

4 Ethnographies of Transposed Places

The Places of Transposition

The sources about the transposed *vyotirlingas* in Banaras provide limited details about the relationship between the 'original' locations and their transpositions. In her study of the landscape and geographical imagination of Maharashtra, Feldhaus (2003) offers several examples of how locations are connected through identification and comparison. The local site or deity can be defined as identical to its counterpart (x is y), or as another form of it (x is another y). Other examples define the local form as a secondary version of the 'original' (x is a *upa* y) or as a manifestation of the invisible 'original' (x is the invisible y). The latter is well-suited for 'replicating' sites that are only symbolically present, such as the city of Prayag and the mythical Sarasvati River, which is said to flow through its territory even though it is not visible.

A widespread method names certain places in the region as the southern version of famous northern locations or natural landscape features (x is the y of the south). Many examples exist of Dakṣiṇ Kāśī (the southern Banaras) and rivers called Dakṣiṇ Gaṅgā. Feldhaus also highlights various methods used to connect places in Maharashtra with renowned pilgrimage sites or northern natural landscapes through comparison. A place in the region may not only be said to be like or similar to one in the north (x is like y), but statements can be made such as 'x confers the same merits as y', 'x possesses the same qualities as y' or 'x functions similarly to y'. Other types of connections between sites are relative: a place may be identified with another only during specific times of the year or for particular people.

In some of our study sites these comparisons take the form of a claim that the local site is superior. This will be articulated in various ways, for example 'x is better than y', 'x is more powerful than y', 'x is older than y', 'x is more significant than a given multiple of y', 'x, is heavier than y' or 'x is more ancient than y'. Superiority can also be as simple as the local site's name appearing first in certain listings or divine groups, but can extend to comparing the merits gained by visiting the local site to those gained from the performance of specific rituals at a distant site during auspicious periods. As well, the comparison of merits can extend beyond pilgrimage or visiting a site to references to living there, thinking about it, hearing about its glory (through texts that extol its qualities and stories) or even expressing an intention to visit.

4 Ethnographies of Transposed Places

Comparisons between places can develop into complex series of equivalences, reflecting a common feature of *māhātmyas* and prescriptive literature: if there is a rule, or if a place is known for being particularly suited to solving certain human problems, there will always be alternatives available. The idea of substituting one action or thing—or in this case, one place—with another to achieve the same result is found in various ritual and cultural contexts.

In this chapter, I illustrate how connections with distant locations, and the appropriation of meanings and qualities from those locations, take even more specific forms in places of transposition. Only through frequent visits, prolonged observation and listening at these places can we begin to understand the web of connections that sustain each locality and document the ways in which the phenomenon of transposition is explained, and how the narratives from textual sources are integrated. We must listen to the places of transposition to hear what they have to say to us.

I have chosen to focus on the shrines included in the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā, the substitute pilgrimage to the twelve local representatives of the *jyotirliṅgas* promoted and practiced by the Kāśī Pradakṣiṇā Darśana Yātrā Samiti (KPDYS), which I joined in the summer of 2011. In cases where specific transpositions have multiple local representatives I will mention those, but it seems to me that the places in the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā have been intentionally promoted as ‘official’ transpositions through the practice of pilgrimage, the variations of which I will analyse in the fifth chapter. Kedāreśvar (Kedār jī) has its own chapter at the end of the book.

Versatility and Stratification at Tripurāntakeśvar- Mallikārjun: The Lord of the Hill

As we will see in detail in the next chapter, locating the transpositions in Banaras requires careful bibliographic research about the various lists of divine groups and their respective urban routes, and then comparison with what local people know about the divine locations. Having the address of a temple, including the building number and the name of the area, does not guarantee on the ground success. Here, I quote my field notes from the day I searched for the Tripurāntakeśvar temple:

The temple is located in the Sagra area [a developed commercial area where contemporary shopping centres are located]; the area is quite large and the address lists only Shivpurv, as a single name (of a street? of an

area? of the area occupied by the temple itself?), but I thought that the name of the temple would be enough as a reference (blessed innocence!) to get a direction and find it. However, when I arrived at one of the main intersections in Sigra no one seemed to know the Tripurāntakeśvar temple; the rickshaw driver asked a couple of shopkeepers, taking the opportunity to buy some *pān*, which certainly makes conversations easier (!), and everyone pointed us to the nearest Śaṅkar jī kā mandir [temple of Śaṅkar, another name for Śiva], having asked me which deity the temple I was looking for was dedicated to. The search is becoming long, and the rickshaw driver is getting impatient, not understanding why I don't simply settle for visiting any temple of Śiva and insist on finding a specific one, especially one that no one seems to know. So I abandon the vehicle and continue my search on foot, going to the various temples that are suggested to me; I visit several, and in each place I try to ask where my temple is, with little success. Instead, I end up with a kind of interview with the usual questions (Where are you from? Where do you live in Banaras? How come you know Hindi? Are you married? Where is the temple you are looking for? (!)). Almost losing hope, I accept a ride on a motorcycle from a man who says he understands what I am looking for... but look at what I'm doing, I find myself on a motorcycle with a stranger searching for yet another hidden *liṅga*... the usual image of a *videśī* [foreigner] who is unprepared and also meticulous, insisting on finding an unknown temple, which maybe isn't so important if no one remembers its name!⁷¹

In the end I found the temple, not because the motorcyclist recognised it but because in a well-frequented shrine the *pūjārī* explained to me that the name Tripurāntakeśvar, which I had been using, is not common in the area; instead, the temple is widely known as Ṭilā Bābā—Lord of the Hill. Indeed, the temple is situated on a rise beside Mahmoorganj Road, and can be reached by a staircase leading to a large, tree-covered terrace where the small building is located. It consists of two similar cells, one dedicated to Tripurāntakeśvar and in the other, facing the entrance, is Trimukhavinayāk, the three-faced Gaṇeśa. Next to the terrace there is another small shrine dedicated to Hanumān.

On the staircase leading to the temple there is a sign with the names Tripurāntakeśvar and Mallikārjun, the pan-Indian *jyotirliṅga*. A few months after my initial visit, two more signs alluding to the connection were added near the temple. At the base of the staircase, one of these signs lists the 'official' names of the shrine: 'Śrī Tripurāntakeśvar Mahādev jī, Śrī Mallikārjun Mahādev mandir'

71 From my field notes, February 2011.



Fig. 5 The stratification of names at Tripurāntakeśvar. Author's photo, November 2012.

and below, in smaller characters, 'Giriśvar Ṭilā (Sigrā Ṭilā Bābā), Mahmoorganj Road, Sigrā, Varanasi' (Fig. 5). At the top and in smaller characters the temple is identified as part of the group of twelve and described as an ancient temple (*prācīn mandir*), and '*kāśikhaṇḍokta*' (literally 'expressed in KKh'),⁷² wordings that serve as a kind of guarantee of authenticity. The diversity of names and descriptions of the temple highlights the complex layering of traditions present in the transposed locations.

We can know something about the recent history of the temple thanks to the current *pūjārī*, Ramesh Kumar Mishra, who allowed me to review the documentation in his possession. The surrounding land belonged to a family of *zamīndārs* (landowners) from the nearby district of Gazipur and a series of heirs, appointees and affiliates; in 1936, the *zamīndār* family arranged for the Rāmākṣṇa Mission to manage the temple, which it did until 1974, when the staff of this institution declared themselves unable to continue the work. The area was then abandoned and the shrine left to itself until administration was returned to the heirs of the previous landowners in 1984, before they in turn delegated the task to new administrators. These administrators eventually transferred the responsibility to

72 For the expression *kāśikhaṇḍokta*, see also the studies by Gengnagel (2005 and 2011) and Zeiler (2014).

the current *pūjārī*, who has been officially in charge of the temple since around 2008, although he had been voluntarily conducting the daily rituals before then.

