

Strong Vibes in Banāras: The views of Western sojourners on the Holy City

Mari Korpela

The first time I planned to travel to India, the image in my mind was from my geography schoolbook: a photo of pilgrims taking a bath on Daśāśvamedh Ghāt. The picture captured the essence of India for me. Later, when I backpacked around India as an undergraduate, I saw how diverse a country it was, yet arriving in Banāras felt like arriving home. During one month's stay in Banāras, I fell in love with the city and three years later, I returned to collect material for my master's thesis investigating the roles of European women in Banāras. This eventually led to several further sojourns in Banāras as I ended up collecting material for my PhD dissertation there, too.

A common understanding of Banāras sees it as an ancient city of spirituality. However, the city is also accorded with other meanings. When on the plane out to India to begin my PhD research in Banāras, the Dutch woman sitting next to me expressed her terror: 'Why do you go there? It is such a tough place.' In addition, many of the Indian expatriates whom I have met in Europe think it is madness that I have voluntarily lived in Banāras when 'it is such a backward place.'

In this article, I discuss the views that long-term Western sojourners in Banāras give of the city. Banāras is a popular tourist destination but it also attracts more permanent Western sojourners: there are Westerners who return year after year (and who are not scholars). They come from Europe, Israel, Canada, and Australia, numbering two to three hundred during the popular season that starts in October and ends in May. I refer to these people as 'Westerners' due to the fact that in Banāras differences between various Western nationalities seem to disappear when opposed to the 'Indian other.'

Most of the Westerners are of middle-class origin. In Banāras, they live in the same houses year after year. For many, this lifestyle has lasted for years, even decades. Typically, Westerners work for a few months in menial jobs or sell Indian textiles and handicrafts in markets and festivals in their countries of origin and then spend the rest of the year in Banāras, living on the money they have earned in those temporary jobs. Most are between 20 and 35 years old but some are 40 to 50, with men in the majority. In Banāras, most live within walking distance of each other, renting apartments in local houses. Most Westerners in Banāras play Indian music, while some do yoga, meditation, or charity work. A lot of time is spent socialising with friends. The most common activities include frequent visits to each other, parties, boat rides on the Ganges, cooking, eating, and playing music together, as well as attending concerts of classical Indian music.

I first encountered long-term Western sojourners in Banāras when I stayed there during my first trip to India. I found their lifestyle fascinating and exotic; it represented something very different from my own life as a university student. This article is based on the research I did for my PhD (Korpela 2009). I conducted anthropological fieldwork among the Westerners in Banāras for 13 months in 2002–3; my methods were interviews and participant observation. My material thus consists of 56 interviews (each lasting for 1–2 hours) and hundreds of pages of field diaries. In my dissertation, I conceptualized the phenomenon as bohemian lifestyle migration and my focus was on community construction among the Westerners. In this article, however, my focus is on the Westerners' views on Banāras. I have visited Banāras several times since finishing my fieldwork there and I am still in regular contact with many of my research subjects. Consequently I know that the discourses and practices I found there ten years ago remain and are as strong as before.

According to Michel de Certeau 'space is a practiced place' (de Certeau 1986: 117 cited in Hastrup and Olwig 1997: 4). In similar terms, Thomas Faist writes that space has a social meaning which comes into being with concrete social or symbolic ties (Faist 2000: 45). In this article, I elaborate on how Banāras becomes constructed as a space in the discourse and practices of the long-term Western sojourners there. On the one hand, they view the city as 'authentic' and spiritual, while on the other they consider it a difficult, even dangerous, place. In addition, they describe Banāras as a city of contradictions which they themselves have learned to handle. I argue that it is not only that Westerners accord Banāras with specific meanings but those meanings also affect their practices and further interpretations of the city.

The 'spiritual' and 'authentic' city

Most Westerners sojourning in Banāras initially backpacked around India. Typically, such backpackers return to their home countries after their trip and continue their lives there. My research subjects, however, liked Banāras so much that they decided to stay. Due to visa regulations and economic reasons, they do not stay in Banāras permanently but return there again and again. Therefore, they have voluntarily chosen to live in Banāras, and it is definitely not a random choice: they attach the city with various meanings and emphasize that they would not like to stay in any other Indian city.

