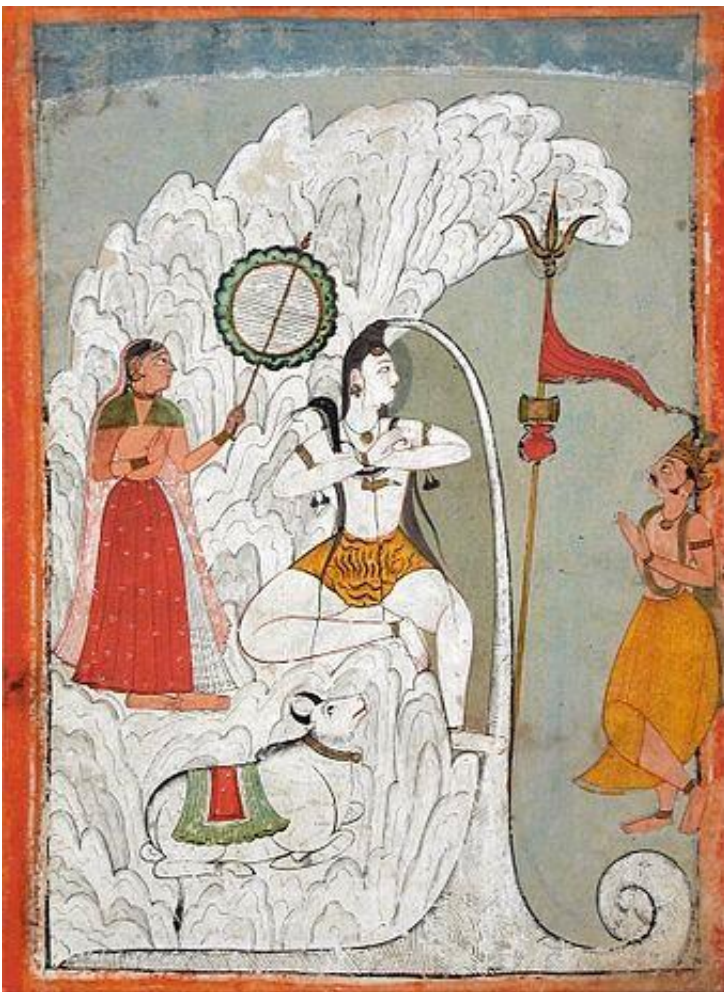
He is the one who makes the world – and who destroys it in the end to open doors for new creation,

He is a metaphor for the cycles of life, for change, for transformation. He is the one who transforms the darkness into light and dirt into gold."

Shiva can be wild and dangerous, and yet benevolent and beautiful. Shiva is the one who transforms the universe – he is beyond the circle of birth and death, of creation and destruction.



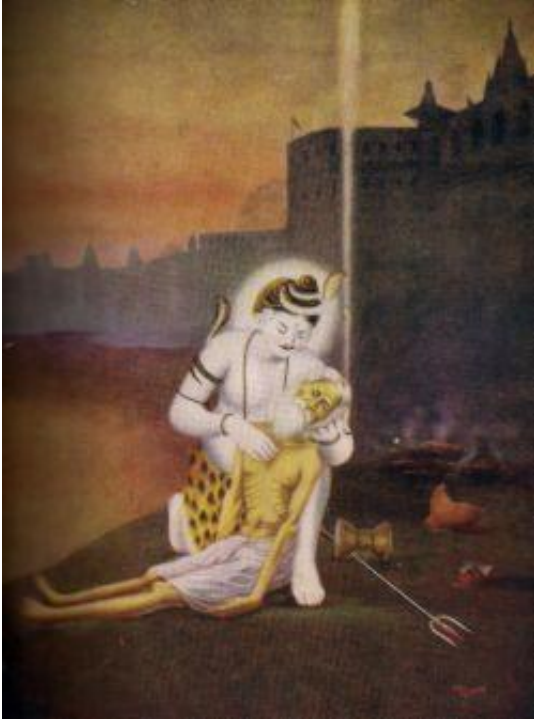
Ardhanareeswara: sharing his body with Parvathi. Shiva and shakthi.



Shiva as gangadhara.

As the Bearer of Ganga, Shiva allowed the celestial Ganga (Ganges) River to come to earth to reward his devotee, but her power was such that she would destroy the earth if she fell on it unobstructed; Shiva compelled the river to pass through his convoluted matted locks, and a gentle stream became the Ganga River on earth. Memorializing this event, Shiva wears a tiny icon of the goddess Ganga in his matted locks. Both of these images feature Shiva as a protector deity whose body is marked with a symbol of these heroic deeds.