The area is located near a Muslim cemetery (*kabristhān*) on land that was presumably donated to the *zamindars* by a regional ruler. Mishra jī states that the temple buildings as we see them today must be about a hundred years old, while the place and the *liṅga* are—as per the tradition—thousands of years old. We can assert that there must have already been a temple with the Tripurāntakeśvar *liṅga* inside when the pictorial map ‘Pilgrims in Banaras’ was created in the mid-18th century because the map includes, as has been mentioned, a temple similar to the current one, with some features that are found at Tripurāntakeśvar.

The current temple seems to legitimise itself as a transposition not so much through the reinterpretation of the narrative of the ‘original’ *jyotirliṅga*, of which there is no resonance in the explanations about the nature of the local temple and its connection with the pan-Indian site; rather, the status of the local representative of Mallikārjun seems to be based on the transposition of spatial elements and its territorial qualities of *tīrtha*. Let us hear from Mishra jī:

This was once a residence of ṛṣis, where there was a small pond (*tālāb*) which, like the one in Pokharā, has been drained [another water point in the city that has been reclaimed], when there was nothing built. When the land originated, the *tālāb* was not created by men, but the water manifested itself. Mallikārjun, following celestial guidance (*ākāśvāṇī*), performed *tapas* [ascetic fervour] here, and because of this heat, the river Kṛṣṇā was drawn here from underground. That water emerges once a year and is pure, like that of the Gaṅgā, and with it rituals are performed during Śivarātrī and in the month of Śrāvaṇa.⁷³

In other conversations Mishra jī explained that the name ‘Lord of the Hill’ comes from the temple’s location on high ground that somewhat resembles a mountain. This reflects the fact that the *jyotirliṅga* Mallikārjun is situated on the mountain of Śrīśail or Śaileś.⁷⁴ These names are also associated with the Himalayas, the quintessential mountains in the Indian imagination, and ‘mountain’ is a landscape

73 From an interview with Ramesh Kumar Mishra, February 2011.

74 Śrīśail, located in the south of Andhra Pradesh, appears to be one of the first places ‘replicated’ in Kāśī; indeed, the sequence of *liṅgas* listed by the SkP around the 7th century begins with Śaileś. It is described as the *liṅga* installed by the Himalaya, which allows a person to avoid rebirth (SkP 29.39-40). However, Śaileś is described as being situated near the river Varāṇā to the north of the city’s territory. The same story is reworked in the KKh (Kālīka Purāṇa 66.33-149), and the *liṅga* referred to is then identified with the one at the temple of Śaileśvar on the banks of the Varāṇā at Maḍhya Ghāṭ. This *liṅga* is given as a ‘replication’ of Mallikārjun in lists of the last

4 Ethnographies of Transposed Places

element often ‘replicated’⁷⁵ Thus, the status of Mallikārjun as a ‘second’ form seems to be legitimised through the ‘replication’ of the sacred geography of the ‘original’ site; the sacred mountain Śaileś and the river Kṛṣṇā are recalled here from elsewhere and are represented in the urban hill and an almost dried-up water source—depicted in the ‘Pilgrims in Banaras’ map—which serve as spatial evidence of the *jyotirlinga*’s presence.

In all the documents reviewed the temple is referred to as Giriśvar Ṭilā, and only some specify it as Tripurāntakeśvar, the name mentioned in the KKh. Despite this, Mishra jī insists that the ‘official’ name, used in government records and the land registry, is Tripurāntakeśvar. The name Giriśvar Ṭilā is mentioned only later, when Mishra jī explains that local people have given the temple on the hill a Bhojpurī name,⁷⁶ which, however, is justified as a descriptive name for the type of place where the temple stands: Ṭilā, Mishra jī explains, indicates the elevation or mountain, and immediately evokes Mallikārjun, the *jyotirlinga* that stands on the famous mountain. The name found in documents and correspondence, where Tripurāntakeśvar is used only in some cases, seems to favour the local tradition of recognising and identifying the temple as the Lord of the Hill; the name Giriśvar Ṭilā in everyday communication becomes simply Ṭilā or Ṭilā Bābā.

The ‘official’ name, or at least the one defined as such by interlocutors when speaking with me, is the one mentioned in sources and used in explaining its tradition. For foreign researchers, as well as for pilgrims from other regions of the country, the place will be known as Tripurāntakeśvar, the ‘replication’ of the *jyotirlinga* Mallikārjun, even before they visit. This is confirmed by Mishra jī’s efforts to persuade me of the place’s authority and power, as well as by what he says about visitors to and their understanding of it:

This is an international temple; that’s why its name is found in the Kāśikhaṇḍa. People come here from all over, from every region, and those who have a map will find it marked as a *jyotirlinga*. For those who don’t know, it will be up to us to tell them!⁷⁷

Mishra jī uses the English word ‘map’ presumably to refer to the maps included in guides to the city, which circulate among pilgrims and also include addresses. In

century. The Tripurāntakeśvar temple on the Sagra hill is listed by Vyas (2011 [1987], 135).

75 For information on the symbolism of the mountain see Pelissero, Shastri and Giuliano in Barbero and Piano (2004). For the mountain as a mythical prototype of the sacred place, see also Eck (1998, 171–174).

76 Mishra jī uses this term almost as a synonym for local; Bhojpurī is commonly spoken in Banaras as a daily and familiar language but *ṭilā* is also a Hindi word.

77 From an interview with Mishra jī, February 2011.

this type of illustrative material, temples mentioned in the KKh that have trans-regional resonance, such as the transpositions of pan-Indian centres, are included as evidence of Kāśī's universality, representing the *tīrthas* of the entire country and transformed into local pilgrimages. The temple of Ṭilā Bābā thus has a connection with another level of local geography, that of the pilgrimage routes and classes of deities that connect and systematise the variety of local divine forms, as I will discuss in the next chapter. Thus, pilgrims and visitors unfamiliar with the city know in advance about the imagined space, and the experience of the lived place then becomes a means of verification, a tangible confirmation of knowledge they believe is derived from textual sources. It is expected that the place and its officiants will confirm, or rather *embody*, the description transmitted, often with creativity, by the informational material. I myself was searching for the temple by its 'official' name, the only one I knew before encountering the place and its various voices.

Many other devotees are in direct contact with the place and its daily reality. For these individuals, the 'official' name, as well as the tradition that considers the *līṅga* a 'replica' of Mallikārjuna and the entire spatial reality a reference to the mountain of Śaileśa, seem to be a subsequent addition, an enhancement of the temple's power and qualities rather than its original significance. The daily activity of the temple does not seem connected to its status as a transposition or to its inclusion in city routes. The emergence of a local tradition that overlaps with the 'official' one does not seem to pertain only to the practice of naming.

In addition to the daily ritual activity, which revolves around two *ārtīs* (ceremonies involving offerings and ritual lamps), one conducted in the morning and one in the evening, with times depending on the season, the place serves as a gathering and recreation spot for the local community. Devotees meet and talk with Mishra jī, who is present for most of the day, in addition to visiting the temple and making offerings to the *mūrtīs* (divine icons installed in the temples that are believed to embody the divine presence once consecrated). Mishra jī, apart from being a fundamental agent in the revitalisation of the place, is a reference point for local devotees; he also provides astrological services and family consultations, which attract a considerable crowd daily.