First of all, the Westerners are very aware that Banāras is an ancient city and a holy city of Hinduism. Just as it was for me, Banāras is a sign of real, 'authentic' India for my research subjects.

I like Banāras because it's something like the heart of India. So much going on also about Indian culture [...] Banāras is real India, still happening. The religion that they practice here, religion is big part of daily life of the people living here, the local people, and it's a very old city. It's actually the oldest existing city in the world. (Ivan, 45¹)

1 After each quotation from an interview, there is a pseudonym for the interviewee and his/her correct age at the time of the interview.

Although their reasons for being in Banāras are usually not religious and most of my research subjects are not studying Hinduism themselves,² all of my interviewees have some basic knowledge of Hindu and/or Buddhist philosophy and they appreciate the environment where they see religion strongly present in people's everyday lives. In their conversation, they construct a clear opposition between the spiritual Banāras and the secular West.

In Europe, we see religion but [it is] ... just dead. It is a few people going to church and you don't see anymore ... the face of god who can make people change everything just for this. It's very beautiful to see. Here you really see because it's so many people, just with a simple heart, they just go. (Laura, 25)

In other words, the Westerners in Banāras appreciate the fact that religion is a living practice there. Many like to socialize with *sādhus* and they spend a lot of time on the ghāṭs where they often see *pūjās*.³ While sitting on the ghāṭs looking at the slowly flowing river Ganges and the religious rituals being performed there, one can easily feel immersed in a kind of a spiritual bubble surrounded by serenity and ignore the dense, non-religious, city life. In fact, all the long-term Westerners live near the Ganges: the Banāras that they appreciate is the Banāras near the river. None of my interviewees mentioned Muslim culture when they talked about how special a place Banāras is; for them it is a Hindu city and as such it represents 'authentic India.'



Rājā Ghāṭ and Ganges

- 2 There are many Westerners in India who have adopted Hinduism or Buddhism as a way of life and who even lead their lives as Buddhist monks/nuns or as Hindu ascetics. Such people, however, are not included in this study (see, for example, Allsop 2000; Giguère 2013).
- 3 *Sādhu*: a holy ascetic; *pūjā*: a religious ritual.

This 'authentic' Banāras is also viewed as a traditional place. For many of my interviewees, Banāras represents a return to the past.

When [...] I tell my mother or the men, how the life is here, they are not so surprised because they had the same fifty years ago, before the war ... like milking the cows [...] My mother [milked cows by hand] until marriage ... mountain life. It is almost the same life, also here. I saw oil lamps and, it was like that. [...] It was the same when they were children. (Anton, 32)

[It feels as] if I was here one thousand years ago, in this place, with this same man, this same place, same clothes, nothing changed, nothing. [...] Also all the architecture is something out of time. [...] First year [in Banāras] for me was really a trip inside the time. (Yvonne, 33)

Banāras is a temporal door, you don't see the time. It's amazing. (Donna, 28)

Superficially, there are a few changes but it really hasn't changed much and certainly for local people, it's still the same sort of thing, for centuries. (Paul, 47)

In their talk, the Westerners often describe Banāras as frozen in the past. In such comments, the past is romanticized as representing an 'authentic' life which is preferable to the present. The 'authentic past' that the Westerners admire is a construction made from their Western perspective in the present: it is a romanticized and idealized construction that never existed the way it is now imagined. In fact, the dichotomization of the authentic, natural past and an inauthentic, even spoilt, present – conceptualized as civilization – has long roots in European romantic philosophy, above all in the ideas of the 'noble savage' (see, for example, Cranston, 1999, on Rousseau; Fabian, 1983). Westerners cannot conceptualize India, or Banāras, as a 'noble savage,' being very aware of the enduring and elaborate Indian system of philosophy; yet, Banāras is conceived as an ultimate other, as fundamentally different from the West, and this 'other' is a spiritual place frozen in the past.

