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Vera Lazzaretti
vera.lazzaretti@gmail.com
(Università degli Studi di Milano)

Questioning Meaningful Layers of Locality in a Pan-Indian *tīrtha*

SUMMARY: This paper critically addresses notions of locality, tradition, and pan-Indian-ness by analyzing the case of Kedāreśvara in Varanasi. Textual evidence from local *māhātmya*s and digests, as well as historical sources, depict Kedāreśvara as one of the city's major manifestations of Śiva. However, the shaping of a progressively more locally-oriented myth in eulogistic texts, together with a mix of regional elements and contemporary practices at the temple constitute a complex reality, where various fragments of locality intersect. Drawing on the anthropological concepts of locality and localization, I detail the layers that constitute part of a supposedly 'great' tradition in one of the most notable and so-considered pan-Indian *tīrtha*s. The paper questions the existence of a unified, 'great' Brahmanical tradition as opposed to and distinct from elements of regionalism and locality; on the contrary, it highlights variations within glorification texts, while documenting interpretations, adaptations and transformations of their narrative material as transmitted and enacted in the contemporary shrine and its environs.

KEYWORDS: tradition, locality, pan-Indian-ness, *māhātmya*, Kedāreśvara.

Introduction

In this paper I explore the layers of locality that constitute the tradition and worship of Kedāreśvara in Varanasi. I draw on textual and ethnographic research conducted between 2009 and 2012.[1] As will

[1] I conducted one year of fieldwork in Varanasi in 2009 for the research project 'Historical and mythological transmission in the temple of Gaurī Kedāreśvar', supported by the Università degli Studi di Milano and

be illustrated further, local glorifications represent Kedāreśvara as one of the major forms of Śiva in the city; moreover, the temple, situated in the southern part of the city, is still a crowded and important one, where both pilgrims and local inhabitants meet to worship the Lord of Kedāra. Varanasi is a notable pilgrimage destination of North India: it has a wide local eulogistic textual tradition and is recognized as one of the main sacred cities in Hindū sacred geography;[2] thus it can be considered a fundamental place to investigate the layers that constitute the 'great' pan-Indian tradition and critically to address notions of locality.

The idea of the existence of a unified, pan-Indian, 'great' Brahmanical tradition, which interacts with and influences 'little' regional and local traditions, has a rich history, as well as many critics, in the study of Hinduism and the anthropology of India. The first theorists (Redfield and Singer 1955, Mariott 1955a) created the terms 'great' and 'little' traditions to explain cultural and social interactions in peasant Indian society. Together with the dynamics of Sanskritization, a term that emerged to explain social mobility in the Indian caste system in village contexts (Srinivas 1955), these concepts were subsequently applied to the study of the historical evolution of religious and cultural phenomena.

In particular, two distinct movements were identified to explain the interactions between great and little traditions: the first, referred to as 'parochialisation', was identified as a 'downward devolution of great-traditional elements and their integration with little-traditional elements' (Mariott 1955b: 197–200). This is what we usually refer to as the Sanskritization of folk and local cultures. Another upward

the Cariplo Foundation. From 2010 to 2012 the research about Kedāreśvara developed into a thesis about the dynamics of spatial transposition in Varanasi for a Ph.D. in Euro-Asian Studies (section of Indology) at the Università degli Studi di Torino. During this period an additional six months of fieldwork was carried out.

[2] For an account of the various puranic *māhātmya*s and medieval digests about the city see Bakker and Isaacson 2004 and Eck 1993. For examples of modern glorifications see Sukul 1977 and Vyas 1987.

movement, through which, on the other hand, aspects of the little tradition are absorbed and generalized into the great Brahmanical tradition, was called 'universalisation'. This is in my view not dissimilar to what has been more recently theorized as a fundamental dynamic in the evolution of Hinduism, namely *deshification* (Doniger 2009: 6), from *deśī* (indigenous or local), which, in fact, means the process of adoption of local and popularly diffused elements by the compilers of the emerging corpus of Brahmanic literatures, thus enabling the new religious system to present itself as more acceptable to the masses by appropriating and displaying familiar elements.

Since the time of the first theorists these processes have been identified as interconnected and invested with a dynamic of 'cross-fertilization' (Doniger 2009). The concepts and theories underwent numerous applications and reformulations, and attracted strong criticism, which I cannot detail here;[3] however, they opened a rich debate around fundamental interactions of the various elements that constitute the multi-faceted cultural phenomenon of Hinduism. The identification of these movements also shed light on the importance and weight of previously neglected voices, as well as stimulating the use of non-textual sources to reconsider the evolution of Indian religions.

The same focus on the various dynamics of appropriation and exchange between different layers of traditions seems, however, to have rarely informed the exploration of the supposedly unified great and pan-Indian tradition. Nonetheless, similar processes *within* pan-Indian realities need to be taken into account in order to document the composite and indeed *localized* nature of aspects and forms belonging to the so-considered great tradition. For example, the reshaping of material through upward and downward movements, such as those described above, are in fact widespread in Puranic literature and, in particular, in *sthalapurāṇa*s and *māhātmya*s.

