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A TEMPLE AND ITS FUNCTIONARIES: A SOCIO-CULTURAL ACCOUNT OF KASHI VISHWANATH TEMPLE

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to give a socio-cultural account of Kashi Vishwanath temple by looking at the role of various social, political, and religious communities in the functioning and management of the temple and its resources. The aim is to highlight the engagement of the diverse social groups and functionaries with the temple, cutting across the notions of caste, religion, gender, ethnicity, physical boundary, and the like. The unique association of these groups with the temple throws light on the social organization of the latter and explains the dynamics through which the temple's affairs have been managed. Through this paper, it has also been argued that the Kashi Vishwanath temple is not just an expression of Hindu-Muslim conflict as it is usually made out to be rather, it is also a beautiful example of socio-cultural amalgamation expressed in how the temple functions. In this argument, we trace out that social cohesion has always been a marked feature of the temple, and it is this unique feature that has, since the very beginning, ensured the participation and involvement of a diverse range of people in the organization of worship and performance of numerous rituals at the temple. Although the temple was controlled by a group of hereditary Priests called Mahants, there was always room for others to negotiate and create their own space within the larger framework of the functioning of the temple, which speaks about the social capability of the latter in terms of accommodation and adaptation. On its part, the temple was able to use its social capital to command the respect and reverence of the political agencies and influential players from across the country. It also became a center of competition and contestation among the latter. Given its pan-India religious importance,

it was seen as a symbol of social prestige that the powerful ruling classes tried to appropriate through their acts of charity and donation. Political rulers and men of influence made generous gifts and offerings to the temple in a bid to perpetuate their name in the history of the service of Lord Shiva, which reflects the greatness of this place of worship. An attempt has also been made to look at the social aspect of this shrine to highlight some of the key points and salient features that give the temple its unique identity and character. This task is planned to be achieved by examining some of the key events in the history of the temple that speak volumes about the social dimension of the latter. Kashi Vishwanath temple has also been a contentious place of Hindu religious worship in the sense that there has always been an attempt on the part of certain vested interests to define and delineate the temple as a private piece of property or temple, which has culminated in the petitions being filed in several courts of law by these entities to get suitable orders in the order to keep their monopoly over the resources of the temple intact. Another important feature of the social structure of the temple was the exclusion of Dalits from the organization and performance of worship, which was done away with only after a suitable piece of legislation by the Uttar Pradesh government was enacted in the year 1956, which goes on showing the complex social organization of the temple and how a small group of people were able to keep large masses of Hindus from having access to the premises of the temple. Another important thing that should not be ignored about the temple is that the temple has had a transnational importance, which is ascertained by examining the involvement of the Kings of Nepal with the performance of worship at the temple. The gender aspect of the place underlines the role of women in the functioning of the temple and throws light on their contribution to the augmentation of the aura and charm of this religious place.

For convenience purposes, the paper has been modeled on a theme basis whereby every theme deals with unique features of the temple and unearths the social, cultural, political, and religious dimensions of the place in the concerned context.

KEYWORDS: *Kashi Vishwanath Temple Varanasi / Kashi Hinduism Shiva (Lord Vishwanath) Pilgrimage (Tirtha Yatra) Rituals and Worship (Puja, Aarti) Priests (Pujaris, Pandas) Temple Functionaries (Sevaks, Administrators)*

INTRODUCTION

Kashi Vishwanath temple is one of the most prominent temples dedicated to the worship of Lord Shiva. It is also one of the twelve Jyotirlingas [pillars of light] through which it is believed Lord Shiva manifested himself during