When Westerners say Banāras is unchanging, they are actually ignoring the modernizing present. Much has changed in Banāras in past decades. Such a discourse of stagnation clearly reflects the image of the city as an ancient spiritual place. Obviously, Westerners cannot completely ignore the modernizing aspects of Banāras but for them, such aspects do not represent authenticity. Authenticity is a concept that has been widely discussed in tourism literature (see, for example, Bruner, 1991; Cohen, 1988; Harkin, 1995; MacCannell, 1973; Noy, 2004; Pearce and Moscardo, 1986; Selwyn, 1996; Urry, 1990; Wang, 1999). MacCannell's (1973) original claim was that tourism is a quest for authenticity: tourists are feeling alienated in their home societies and thus search for authenticity elsewhere. Authenticity is defined as something genuine, true, and original, usually seen in romantic terms and often referring to an 'unspoilt' past in people's imagination. Many scholars (see Wang, 1999) have subsequently argued that there are no originals, only endless reproductions. In other words, authenticity should be understood as a social construction.

All in all, tourists often assume that the ‘other’ can be defined as either inauthentic modern or authentic non-modern (Gavin and Phipps, 2005: 2). The same dichotomy seems to apply among the Westerners in Banāras. They despise the modern present as inauthentic. Yet, the past that Banāras represents is picturesque for them, something that they admire from afar but are not willing to fully engage in themselves, as they like their modern comforts such as refrigerators. Here again, a clear distinction from the ultimate other is constructed. In fact, the Westerners’ whole lifestyle depends on modernity: for them, travelling abroad is easy and relatively cheap and within the current global economic system money earned in the West lasts longer when spent in a location like Banāras where living costs are much lower.

In addition to being authentic in terms of religion, Banāras represents authenticity in terms of ‘natural’ life for the Westerners there. Many interviewees appreciated that in Banāras, one lives in close relation with nature.

What I like the most here [in Banāras] is maybe that you are not disconnected from nature. In a Western city, you never know how full the moon is, and it never has any effect on your life. [...] [Here] it’s a huge difference: no moon, full moon, rainy season, hot season, people behave differently. [...] You’re very connected to nature here, as much as you can be in a city. [...] There are monkeys, and birds and cows. They are a living part of the city. Without these animals everything would rot, everything would be stinking. They also give milk, even the cow shit is used for burning, for fertilizing ... as a mosquito repellent. [...] In a way, it’s men and nature living together in symbiosis. I like many things here, they eat from banana plates, and [...] everything is recycled. (Noel, 31)

In Banāras, cows, water buffaloes, dogs, goats and rats are visibly present in the streets and one must constantly be aware of monkeys that may snatch one’s food. Thus, nature – in terms of animals – is very close to one’s everyday life. One also feels the rather extreme climatic changes profoundly since most houses in Banāras do not have air conditioning or good heating. Many of the Westerners claim to aim at a ‘natural life,’ which means, for example, that they prefer homeopathic or Ayurvedic medicines to Western medicines, and some grow herbs and other plants on their balconies. Many appreciate the fact that one can buy unprocessed milk and butter in Banāras, and one can cook with natural ingredients instead of buying ready-made processed food.



Cows on the alley leading to Nārad Ghāt

It is interesting that such a big city – a clearly urban environment – becomes viewed in terms of natural life. It makes more sense when one realizes the framework from which the Westerners make such an interpretation: the naturalness is connected with the spiritual and ancient image of the city. Moreover, as the quotation from an interview above suggests, Westerners emphasize the Hindu religion's close connection with nature – for example in terms of the significance of sunrise, sunset and the cycle of the moon.

Another important aspect that the Westerners in Banāras appreciate is 'genuine' social contact.

Q: Why do you prefer to live in India?

A: [In Banāras] we can speak with the neighbor, and the neighbor smiles at you, says good morning. This does not exist in the West anymore. (Aron, 42)

The above image of harmonious neighborly contact is obviously much romanticized since Banāras is a very stratified society. This nicely illustrates the point that in real life, local people do not necessarily live the kind of 'authentic' life that the Westerners admire. Such a discourse relies on the image of 'authentic' and spiritual Banāras where people are believed to be friendly towards each other. All in all, it seems that various things that the Westerners see and experience in Banāras are interpreted from the framework of spirituality and authenticity. There are also, however, other important ways to view Banāras.

