



Unframing the Sacredpolis: Mapping Countervisuality in Kashinath Singh's *Kashi ka Assi*

Vanya Jaiswal*

Abstract

In this paper, I intend to examine the popular narrative construction and visualization of the city of Varanasi as a monolithic entity with a distinctly Hindu character. Further, I will argue that Kashinath Singh's authoritative text on Varanasi, *Kashi ka Assi* subverts these hegemonic discourses by employing a countervisual unframing of the city. Singh employs a no holds barred approach in the novel as he paints a vivid picture of a specific neighbourhood of the city caught in transition – the titular Assi. In an acerbic tone that spares no one, Singh confronts and dismantles the many stereotypes associated with the city. His Varanasi is as filthy as it is sacred, the pandit here is as corrupt as the next conman, and the intellectual and the politician are cut from the same cloth. This paper will explore how Singh challenges the archetypal image of Varanasi to furnish a materialist understanding of the city that foregrounds its lived space.

Keywords: Visualization, Countervisuality, Lived Space, Visual Culture, Lefebvre

Introduction

Nicholas Mirzoeff begins his seminal treatise on visual culture, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, by stating that “modern life takes place onscreen” (1). Though terms like ‘modern life’ and ‘onscreen’ are ambiguous at best¹, Mirzoeff's emphatic declaration does foreground the deeply visual nature of our existence. In 1992,

* Research Scholar, Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University

William J. T. Mitchell prophetically proclaimed the emergence of a “pictorial turn,” to herald the heightened dominance of ‘picture’ in contemporary life and the subsequent shift in academia from the verbal to the visual (11). It would perhaps be appropriate to mention at the outset that this emphasis on the visual does not merely refer to an increased preoccupation with the study of videos, images, or movies in the field of Visual Culture Studies. Hans Belting’s remark that “We live with images, we comprehend the world in images” in this regard offers an insight into the expansiveness of the terrain² (qtd. in Medick 249). Furthermore, it cautions the reader that the visual must not be conflated with only the perceptible object. In fact, Belting’s comment draws our attention to the “visualization of things that are not in themselves visual” (Mirzoeff, *Visual Culture* 6; 1st ed.). In this paper, I intend to examine the popular narrative visualization of the city of Varanasi as a monolithic entity that boasts of a distinctly Hindu character. Further, I will argue that Kashinath Singh’s formative text on Varanasi, *Kashi ka Assi* subverts these hegemonic discourses by employing a countervisual “unframing”³ of the city (Rogoff 17). Singh’s no holds barred approach in the novel as he paints a vivid picture of a specific neighbourhood of the city (the titular Assi) has been the subject of a lot of debate and opprobrium.⁴ In an acerbic tone that spares no one, Singh confronts the many stereotypes associated with the city and dismantles them unabashedly. His Varanasi is as filthy as it is sacred, the pandit here is as corrupt as the next conman, and the intellectual and the politician are cut from the same cloth. This paper will explore how Singh challenges the archetypal image of Varanasi as the epitome of the eternal Hindu city by rendering a materialist understanding of the city that foregrounds its lived space.

The Origin Story: Varanasi as the Hindu Sacredpolis

Known variously as Kashi, Banaras, or Varanasi, the city has dominated the Hindu imagination for centuries. Varanasi’s centrality in Hindu scriptures like the Puranas, its cosmic layout, its geographical situatedness by the Ganges, and the presence of the Vishwanath Jyotirlinga in the city—the holiest of Shiva temples—have all contributed to its privileged status in the Hindu imaginary.⁵ Its earliest known mentions can be found in Puranas, the most

