5 Local Urban Pilgrimages: Lists, Routes and Deviations

Pilgrimage and Pilgrimages: The Indian Context

The study of pilgrimage emerged as an independent area of investigation in anthropology relatively late, with the now-classic study by Turner (1978) on the modalities and meanings of this practice in the Christian world. The proposed model draws from studies on rites of passage and their stages. In particular, the journey of the pilgrim is compared to the experience of liminality that characterises many rites of passage; however, unlike someone preparing for initiation, the pilgrim voluntarily chooses the temporary detachment that this journey entails and shares this experience with fellow travellers. Pilgrims find themselves temporarily sharing something unique that creates a sense of communion among them; this is made possible by the fact that in this liminal period, according to the Turnerian model, everyday social divisions, rules and hierarchies diminish.

As pilgrimage studies developed, Turner's model has been reassessed, criticised and ultimately described as a possible ideal description of pilgrimage rather than an accurate empirical account (Eade and Sallnow 1991, Morinis 1992). Instead, religious travel is seen as encompassing the complexity of a broad spectrum in which both religious and secular meanings are shaped and debated by various social actors, and which can not be understood through a universal model, particularly one centred on the Christian world. More recent studies emphasise the need to view pilgrimage as a complex practice with social and economic impacts, one that extends beyond the performance of a specific route by pilgrims and directly or indirectly involves other social groups in the phases of preparation and promotion (Albera and Blanchard 2015). These are aspects that will prove fundamental in the case of the urban local routes of Banaras.

India provides an extraordinary example of the diversification of forms and meanings of this religious practice. Pilgrimage *(tīrthayātrā)* to the holy sites across the vast subcontinental territory is one of the most significant and visible forms of Hinduism, and other Indian religious traditions frequently share destinations with the majority religion. Studies of this phenomenon in Hinduism have explored its origins and historical development, as well as the experiences and forms of pilgrimage at specific locations. Many scholars agree that through the promotion of pilgrimage—especially when it crosses regional boundaries—networks of

places are created that, as in the case of the *jyotirliṅga*s, contribute to the spread of pan-Indian cults and shared landscapes (for example, Bhardwaj 1973; Varma 1990; Eck 1998 and 2012; Gutschow 2006, 340–346 and 367; Fleming 2009; Jacobsen 2013). As previously noted, however, creation of such a 'community' also entails the exclusion of those who do not belong, leading to a certain demonisation of the 'other', especially in contemporary India as highlighted by several scholars (Assayag 1997; Brosius 2003; Freitag 2008; Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012; Lazzaretti 2023; Jacobsen 2024; Lazzaretti and Jacobsen 2024)

The study of Hindu pilgrimage practices inevitably intertwines with studies of specific destinations and their historical transformations. The literature of glorification *(māhātmyā*s and *sthālapurāṇa*s*)* tends to focus on detailed descriptions of these places, but neither elaborates the stages of pilgrimage nor defines it merely as a journey to reach a destination. Glorifications do, however, list the various places and divine forms that constitute the sacred geography of holy sites (Jacobsen 2013), and these lists often translate into local routes within the territory of a relevant *tīrtha*. Thus, lists of divine groups form the theoretical and prescriptive foundation for a level of pilgrimage comprised of urban routes commonly referred to as circumambulations *(pradakṣiṇā, parikrama)*. These routes through or around, rather than towards, a sacred centre are integral to the activities pilgrims can engage in once they reach a specific destination, such as a city like Banaras.

The sources that document and visualise divine groups, the channels of their transmission, the social actors who have facilitated their formation and popularity and those who promote their development into actual routes constitute a complex field of research. Such research, though, can enrich understandings of the meanings of pilgrimage in its multiple dimensions, and contribute as well to understandings of the concept of *tīrtha*. This chapter, then, rather than dealing with the experiences of pilgrims, which has been the general orientation of most anthropological work on pilgrimage, focuses on the individual experiences of those I called elsewhere 'pilgrimage makers' (Lazzaretti 2019), namely the actors involved in 'designing' the practice and routes. This 'design' manifests in the extensive production that catalogues divine forms and locations and prescribes the rituals associated with pilgrimage, as well as ways in which source material from the past is interpreted and transmitted. All of this is done by individuals, in various ways and with different approaches.

Influenced by the reflections of several scholars on the concept of heritage and the dynamics of cultural heritage formation (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 2004; Hafstein 2007; Smith and Akagawa 2008; Bendix 2008), I propose to interpret local urban pilgrimages as a particular form of cultural heritage. The process of constructing cultural heritage has been defined as the selection of cultural fragments that, once imbued with value by a particular community, acquire the

status of heritage (Bendix 2009). This is a complex dynamic of cultural production that relates to the interpretation of the past and characterises all societies across all eras. The forms of local pilgrimage, the process of transmission of information about them and the various actors involved can therefore be understood as a specific form of heritage—one in which the individuals involved are not merely carriers of heritage but rather active agents in its elaboration (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 2004, 58).

In their own era, various compilers and promoters of local urban pilgrimage in Banaras have selected sacred locations to include in the routes, named them, transmitted information about their worship and helped ensure their fame. As we will see when analysing the substitute pilgrimage to local *jyotirliṅga*s, contemporary pilgrimage makers continue to rewrite and select from the sources and the work of compilers in previous eras, 'reorienting the past' (Acri and Pinkney 2014) and 'making the story new' (Lazzaretti 2019), albeit through different methods. The various interpretations and individual ways of embodying traditions in the urban pilgrimage scene in Banaras is, in my view, a fundamental illustration of the importance of a microscopic and ethnographic approach to investigating the processes of individualisation (Fuchs and Rüpke 2015), or the influential actions of individual people in the evolution of religious traditions. The dimension of the individual, and especially the continuous exchange between the person inhabiting a place and the place itself, which nourishes and shapes both in a process of continuous becoming (Ingold 2000), will emerge in the case of Kedarnath Vyas and other experts and practitioners involved in the making of urban pilgrimages in Banaras.

