

# Reviving the Soul of Ganga: A Comprehensive Review of the Development of River Front Ghats

Apoorva Swaroop<sup>1</sup>, Dr.Sangeeta Sharma<sup>2</sup>, Keshav Kumar<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>M.Arch, Department of Architecture, Babu Banarsi Das University, Lucknow

<sup>2,3</sup>Professor, Department of Architecture, Babu Banarsi Das University, Lucknow

## Abstract

This paper presents a comprehensive review of the impact of the Ganga River front Ghats on spirituality and temple architecture, as well as their development over the years. The Ganga River holds immense religious significance for Hindus, and the Ghats serve as places for spiritual and religious practices such as bathing, worship, and rituals. This paper delves into the different types of Ghats, their architectural styles, and their significance in the religious and cultural life of the people living along the river. The paper also analyzes the historical development of the Ghats, from their initial construction during the Mauryan Empire to their current state of disrepair and neglect. Furthermore, the paper assesses the impact of the Ghats on spirituality and the architectural evolution of temples built around them. It also explores recent efforts made by various organizations and government agencies to restore and develop the Ghats, including the use of modern technology and sustainable practices. The aim of this review is to provide an in-depth understanding of the impact of Ganga River front Ghats on spirituality and temple architecture and to evaluate the progress made in their development over the years.

**Keywords:** Ganga River, Temple Architecture, Landscape, Ghats

## Introduction

The Ganga River is not just a body of water, but a symbol of spirituality, purity, and divinity for the people of India. The Ganga River Front Ghats, a series of steps leading down to the river, serve as an important site for spiritual and religious practices, including bathing, worship, and rituals. The ghats have been an integral part of India's cultural heritage, as they are believed to have the power to wash away sins and bring spiritual enlightenment.

This paper presents a comprehensive review of the impact of the Ganga River Front Ghats on spirituality and temple architecture, as well as their development over the years. The paper delves into the different types of Ghats, their architectural styles, and their significance in the religious and cultural life of the people living along the river.

The historical development of the Ghats has been an interesting journey, starting from their construction during the Mauryan Empire to their current state of disrepair and neglect. Several authors have highlighted the significance of Ganga River and its Ghats in their works. For example, (R.Pandey, 2014) have emphasized the cultural and religious significance of the Ghats, while (A.Mookerjee, 2011) has explored the mythological and historical aspects of the river.

Furthermore, the Ghats have had a significant impact on the evolution of temple architecture in India. The temples built around the Ghats reflect the architectural styles of their respective periods, from the Gupta

dynasty to the Mughal era. Several scholars have studied the relationship between temple architecture and the Ghats, including (A.Kalia, 2013) and (R.Shankar, 2019).

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### **Stepping into Sacred Waters: Uncovering the Origin and Significance of River Ghats of Ganga**

The Ganga River Ghats, a series of steps leading down to the river, have been an integral part of India's cultural heritage for centuries. The origin of these Ghats can be traced back to the Mauryan Empire, when Emperor Ashoka constructed a series of Ghats in the city of Pataliputra (now Patna) along the Ganges River. The Ghats were primarily used for bathing and religious purposes and were considered sacred by the people of that time. Over the years, more Ghats were built along the river in various cities, including Varanasi, Haridwar, and Allahabad, among others. Each Ghat has its own unique history and significance, with some dating back to several centuries.

The construction of Ghats along the Ganga River has been extensively studied by several scholars. According to (V.K.Singh, 2018), the Ghats were initially constructed to facilitate bathing and other religious activities, and gradually evolved into a hub for social and cultural activities. (S.Sarkar, 2019) highlights the significance of Ghats as a symbol of communal harmony, where people of different religions and backgrounds come together to perform rituals and ceremonies. (A.K.Sharma, 2017) have studied the architectural styles of the Ghats, which reflect the cultural and religious diversity of India. Moreover, the Ghats have played an important role in the economy of the regions where they are located. For instance, the Ghats in Varanasi have been a center of trade and commerce for centuries (S.Jha, 2014), while the Ghats in Haridwar attract millions of tourists and pilgrims every year (P.Rawat, 2019). Despite their historical and cultural significance, many of the Ghats are in a state of disrepair and neglect. However, there have been efforts to restore and preserve them, including the Clean Ganga Mission initiated by the Government of India (A.Kumar, 2019)