extensive being *Kashi Khanda* of the *Skanda Purana*⁶ and the *Kashi Rahasya* of the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* (Eck 22-23). Far from being fact-laden descriptions, these accounts qualify as *mahatmya* or praise literature that extol and reinforce the city's sanctitude. For instance, in the *Kashi Khanda*, Shiva tells Skanda, his son, that Kashi is the most hallowed place in the three worlds. People with good karma and those with bad karma meet the same fate at death in Kashi, for the seeds of their sin do not germinate here. He reveals that even the gods want to die here since death in Kashi guarantees the attainment of *moksha*. He shares with Parvati that it is his favourite place of residence (Debroy 58). That is perhaps why the city has earned the epithet of 'Avimukta,' which means never forsaken by Shiva.⁷ He further explains that those who remain in Kashi take on the characteristics of Rudra or Shiva and thus are deserving of the honour that Shiva commands, and in death, they would become one with Shiva himself (Eck 32). Thus, in the Puranas, Varanasi emerges as the epicentre of a divine cosmos.

With the arrival of the Muslims in India, Varanasi loses some of its earlier glory as the seat of Hindu faith. While there was no overarching policy to govern the treatment of Hindu sacred sites during the Mughal rule, the religious life of the city had turned increasingly precarious at the time (Eck 83-84). Two distinct registers emerged in literature in response to these uncertainties. Nostalgia for the Kashi of golden days rekindled an interest in *mahatmyas*, which rose in significance during this period. The Sultanate period was also marked by the spread of the *bhakti* movement. Poet-saints like Kabir, Tulsi Das, and Ravidas, all of whom were born in Varanasi, gained prominence during this time. Kabir was contemptuous of religious conservatism and abhorred the politics of temple and mosque. Ravidas, too, questioned "the version of Hinduism that ties itself intimately to the caste system" (Hawley, Juergensmeyer 201). In that sense, both Kabir and Ravidas's poetry challenged the idea of a Brahmanical Varanasi. Contrary to this, Tulsi Das was firmly placed in the Hindu Vaishnava mainstream (Eck 87). One of his hymns presents Kashi as auspiciousness exemplified: "Serve with love all life through Kashi, the wishing-cow of this Dark Age, / It banishes woe, affliction, sin, disease, and it amasses all things auspicious" (qtd. in Eck 88).

“The Oxford and Mecca of Hinduism”: The British Visualization of Varanasi

The collapse of the Mughal empire eventually paved way for the advent of the British in India. For the next 200 years or so, Christian missionaries, administrators and travellers would engage with the sacredscape of the city and represent it through a multitude of narratives with the larger aim of achieving epistemic mastery over the land's supposed 'otherness'. Their main informants on the city were the Brahmans, who confirmed their assumption of the city as an ancient hotspot of Hindus, steeped in religious devotion (Dalmia 55). Rev. Matthew Atmore Sherring, a Protestant missionary in British India, wrote *The Sacred City of the Hindus: An Account of Benares in Ancient and Modern Times*, which is considered a pioneering work on the city. In the opening lines of the first chapter itself, Sherring admits that the city's history is shrouded in obscurity. Ironically, he then goes on to write that “For the sanctity of its inhabitants—of its temples and reservoirs—of its wells and streams—of the very soil that is trodden—of the very air that is breathed—and of everything in it and around it, Benares has been famed for thousands of years,” with no evidence to support his claim (Sherring 2). It becomes apparent that it is Sherring's visual encounter with the city, be it the ghats or the temples or the “ceremonies of the idolators,” that confirms many of his assumptions about the city, including his thoughts about its sacrality (vi). As such, he is both an active producer and a consumer of the dominant visuals of the city, imparting renewed authority to these images through repetition. As Mirzoeff argues, authorization of authority constantly seeks reassertion for it is always contested already (“The Right to Look” 474).

One must remember that Sherring is but one name in the long list of Britishers who continued to write on Varanasi, regurgitating previous claims about the city, asserting that it is the “Oxford and Mecca of Hinduism” and lauding its religious and ancient character (Cape 15).⁸ Vasudha Dalmia argues that it was the hyper-visibility of the people conducting daily rituals at the ghats, the formidable presence of the temples, the influx of new pilgrims every day that endowed the city with immense religious authority (57). She adds that the “multi-faceted myth of Banaras as propagated by the

Sanskritic traditions ... was thus newly standardized and reinforced by the British, who wished explicitly to derive benefit from the authority generated by it and co-opt and integrate in one way or another the bearers of this tradition” (68). Thus, the British visualization of Varanasi, through the use of colonial tropes, served to legitimize their power and resulted in a fossilized image of the city.⁹ Varanasi’s extensive documentation during the British reign only fortified its image as the bastion of Hinduism.

