Long live Banāras: Vārāṇasī in Viśvanāth Mukharjī´s “Banā Rahe Banāras”

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Contents

Introduction

Vārāṇasī is a city of approximately one and a half million inhabitants in Uttar Pradeś, North India. It is an important religious and cultural center, especially for Hindus, containing a long tradition of Sanskrit learning, philosophy (Eck 1993: 58-59), and important textual works. Vārāṇasī is depicted as an important pilgrimage center already in Sanskrit māhātmyas such as the Kāśī Khaṇḍa of the Skanda Purāṇa or the Kāśī Rahasya of the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa (ibid.: 22-23). The most widely used names for the city are Vārāṇasī, Kāśī, and Banāras/Benāres.[1]

Perhaps the most famous English-language quote, permeating the tourism promotion apparatus of the Indian Government (Government of Uttar Pradeś, n.d. and Incredible India, n.d.) and academic works (see e.g. Eck 1993: 5) is by Mark Twain. He describes Vārāṇasī as "older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together" (Twain 1897: 480).

Many authors and scholars, some with a more Orientalist (Said 1978) point of view, have heavily emphasized the Hindu aspects of the city. However, Sārnāth, close to Vārāṇasī, holds a special importance for Buddhists as the place where the Buddha gave his first sermon. Additionally, there are large Muslim neighborhoods as well as Mughal-era mosques.

Throughout its history, the city has passed through many hands. After 600 B.C., it was a capital of the Kāśī kingdom; then under Kosala rule after the 5th century B.C.; Muhammad of Ghur took control in 1193 from the Gāhaḍavāla dynasty; it was under Muslim (and occasionally Marāṭhā) rule until 1775, followed by British rule, to give a few examples (Kulke and Rothermund 1986: 29, 33, 125, 187).

Due to its complex history, it is not so wise to determine Vārāṇasī as a static entity, a city that has always been *only* "Hindu", since that is not completely true. On a "religious" level,

[1] Some other names are e.g. Avimukta, Rudravāsa, Mahāśmaśāna, and Ānandavana (Eck 1993: 28-33 and Mukharjī 1958: 1). In this essay, "Vārāṇasī" is used unless a direct quotation uses a different name. When used as an adjective, the term "Banārasī" is used.

from the present-day point of view, the city is mainly Hindu, but it is not really so on a "historical" level. Portraying or thinking about the city as having remained unchanged through time is not necessarily the best way to inspect a city such as Vārāṇasī.

The majority population is Hindu, as are the most central traditions in the area, but depicting Vārāṇasī as a strictly Hindu city is somewhat misleading. Hinduism contains many forms under one name, and aspects that are more difficult to determine such as "Bir Babas"[2] make it even more complex. Traditions as different as cremation-ground dwelling Aghorīs and orthodox Vaiśnavites fall under the same term. The practices of these two groups are so far apart that it might seem odd to call them both "Hindu". But then again, one could also say that they rose from the same Hindu "root" and can be considered to be a part of a non-dualistic universe on a more philosophical level, even if their physical practices are vastly different.

Vārāṇasī is a city known for retaining its unique identity while many other cities have lost theirs due to modernization or globalization, for example. While Vārāṇasī has been renamed, passed through many eras and the hands of different rulers, the unique "freedom" that it has retained is very special and another place like it does not exist. Even though the city is very holy, local Brāhmaṇs are not very intolerant and prejudiced, and the inhabitants generally have an above-average interest in discussing public matters (Heber 1856: 187). This tolerance and active participation has been important in Vārāṇasī retaining its characteristics as a more heterogeneous, "free" area, resisting forced, homogenizing change and accepting multiple different opinions.

Some have considered Vārāṇasī to be a kind of microcosm of India (Eck 1993: 23), making it a highly useful topic of study. Literature related to Vārāṇasī written in Hindi from a non-religious point of view can help us form a more comprehensive picture of the city by providing us

[2] "Hero father", from Sanskrit "vīra": "hero", "chief". They are area-specific protectors, partly absorbed into Vārāṇasī's pantheon of deities through the city expanding to more rural zones; originally aniconic mounds, cones, or posts that have clothes and masks added on to them to make them resemble more popular deities, for example (Coccari 1989: 130-132). These deities are probably a continuation of ancient yakṣa worship in the form of Vīrs, considered a part of the Śaivite pantheon, mainly worshipped by lower-caste individuals. They can both protect or harm people (Motīcandra 1962: 32-34).

with an alternative understanding not commonly found in English-language sources, which focus quite heavily on religion. Analyzing works of local authors provides a more "authentic" depiction. It can even help in counteracting the disillusionment that Western tourists might experience when coming to the city equipped with perceptions rooted in colonial and popular tourist depictions. They might expect to find a "holy city" that is the antithesis of the material west but become disappointed when confronted with aspects that do not fit their view of what such a city should be like (Doron 2013: 187-193).

Local author Viśvanāth Mukharjī's (1924-1995) "Banā Rahe Banāras" from 1958 is the main primary source of this thesis. A part of the preface added posthumously describes Mukharjī as a true Banārasī: simultaneously stubborn and fun-loving; simultaneously crude and highly refined in his knowledge (Mukharjī 1958: ix-xi). The book, which remains untranslated in English or other languages, is a collection of short essays focusing on various aspects of Vārāṇasī such as its human and animal inhabitants, its physical characteristics, and its culture and customs, while emphasizing the unique, "free", and "uninhibited" identity of the city. The book has been reprinted four times, meaning that it is not irrelevant; at the very least it is being sold enough to merit the reprints. For this thesis, the editions that were accessible were the first[3] and fifth ones, from 1958 and 2017. "Banā Rahe Banāras" is an interesting source since Mukharjī claims to provide the reader with a depiction that is as comprehensive and factually accurate as possible, especially regarding history (ibid.: iii). This is highly useful since Vārāṇasī is often depicted as a homogenous "ancient Hindu city", ignoring various aspects that might not so easily fit into this agenda.

Mukharjī writes that the book is the first "sarcastic portrait" of any city that he is aware of and emphasizes the fact that he has had to resort to hearsay in some parts. He also apologizes for possible insults towards specific people or organizations (ibid.). As the book does

[3] It is likely that this is the first edition from 1958, since it only contains the preface from 1958, and not the newer second and third prefaces found in the fifth edition. It was accessed through hindisamay.com (see bibliography).

contain quite a healthy amount of sarcasm, it is important to try to take it into account – of course, this is not always easy, and misinterpretations can happen.

The time when the book was written is important, since in the 1950s, the presently highly popular right-wing "Hindutva"[4] agenda had not gained much power, even though it had existed since the 1920s, opposing the universalist perspective of the Congress party and opting for a communal national identity determined by Hinduism (Jaffrelot 2007: 3-5). This homogenizing ideology gained momentum, and it took over the government in 1999 through the "Indian People's Party" (BJP), remaining in power for five years (ibid.: 3). The BJP's election victories of 2014 and 2019 brought it back to power after a period of internal divisions had weakened the Hindutva "family" (ibid.: 20-23). As Mukharjī was a Hindu, what he has written before Hindutva entered mainstream politics, but in a time when it was already present, is useful in finding a perspective that is "Hindu" but not so influenced by Hindutva as many present depictions of Vārāṇasī might be. Additionally, analyzing differences between the two available editions might provide valuable insights related to possible biases of the author and the editors.

The focus of this thesis is to inspect the special, unrestrained, and independent freedom of Vārāṇasī through "Banā Rahe Banāras". What is this unique freedom of Vārāṇasī like according to Mukharjī, and how have the issues and events described by him in "Banā Rahe Banāras" played a crucial role in sustaining and creating it?

This paper will continue with explaining the research methodology, followed by a literature review. The main analysis will follow, split thematically into various categories of information regarding the unique freedom of Vārāṇasī, ending with inspecting language use and the differences between the two available editions. The paper will end with a conclusion and suggestions for further research.

[4] See e.g. Anderson and Jaffrelot 2018.

Chapter 1: Methodology

Regarding methodology, this thesis uses the "new historicism" of literary theory. "New historicism" is basically an approach that seeks to link the work in question with its accurate temporal, spatial, cultural, and individual context (Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000: 13-18).

Context is key; it is easy to forget about context while viewing an older work from a present-day perspective, leading to an inaccurate analysis. Of course, it should be pointed out that it is not entirely possible to place a work in its accurate context since in doing this, one must take into account what kind of "nation" a specific author imagines into being (Anderson 1983), or what kind of tradition the author "invents" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), and without actually *being* the author oneself, there will be some parts that are left partly or completely unclear.

Additionally, regarding the context of the book, the original version was published in 1958, and the fifth edition is from 2017. So, the fifth edition was published after Mukharjī had passed away, and between these two editions, numerous differences exist, perhaps because the publishers have wanted to make the book more suitable for the present age (discussed in more detail later).[5] In any case, one can assume that the changes between these two editions might not have been entirely done by the author himself.[6] In studying this work from the "new historicism" perspective, one needs to keep in mind that the temporal context of the book is quite flexible both in terms of when it was written (from the 1950s to 1990s, with edits possibly done even after this) and what time the text itself is about (from ancient times to the modern era). The spatial context is easier to understand, since the book is almost entirely set in Vārāṇasī.

Discourse analysis is also used here to understand *how* and *why* something was written. For example, a single word or a proverb can be interpreted in multiple ways, and context is what determines the intended meaning. The setting of the text is identified more clearly, recognizing

[5] References marked with "§" are absent from the 2017 edition.

[6] An edition published between 1958 and 1995 (the year of the author's death) would have been useful to see if the changes already exist in it, but unfortunately no such edition was available for this research.

where the events take place, who is talking to whom, who narrates, and in what way this takes place. Understanding what is meant as sarcasm and what is not is a part of this, for example. This is perhaps not so clearly visible from the actual research, but in an attempt to place the work and author in their appropriate contexts in as many ways as possible, this approach is required. It works in the "background" of the research.

Additional theoretical background will be provided by Culler (1997), whose thoughts about a "poetic" and a "hermeneutic" approach in analyzing literary works are quite applicable here. The "hermeneutic" is related to interpreting a text as good as possible, whereas the "poetic" is more concerned about how the text creates specific effects (Culler 1997: 61-62). In this thesis, using both these approaches is useful. The way how a literary work creates a specific effect definitely affects how its context (the city of Vārāṇasī, for example) comes alive through the words ("poetics"), and striving for the most accurate context through understanding the meaning of the text and specific parts of it ("hermeneutics") is equally important (Littunen 2019: 3).

Since "Banā Rahe Banāras" is in Hindi (with some Sanskrit and Persian) and there is no English translation, the working process of this thesis has involved translating the book into English to allow easier inspection. For this reason, dictionaries have played an important part in this research (see bibliography).

The International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST) transliteration scheme is used here, unless within a quote or an author's name; in this case the transliteration of the source is used. Additionally, since in Hindi, the inherent vowels[7] of some syllables are "silent", Hindi words will be transliterated without these, even though in proper IAST they would be applied because in Sanskrit these vowels are pronounced. Since the IAST scheme does not cover the two retroflex

[7] "Schwa" or "अ". See e.g. Pandey 1990.

characters "ड़" and "ढ़", these are represented as "ṛ" and "ṛh"[8] respectively, and "ग़" is represented as "ġ" (which means that these three characters follow the ISO 15919 scheme instead).