A further differentiation between traditions, in order to meet the needs of the local community, is reflected in the temple space itself. As mentioned, the main temple consists of two similar cells, housing Tripurāntakeśvar and Trimukhavinayāk, while a small shrine dedicated to Hanumān is also present on one side of the terrace. The devotee can, however, now have *darśana* of four different divine figures, because a cell housing Kālī has recently been added to the central structure. This construction was funded by devotees and as such does not appear in documents listing the *mūrtīs* present at Giriśvar Ṭilā. Unlike other temples in which accessory *mūrtīs* are clearly distinct from the main one, here the space seems to be shared without hierarchy.

The practices and discourses of the Lord of the Hill temple constitute a varied tradition and the place presents itself in its plurality. It does so through the fundamental mediation of Mishra ji, who uses and discusses its names, versions and connections as needed, presenting one or more of its various specificities and ‘services’ to the devotee, the pilgrim from other regions and the foreign researcher.

Filling the Void and Renaming God: Ghuśmeś and Bhīmāśaṅkar

As is evident from the case just illustrated, the names and various designations of a place play fundamental roles in the traditions of the transposed places. The previously mentioned study by Basso (1988) suggests that the activity of naming could be a universal method that humans use to appropriate physical territory. In our case, the act of naming involves establishing various kinds of connections.

Ghuśmeś and Bhīmāśaṅkar, as has emerged from the overview of the presence of the *vyotirliṅgas* in the sources on Banaras, are the two great absentees. The Puranic tradition does not record a *liṅga* called Ghuśmeś in Kāśī. Therefore, this name is a sort of void that needs to be filled. Among the pan-Indian *vyotirliṅgas*, this is one of the most controversial; in many lists of the twelve Ghuśmeś is not included or its name is changed to Ghr̥ṣmeśvar. Fleming hypothesises that the story of Ghuśmeś is a later addition to the collections of the ŚP coming from different narrative traditions (Fleming 2007, 124–136).⁷⁸ The ‘original’ location of Ghuśmeś is also a subject of debate.⁷⁹ Similarly, Bhīmāśaṅkar (whose ‘original’

78 In the ŚP the name appears as Ghuśmeś, but in Maharashtra, the region of its ‘original’ location, the *liṅga* is known as Ghr̥ṣmeśvar. The narrative that circulates near Ellora about the origin of the *liṅga* and Śivālayā, the water source associated with the temple, is completely different from the one in the collections of the ŚP. According to local *māhātmyas*, the *liṅga* was formed by Pārvatī, who pounded the red earth common in the region (the root *ghṛṣ* refers to this action), and the SkP is cited as the source for this, suggesting the presence of two distinct traditions (one from the ŚP and one from the SkP). However, the local *māhātmyas* are not found in the published editions of the SkP (see Fleming 2007, 31). Another possible name of the temple is Guheśvar, which appears in an inscription on a copper plate from 742 AD, citing Elāpura (Ellora) as the origin of the tribute and mentioning the Guheśvar *tīrtha*. The site may have existed, therefore, before the 10th century; for more details, see Fleming 2007, 124–125.

79 In addition to the site near Ellora, a temple in the Sawai Madhopur district of Rajasthan also claims to be the *vyotirliṅga* Ghuśmeś. The website <https://ghushmeshwar.com/vyotrilinga/> (last accessed on 19 February 2025) includes it in the list of the twelve *vyotirliṅgas*.

form, as noted earlier, is in Pune) does not appear in the tradition of glorification connected to Banaras.

It is possible that the lack of specific indications of these two places in Banaras gave rise to the complex history of their placement. In any case, the uncertainty about local representatives of the two *jyotirliṅgas* seems to have been resolved with the emergence recently of places named Bhīmāśaṅkar and Ghuṣmeś. These locations appear to be accepted as local transpositions of the respective *jyotirliṅgas*, as they are included in the route of the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā, the pilgrimage around the twelve. Their identification is the result of a process of appropriation—of both a specific space and a narrative framework that connects them to a known group—through naming. This process, as I will illustrate, has not been without criticism and disapproval from certain ritual authorities.

Ghuṣmeś is undoubtedly the most recent example of the relocation of the local transposition of the pan-Indian *jyotirliṅga* and an attempt to revitalise a place through the renaming of its main deity. The name Ghuṣmeś began to be associated with the territory of Banaras in sources from the past century, specifically in the lists of local ‘replicas’ of the *jyotirliṅgas* compiled by the authors of *māhātmyas* at that time (cf. Chapter 5). Although these various lists do not always agree on the location of each divine form, they do seem to concur on the location of Ghuṣmeś. It is identified with an auxiliary *liṅga* located in the courtyard of the Kāmācchādevī temple, not far from the Baṭuk Bhairav temple. When visiting the Kāmācchādevī temple—also a local transposition of the famous pilgrimage site of Kāmākhyādevī in Assam—one of the *pūjārīs* I consulted confirmed the location of Ghuṣmeś in a secondary hall behind the temple of the goddess, where a series of *liṅgas* is sometimes offered flowers by devotees: ‘*Yātrī log unko Ghuṣmeś mānte hein*’, he said (‘the pilgrims believe, or accept, it as Ghuṣmeś’).

It is difficult to argue that a Ghuṣmeś temple itself has always existed in Banaras if no textual or visual sources mention its name, so the identification of Ghuṣmeś with an auxiliary *liṅga* in a well-known and frequented temple, like Kāmācchādevī, might seem like a way to overcome its otherwise complete absence. This identification perhaps represents a moment just before the compilation of the first local lists of the *jyotirliṅgas*, which I will discuss later. Such lists included addresses, so the issue of missing members of the group would have arisen, perhaps prompting the need to ‘discover’ the existence of Ghuṣmeś in, for example, an already known temple. Over time, however, the group of sacred sites solidified and an auxiliary *liṅga* in an unremarkable room at the back of a separate temple likely became insufficient to serve as the local representative of a pan-Indian *tīrtha*. The logic of representing the whole with just a part, or the group with only a few members (as in the visual production discussed in Chapter 3), no longer seems applicable. Absences and poorly represented members needed to be filled or replaced.

4 Ethnographies of Transposed Places

A new Ghuṣmeśvar has indeed emerged possibly in the first decade of the present millennium, although the building near Śivālā Ghāṭ that houses this new transposition of the *jyotirlinga* predates its renaming as such. At the time of my research, the existence of this Ghuṣmeśvar was not recorded in any published lists but its location appeared in the list of addresses provided by the KPDYS to participants on the day of the pilgrimage to the twelve *jyotirlingas*. In the list I obtained during my participation in the pilgrimage on July 24, 2011, Ghuṣmeśvar had two different addresses: the first referred to the new temple and the second to the one in the courtyard of Kāmācchādevī. In fact, the group of pilgrims visited both manifestations. Had it not been for that pilgrimage I would have had no knowledge of the existence of the Ghuṣmeśvar temple at Śivālā Ghāṭ. It is evident that this shrine remains relatively unknown as a transposed *jyotirlinga*, and is not widely known as Ghuṣmeśvar.

The temple does not seem to be particularly popular. It remains closed for most of the day, opening only for the two daily *ārti* ceremonies, when its caretaker, locally known as Baṅgālī Bābā, is present. He is a renunciant originally from present-day Bangladesh, who has been looking after the temple for about twenty years. The shrine consists of a single square room with the *liṅga* at its centre, and the building has recently been renovated thanks to donations from south Indian devotees.