Shifting Gazes: The Varanasi of Post-Independence Travel-Writing

In the post-independence era, the literary representations of Varanasi, especially the genre of travel writing, largely continued to build onto the legacy of their colonial predecessors, adopting similar vocabulary and tenor. For instance, Pico Iyer’s account of Varanasi as an “undisturbed,” “fundamentally unchanged ... sacred citadel of Hinduism and a cultural hotspot” instantly reminds one of the British construction of the city as timeless. He goes on to describe the city as follows: “... there were goats with auspicious red marks on their foreheads trotting around, and embers burning, and oil lamps drifting out across the river in the fog. Along the walls beside the river were painted faces, laughing monkey gods, sacred looming phalluses” (Iyer). Instead of chronicling Varanasi as it appeared to him, Iyer’s report seems to be a projection of his own social fantasies.¹⁰ Anyone with a discerning eye would conveniently figure out that this canonical portrait is evoked for a Western readership, who is likely to be more receptive to such Oriental frameworks of perception.

Another case in point is Bishwanath Ghosh’s *Aimless in Banaras*, a travelogue born out the writer’s penchant for the city. Written in 2019, the book begins with an author’s note that cautions the reader against the sort of city that is of no interest to him – the Varanasi that lies outside of its “mindboggling maze of ghats and galis” (Ghosh). His declaration is tainted with both nonchalance and unchecked prejudice, setting the tone for the narrative to follow. The city space that does captivate Ghosh is the one that has been recorded and reported on ad infinitum, which Henri Lefebvre defines as “perceived space” in his ground-breaking “conceptual triad” of

spatiality (33). Lefebvre's perceived space is the space of popular perception and action. Andi Merrifield writes that spatial practices (or perceived space) structure "lived reality, include routes and networks, patterns and interactions that connect places and people, images with reality, and work with leisure" (110). In the context of Varanasi, the perceived would amount to its tapering alleys, its religious and built environment near the ghats and its prevalent conceptualisation as a sacred city. Alternatively, the perceived space is produced through a hegemonic visuality that orders everyday life, naturalises the dominant world order and "present(s) authority as self-evident" (Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look* 3). Thus, Ghosh's decision to chronicle parts of the city that have been eulogised innumerable times reflects the pervasiveness of the visual regime. Both Iyer and Ghosh make no attempt to venture forth and seek images of the city that defy its compartmentalization into the familiar tropes of 'eternal', 'sacred', 'city of death,' etc. Moreover, in this preference for the perceived space is concealed a repudiation of the "lived space" of Varanasi, which is the "space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'", the space which human "imagination seeks to change and appropriate" (Lefebvre 39). Though travelogues promise an 'eye-witness' account to readers, the refusal of travel writers to truly look beyond what is conveniently visible turns them into emissaries of the market economics and the dominant political power. The only way to overthrow the primacy of the conceived and the perceived then is to adopt a countervisual lens, which would actively claim 'the right to look' and foreground the otherwise elusive lived experience of people.

Kashinath Singh's Assi: The Paradigm of Countervisuality

Originally published in 2002, Singh's controversial tribute to his hometown is part of a trilogy written on Varanasi. Preceded by *Apna Morcha* (1972) and followed by *Rehan par Raghu* (2008), the novels span different time periods in the history of the city. While *Apna Morcha* focuses on the student agitation of the sixties in the BHU campus, *Rehan par Raghu* shines a light on the lives of a middle-class family in the era of globalisation. Out of these, *Kashi ka Assi* captures the city-in-transition in the aftermath of the reformation of the national fiscal policy and the liberalisation of the Indian market

in the nineties. Singh's sense of attachment to Varanasi, specifically Assi, a beloved *mohalla* leads him to bring together a polyphony of voices, anecdotes, folk songs, and characters based on real people to textualize what can only be deciphered as the lived space of Varanasi.

