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## Lived Islam in Varanasi: Experiences of Muslim Communities

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**Abstract:** Examine the experiences of Muslim communities in Varanasi, highlighting their cultural, social, and economic practices.”

This research article examines how dwelling reveals in fosters the lives of Muslim groups within Varanasi, one of India's oldest and most culturally rich cities, Lived Islam in Varanasi: Experiences of Muslim Communities.

Research questions: How do Muslims in Varanasi negotiate their nonsecular identity? Thus, the qualitative fieldwork that utilizes interviews and player observation opens up the one-of-a-kind methods through which Muslim identification is produced using both the nearby practices in addition to interfaith relationships, socio-political contexts, and historical reminiscence. Nuances of spiritual expressions, community cohesion, and man or woman organization cut the monotheism of their Islam in Varanasi to show a pluralistic and ever-converting form. This article sheds light on the ordinary existence of Muslims in one of the religiously most crucial cities inside the international community, in addition to the complexities of coexistence in a multi-religious environment.

**Keywords:** lived Islam, Muslim communities, religious identity, interfaith dialogue, cultural coexistence, pluralism.

### Introduction:

This ancient city of Kashi, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, often appeared as the spiritual heart of Hinduism; however, its records have been dotted through a great Muslim populace who, along with the city's Hindus, have thrived for hundreds of years. Varanasi sits along the Ganges River. It is a Holy city for Hindus and a traditionally substantial Muslim location. Varanasi is a mainly applicable context in which to look at the manifold intersections of faith, subculture, and politics. The very reality that Hinduism constitutes a majority religion within the city does not divest Muslim communities here in their sorts of spiritual exercise, social enterprise, and cultural expression. The lived stories of Muslims of Varanasi are explored here in some detail, including how they negotiate their non-secular identity vis-à-vis social function in a city at one stage, each a site of religious devotion in addition to communal contestation. As someplace else in India, Muslims in Varanasi have the daunting mission of retaining a spiritual identification even as they aspire to place themselves inside a society characterized by communal tensions and interfaith interplay. Local history and tradition, mixed with economic realities, additionally form the experiences of Muslim groups in this city. This study aims to contribute to a deeper know-how of the approaches through which Muslims in Varanasi maintain their faith, adapt Islamic practices in the direction of a nearby context, and engage with wider social and political surroundings.