In my conversation with the *bābā*, I learned about the renaming of the temple in line with its location at Śivālā—a name that references the mythical lake where the pan-Indian *jyotirlinga* Ghuṣmeśvar is said to arise. There are three distinct stages in the transformation of the site.⁸⁰

Baṅgālī Bābā explains:

In the beginning, there was no name; the temple is very old, and the *mūrti* is a product of nature. It was a stone from the Narmadā River, and therefore it can be called *mahāliṅga* [literally ‘great *liṅga*’] or Narmadeśvar. Someone must have lifted it from beneath the river to bring it here, where it was installed. It is not a self-manifested *liṅga* because it was brought here; however, it comes from nature, not crafted by any artisan.

Contrary to the narratives that typically explain the manifestation of both pan-Indian and local *jyotirlingas* as self-manifested (*svayambhū*), this one is thought to have been placed here by someone. Its significance and uniqueness, however, are highlighted by the natural formation of the divine form, referred to by the *bābā* not as a *liṅga* at first, but as a *śilā*, meaning ‘boulder’ or ‘stone’. Even though the

80 The material presented is a reorganisation of an interview with Baṅgālī Bābā in March 2012, along with unrecorded personal communications that took place in April 2012.

name *Narmadeśvar* is used to explain its formation, he says clearly that initially the form had no name, and it is possible that the shrine had been abandoned for a long time: ‘When I first arrived here, daily activities and care of the temple were resumed; at the beginning, I called it Paśupatināth, and even today this is one of the names by which it is known.’ So with the arrival of the *bābā*, the temple—whose name had presumably been forgotten—was ‘renamed’ with a name chosen by him. The choice of the name indicates a desire to connect the shrine to a powerful entity, Paśupatināth (the Lord of Animals), in Nepal; a place that is likely known to the *bābā* as a known gathering centre for ascetics and a hub of renunciation traditions (also ‘replicated’ in Banaras elsewhere). Baṅgālī Bābā further explains that:

After a few years, on the advice of Swāmī Shivanand Sarasvati, a disciple of Karpatri jī, this was considered a *vyotirliṅga* and was given the name of a *vyotirliṅga*; thus, the temple became known by two different names, Paśupatināth and Ghuśmeśvar, but it is primarily recognised as Ghuśmeśvar. The name was given to it over ten years ago. In fact, the name of the surrounding area, Śivālā, is that of the location of the *vyotirliṅga*.⁸¹

The renaming is justified based on the already explicit evocation of the broader space of the *vyotirliṅga* at the local site of Banaras. Shivalā, a name that appears in the *vyotirliṅgastotra* as the geographical location of Ghuśmeśvar, is already present at the temple: the building is indeed located at Shivalā Ghat, and the transposition of this space precedes that of the *vyotirliṅga* itself.

It should be noted that narrative material related to the pan-Indian *vyotirliṅgas* is not invoked at all in this type of transposition; the name alone is sufficient for the authentication of the local *liṅga*. It is the practice of pilgrimage, as we will see in the fifth chapter, that consolidates the new reality, formalising and disseminating the renaming of the temple and promoting an ‘invented’ tradition. In the case of Ghuśmeśvar, its renaming seems primarily designed to provide a stop on the pilgrimage route; the temple itself does not seem to benefit significantly from this.

The situation of Bhīmeśvar is quite different, even though in this case the transposition is also based on the renaming of a pre-existing site with the name of a pan-Indian *vyotirliṅga*. Today, Bhīmeśvar—or its transposition recognised by pilgrimage practice—is located in the well-known temple of Kāśī Karvaṭ, not far from the Viśvanāth temple complex in the heart of the old city. The renaming is

81 Swami Shivanand Sarasvati was a notable figure from Banaras belonging to the Dandiswami order. Karpatri jī was also a Dandiswami, and a controversial figure in orthodox Hinduism in the last century. We will meet both again in Chapter 5, where some further details can be found.

not as recent as in the case of Ghuśmeśvar; in fact, the tradition that identifies the central *līṅga* of the Kāśī Karvaṭ temple as Bhīmeśvar has been recorded at least since the publication by Kuber Nath Sukul (1977, 211), nephew of the author of the Kāśīdarpaṇa map and author of a comprehensive guide to pilgrimages that I will discuss later.

The choice of the location of Bhīmeśvar at Kāśī Karvaṭ is contested by Kedarnath, another author of a comprehensive pilgrimage monograph (1987) and a member of the family which has resided near for generations and holds hereditary rights over the Vyās Pīṭha, a central hub for pilgrimages. Without delving into the debate over the routes, which I will address in the next chapter, I refer to the information that Vyas jī provided about the transposition of Bhīmeśvar, in order to compare it with what has been communicated to me by the officiants of the Kāśī Karvaṭ temple. Vyas jī locates Bhīmāśaṅkar as one of the accessory *līṅgas* situated in the Viśvanāth complex, to the southwest of the central deity near the image of the planet Bṛhaspatī (Jupiter).⁸² Another identification suggested by Vyas jī places Bhīmāśaṅkar in the temple of Tilbhāṇḍeśvar, in the area of Pandey Haveli while the designation of the temple of Kāśī Karvaṭ as the site of the *jyotirlinga* is considered by Vyas to be a genuine error or invention by Sukul.⁸³ Due to his ritual role and personal history, which we will explore, he sees himself as the unique and natural interpreter of the traditions about the divine forms of the city, and says that the previous name of the central deity of this temple was Jaṭāśaṅkar. This name indeed appears in a publication shown by Vyas jī (Varma 1925) and in the Jaipur Survey Map of the 18th century (Bahura and Singh 1990, 105–106, map no. 191, figs. 55–56).

It is possible that in systematising the list of the twelve transposed *jyotirlingas* gaps have been filled in and missing sites found and verified where there were no sources to identify certain local *jyotirlingas*. Bhīmāśaṅkar does not appear on 19th-century maps. Thus, it seems that two different traditions have emerged regarding the location of this *jyotirlinga*: one places it as a secondary *līṅga* while the other locates it in an already prominent temple, Kāśī Karvaṭ. It is in the latter that the most active promotion of the Bhīmāśaṅkar *jyotirlinga* takes place, and the origins of its renaming are lost.

The officiants in charge of the Kāśī Karvaṭ temple—whom I met at the beginning of my journey—belong to the Upadhyaya family, which has been managing the temple for about a century. Both father and son indicated that the current form underwent renewal (*jīrṇoddhār*) in 1951.⁸⁴ It is likely that the date of this

82 The complete identification of the divine forms present in the Viśvanāth complex, as made by Vyas jī, is documented by Gutschow (2006, 146).

83 Personal communication with Kedarnath Vyas, March 2012.

84 From an interview with Amla Shankar Upadhyaya and his son Dinesh, February 2011.

restructuring coincides with its renaming as the site of Bhīmeśvar—a renaming that may have been intended to revitalise a temple with a rather dubious and obscure reputation. It seems sadly to have been known in the past as a gathering place for officiants of questionable character, and as the site of ritual suicides of pilgrims wishing (or compelled) to die in this divine abode in order to attain liberation from the cycle of rebirths.

The term ‘*karvaṭ*’ (*karvaṭa* in Sanskrit means ‘village’ or ‘slope’ of a mountain) may also suggest a sort of heavy blade (*karvant*) that was placed in the ceiling to fall on devotees chosen by the deity, in an underground room thought to be directly connected by a passage to the nearby cremation ground at Maṇikarṇikā Ghāt.⁸⁵ It is possible that the renewal of the temple and its promotion as a transposed Bhīmeśvar are responses to a desire to restore dignity to a well-frequented shrine in the sacred centre and improve its macabre reputation.