the creation of the universe¹. The temple is located in the city of Kashi, which is believed to be one of the most ancient living cities in the world. In 1983, the control of the temple was taken over by a Board of trustees appointed by the Uttar Pradesh government.² Going by the traditional history of the temple, one is struck by the fact that the first reference to the temple is found in the Kashi Khand of the Skanda Purana, which dates back to the 4th to 5th century A.D.³ If it is assumed to be true, then it can certainly be argued that the original temple dedicated to Lord Adi Vishweshwar was built around that time, which certainly credits it with being one of the oldest temples in the Indian subcontinent. The historicity of the temple seems to be shrouded in myth and mystery and thus does not present a clear historical picture. Still, it is evident that the temple has a history of being destroyed a number of times by Muslim rulers, beginning with Muhammad Ghori in 1194, then Sikandar Lodi in 1505-15, and Aurangzeb in 1669.⁴ The fascinating thing is that every time it was desecrated, it managed to rise to the occasion to assert itself as a symbol of power, prestige, and privilege through a process of rebuilding, resuscitation, and revitalization. The process of rebuilding this temple was first started by Raja Todarmal in conjunction with Man Singh in 1580-85 during the reign of emperor Akbar. After its destruction for the last time by Aurangzeb and the subsequent building of Gyanawapi Mosque in its place, it was reconstructed on an adjacent site near the mosque by the Maratha ruler, Rani Ahilyabai Holker, in 1777.⁵ With the arrival of the British on the Indian scene, Banaras became a site of contest among the three political parties, including Marathas, Rajas of Banaras, and the English. Each party tried to establish their command over the city. A group of four Mahants who had been managing the affairs of the temple as its de facto trustees continued to misappropriate the resources and funds of the temple and did not maintain any accounts of income and expenditure of the same.⁶ Nor did they try to audit the accounts of the temple in their greed to plunder its valuables. On top of that, they did not provide any basic amenities to the pilgrims and devotees visiting the shrine to seek the blessings of Lord Vishweshwara/Vishwanath.⁷ This continued into the post-colonial period, and all the attempts made by individual applicants to bring the temple administration within the jurisdiction of the state through suits went into vain as the Mahants, by

¹ Trivikram Narain Singh and Ors. vs. State of U.P. And Ors. on October 28th, 1986, <https://indiankanoon.org/>

² The Uttar Pradesh Sri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Act, 1983 Act 29 of 1983, https://prsindia.org/files/bills_acts/acts_states/uttar-pradesh/1983/1983UP29.pdf

³ Eck, Diana L, *Banaras, city of Light*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1999.

⁴ Rana P.B. Singh and Pravin S. Rana, *The Kashi Vishwanatha, Varanasi city, India: Construction, Destruction, and Resurrection to Heritagisation*, Pp-19-20, 2022.

⁵ Ibid, Pp- 15-30.

⁶ Report of the Hindu Religious Endowments Commission [1960-62], Government of India, *Ministry of Law*, Pp-49-50.

⁷ Ibid.

utilizing the resources of the temple, managed to prolong and win all the cases filed against them.⁸ Then, this greed came down to the personal level at which these mahants fought against each other in the courts of law to establish their personal control over the temple and its resources.⁹ Even the Pujaris employed by them to perform religious duties were not remunerated properly and resorted to petty measures to enhance their income.¹⁰ Large-scale thefts were committed during the years 1962, 1969, 1976, and 1982, and no accountability was held.¹¹ This crisis reached its peak when, on the night of 4/5 January 1983, the most significant theft involving the stealing of the gold plate of Arghya of Shivlinga was reported, and this precipitated the enactment of legislation in the form of the Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Act, 1983 paving the way for the constitution of a Board of Trustees comprising prominent Hindu religious leaders, other religious persons of repute and high-ranking officials of the state government.¹² With this, the administration of the temple was entrusted to the Board of Trustees with the aim of bettering the management of its resources for the purpose of offering better services to the pilgrims.¹³ The government-instituted temple trust has managed the temple since then.¹⁴ Finally, the government of Uttar Pradesh came up with legislation to set up the DharmarthKaryaVibhaga to supervise the administrative activities of the major temples in the state in 1985.