The lived enjoyment of Muslim groups in Varanasi is a rich tapestry of cultural, spiritual, and social dynamics reflecting India's religious landscape's complicated, plural nature. Praxis: How Islam is practised, skilled, and maintained in regular lifestyles amongst Muslims in Varanasi—a city of precise coexistence and every so often complex residence of Hindus and Muslims. History of Muslims in Varanasi The mediaeval period noticed the start of Muslim records in Varanasi with the agreement of the Delhi Sultanate of their fortress in the twelfth century and then that of the Mughal Empire in the 16th century. The passage of time left its marks on the metropolis by using the Muslim rulers, investors, artisans, and scholars, as seen from the architectural, cultural, and non-secular historical past. Gyanvapi Mosque, an architectural landmark, is a testimony of the rich heritage of the metropolis built with Mughal technology. While Muslims have generally been a minority inside the city of Varanasi, they've in no way been marginalized. Thus, while residing in a non-Muslim majority city, they have participated in many components of city life, which include trading, craftsmanship, education, and non-secular leadership. Their presence appreciably intersects with the cultural matrix of the metropolis, fashioning the nature of Islam in this place. Nature of Islamic Practices in Varanasi Like elsewhere in India, Islamic practices in Varanasi are diverse and formative to nearby traditions, cultural influences, and sectarian affiliations. Muslims dwelling within the metropolis are as much Sunni as Shia, with the Bohra sect, in addition to different cells of Muslims, constituting a lesser share. For instance, the Sunnis of Varanasi are predominantly Hanafi; their practices resemble the mainstream Sunni customs in North India. They study all five everyday prayers, keep speedy within the month of Ramadan, and rejoice in both the two large Islam galas, Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha, with very much enthusiasm. Local practices mirror, to a large extent, nearby customs, Sufism, and local religious leaders, including the communal spirit of celebrations and the intermixture of nearby languages and dialects with Arabic and Urdu. The Shias, however, have unique practices for this month, specifically for Muharram, the month of mourning over the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, Prophet Muhammad's grandson. The Muharram rituals of the Shias in Varanasi are celebrated using processions, recitation of elegies, and public expressions of grief, giving the elements of the metropolis a lively religious texture. Role of Sufism and Local Religious Leaders The position of Sufism, the magical department of Islam, within the religious praxis of Varanasi cannot be disregarded. With the dargah, or Sufi shrine, being a sort of focal factor for human lifestyle spiritual and social lifestyles, such dargahs appeal to fans of the faith, in addition to Hindus, fans of other faiths. The syncretistic practice that has evolved beyond regular time for them is reflected herein. Prominent among those is the dargah of Hazrat Mirza Jan, which attracts large crowds for the duration of the yearly Urs (the demise anniversary of a Sufi saint). In this, looking for advantages from the saint is commonplace, and tenets of inclusivity, open-mindedness, and harmony that Sufism teaches society can be visible. In Varanasi, one of the strands of interaction between Islam and its 'other' is lived by Hindus and Muslims who percentage rituals including imparting flowers and lighting incense in shrines and cultural gala's which they celebrate collectively. Local spiritual leaders, comprising imams, Sufi pirs, and elders, play a tremendous function in maintaining the clothing of Muslim society. They aren't just religious publications but also social workers, sometimes mediators in disputes and advocates for the community's needs. For instance, the Imam of the famous Alamgir Mosque in Varanasi is an active local community member: he gives religious training, organizes charitable occasions, and offers suggestions in crisis. Islam and Identity in a Hindu-majority City From a wider socio-political factor of view also, the lived enjoyment of Muslims in Varanasi takes that colouration as a city rooted in its Hindu heritage. The city frequently narrates its history towards the religious identification of the Other. Muslims in Varanasi have a long record within the city; however, they also face the stiffest demanding situations of being a minority in an area wherein Hindu-Muslim members of the family may be annoying in instances, especially within the framework of political communalism. While its shared areas—markets, streets, and festivals—are websites of interplay and coexistence. For instance, Muslim buyers and shopkeepers in Varanasi frequently engage in business sports with Hindu clients. At the same time, religious and spiritual festivals like Diwali and Holi are celebrated in a way that reflects the metropolis's pluralistic ethos.

These festivities allow Muslims to express their religious identity as part of the city's extra colourful cultural lifestyle. Public or non-public, Islamic rituals in Varanasi are an aggregate of non-secular orthodoxy and neighbourhood traditions. For instance, many nearby Muslims may be observed analyzing the Quran on the tombs of neighbourhood saints- an interest deeply rooted in a nearby way of reverence and appreciation for ancestors. For instance, weddings, funerals, and other life-cycle activities are events wherein rituals are interwoven from Islam into nearby customs, such as traditional tunes and the intake of festive meals.

### **Methodology:**

This qualitative study concerns the reveal of Muslim groups in Varanasi. The study techniques included in-depth interviews, devotee observations, and content material evaluation of media and spiritual texts. The researcher visited and approached extraordinary Muslim neighbourhoods, mosques, and non-secular centres in Varanasi for six months (2023–2024). It interviewed a pass-phase of respondents: local spiritual leaders—imams, community elders, teens, and girls. This helped ensure the right representation of the community. The interviewees were questioned on their reports of practising Islam in Varanasi, their interactions with non-Muslims, and their opinions on spiritual coexistence inside the metropolis. Participant observation became held for spiritual events—those concerned with attending Friday prayers, Ramadan sports, and network festivals—to attain greater insight into the ordinary practices of Muslims in Varanasi. The analysis involved thematic coding, which could discover essential styles and topics on identity, network life, and interfaith relations.