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter will inspect written works about Vārāṇasī in order to bring forth adequate background information. Many depictions of Vārāṇasī exist, of which the oldest ones are perhaps in the Purāṇas (see Eck 1993: 347-348). However, within the confines of this thesis, a comparison of "Banā Rahe Banāras" with Purāṇic and other Sanskrit sources is not possible. Regarding more recent works, two main categories can be identified; those that focus on a more stereotypical, even Orientalist depiction or have chosen to mainly focus on Hinduism due to research purposes; and those that focus on more specific aspects of the city or try to portray a more heterogeneous Vārāṇasī. The literature review will briefly inspect both categories.

Chapter 2.1. Stereotypical, Orientalist, and majority-focused depictions

The stereotypical or Orientalist depictions need to be briefly mentioned because when it comes to Vārāṇasī, there are so many that they cannot be ignored, and many are highly similar with each other. These depictions might also portray a unique city, but the uniqueness is not necessarily based on facts, and more on beliefs, hopes, and even underlying political views. Many of these kinds of sources do not portray a "free" city. In other words, "uniqueness" and "freedom" are not necessarily interconnected in this literature.

As mentioned above, Mark Twain visited the city and wrote about it in his 1897 "Following the Equator…", containing his famous quote. It is worthy to note that most of what Twain writes is

[8] In IAST, "ṛ" represents "ऋ", and "ṛh" would be two characters (ऋ and ह). Here, the character "ऋ" will be written as "r̥", following ISO 15919.

quite negative, at least from a present-day point of view, basically depicting Hindu traditions in Vārāṇasī as laughable and dirty. This could be partly explained as Twain's humor, but nevertheless, he paints a highly Orientalist picture. It could even be said that Twain did not really "care" to find out what local people thought because his material is so largely based on missionary accounts. This makes one wonder if he even really visited the city; and if he did, was he inside his bungalow the entire time?

Reverend Arthur Parker's 1901 "A Hand-Book of Benares" was perhaps the most crucial missionary source that Twain used; almost everything that Twain writes about Vārāṇasī can be found in Parker's guidebook. Parker dismisses Purāṇic sources as having "no historical value" (Parker 1901: 6), calls all Hindu religion "idolatry", and seems to find Hindus always superstitious (ibid.: 26). Parker also focuses mainly on the Hindu aspects of Vārāṇasī. He does, however, give a historical overview of the city throughout different periods of rule such as the Mughals and the British, but all in all, his depiction, perhaps due to when it was written and the author's reverend status, is very stereotypical and Orientalist.

Hertel and Humes, in their 1993 "Living Banaras…" depict a Hindu Vārāṇasī, a holy city. Their point of view can be described as Orientalist, even though it should be noted that the emphasis on Hinduism in their work could be a result of their research focus.

Similar depictions of a "holy Hindu city" are found in "Varanasi: Sustainable Development Goals…" (Singh and Rana 2017) and "Sustainable Development of Heritage City: Varanasi" (SPA New Delhi n.d.). These depictions do not completely ignore all other aspects but are very Hindu-centric and related to developing the city into a form that sustains (Hindu) heritage, bringing in more visitors and profits. Basically, the idea is to physically modernize the city without forgetting its assumed "Hindu" identity. For example, Singh and Rana mention the silk industry in their list of traditional crafts (Singh and Rana 2017: 230) but fail to mention that this industry is almost entirely run by Muslims. The latter text mentions "Declining Handicraft and Traditional

Economic Activities" as a "major issue" of Vārāṇasī, but again, Muslims are not mentioned (SPA New Delhi n.d.: 8).

K.S. Muthiah's 1911 book "Smiling Benāres…" can be considered to be "re-Orientalism", that is, the concept of "'Orientals'…perpetrating Orientalisms no less than 'non-Orientals' and, moreover, perpetrating certain and selected types of Orientalisms" (Lau and Mendes 2011: 3). Muthiah's book is written during the time of British rule but provides us with an interesting depiction of the city. He focuses on the "original" (i.e. "Hindu") state of the city, but dedicates chapters to Buddhism and Mughals, for example, even though the Hindu bias remains, accompanied with a hint of appreciation for the British colonialists in helping Vārāṇasī retain some of its old splendor. Muthiah clearly disproves the accounts of missionaries and appreciates Sanskrit sources, but nonetheless, puts forth a "re-Orientalist" depiction of the city as only "Hindu" and "ancient".

Chapter 2.2. Depictions of a more heterogeneous nature

"Banaras: a City of Light" by Diana Eck (1993) is perhaps the most famous work about Vārāṇasī by a Westerner. It focuses on the Hindu aspects, but also discusses Buddhism and the period of Muslim rule (even though only as a "side" mention), and in doing so, provides the reader with a detailed description of the traditions and history of Vārāṇasī. This work is very important, covering a wide range of topics, and even provides a list of Sanskrit Purāṇas involving Vārāṇasī. For this research, "Banaras: a City of Light" is used as a secondary source that can be consulted if specific questions about traditions, customs, or dates mentioned in "Banā Rahe Banāras" need to be further checked. Nita Kumār's "The Artisans of Banaras…" (1988) is used similarly since it discusses gahrebājī, bahrī alang, picnics, ways of addressing others, etc.; all terms and concepts that are present in Mukharjī's book. Of course, this is inevitable as Mukharjī himself was a part of

explaining what being a Banārasī means to Kumār (Kumār 1988: 83). Kumār elaborates on these ideas further, making her work doubly useful.

Kāśīnāth Singh's 2004 book "Kāśī kā Assī" is sarcastic and humoristic, focusing on the Assī neighborhood, portrayed as a microcosm of Vārāṇasī. The book depicts a Vārāṇasī that is undergoing change due to right-wing Hindu politics, corporations, and tourism, for example, which are increasingly homogenizing the city by only "allowing" one kind of portrayal. Free speech is something that Singh identifies as gradually eroding away, being replaced with communalism and homogeneous ideas of what Vārāṇasī has "always" been. In this way, "Kāśī kā Assī" depicts a situation of reframing and retelling history from a present-day point of view for one's own gain; a partly political project masquerading as being completely about "religion" and the "truth" about Vārāṇasī. Singh's book is especially important since it shows the perspective of another local, but more than 30 years later; it is one depiction of what the city has become due to changes that Mukharjī already identifies in "Banā Rahe Banāras", such as the banning of certain festivals.

Choudhary and Prakash write about how space is used in Vārāṇasī. Hindu right-wing ideas have resulted in the creation of "architectures of fear", which restrict the usage of the city by lower castes, but do not reach all spheres of activity: for example, the mostly lower-caste Bīr/Vīr worship exists simultaneously with the "architectures of fear". The counterpart, "spaces of hope", is seen in Dalits' Ravidās Jayanti celebrations, during which they can use public space more freely.[9] Vārāṇasī is a "city in denial" that has forgotten its heterogeneous origins and is increasingly moving towards a more homogeneous state (Choudhary and Prakash 2016: 41). The article explains how a major part of the most famous architecture of Vārāṇasī is actually from the 19th and 20th centuries (ibid.: 42-44) instead of some undetermined "ancient" era. This is related to a "resurrection" of these architectures due to colonialist and Hindu nationalist political agendas (ibid.: 42).

[9] This ability to make a stronger claim for urban space is enabled by a growing Dalit political presence due to the expansion and success of the Dalit diaspora and the economic and political clout of Ravidās' followers. Many of the Dalits who come to Vārāṇasī for the Jayanti are from other areas in India or from abroad (Borup, Qvortrup Fibiger, and Kühle 2019: 152-153).

Madhuri Desai has researched the architectural aspects of Vārāṇasī from a point of view that is not clearly tied to any political or religious agenda. Her research in "Banaras Reconstructed…" carefully lists various reasons why the popular narrative of Vārāṇasī as an "ancient Hindu city" is not factually correct, at least when it comes to physical representations. The city that we see today is reconstructed multiple times by multiple actors such as the Mughals (who destroyed temples but were also patrons for local Hindus). Through Desai's work, we can see how the city has not remained static, but is a living city, constantly evolving and changing.

Desai has continued her research in "The Vishweshwur temple…" through focusing on perhaps the most contested site in Vārāṇasī, the Vishweshwur temple,[10] where a famous Śiva liṅgam is held. The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb chose not to destroy the temple, and instead repurposed it by partly demolishing it and then turning it into the Jñānvāpī (Gyan Vapi) mosque. In 1780, a "new temple" with the same name was constructed next to the mosque by the Marāṭhā queen Ahilyābāī Holkar. Through a process of demolition and rebuilding, the "faithscape" of Vārāṇasī has redefined what a Hindu temple is by "rebuilding upon the physical and spiritual debris of a mythic past", during which some elements remain intact, some transform, some mutate, and some are destroyed (Bharne and Krusche 2012: 237). In this way, acts of faith are more important than physical manifestations, since everything can be considered to be a part of an omniscient God (ibid.).

Desai's research reveals that what is represented as "ancient" is not always so; the "ancientness" is more rooted in belief and retelling of history than in actual physical structures. Her work goes hand in hand with Mukharjī, who writes that most temples in the city are not more than 300 years old, even though they are depicted as being from different "yugas"[11] by Brāhmaṇ priests (Mukharjī 1958: chapter 4§). The yuga system, combined with existing architecture, posits these

[10] More commonly known as the Viśvanāth temple.

[11] Here, "yuga" roughly means "era" or "age". Yugas are parts of the mahāyuga/caturyuga system (Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online: "Kalpas and Yugas").

structures into a mythological, religious perception of time, which then combines with present-day agendas. In this way, the distinction between "religious" and "scientific" knowledge is blurred, based on religious or political opinions, for example. Desai's research helps in distinguishing what is "religious" and what is "scientific" when inspecting "Banā Rahe Banāras". However, Desai focuses on what happened after the Mughals took control, bypassing the idea that before being a religious center, Vārāṇasī was an important commercial center, starting from the eighth century BC (Bakker 1996: 32-33). The commercial and geographical importance of the city is also attested to by Motīcandra (1962: 1). This "commercial space" transformed into increasingly "sacred space" in the fourth to sixth centuries CE during the time of the Gupta empire (Bakker 1996: 33), and this gap of over a thousand years from the Guptas to the Mughals is not really discussed by Desai.

Christiana Zara's "Performing the Sacred…" presents Vārāṇasī as a living city, since everyone who is present in the city continuously redefines what it is "supposed" to be. In this way, multiple actors can portray the city as ancient and unchangeable from the point of view of *their* present time. Zara's article deconstructs the static nature that many push on the city and represents Vārāṇasī as "living heritage" instead. Her article makes one think of how to avoid "misrepresenting" or misunderstanding "Banā Rahe Banāras" by inadvertently viewing it from too much of a contemporary point of view, for example. Zara also focuses on the city constantly redefining itself after the needs of tourists (Zara 2015: 40). This happens through their "gaze", i.e. everyone sees what they see in different ways, according to their background, education, and other factors (ibid.: 27-28). This adds a deeper dimension to how in creating this thesis, it should be recognized that one's "gaze" makes a big difference as to how one will understand and perceive Vārāṇasī.

Chapter 3: Main analysis

The main analysis looks at multiple aspects of Vārāṇasī related to the unique freedom that the city enjoys according to Mukharjī, divided into categories regarding humans, animals, architecture and other material aspects, religion, and the concept "tīn lok se nyārī".[12] Language use and the differences between the two available editions of "Banā Rahe Banāras" are also analyzed.

Chapter 3.1: The unique freedom of the humans of Vārāṇasī

The human population of Vārāṇasī is the main concern of Mukharjī in his book. He writes that "real Banārasīs" will not be stopped in their daily actions even by strikes or typhoons, are generous even if poor, and truly obey the principle "guest is God", even guiding lost tourists due to intimate feelings of kinship (Mukharjī 1958: 45). The "real Banārasīs" want to show people how the city is *really* like, and are displeased if foreign leaders, for example, come to the city and are "kept in purdah as if they are in the Mughal period" instead of having the essential experiences of Vārāṇasī such as bhang,[13] gahrebājī,[14] or boat trips (ibid.: chapter 10§).