THEME

SOCIAL- [SOCIO-CULTURAL]

The social structure of the temple happens to be quite complex.¹⁵ The temple is a patriarchal institution based on the system of patrimony, as the temple's Mahant is always a male. Even the Board of Trustees appointed by the government for the temple's administration is a male-dominated trust into which women are not generally given any positions. The exclusion of women from the organization of worship in the temple is a marked feature of

⁸ The Uttar Pradesh Temple Entry [Declaration of Rights] Bill, 1956, Government of India, *Ministry Of Home Affairs, Judicial-I*, National Archives Of India.

⁹ Trivikram Narain Singh and Ors. vs. State of U.P. And Ors. on October 28th, 1986, <https://indiankanoon.org/>

¹⁰ Report of the Hindu Religious Endowments Commission [1960-62], Government of India, *Ministry of Law*, Pp-166.

¹¹ The Uttar Pradesh Sri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Act, 1983 Act 29 of 1983, https://prsindia.org/files/bills_acts/acts_states/uttar-pradesh/1983/1983UP29.pdf

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Sri AdiVisheshwaraof Kashi ... vs. State of U.P. And Ors on March 14th, 1997, <https://indiankanoon.org/>

¹⁵ Report of the Hindu Religious Endowments Commission [1960-62], Government of India, *Ministry of Law*, Pp-6-22.

every Brahmanical temple. However, women are allowed to worship and perform certain rituals within the temple.¹⁶ This is something that seems to be reflective of the existing social patterns in Hindu society, where women cannot be trained to act as priests or archakas, given the fact that they are believed to be impure due to their physical traits and the notion of purity and pollution.¹⁷ A study of the history of Kashi Vishwanath temple shows that after the destruction of this place by the forces of Aurangzeb in 1669, it was a woman ruler named Ahilya Bai Holker of Indore from the Maratha clan who rebuilt this temple at its existing place¹⁸ and to whom a statue has been dedicated within the precincts of this grand place of worship. However, there were attempts from other Hindu male rulers, such as Malhar Rao Holker of Indore and Jai Singh II of Jaipur, to rebuild the temple¹⁹, yet none of them could take this task to its logical end. After rebuilding this temple, she entrusted its management to a Brahmin priest.²⁰ Building on this tradition, Baija Bai of Gwalior got the pavilion of the Gyanwapi, which was well built by erecting a hall with more than 40 pillars, which speaks to the resilience of the great lady warrior.²¹ This tradition is further testified to by the wife of Vishweshwar Dayal Tiwari, who left a will before her death expressing wishes regarding the management of the temple and resources, which suggests that although limited in scope, she did exercise a certain degree of supervision over the affairs of the temple.²² So, all of these examples put together do present a picture of how even women, who were not supposed to be an integral part of the administration of the temple, did play an important role in the functioning of the sacred place from time to time. As an institution, the temple has remained and continues to remain highly patriarchal in its structure and organization. Drawing on this, S. Selvan argues that irrespective of caste and denomination, women were not allowed to hold any office due to their association with the concept of purity and pollution.²³ The principle of

¹⁶ Selvam, S. *Religion, state, and social policy: the changing social organization of Hindu temples*. Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, 2003, Pp-1-18.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The Uttar Pradesh Sri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Act, 1983 Act 29 of 1983, https://prsindia.org/files/bills_acts/acts_states/uttar-pradesh/1983/1983UP29.pdf

¹⁹ The Kashi Vishwanath-Gyanvapi Equation: A Parable for People, Power, Politics, <https://thewire.in/communalism/the-kashi-vishwanath-gyanvapi-equation-a-parable-for-people-power-politics>

²⁰ Rana P.B. Singh and Pravin S. Rana, *The Kashi Vishwanatha, Varanasi city, India: Construction, Destruction, and Resurrection to Heritagisation*, p-15-30, 2022.

²¹ Sherring, Matthew Atmore. *The sacred city of the Hindus: An account of Benares in ancient and modern times*. Trübner & Company, 1868, Pp-37-61.

