

Kashi Vishwanath temple

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Manifest Pedagogy

The heritage structures are very important in UPSC both Prelims and Mains the heritage structures in news have a higher probability of being picked in the exam. Kashi Vishwanath temple saw renovation and reconstruction in recent times and it is part of Hriday scheme.

In news

The issue of Kashi Vishwanath temple corridor

Placing it in the syllabus

Indian Heritage and Culture, Architecture from ancient to modern times.

Static dimensions

- History of demolitions and reconstructions of Vishwanath temple.
- Structure of the Vishwanath temple.

Current dimensions

- The recent renovation projects in Kashi.
- The recent corridor issue in Varanasi.

Content

About the Varanasi city

Varanasi, also known as Benaras and Kashi, is a major city in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Situated on the banks

of the holy river Ganga, the city has great religious significance for the Hindus. Varanasi is home to Kashi Vishwanath Temple, which is dedicated to Lord Shiva. It enshrines one of the twelve Jyotirlingams of Shiva. It is said that this temple was rebuilt several times. The latest structure standing here dates back to the 18th century.

Architectural features

- The temple complex consists of a **series of smaller shrines**, located in a small lane called the Vishwanatha Galli, near the river.
- The linga of the main deity at the shrine is 60 cm tall and 90 cm in circumference housed in a silver altar. The venerable Jyotirlinga is a dark brown coloured stone.
- The **main temple is quadrangle** and is surrounded by shrines of other gods.
- There are **small temples for Kaalbhairav, Dhandapani, Avimukteshwara, Vishnu, Vinayaka, Sanishwara, Virupaksha and Virupaksh Gauri in the complex.**
- There is a **small well** in the temple called the *Jnana Vapi* also spelt as *Gyaan Vapi* (the wisdom well). The Jnana Vapi well sites to the north of the main temple and it is believed that the Jyotirlinga was hidden in the well to protect it at the time of the invasion.
- According to the structure of the temple, there is a **Sabha Griha or Congregation Hall** leading to the inner **Garbha Griha or Sanctum Sanctorum**.
- **Structure of the Mandir is composed of three parts.** The first compromise a **spire** on the Mandir of Lord Vishwanath or Mahadeva. The second is a **gold dome** and the third is the **gold spire** atop Lord Vishwanath carrying a flag and a trident.

History of demolitions and reconstructions

- The original Vishwanath temple was **destroyed by the army of Qutb-ud-din Aibak** in 1194 CE, when he defeated the

Raja of Kannauj as a commander of Mohammad Ghorī.

- 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).
- Raja Man Singh built the temple during Mughal emperor Akbar's rule, but orthodox Hindus boycotted it as he had let the Mughals marry within his family. Raja Todar Mal further re-built the temple with Akbar's funding at its original site in 1585.
- In 1669 CE, **Emperor Aurangzeb destroyed** the temple and built the Gyanvapi Mosque in its place.
- 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 Nawabs of Lucknow, who controlled 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. A 7-foot high stone statue of Nandi bull, gifted by the Raja of Nepal lies to the east of the colonnade.

The recent renovation projects in Kashi

- Varanasi Convention centre.

- Kashi Vishwanath temple to Ganga Ghats corridor.
- Trade facilitation centre.
- Expansion of Panchakoshi Parikramana marg.
- Sewage treatment plant in Varanasi etc

Varanasi – Kyoto project

- The initiative links India's heritage capital Varanasi with Japan's heritage city Kyoto.
- The **initiative aims to** transform Varanasi into a Kyoto-style smart city, under which Japan will partner with India in order to boost the overall infrastructure of Varanasi, making the city a symbol of India's development.
- The Varanasi-Kyoto partner city agreement, **initiated by India Center Foundation (ICF)**, was signed in 2014. ICF has been working towards India's national development process through the India-Japan Global Partnership (IJGP) for nearly two decades.

Hriday scheme

National Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) was launched in January 2015 with the **aim of bringing together urban planning, economic growth and heritage conservation in an inclusive manner** to preserve the heritage character of each Heritage City.

The Scheme shall **support the development of core heritage infrastructure projects including the revitalization of linked urban infrastructure for heritage assets such as monuments, Ghats, temples** etc. along with reviving certain intangible assets. These initiatives shall include the development of sanitation facilities, roads, public transportation & parking, citizen services, information kiosks etc.

The Scheme was implemented in **12 identified Cities** namely, Ajmer, Amaravati, Amritsar, Badami, Dwarka, Gaya, Kanchipuram, Mathura, Puri, **Varanasi**, Velankanni and Warangal.

The objectives of the scheme are:

- Planning, development and implementation of heritage-sensitive infrastructure.
- Service Delivery and infrastructure provisioning in the core areas of the historic city
- Preserve and revitalise heritage wherein tourists can connect directly with the city's unique character
- Develop and document a heritage asset inventory of cities – natural, cultural, living and built heritage as a basis for urban planning, growth, service provision and delivery
- Implementation and enhancement of basic services delivery with a focus on sanitation services like public conveniences, toilets, water taps, street lights, with the use of the latest technologies in improving tourist facilities/amenities.
- Local capacity enhancement for the inclusive heritage-based industry.

The recent corridor issue in Varanasi

The Kashi Vishwanath Temple Corridor: Critics complain that dozens of small and medium-sized old temples, most built in residential complexes, were destroyed along with the scores of shops and 'bhavans' to clear the way for the project. They see the demolitions as a loss to the Hindu cultural heritage of the city. At least 296 structures have been identified by the government for demolition to provide direct access to the temple from the Ganga.