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## #Thread on "Kashi (Varanasi), From Birth to Death and Death to Moksha."

## Located on the left bank of the Ganga, Varanasi is one of the 7 holy cities of the Hindus. According to the Vamana Purana, two rivers named Varuna and Assi originated since the beginning of the timei

The name Varanasi originates from the two tributaries of the Ganges, the Varuna &the Assi, which flows at its northern & southern boundaries. The land lying between them was named 'Varanasi'. Its original name was derived from the word 'Kashi', 'Kaasha', which means brightness.

By the way, kashi is mentioned in many Vedic literatures. Kaushitaki Upanishad mentioned about the places like Kashyas and Videhas. Ajatashatru has been declared as the ruler of Kashi or Videha in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. Apart from this, Kashi &Videha are also mentioned in

Shankhayan & Boudhayan Srotasutra.

It also mentions about Kashi joining the Kosala after the independent state got destroyed. It is often referred as adjectives such as 'city of temples', 'religious capital of India', 'city of Shiva', 'city of lamps', 'city of knowledge' etc.

Famous American writer Mark Twain writes: " banaras is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend and looks twice as old as all of them put together."

In the Middle Ages it was a part of the Kannauj kingdom and later it was ruled by Pala kings of Bengal.

In 1194, Shahabuddin Ghori looted and damaged this city. Then Qutub-ud-din Aibak destroyed thousands of temples and religious monuments. It was renamed as Muhammadabad in the Mughal period. Later it was placed under the direct control of the Awadh court.

Balwant Singh sided with the British in the battle of Buxar and on this occasion liberated Varanasi from the Awadh court. In 1911, the British made Maharaj Prabhunarayan Singh the king of Varanasi. In 1950, this state voluntarily joined the Republic of India.

Varanasi has been the confluence of various opinions. This ancient and eternal city of learning has attracted religious gurus, reformers and preachers for centuries. Apart from Buddha & Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, Vallabhacharya, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Tulsidas,Chaitanya Mahaprabhu etc

had visited this city. It is said that Kashi has been a great center of learning and teaching for 3000 years. It is associated with the promotion of spiritualism, mysticism, Sanskrit, Yoga and Hindi language. BHU in Kashi, even today, is the Asia's largest residential university.

Two Vishwanath temples located in Kashi further enhance its fame. The Vishwanath temple, which was renovated by King Harishchandra in the 11th century BC, and again renovated by Emperor Vikramaditya. The first Vishwanath temple, which is the ninth place among the 12 Jyotirlinga

however, the 2nd Vishwanath temple is located at the premises of BHU. Amarnath Upadhyay, senior priest of Kashi Vishwanath Temple, says, 'Kashivas consists of 4 elements - stay here, stay in the company of scholars, consume Gangajal & pray to lord Shiva.

Those who follow these four elements get salvation from the endless circle of births and deaths with the blessings of Lord Tarakeswar, an incarnation of Lord Vishwanath.

Ayurveda is said to have originated from Varanasi and is the basis of modern medical science such as

plastic surgery, cataract etc. Maharishi Patanjali, a predecessor of Ayurveda and Yoga, was also associated with Varanasi.

Taking a bath in Ganga at Kashi has a huge significance. Ganga in Kashi has the power to sanctify not only the body of mortal people but also the soul.

'If you die in Kashi, you will get direct moksha' This is world famous statement.

Since Kashi is considered as the abode of Shiva & Parvati, we believe that one who is gracious to die on the land of Kashi will attain moksha (salvation) from the cycle of birth and rebirth.

To achieve moksha, Aghori sadhus, who worship Mahakal as Shiva, consider Kashi as their stronghold. For Aghoris, Shiva is everything & Beyond philosophy. That’s why their ritual & way of living, has always been controversial.

Death is necessary to attain moksha. But between death and moksha there comes a place called “the crematorium”. And since, Kashi is the center of moksha, it has a grand crematorium in the form of Manikarnika Ghat.

Shiva has blessed Manikarnika Ghat with eternal peace. People also believe that once Lord Vishnu worshiped Lord Shiva here for thousands of years and prayed that Kashi should not be destroyed even during the destruction of the creation.

Pleased with the prayers of Shri Vishnu, Shiva came to Kashi with wife Parvati & fulfilled the wish of Vishnu. Since then it is believed that by performing the last rites in Varanasi, one attains moksha.

Some people say that Shiva & Parvati had a bath in a well dug by Vishnu,

which is now called Manikarnika Kund. It is also said that While Shiva was bathing in this well, one of his coil fell into the well. Since then this place came to be known as Manikarnika (Mani i.e. Kundal and Karnam means ear) Ghat.

I think, I have written enough but still it seems to be an incomplete one. May be because kashi has always ruled on my heart.