²² Trivikram Narain Singh and Ors. vs. State of U.P. And Ors. on October 28th, 1986, <https://indiankanoon.org/>

²³ Selvam, S. *Religion, state, and social policy: changing social organization of Hindu temples*. Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, 2003, P-200.

pollution continues to be the driving force in preventing women's participation as priests and Archakas. He further stresses that despite the presence of numerous female deities in the Hindu pantheon, the segregation of women from the affairs of the places of worship continues to prevail.²⁴ The relevant temple authority followed this rule to the exclusion of women. This practice got its original form in the will of Pt. Vishweshwar Dayal Tiwari. One of the proposals was that only the male member of his family would be considered eligible for the post of Chief Mahant.²⁵ His successors gave this proposal effect after his death, and it became one of the foundational principles regarding the election to the post of Chief Mahant in Kashi Vishwanath temple. The post of Mahant has always been hereditary and adheres to the custom and usages of the temple, which provide for the election of the Mahant from the family of the first Mahant only.²⁶ Besides, the Mahant in the temple had combined in his office the duties and privileges of both the manager or trustee and chief Archaka or Pujari²⁷ until 1983 when the duties of manager were taken over by the government-appointed trust while leaving behind those of chief Archaka in the hands of the chief Mahant. Caste as an agency has been associated with religion and polity in India, and it should be remembered that Brahmanic Hinduism prescribes the caste system as the structural basis of Hinduism and Hindu society.²⁸ In light of this, caste is linked to Hindu temples, and Hindu temples staunchly follow caste rules and norms. The Agamas, a collection of manuals about rituals and rites to be performed in Hindu temples in accordance with appropriate caste-based norms and rules, provide the basis for the differentiation that various caste groups have to maintain while performing worship and temple-related rituals.²⁹ So, it is the agamic laws, which are basically a collection of customs and usages, that decide the inclusion and exclusion of numerous caste groups in Hindu temples. Given the caste-centric norms of these Agamas, Untouchables and Dalits were kept away from accessing Hindu temples, and Kashi Vishwanath temple was no exception to this rule. Untouchables and other low caste groups were not allowed to enter Kashi Vishwanath temple till the year 1956 when the Uttar Pradesh government was forced to enact the Temple Entry Proclamation Act to ensure the entry of these social groups into Kashi Vishwanath temple.³⁰ It must be mentioned

²⁴ Ibid, Pp-200-202.

²⁵ Trivikram Narain Singh and Ors. vs. State of U.P. And Ors. on October 28th, 1986, <https://indiankanoon.org/>

²⁶ Hasarat, Shriyut Shrikrishna. Shri Kashi Vishwanath, *Hansa Magazine*, Vol-4, No-1-2, October, November, 1933, Pp-143-147.

²⁷ Report of the Hindu Religious Endowments Commission [1960-62], Government of India, *Ministry of Law*, Pp-42-63.

²⁸ Selvam, S. *Religion, state, and social policy: the changing social organization of Hindu temples*. Kanishka Publishers, Distributors, 2003, Pp-1-18.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The Uttar Pradesh Temple Entry [Declaration of Rights] Bill, 1956, Government of India, *Ministry Of Home Affairs, Judicial-I*, National Archives Of India.