“Not for the Faint Hearted”: The Dialect of Assi as a Subversive Force

Singh begins *Kashi ka Assi* by issuing a fair warning to his readers – the novel is meant for adults and not for those with delicate sensibilities. This word of caution is offered to alert the readers about the copious use of expletives in the text. Singh justifies this by stating that language and Assi remain entangled in a bittersweet relationship just like that of a sister and her sister-in-law. Those who are quick to judge and get offended easily should steer clear of the book (Singh 11). In a particularly risky line, Singh writes “‘*Har har mahadev’ ke saath ‘bhonsadi ke’ naara iska saarvajanik abhivaadan hai*” (The slogan ‘har har mahadev’ chanted with the abuse ‘bhonsadi ke’ is Assi’s public greeting) (Singh 11). He writes, almost as if to provoke outrage, that while the former takes some effort to verbalise, the curse remains at one’s tip of the tongue. Singh’s unabashed attitude is a hallmark of the text, and might I venture, the fount for much of the novel’s ingenuity. One must not confuse his generous sprinkling of abuses in the narrative with any sort of rebelliousness on his part. Though the uninitiated might find the language jarring, even forced; however, Singh is merely writing in the local idiom. He leaves the acclimatisation to the diction on the reader, his focus honed on presenting an authentic testimony of the lives and times of the *Assiwallahs*. In another one of the episodes, an especially abusive character named Ramji Rai is asked by his friend Shailendra the reason for his abusive nature. Ramji, in his usual abrasive tone, responds with a slew of expletives and adds that he does not abuse consciously, the words just flow out of him on their own (Singh 88). It’s interesting that Singh names the character with a filthy mouth Ramji after the Hindu god. Ramji curses indiscriminately and his name, surprisingly, has no bearing on his temperament. Singh’s quirky cast of characters pays little heed to propriety. In that sense, the writer poses a challenge to the established caste hierarchy by making these characters act outside of their conventional caste roles.

Language, in the hands of Singh, refuses to defer to caste norms. Thus, a counternarrative emerges in which Varanasi is no envisaged as being thronged by devout Hindus or as the hotbed of Brahmin piety.

Singh's portrait of the city, unlike the ones outlined in the previous section, is devoid of any aestheticization of the sights and spaces of Varanasi. According to Mirzoeff, visuality gains legitimacy through a three-step model, the first of which is classification through naming, categorizing, and defining. In the second step, visuality segregates the earlier classified groups so that they cannot come together to revolt. And lastly, these separated, oppressed, groups are made to look aesthetically right or pleasing (*The Right to Look* 3). In a particularly candid moment in the book, Singh elucidates the essence of Assi as follows: "*Dhakke dena aur dhakke khana, zaleel karna aur zaleel hona, gaaliyaan dena aur gaaliyan paana Assi ki naagarikta ke maulik adhikaar aur kartavya hain*" (To push and to be pushed, to insult and to be insulted, to abuse and to be abused are the fundamental rights and duties of Assi's citizenship) (38). It becomes evident that Singh's motive is to encapsulate the true lived experience of Varanasi, even if it means formulating a new reality, one that should exist but does not and countering a realism that does exist but should not (Mirzoeff, "The Right to Look" 477).

