6 Supremacy of the Transposed Place and Production of Locality: Kāśī's Kedār

Movements of Traditions

In previous chapters I outlined the formation of the pan-Indian group of *jyotirliṅga*s and their 'transposition' to the territory of Banaras, as documented in textual and visual sources. Then, in the ethnographic account of the various temples, plural narratives of the places of transposition emerged. Subsequent analysis of the various forms of substitute pilgrimage to the twelve *jyotirliṅga*s contributed to painting a complex picture of traditions centred on the divine places and forms, in their dispersed but connected localities, the study of which can enrich the interpretation of aspects of Hindu sacred geography.

Spatial transposition, as mentioned at the beginning of this work, has often been explained in terms of the geographical equivalent of the phenomenon of Sanskritisation (Eck 1981: 336), assuming that local divine forms need to reference already known pan-Indian forms to authenticate themselves—a view that, as I have suggested, I find rather reductive. The concept of Sanskritisation—initially developed to explain mobility within castes (Srinivas 1955)—is often associated with the assumption that there is a 'great' Brahmanical and pan-Indian tradition that interacts with, influences and, as in the case of 'replicas', inspires the elevation of 'little' regional traditions, otherwise often associated with popular and 'folkloric' forms of worship. Early theorists wrote about great and little traditions mainly to explain the social interactions observed in rural contexts (Redfield and Singer 1955; Mariott 1955a)—the village, as is well known, was long the main focus for anthropological studies in India (Berger 2012). These concepts, along with Sanskritisation, were then extended and used in the historical analysis of religious and cultural phenomena. To explain the exchange of elements between great and little traditions, two distinct movements were identified. The first, known as 'parochialisation' and defined as 'a downward devolution of great-traditional elements and their integration with little-traditional elements' (Mariott 1955b, 197–200), is generally what we refer to when speaking of the Sanskritisation processes of folk and local elements. The second movement, through which aspects of the little tradition are absorbed and generalised within the great tradition, was called 'universalisation'. This is what Doniger (2009, 6) calls 'deshification', that is, the process by which the Brahman elite—and in particular, the compilers of Sanskrit

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texts—adopt and adapt local *(deśi)* elements, such as characteristics of popular deities or specific attitudes and ritual forms. This process has been observed in the historical evolution of Brahmanical religion, from at least as far back as the centuries in which the ideology of sacrifice was in crisis and Brahmanism had to reformulate itself to compete with new religions. I mentioned some effects of this in the introductory chapter; in particular the influence that local cults had in, for example, the development of the idea of the sacred place and the rise of locative piety, which was absent in an earlier phase of Brahmanical religion.

The interpretive paradigms of the great and little traditions have seen various applications and, more importantly, received much criticism.[125] It is clear, though, that the debate has helped bring attention to the complexity of the interactions, both within the cultural universe we call Hinduism and in Indian society more generally. More specifically, it has led to a reconsideration of the influence of so-called 'folk traditions' on 'high culture', which is primarily represented by Sanskrit texts. The value of archaeological and artistic evidence has been recognised, after previously being more often used to support hypotheses based on the study of texts; it has become indispensable in providing different perspectives and testimonies not available in those Brahmanical texts.[126]

However, in my view what has often been lacking is a critical ethno-indological approach (Michaels 2004) to the so-called great tradition—one that combines analysis of texts from the Brahmanical tradition with historical and ethnographic study of places, actors and practices. Studies of acculturation, adoption and adaptation within the Brahmanical tradition have certainly contributed to revealing its dynamism, especially by highlighting the exchange with so-called little traditions. However, such dynamics are not only found in such 'outside' exchanges but, I argue, also *within* particular 'great' traditions. This is evident in the traditions about holy places recorded in the *māhātmya*s *and sthalapurāṇa*s: not only is a *tīrtha* (for example, Banaras) praised differently by sources that emphasise its various aspects—highlighting different parts of its territory and excluding others depending on specific political-religious affiliations, for example[127]—but within the territory of each sacred centre individual places have layered traditions and are praised differently by different sources.

125 For a comprehensive overview of the debate, see Berger 2012.

126 For an overview of the debate on the relationship between archaeology and texts in the study of ancient India, see Guha 2012, 43–44 and the bibliography in notes 4, 5, 6.

127 See Chapter Two. For a more detailed analysis of the competing perspectives expressed in the glorifications of Banaras, see Bakker and Isaacson 2004 and Smith 2007a and b.

The situation becomes even more complex when we consider the current traditions being propagated in individual temples, examining the modes of transmission and considering the strategies employed by social actors in the life of these places to narrate, promote, explain and reimagine the locality. I argue that it is the *locality*, rather than the interchange between great and little traditions, that provides a lens through which to observe modification, change and development of traditions in these places.

The concept of locality, liberated from one of the commonplaces of social theory that regards it as a distinctive feature of social life subjected to the challenges of modernity and the dangers of homogenisation or globalisation, has been reinterpreted as something inherently fragile, which must therefore be continuously rethought and reaffirmed (Appadurai 2001 [1996], 52). The spatial production of locality—that is, the naming of places, the techniques of treatment, protection and demarcation of territory, and, I would add, the ongoing narrative about the meanings and specificities of places—provides insight into how communities regard locality not as an unassailable fact but rather as a 'ephemeral good that must be produced and maintained' (ibid., 233) and continuously reconsidered. The layers of tradition regarding Kedār jī that we are about to explore will thus be read as instances of localisation and attempts to design the locality by the many voices that comprise, interpret and reinterpret it. From a phenomenological perspective, the places of transposition—far from being the geographical equivalent of the Sanskritisation process outlined by Eck—will emerge as the true laboratories for the constitution of both imagined space and the 'great' traditions. In our case, such traditions can be identified as the glorifications both of Banaras and of the various 'original' sites of pan-Indian *jyotirliṅga*s.

Introducing the Universe of Kedār jī

Kedāreśvar—or Kedār jī to give the temple its familiar local name—represents both the chronological beginning and the conceptual conclusion of my research journey. Located in the eponymous area (Kedāra *khandā*) south of the city, Kedāreśvar stands high above the Kedār Ghaṭ, just north of Hariścandra, one of the two cremation grounds along the river in Banaras.

The building used to be recognisable by its façade, which was till recent years painted with vertical red and white stripes, mirroring the colours painted on the *ghaṭ* itself and the style of many shrines and houses of south Indian Brahmans. Several statues, also reminiscent of southern temple architecture, adorn the roof of the temple. Kedāreśvar is indeed considered by many to be a 'southern' temple; the current shrine is said to have been established by Kumāragurūparar,

a poet and saint from Tamil Nadu, who was a follower of Śaiva Siddhānta[128] and is presumed to have settled in the city in the 17th century and established the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh.[129] Legend has it that Saint Kumāragurūparar entered the royal palace to meet Dara Shikoh accompanied by a lion he had tamed himself; the Mughal emperor then granted him land to start a monastery and build a temple (Zvelebil 1975, 229–230). The saint apparently settled in the city in 1658 and remained there, teaching his numerous followers, until his death in 1688. He is said to have restored the worship of the ancient *liṅga* that lay in ruins when he arrived and built the *maṭh* to accommodate pilgrims from the south, manage the temple and spread his teachings.[130] Even at the time of this research, the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh was the institution that oversaw daily ceremonies, and the *pūjārī*s who perform the collective rituals were paid by the monastery. The surrounding area had historically been occupied largely by businesses catering to pilgrims from the southern regions who reside in nearby *dharmaśālā*s (pilgrim lodges). This area continues to be home to many Bengalis, who, alongside Tamils, have long been considered primary devotees of Kedāreśvar (Eck 1983, 137).