that the U.P. government was forced to bring this act because the two earlier acts, namely the Uttar Pradesh Removal of Social Disabilities Act, 1947, and Untouchability Offences Act, 1955, which were aimed at eliminating all kinds of social disabilities while ensuring the entry of untouchables into all public places of Hindu worship, failed to materialize.³¹ This shows the level of social conservatism that prevailed in Hindu society at that point in time and throws light on the reluctance of the conservative Hindu class to allow these social groups into the temple. With the passage of each of the two earlier acts in 1947 and 1955, the Mahant of the temple was able to get the local court to issue injunctions stopping the Dalits from entering the temple.³² It was because the entry of untouchables into the temple was seen to be polluting and contrary to the notion of established tradition, and it was held that if these people were allowed to enter the temple and worship the lingam, they would defile the sanctity of the lingam by touching it.³³ So, the temple authority made tireless efforts to prevent the untouchables from entering the temple premises, but since the government was to act in accordance with the principles of the newly propounded constitution, it had to act in a manner in which it could ensure the basic constitutional rights of the Dalits. At the same time, it did not want to rile up the temple authority, which consisted of the temple Mahant and other prominent orthodox Hindu personalities. So, the state decided to engage in the act of power balancing whereby it reached a compromise with the temple authority that the latter would allow the Dalits to enter and worship inside the temple. Still, nobody would be allowed to touch the lingam, and in this way, the sanctity of the lingam would be protected. On the other hand, the Dalits would be allowed to proclaim their right to enter and worship inside the temple in the same manner and to the same extent to which upper caste Hindus would be allowed.³⁴ However, even this arrangement did not solve the conflict, and issues relating to the social organization of the temple kept propping up. This episode also underlines the tension prevalent between the temple authority and the state, which finally culminated in the latter's taking direct control of the former in 1983. This shows that Kashi Vishwanath temple, one of the country's most important temples, had its share of conflicts due to its strict code of conduct and social structure. At the same time, it should be noted that twice-born people had unrestricted access to every portion of the temple due to the purity and integrity of their character. Right on the main wall of the entry gate, a plaque that reads Aryerdhetaranam Pravesho Nishiddhah is engraved, which means that entry of non-Aryans is prohibited.³⁵

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Hasarat, ShriyutShrikrishna. Shri Kashi Vishwanath, *Hansa Magazine*, Vol-4, No-1-2, October, November, 1933, Pp-143-147.

Another important social aspect of the temple is the association of the Nattukottai community with the temple, which dates to 1813³⁶. This small group of people from the southern state of Tamil Nadu were able to carve out their space within the management structure of the temple for themselves. The Nattukottai community is a small social block in Tamil Nadu and is known for its affluence and resulting charity. This community, being Shaivite, made huge offerings and donations to the Kashi Vishwanath temple and set up a Kshatram in the city in 1863, with the help of which they offered free meals to the visiting devotees to the temple.³⁷ This Anna Kshetram continues to serve free meals to the people even today. What is interesting about the association of this social group with the temple is its control over the performance of two out of four Artis that happen at the temple.³⁸ These two Artis, which happen at two different times [during evening and night pujas], are conducted by the priests with the help of this community in south Indian style to the accompaniment of the south Indian religious music. The latter ensures the arrangement of all articles of worship, including milk, sweat, flowers, camphor, and numerous other things for them.³⁹ During the Arti times, they conduct a procession in which they carry all the necessary articles of worship from their center to the temple while chanting slogans hailing Lord Shiva. In the city, the community owns a big parcel of land on which it has set up a Gaushala to domesticate cows whose milk is offered to the lord. At the same time, flowers are grown on a portion of the same plot and offered to the lord at the time of Puja.⁴⁰ Their devotion to lord Shiva is unique because they have been performing these pujas since 1813 without any break. They did not stop this Puja even when there was a curfew in the city during the Quit India movement, and they made sure that they got special permission to conduct their Puja. It is also important to note that they have the first right of Puja for these timings, which reflect their position and importance within the ritualistic affairs of the temple.⁴¹

RELIGIOUS

It has already been suggested that the temple is a unique place of religious worship and has been a center of religious cohesion due to the engagement of numerous religious communities in the performance of worship. One

³⁶<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/varanasi/rs-240-crore-land-freed-from-mafia-in-varanasi/articleshow/91428010.cms>

³⁷Mudaliyar, Kumaraswamy. Kashi Me Madrasi, *Hansa Magazine*, Vol-4, No-1-2, October, November, 1933, Pp-142.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/varanasi/rs-240-crore-land-freed-from-mafia-in-varanasi/articleshow/91428010.cms>