Repositioning of Divine Stories in Rāmeśvar

The popular story about the origins of the *liṅga* of Rāmeśvar, installed by Rāma to pay homage to Śiva before embarking on his journey to Laṅkā, is not found in the Rāmāyaṇa, the epic poem dedicated to the exploits of Rāma. Instead, it is an episode added by the ŚP tradition, which incorporates it into the story of Rāma’s crossing to Laṅkā to defeat Rāvaṇa.⁸⁶ The name of the *liṅga* is clearly inextricably linked to its originator, allowing devotees to infer its origins even without knowing the story in detail. The widely-known tales of Rāmacandra, particularly conveyed through the Rāmcaritmānas—an all-pervasive work in the culture of Banaras, the birthplace of its author—have ensured the special prominence of this *vyotirliṅga*.

Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that Rāmeśvar is one of the divine forms with the most transpositions in Banaras. The KKh mentions among others a Rāma *tīrtha*, a water site for bathing in order to attain the abode of Viṣṇu (KKh 84.69), which may be identified with the present-day Rām Kuṇḍa. This is the large pond where a temple dedicated to Rāmeśvar now stands and is part of the route of the twelve *vyotirliṅgas* of the KPDYS. Other transpositions of the *liṅga* in the Banaras area include one located in a small temple at Mānmandir Ghāt, near the

85 Personal communication with Om Prakash Sharma, former director of the Swedish Study Centre for Indian Culture in Banaras, October 2010.

86 The story is introduced in JS 57 and further elaborated in KS 31.

4 Ethnographies of Transposed Places

transposition of Someśvar,⁸⁷ mentioned by Sukul and Vyas but not by Sarasvatī, another composer of modern *māhātmyas* who we will meet soon;⁸⁸ one at Hanu-mān Ghāt, mentioned only by Sukul (1977, 211); and that of the village of Rāmeśvar, located on the Varanā river, which is not included on any list of the twelve but represents one of the most important stops in the Pañcakrośīyātrā.

It is, however, the temple near Rām Kuṇḍa to draw most attention here. Apart from its inclusion in the KPDYS pilgrimage, it is much bigger and more widely-known than the temple at Mānmandir Ghāt, which is now infrequently visited. The latter is known in the area of the *ghāt* and honoured during the Dvā-daśajyotirliṅgayātrā (possibly as a result of the visit on that route to the nearby Someśvar) but its *darśana* can only be obtained through a small window from the outside or during the two daily ceremonies.

The temple near Rām Kuṇḍa (Fig. 6) is included as one of the transpositions of the pan-Indian *jyotirliṅga* by Sukul (ibid.) and as the only one by Sarasvatī (1993, 251), but it does not appear in the work of Vyas, despite his personal confirmation that he does recognise it. The temple is located not far from the more famous Lakṣmī Kuṇḍa, close to Laksa Road, in the centre of a rather affluent residential area. Unlike other water bodies in the city that are evidently neglected, the pond at the back of the temple seems to be well maintained and managed. The area of the tank and the temple are identified as *paurāṇika tīrtha* (ancient and / or Purāṇa-transmitted sacred places), as indicated by signs placed around the water area. Meanwhile, the entrance to the temple bears the inscription: ‘Śrī kāsīkhaṇḍokta dvādaśa jyotirliṅga, śrī prācīn rāmeśvar nāth mahādev mandir’, identifying the temple as one of the ancient *jyotirliṅgas* described by the KKh—the expression *kāsīkhaṇḍokta* being seen again. Below, the address of the temple is provided (*akhārā rāmkunḍ, laksā, vārānasī*); indeed, the outer area of the complex is occupied by an *akhārā*, a local gymnasium.⁸⁹

In the centre of the pond is a platform housing the *mūrtis* of Rāma, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa. The temple’s location on a body of water is also a characteristic of the temple of Rāmeśvara on the Varanā river., and the presence of water can be seen as a necessary element that recalls the ‘original’ landscape of Rāmeśvara, almost surrounded by the Indian Ocean. However, this transposition is not explained

87 Rāmeśvar and Someśvar are often located close to each other; in fact, near the temple of Rāmeśvar on the Varanā river there is also a *liṅga* named Someśvar.

88 Sukul (1977, 211) and Vyas (2011 [1987], 136) note that Setubandha Rāmeśvar, or Setubandha yātrā, is present at Mānmandir ghāt. For this reason, Sukul considers this transposition the most important, listing two other forms alongside it. Vyas jī includes only this one among the transpositions and does not, for example, mention the presence of the one at Rām Kuṇḍa.

89 For the importance of these places in Banarsi society, see Kumar 1988 and 1992; Alter 1992; Freitag 1989, 120–121.



Fig. 6 The Rāmeśvar *līṅga*, decorated with offerings. Author's photo, March 2011.

through the repetition of spatial elements from the southern site; instead, it is explained through the appropriation of the narrative about the establishment of the *jyotirlinga*. Both the temple officiant and one of the regular devotees with whom I often shared the spacious and ventilated *maṇḍapa*, while contemplating the sacred pond, recount that the *līṅga* was established by Rāma himself to worship Śiva and seek his favour for the impending battle against the demon Rāvaṇa.⁹⁰ This account places the local transposition of Rāmeśvara as contemporaneous with or even prior to the establishment of the eponymous form in the south of the country,⁹¹ thus reversing the hierarchy between the 'original' place and its transposition.

Another example of inversion between the 'original' site and its local version, articulated in more detail in a myth that narrates the transfer of the actual deity

90 The versions presented in the JS and KS of the ŚP place the action before the battle. Other variants of the episode have Rāma installing the *līṅga* after his victory, as an act of thanksgiving and atonement for the sin of killing a Brahman (*brahmahatyā*) (Fleming 2007, 119–120).

91 Similar versions are recounted by Shankar Prasad Yadav, the priest of the temple, in an interview in March 2011; and Anil Kumar, a daily devotee, in March 2012.

4 Ethnographies of Transposed Places

from one place to another, will be encountered when discussing Kedāreśvar in the concluding chapter. The case of Rāmeśvar, however, demonstrates how transpositions can be understood by devotees as identical and simultaneous forms of the object they might be said to ‘replicate’. For the devotee, the venerated, local form is primary; from this perspective, it was the same Rāma who came here first and then to the south, establishing both forms and conferring upon them the light.⁹² The priest’s discourse also echoes this inversion of hierarchy when asserting that *darśana* of Rāmeśvar in Kāśī yields greater benefits than that in south India. This is attributed to the KKh, and it is indeed not uncommon, as we will see in the case of Kedāreśvar, to find such assertions in *māhātmyas* about local shrines compared with those in other regions. Something about the very territory of the city of Banaras seems incontrovertibly to make its places and divine forms superior. In the case of Rāmeśvar, however, the reference to the KKh is purely rhetorical; as often happens, the KKh is cited to lend validity and authority to the discourse, without actual correspondence between the source and what is transmitted orally.