Kedār jī is the devotional focal point for a large area of the city and serves as a kind of southern counterpart to the more famous and geographically central Viśvanāth temple (Fig. 10). Kedār Ghaṭ is a popular spot for morning ablutions, and in the evening hosts an *ārti* ceremony dedicated to the river; the ceremony is more modest than the spectacular ritual performances staged near Daśāśvamedh Ghaṭ but attracts an increasing number of participants. In addition to the dramatic entrance from the riverfront the temple has a second access point from the busy lane behind it. Here, the entrance portal blends into the vibrant array of stalls, shops and eating houses and is flanked on either side by small areas dedicated to the sale of flowers and garlands to be taken inside and offered to *bābā*. During the busiest times of the day a group of renunciants, widows and elderly people can be found near the entrance, soliciting alms from passersby, especially those going to the temple.

Entering from the rear, we leave behind the chatter of the market. Crossing the threshold and touching the golden step that marks the boundary between external and internal spaces, we find several renunciants *(sādhus)* seated on the colonnaded porch, intent on collecting the offerings given by departing devotees. The wall directly in front of us is entirely covered with votive plaques in various

128 The Śaiva Siddhānta is a philosophical school in the tradition of Śaivism that is deeply rooted in south India. For a comparison with other schools of thought within Śaivism, see Flood 1996, 192–196.

129 Motichandra (1985 [1962], 219) places the origins of the institution in the reign of Akbar but other sources place Kumāragurūparar in the 17th century and describe his journey to Kāśī during the reign of Dara Shikoh (Zvelebil 1975, 229–230).

130 For an overview of the works, see also Arunachalam 1990; Ghosh 1991.

Fig. 10 Front view of Kedār jī, November 2012. Author's photo.

regional languages and is the rear of the sanctum *(garbhagṛha)*. A darker mark on the wall at eye level indicates the point that coincides with the position of the *liṅga*, and here those entering from the back pay their initial homage to the deity by bowing their heads.

Completing half a circumambulation of the sanctum to the left, we find ourselves in the spacious pavilion *(maṇḍapa)*, where various activities take place, depending on the time of day. From here, one can enter the *garbhagṛha*, but before accessing the inner chamber of the *liṅga* we may have the *darśana* of Daṇḍapaṇī and Kāl Bhairav—the two guardians of the city, situated in an auxiliary room to the right of the entrance to the sanctum—as well as Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya. In a more secluded position, we find Gaurī, whom devotees can contemplate from the pavilion through a gridded opening directly in front of her. The actual *darśana* of Kedār jī is sometimes only attained with difficulty on crowded days, and devotees sweat profusely as they jostle to touch the *liṅga,* which is covered with milk, fruit, flowers and water from the Gaṅgā *(gaṅgā-jala)*. The *liṅga* is certainly not common in appearance—the stone, which is slightly elevated from the ground, reveals grains and grooves. As I will describe, the most pronounced groove at its centre, where the oblation liquids converge, is considered by the faithful as evidence of a divine manifestation.

Like most foreign visitors, the first times I visited Kedār jī I was 'unprepared' and overwhelmed by the activities and the people; it was impossible at first to

distinguish who was responsible for what and who the key figures in the ritual scene were. In the first weeks of attending the temple, I simply tried to acclimatise to its space, observe everything that happened and allow the temple-goers—regular devotees, pilgrims and officiants—to become accustomed to my persistent presence. This was a process that primarily involved my body; I soon learned how to sit correctly, getting used to staying for several hours with my legs crossed and, in any case, never pointing my feet toward the sanctum or a conversation partner. I learned the appropriate gestures to honour the main deity and greet the secondary ones. I focused on the practices I observed, and before long I became an object of interest to those I encountered, who saw me writing apparently endless notes each day. I was interviewed often, before I could conduct any interviews myself, and repeatedly touched by the many women with whom I could often exchange only smiles and gestures because they were pilgrims from the south who spoke languages I did not know.

After some time I decided to begin to conduct interviews to try to understand the prevalent myths about this place. The choice of semi-structured interviews in this initial phase was due to my still relatively limited command of the Hindi language during those first months but I soon realised the inadequacy and rigidity of those interviews. After I became familiar with the concepts and terms used by my interlocutors, and more used to conversing in Hindi, those semi-structured interviews transformed into dialogues in which my questions were posed in the order that naturally presented itself, but served only as general prompts for my interlocutors. It has been highlighted that simply asking a particular question can provoke a certain type of response (Piasere 2002, 12–13) or, at the very least, introduce terms and concepts that do not always belong to the interlocutor and therefore have an impact on the spontaneity of their expression. Aware of the reductive nature of this tool and the power dynamics inherent to the practice of ethnography itself (De Lauri and Achilli 2008), I found however that interviews, if used flexibly and integrated with other spontaneous interactions, can be valuable tools. Listening to recorded voices to transcribe the words used by interviewees allows for reflection not only on recurring terms, ways of responding and meanings, but also on the gaps, the unanswered questions and the turns that some responses take without prompting if the interlocutor is not interrupted. For example, assessing the length of a response relative to others already reveals much about the preferences and mental hierarchies of the speaker and, of course, what our interlocutors believe we are seeking. Over time, one stops seeking precise data and analysing each collected sentence in detail; familiarity is gained with the lexicon used by interlocutors, and especially with those key indigenous categories that have the potential to stimulate fluid and spontaneous storytelling (cf. Kumar 1992).

The first interviews were primarily of the devotees I met, especially at the times of the rituals that, as I will describe later, structure the day and mark

specific moments of divine time. Initially, I visited the temple at those times, and the time of the *ārti*, reasoning that during those moments the activities of the temple were at their most vibrant, providing an opportunity to meet the community and observe the officiants at work. It was only after I began to frequent the temple at other times, such as in the very early morning, that I started to glimpse the complexity of the work and roles at Kedār jī. In addition to those I had identified as *pūjārī*s, many other figures were engaged in various activities and discussions, and I struggled to ascertain their positions. While initially my visits and interactions with interlocutors were conscious efforts to pursue my research, over time they transformed into less planned daily activities. Interactions were no longer confined to dialogues clearly relevant to my research; they merged with recreational activities and pastimes and the flow of life itself. Although not always obviously productive for my research, this was a gradual learning process about behavioural codes, courtesy and dialogue, combined with a more subtle and invisible process of 'impregnation' (Olivier de Sardan 1995), whereby the knowledge accumulated, even unconsciously, becomes sedimented in the researcher's body and mind and resurfaces during reflection, serving as a framework, or indeed a binding agent, for the transcribed data and field notes and enabling the writing of the ethnographic account.

Indeed, my notes—which include descriptions, local terms, names, maps of locations, transcriptions of interviews and questions—are just fragments that need to be reworked at the writing stage, something that would be almost impossible without being able to draw on that latent substrate of impregnation. From the perspective of impregnation, the first year of research spent in Banaras was fundamental, despite my initial naivety. The periods of study in Italy, the traumatic separation from the field and my subsequent stays were all shaped by that initial period, in which impressions, knowledge, mistakes, awkwardness and joy remained deposited somewhere in my body. One could say that the very structuring of the first written account, and (why not?) this book, are all attempts to respond to those months of continuous immersion in the reality of Kedār jī.

Kedār in Textual Sources: The Layers of a Narrative Tradition

Kedār is the only one of the 'replicas' of *jyotirliṅga*s in Banaras that possesses a textual tradition focused on transposition. Indeed, we have seen that almost all the *jyotirliṅga*s mentioned in the local glorification tradition appear as names of divine forms already present in the territory, and which are part of routes or

lists of deities. In some cases it is stated that a form originates elsewhere, but no articulated explanation of their manifestation in the local context is provided. The only exception is Oṁkāreśvar, which as we have seen retains an independent tradition explaining its local manifestation.