⁴¹<https://indiansareejournal.blog/2021/09/20/chettinadu-splendour-part-2-the-benares-connection/>

unique element of Hindu-Muslim unity that gets reflected at the temple is in the playing of Shehnai by Muslim artists from the terrace of Naubatkhana to the accompaniment of Puja inside the GarbhaGriha which adds to the serenity and beauty of the worship and suggests that the local Muslim community has revered the temple.⁴² The Bharat Ratna winner Ustad Bismillah Khan, who was popular for his Shehnai playing skills across the world, was associated with this practice and would play Shehnai in sync with the performance of Puja from the roof of Naubatkhana. Naubatkhana is a building adjacent to Kashi Vishwanath temple and was built by Wajid Ali Shah, Nawab of Oudh, in 1856.⁴³ It happened that the Nawab was deposed by the British in 1856 on charges of maladministration. When he learned of this, he decided to retire to Calcutta to express his grievances to the British authority. On his way to Delhi, he stopped at Varanasi and was requested by Iswari Prasad Singh, Raja of Varanasi, to spend some time in the city as his chief guest, and the Nawab obliged. Since he had visited the city of Kashi Vishwanath, he wanted to perpetuate his visit to the city, so he bought a plot of land right next to the temple of Kashi Vishwanath, constructed a Naubatkhana and made the provision of having a Muslim play Shehnai as many as three times during the Pujas every day from the morning when the lord woke up to the night when he went to sleep.⁴⁴ This act enhanced goodwill and brotherhood between Hindus and Muslims, which irked the British, which felt threatened by the prospects of a united Hindu-Muslim front in case they were to measure swords with the natives, so they got this practice stopped in 1887, and it took the natives more than hundred years to revive it. Another notable event of religious harmony at the temple took place when Maharaj Ranjeet Singh of the Sikh kingdom of Lahore, at the behest of his wife, Datar Kaur, donated one ton of gold for getting two spires of the temple gold-plated in 1839. This is precisely why Kashi Vishwanath temple is also known as the Golden Temple.⁴⁵ During the British period, every Viceroy from Canning to Irwin not only visited the temple to seek the blessings of lord Shiva but also contributed towards the maintenance of this place by offering gifts and donations.⁴⁶ Through their visit, they tried to legitimize their rule and create an impression of their acceptance of India's religious values and norms. In spite of being staunch Christians, these representatives of the British crown made sure that they won the support and goodwill of the Hindus through their visits to Kashi Vishwanath temple.

⁴² Revival of Muslim Participation in Lord Vishwanath Mandir Ritual, <https://oudh.tripod.com/paq/kvpaq/kvpaqdv.htm>

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ The Uttar Pradesh Sri Kashi Vishwanath Temple Act, 1983 Act 29 of 1983, https://prsindia.org/files/bills_acts/acts_states/uttar-pradesh/1983/1983UP29.pdf

⁴⁶ Hasarat, ShriyutShrikrishna. Shri Kashi Vishwanath, *Hansa Magazine*, Vol-4, No-1-2, October, November, 1933, Pp-143-147.

This explains the cross-religious importance of the temple and demonstrates the level of support that it commanded and continues to command from rulers of different religious faiths.

