Twitter Thread by Vatsal Tyagi



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Thread on History of Kashi Vishwanath. Do read till end. Very interesting. Share and Support.

Vishwanath's first mention comes from Skanda Puran
The Glory of Kashi is described as such;
Skanda Purana Kashi Khand Chapter Six
Verse 68- "These seven cities are the bestowers of salvation here itself: Käsi, K■nti (K■ñc■), M■y■, Ayodhy■, Dv■r■vat■, Mathur■ and Avantik■."

Verse 71- "The other holy spots of salvation make K■■■ accesible. If one does not get released (from Sams■ra) even after reaching K■si, he cannot get salvation even if he visits millions of other holy spots.

Chinese Buddhist Pilgrim Hiuen Tsang visited Kashi in 7th century, and wrote as such;
"The capital (V■r■■asi) is densily populated. The families are very rich. The disposition of the people is soft and humane, and they are earnestly given to study."

"They are mostly unbelievers [that is Hindus]. In the capital there are twenty Deva [Hindu] temples, the towers and halls of which are of sculptured stone and carved wood. The foliage of trees combine to shade whilst pure streams of water encircle them."

"The statue of the Deva Mahe■vara [i.e. Siva], made of (native copper), is somewhat less than 100 feet high. Its appearance is grave and majestic, and appears as though really living"

PV Kane in his History of Dharamshastras Vol IV wrote as such:

"There is hardly any city in the world that can claim greater antiquity, greater continuity and greater popular veneration than Banaras. Banaras has been a holy city for at least thirty centuries."

Apparently in response to the Muslim threat from the west, V■r■■asi was turned into a stronghold of Hinduism, and, significantly, was made into the actual seat of political power of the mightiest ruling dynasty of North India, the Gahadavalas, at the end of the 11th century.

The greatest of the Gähadav■la kings, Govindacandra (AD 1109-1155), recorded in AD 1109 that he, while still crown prince, in fame resembling Rama, son of Dasaratha, owinging to his unparalleled and repeated sports (krida) on the battlefield, declared in his Inscription as such:

"Hari (Visnu), the only one capable of protecting the earth, who had been called upon by Hara (Siva) to protect Varanasi against the wicked Turkish (Turuska) warrior, was therefore born again here under the celebrated name of Govindacandra"

The temple in itself is very ancient, but was repeatedly destroyed under Muslim Invasions.
The first time it was destroyed by Army of Qutb al-Din Aibak. Aibak, as the commander of Ghori's forces, captured Kannauj and Varanasi around 1198-1199.

In the plundering of Kashi, his soldiers destroyed the temple of Vishwanath.
According to the Chronicle of Hasan Nizami the victorious troops of Qutb al-Din Aybak plundered the state treasury at Asni and,

"Proceeded towards Benares, which is the centre of the country of Hind"

"and here they destroyed nearly one thousand temples, and raised mosques on their foundations; and the knowledge of the law became promulgated, and the foundations of religion(Islam) were established."

The temple was rebuilt by a Gujarati merchant during the reign of Delhi's Sultan Iltutmish (1211–1266 CE). It was demolished again during the rule of either Hussain Shah Sharqi (1447–1458) or Sikandar Lodhi (1489–1517).

About 1585 A. D. Narayana Bhatta re-established the temple of Visvanatha with the help of Raja Todarmal. Even this temple was desecrated soon after by Aurangzeb.

The following passage from the Ma-A'sir-i-A'lamgiri quoted by Elliot and Dowson ('History of India,' vol. VIL p 184)

"It reached the ears of his Majesty(Aurangzeb) the protector of the faith(Islam), that in the provinces of Multan and Benares, but especially in the latter(Benaras) foolish brahmanas were in the habit of expounding frivolous books in their schools and that students and learners,

Musalmans as well as Hindus, went there even from long distances, led by a desire to become acquainted with the wicked sciences they taught."
"The Director of the Faith' consequently issued orders to all the governors of provinces to destroy with a willing hand the schools-

and temples of the infidels(Hindus) and they were strictly enjoined to put an entire stop to the teaching and practising of idolatrous forms of worship.
On the 15th Rabiu-lakhir (i, e, December 1669) it was reported to his religious Majesty, leader of the Unitarians,

that in obedience to order, the Government officers had destroyed the temple of Bishnath(Vishwanath) at Benares."

A mosque, which still exists, was built on the site of the Višvesvara temple by Aurangzeb, who even changed the name of

The result is that, as stated by Sherring (p. 32), it would be difficult to find twenty temples in the whole of Banaras of the age of Aurangzeb (1658-1707 A. D.).

Visvesvara or Visvanatha is the tutelary deity of Banaras and the principal and most holy temple in it.

It is prescribed that every resident of Kasi must every day bathe in the Ganges and visit the temple of Visvesvara. After Aurangzeb pulled down the temple of Visvanatha, there was no shrine of Visvanatha in Benares for over a hundred years

In 1742, the Maratha ruler Malhar Rao Holkar made a plan to demolish the mosque and reconstruct Vishweshwar temple at the site. However, his plan did not materialize, partially because of intervention by the Nawab of Awadh, who was given the control of the territory.

Around 1750, the Maharaja of Jaipur commissioned a survey of the land around the site, with the objective of purchasing land to rebuild the Kashi Vishwanath temple. However, his plan to rebuild the temple did not materialize either.

In 1780, Malhar Rao's daughter-in-law Ahilyabai Holkar constructed the present temple adjacent to the mosque. In 1828, Baiza Bai, widow of the Maratha ruler Daulat Rao Scindhia of Gwalior State, built a low-roofed colonnade with over 40 pillars in the Gyan Vapi precinct.

During 1833–1840 CE, the boundary of Gyanvapi Well, the ghats and other nearby temples were constructed. Many noble families from various ancestral kingdoms of the Indian subcontinent and their prior establishments make generous contributions for the operations of the temple.

In 1835, Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Sikh Empire, donated 1 tonne of gold for plating the temple's dome. In 1841, Raghuji Bhonsle III of Nagpur donated silver to the temple.
A 7-foot high stone statue of Nandi bull, gifted by the Rana of Nepal sometime in the 1860s.

Sources/Further Readings:
1) Catherine B. Asher. "Architecture of Mughal India". Cambridge University Press
2) PV Kane, "History of Dharmashastras" Vol IV
3) Elliot and Dawson, 'History of India'

4) S. Beal (tr.), Si-Yu-Ki. Buddhist Records of the Western World. Translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629), Delhi 1969 (reprint of the London 1884 edition), Vol. II,

5) Epigraphica Indica, VOL 9,
6) Construction and Reconstruction of Sacred Space in V■r■■as■ by Hans Bakker