The name Kedār becomes known as that of the Himalayan *jyotirliṅga* from the time of the formation of the tradition of the ŚP between the 10th and 13th centuries (Fleming 2007 and 2009); it was later adopted by the KKh to indicate a prominent form within the sacred geography of Kāśī. The text includes the narrative about the origins of the local form of Kedār in the context of a list of fourteen *liṅga*s that constitute the field of liberation *(muktīkṣetra)*[131]. The chapter dedicated to Kedār introduces what is effectively a myth of transposition, in which the presence of the form in Kāśī is explained as the result of the transfer of Śiva (in the form of Kedārnāth) from the Himalayas. It is evident that the compilers of the KKh were well acquainted with the Himalayan form of Kedār, indicating that it must have been known at a trans-regional level by that time.

The KKh tells the tale of the son of a Brahman who, upon arriving in Kāśī from Ujjayinī, takes a vow of chastity and is initiated into the Pāśupata order, taking the name Vaśiṣṭha. At the age of about twelve, along with his beloved guru Hiraṇyagarbha, Vaśiṣṭha embarks on a pilgrimage to Kedārnāth in the Himalayas. Half way through the journey, however, the guru dies and the attendants of Śiva carry him away on a celestial chariot to the divine abode on Kailās. Indeed, the myth recalls that those who die during the pilgrimage to Kedār will live long in the celestial abode of Śiva. Witnessing this miracle, Vaśiṣṭha becomes convinced of the superiority of Kedār among all the *liṅga*s, and upon returning to Kāśī he decides to undertake the pilgrimage to the mountain site every year during the auspicious time. Vaśiṣṭha completes sixty-one of these journeys while remaining chaste.

The devoted ascetic prepares for yet another pilgrimage, despite being old and unwell. His fellow disciples are worried about his imminent death and try to dissuade him from going. Vaśiṣṭha thinks to himself: 'Even if I die along the way, I will attain liberation like my master'. Pleased with the resolve of the ascetic, Śiva appears to him in a dream, ready to fulfil a request. Vaśiṣṭha asks the deity to bless his companions, and Śiva, impressed by the devotee's generosity, insists on granting another wish. Vaśiṣṭha then asks Śiva to take residence in Kāśī, transferring from the Himalaya to the city. The god decides to remain in his mountain abode with only one-sixteenth of his power and to establish himself otherwise in Kāśī (KKh 77.41).[132] In a sort of procession formed by Vaśiṣṭha himself and the

131 The list can be found in KKh 73.32-36. Subsequent chapters describe the *liṅga* mentioned in the list. KKh 77 is entirely dedicated to Kedār.

132 The sixteen parts of Śiva are called *kalā*s.

attendants of the deity, Śiva (as Kedār) then moves to Kāśī. The text goes on to list the merits obtained by coming to Kedār in Kāśī, even in comparison to the pilgrimage to the Himalaya. It is said, for example, that by seeing Kedār in Kāśī one obtains seven times the merit acquired from the pilgrimage to Kedārnāth in the Himalaya; it also advises devotees considering that pilgrimage that touching the Kedār *liṅga* in Kāśī just once will achieve far superior results.

The narrative tradition collected in the KKh indicates the fame of the Himalayan site at the time the text was composed; in fact, the myth shows how popular the pilgrimage to Kedārnāth must have been. The initial part of the chapter dedicated to the narrative about the *liṅga,* refers to a series of merits that Kedār confers (KKh 77.4-12); here the glorification seems to refer to the 'original' abode of this form. The KKh thus seems to base the greatness of Kedār in Kāśī on the connection created with the Himalayan Kedār, representing a first level of localisation through which a local form gains power and fame.

The textual tradition about Kedār in Kāśī is further enriched by the later compilation of the Kāśīkedāramāhātmya (KKm). The KKm is considered an appendix of the Brahmavaivartapurāṇa but circulates independently and seems to be currently available in two versions based on the same edition.[133] This *māhātmya* is divided into thirty-one *adhyāya*s and is generally dated around the 16th – 17th centuries, a period that probably coincides with the construction of the current temple at Kedār Ghāṭ on the orders of Kumāragurūparar.

The work is dedicated to the glorification of the Kedār *khaṇḍa*, the southern area of the city, and its various sites; the most important temple is, of course, Kāśī Kedāreśvar—our Kedār jī. The text narrates the origins of Kedār in the Himalaya, the appearance of the *liṅga* in Kāśī and the connections between the two places; it then describes the singular importance and powers of Kāśī Kedāreśvar, which in the hierarchy promoted by the glorification appears to be the main, if not the only, place where liberation can be achieved. The *māhātmya* also includes its own versions of some myths from the Puranic tradition that are associated with the city or known at a pan-Indian level. These include myths about river deities, in particular the descent of the Gaṅgā, and the stories of King Divodāsa that are central to the KKh (Smith 2007b). The narrative about the Kāśī Kedār in the KKm represents an additional level of localisation that reinforces the notion of the local form as a transposed deity (as established by the KKh), and further sanctions its superiority over the 'original'. As we will see, the KKm reworks material from the traditions of the ŚP and the KKh in its own way, not only to establish the importance of the local form and to reestablish connections between the namesakes, but also to rewrite the hierarchy of divine forms within the territory of Kāśī.

133 Both appear in the list of references in this book.

The KKm contains two fundamental myths about the transposition of Kedār from the Himalaya to Kāśī. The first appears as one of the early stories presented (KKm 1.60-103) and concerns Brahmā at Kedārnāth; the episode, based on the well-known rivalry between Śiva and Brahmā, explains the origin of the Himalayan Kedār, the journey of Brahmā to Kāśī and the appearance of the *liṅga* in the holy city. We may note that the description of the appearance of the *liṅga* in its Himalayan abode, as presented by the KKm, is a reworking of the manifestation myth of the same *jyotirliṅga* contained in the KS (19.13-17) of the ŚP. In the KS the Pāṇḍava brothers go to seek Śiva in his Himalayan dwelling but the god evades them and transforms himself into a buffalo. Although recognised by Bhīma, one of the brothers, he burrows into the ground so that the Pāṇḍavas can see only his rear end as a buffalo.[134] The Himalayan Kedār is indeed considered to be the backside of the god in animal form.[135]

The narrative is echoed in the KKm, but the protagonist is Brahmā rather than the Pāṇḍava brothers and the appearance of the Himalayan form, as well as the one in Kāśī, is connected with his desire to contemplate Śiva in the form of Kedār. Taking the form of a buffalo in a herd, Śiva hides from Brahmā, who had boasted of his superiority. Brahmā, though, much like Bhīma in the KS version, recognises the deity and attempts to detain him as he burrows into the ground. Śiva ensures that Brahmā and the other beings are granted a *darśana* of his buffalo form at the Himalayan site but the *liṅga* itself is not visible there. This will manifest later in Kāśī, after Brahmā has atoned for the sin of defaming Śiva. The chronology of the story is rather curious: Brahmā goes to Kedār because he has heard of the place's greatness; however, upon arriving he seems to be the cause of the manifestation of Śiva in buffalo form. The narrative also appears to assume the emergence of the supreme form of the *liṅga* at Kāśī, at a moment not described but rather taken for granted. It is noteworthy as well that in the KKm story the term *jyotirliṅga* does not appear.

The other myth in the KKm about the origins of Kedār in Kāśī is particularly important for us, because in my research it was the only one transmitted orally in the Banarasi temple.[136] The episode centres around King Māndhātā and the appearance of Kedār in a plate of *khicṛī*—a rather simple dish made of rice, lentils *(dāl)* and vegetables. The tale narrates how King Māndhātā, after leaving

134 The earliest JS (47), on the other hand, associates the origins of the *liṅga* with the sages Nara and Nārāyaṇa. For a comparison of the two collections, see Fleming 2007, 81–84.