KASHI VISWANATHA AND RAM NAMA



It is said that if one dies in Varanasi, one gets 'moksha'. Kashi Viswanatha lord Shiva Himself bestows salvation to the souls. It is believed that when the time comes for a soul to depart, Lord Shiva whispers in the ears of the person the name of Rama which is guaranteed to grant moksha.

DEVOTEES OF SHIVA
Karaikal ammayar

Karaikkal Ammaiyyar, Shaiva Saint

ca. late 13th century

India (Tamil Nadu)

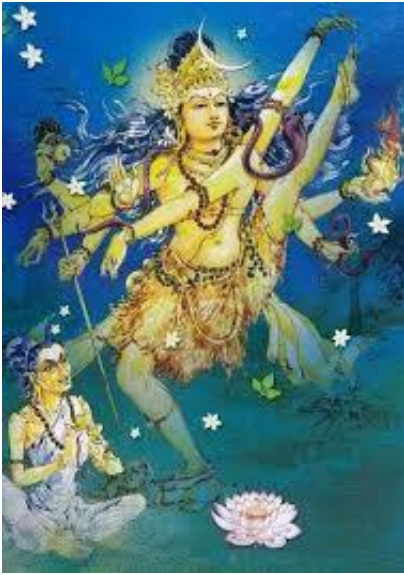
Ammaiyar, a sixth-century South Indian Shaiva poet saint, achieved her emaciated state after beseeching Shiva to free her from all her worldly encumbrances, including her famed beauty. He granted her wish, transforming her into a withered old woman, and she delighted in devoting her life to composing hymns in praise of her Lord. Here, she is seen singing Shiva's praises, accompanying herself with a pair of cymbals. Her hymns celebrate Shiva's predilection for cremation grounds and for his wild dancing form as Nataraja.



By not providing details about herself, the poet may have sought to present a universal voice in her poetry through which the devotional subjectivity she describes is accessible to all of humankind and not limited to people who match her own identity characteristics. Her voice is thus that of humanity as engaged in contemplation of the divine.

Karaikkal Ammaiyar's poetry describes a devotional subjectivity that is fully engaged with Shiva. Hers is an exploratory attempt to experience affectively the mystical connection between the divine and the human (Pechilis 2013, 2016c), and as such, in her compositions she reflects on both the nature of the divine and the nature of the human self, often raising questions rather than providing answers. One way of interpreting her corpus is to **note five major themes in her compositions.**

Her hymns suggest that a devotional subjectivity leads to a transformation of consciousness that enables the devotee to appreciate all aspects of the divine, including his awesome power over life and death. Taken as a whole, Karaikkal Ammaiyar's compositions affirm that visceral knowledge of the finitude of the human lifespan compels one to live life as fully as possible in expressed dedication and service to Shiva.