Banārasīs are very fond of their freedom, having considered themselves to be free long before 1947 (ibid.: 107), the year India became independent. Their way of living, "Banarasipan", consists of "simplicity, carefreeness, contentment, and love of certain 'Banarasi' things such as natural beauty, darshan, pan, *bhāng* (an intoxicant), and *malai* (cream)", and equality (Kumār 1988: 82). Banārasīs have always voiced their opposition to new orders/arrangements, new laws, and new things in general: the first strike in India took place in Vārāṇasī on the 24th of August

[12] "Unique from the three worlds of earth, heaven, and hell"; also commonly used with Mathurā, another Indian holy city. "Tīn lok": the three lower worlds, the "Vedic realms" of the Purāṇic worldview (see Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online: "Vertical Space and the Egg of Brahmā").

[13] An edible/drinkable form of cannabis, "भांग".

[14] See "Language use".

1790, and in 1809, locals protested the imposition of a house tax. Banārasīs also opposed Harijan[15] temple entry, which Mukharjī sarcastically describes as a result of the Banārasīs wanting to always remain free (Mukharjī 1958: 107). This could be interpreted as "Harijans" being outside the "real Banārasī" category, since they most likely would want "freedom" as well, but this is more related to how Banārasīs protest anything that is *forced* upon them due to their "svacchandatā".[16] Even if "Banarasipan" includes equality, imposing anything forcefully will lead to opposition, even if that which is imposed is aimed at producing more equality.

The "freedom" of Vārāṇasī is also seen in daily activities: freely moving on the streets and urinating wherever one pleases are a part of this (ibid.: 108). Even shopkeepers might refuse to sell if they are in the middle of a chess game, for example, claiming that they do not have the requested wares or demand a quadruple price in order to get the customer to leave (ibid.: 107).

In terms of outside appearance, the dressing habits of Banārasīs are described as unique and "free" since any clothes and colors are accepted and used (ibid.). In Vārāṇasī, it is not possible to know what kind of person is in question just by looking at their outward appearance. "Who knows in which form one might meet Nārāyaṇ":

का जाने केहि भेषमें नारायण मिल जाँय ।
(ibid.: 87)

Mukharjī mentions that the ancestors of king Kāśya[17] came to the city to be independent after being

[15] Mukharjī uses Gandhi's term "Harijan" (Rao 2009: 15), which was dismissed by Ambedkar who preferred "Dalit" mainly because of the Hindu connotations of "Harijan". In his last years, Ambedkar focused on Dalits being originally Buddhist non-Hindus instead of the lowest rung of the Hindu Varṇa system (ibid.: 148-160).

[16] Monier-Williams translates this as "independent action" or "uncontrolled behavior". In Hindi it means "unboundedness".

[17] An ancient king, an ancestor of Divodāsa (Eck 1993: 25). Mukharjī speculates that "Kāśī" could have come from Kāśya (Mukharjī 1958: 2). Eck mentions the same idea, adding that the most common origin explanation is the Sanskrit root "kāś", "to shine" (1993: 25-26).

denied a share of their family's ancestral property (Mukharjī 1958: 2). Subsequently, king Kāśya made it widely known that Kāśī is a special area where, upon dying, a "certificate of Śivlok was obtained" (i.e. a certificate to go to Śivlok) (ibid.: 82). The Mughals came to loot the city,[18] and Aurangzeb changed the name of the city to Muhammadābād, because he thought that no "juice" ("ras"[19]) is actually made ("banā") in the city, and the people are not "juicy" either. Thus, he thought they were not living up to the name (ibid.: 5). This is satire by Mukharjī, as Aurangzeb's actual motives were probably related to his re-imagining of the city as more Islamic (Desai 2019: 77-78). The British realized that Banārasīs are really strange; they drink bhang, do gahrebājī, and talk really fast, and for this reason the British chose to keep the name of the city as "Benāras" (i.e. "Binā ras", "without juice"[20]) (Mukharjī 1958: 5). These different rulers have affected the freedom of the city, determining what Vārāṇasī should be themselves; the Kāśya dynasty in an attempt to become "free", and the Mughals and British more through restricting the freedom of the city as "outside" actors exercising their authority.

Ways of addressing people in Vārāṇasī are also special; calling one another "gurū"[21] is a common thing (ibid.: 58). Mukharjī mentions two types of "gurūs": those who teach in universities, colleges, and schools, and those who teach "the dead language (Sanskrit)" in their homes (ibid.: 59). Additionally, some teach painting, crafts, or theft to their disciples, while others merely "whisper a mantra in the ear and prepare an army of male and female disciples"[22]:

[18] Mukharjī does not mention Mughal patronage (during the reign of Akbar) (Desai 2017: 14). However, it is clear that the most concrete reminders of the Mughal era are e.g. the Viśvanāth temple destruction and the building of the Jñānvāpī mosque (ibid.: 67).

[19] The word "ras" can mean multiple things; the Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary translates it as "juice", "essence", or "taste", for example. "Juice" is used here due to the Aurangzeb story.

[20] In this case, "Binā ras" could also be translated as "without essence".

[21] "Teacher". Mainly used to mean "dear" in contemporary Banāras. Mukharjī often spells "gurū", contrary to the more common "guru". Chaturvedi (1970) gives the same spelling, but all other dictionaries consulted here use "guru".

[22] This refers to proselytizing gurus.

कानमें मंत्र फूँककर चेला-चेलियोंकी फौज तैयार करते हैं ।
(ibid.)

Mukharjī writes that every Banārasī considers himself to be a "gurū" (ibid.: 61), even though he does mention that the "gurū" address is reserved to Brāhmaṇs (ibid.: 58). Additionally, "rājā"[23] is not only used for the Kāśī Nareś, the actual king of Vārāṇasī; Banārasī people use this for each other as a respectful way of address (ibid.: 48).

Mukharjī has dedicated an entire chapter to the Ahīrs,[24] since milk is so important to Banārasīs, and mentions how Ahīrs live in most neighborhoods, forming the second largest population after Brāhmaṇs (ibid.: 62). Ahīrs are described as having a historical significance as able fighters who have protected Vārāṇasī even more than the Kṣatriyas, which is why to honor the Ahīrs, "the people of Kāśī call them 'Sardārs'"[25]:

इस जातिको सम्मानित करने के लिए ही काशीकी जनता उन्हें – सरदार – कहकर पुकारती है ।
(ibid.: 63)

However, Mukharjī also mentions that a bad smell on a street means that an Ahīr lives there (ibid.: chapter 15§). In any case, the unique ways of address in Vārāṇasī emphasize the city as a free area where the inhabitants do not conform to "outside" conventions.

Various things that are sold in Vārāṇasī are mentioned as being special, such as sāṛīs, surtī,[26] and the

[23] "King".

[24] An intermediate backward caste (OBC).

[25] "Chief", "leader", or a term of address generally used for a Sikh.

[26] Chewing tobacco.

"langṛā ām",[27] but Mukharjī describes Banārasī pān[28] as so famous and unique that it is imitated all over India. He considers pān to be central for a true "Banārasī" (ibid.: chapter 10§) and has dedicated an entire chapter for discussing pān and Vārāṇasī's status as a perhaps unprecedentedly large commercial center for it (ibid.: 75). Even the way Banārasīs consume pān is unique; in other cities, it is generally eaten, but in Vārāṇasī it is dissolved in the mouth, resulting in red-colored saliva which, when spat out, colors the houses in the alleys red from the waist down (ibid.: 76). A special practice of spitting pān spit from the roofs of houses alongside alleys on unsuspecting people walking below is also described. The idea is to get the person who has been spat on to start hurling insults, and when this happens, the "spitters" will be pleased, and possibly invite the person to their house, give them clean clothes and apologize. However, if the person who has been spat on does not become angry, the "spitters" became angry and disappointed themselves (ibid.: 51). Pān use also explains how many Banārasīs sometimes talk with their mouths facing upwards so that the pān spit will not fall from their mouths (ibid.: 76). The fact that Mukharjī himself died from mouth cancer, possibly due to heavy pān use, might explain the extent of his fascination with it (ibid.: x). However, he is not wrong about the centrality of pān in Vārāṇasī; this I can attest to myself.

"Bahrī alang" ("outside area"[29]), in addition to being the area where most of the poor and lower castes reside (ibid.: 25), is described in the book as a central custom of Banārasīs. It is the "main entertainment of Banaras" (Kumār 1988: 84), consisting of daily and impulsive trips, and seasonal and specially planned ones. The daily one is generally done alone, the impulsive with friends, and the seasonal and planned with family (ibid.: 97-98). The distinction is not only one of "inside" and "outside"; this custom requires solitude, and "peace" is emphasized (ibid.: 98).

[27] A famous mango variety.

[28] A stimulant of betel leaf, areca nut, and various other ingredients depending on the maker and the type of pān. The Banārasī variety uses pān leaves from Magadh in Bihār, which are baked in closed charcoal-warmed rooms, causing them to change to a white color. This adds value to the leaves and makes them *Banārasī* pān.

[29] A free translation, formed from its opposition to "bhītarī mahal", the "inside neighborhood". The adjective "bahrā" is from the verb "to amuse". "Alang" means "side" or "direction". So, another translation could be "side of amusement", i.e. the "side" of town that is for amusement.

Suitable areas move further away because the city expands and takes over the old locations, making them too noisy or crowded (ibid.: 85). There are two explanations for "bahrī alang"; the "historical" and the "intellectual". The "historical" perspective considers the heavy dependence of Banārasīs on the tourist trade as having caused a fondness for traveling around, and the "intellectual" one considers the custom a result of the lack of fresh air and sunlight in the city (ibid.: 90). If one wants to see the real form of the city and its inhabitants, one should go and see "bahrī alang" (Mukharjī 1958: 40). It is a custom of going to a "divine place" to enjoy, a place where the "gurū" people can wander while being free. This place needs to have water, be suitable for relieving themselves (i.e. defecate), be fit for preparing and consuming bhang, and good for washing one's clothes (ibid.: 39). The place for defecation is of utmost importance; some nobility who consider it a sin to defecate in the city even cross the Ganges with boats to defecate; Mukharjī informs that the darśan[30] of this "divine view" of boats crossing the river can be seen in the evenings (ibid.: 29).

Going to the "bahrī alang" could be said to be mainly for higher-class and caste individuals since the poor and the lower castes already live in these areas. However, this custom is increasingly a lower-class and older age one; education and cinema perceptions deter higher classes and younger people from the practice since it is considered old-fashioned (Kumār 1988: 107-109). Additionally, "bahrī alang" is a predominantly male custom as it involves things that women generally do not do outside in Vārāṇasī, such as defecating (ibid.: 88). Muslims also participate, but use a different terminology, and do not connect ritual elements to the practice as Hindus do; even though for the Hindus, the practice is described in non-religious terms even if visiting a temple is included in the trip (ibid.: 101-103).

Picnics are similar to "bahrī alang" but involve more people, making food, and visiting temples or other sight-worthy places. It seems that the picnics do not take place in exactly the same locations as "bahrī alang" does; they are held in "special places" (Mukharjī 1958: 79), but

[30] "Darśana means 'seeing'. In the religious sense, it means beholding the divine image…" (Eck 1993: 20).

whether or not these places are included in “bahrī alang” is unclear. Mukharjī writes that someone who has never been to these picnics cannot consider himself to be a Banārasī. “This is called the Banārasī picnic. The place where there is the freedom of not only the mind but also the body. Is there freedom like this in any place of the world?”