135 The myth of the Pāṇḍava brothers appeared to be the most widespread at the 'original' Kedārnāth at the time of my research in August 2009. The interior of the temple also features *mūrti*s of the brothers.

136 KKm 19-21 are dedicated to the entire narrative. The central core of the myth recounting the episode of the transposition of the *liṅga* is in KKm 19.31-78 and 20.26-55.

his kingdom to his son, settled near the Himalayan Kedār, eager to have a vision of the supreme *liṅga*. There he remained absorbed in prayer for a hundred *yuga*s (cosmic ages) but his wish was not fulfilled. Śiva then appeared to him, explaining that due to an offence given by Brahmā the vision of the *liṅga* was no longer accessible except at Kāśī, and invited him to go to there. Māndhātā did so, yet for a long time he still did not achieve the desired *darśana* although he continued to make daily pilgrimages to the Himalaya, empowered by the ascetic practices he had undertaken. As he grew old and weary, he maintained his routine and prayed to the Lord for the supreme *darśana* because his strength was waning. Śiva advised him to cook and nourish himself before undertaking the pilgrimage to the Himalaya to regain his strength, disregarding the customary practice of eating only after completing a pilgrimage. After much hesitation, the king decided to follow Śiva's advice and prepared *khicṛī*, which he resolved to share with a needy person before departing on his journey. When it seemed that no such person would pass by, Māndhātā feared he would not be able to fulfil his duty, but finally Śiva appeared in the form of a beggar, asking for food. Māndhātā went to fetch the food, already divided into two portions, but found that the *khicṛī* had turned to stone. In despair, he began to cry, believing he could not satisfy the beggar's request and thus could not complete the pilgrimage. At that moment, the beggar vanished, merging with the *khicṛī*. Śiva, his family and attendants then appeared in a celestial chariot and escorted Māndhātā to the god's abode.

This myth represents another level of localisation: the origins of the local form of Kedāreśvar are explained in the KKm through a narrative that is different from the earlier myth in the KKh, of which there is no trace except for the motif of the daily pilgrimage to the Himalayan site. Furthermore, as noted, the myth of Māndhātā is the focus of oral transmission in the contemporary temple. What remains from the two glorifications for most devotees—and what is presumably transmitted by the temple officiants—is reduced to the elements of the myth of Māndhātā; these, however, acquire resonance and authenticity in the temple space, in the material form of the *liṅga* and during specific celebrations.

In addition to the reformulation of that myth, the KKm is a formidable attempt to rewrite not only the hierarchy of 'original/pan-Indian' and 'replica/local', but also the position of Kedār in the urban landscape of Banaras. Numerous myths associated with the city in the KKh find new formulation in the KKm, which reintroduces well-known scenarios but changes the spaces in which these events take place. An example of such appropriation of events already linked to the geography of Banaras—and no longer to the pan-Indian landscape—is the description provided by the KKm of Gaurī Kuṇḍa. This pond (Fig. 11) is located at Kedār Ghāṭ and is itself a spatial transposition, as it 'replicates' the eponymous *tīrtha*

Fig. 11 The Gaurī Kuṇḍa tank at Kedar Ghat, March 2011. Author's photo.

located along the pilgrim route to the Himalayan Kedārnāth.[137] Gaurī Kuṇḍa is also referred to as Ādi Maṇikarṇikā, where the prefix *ādi* denotes something that precedes, establishes and belongs to an ancient, mythical and eternal time, while Maṇikarṇikā is the name of the main cremation ground in Banaras. The KKm (2.21-108) places the 'original' site of the quintessential cremation ground here and thus recognises the existence of two Maṇikarṇikās: the first, the 'original' one, is the most powerful and significant and is situated at the foot of Kedār jī. The location of a locally well-known mythical event—the fall of a jewel from Śiva's ear, which created a pond in the time of primordial creation (KKh 26)—is relocated near Kedār, rather than near the better known Maṇikarṇikā to the north of the city, and to a time preceding the foundation of the latter.

At the same time, the fall of an earring from the goddess Gaurī during her bath is also said to have created the Gaurī Kuṇḍa and led to the decapitation of her son

137 The village of Gaurī Kuṇḍa, where the sacred pond of the same name is located, is at an altitude of about 2000 meters and is a necessary stop on the pilgrim route to Kedārnāth, at 3552 meters. It is the starting point of the final 14 km ascent, which pilgrims undertake on foot or on donkeys.

Gaṇeśa by his father Śiva, who had not recognised him. In this way, a mythological episode well-diffused across India (the genesis of Gaṇeśa's particular form) merges with one already connected to the urban space (the fall of the jewel and the origins of Maṇikarṇikā), creating an additional ad hoc narrative. The specific location is thus anchored to mythical elements and embodies, once again, the deeds and names of ancient times, so that it surpasses in importance and antiquity the place it was inspired by. Maṇikarṇikā is one of the best-known names and places in the geography of Kāśī; the city, long a dispenser of liberation, finds its essence in the cremation ground. Moreover, Maṇikarṇikā embodies the site of cosmic creation and dissolution. The transposition in the KKm of such grandeur to Kedār Ghāṭ is equivalent to activating a strategy of local appropriation of the symbolic meanings of Maṇikarṇikā. Furthermore, calling the transposed site Ādi Maṇikarṇikā, and asserting its pre-existence, is an attempt to re-establish the geography of the imagined space with a new centre.

The KKm also compares Kedār with Viśvanāth, another significant site in Banaras, and one that emerged as a prominent divine form relatively late in the city's history, primarily through the KKh (Bakker 1996). Several sections of the KKm make the comparison (KKm 9.14-18; 13.12-16; 21.5-9). A declaration of the identity of the two places is included, and both are said to dispense liberation to devotees who contemplate different forms of Śiva. On the other hand, however, despite the greater fame of Viśvanāth, Kedār is said to be more powerful precisely because it is less known, and indeed, secret *(gupta)*. This distinctive element of Kedāreśvar seems to have been, in the last century and to some extent today, the focus of its oral glorification; Eck (1983, 143–144) refers to interviews conducted near the temple, in which devotees and *pūjārī*s claim that Kedār jī is older and more powerful than Viśvanāth, but less well-known. In my conversations around Kedār jī a desire continued to be expressed to stress secrecy as a distinctive feature of the temple. A place untainted by the masses who visit the city's patron, Viśvanāth, is seen as more powerful and only for those who are truly worthy.

A final example that speaks to the desire of the compilers of the KKm to reposition Kedār in the sacred geography of Banaras is its promotion of the route of the Kedārāntargṛhayātrā, a counterpart of the well-known Antargṛhayātrā pilgrimage centred on Viśvanāth and described in the KKh (Vyas 1987, Gutschow 2006). By prescribing the Kedārāntargṛhayātrā, the KKm again promotes a new centre and glorifies the Kedār Khaṇḍa as a special area, excluded for example from the punishments of Bhairava, the divine form that in Kāśī replaces Yama, the god of death. In these ways, the KKm openly challenges the hierarchies promoted by the KKh.

Transmission of Locality at Kedār jī

We have seen the levels of localisation of the Kedār tradition in Kāśī through analysis of glorification texts, and the way their narratives enrich and connect the divine form to other spaces in the pan-Indian and local geography. The picture becomes even more complex, however, when we turn our gaze to the contemporary reality of a temple that is now among the most prominent in the city, and question what has become of these narratives over time.