Local Urban Pilgrimages of Banaras, Yesterday and Today: Sources, Actors and Research Context

As noted when discussing the history of Banaras, the establishment of urban pilgrimage routes marks a crucial stage in the ongoing reimagining of the city by various actors and social forces. These routes, often described and perceived as having been handed down from ancient sources, have development paths that are not well understood and are presumably quite distinct from one another. As mentioned above, glorifications often mention the locations of various deities and enumerate, albeit not systematically, a series of divine places, but the mechanics of actual pilgrimage is not detailed. By the time of the KKh, the most authoritative and comprehensive glorification of the city, however, the destinations of thirteen

routes are listed in the final chapter.[104] The KKh as well mentions more than three thousand names of places and deities associated with the city (Dimmers and Gengnagel 2003). The panorama of pilgrimage routes expands in the seventeenth century, with the KR detailing the Pañcakrośīyātrā, currently the most well-known urban route. Its 108 stages and its path were, however, formalised only in the 19th century (Gengnagel 2011).

There are also numerous compendiums *(nibandhan*s*)* that draw primarily from the KKh and KR to reproduce and reinterpret lists and sometimes quote entire passages from the glorifications. Gengnagel (2011, 43) highlights the diversity of lists, orders and enumeration in texts from the period immediately following the compilation of the KR. The routes then seem to gain greater importance between the 18th and 20th centuries, amidst the architectural 'resurrection' (Desai 2007) of the city and the 'Hinduization' of the urban landscape. As noted, the materialisation of the textual geography onto the urban fabric is also facilitated by the prolific production of pictorial and printed maps; through the visualisation of the routes, the divine groups from the glorifications are projected and anchored to the physical territory (Gutschow 2006, Gengnagel 2011).

In the 19th and 20th centuries secondary literature that describes the city introduces more systematisation of routes: new schemes and methods are developed to circumscribe and organise the diverse material collected.[105] Alongside lists and routes, places themselves also evolved. Individual shrines, often competing with one another to attract more devotees and offerings, presumably viewed urban pilgrimage and connection with other shrines as a potential way to achieve fame and success. We have seen something of this in the renaming of Bhīmāśankar and Ghuśmeśvar (cf. Chapter 4). When the urban landscape features different homonymous representatives of a single divine form, as noted for several transpositions and as in the case of the substitute route for the twelve *jyotirliṅga*s that I describe later, we see evidence of the ongoing negotiation between ritual specialists of individual places and the compilers of modern lists to select and sanction the inclusion of one representative or another in an 'official' list for the specific route.

The flourishing of local pilgrimage practices led to the crystallisation of a central space that, until very recently, served as the ritual arena for them and remains at the centre of debates regarding the routes. The area near Jñānavāpī, with its

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104   In KKh 100 the routes mentioned are *pañcatīrthiyātrā, vaiśveśvarīyātrā, aṣṭāyatanayātrā, śubhayātrā, caturdaśaliṅgayātrā, ekadaśaliṅgayātrā, gaurīyātrā, vighneśayātrā, bairavayātrā, raviyātrā, caṇḍīyātrā, antargṛhayātrā* and *viṣṇuyātrā*.

105   The most notable example is the canonisation of the number 108 for the stops that make up the Pañcakrośīyātrā, introduced only in the 19th century. For more on this route, see Gengnagel 2005.

ritual specialists—the Vyas family, whom I will discuss shortly—likely became the focal point for *saṅkalpa* rituals in the first half of the 19th century.[106] This practice, prescribed by both the KKh for the Antargṛhayātrā and the KR for the Pañcakrośīyātrā as having to take place in the Muktīmaṇḍapa (the 'Pavilion of Liberation', where the Jñānavāpī well is located), was definitively anchored to this site and, at least ideally or rhetorically, extended to all other pilgrimages from this period onward.[107] The systematisation of the routes thus coincides with attempts—by compilers, ritual specialists, patrons and city administrators—to canonise rules, spaces and ritual authorities, thus establishing boundaries that, as we will see, are nevertheless inherently porous and subject to ongoing negotiation.

Through painstaking study of past glorifications and on the ground exploration of the city by various individuals—some of whom I will introduce shortly—the divine population described in the texts gradually solidifies within the urban fabric. A crucial testament to this process is the publication of the Hindi edition of the KKh edited by Narayanpati Tripathi (1908), which includes the Kāśīyātrā as an introduction.[108] This provides lists of the various urban routes with names of the divine forms, along with their geographical locations, the most auspicious times to visit and textual references for each. The Kāśīyātrā collection would later circulate independently, prompting the compilation of additional pamphlets, guides, compendiums for pilgrims and modern glorifications of the city—a body of work that has so far attracted the attention of only a few scholars, albeit tangentially (for example, Gengnagel 2011, Desai 2017). As detailed elsewhere (Lazzaretti 2019), numerous other publications of this kind, which I term 'modern *māhātmyas*', elaborate past material in various ways, updating locations as urban geography change. In more recent works, the geographical indications become specific addresses that, as we will see, remain a source of heated debate.[109]

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106 The term *saṅkalpa* refers to formulas pronounced by the officiant and participants in a ritual. In the case of pilgrimages routes, there are initial and final formulas. More generally, *saṅkalpa* indicates a promise or an oath. For a study of some types of *saṅkalpa*, see Michaels 2005.

107 In first half of the 19th century, Jñānavāpī ('the well of knowledge') was the focus of an architectural restructuring that culminated in the construction of the pavilion housing the well. This restructuring was sponsored by Baija Bai, the widow of Daulat Rao Sindhia of Gwalior—whose family were patrons of other architectural projects in the city—and promoted by the colonial administration (Sherring 1868, Medhasananda 2002). For the history of Jñānavāpī, see Lazzaretti 2017.

