



**BANARAS HINDU UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR: 5-7 JANUARY 2009

**UNDERSTANDING VARANASI THROUGH THE AGES:
CONTINUITY, CHANGE AND GLOBALIZATION**

(The Department of History, Faculty of Social Sciences, BHU, will be hosting an International Seminar on "understanding Varanasi through the Ages: Continuity, Change and Globalization". papers are invited across the world from all disciplines)

Varanasi, as the veritable cultural capital of India, has a long and unbroken past with hoary traditions and inimitable conventions. It is arguably the oldest city to retain its original cosmic orientation in its entirety, while negotiating with everyday mundane nuance. As the city of light, life and lilt, it continues to function as a sacred microcosm of Hindu universe. Cutting across caste, class, creed and gender, it offers a unique opportunity for Hindus to forge a religious identity through the process of expiatory mechanism. Sages, seers, widows, aged, destitute and people from all walks of life throng the city in search of solace, salvation and relief in the midst of their mayhem-ridden miserable life.

Varanasi demonstrates a curious blend of spiritual quest and material cupidity where both were exchanged at the expense of each other. While on the one hand, the prosperous trader visit the city with his bounty to accomplish his annual ritual

ceremony, on the other hand, the penury stricken pundit tries his level best to eke out his living at the expense of hapless devotee who is there to perform his parental funeral rites. Life in Varanasi is vigorous, vibrant and convivial. The city is always decked for the festivals of the one or the other religions. Musical evening, cultural events and other myriad of activities appealing to soul, body and spirit constitute the mainstay of city itineraries. Ghats, temples, bazaars and religious fairs are the integral part of incandescent Varanasi. They exhibit an everlasting sense of scenic beauty and sensibility of religious enthusiasm. Every landmark of the city offers a multi-layered experience, which is cosmic in its orientation and esoteric in explanation.

Interestingly enough, the city attempts to live out its past along with its present simultaneously while trying to grapple with the challenges of the future. Varanasi, located in the crescent bend of Ganges enjoyed a unique geographical position with a commercial advantage for riverine trade and transport. In spite of, its chequered political history, the city has been the seat of ancient wisdom, patronizing various schools of philosophy, arts and aesthetics, medical and material sciences, astronomy and other mathematical sciences and Sanskrit and allied subjects since eight hundred B.C.

The city has zealously guarded its meta-intellectual traditions in its pristine glory against all odds. It has been the place of thinkers, scholars and philosophers. Lord Buddha, perhaps the most influential thinker that India ever produced, delivered his maiden sermon in the vicinity of Varanasi. Shankara, Ramanuja, Ramananda and hosts of saints came to this city to get accreditation for their ideas and discourses. Heterodox thinkers, syncretic religious saints and other bhakti movement activists have immensely benefited from the fountain wisdom of Varanasi.

Varanasi made a remarkable contribution to the growth of Sanskrit language and scholarship with which stood crucible of time to remain standing as the Rajdhani of Sarva Vidhya Kala. Scores of colleges, schools, seminaries and institutions in the city are even today actively engaged in imparting Vedic learning with indomitable vigor, verve and tenacity.

Varanasi has the history of immortalized legacy which needs to be reconstructed from the pile of hagiographic fables. While myths and legends cannot be naively dismissed as illegitimate candidates of historical representation, they ought to be sufficiently sustained by other corroborative and collateral evidences. As a matter of fact, Varanasi fell prey at least four times into wholesale destruction of the invading foreign armies and on account of its cultural inheritance and cosmic relevance rose time and again from its rubbles to splendor. As of now, the city does not have any standing monument that would lend support to its claim for an antiquarian past. On the contrary, the physical fabric of the whole city bears testimony to its unravelled arcane archaism and streets and the alleys of the city are redolent with a smell of historical antecedent everywhere. Intrigued by enigmatic archaism of the city Mark Twain suavely remarked that "Benares is older than history, older than tradition, and older even than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together."

Varanasi is captivating, challenging and endlessly fascinating and no foreign scholar's visit in search of Hindu wisdom will be complete without visiting, living and writing about the city. Ages passed, time had elapsed, political regimes yielding place to new, but Varanasi the city of bliss in spite of its epiphenomenal variations continues to exude a sense of inexorable cultural self-sufficiency.

Undoubtedly, the city had withered all the political storms, cultural invasions and economic expropriations and now the question arises, will it be able to withstand the vagaries of globalization and its concomitance of rapid urbanization and nagging commercialization of culture. Is it possible to imagine the city of Lord Shiva without river Ganges and what would

be her fate in the vogue of impending environmental crises and global warming? And how will it cope up with the issues of pollutions and sanitation or some of our major concerns?

To discuss and delve into these vexed challenges, the Department of History, the Faculty of Social Science, Banaras Hindu University, is to organize a three day seminar commencing 5th to 7th January 2009. Scholars across the world, cutting across disciplines are requested to send their papers on any topic pertaining "Varanasi Through The Ages Focusing on Continuity, Change and Globalization". Hereby we have enlisted a corpus of topics for your pensive consideration.

1. Reflections on the spiritual importance of Varanasi.
2. Visualizing the space of Varanasi with maps and cartographic tools.
3. Maps, art and architecture painting and photographs of Varanasi.
4. Gods and Goddesses of Kashi.
5. Festivals and religious fairs of Varanasi.
6. Situating Varanasi in the past with archaeological evidences, with special reference to Terracottas from Rajghat and seal-sealings etc
7. Hagiography and cultural legends of Varanasi.
8. Varanasi the seat of learning, language scholarship and literary conventions.

9. Music Theatre and fine arts in Varanasi.
10. Contribution of Varanasi to medical and material sciences.
11. Trade, technology and textile in Varanasi – through the ages Sculptures from Sarnath, jade fashioning and enamel work.
12. Ayurveda, astronomy and other mathematical sciences in Varanasi..
13. Varanasi observed –by Sculptors , painters, photographers and cartographers.
14. Varanasi and its environs.
15. Demography, development and ecological disturbances and other pertinent issues.

Abstracts of the research paper must be sent on or before 30 September 2008 in about five hundred words. It must be typed in double space, processed through MS word with clear title. Final version of the paper should reach us on or before 30 November 2008. References must be furnished as end notes with continuous numbering in sequence.

Local hospitality and accommodation will be provided for all those whose papers are accepted for presentation. We are trying to arrange funds for travel allowance. Foreign Scholars are also encouraged to arrange funds through other funding agencies. For further enquiry contact us through following email or postal addresses.

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Convener: Understanding Varanasi Through The Ages: Continuity, Change and Globalization

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Looking forward to your early reply

With regards,

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Prof & Head

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