Some shrines in Banaras, both prominent and less so, distribute simplified or abridged versions of *māhātmya*s and collections of stories related to the temple deity, but such written material is not available about the myth of Kedāreśvar either inside the temple or in the nearby shops that sell pamphlets and other texts for pilgrims. The only written source dedicated to Kedār, apart from a chapter of the KKh—which does not circulate independently—is the KKm, of which I have found no simplified or abridged versions produced for the common devotee. A recent reissue is not very accessible; indeed, at the time of my research it was not available in bookshops that distribute religious texts or openly at the temple itself, but was being given to educated devotees who requested it or purchased by wealthy devotees in contact with Chandra Shekar Pandey, one of its editors, who is a *paṇḍā* at Kedār jī.

A possible explanation for the lack of written material glorifying the temple is the vitality of oral transmission there. The people I spoke with rarely claimed to own or have read the KKm; some are aware of its existence, while others refer to the more famous ŚP or the KKh, even though the mention of these sources is often purely notional or rhetorical. The transmission of myths about the origins of Kedār thus occurs mainly in oral form: the various officiants—whose nature and roles we will examine further—narrate it to devotees.

In addition, however, the temple and *liṅga* themselves serve as vehicles for the transmission of the narrative. Not only is the space of the temple the arena in which the transmission occurs, it is also a visual text, its walls adorned with inscriptions in various regional languages that highlight parts of the myth, record the names and offerings of donors and indicate the various festivals. During the annual Makar Saṅkrānti festival, as we will see, the temple becomes a stage on which the hierophany of the divine form is reenacted. As well, we will see that the *liṅga* of Kedār jī is said to constitute proof of its own origins; devotees describe it as a form with extraordinary characteristics that themselves narrate it as a divine manifestation that came from food, and one that could not have been established by humans.

References to the pan-Indian connections of Kedār jī can be found in images hanging inside the temple. There is, for example, a portrait of Kumāragurūparar that evokes a link with the historical founder and the southern traditions he

represents. Additionally, hanging at the centre of the pavilion that leads to the cell containing the *liṅga,* and visually connecting the local temple with the 'original', there is an iconographic image of the Himalayan Kedār. It is, then, not only the oral narration of stories from the texts that keeps the traditions of Kedār alive; other elements of the material space of the temple, along with tangible visual references, also reiterate the connections that establish the locality of Kāśī Kedāreśvar.

Regarding the myth of the origins of the *liṅga*, not all devotees provided the same details and many only have a general idea of the story of Māndhātā. However, analysis of the variants reveals recurring elements in the characterisation of the *liṅga* and the local interpretations of its status and meaning as a transposed form. One constant, encountered elsewhere (see Chapter 4) and used to explain most transposed *jyotirliṅga*s, is the nature of the Kedāreśvar *liṅga* as *svayambhū*, or 'self-manifested'; for all the consulted devotees and officiants, this is a divine form not installed by humans or even by a god, but rather the result of a theophany.

Another element that appeared frequently in the accounts collected is the origin of the *liṅga* as *khicṛī*. Even devotees with limited other knowledge of the temple and its mythic origins would mention this, probably because the uncommon appearance of the Kedāreśvar *liṅga* visually evokes its 'origins'. Indeed, devotees seem to remember or want to convey elements that can be 'verified' inside the cell where the deity resides. For example, they refer to the graininess of the stone of the *liṅga*, which resembles the *khicṛī* from which Śiva manifested, and to its distinct shape, which is in two parts, said to symbolise the presence of the god alongside his consort, Gaurī. Another widespread belief among devotees, is that the goddess Annapūrṇā ('full of food', where *anna* is a Sanskrit word for cooked rice, the quintessential food) also resides within the *liṅga*. The goddess is commonly associated with Viśvanāth, and locally seen as his consort, but her connection with Kedār jī possibly contributes to enhancing the association between the *liṅga* and its origins.

Perhaps surprisingly, few devotees mention the connection of the Kedāreśvar *liṅga* with its Himalayan counterpart. When directly asked about the matter, some acknowledge a connection between the two *tīrtha*s but many have no knowledge of it. Those devotees who *are* aware of the Himalayan Kedār refer to the myth of spatial transposition as narrated in the KKm, in which the focus is on the transfer of the *liṅga* to Kāśī and the consequent possibility of having *darśana* of the 'original' there, without a long journey to the Himalaya. They invariably insist on the greater power of the local *liṅga*. Although most local devotees do not link the origin of Kedāreśvar to the transfer of the *liṅga* from the Himalaya, temple officiants certainly do when they address other interlocutors, such as pilgrims not from Banaras and foreign or Indian researchers. Officiants also convey the myth of King Māndhātā.

The reference to the myth of transposition does not appear to be used as a means to construct an authoritative link for the local temple. Rather, when recounted by officiants it serves as a prelude to the inversion of the canonical hierarchy between 'original' and 'replica', affirming the superiority of the local form over the pan-Indian site. For example:

> The Kedār of Kāśī is the most important because the most significant part of the body has been given here; therefore, this Kedārnāth is the most important, as the *liṅga* is present here. Śiva is here with fifteen of his portions *(kalās)*—in total, there are sixteen, with fifteen in Kāśī and one in the Himalaya. For this reason, the *darśana* here is more desirable and more powerful.[138]

> Badri Kedār Śiva manifested himself in the rice bowl and said to the king, "Here in Kāśī I will give you *darśana* in my entirety, while up there you remain only with a part of me!" Seeing the king's devotion, Śiva was satisfied and asked him what he wanted for himself. The king replied, "I do not want anything. Those who come to Kāśī like me will have your *darśana*, they will see your *liṅga*; whoever comes here will get liberation with your *darśana*."[139]

> The Kedār of Kāśī is the most important; here there are 15 parts (of the powers, the portions) of Śiva, while in the Himalaya there is only one. What a pilgrim gains from having the *darśana* sixteen times in the Himalaya, here is obtained in a single visit.[140]

The assertion of the supremacy of the local form is not foreign to other temples praised in the KKh tradition. As we have seen, transpositions in Kāśī seem to acquire greater importance, power and fame simply by being situated in a territory particularly auspicious and dear to Śiva. It is here that the divine forms are present in their entirety and with all their powers, while in the 'original' places they retain only a small portion of themselves. Paradoxically the 'original' place, in its 'original' location seems to play the role of 'replica', 'substitute' or a kind of historical memory.

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138 From an interview with Ramesh Tivari, a *paṇḍā* at Kedār jī, April 2009.
139 From an interview with Narayan, a *pūjārī* at Kedār jī, April 2009.
140 From an interview with Gautam Chakravarti, known as Damu (short for Bengali *dada or* brother), a devotee doing *sevā* (voluntary service) at Kedār jī, April 2009.

The Management of the Locality and Its Spatio-temporal Dimensions: *Pūjārīs* and *Paṇḍā*s

Kedār jī hosts various types of Brahman ritual specialists. Some manage the temple, while for some it is their 'workplace', where they conduct a range of activities. As noted, the temple is partly managed by the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh, an organisation that continues the teachings of the founding saint, administers properties, maintains certain shrines and engages in charitable activities.[141]

In relation to management, at the time of my research the Maṭh was responsible for paying two *pūjārī*s (originally from south India) who perform the four daily ceremonies, for providing economic support for the rituals and for maintaining a temple caretaker. The ritual ceremonies here were often described by my interlocutors as connected to southern traditions: Tamil Brahmans, and those from the south in general, are widely considered to be better, more skilled ritual specialists than locals (Vidyarthi 2005 [1979], 92–93). Thus they are highly valued, because correct recitation is believed to render the rituals effective and, in the case of the lamp ceremony *(ārtī)*, to have a greater impact on the deity and the devotees present. Kedār jī is renowned locally for performing particularly exact and rule-compliant rituals, thanks to its officiants and the management by the Maṭh, an institution also of great renown in the city. The *ārtī* ritual at Kedāreśvar follows the Puranic guidelines of *pūjā* in sixteen steps *(ṣodaśopacārapūjā)*.