### **Ghats Galore: Unpacking the Types and Usability of India's Iconic River Ghats**

Moreover, Ghats, which are a series of steps leading down to the river, hold immense cultural and religious significance for the people of India. The types of Ghats found along the Ganga River are diverse, ranging from simple stone steps to ornate structures with intricate carvings and decorations.

One of the most famous types of Ghats on the Ganga is the Dasaswamedh Ghat in Varanasi. This Ghat is known for its elaborate architecture and hosts the famous Ganga Aarti ceremony, attracting millions of tourists and pilgrims every year (S.Jha, 2014). Another type of Ghat found along the Ganga is the Har Ki Pauri Ghat in Haridwar, which is considered to be one of the most auspicious Ghats for taking a dip in the river (P.Rawat, 2019).

The Ghats can also be classified based on their usage. Some Ghats, such as the Har Ki Pauri Ghat and the Triveni Sangam Ghat in Allahabad, are primarily used for religious activities and bathing. Other Ghats, such as the Assi Ghat in Varanasi, are popular among tourists and are known for their lively atmosphere and street food (S.Sarkar, 2019). There are also some Ghats, such as the Chet Singh Ghat in Varanasi, that have historical significance and are associated with key events in India's history (V.K.Singh, 2018).

Furthermore, the Ghats also differ in terms of their architecture and design. Some Ghats, such as the Raj

Ghat in Varanasi, feature simple stone steps and a basic design (A.K.Sharma, 2017). Others, such as the Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi, are known for their intricate carvings and decorations (P.Rawat, 2019).

### **Ganga Ghats: Where Spirituality and Society Meet**

The Ganga River Ghats are an integral part of Hindu spirituality and culture, and have a profound impact on the Indian society. They are believed to be sacred places where people can attain spiritual purification and liberation from the cycle of rebirth (samsara). The Ghats serve as a meeting point between the physical and spiritual worlds, and are an embodiment of the Hindu philosophy of merging the individual self with the cosmic self (R.Gupta, 2016).

The Ghats also play an important role in fostering social connections and community bonding. People from different backgrounds and castes come together at the Ghats for religious ceremonies, cultural events, and social gatherings (R.Sharma, 2016). The Ghats thus serve as a platform for promoting social cohesion and reducing social disparities.

Furthermore, the Ghats are not only important for the local communities but also attract tourists from around the world. The Ghats have become a symbol of India's rich cultural heritage and attract millions of tourists and pilgrims every year (A.Gupta, 2018). The tourism industry surrounding the Ghats has also contributed significantly to the local economy and provided employment opportunities for the local communities. Understanding the impact of Ghats on the society can provide insights into the complex cultural and religious landscape of India.

### **Tracing the Divine Journey: Evolution of temple architecture along the Ganga ghats**

The Ganga River Ghats are not only known for their spiritual and cultural significance but also for their unique temple architecture. The temple architecture along the Ganga Ghats has evolved over centuries and reflects a fusion of different architectural styles and cultural influences. The temples along the Ghats are not only places of worship but also serve as important landmarks and tourist attractions.

The earliest temples along the Ganga Ghats were simple in design and were built with wood and mud. However, with the arrival of the Gupta dynasty, the temple architecture underwent a transformation. The Gupta temples were characterized by their intricate carvings, ornate pillars, and elaborate arches (R.Kumar, 2015) The Chalukyas, who ruled over parts of India during the 6th-8th century CE, also made significant contributions to the temple architecture along the Ganga Ghats. They introduced a unique architectural style that combined elements of northern and southern Indian architecture (K.N.Misra, 2007). The arrival of Islam in India in the 12th century CE brought about a new era in temple architecture. The Mughals, who ruled India during the 16th-18th century CE, introduced a new architectural style that blended Islamic and Indian elements. This style was characterized by its domes, minarets, and intricate calligraphy (B.K.Sahu, 2017).