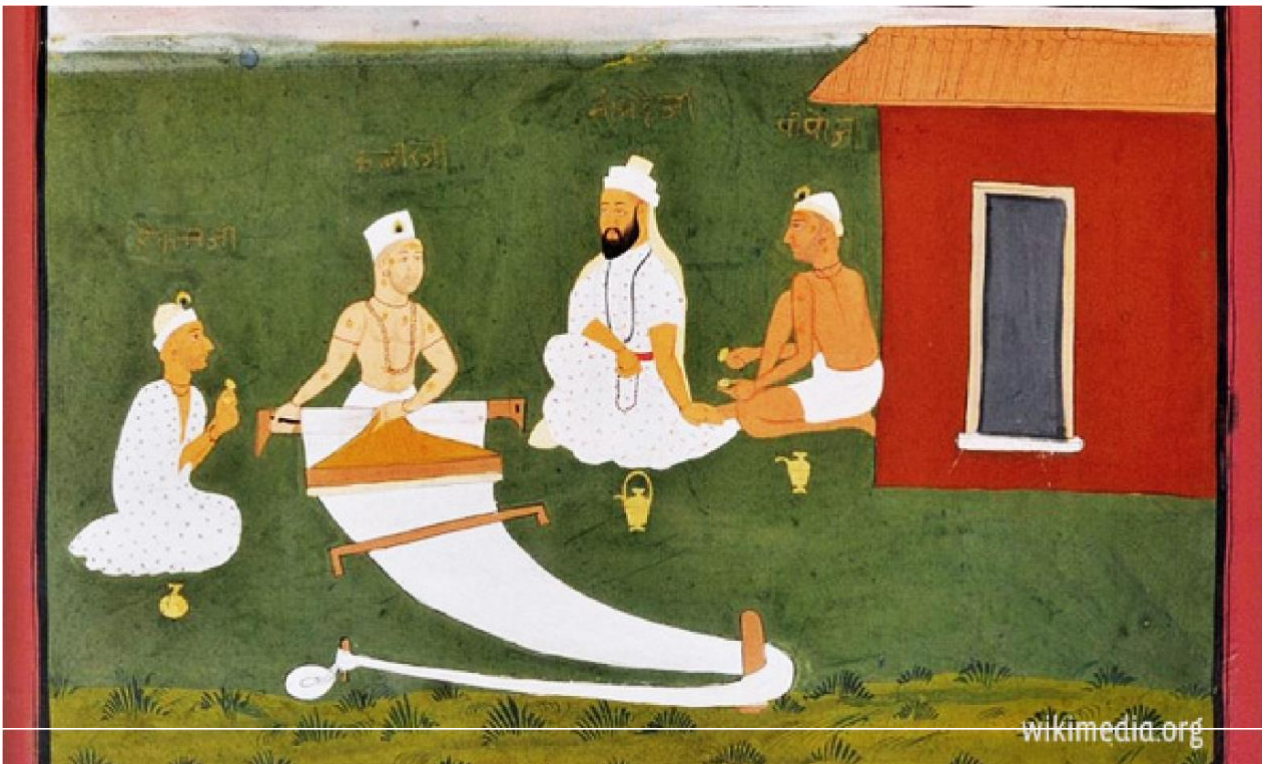


Kabir

Kabir was one of the great reformers of the Bhakti movement. He taught Hindu Muslim unity. He believed that God is one and 'Tshwar' and 'Allah' are different names of one God. He taught devotion to God and also preached brotherhood of man. He was against caste distinctions because he firmly believed that salvation could be attained only through good deeds.



Born in fifteenth century in **Benaras**, when the city was facing a cultural concoction with the **Bhakti movement**, the early life of Kabir played a crucial role in the formation of his spiritual ideologies and the tendency to observe with reason. **Kabir remained a disciple of Ramananda for several years.** Frequently accompanying his guru to discussions on theology and philosophy held with Muslim intellectuals and Brahmins shaped his thoughts and introduced him to Hindu and Sufi philosophy.



He lived in a weaver's neighborhood and obtained his livelihood by trading the cloth woven by his family. Writing was something which came to him while he worked on his loom, meditating with his mind fixed on alternating warps and wefts. Here is one of his numerous songs, which were inspired by the craft of weaving:

***I weave your name on the loom of
my mind,***

***To make my garment when you
come to me.***

***My loom has ten thousand
threads***

***To make my garment when you
come to me.***

***The sun and moon watch while I
weave your name;***

***The sun and moon hear while I
count your name.***

***These are the wages I get by day
and night***

To deposit in the lotus bank of my heart.

I weave your name on the loom of my mind

To clean and soften ten thousand threads

And to comb the twists and knots of my thoughts.

No more shall I weave a garment of pain.

***For you have come to me, drawn
For you have come to me, drawn
by my weaving,***

Ceaselessly weaving your name on the loom of my mind.

He was an eloquent observer with an opinion that was unaligned and perched on fairmindedness.
His poems often interpret the trivialities of life

Pilgrim paths

The sacred city is bounded by a road known as Panchakroshi; devout Hindus hope to walk that road and visit the city once in a lifetime and, if possible, to die there in old age



Kasi Viswanatha Temple.



Moksha is more than liberation from a life-rebirth cycle of suffering (*samsara*); *jivanmukti* (liberation in this life) and *videhamukti* (liberation after death) *Moksha* in this life includes psychological liberation from *adhyasa* (fears besetting one's life) and *avidya* (ignorance or anything that is not true knowledge)

Moksha in Hinduism, implies a setting-free of hitherto fettered faculties, a removing of obstacles to an unrestricted life, permitting a person to be more truly a person in the full sense; the concept presumes an unused human potential of creativity, compassion and understanding which had been blocked and shut out.