Banāras: a difficult and dangerous place

The idealized and romanticized image of Banāras becomes very clear in the talk of the Westerners there. They also encounter, however, various hardships of everyday life in Banāras, and complaining about those hardships is almost as common as praise for the city.

It's very difficult, Banāras is a tough life, they cheat you all the time. [...] It's the dirtiest city of all India and the people are the least educated from anywhere else that I've seen. (Rafael, 40)

The Westerners sojourning in Banāras not only praise the city but criticize its backwardness and lack of development. They constantly complain about the city being dirty and crowded and suffering from a serious lack of infrastructure – especially in terms of water, electricity, and rubbish. Hence, in practical terms the city is often characterized in negative terms. Moreover, while on the one hand, spirituality is much appreciated among the Westerners, on the other, it is also considered dangerous.

Spirituality not only means temples, *pūjās*, *sādhus*, and other visible signs of Hinduism for the Westerners in Banāras; it also refers to certain 'energies' and 'vibrations,' that is to powers beyond rational understanding. Many of my interviewees claimed they had not wanted to come to Banāras at all but somehow it was their destiny to come and stay: they say that Banāras 'pulled' them and they could not resist the call: 'I knew I had to stop in Banāras because this place, Kashi, attracts you, it's calling you. I didn't really want to but I felt I had to' (Margaret, 56).

Most mentioned that once they arrived in Banāras, they got stuck there and lost interest in travelling to other parts of India.

I have a very strong feeling for Banāras, surely. I didn't see anything else about India, for many years, I came [to India] and took the first train to Banāras and when I left, I took the train out of Banāras. (Rafael, 40)

It's difficult to leave this place. When you come, there is some kind of energy which sucks you in in Banāras and it's very difficult every time I have to go. (Sara, 32)

All this talk about the energy that 'sucks' a person in is connected with the 'strong vibes' of Banāras: almost all my interviewees mentioned the very strong energy that they feel in the city: 'There is a vibe here, it's true [...] it's a feeling. The feeling here is very strong in Banāras, very active' (Marcel, 31).

Although the special energies of the city attract the Westerners in Banāras, those same energies are viewed as overwhelming, even potentially dangerous: 'Very strange vibrations, *sādhus* and all. [The first time I was here], it was too much [for me to handle]' (Ivan, 45).

Consequently, it was commonly agreed by my research subjects that one should not stay in Banāras for too long as one is bound to lose one's mental balance if one stays: 'I can't live here, no, no. It's full energy, it's too strong to live here, it's too strong, really too strong' (Donna, 28).

In fact, the danger of Banāras is not only a discourse but also a real-life fact. Western tourists frequently develop psychological problems in Banāras. These are sometimes related to drug abuse but not necessarily. Mental problems among backpackers in India are a recognized phenomenon: 'India acts as an amplifier of minor idiosyncratic symptoms which may escalate to mentally dysfunctional levels' (Airlault 2000: 53, cited in D'Andrea 2007: 216). Most long-term sojourners in Banāras know about such 'crazy' people and some have been involved in helping them to return to their home countries. Banāras is actually a very special place to lose one's mental balance: cities loaded with particularly strong significance sometimes cause mental disorders for tourists. The 'Jerusalem syndrome'⁴ is widely recognized (see Kalian and Witztum 1998; Bar-el et al. 2000; Van der Haven 2008) and the 'Paris syndrome'⁵ especially affects Japanese tourists (see Nam 2007). Perhaps one should add 'Banāras syndrome' to this list? Very often, the Westerners who lose their mental balance in Banāras claim to follow a spiritual call; for example, they believe they have become enlightened.

Because of these dangers, the Westerners emphasize that one should not stay in Banāras for too long, and definitely not forever. A central aspect in such talk is defining Banāras as an ultimate other. Although seduced by the magic of Banāras, the Westerners carefully maintain their identity as different. The city should not be allowed to 'seduce' one to the extent that one becomes lost in it.