108 The Sanskrit text was published by Hariprasad Sharma in 1908 and the Hindi translation by Narayanpati Tripathi appeared as Kāśīkhaṇḍabhāṣā in the same year, published by Venkateshvara Steam Press, Bombay. Both versions are in a four-volume publication edited by Karunapati Tripathi (son of Narayanpati Tripathi), released between 1991 and 1998.

109 The list of references in this book has an overview of the sources analysed.

Despite the large number of publications of this kind, negotiation of the locations, deities and stages of pilgrimage routes continues to this day. The most extensive modern *māhātmya*s are those of Kubernath Sukul (1977) and Kedarnath Vyas (2011 [1987]), which incorporate increasing numbers of pilgrimages and lists of locations: it is worth noting that apart from the thirteen *yātrā*s explicitly mentioned in the KKh, these texts contain no fewer than fifty lists of divine forms and their locations, corresponding—at least on paper—to urban pilgrimage routes. Variations continue, and as we will see in the case of the substitute pilgrimage to local *jyotirliṅga*s, the contemporary dynamics of redefinition of urban pilgrimages is a vital area for the production and reproduction of religious heritage.

During two research periods in 2011, alongside my occasional visits to Kedār jī, I began to gather material on other local transposed *jyotirliṅga* shrines. To find out the location of a minor shrine in the city, it is necessary to obtain modern *māhātmya*s that lists the divine groups of Kāśī. Then, given the variety of selection criteria used by the authors of those glorifications, which often present more than one representative for each divine name and form, it is essential to compare them. At the same time, I spoke with various interlocutors—temple officiants, devotees and local scholars—to construct a picture of the complex reality. Obviously, this process was not linear; interactions with interlocutors meant that each presented their own ideas about the exact location of shrines, and referred to the relevant textual material to sustain their interpretations, leading me constantly to revise my few certainties.

Some of my interlocutors spoke to me about a pilgrimage to the twelve local *jyotirliṅga* temples, the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā, and placed it in the summer month of Śrāvaṇa. Until then, the idea that such a route was being practiced in contemporary times was merely a hypothesis; my reading had not clarified whether the lists of divine names were actually used as prescriptions for routes by individual pilgrims or whether pilgrimages were being undertaken by organised groups. According to several interlocutors, it was both: I was told that both individuals and groups of pilgrims used the lists as a basis for pilgrimage to the various shrines. I wanted then to understand who the organisers, guides and individuals involved were.

Subsequently, I discovered that there were several associations involved in organising local routes, particularly the Pañcakrośīyātrā, which was the only urban pilgrimage known to most local people and pilgrims I spoke with. It was by pure chance that I became aware of the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā, promoted by what turned out to be the most active organisation dedicated to the actual practice of the pilgrimage routes in the city. At the end of my first research stay I found the annual program of the KPDYS posted outside several temples and decided that I would return to Banaras to participate in the route of the twelve,

so that I could begin to integrate the disparate information about the group of temples with the living practice. Participating in the KPDYS pilgrimage, and later talking with the organisers and participating in other urban routes organised by the KPDYS and others, allowed me to develop a description of that living practice. I was also able to access the list referenced by the KPDYS to compare it with lists in the publications of other local experts, assess the deviations introduced and question the causes and effects of changes in the tradition of urban pilgrimage, thus opening new research avenues.

A crucial point in my research came after I returned to Banaras and encountered an exceptional guide, after having participated in the Dvādaśajyotir-liṅgayātrā and completed my work on the group of twelve. Until then, I had engaged with many informants, choosing not to have a privileged interlocutor and preferring to collect a variety of voices. We have already seen that the names and addresses of the shrines do not guarantee success in finding them, and the researcher's mood is often affected as they try to navigate through apparently contradictory lists and addresses, as well as the complex urban fabric of the city. It is no surprise, then, that many local and foreign scholars have had the personal guidance of local ritual specialists[110]—illustrating that such knowledge is transmitted from individual to individual, where the 'instructor' is someone who has an understanding of both textual material and topography.

The name of Kedarnath Vyas had been mentioned by interlocutors since my early stays in the city but looking back it is clear that meeting him changed my life and shaped my subsequent research interests. Vyas jī became, and was until he passed away in January 2020, a privileged interlocutor—a central narrative voice, both subject and object of research—at the convergence of a series of paths of which our first encounter was only one. At that time, he was already a well-known figure in Banaras, and perhaps a sort of reverential awe had kept me at a distance until then. As a member of a local Brahman family which holds hereditary rights over the rituals of *saṅkalpa* and the area around Jñānavāpī, and as a teacher to many scholars, Vyas's reputation was further enhanced by the fact that several promoters of local routes recognised him as an authority and somehow representative of the urban pilgrimage tradition. I was aware before meeting him of his ability to navigate the names, stories and locations of the rich divine population of Banaras. Niels Gutschow describes him this way:

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110 Singh mentions Vyas as his local guide to the routes. Eck refers to Sukul's tradition and mentions other informants including the Tripathi family of Viśvanāth. Michaels, Gutschow, Gengnagel and the Varanasi Research Project group from Heidelberg University gained access to the temples and routes through the collaboration of Singh and Vyas, who served as mentors and guarantors during their stays.