इसे कहते हैं बनारसी पिकनिक । जहाँ मनकी ही नहीं, तनकी भी आजादी रहती है । है दुनियाके किसी परदेमें ऐसी आजादी ?

(ibid.: 81)

The practices of “calauvā”, transferring sicknesses to another neighborhood from one’s own locality, and “utārā”, “lifting” disease from an individual, mediated by individuals through “ojhāī”,[31] are common. Those who know this “science” are highly respected in their neighborhoods, and are put to work where regular doctors, Yūnānī physicians,[32] and Āyurvedic physicians[33] have failed (ibid.: 82-83).

Three customs are described by Mukharjī as being indigenous to Vārāṇasī, or at least existing there in a unique form. The first, “Gangā pujaiyā”, is not the common form of worshipping the Ganges, but instead a ritual where women from the neighborhood decorate a recently married couple and walk them from their house to the Gangā ghāṭ, singing songs. This is humiliating for the groom (ibid.: 84) because of being surrounded by the neighborhood women right after his marriage and being the center of attention. The second, “Śayan parikramā”, “lying circumambulation”, is done for religious merit, and basically means circumambulation through repeatedly lying down and getting up.[34] The third, “Gayā darśan pradarśan” (“Gayā darśan presentation”), is about going to

[31] The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary translates “ojhāī” as “the practice of sorcery”.

[32] “Yūnānī” (“Unani”) is a Perso-Arabic system of traditional medicine that became popular in India around 1350 AD (Raviśankar and Śukla 2008: 9).

[33] “Āyurveda” is a traditional system of Indian medicine (Britannica Academic, n.d.).

[34] This practice is more widespread, see e.g. Ghosh and Dixit 2014.

Gayā[35] (in Bihār) for specific rituals, and upon coming back, "bragging" about what one has accomplished (ibid.). So, the freedom of Vārāṇasī is evident in its unique customs, and even customs that also exist elsewhere assume unique, "free" identities in the area.

Thugs[36] are common in Vārāṇasī; the best teachers of their "art" are from the city, and even the infamous "silk-handkerchief thugs" used handkerchiefs from Vārāṇasī (ibid.: 86). Many thugs also masquerade as fake priests because pilgrims bring a lot of money with them in order to gain merit by having monasteries and temples built, for example (ibid.). Mukharjī writes that it is good that the Banārasīs are aware of thugs and their habits, since this makes it less likely that they will be cheated. However, this has caused the thugs to become more progressive, inventing new methods of cheating people (ibid.: chapter 21§). The thugs are accepted; their "way of life" is just another aspect of the city, and other inhabitants need to accept and deal with it since the other option would be to restrict the thugs' activities, which would in turn restrict the "freedom" of Vārāṇasī.

In terms of general daily activities or customs, women are not really mentioned in the book, except in chapter 23, which is about female singers in Vārāṇasī. They are only described in a very list-like manner; how famous they are, which musical styles they know, and so on. Mukharjī does seem to respect them for their skills, but the chapter is quite general. Perhaps the lack of information regarding women can be attributed to Mukharjī's own gender and the time when the book was written, but this remains unclear. Thus, the level of freedom women enjoy in Vārāṇasī is not clearly described.

Mukharjī depicts a free and special city that has unique traditions and customs, where appearances can deceive, people are accommodating and friendly in most ways, and heterogeneity is quite

[35] Gayā is an important center for rituals giving liberation to the souls of deceased relatives through Śrāddha Yajña (ancestor sacrifice), consisting of Tarpaṇa and Piṇḍa Dān (Vidyārthī 1961: 33-38).

[36] Hindi: "ठग" ("ṭhug") has been adapted as a loanword to English so "thug" is used here.

appreciated. Even aspects that could be considered negative, such as thugs or spitting pān on people, are a part of the freedom of Vārāṇasī.

However, it is difficult to become a "real Banārasī", and even being born in the city and living there for one's entire life is not firm proof of this disposition (ibid.: 41). Who are the "real Banārasīs" then? Mukharjī writes that "even the washer-man of Banāras *considers* himself to be a noble" (emphasis added) (ibid.: 51), and Ahīrs are also respected. It seems that there is a dichotomy[37] between migrants and the "original" inhabitants, and for the migrants, it is very difficult to become a "real Banārasī", especially if they identify with their places of birth more than with Vārāṇasī. It is worth repeating here that "bahrī alang" involves (in the author's time) the more fortunate parts of the population, the "real Banārasīs", as going to places where more disadvantaged populations live and defecating and "partying" there. However, to be fortunate in this way does not necessarily mean to be rich or upper-caste; one just needs a suitable location, enough time, and a "real Banārasī" willingness to participate.

So, does Banārasī freedom exclude Muslims, since they are not really mentioned except when related to Mughals? What about Dalits, or women? Is this "āzādī" for only upper-caste Hindu men? For example, "urinating anywhere one wants" (even though Mukharjī is being sarcastic when he mentions this, referring to the "unboundedness" of Banārasīs) is not very easy for women, and Muslims and those on the lower echelons of society certainly want to be "free" as well! It is unclear if any of these ignored people can fully be "real Banārasīs" as they are unmentioned for the most part, but at least they were not important enough to be included in Mukharjī's depiction of what Vārāṇasī and its freedom are really like.

[37] Also evident in "Kāśī kā Assī".

Chapter 3.2: The unique freedom of the animals of Vārāṇasī

Mukharjī identifies the unique freedom of the city in the animals of Vārāṇasī and their behavior as well. He mainly describes bulls and monkeys, of which the former is clearly his main focus, since he has even dedicated an entire chapter for them. One would imagine that Mukharjī puts so much emphasis on bulls because Vārāṇasī is the city of Śiva, and the mount of Śiva is a bull, Nandi/Nandin.[38]

If one meets a "vehicle of Lord Śankar",[39] one might be in trouble, and every year one or two people "get the benefit of Kāśī" due to the bulls. This means that they die and receive the freedom from the cycle of rebirths that dying in the city is considered to give (ibid.: 17). The bulls are a symbol of the freedom and unboundedness of the city, able to do whatever they want. Violating rules related to defecation or urination is "their birthright" (ibid.: 71). The bulls fight when they want to, paying no heed to anything else happening around them. If they are hungry, they go to any market to eat the wares, for which they are never punished (ibid.: 73).

However, Mukharjī specifies that he means only those bulls who have not been castrated; bulls that refuse to be yoked to bullock carts, do not have owners, and perhaps have had a Vṛṣotsarg, a specific ritual in which captive bulls are branded with a trident symbol and then released, done to them. The people who perform the ritual do it for the benefit of their deceased relatives but also to save the bulls from castration and usage as cart-pullers for the rest of their lives (ibid.: 70-71). Additionally, in 1852 during East India Company rule, the people of Vārāṇasī protested the capturing of branded free-roaming bulls, which led to violence and the capturing of the bulls was stopped (ibid.: 73).

Bulls have been the root cause of every riot in the city: first the bulls start fighting,

[38] This is the popular name of Śiva's mount, not to be confused with Nandin as Śiva's door guardian and master of troops (Bisschop 2009: 749), who can also be e.g. a musician or a charioteer when connected with Śiva (Bhattacharya 1977: 1547). He was associated with the bull in various Purāṇas, such as the Matsya, Vāyu, and Bhāgavata, but earlier, in the epics Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa, Nandin and the bull are still different characters (ibid.: 1555).

[39] i.e. Śiva.

general panic ensues, and the situation develops into a full-blown riot (ibid.: 72). Mukharjī writes sarcastically about asking a Rām Rājya Pariṣad[40] (RRP) member involved in cow-protection initiatives about why they do not have bull-protection initiatives as well. The RRP member tells him that since bulls cause all the riots, without them India would not have been partitioned and the separate state of Pākistān would not have been created. This makes bulls traitors and friends of Pākistān (ibid.: chapter 17§).

After describing various nationalities as bulls (ibid.), Mukharjī writes that in Vārāṇasī there are all kinds of bulls: communist, capitalist, terrorist, socialist, Gandhist, and proletarian (ibid.: 71). This is important because it portrays a Vārāṇasī that has a large variety of different "types" of bulls, but they all roam around in the city and have the same freedoms!

In addition to bulls, Mukharjī briefly mentions monkeys, who have arrived in the city with Hanumān and settled here as his community. The monkeys drop items from the roofs of buildings on people for fun, occasionally causing deaths (ibid.: 18). The monkeys are also not punished for this, or at least Mukharjī does not mention this, and they seem to be able to take part in the same freedom as the bulls; they play around as they wish and do not care if some human dies because of them.

Mukharjī also writes about the animals in the city fighting each other. The bulls fight whenever they feel like it, but in the winter, buffalos, rams, and birds have their own fights as well. During Makar Sankrānti celebrations, people have their own birds fight each other and place bets:

लोग अपने-अपने पक्षियोंका दंगल उस दिन अवश्य कराते हैं । यह दंगल केवल दंगलके लिए नहीं, बाजी लगाकर किये जाते हैं ।

(ibid.: 40)

[40] A right-wing Hindu party, an ally of the Jana Sangh (Dasgupta 2020: 93), in turn a predecessor of the BJP (ibid.: 1). Founded by Svāmi Karpātrī, a famous Hindu monk from Vārāṇasī (ibid.: 66).

In addition, Vārāṇasī is described as a city where various different types of animals that would normally not be able to, live together in peace: "that city in which the king's vehicle is the bull, the queen's vehicle is the lion, the prince's vehicle is the peacock and the police officer's vehicle is the dog… all known enemies of each other"[41] (ibid.: 66). This is because Śiva has made a separate residence for all of them (ibid.). This could be considered to apply to humans in the way that Muslims, for example, live in their "own" neighborhoods.

So, the animals of Vārāṇasī are not exempt from the unique freedom that exists in the city. Bulls, and to a slightly lesser extent, monkeys, seem to have even more freedom than the humans, because they can *visibly* commit "crimes" and not be punished. Other animals do not always enjoy this freedom, as seen from the bird-fights for gambling purposes.

Of course, the reason that bulls and monkeys enjoy these freedoms in Vārāṇasī is related to religion; they are linked to Śiva and Hanumān, respectively. In any case, it is an important part of the general depiction of Vārāṇasī's special freedom that the animals "higher" on the scale of importance can do whatever they want. Maybe it could even be said that in some way Mukharjī envies the bulls and wants to retain their level of freedom for the people as well, or for himself. On a metaphorical level, his emphasis on the bulls that have not been castrated as the really "free" bulls can also be linked to how different legislations or other scenarios that force humans to act in a certain way lessen the "freedoms" that humans enjoy. Maybe this is one reason why he considers Vārāṇasī to be such a special city; a city where everyone still enjoys more freedom than in most places. The bull as a symbol is also quite central in how Banārasīs resist change; this can be seen in the protest against the capturing of stray bulls, for example. Even if all sorts of legislations and other obligations are imposed on the people of Vārāṇasī, they still want to keep the bull as a symbol of their unique freedom. Moreover, the various types of bulls and other animals that live together

[41] Mukharjī is referring to the "vāhanas" of Śiva, Mahādevī, Kārttikeya (Murugan), and Bhairava (Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online: "Vāhanas").

can be interpreted as depicting a city that thrives through heterogeneity. Even if conflicts sometimes arise, each bull has the same inherent freedom. This can be a metaphor for equal rights to freedom, but since the bulls need to be uncastrated and untamed, what does this mean for the "castrated", or for women, for example?