Banāras gets claustrophobic, it's so ingrown, it's a complete world. My feeling was you can get stuck there and never get out. It's very absorbing ... but it gets more and more claustrophobic. [...] I said I have to get out of here. [...] I said no, I am gonna break from here. And it was, it was a traumatic break, because it was, at that point, you could stay forever. [...] For me in Banāras, I was never in touch with the rest of the world, I was completely sort of shut into this bubble. [...] I'm very happy that I left but it was a break, definitely it was traumatic, like ripping away from something. It's a very absorbing place. [...] Banāras, there is something sort of trap like about. [...] I think when you get into Banāras mentality, you don't need to go anywhere, you are not interested in going anywhere. You are not interested in a larger world, you are not interested in larger ideas [...] you sort of see them from a distance but it doesn't matter. I don't think that's so healthy. It wasn't for me. (Katie)

The quotation above comes from an interview with an American woman who had lived in Banāras for several years in the 1970s but was living in the USA at the time of the interview in 2004. In her comment, she describes Banāras as a place where one loses one's own agency and free will. This clearly conveys a message that the city has powers that are beyond one's rational understanding, and consequently it is a dangerous place.

4 *Jerusalem syndrome*: a visit to Jerusalem may trigger religiously themed mental phenomena (obsessive ideas, delusions, or other psychosis-like experiences).

5 *Paris syndrome*: a psychological disorder, including a number of psychiatric symptoms, triggered by a visit to Paris.

City of contradictions: making sense of it by living in it

According to the Lonely Planet guidebook, India is an assault on the senses (Lonely Planet, 1997: 16). For many Westerners, Banāras is an archetype of such an image: ‘Many Westerners, in one life, don’t see what my [two-year-old] child has seen in two years [in Banāras]’ (Aron, 42). Many of my interviewees emphasized that Banāras is never boring:

Banāras is one of the most interesting places in the world. It’s not boring. (Tom, 36)

I don’t get bored in this place [...] I keep on being seduced by just walking down on the Gaṅgā, and it’s always as if it was a new experience every time. (Marcel, 31)

The above comments refer to concrete phenomena but underneath, there is the understanding that it is above all the spirituality that makes Banāras so interesting. It is also a city of contradictions for many Westerners there:

Because you have all the shit in the street, but also all these flowers, and the smell of incense. (Sara, 32)

I think Banāras definitely is a city of contradictions. [...] There are like drastic contrasts, it can be a very pleasant city and it can be a very horrible city. (Marcel, 31)

In the Westerners’ discourse, it seems as if everything in the city is extreme: in both good and bad aspects. The Westerners’ everyday experiences in Banāras often contradict their idealized and romanticized image of the city and, in order to solve this dilemma, they seem to rely on the image of Banāras as a city of strong energies. It is not a neutral place but invested with various, negative and positive, meanings. It is an ultimately and fundamentally different city; it is, by no means, an ordinary place.

Despite the hardships of everyday life, the Westerners in Banāras are attracted by the magic they claim to sense in Banāras: ‘People who come here, who stay, they catch it. If you get spelled by the magic, [you stay]. If not, you leave’ (Stefan, 32).

So far in this article, I have illustrated how the Westerners in Banāras share a discourse where the city is invested with various kinds of meanings. Above all, Banāras is understood as an ‘authentic,’ spiritual, and dangerous place with strong energies. This discourse, however, also becomes a lived practice among the Westerners. Not only do they talk about the city in a certain way but they put this discourse into practice in their own actions in Banāras. In other words, the place of Banāras becomes a lived space through the practices of the Westerners.