> Walking briskly at the head of them is Kedarnath Vyas, always with a clear objective. He is a walking atlas of the city. So it is not surprising that despite his 70 years, he knows every single thoroughfare. Born directly next to the temple dedicated to the Lord of the World, or Vishvanath, this Brahmin son is himself part of the centre. One could even say he personally represents the centre. He brings to life the universe that has been realised in the sacred landscape about the city. Which is why he can set out without any hesitation for any of the hundreds of places named in the fourteenth century texts. Vyas guarantees not only orientation in space, but also in the texts. He knows all the paths that connect the temples of even the most diverse pilgrimages, so that the routes the group takes, from a to b or from temple 97 to temple 98, seem to open up by themselves. Often the struggling group loses contact with the Brahmin as he hurries down the alleys in his white dhoti. They would be lost without him, sucked into the seemingly endless hubbub of the backstreets which only an initiate can read as a subtle hierarchy. Vyas is not only a municipal atlas and scholar in one, not only a means of orientation in space and in spirit, but also a kind of protective shield. [...] In his search for hidden places, Vyas acts as the key to long sought and at times truly hidden chambers, sometimes located two storeys beneath the city's present ground level. Set in the bowels of the city, they recall a long lost topography of the city that has been covered over. Vyas leads the way through the chaotic space and locates the desired places. There's scarcely an alley in which he doesn't meet someone he knows [...].[111]

When I met him about fifteen years after Gutschow he was over eighty years old, but he still knew about the multiplicity of gods, and especially of places; and he knew the lists of divine names, the appropriate timing, the gestures to perform and the formulas to pronounce when starting a pilgrimage in the city. He still had the heavy aura of authority surrounding him but Kedarnath Vyas was much more than that. When I knew him he had visibly aged and was an old man in decline, whose role—painstakingly built and reinforced over time—was being questioned by new logics, different conceptions of space and other looming projects for the city. I have always preferred the fragile and sad man to the ideal ritual specialist I had envisioned before meeting him; he still embodied a municipal atlas, even though could only walk the streets in his mind, because he had memorised the names of the gods and the corners of the city. I think I was fortunate to meet him when he was already in his old age, even though we could

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111   Bau and Gutschow 2006, 13–15.

not venture in search of hidden *liṅga*s as other scholars had done, because I feel I had a paradoxically privileged access (as a female researcher in a world of male interlocutors). I was able to discover Kedarnath Vyas as a person, and not just Vyas the local authority—a discovery based on a relationship of trust and friendship over some years,[112] the meanings and ambiguities of which I aim to reflect on in my future writings. Sitting with him on the roof of his old house, in a panoramic position between the Viśvanāth temple and the Gyān Vāpī mosque, listening to his uncertainties about the new trends in pilgrimage routes, his fears for the present and his memories of the past, and about the weight of his declining authority, Vyas provided me with new insights into the variations in tradition and opened countless paths of research and human understanding which I am still exploring. Kedarnath Vyas presented himself to the foreign researcher as a supreme expert and the natural heir to local pilgrimage traditions, justifying his authority by highlighting his family's role at Jñānavāpī. He explained that the Vyas family has always had a connection to this central ritual arena, and their ritual authority is rooted in their home's location there, at the heart of the city. They saw themselves as the owners and managers of the area, a position that distinguished them from the other ritual specialists we will encounter later, but which evolved and changed after my research and I have detailed elsewhere (Lazzaretti 2019 and 2021).

Vyas's life can be understood through the perspective of dwelling proposed by Ingold (2000). He embodies a constant 'sensory engagement' with the space he has inhabited; his stories reveal the ongoing exchange between the individual Vyas and the city as a lived space—an exchange that shaped and reshaped the person he became. In the last part of his life he genuinely felt at one with the space of Jñānavāpī, and that he embodied the city itself. He was one of four rather quarrelsome and competitive brothers and had not been formally educated, having completed only three years of schooling before needing to work to support his family. Vyas then has traveled extensively while working in various sectors; he is described by his brother's son as the family member who worked the hardest.

At fifty, Vyas returned to Banaras and dedicated himself to what he believed was his true calling. He began researching the city, comparing past materials with the urban geography, spending days and nights searching for places and becoming one of the foremost experts of his time. Vyas considered his personal library an inexhaustible treasure in which he could find answers to questions about the sacred territory, and relocate the past in the present. Eventually he published his monograph (Vyas 2001 [1987]), which includes lists for 57 *yātrā*s and 293 sacred water sites (ibid., 218–231). The work was fuelled by the continuous

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112 A reflection on friendship as an ambiguous relationship between ethnographers and field interlocutors can be found in Monsutti 2008.

exchange between Vyas as a person and the city's locations, mediated by a series of encounters throughout his life. One significant encounter was with the voices of the past, such as the authors and experts who came before him, as he gathered and systematised glorifications, reorienting the past and making it relevant and tangible. His encounter with places, though, initially through their divine names mentioned in historical sources and later in the tangible geography of the city, has undoubtedly helped shape both the places and the individual (Ingold 2000). On one hand, Vyas was deeply attached to the city's space and always striving to immerse himself in it. He dreamed at night of the locations in the city and even in old age, when he could move less, he tried to place the divine forms precisely, visualising them in his mind and feeling them in his body. On the other hand, the places he sought, measured, selected, transcribed and narrated have undoubtedly gained recognition, becoming 'official' representatives of specific divine forms.

Other encounters that shaped the vital exchange between Vyas and the city's space include the people he has met throughout his life. Many of them, he recalls, recognised something special in him—a light *(rauśnī)* or a particular beauty—something he described with humility and timidity. These individuals, he felt, acknowledged his authority before he even realised it. He holds negative memories, though, of encounters with other pilgrimage experts, most of whom he considered impostors.

Additionally, the meetings he had in his seventies with a series of international researchers facilitated his process of self-recognition. These exchanges have solidified his status as the 'representative of the centre' that Gutschow describes. Vyas kept the publications of many German scholars as part of his treasure, often showing newcomers—like me—his name in them. Paradoxically, perhaps, he had more respect for foreign researchers than those local pilgrimage 'experts', whose assertions about sacred locations he often criticised.

As for us, our encounter and my role as a listener opened the door to his life story, now reconstructed from a perspective different from the way he had typically presented himself to other researchers in the past. Rather than focusing on his role as a guide and local expert, his narrative shifted to emphasise the precariousness of his authority, which stemmed partly from ongoing transformations in the area traditionally inhabited by his family—a topic I will briefly touch upon later, but which is explored further elsewhere (Lazzaretti 2021a and 2023).