The inversion of the hierarchy between ‘original’ and ‘replica’ can be seen as the ultimate expression of the desire of compilers of local *māhātmyas* to construct the myth of the city as a comprehensive space. However, it is the places themselves that embody and reinterpret these all textual traditions in anything but ‘orthodox’ and predictable ways. In the present case, the transposed temple of Rāmeśvar, a space imagined by Brahman compilers of *māhātmyas*, is managed by a family of Yadavs, a pastoral caste group. They assure me that the temple belongs to no one in particular and that no Brahman serves as *pūjārī*. Instead, they describe it as a communal reality: it is primarily the attendees of the adjacent *akhārā* who take care of it. Like the *akhārā* members, other regular devotees of Rāmeśvar are part of the surrounding community. In fact, it is not a temple located in the area of the *ghāṭs*, or in a frequented passageway where it might attract the interest of casual passers-by. In addition to being a form that encapsulates the power of Śiva and recalls the deeds of the hero Rāma, however, it also symbolises the will of Viṣṇu, who guided the actions of the epic hero and personally participated in the installation of the *liṅga*. As a result, devotees of Viṣṇu also revere this form.

92 Personal conversation with Anil Kumar, March 2012.

The Faded Fame of Oṃkāreśvar

The case of Oṃkāreśvar in Banaras is quite singular and highlights the fundamental contribution of individual sites and local actors to the production and continuation of a tradition or its fall into oblivion. Both Oṃkāreśvar and Kedāreśvar, are described in textual sources as important *liṅgas*, but Kedāreśvar has developed differently.⁹³

Oṃkāreśvar is to the north of the city, on what were once the shores of Matsyodarī, a lake that was drained and reduced in size during colonial rule in the 19th century. The temple area features a large earthen mound where there are the three shrines that make up Oṃkāreśvar, as well as several Muslim graves. This space serves as a gathering point for the local community of Muslim weavers who come together to spread and prepare their textiles. The divine form is believed to be divided into five parts, corresponding to the sounds of the sacred primordial syllable Oṃ: A-kār, U-kār, Ma-kār, along with the nasalisation (*bindu*) and the resonance (*nād*). Of these, only the first three parts are said to be visible and physically present in the shrines that make up Oṃkāreśvar. Their manifestation in Kāśī is narrated in the KKh (73.79-88).

The small shrine commonly referred to as Oṃkāreśvar, representing the Ma-kār, is the only one visible when approaching from the main road. It is a modest structure that can accommodate not more than one devotee at a time, while another shrine, U-kār, is lower down, slightly larger and better maintained. Its *liṅga* is situated below ground level. During my visits in the spring of 2011 this temple was undergoing restoration; the project included the reconstruction of the building's walls and possibly the renewal of a *śikharā*. The other part of Oṃkāreśvar, A-kār, is in a more hidden spot near a large *pīpal* tree, and seems to be less well-known; indeed, during my initial visits, it was not pointed out as part of the complex. As noted during my participation in the Dvādaśajyotirliṅga pilgrimage, however, pilgrims are guided to this third temple for a complete *darśana* of the portions of Oṃkāreśvar. Current *pūjārī* Shridar Pandey has been tasked with the management and upkeep of the temple by its well-known owner, Bhavani Shankar Pandey⁹⁴ and the *pūjārī* and his family reside in the area.

93 In the sources, starting with the compendium of Lakshmidhara (TVK p. 57), Oṃkāreśvar is given considerable attention. The KKh dedicates almost two chapters (73–74) to it, referring to it as a miraculous and radiant *tīrtha* (33.118, 61.189, 69.167, 76.156, 86.108-10, 87.15). Additionally, it is included in a route of the fourteen divine abodes (*āyatana*) (100.43-47). This highlights its significance within the broader context of sacred geography and the tradition surrounding divine worship in the region.

94 Bhavani Shankar Pandey is a central figure in the religious life of Banaras, as the owner of shares in the rotation system for revenue distribution among the temples (*pārī*) of the Śitala temple at Daśāśvamedh Ghāt, one of the city's most popular shrines.

4 Ethnographies of Transposed Places

The name Oṃkāreśvar appears in the KKh as a *liṅga* that is part of a sequence of fourteen divine abodes (*āyatanas*) that delineate the *muktikṣetra*, or ‘field of liberation’.⁹⁵ The sequence begins here and traces the territory known as Avimukta, the broader spatial entity of the city, which is described as a *liṅga* extending for five *krośa*. Vyas jī includes a list of deities near the temple, which together constitute the Oṃkāṛ Antargrhyātrā, a pilgrimage that prescribes visiting 108 divine forms found in the Oṃkāṛ *khaṇḍa*—which, starting from the north, is the first of the three sections into which the city’s territory is divided. The first eight stops mentioned are part of the Oṃkāreśvar complex, indicating that the space around the current buildings has been perceived ideally as rich in divine forms, many of which Vyas recorded as having vanished (*luṭta*) in the last century.

Since the beginning of the last century, the glory of Oṃkāreśvar must have faded, indicating that the richness of the imagined space cannot live on past glories but must be sustained by local practices and the ingenuity of the individuals involved in the daily life of the place. Oṃkāreśvar, though, is one of the few transposed *jyotirliṅgas* that has had an independent local tradition since the Puranic glorifications, which narrate its origin in a myth entirely disconnected from that of the homonymous *jyotirliṅga* and place it among the predominant and constitutive forms of the urban territory. However, this apparent renown is not enough to maintain activity at the site that remains today after past glories have faded. Oṃkāreśvar is now a temple with few regular devotees and has been forgotten even by many people living nearby, who, as my research reveals, prefer to go to other temples located a little further south. The only promoters of the place seem to be ‘outsiders’, as communicated sadly by Shridar Pandey, who explains that the restoration work has been funded by devotees from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, along with a few other individuals interested in the fate of the temple, such as some prominent ritual specialists from Banaras.

Shridar Pandey explains that the neighbourhood is inhabited by very poor people, unlike the area just south near Trilocan, where some devotees go and support the ancient temples, as he believes they should support Oṃkāreśvar. He attributes the temple’s low profile as well to the strong Islamic presence in the area and says that it is only during festivals specifically dedicated to the worship of Śiva that there is a certain influx of visitors, which is completely absent for the rest of the year.

This highlights the complexities of temple management and the significance of individual roles within the broader religious ecosystem of Banaras. For more details, see Chapter 6.

95 A summary is in KKh 100.43-47, but the route had been previously described in chapter 73, which is dedicated to the greatness of Oṃkāreśvar.

As noted, the presence of most of the *jyotirlingas* in Kāśī is transmitted by local sources as if they have always been connected to the city's territory, regardless of their belonging to the group. Only for some of them is the 'original' location mentioned from which they were transferred or moved to the city. Others seem to have independent traditions, originally connected to the territory of Banaras, and Oṃkāreśvar appears to be one of these cases: the narrative explaining its manifestation in Kāśī has nothing to do with the tradition associated with the 'original' site in Madhya Pradesh, where Śiva manifests in response to worship from the Vindhya mountain. The status of *jyotirlinga* is not mentioned in the KKh description of Oṃkāreśvar in Kāśī, and neither is the site on the island in the Narmadā River. On the other hand, the KKh refers extensively to the sacred river and a corresponding *liṅga*, Narmadeśvar, installed in Kāśī and 'replicated' in numerous variants throughout the region.⁹⁶

In the myth introduced in the KKh to illustrate the greatness of Oṃkāreśvar in Kāśī, the narrative device involves a visit by the Brahman Damāna to the 'original' Oṃkāreśvar, said to be on the banks of the Revā—another name for the Narmadā River—near Amarakaṇṭhak. This *liṅga* is said to be near the source of the sacred river (KKh 73.70-75 and 74.7-8), seemingly ignoring the existence of the island where the *jyotirlinga* recognised today is situated. On the Narmadā near Oṃkāreśvar, then, Damāna is seeking a guide to achieving mental detachment and encounters Pāśupata ascetics who narrate the greatness of Avimukta, describing its places and divine forms and indicating the existence of the *liṅga* of Oṃkāreśvar in Kāśī, whose *darśana* bestows great merit (KKh 74.1-122). To demonstrate the greatness of this place, the Pāśupatas recount the story of a devotee of the *liṅga* who, in addition to her daily devotional practices, physically unites with the *liṅga* on the night of the fourteenth day of the bright half (*śukla pakṣa*) of the lunar month of Vaiśikha in April–May (KKh 74.96-98). The text then describes the incredible power acquired by the *liṅga* at this time, when all sacred places merge into it (KKh 74.100), and praises other places around the *tīrtha*. Remarkably, the praise in the KKh for the *liṅga* of Oṃkāreśvar in Kāśī is said to take place near an 'original' Oṃkāreśvar (near the source of the Narmadā rather than in its current location), but indicates the superiority of the distant *tīrtha* (in Kāśī) compared with the place where the action occurs (Oṃkāreśvar in its presumed 'original' location).