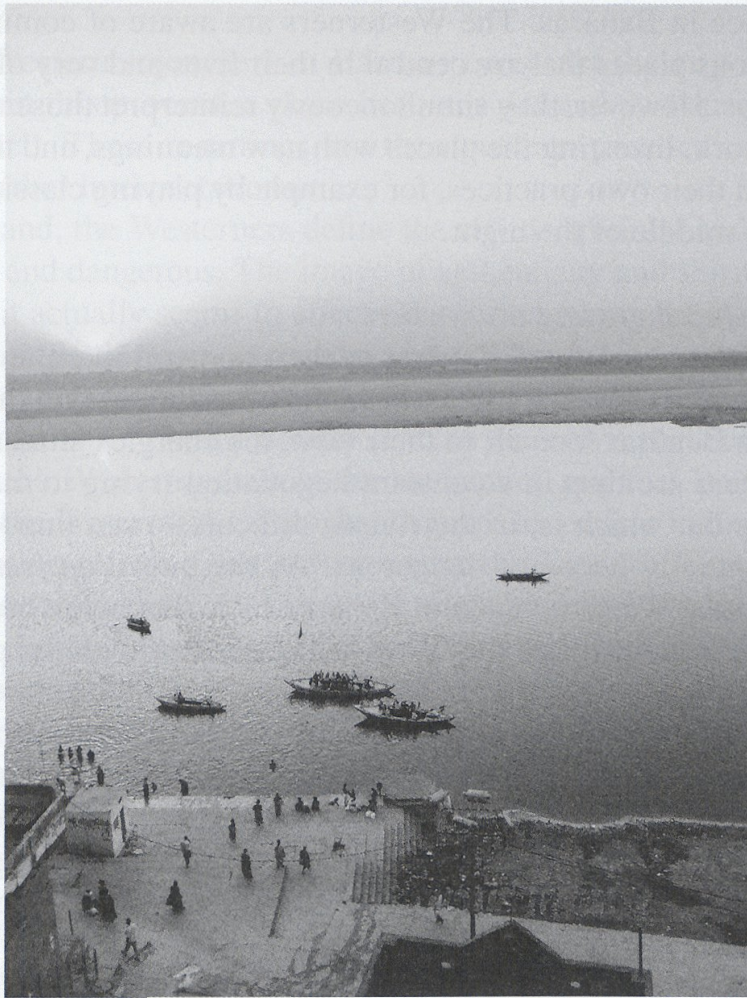
The Westerners emphasize the importance of spiritual values and spiritual growth. However, instead of following Hinduism, they define spirituality in their own terms, and Banāras offers a beautiful and ‘authentic’ setting for one’s personal spiritual growth.

I feel good in this environment, especially in Banāras where people go to make prayers, *pūjā* and full faith. This I like, really, I like very much. You feel united between human beings. (Donna, 28)

They understand that all creation is one vibration. So if you speak this vibration, you connect, and so, we, I feel more part of, I really feel part of the universe, the cycle, I feel part of it here, there in Europe I don't feel. (Olga, 48)

Many Westerners in Banāras claim that 'Western' culture has lost its spiritual links, and in order to improve one's life, one must regain spiritual understanding. For them, good spirituality means personal experience instead of empty words and rituals. However, instead of worshipping Hindu gods, most of them talk about spirituality in broader terms, picking and choosing from various spiritual beliefs whichever suits them best. Such New Age spirituality – choosing from the supermarket of spirituality whichever combination of beliefs and practices pleases one at the time – is currently fashionable (see, for example, Aupers and Houtman 2006; D'Andrea 2007: 55), and India definitely has its share of 'the market of spirituality.' Among the Westerners in Banāras, this personalized spirituality may, for example, mean a combination of some Hindu beliefs and practices with some Buddhist and Christian or Jewish practices and beliefs.

Although the discourse of spirituality is shared among the Westerners, the combinations of particular practices and beliefs are unique to each individual in Banāras. Yet living out 'the space of Banāras' does have shared aspects. There is a particular 'Western geography' in Banāras. By this I mean that there are certain places that are central to the Westerners and the meanings they attach to those places are somewhat different from those of the locals. Firstly, all the long-term Western sojourners live within walking distance of each other, as a consequence of which their Banāras is actually a rather limited physical area in the city. Moreover, they all live near the Ganges, and the river is central in their daily lives. They spend time on the ghāṭs on a daily basis, they often take boats in order to swim on the other side and occasionally they organize picnics there. In addition, they regularly attend concerts in Banāras and these frequently take place on the ghāṭs, or alternatively in temples – clearly offering another spiritual setting. Certain tea stalls, shops, and restaurants are also particularly important to the Westerners although those may not be very significant for many locals.