Vyas's testimony speaks of a continual struggle for recognition within a Brahman class that, contrary to the way it is often perceived, is anything but unified and exhibits internal hierarchies, prejudices and competition. His case, while unique because of the specific ritual role his family carved out over the centuries, is significant because it demonstrates the centrality of the individualisation

process—driven by personal initiative—in the reformulation of ritual and religious traditions. Vyas was motivated by personal drive and specific inclinations, competition with his brothers, faith and especially love for the city's places. He dedicated himself to local urban pilgrimages during a specific period of his life and from that moment, he based his existence on this 'mission', becoming one with it. We will see later, in discussing other promoters and organisers (who have roles quite different from Vyas) that the drive toward a goal, specifically the promotion of local pilgrimages, often seems to be a task for which those individuals feel chosen or predestined.

The Transposed *Jyotirliṅga*s as a Group

From the multiplicity of voices that have reached us in the sources on local *jyotirliṅga*s (cf. Chapter 3) and from the ethnographies of the places of transposition (cf. Chapter 4), it is difficult to think of the *jyotirliṅga*s in Banaras as a unified group. They are individually present both in glorifications and visual representations of the sacred space as independent entities, disconnected from each other, whose connections with the city and with spaces elsewhere are based on well-differentiated narrative modes and strategies, not attributable to a single type of transposition.

The transposed *jyotirliṅga*s emerge as part of a group relatively late in the history of the city, and perhaps never definitively; as noted, the maps of the 18th and 19th centuries initially depict only some of the locations in question. Sukul's Kāśīdarpaṇa includes almost all the *jyotirliṅga*s, but some of the locations do not correspond to those later recognised and the omission of some elements indicates that those temples were still missing from the group at the end of the 19th century. As noted, the case of the *jyotirliṅga*s is not comparable to other lists of deities in the *KKh*, indeed the text does not provide a systematic list of them and rarely identifies them as *jyotirliṅga*s. The same fragmented situation is found in the maps.

We might be tempted to characterise the idea of the presence of the group of twelve *jyotirliṅga*s in the territory of Banaras and the formation of the related pilgrimage route as an 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). In the now widely accepted sense given by these scholars, invented traditions are defined as sets of practices that are established in short periods of time and that, while openly referencing a selectively constructed past, assert themselves as ritual and symbolic customs intended to instil certain values or beliefs. They present themselves as immutable realities, though, while asserting a purely fictitious continuity with the historical past. These scholars emphasise that immutability

is a criterion for identifying invented traditions and distinguishing them from customs and what they call 'authentic traditions' (ibid., 3–4). The latter, unlike the former, are characterised by adaptability, vitality and the ability to reinvent themselves.

In my view, however, when looked at in light of the revision of the dialectic between great and little traditions, and between Sanskritisation and 'deshification' (which I will mention in the final chapter), the distinction between authentic and invented traditions seems to lose significance. Rather, each tradition appears to be built on continuous inventions, borrowings and reformulations, and above all every place has a plurality of connections that are always evolving. As the case of the *jyotirliṅga*s shows, immutability might be more of an ideal than an actual characteristic, a quality to which a tradition appeals in order to present itself as strong, along with its claim of antiquity.

The secondary literature records the appearance of the local group of twelve rather late: the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā, unlike the routes mentioned in the KKh, does not appear in the 18th and 19th-century manuscript sources analysed by Gengnagel (2011, 44–49), nor, for example, in the 1908 *Kāśīyātrā* collection, whose list of *yātrā*s is referenced in many subsequent publications on the topic.[113]

The group seems first to have been included in Kubernath Sukul's 1977 publication. It may therefore be presumed that the author introduced the route, deriving it from a source that can probably not be traced now, and conducted research on the presence of these locations in the territory. By formulating the list, he most likely initiated debate on the authenticity of the locations of the transposed *jyotirliṅga*s. The source provided by Vyas (1987) for his list of the twelve is the Śivarahasya, considered an *upapurāṇa*;[114] however, the same reference does not appear in Sukul's bibliography—indicating that two leading experts of the last century about the sacred geography compiled their lists of the twelve independently, referring to different traditions and sometimes selecting different locations for one or more representatives of the group. This hypothesis would not be undermined by the already noted critical stance of Vyas towards

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113   An overview of the primary sources consulted for this research can be found in the list of references. Between November 2016 and March 2017, I was given access to the private library of Kedarnath Vyas, which includes the sources he used in compiling his 1987 monograph. Only one source emerged that includes a list of the twelve and their locations: a Kāśīyātrāprakāśa (a title used by several publications of this type), edited by Keshav Krishna Pavgi and published by Hitacintak Press, Banaras (second edition, 1951). The list has some variations from those of Sukul or Vyas; in particular, Someśvar is absent, while Gokarneś is included. Some recorded locations seem to have fallen into disuse in later years.

114   The source has so far proven to be untraceable.

Fig. 8   'Map of Kashi', or *Aslī kāśī kṣetra kā nakśā*, 20th century. Author's private collection.

some of Sukul's choices, which he considered arbitrary and not in accordance with tradition.

The idea of the group of twelve *jyotirliṅga*s became more prominent with the distribution of maps in the 20th century. The 'Map of Kashi' or '*Aslī kāśī kṣetra kā nakśā*' (Fig. 8), widely circulated until a few decades ago but nowadays found only in a few bookshops, includes the *jyotirliṅga*s in its picture border but does not locate them in the territory. Gutschow (2006, 105) suggested that the places depicted in this border could be interpreted as representing the divine space of the whole subcontinent. In my opinion, however, the inclusion of places that are elsewhere in the border of a map of Banaras could also be intended to appropriate these divine manifestations within Kāśī—an idea far from alien to glorification discourses. In more recent images of the city the *jyotirliṅga*s are a consistent presence and the group is now undoubtedly associated with the space of Banaras. At their pan-Indian sites, popular depictions typically show the local *jyotirliṅga* as the central figure, surrounded by the other members of the group. However, particularly in one postcard-like image that I interpret as a direct reworking of '*Aslī kāśī kṣetra kā nakśā*', the 'original' Viśvanāth *jyotirliṅga* does not seem to be the central focus of the representation. Instead, it depicts the riverfront, now an undisputed icon of

the city, in which Viśvanāth is just one of the members of the group along with the others. The entire class simply appears to be present in the urban space (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9   Postcard image of Kāśī with the group of *jyotirliṅga*s, 21st century. Author's private collection.

The Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā in Banaras: From Lists to Practice

The diversification of criteria, sources and interpretations in the evolution of the lists and their practice emerges from a comparison of the two main versions of the list of local *jyotirliṅga*s to which contemporary practitioners likely refer: those by Sukul (1977) and Vyas (2011 [1987]). Like the main lists of pan-Indian *jyotirliṅga*s, the sequences proposed by Sukul and Vyas do not seem to consider the practicality of the pilgrimage route but practicality would later become central in pilgrimages promoted by the KPDYS. The lists differ from each other, as shown below:

SUKUL (1977)	VYAS (1987)
Somnāth	Someśvar
Mallikārjun	Śaileśvar
Mahākāl	Mahākāleśvar
Oṃkāreśvar	Oṃkāreśvar
Vaidhyanāth	Kedāreśvar
Bhīmāśaṅkar	Bhīmāśaṅkareśvar
Rāmeśvar	Viśveśvar
Nāgeśvar	Tryambakeśvar
Tryambakeśvar	Vaidhyanātheśvar
Kedār	Nāgeśvar
Ghusṛṇeśvar	Rāmeśvar
Viśveśvar	Ghuṣṇīś

The Vyas list reflects one of the most widespread variants of the Jyotirliṅgastotra; it seems, therefore, that it was compiled by following the order of recitation of a sequence of names already validated by tradition rather than derived from practice.

We do not know whether Sukul's list stems from a different recitation of the Jyotirliṅgastotra, from a previous list or (less likely) whether it reflects an actual route on the ground. Such lists—especially those of classes of deities that do not explicitly constitute a *yātrā* in the source texts, as is the case here—seem to represent an attempt to inventory the places corresponding to the names and divine forms mentioned in the glorifications, first among them the KKh. This tendency toward collection is also inherent in the compilation of Purāṇic lists, which are not necessarily created to prescribe routes but only later stimulate the emergence of practice.

The list of the transposed *jyotirliṅga*s, initially transcribed following a canonical order of recitation of their names—detached from the spatial context—subsequently becomes a prescription for an actual route to be walked and later, in a subsequent phase, adapts according to the topographical reality and to facilitate ritual performance. Today, the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā is organised only by the KPDYS, which also promotes about twenty other urban pilgrimages throughout the year. The KPDYS follows the lists used by the association's founder, Shivanand Sarasvati (1993), while introducing slight variations (as I observed

in practice). The association has been operating since 1979 and was officially registered in 1999 according to Sarasvati (2001, 249), or in 2000 according to Uma Shankar Gupta, the current organiser of the association. According to him, the association aligns with the traditions promoted and recorded by previous experts, including Kedarnath Vyas and Kubernath Sukul; however, today the KPDYS operates completely independently, aiming to spread the practice and knowledge of various shrines excluded from the classic visitation routes of the sacred territory.[115] In addition to organising pilgrimages on specific dates, the association also arranges private ad hoc urban pilgrimages on the request of interested pilgrims and visitors.

The founder and spiritual leader of the KPDYS, Shivanand Sarasvati, was a disciple of Swami Karpatri ji (1907–1982),[116] an ascetic of the Dandīsvāmi order and a key figure in opposition to the reform movements in Hinduism in the 20th century. Karpatri notably opposed the reformist Ārya Samāj and in 1940 founded the Dharma Saṅgha in Banaras, which later established branches in cities across northern India (Marchetto 2009, 21–22). This institution was one of the associations that emerged in response to Christian missionaries and reform movements, and wanted to defend what was proclaimed to be the 'orthodox tradition' or *sanātana dharma* of Hinduism.[117] In Banaras, the memory of Karpatri jī is inextricably linked to his involvement in the cow protection movement, for which he was incarcerated, and to the establishment of a new temple of Kāśī Viśvanāth, which so-called 'untouchables' were not permitted to enter. He is widely regarded as an icon of orthodoxy and served as a reference point for local religious authorities in Banaras until his death in 1982.[118]

The KPDYS emerged first as the Kāśī Yātrā Darśana Maṇḍala (Gengnagel 2005, 76). An initial period of collaboration between the Vyas family and Shivanand Sarasvati's organisation is reported by both Vyas jī and Gupta jī, who considers Vyas an undisputed authority and confirms that the organisation relies heavily on

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115 From an interview with Uma Shankar Gupta, July 2011.
116 For a comprehensive account of the life, work and thoughts of Karpatri, see Pellegrini 2009.
117 The first association for the defence of *dharma* was probably the Dharma Sabhā, which was established in 1830 in Bengal and opposed movements for the reform of Hinduism. It particularly spoke against notions that Hinduism should be purified from practices considered 'primitive', such as the worship of images. The frequent visits to Banaras of Dayanand Sarasvati, founder of the Ārya Samāj, sparked heated debates among the intellectual elite and Upadhyaya (1983, 824–829) reports, for example, on clashes at the end of the 19th century between Dayanand and the local Brahman community, in relation to the worship of *mūrti*s.
118 There has been much discussion about Karpatri and his political activities, which many consider to be aligned with Hindu nationalism. Zolli (2009) offers a different interpretation.

his published work. However, this initial collaboration—during which all urban pilgrimages began with rituals at the Vyās Pīṭha, the 'throne' where a member of the Vyas family sits and guides pilgrims in reciting the *saṅkalpa*—came to an end for reasons I will discuss later. Subsequently, Vyas jī has been highly critical of the activities of the KPDYS, which has become the most active organisation of its kind.