There are four ceremonies every day, performed in rotation by the two *pūjārī*s employed by the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh: *maṅgala ārtī*, *bhoga ārtī*, *śṛṅgāra ārtī* and *śayana ārtī*. These generally take place shortly after the temple opens, between 3:30 and 4:00 am; in the morning between 10:30 and 11:00 am; in the afternoon, just before sunset between 6:30 and 7:00 pm; and in the evening before the temple closes, between 9:30 and 10:00 pm. The timings vary depending on the seasons, the light and any festivals. The four rituals mark moments of the divine day as it relates to human activities and needs: *maṅgala ārtī* celebrates the awakening of the deity, offering a kind of wish for a prosperous and fulfilling day; *bhoga ārtī* accompanies the deity's meal, typically symbolised by the offering of cooked rice; *śṛṅgāra ārtī* involves adorning and caring for the deity's aesthetics, and is regarded as the most lavish *ārtī*—comparable to those held at only two other temples in the city (Zeiler 2014, 177)—and is also the most appreciated by devotees, who can behold the deity in all his splendour; and finally *śayana ārtī* marks the end of the divine day and the beginning of rest. The last *ārtī* must be followed by silence, out of respect for the divine slumber.

141 From an interview with Annapurna Mishra, former director of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh in Banaras, January 2010.

The *pūjārī*s of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh usually only come for the *ārtī* ceremonies. In some ways they are like salaried workers, as they receive a fixed compensation for their services; they are not responsible for collecting offerings, accepting donations near the *liṅga* or performing other rituals within the temple space. It is possible, however, for them to provide some services elsewhere to earn extra income, for instance, by assisting pilgrims from the south in performing rituals for their ancestors *(śrāddhā)* and making devotional offerings to the river *(gaṅgā pūjā)*. Other than at *ārtī* times, the temple is a ritual arena and 'workplace' of other Brahmans.

These fall within a broad category identified as *pandā*s, and like the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh they claim ownership of the temple. The term *pandā* generally refers to a specialist who is entitled to maintain *jajmānī* (inherited client-based exchange) relationships with pilgrims. For their pilgrim-clients, the *pandā* organises accommodation (historically even in their own homes), arranges the performance of rituals (for which they hire other officiants and specialists) and they may also organise visits to other deities and *darśana*s elsewhere in the city. In some ways, it could be said that *pandā*s are not so much ritual specialists or officiants as intermediaries between the pilgrim and the Brahmans who perform agreed-upon rituals on their behalf; the situation is more complex than that, though, because in some cases, or in the absence of appropriate other specialists, they do themselves perform ceremonies for their clients. Additionally, the term *pandā* is often loosely extended to refer to their subordinates and collaborators, who are also involved in serving or 'managing' pilgrims. These subordinates, often non-Brahmans, may take on new roles and assert their membership of the group but the *pandā*s themselves typically maintain a higher position in the hierarchy (Vidyarthi 2005 [1979], 97).

In Banaras, the 'property' of a *pandā* is made up of the right to manage certain pilgrims (typically divided by their region of origin), the records of family genealogies *(bahī)* of their clients *(jajmān)* and a share of offerings made by devotees to particular deities in particular temples (*pārī*, or duty). A portion of this property can be transferred, gifted or sold according to a principle established, with regard to Banaras, by the colonial administration in the mid-18th century (Parry 1994: 94). Claims, disputes and transfers of ownership seem to be a daily occurrence in the lives of *pandā*s, who have, moreover, acquired a generally poor reputation among pilgrims.[142] The *pandā*s refer to themselves as *tīrthapurohita*s, a term that

142 Countless anecdotes can be collected about the misadventures of pilgrims at the mercy of shady figures who communicate in a secret language to organise the '*mokṣa* business', a term coined by Om Prakash Sharma, a collaborator with Parry in research about specialists connected to funeral rituals (Parry 1994). About so-called secret languages, see also Mehrotra 1993. Regarding the decline of the *pandā* figure and the

indicates pilgrims priests but that in Banaras has often been translated as 'sons of the *tīrtha*' or 'sons of the Ganges'.[143]

Three interrelated lineages of *pandā*s, the Dubey, Pandey and Tivari families, participate in the everyday life of Kedāreśvar and have the right to collect *pārī* made to central and ancillary deities within the temple, according to a rotational system from day to day. The Dubey and Pandey families appear to have majority shares, while the Tivari are minority shareholders and at times seem to be employees or salaried workers for the other two families.[144] Since members of the three families often leave their religious duties to pursue more profitable activities, appearing at the temple only during busy periods to support their relatives, numbers of 'employees' *(naukrīs)* of the three families also work at the temple. These people are responsible for collecting offerings and managing, on behalf of their employers, relationships with the pilgrims. When members of the three families are not present, offerings are collected in a box, the proceeds of which are divided at the end of the day by the family in charge that day.

A system similar to the broader *pārī* system operates in relation to managing offerings to secondary *mūrti*s. Among those that receive special worship by devotees, and therefore require attention and management from officiants, are those in cells at the back corners of the temple, near the rear entrance. At the end of a corridor, where a devotee performing the *parikramā* (ritual circumambulation) passes, for instance, is the cell of Badrīnāth, a transposition of the Himalayan deity which belongs, in its mountain location, to the *cār dhām* ('four abodes') route in Uttarakhand. This route is itself a regional 'replica' of its namesake pan-Indian pilgrimage that also includes Himalayan Kedārnāth.[145] The fame of the name and divine form of Badrīnāth attracts many pilgrims from other regions who,

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profession generally, linked to changing *jajmānī* relationships and the emergence of a more impersonal religious market, see Van der Veer 1988 and Parry 1994, 97–109.

143 In Banaras, the term was originally used to refer to *naukulsardar*s, nine family lineages considered in myth to have been the first inhabitants of the city. However, it is difficult to find an agreed list of the families; Vidyarthi (2005 [1979], 99) does provide a list of the nine, all of whom belong to the Kanyākubja group of Brahmans. Of these families, only six have survived. Two of those, lacking male heirs, broke the custom of endogamous marriage and intermarried with the Tivari family, Brahmans of the Saryūpārīṇ subgroup, who now claim original belonging as *tīrthapurohita*s. (Parry 1994, 99).

144 The *pārī* system in Banaras is very complex and offerings at the various temples are reportedly divided among three (alliances of) *paṇḍā* families; within each temple, the principle of rotation of offerings between families seems to vary. According to Parry (1994), the term *pārī* and the rotation of offerings also apply to funerary activities.

145 Also known as *chotā cār dhām* ('little four abodes'), the route in Uttarakhand includes visits to Yamunotrī, Gaṅgotrī, Kedārnāth and Badrīnāth. The last is also a stop on the pan-Indian *cār dhām*, the route of the four cities that symbolise the divine abodes

having come to the temple for the *darśana* of Kedār, are offered by the *paṇḍā* the opportunity to contemplate this manifestation of Viṣṇu as well. Opposite and parallel to Badrīnāth is the shrine of Viśālākṣī, a 'replica' of the goddess already located in the city at Mīr Ghāṭ and considered a *śakti pīṭha*. The *darśana* of the goddess is normally managed by a woman member of the Tivari family.

Women from *paṇḍā* families do typically manage feminine deities in the temple. They take turns throughout the day to occupy, for example, a position just to the right of the entrance to the central hall, at the opening directly in front of the *mūrti* of Gaurī. This image is situated within an auxiliary hall that opens off the corridor that leads to the innermost part of the *garbhagṛha,* and is visible to devotees only from that point. On either side of the opening are small *mūrti*s of Śītalā and Saṅkaṭā, two goddesses of particular local importance, to whom devotees—particularly regular worshippers who are familiar with them—pay great attention. Their presence seems to enrich the divine form of Gaurī because these other manifestations of her are important to the everyday concerns of devotees, such as healing and the removal of obstacles, and thus attract a wide range of requests and vows.