In modern times, the temple architecture along the Ganga Ghats has undergone yet another transformation. Many new temples have been built using modern materials and technologies, while still retaining the traditional elements of temple architecture (M.Puri, 2012). These temples serve as a testament to the rich cultural heritage of India and attract thousands of tourists and pilgrims every year.

### **The Divine Splendor: A Journey Through the Temple Architecture Styles Along the Ganga River**

The temples along the banks of the river Ganga showcase an interesting amalgamation of architectural styles that have evolved over the centuries. The unique blend of Hindu, Islamic, and colonial

influences have given rise to an eclectic mix of temple architecture that is distinct to this region. The earliest temples were simple structures made of stone, brick and wood, with sloping roofs and intricate carvings. These were later replaced by grand temples made of sandstone and marble, featuring ornate carvings and domes. The Nagara style of temple architecture is predominant in North India, and can be seen in the temples along the Ganga. This style features a curvilinear shikhara or tower that rises above the sanctum sanctorum. The temple also has a mandapa or porch that is supported by pillars, which lead to the garbhagriha or inner sanctum.

Another prominent style of temple architecture is the Dravida style, which is prevalent in South India. This style features a pyramidal shaped tower or vimana, which is topped by a kalasha or finial. The temples along the Ganga River, which have been built in the Dravida style, are characterized by elaborate carvings on the vimana and the mandapa. The Hoysala style of architecture is also visible in some of the temples along the Ganga. This style features intricately carved sculptures of gods, goddesses and mythical animals, which adorn the temple walls.

One interesting feature of the temple architecture along the Ganga is the influence of Islamic architecture. This is visible in the use of arches, domes and minarets in the temple design. The famous Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi is a perfect example of this fusion of Hindu and Islamic architecture. The temple has a beautiful blend of intricate Hindu carvings and Mughal domes and minarets. In addition to the architectural styles, the temples along the Ganga are also known for their unique art and sculpture. The temples feature intricate carvings of gods and goddesses, mythical animals and scenes from Hindu mythology. The art and sculpture is characterized by its attention to detail and the use of bright colors.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the Ganga river front ghats are not only significant in terms of their religious and spiritual importance but also their architectural splendor. The ghats have evolved over centuries, with various styles of temple architecture emerging and influencing each other. The ghats along the Ganga river have been centers of spiritual and religious activities, and have played a crucial role in shaping the cultural identity of India. They have not only witnessed the development of temple architecture but also witnessed the historical events of India. The ghats have been the platform for socio-cultural exchange and provide insights into the diversity of India. The temple architecture along the Ganga ghats is a testament to the craftsmanship of the artisans of India, and their expertise in building grand structures with intricate carvings and decorations.

Furthermore, the ghats along the Ganga river have served as a means of livelihood for the local people. They are not just places of worship but also of commerce and recreation. The ghats also serve as a means of transport for the local people and tourists alike. However, the ghats have been facing various issues such as pollution, degradation, and neglect. It is essential to take necessary measures to preserve the ghats and their architecture, which form an integral part of India's cultural heritage.

In the end, it can be said that the Ganga river front ghats and their temple architecture have played a significant role in the development of Indian culture, history, and spirituality. The ghats have not only served as a place of worship but also as a center of social and economic activity. The temple architecture along the Ganga riverfront is a testimony to the creativity and skill of Indian artisans. However, it is necessary to ensure the preservation and protection of these ghats and their architectural heritage for future generations. Therefore, a holistic approach needs to be taken towards their preservation, including the

implementation of sustainable development practices and community participation.

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**Data availability** All the data associated with research are collected through site visits and secondary study.

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