Sunset at Nārad Ghāt

Music students also put the meanings accorded to Banāras into practice in their own activities.

It is almost midnight. I sit on a ghāt by the Ganges River where I am watching a jamming session of Western music students. Several Indian instruments are played but there are no Indians present. (Field diary, March 2003)

Listening to and playing Indian classical music by the holy river in the middle of the night clearly contributes to a view of the city as a magical place. The diary excerpt above reflects that the Westerners create their own social space within the public space in Banāras. It is ironic that the Westerners play classical Indian music by the holy river of Hinduism, yet there are no Indians present. On that particular occasion, some Indians walked by but did not try to join in – there was an invisible boundary. Thus the Westerners can be understood to be performing or acting out *their* ‘authentic’ India that does not require ‘authentic’ Indian people (see Korpela 2010).

While the Westerners and locals share many common meanings of Banāras, the Westerners put them into practice in ways that are not necessarily shared with the local population. I thus argue that there is a Western social space located within the

local physical place in Banāras. The Westerners are aware of common local meanings given to various places that are central in their lives and very often they cherish the same meanings. However, they simultaneously reinterpret those meanings within their own framework, investing the places with new meanings, and they often act out those meanings in their own practices, for example by playing classical Indian music on the ghāt in the middle of the night.

Spirituality: here and there and everywhere

Many of my interviewees defined Banāras as their home: ‘I like Banāras because it’s Gaṅgā, you have many energies, I feel like home’ (Susan, 27). Yet the Westerners do not wish to stay in Banāras forever; in their view, the energies attract but are dangerous. The Westerners are thus in a constant negotiation trying to make sense of the city that they love but which is, in their view, difficult – even impossible – to comprehend, and eventually becomes dangerous. As the quotation from the interview above suggests, many Westerners claim Banāras feels like home because its special energies have attracted them and they now feel connected with the place.

Seeing Banāras from the viewpoint of ancient spirituality has various effects. For example, a Westerner once told me how she had seen a boat on the Ganges on a foggy morning. She had thought it to be some ancient boat performing a special *pūjā* whereas when it came out of the fog, she realized that it was actually a police boat. In similar terms, when the Westerners encounter mentally disturbed people (either Western or local) in Banāras, a typical explanation offered is that the person behaves in such a way because it is Śiva’s city.

The framework of spirituality is also very much present in the Westerners’ music studies in Banāras. Most long-term Westerners in Banāras study Indian classical music; they constantly emphasize the spirituality of the music and the fact that this aspect of music is particularly strong in Banāras (see Korpela 2010).

I owe a lot to this city, what it has brought into my life. And it’s really special, it’s mystic, different. And ... it has taught me some things about music that I don’t think it’s possible to learn anywhere else [...] because music here, is a religious thing, it’s a totally religious thing and this kind of attitude you cannot understand anywhere else. You can’t learn about it in a university, you cannot understand it in this way. Only here you can really understand the idea of devotion that’s got to do with the idea of being a musician as they see it here. (Rafael, 40)

The Banāras environment and the meanings attached to it provide a beautiful and ‘authentic’ setting for the Westerners’ lives and they act out the special place in their own ways, as Western agents creating a space and understanding about the city somewhat different from the local ones. Yet, the emphasis on spirituality is the overall framework into which the Westerners fit everything they see and experience in Banāras.

Conclusion

The long-term Western sojourners in Banāras construct the city in their discourse and actions and in this process, a place becomes defined as a space with particular meanings attached. These meanings are then put into practice in the Westerners' activities and further interpretations.

On the one hand, the Westerners define the city as spiritual and authentic, on the other as difficult and dangerous. The image of authenticity and spirituality of Banāras is so strong that it actually seems to affect almost everything the Westerners sojourning there say about Banāras or experience there. They come to a place loaded with meanings and they interpret what they see and experience from the given framework, but they construct and act out the discourse from their own particular perspective. In addition to talk, the Westerners create the 'authentic,' spiritual Banāras in their own practices. When the Westerners value what they see as ancient Indian culture, they are actually appreciating a 'frozen past' transposed to the present. The authenticity that the Westerners appreciate is therefore a construction and a very Western project; it is the Westerners who decide how to imagine and act out 'the authentic spiritual Banāras.' The discursive 'authentic' Banāras that the Westerners appreciate may not have much to do with the real life of local people in Banāras but it shows how images and discourses circulate and become reinterpreted and reused in real-life practices.