Chapter 3.3: The unique freedom of the architecture and material aspects of Vārāṇasī

In Vārāṇasī, the uniqueness and freedom of the city is seen also in non-living, material things. The stairs in the city (mainly referring to the steps leading to the ghāṭs[42]), are built with all sorts of differently shaped stones and various techniques; even the height and depth of each stair is different. Mukharjī writes that every step has its own "unboundedness", and that in the same way as the appearance of every human is different, the stairs are all different from each other (ibid.: 31). Mukharjī also mentions that the steps might be dangerous to walk on since one has to pay attention to their uniqueness. Otherwise one can end up falling and hurting oneself (ibid.: 31-32).

The riverbank of Vārāṇasī is described as a kind of congregation of different sights, where one has everything in a small area; a kind of microcosm of various styles and emotions (ibid.: 30). Since the Ganges river flows north in Vārāṇasī, the ghāṭs are all on one bank of the river (ibid.: 98). Mukharjī writes that the two-mile long line of ghāṭs is so special that it should be included in the wonders of the world and praises the ingenuity of their construction; they protect the city from floods and are able to withstand the force of the river without breaking (ibid.: 32). The ghāṭs also serve as shelters; the police or no one else will trouble people sleeping there (ibid.: 33).

The alleys of Vārāṇasī are labyrinth-like, especially in the inner city, causing difficulties even for the locals, not to mention pilgrims or tourists. Sometimes the alleys are so narrow that sunlight does not reach them. Mukharjī further describes the alleys as having a lot of freedom; people sit where they want or even wander around naked. The alleys are considered by

[42] The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary defines "ghāṭ" as "a slope to water" and "a flight of steps to water".

people to be their courtyards, which is why some lift their bunks on the streets and sleep there (ibid.: 19). According to Mukharjī, the "real fun of Banāras is found on the alleys", and if one looks only at the major roads, the real image of the city will not appear (ibid.: 14-15).

The houses of the city are "of every model, every color, and every shape of geometry", and "there are no two houses in Banāras that are constructed in the same way" (ibid.: 25). Additionally, the idea of Banārasīs wanting to live next to the Ganges so that they can easily bathe in it has resulted in a dense cluster of multiple-floored houses next to the river, accompanied with ghāṭs (ibid.: 32).

Some temples found in Vārāṇasī are completely unique; the Bhārat Mātā[43] temple, containing a relief map of India that later became a site of worship is an example of this (ibid.: 8). Vārāṇasī temple architecture is also quite multifaceted because of construction methods: those who cannot afford to build an entire temple themselves donate various things to obtain merit; marble pieces, bells, boundary walls, a new layer of paint, and so on (ibid.: 21-22).

Sometimes, Banārasīs also take over spaces by cleaning up trash dumping sites and building temples in their place. Since religious buildings are highly respected in the city, the municipality does not dare to demolish them to reclaim these locations (ibid.: 22). Taking over locations from the municipality in this way is again an example of how the people act freely, disregarding the "higher-ups".

In the temples of Vārāṇasī, deities have also "converged" from all over the country. Mukharjī writes that if one is not able to go to all of the four most important pilgrimage destinations in India, one can go to Vārāṇasī instead. All deities have their own temples there in addition to kings and affluent individuals from all over South Asia having come to the city and building temples for their "own" deities (ibid.: 22-23).

The temples of Vārāṇasī have also been torn down and rebuilt, possibly multiple

[43] See e.g. Eck 1993: 38-39.

times. Aurangzeb, for example, was responsible for many destroyed temples, and according to Mukharjī, every other temple except the Kardameśvar temple has been built within the last 300 years, even though many paṇḍits of the city say that the temples originate from Satya, Dvāpara, or Tretā yuga (ibid.: chapter 4§). Madhuri Desai also describes the architecture of the city, at least that on the riverfront, as having "no significant building…earlier than the year 1600" (Desai 2017: 10). However, it should be noted that the "spiritual" or "religious" age of a building is not necessarily tied to its actual, physical age, and the actual usage of a building in a "faithscape" is what makes more of a difference, at least when it comes to how people view and think about it (Bharne and Krusche 2012: 237).

Vehicles in Vārāṇasī are also "free"; buses will stop wherever the customer wants, unless the driver is in a bad mood or the bus is late (Mukharjī 1958: 69-70). This "freedom" is again something that changes according to the situation, further emphasizing the depiction of the city as truly "free"; there is no fixed rule that is followed, and the city is continuously in flux.

So, the freedom of Vārāṇasī is found in many of its material aspects and in how they are used. In dealing with this, one needs to pay attention much in the same way as one would have to with ensuring that thugs will not cheat oneself, for example.

The fact that people from all over India have come to Vārāṇasī to build their own temples is another reminder of how "free" the city is in accepting various kinds of inhabitants.[44] That is, if they are Hindus; Mukharjī does not talk about mosques in the same way, so this acceptance might be only for those who have the potential to become "real Banārasīs".

[44] Open proselytization by Christian missionaries is also mentioned (Mukharjī 1958: chapter 2§).

Chapter 3.4: The unique freedom of the religious aspects of Vārāṇasī

As the "city of Śiva", Vārāṇasī holds a special importance for Śaivites. Even when the king of Kāśī had the city under his control, Śiva was still the "real" ruler for the inhabitants (ibid.: 46). Perhaps the most important aspect is related to dying: "to give up one's life force in Kāśī is considered to be an easy way to reserve one's place in heaven":

काशीमें प्राण त्यागना स्वर्गमें सीट रिजर्व करानेका सुगम मार्ग माना जाता है ।
(ibid.: 21).

This belief is the central religious aspect of Vārāṇasī; no other place bestows "instant liberation" from the cycle of births and deaths. This attracts large numbers of pilgrims, especially those who are approaching their deaths, hoping to breathe their last breath in the city and thus receive liberation. Various groups flock to Vārāṇasī for this reason, believing that they will receive liberation regardless of what they might have done in their lives (ibid.: 43-44).

Additionally, Mukharjī writes about the existence of two special "religious banks"[45] in the city, which are a direct result of so many pilgrims coming to city and wanting to obtain merit. One of these banks is a bank of Rām, and the other is Śiva's bank (ibid.: 23).

Vārāṇasī is depicted as a city that is not only an important pilgrimage center, but also a kind of religious authority; the decisions made in its religious "Parliament" apply to the whole of India and keep the country "tied in religious unity" (ibid.: 53). Vārāṇasī is the city to which the originators of all prevalent "Hindu" religious sects in India came to in order to get their "permits" for establishing and running a new religion (ibid.). This does not mean that some permit was actually needed but is instead a way to emphasize the city's centrality within Hinduism; religious visionaries came to get

[45] These are not banks dealing with money, but with the name of the God Rām written on paper, for example (Kapoor 2017).

legitimacy for their ideas, gaining widespread acceptance and more followers.

Mukharjī mainly writes about Hinduism, with only passing mentions about Islam. However, he writes about Buddhism in more detail, but his depiction is not very positive. He sarcastically describes the Buddha and his disciples as having created so much commotion and having done so much malpractice that the Buddhist era has left an imprint into history, without which "people would not know so much about what Indian society at the time was like" (ibid.: chapter 13§). He attributes a quote to Rāhul Sānkr̥tyāyan,[46] related to how during the five centuries of Buddhism in India, the entire population became stupidly faithful, work-addicted, and alcoholic by being in the vicinity of the Buddhists (ibid.: 55). However, he also describes Buddhism as very esoteric, and the monks' practices of womanizing or drinking alcohol from skull-cups as something the uninitiated would not understand, and through merely copying the monks' actions, the wrong result is achieved. Thus, Mukharjī appreciates the historical accounts but depicts Buddhism itself as something quite negative. One could interpret being "stupidly faithful" as something that departs from the multiplicity and special freedom of religious beliefs and practices in Vārāṇasī; a departure from "free" religion to "organized religion".

Mukharjī is not really a fan of Śaṅkarācārya either, because Śaṅkarācārya's Hinduism was again a more organized, less "free" religion. He writes how rape, murder, destroying households, and so on are a part of this Hinduism (Mukharjī 1958: chapter 13§). Mukharjī describes the formation of the Daśanāmi sects of ascetics, and the spread of Śaṅkarācārya's Hinduism into the four corners of India,[47] and writes that if people would have known what Śaṅkarācārya's actions would cause, they would not "have made this mistake" (ibid.: 55); i.e. this type of more organized Hinduism would not have become so popular.

[46] A Famous Indian author who converted to Buddhism.

[47] See Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online: "Śaṅkara" and Aquil and Curley 2017: 64-67.

Additionally, Mukharjī writes about present-day Hindu ascetics in quite a negative manner. If these ascetics would be renting their properties, the housing problems of citizens would be solved; if the people would be working instead of listening to the ascetics' discourse, the finance minister could stop increasing taxes yearly; and if the ascetics and their disciples would cultivate fields, India would not have to ask for food from foreign countries[48] (ibid.: 57). He hints at male ascetics having sex with female disciples and calls the ascetic religion of today a "fancy-dress competition" (ibid.).

Religious festivals are celebrated with special fervor in Vārāṇasī; this is something Mukharjī considers to be unique to the city. He says that the grandeur of religious festivals is not only for show, but stems from real devotion, and that seeing Banārasī festivals takes one back to an older time where there was no hydrogen bomb, terrible poverty, or a food crisis (ibid.: 103). He does seem disappointed in some festivals losing their old "essence", for example after having been banned and then "re-started". Mukharjī points out some unique characteristics of festivals in Vārāṇasī, for example the way how they are celebrated for at least two days, the first day by Śaivites and the second by Vaiṣṇavites (ibid.: 105). The festival of Holī[49] gets a special mention, as it is extremely out of hand, and people get injured and might even die, but no police complaints are reported (ibid.). Another unique aspect of these festivals is the Pañcakrośī pilgrimage (ibid.: 21) that takes place *en masse* around Mahāśivrātri[50] every year, for example. It covers 108 shrines (Eck 1993: 41-42) over a distance of 88,5 kilometers at the present time (Singh 2011: 47) and takes five (Eck 1993: 42) or six days to complete (Singh 2011: 145).

[48] This is a reference to the mid-1950s when India signed a three-year "Food for Peace" contract with the U.S. to get food imported due to poor crops and high population growth (Bateman 1965: 30).

[49] A spring festival mainly known for the throwing of colored water and powders, but also during which crude behavior takes place, and the "usual rankings of caste, gender, status, and age" are reversed (Britannica Academic, n.d. "Holi").

[50] An annual festival sacred to Śiva (Flood 2015: 212).

The special love the people of Vārāṇasī have for Śiva is also the result of the deity previously accepting all kinds of offerings and devotees. Expensive offerings were not required; bael leaves and water[51] were enough, and one could go meet the deity in any state, at any time, even without clothes. However, the present situation is different, since Śiva has been "locked in a cage" and has become merely "a creature for exhibition" as a result of a quarrel between Brāhmaṇs and "Harijans" (Mukharjī 1958: 46). This can be interpreted as the banning of lower caste entry to temples by the higher castes.

As the Viśvanāth temple is the most important Śiva temple in the city, and most would want to have the darśan of Viśvanāth, the situation has been kind of solved by the existence of three different Viśvanāth temples. One allows all Hindus, the second upper-caste Hindus, and the third university students (ibid.: 23). Mukharjī also describes temples where people go who "do not manage to go to good temples or do not believe in the big deities"; most of these are "Bīr"[52] deities, who accept any offerings given *with love*, including alcohol and cannabis:

> कुछ ऐसे मन्दिर हैं जिनकी पूजा वे लोग करते हैं जो अच्छे मन्दिरों में जा नहीं पाते अथवा बड़े देवताओं पर जिनका विश्वास नहीं होता ।
> ऐसे लोग... शराब-गाँजा भी चढ़ाते हैं... इनके देवता सब कुछ प्रेमसे दिया नैवेद्य स्वीकार कर लेते हैं ।
> (ibid.)