In addition to accusing its leader of plagiarising material from his publications,[119] Vyas jī considers the routes promoted by the KPDYS to be incorrect (he uses the terms *tūtā* or 'broken' and *ultā* or 'upside down') because they follow an incorrect order, prioritising the practicality of the path and, above all, failing to respect the *saṅkalpa* ritual. Open argumentation about the correct execution of the routes has ruptured relationships, as evidenced by Vyas jī's eloquent reactions of regret and irritation about the matter, which I have witnessed several times.[120]

As I observed in the case of the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā (July 24, 2011), pilgrimages organised by the KPDYS generally begin at the first temple listed in the sequence, where the *pandā* or *pujārī* of the site performs the initial ritual for the pilgrims, rather than at the Vyās Pīṭha. This means that the Vyas family is no longer involved and has progressively lost some of its ritual authority, along with a significant source of income; indeed, as with many Hindu rituals, the offering to the officiant is an integral and necessary part of the rite itself. Moreover, the Vyās Pīṭha, the starting and ending point for all routes, is overlooked during the association's pilgrimages, thus losing its specific role as a ritual arena. In addition to the above criticism of the KPDYS, Vyas jī believes that some locations in the lists followed by the association are incorrect and not authentic.

We know that, as has happened with the route of the *jyotirliṅga*s, some temples identified as part of routes in previous centuries have fallen into disuse, and new shrines dedicated to those deities have emerged and continue to emerge to renew and revitalise interest in the tradition. The contemporary routes of the KPDYS do seem to prioritise newer locations, such as the 'new' Ghuśmeśvar discussed in the fourth chapter. This logic strongly contrasts with the position taken by Vyas.

Sarasvati appears to have reformulated the lists for the KPDYS so that they correspond to more easily practicable routes. In the case of the Dvādaśajyotir-liṅgayātrā, though, even that is subsequently modified slightly—indicating that the execution of the pilgrimage takes precedence and in turn influences the prescription, or the list itself. Its latest version (which is to say, the one developed by taking cues from Sarasvati's material and integrating it with knowledge of

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119 Vyas jī refers to a case from 2008, in which the judge established that the references in Sarasvati's publications originate from the Purāṇas and do not constitute plagiarism of Vyas's material.

120 Gengnagel (2005, 78–79) describes the state of the dispute during the years 2000–2002.

the geography), is very practical, following a direct path without long detours or deviations that would extend the journey, or make it more difficult.

However, it should be noted that while the main route followed has gradually been shaped to simplify the pilgrimage, deviations and additions to the route are commonplace. As I have observed, there are frequent detours to visit deities and shrines not listed as on the pilgrimage route; in the case of my participation in the Dvādaśajyotirliṅgayātrā, a stop at the second form of Ghuśmeś was included, as well as a stop at its newer shrine at Śivālā. This allowed for the addition of *darśana* of Baṭuk Bhairav as well as of course Kāmākhyādevī, the shrine where the auxiliary *liṅga* of Ghuśmeś is located. Baṭuk Bhairav is very close to Kāmākhyādevī, and its inclusion in the route was justified because it was Sunday, a day on which visiting Baṭuk Bhairav is auspicious; indeed, KPDYS routes are usually held on Sundays to encourage greater participation by workers.

Another deviation occurred during the stretch that leads from the relatively distant Oṃkāreśvar back towards the city centre; a visit to Kāl Bhairav was included, which is also considered auspicious on Sundays. Ironically, the instructions printed on the pamphlet distributed to pilgrims also anticipated a visit to Jñānavāpī, where the route would be completed with the *saṅkalpa*; this indication seems to be a faded trace of past practice—a trace that perhaps helps maintain, at least formally, some continuity with tradition.

For a certain period, the absence of a visit to Jñānavāpī and the Vyās Pīṭha was fixed by a compromise of sorts that involved delivering an offering to the Vyas family.[121] However, Vyas jī reported no connection with the KPDYS any more, and seemed unaware of most of its current practices. The issue of the *saṅkalpa* is apparently the focus of the clash between a 'traditional' and 'orthodox' view, in which the actions taken by the pilgrim must be sanctified ritually and in a specific location, and a more pragmatic vision, as taken by the KPDYS. In response to the criticisms made by Vyas jī, who, as we have seen, believes he is the embodiment and sole natural representative of the pilgrimage tradition, the arguments raised by the association are pragmatic. Gupta jī says that keeping the tradition of the routes alive is the primary goal of the association; attention is thus focused on the vitality of a practice that, in his view, risks disappearing due to a lack of successors to past experts, the limited activity of other institutions (Gengnagel 2005, 79) and a lack of interest and commitment to pilgrimage, especially on the part of the city's residents.[122]

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121   This is the situation described by Gengnagel (2005, 79), which presumably developed in 2002, following discussions between the organisers and Vyas.

122   Gupta jī says ironically: '*yahāṁ ke log khālī viśvanāth kā darśana karte heiṁ*' ('people here only have the darshan of Viśvanāth'), meaning that the people of Banaras only want to visit Viśvanāth, rather than the other temples of the city. (From an interview

Gupta jī's argument, that it is better to perform modified routes than let the practice fade away, is not new in debates about the correctness of pilgrimage routes.[123] Modifications of tradition include the simplification of routes, the use of motor vehicles and the conduct of the *saṅkalpa* at the first stop are all measures adopted by the KPDYS to save time and make pilgrimages more convenient and accessible. These adaptations respond in part to changed expectations of the participants, many of whom join a pilgrimage because of their curiosity about the places in their city and willingness to share the experience in a group, rather than for an interest in a normative ritual. The KPDYS also attracts some foreign visitors, who often prove to be genuinely interested in the routes but perhaps more as a way alternatively to discover the city.