In the end, in the Westerners' discourse, living in Banāras is a privilege.

M: What do you think, what kind of people stay in Banāras for a long time?

I: Lucky people. (Ron, 31)

Bibliography

- Airault, Regis. 2000. *Fous de l'Inde. Délires d'Occidentaux et Sentiment Océanique*. Paris: Payot.
- Allsop, Marcus. 2000. *Western Sadhus and Sannyasins in India*. Prescott, AZ: Hohm Press.
- Aupers, Stef and Dick Houtman. 2006. Beyond the Spiritual Supermarket: The social and public significance of New Age spirituality. *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 21/2: 201–22.
- Bar-El, Yair, Rimona Durst, Gregory Katz, Josef Zislin, Ziva Strauss, and Haim Y. Knobler. 2000. Jerusalem Syndrome. *British Journal of Psychiatry* 176: 86–90.
- Bruner, Edward M. 1991. Transformation of Self in Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 18/2: 238–50.
- Cohen, Erik. 1988. Authenticity and Commoditization in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 15/3: 371–86.
- Cranston, Maurice. 1999. *The Noble Savage: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1754–1762*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- D'Andrea, Anthony. 2007. *Global Nomads. Techno and New Age as Transnational Countercultures in Ibiza and Goa*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fabian, Johannes. 1983. *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Faist, Thomas. 2000. *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*. Oxford: Clarendon Press (reprinted 2004).
- Gavin, Jack and Alison Phipps. 2005. *Tourism and Intercultural Exchange: Why Tourism Matters?* Clevedon: Channel View Publications.
- Giguère, Nadia. 2013. Feeling at Home in a Liminal Space in India: Self-fulfillment through sociation in Rishikesh's spiritual expatriate community. In Mari Korpela and Fred Dervin (eds.) *Cocoon Communities: Togetherness in the 21st century*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 15–36.
- Harkin, Michael. 1995. Modernist Anthropology and Tourism of the Authentic. *Annals of Tourism Research* 27/3: 650–70.
- Hastrup, Kirsten and Karen Fog Olwig. 1997. *Siting Culture: The Shifting Anthropological Object*. London: Routledge.
- Kalian, Moshe and Eliezer Witztum. 1998. Facing a Holy Space: Psychiatric hospitalization of tourists in Jerusalem. In Benjamin Kedar, Anthony King, and Zwi Werblowsky (eds.) *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land*. Macmillan and the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.
- Korpela, Mari. 2009. *More Vibes in India: Westerners in Search of a Better Life in Varanasi*. Tampere: Tampere University Press.
- 2010. A Postcolonial Imagination? Westerners searching for authenticity in India. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36/6: 1299–315.
- Lonely Planet. 1997. *India: A Travel Guide*. Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.
- MacCannell, Dean. 1973. Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of social space in tourist settings. *American Journal of Sociology* 79/3: 589–603.
- Nam, Janina. 2007. Paris Syndrome: Reverse Homesickness? Unpubl. paper, ASA conference, London, 10–13 April.
- Noy, Chaim. 2004. This Trip Really Changed Me: Backpackers' narratives of self-change. *Annals of Tourism Research* 31/1: 78–102.
- Pearce, Philip L. and Gianna Moscardo. 1986. The Concept of Authenticity in Tourist Experiences. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 22/1: 121–32.
- Selwyn, Tom. 1996. *The Tourist Image: Myths and Myth Making in Tourism*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Urry, John. 1990. *The Tourist Gaze. Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. London: Sage.
- Van der Haven, Alexander. 2008. The Holy Fool Still Speaks: The Jerusalem Syndrome as a religious subculture. In Tamar Mayer and Suleiman Ali Mourad (eds.) *Jerusalem: Idea and Reality*. Abingdon: Routledge, 103–22.
- Wang, Ning. 1999. Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience. *Annals of Tourism Research* 26/2: 349–70.