Changes in religious practices are also identified. Mukharjī explains how families used to worship a single deity at home, but nowadays they might worship many, or change their main family deity due to need or frustration (ibid.: 21). Mukharjī comments on how the worship of multiple deities has become a norm since there are so many different deities to choose from, and one can never know which ones are the most suitable. This could be related to the freedom of the city, emphasizing its

[51] Bael tree (aegle marmelos) leaves are an important symbol and offering for Śiva (Vasava et al. 2018: 1166-1167), and the water that is mentioned here most likely refers to the sacred water of the Ganges.

[52] See Coccari 1989.

plurality, because in this way personal religious beliefs can contain widely different practices related to different deities.

Mukharjī talks about how the Skanda Purāṇa describes Vārāṇasī as the best place for pilgrimage in the "three worlds" (ibid.: 52). According to Mukharjī, Gopīnāth Kavirāj described the city as the best "tīrth"[53] of all, because it is a place of knowledge instead of a place of action/karma (ibid.).

The religious aspects of Vārāṇasī are described by Mukharjī as being unique and free. He seems to be disappointed in the role of various more fixed aspects, such as temple entry restrictions, in making the city less heterogeneous, forcing people to identify with specific forms of organized religion. He does consider the "Harijan temple entry" protests as something "real Banārasīs" may do, but this is not against Harijans *per se* and more against rules imposed from "outside".

Worshipping multiple deities is an aspect of "freedom" in the sense that one can worship any deity one wants, but this is also related to every deity having its own function: Annapūrṇā is worshipped for prosperity, Gaṇeśa for good trade, and so on (ibid.: 20-21). In this way, the choice of the deity is "free", but the desired effects of the worship are mainly determined by those sources that one believes in religious matters.

The idea of Vārāṇasī as the place where "permits" for new religion are acquired could be interpreted as how the "free" ideals of the city should be spread to other areas. However, it seems more likely that this is merely about the central role of Vārāṇasī in religious matters; an extension of the religious power of the city over India.

Temples are not free for anyone to enter anymore, festivals lose parts of their original essence, ascetics become more sectarian and useless for the actual public, and so on. Even if this is so, Mukharjī still depicts the city as free, but seems to long for a nostalgic past, and perhaps a more

[53] Sanskrit "tīrtha": "ford" or "passage". Here it means a "spiritual ford, where earth and heaven meet, or where one 'crosses over' the river of samsara…to reach the 'far shore' of liberation" (Eck 1993: 34).

"unity in diversity" kind of approach to life. Then again, perhaps this is an unity of the "real Banārasīs", and not necessarily *everyone* who resides in the city.

Chapter 3.5: "Tīn lok se nyārī"

Mukharjī uses "tīn lok se nyārī" ("distinct from the three worlds" or perhaps more freely translated as "unique in the three worlds"[54]) in many chapters of the book to describe Vārāṇasī. He uses a similar concept, "duniyā se nyārī" ("distinct from the world"), once in chapter six. Chapter nine is also named "tīn lok se nyārī". This concept applies to everyone and everything in the city; the people, animals, their way of living, their manners and principles, even the organizations are all unique and thus free in their own way. "In the Kāśī that is unique in the three worlds, also the nobles are of unusual forms".

तीन लोकसे न्यारी काशीमें रईस लोग भी निराले ढंगके हो चुके हैं ।
(ibid.: 50)

Even geographical aspects are linked to this concept; the earth is on the hood of the Śeṣnāg,[55] but Vārāṇasī is on the trident of Lord Śankar,[56] with the ancient location of the main cremation ground on the middle prong. There are no earthquakes in Vārāṇasī, except when Śiva rests, supporting his back with his trident, which causes some shaking (ibid.: 7).

Mukharjī mentions the "main ghāṭ", Daśaśvamedh[57] as being the source of the uniqueness of the city (ibid.: 29). He also emphasizes how "bahrī alang" is an important

[54] "Nyārā" is defined in the Oxford Hindi-English dictionary as distinct, different, unusual, rare, or distant.

[55] Monier-Williams: "Śeṣanāga", "the serpent Śeṣa".

[56] Another name for Śiva.

[57] Sanskrit: Daśaśvamedha, "ten-horse-sacrifice" (see Eck 1993: 226-228).

contribution to this uniqueness. On the level of emotions, the carefreeness and freedom of Vārāṇasī is unequaled; this is the main reason why the inhabitants love their city so much (ibid.: 38). Importantly, Mukharjī writes that the uniqueness that exists in the city cannot be merely explained with writing; one needs to come and visit to understand it more fully (ibid.: 6).

The concept of "tīn lok se nyārī" is a central term as it describes Vārāṇasī as truly being distinct from not only this world ("duniyā se nyārī"), but also the other two,[58] emphasizing how special the freedom of the city really is. This is clearly something that Mukharjī would like to retain, but as mentioned above, he already identifies aspects that reduce the free characteristics of Vārāṇasī. In any case, the freedom of the city is connected to its role as "tīn lok se nyārī"; that is, its freedom is a result of this unique characteristic.

Chapter 3.6: Language use

The language use of the book is very authentic, containing an accurately local vocabulary and terminology. One of these is the concept of "gahrebāj/gahrebājī", which can mean a specific type of a single horse-drawn carriage that is used by the nobility, a kind of status symbol (ibid.: 68), but can also be interpreted in some contexts to mean a way of thinking related to a kind of "deep" thought, unique to Vārāṇasī (ibid.: 5 and "Artists of Banāras"§). Another examples are the sarcastically named "divine view" ("divya chaṭā"), related to the tendency of the locals to carefully choose where they defecate (ibid.: 29), and the term "sāfā lagānā" which literally means "to put on a turban", but here it means to wash one's clothes (from Hindi "sāf" + "lagānā").

Mukharjī's sarcastic use of "darśan" to describe the view of boats taking individuals to the other side of the Ganges for their "divine dispensation" (ibid.) might be considered offensive

[58] See Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism Online: "Cosmic Cycles, Cosmology, and Cosmography" for an explanation of Hindu cosmography.

by some. Other parts where Mukharjī is clearly sarcastic include for example his depiction of the Kalcuris[59] from Madhya Pradeś as having come to the city to "rule and drink the bhang" (ibid.: 4), making fun of the Kalcuris' fondness of bhang. Another example is when Mukharjī mentions the "grace of the fair-skinned Gods" (ibid.: 5), meaning the British colonialists or perhaps Westerners in general.

Mukharjī uses a different kind of language when he narrates what locals say; this is the dialect of Vārāṇasī, Kāśikā Bhojpurī. This makes the book more authentic, and more clearly reveals that the book contains an attempt in describing the city as authentically as possible, since in the case of attempting to over-represent the "Hindu" aspects of the city, at least from the present-day point of view, it could have been quite logical to use a more Sanskrit-influenced way of speaking. A few examples of the locals' speech are "गरेम है जी" "It is hot" (ibid.: 12), "सुकवा उगल बाय, अब भिनसारमें कितना देर बाय ?" "Venus has risen, how late is it in the morning now?"[60] (ibid.: 34), "का राजा, नहाके आवत हउवा ?" "Oh king, are you coming back after bathing?" (ibid.: 48), and "जागत रहिहा हो, चलौवा आवत हौ" "Stay awake, the calauvā is coming" (ibid.: 83).

Mukharjī also uses some famous sayings about the city. These contain quite a sarcastic view, emphasizing the negative qualities of ascetics and the reasons they took up renunciation:

नारि मुई सम्पत्ति भई नासी
मूड़ मुड़ाये भये संन्यासी ।
Woman died, lost all wealth;
(he) shaved (his) head, (and) became an ascetic.[61]

[59] There were multiple Kalcuri dynasties, but Mukharjī means the most famous one (9th-11th century); the only Kalcuris from Madhya Pradeś, and the only ones to conquer Vārāṇasī (Middleton 2005: 477-478).

[60] This is a rhetorical question.

[61] This means that the reason for becoming an ascetic was not religious; it was more a necessity. The newer edition has "नारि मुई घर सम्पत्ति नासी" "woman died, lost house and all wealth" (Mukharjī 1958: 56).

आन क आटा आन क घी
बइठ के मजा लें बाबा जी ।
Ask for flour, ask for ghee;
sit and enjoy Bābā jī.[62]

राँड़ साँड़ सीढ़ी संन्यासी
इनसे बचे तो सेवे कासी ।
Widows, bulls, stairs, ascetics;
if you are saved from them, then only you can stay in Kāśī.[63]

छत्तरे भोजन मठे निद्रा।
Food with six rasas, (and) sleep at the monastery.[64]
(Mukharjī 1958: chapter 13§)

In addition to being the origin of many Hindi words that are in the book, Sanskrit is sometimes used in full sentences. One instance like this is a quote attributed to the Buddha, related to him knowing that Vārāṇasī was already an important religious center even in his time:

वाराणसीं गमिष्यामि गत्वा वै काशिका पुरीम् ।
धर्मचक्रे प्रवर्तिष्ये लोकेष्वप्रतिवर्तितम् ॥
"I will go to Vārāṇasī; surely having gone to the city of the Kāśis I will turn (in) the wheel of dharma [and be] accomplished without opponents in the worlds".
(ibid.: 55)

[62] This depicts ascetics as "lazy" and supported by the society. The newer edition has "भोग लगावैं" "enjoy" instead of "sit and enjoy" (ibid.).

[63] This saying highlights four unavoidable aspects of Vārāṇasī which will most likely be problematic. The newer edition has "काशी" instead of "कासी" (ibid.).

[64] This refers to Ayurvedic eating principles, suggesting that the ascetics merely eat and sleep.

Mukharjī does not mention where he took this quote from, but it is from the Lalitavistara Sūtra,[65] related to the Buddha's first sermon to his disciples in the "Deer Park" in Sārnāth, close to Vārāṇasī (Eck 1993: 56).

Mukharjī's use of Sanskrit is dependent on what he is writing about, i.e. he adjusts his language according to the topic. In chapter 13, for example, he uses a lot of Sanskrit terminology since the chapter is about Hindu saints and ascetics. The same applies for a lot of Marāṭhī influenced Hindi in chapter six: as an example, "caupāṭī"[66] is used to refer to the "coast" of Vārāṇasī.

Persian is also used, mainly in chapter eight where Mukharjī quotes and translates an entire poem by Mirzā Ġālib that praises the beauty of the idols of female deities in Vārāṇasī (Mukharjī 1958: 35-37). Mukharjī's translation is also proof of a deeper understanding of Islamic concepts, without which it would have been difficult to accurately translate the poem. Additionally, the preface of the book is highly Persianate.

Mukharjī's approach might have been even more sarcastic related to developments in Indian politics if he had written the book later, but the opposite could have been true as well. For example, the preface of the second edition (in the form as it has been included in the fifth edition) has changed its language to a more Sanskrit-heavy "tatsama" Hindi, whereas the first edition preface is in Urdu-heavy "legalese". The third edition preface has been written by the publisher and continues in the same vein: the second edition preface uses the ordinal "dūsrā", and the third has "tr̥itīy"[67] instead of "tīsrā" (ibid.: iii-iv). This can be seen as part of a move towards more Sanskrit-leaning Hindi, where Perso-Arabic words are replaced with Sanskritic ones to distance it from Urdu; to

[65] Verse 26.6. Gretil (see dictionary) contains an e-text of this based on P.L. Vaidya's 1958 edition.