Responsibilities of the *paṇḍā* women in the management of the goddesses include collecting coins and banknotes offered by devotees and placed near the *mūrti*s of Śītalā and Saṅkaṭā or at the feet of Gaurī (whose actual *mūrti* is not directly accessible to devotees). The coins and banknotes are collected exclusively by these women, who take turns in a sort of cyclical ritual of cleaning and changing the offerings. The *paṇḍā* women are a routine presence at Kedār jī; their spatial placement is also fixed, unlike their male counterparts and their agents, who tend to transit through the space. The heads of the *paṇḍā* families appear at the temple very rarely and then usually only to attend rituals organised by their own family for wealthy *jajmān* or during special festivals, as will be discussed shortly. It is the younger brothers, sons, women and employees who appear daily.

The apparent harmony in the presence and rhythmic alternation of the *paṇḍā* families and the *pūjārī*s of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh in the management and life of Kedār jī comes after reported conflict in the past. Some local residents, who are regular attendees of the *ārtī* ceremonies, consider the temple to be the property of the Maṭh and report attempts by the *paṇḍā*s to take possession of it. On the other hand, the *paṇḍā* families assert an inalienable belonging to the urban space and hereditary rights over the temple and its offerings. The secretary of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh described a fairly tolerant attitude, with *paṇḍā*s reminded of certain rules: they are required to vacate the inner cell for cleaning and daily

at the cardinal points of the subcontinent. These are: Badrīnāth in the north, Puri in the east, Rameśvar in the south and Dwarka in the west.

ceremonies and must not flaunt their power within the temple.[146] Conversely, the *pūjārī*s of the Maṭh do not interfere in the activities of the *paṇḍā* families and are not authorised to receive offerings from pilgrims or provide extra services within the temple.

The presence of the various officiants does alternate in space and time but beyond the daily routine marked by the four *ārtī* ceremonies there is a cycle of other special moments in life, activities and worship at Kedār jī. Some extraordinary days and months are dictated by the general calendar but in Banaras the year is rich with pan-Indian, regional and local festivities. There are moments that are particularly significant for the temple itself, while other Pan-Indian festivals take on local forms and include activities specific to Kedār jī. These are opportunities to reinvent and transmit the traditions of the temple, establish meanings for the community and reaffirm the position of Kedār jī in the broader urban space. Other moments are occasions for *paṇḍā* families to assert their belonging to and authority over the temple space; while still others allow pilgrims from distant regions to relive experiences connected to their own land and region, creating extended spatial connections throughout the country.

In Banaras, time and space are intrinsically linked; the passing of the seasons accompanies the changing landscape and waterscape and consequently influences human activities of all kinds, from devotion to work and from celebrations of rites to daily concerns. The most tangible change is the disappearance of the recreational, cultural and social activities on the *ghāṭ*s that so characterise certain images of the city; these activities are interrupted when the Ganges floods half of the riverside palaces and the city's inhabitants 'relocate' to the rooftops where they might also find some coolness during the humid monsoon days. Viewed from there, the *ghāṭ*s do not exist, and neither does the opposite shore, where some rituals and recreational activities take place in other seasons.

Around the time of important festivals, such as Diwali, Mahāśivarātri, and Holi, Kedār jī attracts increased numbers of devotees who crowd in to have *darśana*; however, it is the lunar months of Kārttika and Śrāvaṇa, and the period leading up to Mahāśivarātrī, that draw the largest crowds, as a result of the influx of pilgrims into the city on these occasions. The lunar months are marked by vows, fasts, specific *darśana*s on particular days and required offerings. Specific *vrata*s (vows) regulate and influence the lives of individuals and the very geography of the city, often entailing *snāna* (ritual bathing) as well as donations to Brahmans. Ritual fasts, prescribed for certain days, or for the deity one wishes to honour, involve the preparation of particular foods that replace meals and are prepared

146 From an interview with Rajaraj, secretary of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh, January 2010.

in the streets near the major shrines. All these activities condition the life and geography of the places of worship and the city itself.

The pattern of vows, fasts, *darśana*s and auspicious activities marks the passage of time for many of the city's inhabitants; festivals, even if not directly observed, become temporal markers on which to base concepts, fix memories and remember events. Spending a year in Banaras, even for the foreign researcher, means submitting, physically and geographically, to the flow of local time, marked as it is by festivities and practices connected to the gods and their places in the city (cf. Kumar 1992).

Some of the particularly significant moments at Kedār jī occur weekly or biweekly rather than annually. For example, on the thirteenth day of each lunar fortnight the *pradośa vrata* (fast for Śiva) is always exuberantly celebrated by *pūjārī*s of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh. On the morning of that day, special brass *mūrti*s of Śiva and Pārvatī—originating in Tamil Nadu—are placed on a large image of Śiva's divine vehicle Nandin, so that they can be admired during the rest of the *pradośa vrata*. Then, after the day's *śṛṅgāra ārtī*, Nandin is lifted by a group of devotees, and the gods, richly dressed and protected by a tall parasol, are accompanied in a series of circumambulations around the central worship hall by the enthusiastic faithful, led by the *pūjārī*, who walks behind Nandin to regulate the pace of the fervent crowd. This event is felt to be exclusive to Kedār jī and a great honour for the *pūjārī*s of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh, who say they know of no other place in Banaras that has the same observance. *Pradośa vrata* is experienced as an extension of time and an expansion of the space of the temple, symbolised by the figure of the *pūjārī* who manages the entire celebration.

During Diwali and Kārttika Pūrṇimā (the major festivities of the month of Kārttika) and for Mahāśivarātri (the great night of Śiva), Kedār jī becomes a destination for crowds of devotees who come to perform the ceremonies and rituals prescribed by tradition. For Kārttika Pūrṇimā, locally known as Devdīwali, the temple space is literally overwhelmed by the *pūjā*, which is primarily performed by women.[147] The festival of Mahāśivarātri in Banaras is a time of frenzied devotional activities in all the shrines dedicated to the god. In the period leading up to the night, the city, conceived and built over time as the abode of Śiva, aligns itself with this image and presents itself to visitors as a colourful realisation of the imagined space. During this time—as many of my interlocutors in places of transposition noted—groups of pilgrims visit otherwise less frequented sites and officiants enact the narratives and explanations that connect local centres to pan-Indian mythical events.

147 In relation to the celebrations of the month of Kārttika in Banaras, see Pintchman 2005; which also discusses the *pūjā* of Kārttika Pūrṇimā (ibid., 83–87.)

On the day before Mahāśivarātri, Kedar ji is an important destination for visitors and the local community; the *darśana* of Śiva and his consort at this time is considered to be most auspicious. The union of the couple is, as noted, an observable fact in the temple, where the stone *liṅga* preserves a groove that divides it in half, marking its duality and thus sanctifying its greater power. The faithful spend the night in the spacious *maṇḍapa*, absorbed in prayer and contemplation or engaged in joyful exchanges with neighbours. They also share *prasāda*— the food offered and consecrated through contact with the divinity, and then distributed to devotees. At Mahāśivarātri, the *prasāda* mainly consists of *ṭhaṇḍāī*, a drink made from milk, spices and dried fruits, typically consumed in the city during social and recreational occasions and often enriched with *bhāṅg*, a paste derived from *gāñjā* that is widely used in the worship of Śiva during major festivals.