It should be noted that, in relation to these routes, the positions of Vyas and the KPDYS are not the only ones, and at least two other associations promote pilgrimages in Banaras. Vishvanath Narayan Palande, an heir to a tradition started by Datar Shastri, claims to have been 'called' by the gods and his guru to dedicate himself to the continuity of pilgrimages, and conducts an annual route of the Pañcakrośī. The other association, the Śrī Karapātrī Svāmī Smṛti Kāśī Pañcakrośīyātrā, is led by Bathuknath Shastri and based on the teachings of Karpatri. Each group follows its own rules: for example, Palande has chosen to relocate the *saṅkalpa* rituals of his Pañcakrośīyātrā, thus excluding the involvement of the Vyas family, while Shastri's group continues the tradition of visiting the Vyās Pīṭha despite the difficulty of doing so.

To understand those difficulties, we need to understand something of the recent history of the area. The Vyās Pīṭha is in the Muktīmaṇḍapa, near Jñānavāpī, at the centre of the complex that includes the temple of Viśvanāth and the Gyān Vāpī mosque. Given the controversy about the locations of previous Viśvanāth temples, the entire area has long been a symbolic centre of contention between Hindus and Muslims. However, in 1992—the year of the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu nationalist activists—a protective enclosure was constructed around the mosque and a larger security zone created, resulting in the surrounding access roads being blocked by security barriers, and entry regulated by strict police checks (Lazzaretti 2020 and 2021b). At the time of this research it was already difficult and time-consuming for groups of pilgrims to access the Vyās Pīṭha, and before each visit they had to request special permits from the authorities to perform the *saṅkalpa* there. Both Gupta jī and Palande

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with Uma Shankar Gupta, July 2011) In contrast, *kāśīvāsi* or pilgrims from the south who have vowed to reside in the city, are more likely, seek the association's help to visit lesser-known deities. (Personal communication with Gupta jī, April 2012.)

123   For a report on the debate regarding the correct route of the Pañcakrośīyātrā in the 19th century, see Gengnagel 2011, 63–64.

explain how difficult it had become for groups of pilgrims to do this. Thus the paths of pilgrims even adapt to contested, securitised places, possibly undergoing irreversible changes.

With redevelopment of the area starting from 2017 and the construction of the ambitious and controversial Kashi Vishvanath Dham and Corridor, the geography of the temple-mosque compound and, indeed, of the whole neighbourhood changed substantially and so did the roles of the Vyas family and other religious authorities (Lazzaretti 2021a and 2024). The impact of this transformation on urban pilgrimage is yet to be studied and assessed.

Concluding Note: Variations to the Norm, or on the Changing of Traditions

Debates about the correct performance of urban pilgrimages are connected on one hand to the relationship between practice and textual prescription (Gengnagel 2005, 80), and on the other hand to the dialectic of exchange and influence between lived places (and the practices enacted there) and the imagined space described by the glorifications. The example of the route of the twelve *jyotirliṅga*s shows how a practice seemingly derived from a desire to adhere to the dictates of the imagined space—to the idea of Kāśī as a universal and all-encompassing space that includes all the sacred centres of the entire country—mutates when coming into contact with physical places (the various shrines that house the transpositions and their voices) and in the process of reinterpretation and design by individual personalities. We could say that tradition adapts to reality. The imagined space is then seen not to be fixed at all but to transform as much as the places and practices, being reconstituted and taking the form of a developing palimpsest on which we find traces of the past (Gaenszle and Gengnagel 2008, 17), but whose meaning can only be understood through experience in lived places and the practice of pilgrimage.

Thus, the list of the twelve *jyotirliṅga*s, which began as a purely notional sequence, possibly stemming from the recitation of the Jyotirliṅgastotra, is transformed in practice according to the exigencies of the territory. Once it is included in the prescriptions of an association such as the KPDYS it becomes a new and 'official' route of pilgrimage and Gupta jī in fact hopes for and anticipates the drafting of new texts that convey the changed traditions. He told me: 'Abhī itnī moṭī kitābeṁ kaun likhegā? Pūrānī kitābeṁ dhīre dhīre gāyab ho gaye heṁ.

To abhī nayā karnā paṛegā.'[124] The old books to which he refers are presumably those of Sukul, Vyas and Sarasvati, and he sees the need for new ones. Through a process of 'classicisation' of traditions (Chatterjee 1993, 76–77), new texts with modified lists would seemingly establish and fix the practice as it is implemented now, facilitating its recognition as the 'official' tradition; the imagined space would then take this as incontestable fact, ancient and always existing in the holy city.

Debates about the correct performance of urban pilgrimages are also inter-twined with reflections on the meanings and functions of rituals. Long interpreted as static and repetitive events, rituals have been rethought as mutable instances and 'propositions for alternatives and as symbolic actions, thus as highly productive elements for social interaction and the creation of meaning' (Michaels and Mishra 2010, v–vi). The 'ritual dynamics' strand in anthropology has revealed that changes and variations to rituals do not emerge solely as the result of the confrontation of an alleged ancient period with modernity, but rather as an integral part of the ritual itself (Husken 2007; Michaels and Mishra 2010). From this perspective, and as we have seen in the case of the *jyotirliṅga*s in Banaras, both textual tradition and practice evolve, are transmitted and survive through change. In a sense, it could be said that this type of ritual practice exists precisely *because* it transforms; thus, it is in the continuous exchange between written sources, individual interpreters of those sources and practice that the tradition is transmitted and transposed. The agents of change in the ritual tradition are individual people.

As noted in the case of Kedarnath Vyas, and as has emerged from examining the positions embodied by the promoters of local pilgrimages in Banaras, continuing such traditions is felt to be a kind of 'mission'. Each of these men, albeit with different motivations and interpretations, feels that he is facilitating the continuation of these pilgrimages because he could not do otherwise. The practice of these individuals illustrates the 'sentient involvement' (Ingold 2000), which they have and cultivate over time with the space that is the city.

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124 'Who will write such thick books now? The old ones are gradually disappearing, so now we will have to make new ones'. (From an interview with Uma Shankar Gupta, July 2011.)