



Banaras: CITY OF LIGHT

Diana L. Eck

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The sacred city of Ban?ras on the River Ganges is one of the oldest living cities in the world—as old as Jerusalem, Athens, and Peking. It is the place where Shiva, the Lord of All, is said to have made his permanent home since the dawn of creation. There are few cities in India as traditionally Hindu and as symbolic of the whole of Hindu culture as Ban?ras. In this eloquent, finely observed study, Diana Eck shows how the city over the centuries has become a lens through which the Hindu vision of the world is precisely focused.

She reveals the spiritual and historical resonance of this holy place where great sages such as the Buddha and Shankara were taught, where ashrams, palaces, and universities were built, where God has been imagined and imagined in a thousand ways. She describes the rites of its temples, the busy life of its riverfront, and the exuberance of its festivals. She tells how people travel from all over India to Ban?ras for the privilege of dying a good death here, for they believe that on the banks of the River Ganges where “the atmosphere of devotion is improbable in its strength,” it is possible to be released from the earthly round forever.

In her account of the sacred history, geography, and art of the city, its elaborate and thriving rituals, its myths and literature, and its importance to pilgrims and seekers, Diana Eck uses her wealth of scholarship to make the Hindu tradition come powerfully alive so that we come to understand the meaning of this sacred city to the millions of believers who have been coming here for over 2,500 years.

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