[66] "चौपाटी" is a name of a famous beach in Mumbāī; Marāṭhī is spoken mainly in Mahārāṣṭra.

[67] I.e. "tr̥itīya"; "third" in Sanskrit.

distance the "Hindu" language from the "Muslim" one.[68] This process has been apparent since the beginning of the 20th century (Everaert 2010: 23-24), becoming more clear-cut after the Partition which made it easier to link each language to a separate country (ibid.: 264). In any case, the fact that the language use in the book varies quite widely can be understood as a further depiction of the "freedom" of Vārāṇasī since it freely adapts to multiple contexts; it examines various topics by taking multiple forms, similarly to how one would navigate in all the different physical and mental contexts of the city.

Chapter 3.7: Differences between the editions

The two editions available for this research have quite many differences. Some are quite functional in nature, with sentences repeating the same idea with different words or sentences that are seemingly not that important or outdated (such as mentions of hydrogen bombs in chapters 10, 13, and 19) removed from the book.[69] However, most of the differences between the editions are more significant; two entire chapters have been removed and "replaced" with two new ones, and many times "controversial" material has been removed.

The two chapters that existed in the older edition are "Organizations of Banāras" and "Artists of Banāras", and the two new chapters that have taken their place are "Songstresses of Banāras" and "Ghāṭs of Banāras". "Organizations…" depicts organizations in Vārāṇasī as basically personal ATMs or banks for the members, or as simply serving to facilitate meetings where alcohol and bhang are consumed. Mukharjī does mention that some organizations are more serious, but even they get bogged down by the members discussing unrelated things, making the actual work impossible. He also writes that almost everyone in the city is part of some organization, and that some corruption seems to always be involved. The general image is a deep mistrust of all these

[68] Both "Hindi" and "Urdu" used to refer to the same language, which then split due to identity formation, politics, and ideological differences (Everaert 2010: 277-278).

[69] See Appendix B for a complete chapter list of both editions.

organizations.

"Artists…" is basically a list of artists from various fields, with Mukharjī praising those he mentions. However, he also writes that every person in the city claims to be some kind of artist or expert, with people putting their credentials on nameplates outside their houses and so on. Generally, the chapter seems simultaneously sarcastic and praising the skills of the artists.

Some parts have also been added. A mention of the Viśvanāth temple as a place where in the morning, the shahnāī[70] of Muslims is heard and in the evening the sounds of the Hindu ārtī[71] are heard (Mukharjī 1958: 22) has been added; the part mentioning Muslims did not exist in the older edition. This can be interpreted as describing how multiple faiths coexist in the daily life of Vārāṇasī, which is most likely the intended meaning based on Mukharjī's overall description of Vārāṇasī as a city where the inhabitants possess a special unboundedness and freedom. However, as this place is quite controversial because of the Jñānvāpī mosque - Viśvanāth temple issue,[72] it could also be that this part has been added to emphasize how "Muslims are taking over" the area, again feeding into a similar communal situation that exists around the Ayodhyā issue.[73]

Another part, that mentions local Muslim sāṛī artisans as having come back from Pākistān since they could not accept Pākistānī rule, has been edited out (ibid.: chapter 10§). This non-acceptance is something that most "patriotic Indians" would consider a positive thing, so its removal might be linked to not wanting to give a positive depiction of Muslims. However, Muslims can obviously be "patriotic Indians" as well; some can be "more Hindu than the Hindu himself", following the majority community (Kumār 1988: 73). Vārāṇasī is also an Islamic center, Islam is an

[70] "Shehnai", a woodwind instrument.

[71] The "lamp offering" of circling a lamp in front of an image of a deity (Eck 1993: 106).

[72] See more in e.g. Desai 2019.

[73] See e.g. Hansen 1999: 159-188.

important part of the city's culture, and Muslims worship in many shrines with Hindus, such as those of Bīrs (ibid.: 76), and participate in "bahrī alang", even though they call it "saill" (ibid.: 103). Communal tensions *are* present and the Hindu and Muslim communities are becoming more and more separate,[74] but the removal of this part from the newer edition can also be understood as a choice of focusing on the "exaggeratedly Hindu" popular image of the city (ibid.: 70) instead of deliberately avoiding a positive depiction of Muslims. Similarly, a mention of open proselytization by Christian missionaries has also been removed from the newer edition.

The conversation with an RRP member about bull protection and bulls as friends of Pākistān could be quite offensive at the present time, especially considering how right-wing Hindus would very likely support all bull (and cow) protection initiatives. Any right-wing Hindu neglecting bulls and thinking of them as Pākistānīs would be bad publicity.

Most ascetics are described as even worse in the older edition, as having taken a vow to drink alcohol, fornicate, murder, ruin houses etc. in the name of religion (Mukharjī 1958: chapter 13§). Mukharjī's criticism of road conditions being bad (ibid.: chapter 16§) has also been removed. It seems that the edits are geared towards making the book more suitable for the present majority; a right-wing, Hindu readership supportive of the Hindutva ideology, who might become annoyed by the city represented as corrupt, Hinduism made fun of, most ascetics and saints described as useless, and Muslims depicted as a normal part of the society instead of "enemies". However, many parts remain that are unsuitable for Hindutva, for example all kinds of "bulls" roaming around freely regardless of their political preferences, so it cannot be said that the book has been completely edited to represent this point of view or to avoid litigations filed by offended parties. Additionally, these differences between the editions could also merely be a result of wishing to depict Vārāṇasī as a more attractive tourism or pilgrimage destination by removing those aspects that are negative from a present-day point of view.

[74] This process has been ongoing since the 1940s, following a series of Hindu-Muslim communal riots (Kumār 1988: 159).

Conclusion

On the one hand, “Banā Rahe Banāras” depicts a unique and free city in which a person should not be judged by the way they look, a city where everyone does “gahrebājī”, is accommodating for others, and respects the differences between themselves and their “neighbors”. Vārāṇasī is “tīn lok se nyārī” and “duniyā se nyārī”; a truly extraordinary city the like of which is not found anywhere else.

On the other hand, this description ignores women, Muslims, and Dalits, and seems to define a more specific population as the “real Banārasīs”. It should be said that Mukharjī does consider Ahīrs and all service castes as being within this category; that is if they are culturally, linguistically, and behaviorally “real Banārasīs”, and most preferably born in the city. The depiction of Vārāṇasī is wholly “Hindu”, which is perhaps obvious since it is the majority religion in the area as well as the author’s religion, but it is strange that a depiction that claims to be as comprehensive as possible ignores and downplays so many aspects of the city, however secondary Mukharjī might have considered them to be. Of course, the book is originally from 1958, and thus the situation should not be viewed from a present-day point of view in the sense of projecting ideas of political correctness or modern women’s rights on it; the original context is different.

The animal kingdom, when taken as symbolic of what Vārāṇasī is like, represents a more inclusive community: all different kinds of “bulls” roam on the streets, and even though they sometimes fight, they enjoy the same freedom and can do anything they want without repercussions, if they are not castrated. Perhaps the castrated bulls, who Mukharjī sympathizes with due to the hardships they face, represent those who are not “real Banārasīs” such as outsiders, Muslims, or women. Perhaps these people do not possess the freedom and self-determination that “real Banārasī *men*” have as uncastrated bulls. Another, more plausible interpretation of this symbolism is that Mukharjī does not want that the *freedom* of Vārāṇasī and the “real Banārasīs” is “castrated”. This makes more

sense, since it would be strange to depict women or Muslims, for example, as *castrated* bulls in this context, implying that they were originally *uncastrated* bulls and thus the same as Hindu men.

Regarding the material aspects of the city, the same freedom in diversity is found, and heterogeneity seems to be the defining factor. Maze-like alleys, houses of all shapes and sizes, steps that are so irregular that they can even be dangerous; all these are found in the city, and thus a central aspect of this freedom is that one needs to pay attention; this remains the same whether one is dealing with steps, humans, or animals.

As for religion, it seems that the "real Banārasīs" should be able to protect their freedom to retain the heterogeneous nature of Vārāṇasī. This means that festivals should keep their original essence, ascetics and saints should be of more use to the actual public, and religion generally should be "free", less organized, and not so heavily connected to money. But then again, as the "real Banārasīs" are a select group of citizens, their "freedom" and what they generally want can be very different from others, such as "Harijans" or Muslims, and does not really represent the city in its entirety. However, the main distinction is between original inhabitants and migrants. The "originals" speak the local language, are hospitable, carefree, passionate, and do not wish to leave the city for better opportunities. This means that a Dalit born in the city can be a "real Banārasī", whereas a migrant Brāhmaṇ might not qualify. Of course, Muslims are absent from this discussion, so it seems that they cannot be "real Banārasīs" either way, regardless of their place of birth.

When Mukharjī talks about "every Banārasī", perhaps we should understand this as only meaning those who he calls "real Banārasīs". When he talks about freedom, we should not take it as meaning freedom for everything and everyone but understand the freedom of Vārāṇasī to be a special form of freedom, a "Banārasī freedom", an "unboundedness" that cannot be extracted from its personal and area-specific contexts. This freedom is not the same for everyone and does not remain static; it evolves and fluctuates. To live in a city that has this kind of freedom, one needs to learn how to pay

attention, to navigate all the different contexts that a heterogeneous "Banārasī freedom" creates. In a way, one needs to know one's "place".

The way how "Banā Rahe Banāras" has been altered points towards an attempt to make it more suitable for the present-day atmosphere. Making fun of Hinduism and supporting a more inclusive agenda is not very popular at the current time. Maybe the changes have been made because the publishers want more profits, maybe it is a representation of their ideological and political views, maybe it is related to tourism promotion; this is unclear. One thing is clear, however: the book "continues to be made", much in the same way as "Banāras continues to be made".

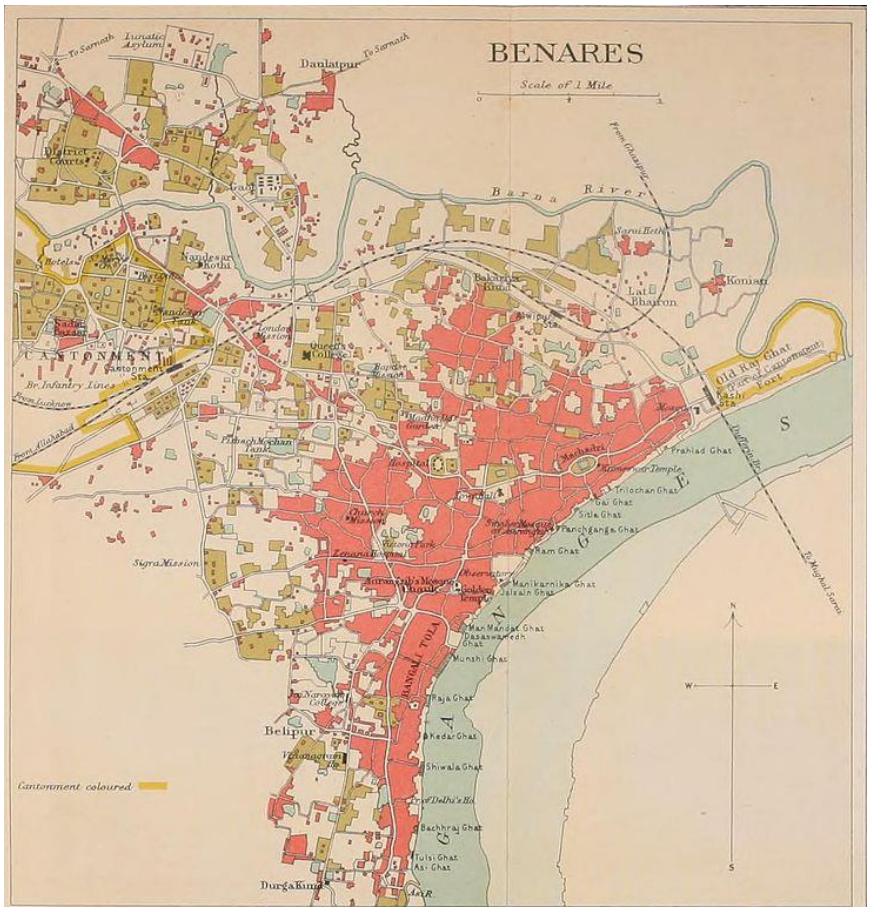
"Banā Rahe Banāras" can be translated as "long live Banāras", but this makes it sound fixed, so perhaps "may Banāras continue to be made" is a more suitable translation here. Vārāṇasī is a living city, not a static piece of history that remains unchanged; it changes while its inhabitants, ideologies, religious beliefs, laws, material aspects, and everything contained within changes. It changes through personal re-interpretation; through representing the past from a present-day point of view. Even if more majoritarian perspectives make the city more homogeneous, if Vārāṇasī manages to remain a "living city", adapting and taking on multiple forms, its "living freedom" will always remain alive as well.