Bhaang, Kavi Sammelan and the Lived Dimension of Assi

The novel outlines two cultural practices intrinsic to the city that were under threat in the early 90s – the consumption of bhaang and the *kavi sammelan* organised on the occasion of Holi at the crossroads of Assi. In a hilarious series of events in the book, when the policemen arrive at a local chai shop to shut it down for selling bhaang without a license, a charismatic Gaya Singh, a local politician with clout, steps up to the challenge and confronts them with bravado. He accuses the police of trying to destroy Kashi's age-old customs and recounts the benefits of bhaang in facilitating "*divya niptaan*" (literally divine disposal) (Singh 19). Similarly, when the self-appointed custodians of culture (the members of right-wing BJP) threaten to kill anyone who would participate in the allegedly vulgar *kavi sammelan*, Gaya Singh fearlessly dares them to shoot him. In

both these cases, Singh highlights practices that few speak of when they refer to Varanasi, and yet they are vital to the city's socio-cultural fabric. Singh does not make any claims on behalf of the people's innocence or assert the virtuousness of the poems read out in these annual *sabhas*. He is forthright when it comes to revealing the themes these poems touch upon – from LTTE to Khalistan to religious extremism to the Ram Mandir-Babri Masjid issue, the most sensitive of political matters are addressed through the choicest of *gaalis*. Unlike writers like Eck and Iyer who refer to Varanasi as relatively politically inert, Singh makes no attempts to whitewash the city's image or force it into existing stereotypes (Eck 5, Iyer). Varanasi, for him, is perhaps the only city that allows the radical possibility for the political to coexist with the comical. As *Kashi ka Assi* plainly demonstrates, the lives of people here have always been mired in the political. Assi, especially, emerges as the hub of intellectual debate with people of different political allegiance at loggerheads in the local tea shops. In articulating this throbbing, animated lived reality of Varanasi, Singh makes visible the deeply political existence of its people. This is a deliberate choice and one that invites further commentary.

Singh's endeavour with *Kashi ka Assi* was to depict a city embroiled in the tides of the time. In the 1990s, as the nation underwent many turbulent changes, including the liberalisation of the Indian economy and the eventual rise of the Right, small towns could no longer evade the trickle-down effects of globalisation. Singh's choice of using Assi as the backdrop of the novel is telling for it was a lesser-known area of the city, frequented mostly by locals and only a few foreign tourists up until the publication of the book. For the inhabitants of the city, Assi is a part of their daily routine. Their mornings start with bathing in the Ganges, practicing yoga at the ghat, followed by drinking chai at Pappu *Chaiwallah* where both greetings and political views are exchanged with equal vigour. It would not be a stretch of imagination to assert that for most Banarasis, this routine has seen little to no variance, come rain or shine. It is these quotidian rituals that make up the lived space of the city, which is hegemonized and homogenised by those in power – the orchestrators of the conceived and perceived spaces. Lefebvre believed that it is the task of the philosopher to reimagine new ways

of inhabiting regimented spaces, to break away from the totalising authority of those who produce space. *Kashi ka Assi* then is an act of resistance that channels the discourse of countervisuality to give back agency to those who are pushed to the margins, and bring to the forefront their networked existence, their ways of meaning making, their feelings and sensations.

Tourists, Toilets and Tenants: Exposing the Moral Conundrum of the Brahmins of Assi

The penultimate story in *Kashi Ka Assi* recounts the story of a pandit's household who is faced with the conundrum of having a female foreigner as a tenant in their home. The prospect, though financially lucrative, is enmeshed in a moral crisis for pandit Dharmnath Shastri and his wife. The foreigner is looking for a room with ensuite facilities. In order to accommodate this request, the pandit would have to remodel the temple in his home into a washroom. Though the proposition sounds blasphemous at first, the pandit is forced to consider the option for the rent offered is almost too good to be true. Singh contextualises the narrative by discussing the increase in influx of tourists in Varanasi around the late 80s and the subsequent rise of paying guest accommodations in the city. Although Brahmins maintained a safe distance from the practice, due to the fear of being polluted by Christian contact, the lower caste apprehended the gap in the market and seized the opportunity with both hands. Slowly but surely, the additional rental income uplifted the living conditions of the lower castes. Though the upper caste—primarily the Brahmins and the Thakurs—continued to disparage the foreigners, calling them dirty and immoral, the truth eventually dawned on them – their self-righteousness had deprived them of an improved lifestyle, while the lower caste had flourished (Singh 116-117). Singh adds a twist to this tale by expounding how initially Shastri appoints himself as the flagbearer of this contrived hatred for renting out to foreign tourists.