POLITICAL

Politically, it was a very contentious place in the sense that every major political force tried to appropriate the temple to gain political legitimacy. The Marathas were patrons of a lot of Hindu temples, including the temple of Kashi Vishwanath in Banaras. They made lavish donations for the maintenance and upkeep of these temples.⁴⁷ The Bhosale family of Nagpur donated a copper arcade in which the lingam was placed. The Maharaja of Nepal donated a massive stone-cut bull [Nandi] to the temple, which has been placed right next to the Gyanwapi well.⁴⁸ The date of donation is debatable, and its nature is controversial. What makes this structure controversial is the direction in which the bull looks. As in every Shiva temple, the head of the bull faces the linga; this happens to be different in the case of Kashi Vishwanath temple as the head of the bull faces the Gyanwapi mosque and not the existing temple of Kashi Vishwanath, and this is used as a pretext by the Hindu side to argue that the original temple of Kashi Vishwanath existed where the current Gyanwapi mosque stands. The Maharaja of Nepal had been given certain privileges in the ritualistic affairs of the temple and continued to enjoy certain privileges.⁴⁹ Even George V, a British monarch, paid a visit to the temple and sought the blessings of lord Vishwanath, which underlines the transboundary prominence of the latter.⁵⁰ Besides, the Rajas of Banaras always enjoyed a supervisory role over the affairs of the temple. They made interventions from time to time to remedy mismanagement and abuses and assert their right as sovereigns of the state of Banaras. They also acted as the trustees of the temple and ruled the state as representatives of lord Shiva.⁵¹ Even when the control of the temple was taken over by the government-sanctioned trustee, Vibhuti Narayan Singh, Raja of Banaras, was appointed as the chief trustee of the Board. In the temple arena, the Raja of Banaras had full control over one of the Pujas of the deity. On certain special occasions, he would preside over the worship of the deity, and even the Mahant would not be allowed to enter the GarbhGriha at that time. So, in this manner, the Rajas of Banaras had a very intricate relationship with the temple of Kashi Vishwanath and used it to legitimize their rule by gaining

⁴⁷ Eck, Diana L, *Banaras, city of Light*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1999.

⁴⁸ Sherring, Matthew Atmore. *The sacred city of the Hindus: An account of Benares in ancient and modern times*. Trübner & Company, 1868, Pp-37-61.

⁴⁹ <https://indiansareejournal.blog/2021/09/20/chettinadu-splendour-part-2-the-benares-connection/>

⁵⁰ Hasarat, Shriyut Shrikrishna. Shri Kashi Vishwanath, *Hansa Magazine*, Vol-4, No-1-2, October, November, 1933, Pp-143-147.

⁵¹ Ibid.

religious sanction, which helped them in terms of securing the support of the dominant classes of the society. This tendency seems to be a continuation of the medieval period, where the state and temples were connected and would act in a manner that would benefit both. The state support of the temple was necessary for the latter to perform its wide range of functions with the help of the dominant caste groups. In comparison, the temple support of the state would allow the latter to gain religious sanction and political legitimacy in society. So, it should be noted that both these institutions were complementary to each other and existed and flourished in an atmosphere of harmony.

The British policy towards the temple of Kashi Vishwanath was quite ambivalent. They did not make any attempt to take direct control of the temple and made numerous efforts to bring the activities of the shrine in consonance with the strategic interests of the Raj.⁵² In this direction, they took measures to appease and mollify the dominant priestly class from the city in general and Kashi Vishwanath temple in particular. After taking control of the city, they made numerous pro-dominant caste measures, among which was the acceptance of the privileges and prerogatives of the Brahmins and others. A good number of Christian pastors were sent to the temple to study and map the nature and extent of the influence that the temple enjoyed among the people.⁵³ Their main objective was to gain an understanding of the notion of idolatry and use the same to criticize and ostracize the Hindu religion. Many Christian Missions wrote about their experiences of the temple visits and gave accounts of how the affairs of the temples were managed. One thing that everyone had a consensus on was the corrupt nature of the Pandas and Mahant from the temple, who were said to be engaging in dishonest practices to augment their earnings.⁵⁴ The main contention of these travelers is that the Pandas and the Mahants were not serious about improving the state of affairs prevalent inside the temple; rather, they were fully focused on manipulating and pillaging innocent pilgrims visiting the temple from various parts of the country.⁵⁵

⁵² Report of the Hindu Religious Endowments Commission [1960-62], Government of India, *Ministry of Law*, Pp-22-31.

⁵³ Sherring, Matthew Atmore. *The sacred city of the Hindus: An account of Benares in ancient and modern times*. Trübner & Company, 1868, Pp-37-61.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

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