Eulogistic literature, although considered at the margin of classical Sanskrit literature because of its poor literary value and lack of

[3] For a study of the history of these ideas see for example Berger 2012.

sophistication, is crucial for the understanding of the historical processes and dynamics of tradition making (Bakker 1990: 2–3). With the aim of glorifying and promoting specific shrines, places or sacred centers, these texts display a variety of exchanges and appropriation within and between different layers on the whole apparently belonging to the great tradition. Moreover, their importance lies in the fact that they represent the more accessible level of textual material for devotees and sacred specialists,[4] who can easily use them as they select, filter and retell mythological narrations to convey new meanings.

In addition, the various texts that praise and promote the same *tīrtha* indeed differ significantly in content, depending on the compilers, the contexts and the focus of their attention. *Māhātmya*s have, in fact, been highlighted as means to implement and adapt previous material and knowledge about sacred places in new social, political and historical contexts (Smith 2007: 2; Acri and Pinkney 2014). Dynamics of *deshification*, universalisation, parochialisation and authentication necessarily exist *within* these texts, and *not only* in their exchanges with non-textual and local cultural forms. Moreover, such dynamics emerge even more clearly if we look at the modern re-uses and adaptations of living textual traditions of glorification at contemporary shrines. These movements can be used to highlight the various layers of the great Brahmanical tradition.

This paper thus analyses the case of Kedāreśvara in Varanasi with the intent of highlighting these movements within a particular tradition. They will be seen as inherent to the genre of eulogistic literature and to the uses that sacred specialists and devotees make of mythological narrations. As detailed in the next section, the downward and upward

[4] I use the term sacred specialist in the sense of 'specialist of the sacred' and in a more general sense to refer to the whole heterogeneous group of ritual specialists. This includes diverse sub-groups of Brahmans involved in temple activities and services related to the business of the sacred; see also Parry 1994. For an account of the various local sacred specialists active in Varanasi and their working status see Vidyarthi *et al*. 1979.

dynamics through which traditions evolve will be referred to as various layers of *localization*, thus stressing the fact that such movements do not only pertain to exchanges between two supposedly distinct levels of tradition, such as local and pan-Indian. The term local itself will be seen as having a variety of applications and thus in need of being better qualified and rethought as interconnected with and inherent to textually sanctioned and recognized 'great' traditions.

Addressing locality through an anthropological perspective

Locality and the concept of local have been reformulated in anthropology after the 'spatial turn'[5] and under the strong influence of Geertz's interpretative approach and theory (Geertz 1988), which opened rich debates about concepts of voice, culture and space (for example, Appadurai 1988). Post-modern anthropology deconstructed the identification of cultures with specific spatial locations and re-evaluated processes of interconnection, mobility and transmission between cultures, which were as well rethought not as secluded and remote, but as ongoing processes, open to a variety of influences and impulses (Gupta and Fergusson 1996).

Locality has been rethought as something to be cyclically reconstituted, especially in the contemporary situation of high population mobility (Fabietti, Malighetti and Matera 2002: 106). However, locality has also been seen as something inherently fragile, even in spatially isolated contexts (Appadurai 2001), and not only in the light of modernity and the globalizing world. The great variety of social practices and rituals connected to the cyclical re-definition of space (and knowledge about it) highlights the social actors' need to constantly produce and maintain the ephemeral locality (*ibidem*) and redefine what is local. Cultures as well

[5] By 'spatial turn' is meant the moment in which places and the spatial dimension in general started acquiring a fundamental role as a subject of study in anthropology, thanks to the influences of cultural geography. The new trend was marked by a series of works in this direction; see for example Appadurai 1988, Rodman 1992, Feld and Basso 1996, Gupta and Ferguson 1996, Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995.

have been rethought as inherently and originally interconnected, rather than their 'contamination' being just a consequence of modernization (for example, Amselle 2001). The acts of localizing and producing localities, which are often employed in the investigation of globalization to document the vital capacity of communities to appropriate global elements, represent indeed fruitful concepts through which to investigate current and also past cultural (re)production.

In the following analysis I will make use of the terms local, locality and localization as informed by this anthropological perspective to address the tradition of Kedāreśvara. Instead of referring to dynamics of Sanskritization and deshification, which strongly convey the idea of only a bi-dimensional exchange between two clearly defined and contrasting traditions, which constitute strict dichotomies such as great–little, or pan-Indian–local, I prefer to talk about different layers of localization to explore the ways in which locality is produced in time and space. This approach focuses on the need of social actors (in our case various groups of compilers, different sacred specialists, pilgrims from different regions and devotees) to constantly reproduce, redefine and re-enact their own locality and what local means to them. In particular, I will argue that Kedāreśvara in Varanasi, a major shrine of a pan-Indian *tīrtha*, is constituted by layers of locality and a series of acts of localization and appropriation, which reflect a kaleidoscopic reality in which fragments of pan-Indian-ness and stratified local traditions intersect. This study will suggest that indeed the multi-faceted reality of Kedāreśvara serves as a magnet which attracts and satisfies a great variety of devotees, both local and from other regions; thus, the all-encompassing and yet fragmented nature of this sanctuary and the creativity of various local actors will emerge as key to the shrine's success and reverence in the urban panorama of Varanasi.