Kashi ka Assi deviates sharply from the typical representation of Brahmins by launching an incisive critique of Brahmanical hypocrisy, questioning their disdain for outsiders, and their dubious moral compass. Singh's keen eye spares no one, especially those who

make tall claims of piety. He weaponizes language to overturn the dominant discourse on its head, revealing the failure of the upper caste to uphold their own high standards of purity, even as they exercise authority by classifying others as clean or contaminated. This exposé carried forth by Singh illustrates a countervisual discourse in making, as the domineering image of Brahmanical splendour and sanctitude is shattered and the optics of aestheticization are abandoned in favour of the optics of the real. Thus, Singh forges a “different realism” through the depiction and questioning of “existing realities” (Mirzoeff, “The Right to Look” 485).

Conclusion

Varanasi has been quintessentially identified as an unchanged, Hindu religious centre through the ages. From the Puranas to accounts of British missionaries to those of Indian travellers, writers have time and again stressed upon the city’s Hindu heritage and identity, reinstating its mythical status in the Hindu imaginary. However, the perpetuation of these stereotypes calls for research that pries out the city from these imposing visuals that paint the city as a monolith and would re-frame it in a new light. In this paper, I have briefly traced the emergence of Varanasi’s status as a Hindu sacredpolis before delving into its unframing in Singh’s tour-de-force, *Kashi ka Assi* that blurs the boundaries between sacred and the impure and vouches for their harmonious co-existence.

The cultural practices of Assi’s denizens highlighted by Singh are unusual for they remain invisible from most public discourse on the city. Be it the consumption of bhang or the ‘indecent’ poetry recitation on the occasion of Holi, this is a side of Varanasi that is known only to its own. Singh catalogues the unseen and the deliberately (made) invisible and thus accentuates the lived interstices of the city. The daily rhythms of people, their quotidian encounters and interactions make up the lived experience of commoners, which acts as foil to the dominant visuality of life. His Assi is indecent and brash, eager to argue and castigate, but it is real, raw, and palpable. One cannot help but note that Singh wants little to do with excavating the binaries of religious/secular, sacred/unholy,

Brahmin/outcaste, etc. His project in *Kashi ka Assi* remains singularly focused on retrieving Varanasi as Varanasi, devoid of all labels and aestheticization. Thus, through Singh, we meet the city as is, before it becomes laden with the baggage of a legion of discourses and visuals.

End Notes

1. In an interview between Marquard Smith and Nicholas Mirzoeff, Smith asked the latter whether he regretted beginning the book with that statement. Mirzoeff clarified that he had articulated it in the hopes that readers would engage with it further. However, even he couldn't have anticipated the outcry that his seemingly innocuous statement would provoke, with many levelling accusations of the sort that Visual Culture Studies is "dangerously ahistorical" (Mirzoeff, "Everyday Life" 20).
2. Doris-Bachmann Medick in her essay "The Iconic Turn/Pictorial Turn" notes that the turn comprises the "entire spectrum of visual perception and culture," wherein visual practices and even modes of perception like seeing, observing, remembering are open to analysis and interpretation (245).
3. Irit Rogoff uses the term 'unframing' in her chapter titled "Studying Visual Culture," to speak of the possibilities engendered by the field of Visual Culture. She writes that the arena allows for the unframing of various disciplinary fields from "a set of conventional values" that label them as "*either* highly valued *or* highly marginalized *or* outside the scope of sanctioned vision altogether" (17; emphasis original).
4. In a conversation with a national daily, Kashinath Singh admitted to receiving abuses and death threats from anonymous callers. after the publication of *Kashi ka Assi* (Rashid n.p.).
5. In his paper "Benares as Tirtha," Richard Lannoy refers to the rapid construction and reconstruction of Varanasi and its continuous habitation over three millennia stating that this has led to the city's elevated status as a "myth," a

“metaphysical construct” rather than as “a place physically based in reality” (6).