Directions for further research could involve looking into other Hindi sources by authors such as Munshi Premcand or Śivprasād Singh. Older Sanskrit sources could be inspected and utilized to make critical editions, and even compared with other sources to see how depictions of an earlier era differ from more modern ones. The important thing is to continue finding more pieces of the "puzzle" that Vārāṇasī is, to continue the search for a more complete depiction of the city.

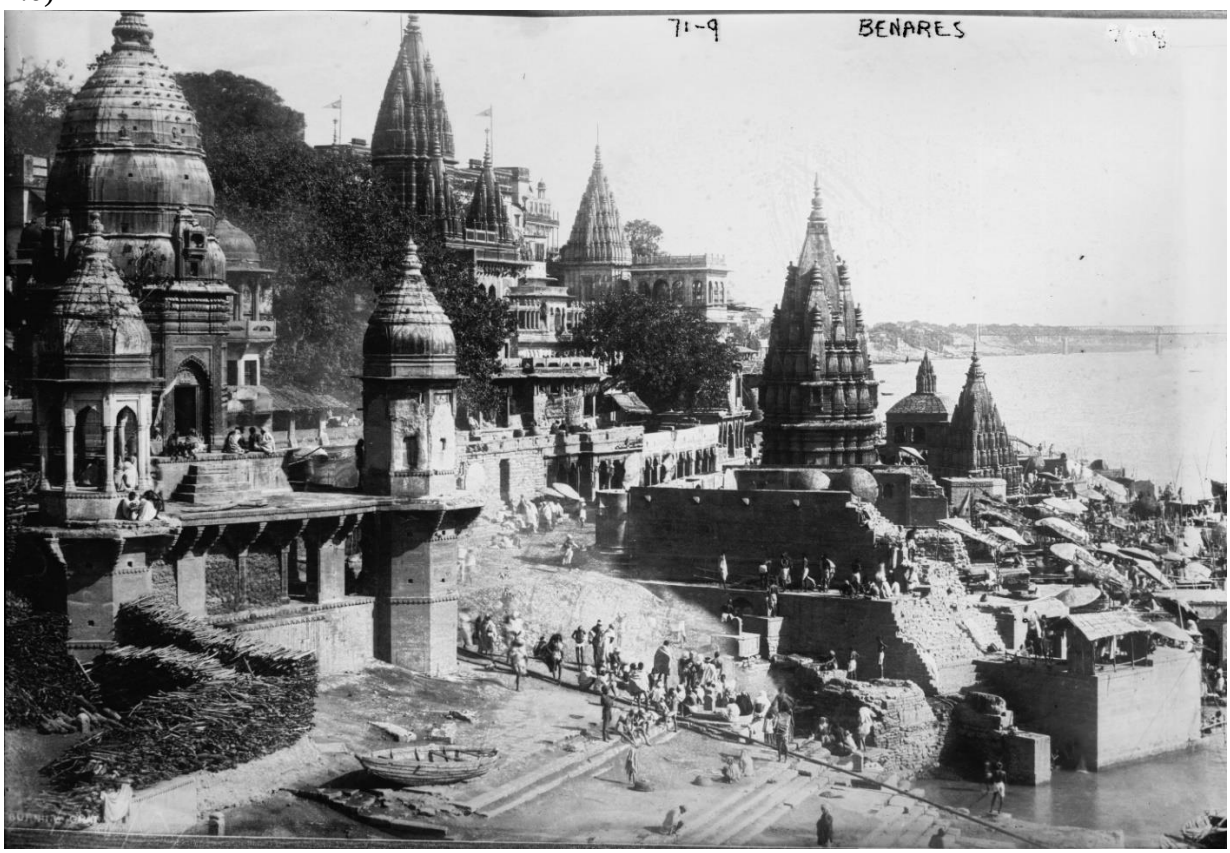
Appendix A: Pictures and maps

Location of Vārāṇasī within India. (Dhwanit 2006. Wikimedia Commons / CC0 1.0 Universal)

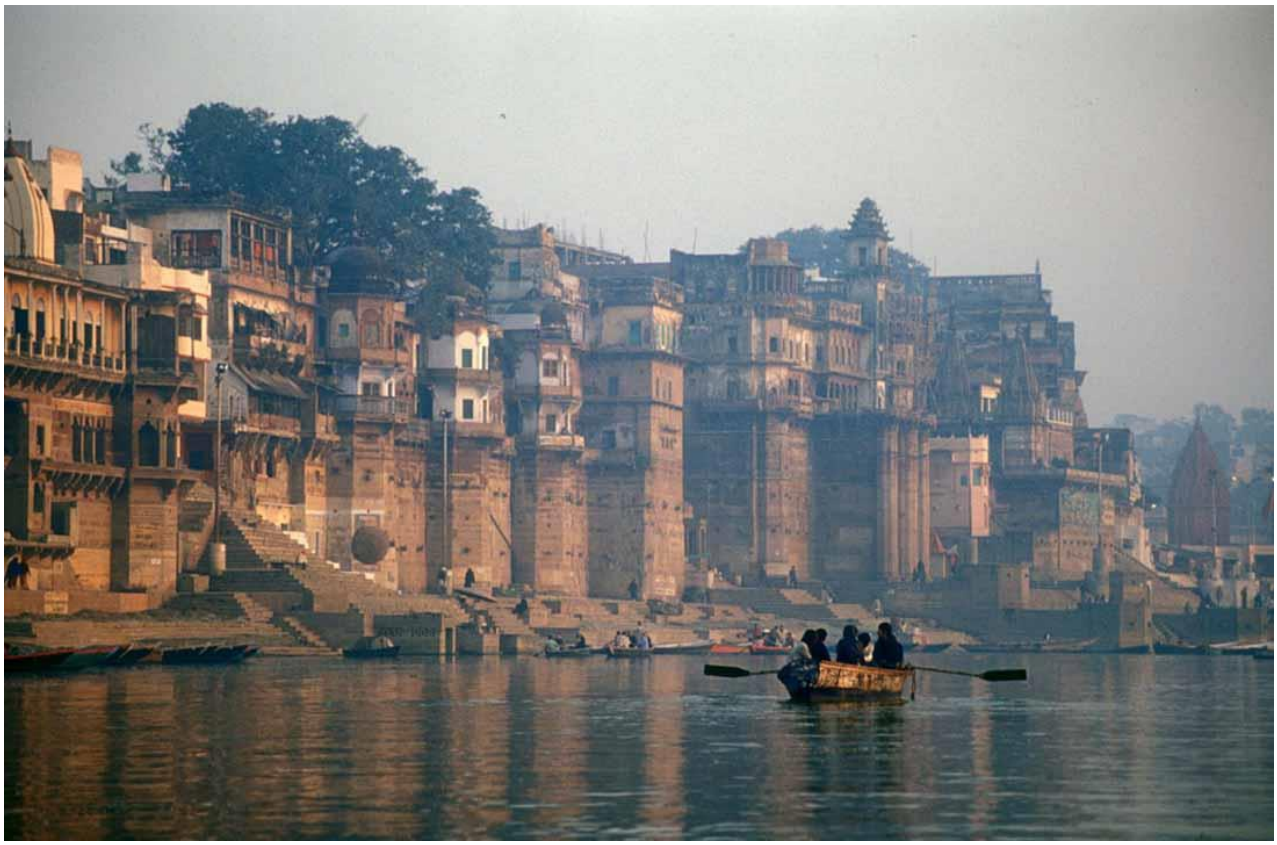
Location of Vārāṇasī district within Uttar Pradeś. (Faizhaider 2009. Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain)



A 1911 map of Vārāṇasī. (Internet Archive Book Images 2014. Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-2.0)



Vārāṇasī riverbank, 1922. (Unknown author 1922. Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain)



A more recent image of the riverbank in Vārāṇasī. (Babasteve 2007. Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-2.0)

A street near Assī ghāṭ. (Juggadery 2015. CC-BY-SA-2.0)

A cow encounter on a pān-spit colored alley in Vārāṇasī. (Bockaert 2015. Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-2.0)

A view of the riverbank. Note the Aurangzeb mosque in the background. (Juggadery 2015. CC-BY-SA-2.0)

Appendix B: Chapter list of both available editions

Chapter name differences (chapters 15-24) are highlighted in grey, and the two chapters that are completely different between the editions are indicated by bold font. Please note that there are chapter name spelling differences, i.e. the postpositions have been separated from the words preceding them in the 1958 edition (also chapter 24, "बनारस की संस्कृति" has changed to "बनारसी संस्कृति" and chapter 7 "बनारस की सीढ़ियाँ" has changed to "बनारसी सीढ़ियाँ" in the newer edition). The same also applies for the entire text, not only chapter names. This is most likely done while re-typesetting the book for the website, since the "older" way of writing Hindi generally involves writing the postpositions together with their preceding words. This also reflects other style changes in modern Hindi typesetting such as using dots for candrabindus, simplifications of conjuncts, and spelling differences, etc. The spelling differences are not separately indicated in the table.

1958 edition	**2017 edition**
1. बना रहे बनारस	बना रहे बनारस
2. बनारस: एक दिग्दर्शन	बनारस: एक दिग्दर्शन
3. बनारस की गलियाँ	बनारसकी गलियाँ
4. बनारस के मन्दिर	बनारसके मन्दिर
5. बनारस के मकान	बनारसके मकान
6. बनारस की चौपाटी	बनारसकी चौपाटी
7. बनारस की सीढ़ियाँ	बनारसी सीढ़ियाँ
8. बनारस की सुबह	बनारसकी सुबह
9. तीन लोकसे न्यारी	तीन लोकसे न्यारी
10. बनारसी	बनारसी
11. बनारस के राजा	बनारसके राजा
12. बनारसी रईस	बनारसी रईस
13. बनारस के संन्यासी	बनारसके संन्यासी
14. बनारसी गुरू	बनारसी गुरू
15. बनारस के कलाकार	बनारसके अहीर
16. बनारस के अहीर	बनारसके यान-वाहन
17. बनारस के संस्थाएँ	बनारसी साँड़
18. बनारस के यान-वाहन	बनारसी पान
19. बनारसी साँड़	बनारसी पिकनिक
20. बनारसी पान	यह है बनारस!
21. बनारसी पिकनिक	बनारसकी ठगी
22. यह है बनारस	**बनारसके घाट**
23. बनारस की ठगी	**बनारसकी प्रमुख गायिकाएँ**
24. बनारस की संस्कृति	बनारसी संस्कृति

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