Mahāśivarātri is a communal moment not only for the diverse devotees gathered in the temple but also for the groups of officiants at Kedar ji. It is a pan-Indian festival, and felt as such in a temple that, for some, is connected to the far south of the country. While other celebrations are identified by *pūjārī*s from the south and staff of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh as '*hindustānī*'—and thus connected to local rituals rather than southern traditions— Mahāśivarātri is regarded as a shared festival. For devotees from south India, it is also an opportunity to remember nostalgically the celebrations held on this occasion back home. The month of Śrāvaṇa (July and August) also sees significant religious activity in Śiva shrines throughout the city, and Kedār jī again is an important hub of devotion.

Acting Out Tradition, Reenacting the Myth

A festival worthy of particular attention is Makar Saṅkrānti, the only pan-Indian celebration timed according to the movement of the sun. It takes place on January 14th and marks the transit of the sun into Capricorn *(makar)* and the beginning of its northern journey, thus signalling the end of the darker winter period during which many activities are suspended. Makar Saṅkrānti marks the start of a new phase in the calendar, symbolically seen in the resumption of ritual ablutions, which had been suspended or reduced. It is celebrated as a harbinger of good fortune and prosperity and the day is spent on rooftops, where colourful kites soar and special foods are prepared. In Banaras, offerings are made particularly to Śani (the planet Saturn, lord of *makar*), and of course to Śiva, the patron of the city.

At Kedār jī, however, this pan-Indian festival is transformed into a local celebration commemorating the foundation of this specific divine form. On this day,

a sort of birthday is celebrated for its deity; it commemorates the manifestation of *bābā* Kedāreśvar in *khicṛī*. Particularly in the southern neighbourhoods of the city, the day is known as *khicṛī kā din* (the day of *khicṛī*), but the preparation of *khicṛī* is considered auspicious elsewhere in the city as well. About two weeks before the festival, the *paṇḍā*s begin preparations and collect offerings of money, rice, *dāl* and ghee. The Dubey family has been responsible for organising the event for about ten years, probably being responsible for its current form, and the particularly authoritative member of the family is Anand Prakash, known as Pappu Guru. Several signs announce the details of the day, summarise the founding myth and thus identify Makar Saṅkrānti with the day of the manifestation *(prakaṭyotsāva)* of Kedār jī through the *khicṛī* of King Māndhātā.

About one hundred kilos of *khicṛī* are cooked in large pots in the *maṇḍapa*, along with an equal quantity of *khīr*, a type of rice pudding. This food will be offered to Kedār jī and later distributed among the devotees, who will consume it directly at the temple or collect it in metal baskets for their subsequent meals, as is customary for *prasāda*. A central aspect of the day is the special decoration *(śṛṅgāra)* of the *liṅga* and the divine cell where it resides (Fig. 12). The decoration includes not only garlands of flowers placed directly on the *liṅga* but also the creation of a panel positioned behind the deity, facing the entrance of the cell and clearly visible to devotees approaching the *garbhagṛha* entrance. This panel is made of intertwined leaves and flowers, along with other plant offerings dear to the god, and features a face—an anthropomorphic form of the deity—at its centre.[148] The uniqueness of the face depicted in the *śṛṅgāra* lies in its dual nature: it draws inspiration from the iconography of Ardhanārīśvara, the form of Śiva that is half woman, although only the head is shown here, rather than the full body. The left side of the face represents the goddess, Pārvatī, beautifully crowned with jewels, while the right shows the disheveled hair of Śiva, topped with a crescent moon.

The idea of the presence of the two deities in Kedār jī, mentioned in the glorification myth and reinforced by oral tradition, is further strengthened during this celebration. The duality is already evident to the devotee in the stone, which is effectively divided in half by a groove, but it is more vivid in its anthropomorphic depiction in the *śṛṅgāra*. This face portrays the dual image as constitutive of Kedār, reinforcing its intrinsic connection to Annapūrṇa and to food. The *śṛṅgāra*, commissioned from specialised artisans, is a source of great pride for

148 This description is based on my experience of participating in preparations for Makar Saṅkrānti in 2010. However, I observed similar details during the festival of 2011 and Asu, the son of Pappu Guru, showed me photographs of similar details in previous years.

Fig. 12 The special decoration *(śṛṅgāra)* of Kedār jī with food offerings at Makar Saṅkrānti, January 2010. Author's photo.

the organising *paṇḍā*s and devotees express awe and reverence for it during the majestic *darśana*.

A special *ārtī* is offered by the *paṇḍā*s rather than the official *pūjārī*s, but not at one of the usual *ārtī* times. This extraordinary event appears to be based on the suspension of daily time and the inversion of usual roles. Just once every year at Makar Saṅkrānti, instead of being excluded from official rituals in the cell, the connection of the *paṇḍā*s with the divine form is enacted. The celebration can thus be read as an instance of creativity and subversion that questions but simultaneously confirms the accepted roles and the usual divisions of space and time, all of which will return once the festival concludes. This is in line with what much anthropological literature on rituals and festivals demonstrated about temporary inversion of social roles and its necessity,[149] and we might presume that Makar Saṅkrānti helps to maintain the usual order and division of roles during the rest of the year. Certainly, the festival serves to spreading the narrative about the origins of the divine form, involving and informing new devotees each year and reinforcing the specific contours and characteristics of their locality.

Final Note: A Polyphony of Voices

Traditions surrounding Kedār jī consist of a polyphony of voices and meanings depending on the compiler of the *māhātmya*, the devotee, the officiant or the occasion; at the same time they exhibit a series of instances of individualisation and localisation. The narrative about the origins of Kedār jī, and its definition as a transposed deity, is initially established by the KKh, a text that serves as an authoritative framework for most oral accounts of the city's sacred sites. That myth is then reformulated and enriched in the KKm, a glorification that adds a level of localisation centred on a section of the entire city—the centre of which is precisely Kedār. From an analysis of these *māhātmya*s, several devices and strategies emerge that are used to make connections with pan-Indian sacred sites, invert the hierarchy of 'original' and 'replica' and, just as importantly, make comparisons with places that belong instead to the local sacred geography. These devices and strategies are then reused and enriched by oral transmission and practices within the temple.

Another particularity of the locality of Kedār jī emerges because of its appeal to pilgrims from the south. It has a ritual tradition, a priestly costume and iconographies that they recognise as familiar, thus activating the kind of reflexive

149 See, for example, van Gennep 2012 [1909], Turner 1969, Falassi 1987, Scarduelli 2000, Caillois 2001, Picard 2015.

relationship between people and places described by Rodman (1992, 646). In this sense, Kedār jī evokes and makes accessible for pilgrims from the south, whether visitors or residents of Banaras, something that they feel they 'own' and can be proud of, but which is at the same time in a 'distant' Indian city.

The promotion of Kedāreśvar takes place on multiple levels, addressing various types of devotees and pressing various buttons, while the fragility of its locality—which has to be reconstituted, re-enacted and redefined daily—provides various layers and costumes to be adopted at the right moment. The quality of being a transposed place is only one of the possible faces shown by the place. Temple officiants tend to feel that this face is appropriately shown to pilgrims from other regions or foreign scholars who are thought to be seeking lofty references. Local devotees, however, are more often shown a different face: the officiants present the temple as primarily inscribed in the locality, comparing it with well-known sites in the surrounding sacred geography to elevate and reaffirm it as a uniquely significant centre. From all this, the site emerges as a web of connections and references that can be drawn upon to strengthen the locality and offer each individual devotee the specific characteristics, qualities, parallels and services that meet their needs.

The unifying experience underlying the sacredness of a *tīrtha*, then, may not so much be the uniqueness of the place or any of its fixed qualities; rather, it may lie in the connections that the place weaves—connections that we have seen are original and foundational modes for the temples we have visited in these pages. The myriad of voices collected in the texts, along with the voices of officiants, devotees and pilgrims, seem to tell us that the more a place creates connections between the here and the elsewhere, the more it exists and exerts its power.