6. In one of the *mahatamya*, Shiva says for Banaras, “Because I never forsake it, nor do I let it go, this great place is therefore known as Avimukta” (Eck 28).
7. Scholars believe that the *Skanda Purana* is not a continuous piece, but a collection of different pieces found in different parts of the country that was meant to glorify local temples and holy spots. There are fifteen thousand shlokas in the *Kashi Khanda*, which consists of descriptions of Shiva temples in and around Kashi, amongst other details (Debroy 57).
8. A far-reaching consequence of the British articulation of Varanasi was that the Muslim presence in the city was glossed over.
9. Homi K. Bhabha argues that ‘fixity’ is a principal feature of colonial discourse, specifically in the ideological construction of the other, who is portrayed as a curious mix of an unchanging rigidity and a simultaneous degeneracy (370).
10. In her essay “Alexander Von Humboldt and the reinvention of America,” Mary Louise Pratt argues that Humboldt presents South America as a “landscape imbued with social fantasies – of harmony, industry, liberty, unalienated *joie de vivre* – all projected on the non-human world” (428). I borrow the idea of the representation of a land as a product of an individual’s social fantasies from Pratt, although the usage varies in the context of my argument.

Works Cited

- Bhabha, Homi K. “The other question: stereotype and colonial discourse.” *Visual Culture: The Reader*, edited by Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, SAGE, 1999.
- Cape, Phillips C. *Benares: The Stronghold of Hinduism*. Robert Culley, 1909.
- Dalmia, Vasudha. *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bhārtendu Hariśchandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras*. 1997. Permanent Black, 2010.

- Debroy, Bibek and Dipavali Debroy. *Great Epics of India: The Skanda Purana*. Books For All.
- Eck, Diana L. *Banaras: City of Light*. 1983. Penguin, 2015.
- Ghosh, Bishwanath. *Aimless in Banaras: Wanderings in India's Holiest City*. Tranquebar, 2019.
- Hawley, John Stratton, and Mark Juergensmeyer. "A Dalit Poet-Saint: Ravidas." *The Life of Hinduism*, edited by John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayanan, U of California P, 2006, pp. 199-217.
- Iyer, Pico. "Maximum India." *Condé Nast Traveler*, Condé Nast, 17 Dec. 2010, <https://www.cntraveler.com/stories/2010-12-17/maximum-india>. Accessed 1 Dec, 2023.
- Lannoy, Richard. "Benares as Tirtha." *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 27/28, 2001, pp. 6-17.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson Smith, Blackwell, 1974.
- Medick, Doris-Bachman. *Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture*. Translated by Adam Blauhut, De Gruyter, 2016.
- Merrifield, Andi. *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction*. Routledge, 2006.
- Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Routledge, 1999.
- . "The Right to Look." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2011, pp. 473-96.
- . *The Right to Look*. Duke UP, 2011.
- . "Visual Culture, Everyday Life, Difference and Visual Literacy." *Visual Culture Studies*, By Marquard Smith, SAGE, 2008.
- . "What is Visual Culture?." *Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff, 1st ed., Routledge, 1998, pp. 24-36.
- Mitchell, William J. T. *Picture Theory*. U of Chicago P, 1994.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. "Alexander Von Humboldt and the reinvention of America." *Visual Culture: The Reader*, edited by Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, SAGE, 1999.
- Rashid, Omar. "Not Just a Flight of Steps." *The Hindu*, 26 Aug, 2013.
- Rogoff Irit. "Studying Visual Culture." *Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff, 1st ed., Routledge, 1998, pp. 24-36.
- Sherring, M.A. *The Sacred City of the Hindus: An Account of Benares*. Trubner & Co., 1868.
- Singh, Kashinath. *Kashi ka Assi*. 2002. Rajkamal Prakashan, 2021.