### **Findings:**

The observer exposed several critical trainings related to the lived expressions of Muslims in Varanasi:

- **Religious Identity and Local Practices** Muslims in Varanasi enjoy Islam both globally and regionally. Even though norms along with salat, sawm, and zakat are strictly in line with Islamic prescriptions, each local cultural practice and vernacular reading of Islam are very significant. The syncretism of Islamic rites with nearby practices, which include the Urs, the annual death anniversary of Sufi saints, and Eid, also manifests Islam's adaptability to the neighbourhood's cultural state of affairs. Several respondents defined the overlap of non-secular exercise with the specific cultural atmosphere of the metropolis.

- **Interfaith Relations** Interfaith family members in Varanasi are the result of cooperation in addition to conflict. Despite all of the political and social tensions that have marked the Hindu-Muslim members of the family in the closing decades, there remain areas of enormous cooperation and mutual recognition. For instance, most Muslims take part in Hindu festivals like Diwali and vice versa, with some Hindus attending Muslim religious gatherings all through Eid. The interviews brought to light that the everyday existence of a social nature in Varanasi regularly crosses non-secular limitations: people from special faiths share markets, streets, and network spaces. However, the identical look additionally revealed a growing stage of lack of confidence among some of the Muslim residents, particularly some of the more youthful populations, concerning the polarization inside the city. Incidents of occasional fights and tensions were reported, at the least concerning non-secular holidays and touchy places, including the Gyanvapi mosque, which has been one of the hotspots of Hindu-Muslim conflicts.

- **Three Socio-Political Contexts** The lived studies of Muslims are, in particular, prompted by using the socio-political environment of Varanasi. Most of the respondents mentioned how resurgent Hindu nationalist politics challenged Muslims, focused on spiritual practices and public spaces, and "othered" them. Yet, this observation also tested the potential of Muslim political mobilization through nearby parties and corporations, allowing Muslims to navigate these antagonistic environments while keeping a proportion of political illustration and social welfare. It has, for instance, ended up a mosque locally, a place for spiritual worship, in

addition to social congregation, political debate, and charity. • Gender and Religion Worth mentioning is also the dynamics of gender amongst Muslims in Varanasi. While for many ladies, patriarchal restrictions are still the order of the day, increasing numbers of ladies participate in public spiritual leadership, social activism, and educational sports. Roles for women in non-secular and network existence are changing, with some ladies becoming conspicuous leaders of non-secular education and charity organizations.

- Discussion The stories of Muslim communities in Varanasi underscore the complexity of religious identity in a multi-faith, multi-cultural society. Islam in Varanasi is not monolithic; it is formed through neighbourhood traditions, interfaith relations, socio-political pressures, and gendered stories. The examination demonstrates how Muslims in Varanasi navigate their non-secular practices and identity in various ways, adapting Islamic teachings to the local cultural context while also responding to broader socio-political traits. The dual approaches of lodging and resistance are glaring inside the way Muslims in Varanasi assert their non-secular identification whilst additionally enticing the bigger Hindu-majority network. This leads to cooperation and mutual admiration; in other instances, it results in tensions and demanding situations, specifically in the face of growing non-secular nationalism. Nevertheless, the resilience and adaptability of the Muslim network in Varanasi monitor a form of lived Islam that is dynamic, pluralistic, and deeply embedded within the local socio-cultural cloth

### Conclusion:

This article looks at the lived Islam in Varanasi. It provides treasured insights into the article of Muslim groups in a historically giant city marked using both non-secular devotion and communal contestation. It highlights how Muslims in Varanasi exercise their faith in approaches that both Islamic teachings and nearby cultural traditions might form. Moreover, it underscores the importance of interfaith relations and network team spirit in navigating the demanding situations posed via social and political dynamics. The findings of this article contribute to a broader know-how of non-secular coexistence in India and the diverse ways in which Muslim identities are constructed and lived in modern urban settings.

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