The mention of the divine form originating elsewhere appears, in this case, to be a later addition to the KKh aligning with its totalising logic of and the promotion of the city as a universal centre where all deities and *tīrthas* have come to reside in the house of Śiva. The narrative of the origin of the local Oṃkāreśvar

96 KKh 92 is dedicated to the glory of Narmadeśvar; for the different manifestations of this *liṅga* in the region, see Gutschow 2006, 364–365.

describes a divine appearance in the form of the primordial syllable to Brahmā, completely detached from any myth about the appearance of a *vyotirliṅga*,⁹⁷ and seems to indicate the existence of an independent tradition.

The same can be said regarding the myth of the devoted girl, which seems to testify to locally defined worship practices; indeed, it indicates a specific time of year and describes other locations around Oṃkāreśvar. For example, it mentions Śrīmukhī, a cave or well where those who stay for five nights can see the Nāgini, or serpent deities associated with water places, who will reveal both auspicious and inauspicious events (KKh 74.101-102) and the lake Matsyodarī, whose waters are considered a repository of celestial rivers (KKh 74.105).

The case of Oṃkāreśvar demonstrates how a tradition centred on a place is always composed of overlapping layers and connections to spaces from elsewhere—and we will explore this more thoroughly in our encounter with Kedāreśvar. On the other hand, a rich and articulated tradition like that of Oṃkāreśvar seems to have faded, for reasons that are not well understood, but likely depend on a lack of vitality in its transmission within the place itself.

Other Forms of Transposition: Narratives and Textual References in the Temples of Vaidyanāth, Mahākāl, Someśvar, Tryambakeśvar and Nāgeśvar

The transposition of the *vyotirliṅga* Vaidyanāth is now located in Banaras at the Baijnāth temple in the Kamacchā area, within a residential complex surrounding the temple. The building was constructed at the behest of Ahilyabai Holkar and the Kāśī Nareś, as noted on a plaque placed at the base of the staircase leading to the temple entrance in 1984. The activities and management of the donations that sustain the temple have been in the hands of Shriram Suvedi and his son Hari for about forty years, since the family arrived in Banaras from Nepal. Shriram Suvedi informs me that the owner of the land and temple—a Gosvāmī—has not managed it for a long time and has handed over all responsibilities to them. The current officiants explain that they rely on devotees for any renewal expenses and

97 The appearance to Brahmā does recall the myth of the column of fire, where Śiva emerges as a *liṅga* of light, as in this case (KKh 73.143). Here, however, Śiva manifests to grant a boon to Brahmā, who has praised and propitiated Him. As is customary, the devotee expresses the desire for the deity to remain where he has manifested, in the form of the *liṅga*.

for organising special ceremonies.⁹⁸ The system seems to be working, as during my last visit I noticed that the building has been entirely repainted in bright colours and renovated. In front of the main temple, behind Nandin (gazing at the *liṅga* of Vaidyanāth or Baijnāth), there is a small cell dedicated to Hanumān. Behind the building, there is another entrance to the temple that accesses it directly from the residential complex; here we also find a well of sacred water used for ceremonies and as a common resource by the surrounding community.

The temple officiants explain the existence of the transposed form in terms of *prātirūpa* of the ‘original’ form located in Jharkhand;⁹⁹ there is no reference to any narrative about that, but it is identified as *svayambhū*, meaning it was not installed by human hands. The officiants then explain the presence of transposed divine forms from across India in Kāśī by echoing the repeated narrative motif of the city as a universal abode where all deities, names and forms have a representative, allowing devotees to accumulate the same or greater merits with a visit to the city. The verses of the *Jyotirlingastotra* are carved on a votive slab on one side of the square building, and some devotees stop to recite the names of the *jyotirlingas*.

The remaining transpositions of the *jyotirlingas* in Banaras do not seem to be particularly significant in the contemporary religious life of the city. Neither are they prominent in the imagined space outlined by textual and visual sources. In particular, the *liṅgas* of Someśvar, Tryambakeśvar and Nāgeśvar are currently housed in small shrines that receive little attention.

Mahākāl presents a somewhat different situation, as it is the only name in the group explicitly designated as a *jyotirlinga* in the KKh, which also highlights its presence in the city more than the others (apart from Kedāreśvar, Oṃkāreśvar and Viśveśvar). It is located in the expansive complex of the Mahāmṛtyuñjaya temple in Daranagar, a part of the commercial area known as Koṭval, near the well-known temple of Kāl Bhairav. The transposition of the Ujjain *liṅga* is housed in one of two similar cells: the other hosts the Vṛddhakāleśvar *liṅga*. These cells were likely intended to be an independent temple but were later incorporated into the larger complex, which was undergoing renovation during my research. This name Mahāmṛtyuñjaya refers to another *liṅga* in a different part of the building. The temple was presumably previously known as Vṛddhakāl; indeed, in the lists of addresses of the pilgrimage route to the *jyotirlingas*, Mahākāl is noted to be ‘within the perimeter of Vṛddhakāl’ (Sukul 1977, 173; Vyās 2011 [1987], 136; Singh 1993, 159). The Kāśīdarpaṇa places it nearby. The merging of Mahāmṛtyuñjaya

98 From an interview with Shriram Suvedi, March 2012.

99 Vaidyanath has an additional representative in Parli, Maharashtra.

4 Ethnographies of Transposed Places

with the surrounding shrines must, then, have happened in relatively recent years.¹⁰⁰

Above the cells of Mahākāl and Vṛddhakāl, a series of frescoes illustrates the manifestations of the *liṅgas*, accompanied by verses.¹⁰¹ As we will see, the text relating to Mahākāl reproduces in a condensed—and in some cases modified—form the stories collected in the ŚP about the greatness of the eponymous ‘original’ divine manifestation. The section related to Vṛddhakāl, draws from narratives presented in the KKh.

The first narrative about Mahākāl, depicted in four panels, tells how he manifested to defeat the demon Dūṣaṇa, who had disturbed a group of sages, or devotees of Śiva, in Avantī, (Ujjain). This form is described as supreme among the twelve *jyotirliṅgas*, with its locations indicated as Kāśī and Avantī. The next scene shows the climax of the story, grouping various moments into a single depiction: the sages are shown in devotion around the *liṅga* at the centre. The demons are seen in two places: on the left, they are in an attacking stance, while on the right they are defeated and in flames. Above, in the centre, Śiva triumphs, evidently having caused the depicted events as a result the veneration of the *liṅga* by the sages. A final scene illustrates the fusion of the deity’s anthropomorphic form with the *liṅga*, as the sages pay homage. This story, conveyed through the images and the inscribed verses, relates to the origins of Mahākāl in Ujjain as narrated in the ŚP collections.¹⁰²

The transposition of Mahākāl is the only case among our examples that visually presents the narrative about the origins of the *liṅga*, making it accessible to all visitors. The appropriation of the ‘original’ site’s narrative by the transposed reality, however, recalls what we have seen at Rāmeśvar, enriched here by an intrusion of local reality into the narrative. At the conclusion of the story, the text states: ‘kāśī madhya avantī yah mahākāl kā sthān’, indicating that Avantī, the place (*sthān*) of Mahākāl, is in the centre (*madhya*) of Kāśī (Fig. 7).

The second narrative depicted in three scenes concerns the king of Avantī, who seeks refuge in Mahākāl when tormented by difficulties. This story draws directly from the KS (17), which is not referenced in the earlier JS material, where the only myth regarding the origins of Mahākāl had no connection to Banaras.¹⁰³

100 Sarasvati (1993, 251–252) adds a visit to Mahāmṛtyuñjaya to the pilgrimage path, considering it an independent and separate place

101 During a later visit, I noticed that the frescoes had been transformed into bas-reliefs, now painted in much brighter colours. The depicted events remain the same.

102 The story of the demon Dūṣaṇa is narrated in JS 46 and KS 16. For a comprehensive collection of myths related to Mahākāl, including those in the SkP tradition, see Fleming 2007, 64–74.

103 The story was included at a later stage in the compilation of material about the twelve *jyotirliṅgas*. The JS dedicates only one chapter to Mahākāl, while the KS includes



Fig. 7 Depiction of the manifestation of Māhakāl in the images above the cell of the *liṅga* at the Mahāmṛtyuñjaya temple. Author's photo, March 2011.

4 Ethnographies of Transposed Places

A further narrative focuses on the exploits of King Vṛddhakāl, as described in the KKh (24), which references the salvific qualities obtained by repeating the name of Mahākāl (KKh 24-83). This establishes a connection between the two divine forms, likely contributing to their interconnection in the real geography. The Mahāmṛtyuñjaya complex is currently managed by the Dikshit family, and the *mahant* of the temple participates in the pilgrimages of the KPYDS.

The Power of Transposition

From the ethnography of the various transposed realities, a polyphony of voices has emerged. Places form and reform by weaving connections between sites and divine forms located elsewhere; simultaneously, they cultivate ties—sometimes purely ideal or rhetorical—with other places in the city itself, such as the other local homonymous *jyotirlingas*. The temples where I conducted my research emerge as multivocal and multilocal expressions, sites that shape themselves based on the ability to create and, importantly, *maintain* significant references to other spaces and divine forms. These places are inscribed in plurality, and the transposition is characterised as one of the possible connections—sometimes one among many, as we will see in the case of Kedār jī—that express this plurality.

We have seen that the transposition of the ‘original’ sites is expressed and enacted in the local *jyotirlinga* shrines in various ways. It can occur through the repetition of a purely imaginary spatial prototype that is not directly known: the presence of a natural element, such as water or a hill, or simply a toponym, evokes not so much the ‘original’ site itself as its geographical context, but serves as the essence of the transposition (for example, in the cases of Mallikārjun, Rāmeśvar and Ghuśmeś). Alternatively, it can occur through the appropriation of the narrative of the ‘original’ site and the re-narration of the events that led to the manifestation of the ‘original’ *jyotirlinga*, now relocated within the geography of Banaras (Rāmeśvar and Mahākāl, in different ways). Another strategy employed, which ultimately supports all transpositions, is the act of renaming a local place with the name of a *jyotirlinga*: transposing the name is almost equivalent to transferring the location and the divine form itself. Indeed, the toponyms of *jyotirlingas*—like those of many other holy places on the subcontinent—correspond to divine names: in our case, they are names of Śiva that identify the deity as ‘Lord of x’.

two, the first of which (16) repeats the JS material with slight modifications, while the second (17) presents the myth of King Chandrasena.

The evocative power of such linguistic symbols is infinite: a vast range of mental, geographical, and emotional associations is encapsulated in the sounds that identify the various places encountered (cf. Basso 1988). The names of *jyotirlingas* carry with them the narratives of origins, confirmations and qualities—elements that can be re-positioned, in the sense of the verb ‘transpose’, by changing the original order of elements (cf. Ch. I).

It is important to emphasise that the range of possible modes of transposition relies, as shown by the cases illustrated, on the initiative of the officiants of the various temples. Each individual, with his own history and particular ritual roles, is active in the care of a shrine and in transmitting the traditions of the individual divine forms. His mediation between specific places and various worshippers is crucial to the ‘success’ of the temple. The traditions of these places thus depend on processes of individualisation (Fuchs and Rüpke 2015); this concept, which will resurface in the next chapter in the analysis of ritual specialists who systematise and promote local pilgrimages, sees the individual as fundamental to the development of religious traditions and, in our case, as influencing and defining the contours of various imagined spaces within the urban geography of Banaras and the wider Indian context.

The voices of the places speak to us about the possibility of mobilising, transmitting and defining the contours of a particular ‘original’ divine form in dispersed centres (cf. Remotti 2014), such as the urban framework of Banaras. Beyond attempts to connect with the powerful places of the elsewhere, the places of transposition maintain a continuous dialogue with the imagined space of the city. On one hand, it is the quality of universality and the magnificent power of the urban ground that explains the presence of these ‘replicas’, as emphasised by my interlocutors. On the other hand, the confirmation of these qualities of the city is found precisely in the presence of transposed places, which in turn uphold the tradition of the imagined space and reformulate it through daily acts and narratives. The ethnographies of transposition are, in phenomenological terms, examples of the creative reconstitution of imagined space by specific practices. Kāśī, glorified as a universal city that possesses every *tīrtha* within its territory, becomes such only through the narratives transmitted in its physical places and through renaming, revitalisation and reconstitution; situated and localised activities that evidently support the myth and universality of the city.

Similarly, the ‘original’ sites themselves, positioned in another dimension and distant from the here of the city, seem to be known only through the reflection glimpsed in their ‘doubles’. One might argue that it is precisely the transposition into local forms that keeps alive the sites and landscapes of pan-Indian significance in the imagination of pilgrims and local devotees. The power of transposition lies in the infinite possibilities for connection; plural, stratified and highly localised places can be experienced as resonant parts of a whole,

4 Ethnographies of Transposed Places

composed of classes of deities and groups whose fragmentation, incompleteness and exportability to various elsewheres do not hinder the quest for unity at all.

Connections and resonances, however, are mutable and intrinsically fragile. The ties between sites here and elsewhere can lose vitality and even fall into oblivion because they depend heavily on the individual mediation of officiants and, ultimately, on the willingness and ability of devotees and pilgrims to see connections. These need to be cyclically reactivated through the redefinition of 'locality' (Appadurai 2001 [1996]), which I will discuss in detail in the final chapter. Both textual and visual sources, as well as observed reality, seem far from promoting the transposed *jyotirlingas* at Kāśī as part of a group. The concept of *jyotirlinga* and belonging to this divine class is certainly mentioned as a guarantee of importance and authenticity by promoters of the shrines, but inclusion in the whole often remains a purely ideal or rhetorical reference and does not translate into the cultivation of ties between them.

Now let us see how the pilgrimage route of Dvādaśajyotirlingayātrā—and, more generally, local urban routes—provide further contexts for thinking about and constituting divine groups, and anchoring them to the urban reality of Banaras.