Kedāra in texts: Layers of localization and appropriation

The temple of Kedāreśvara, widely known in Varanasi as Kedārjī, is a major shrine located in the southern part of the city, which in fact is referred to as Kedāra *khaṇḍa*. The temple rises at the top of Kedāra

ghāṭ and is recognizable from the river by its colourful *façade* with statues at the top; the decorative style and colours of the building and of the *ghāṭ* itself derive from South Indian (Tamil) temples and indeed, as will be mentioned, the shrine is considered by some and referred to as a temple of and for South Indians. It has two entrances: one from the river, at the top of the steep stairs, the other from the busy lane of Kedāra *bazār*.

Kedāreśvara is not, or not only, an indigenous form of Varanasi: the name is widespread in the *Purāṇa*s.[6] However, it became known mainly as the Himalayan deity who was identified as one of the twelve *jyotirliṅga*s between the 10th and the 13th centuries by the *Śivapurāṇa* (ŚP) tradition (Fleming 2007 and 2009). The *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* (KKh), which is the main glorification text about Varanasi and one section of the *Skandapurāṇa* (SkP),[7] has been dated to the 13th–14th century (Bakker 1996, Eck 1993): however, part of its material is considered by Hazra to be more ancient (Hazra 1975), and Smith (Smith 2007) dates the text tentatively to around the 11th century. The KKh knows the Himalayan Kedāreśvara, which by that time must have been a famous pilgrimage destination. The text, in fact, establishes the local presence of Kedāreśvara in Varanasi with a transposition myth that I will analyse further in this section; it tells of the transfer of Śiva Kedāreśvara from the Himālaya to Kāśī. The transposition and appropriation of Kedāreśvara into the local geography of the city projected by the KKh can be seen as the first layer of localization of a widely known pan-Indian tradition represented by the Himalayan form and the tradition of the ŚP. This could be seen as a sort of Sanskritization within the Puranic tradition.

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[6] For example, Kedāranātha is mentioned by the early SkP as part of a group of Himalayan sites sacred to Śiva (Bisschop 2006: 20–21); the *Skandapurāṇa* (*Kedārakhaṇḍa* 7.28–35) lists twenty-seven *liṅga*s of the whole subcontinent, including Kedāra. For a full account of the sources see Fleming 2006: 48.

[7] The KKh is a section of the edited SkP; however, the historical SkP has a complex history and a variety of recensions and section which do not correspond to the edited version; a full account on the SkP is found in Bakker 2004.

The KKh lists Kedāreśvara as one of the fourteen *liṅga*s which constitute the *muktikṣetra*,[8] the field of liberation of the city. The myth about the origins of the local Kedāreśvara tells the story of Vaśiṣṭha. Son of a Brahman, he came to Kāśī from Ujjayinī, was initiated in the Pāśupata order,[9] and took the name of Vaśiṣṭha. When he was twelve he departed for a pilgrimage to Kedāranātha, in the Himālaya, together with his *guru* Hiraṇyagarbha. During the *yātrā* the old *guru* passed away, and because of the meritorious action of pilgrimage, he was taken to the celestial abode of Kailāsa by Śiva's attendants. Observing the miracle, Vaśiṣṭha realized the supreme power of Kedāreśvara among other *liṅga*s and, after returning to Kāśī, he decided to undertake a pilgrimage to the Himālaya every year, at the auspicious time. Vaśiṣṭha kept his vow and performed the pilgrimage sixty-one times. By then old and tired he kept preparing for the annual pilgrimage even when his disciples tried to persuade him not to undertake such a difficult journey; Vaśiṣṭha, however, still felt capable of doing it and was not scared of passing away during the pilgrimage. In fact, he thought that if he died during the journey, he would obtain liberation as his *guru* did. Śiva was satisfied with Vaśiṣṭha's grit and decided to grant him a boon. Vaśiṣṭha asked for blessings for his companions and impressed the god with his generosity; Śiva then decided to grant him one more boon and Vaśiṣṭha asked him to come from the Himālaya and dwell in Kāśī. The god decided to remain in the mountains as only one of his sixteen parts and to take abode in Kāśī in his entirety.[10] Vaśiṣṭha and Śiva's attendants then accompanied Kedāreśvara to Kāśī.

The text also compares the merit obtained by devotees who come to this place with that resulting from the pilgrimage to the Himalayan Kedāreśvara. For example, it is said that by seeing Kedāreśvara

[8] The list is given in KKh 73.32–36; the following chapters describe the various *liṅga*s; KKh 77 is dedicated to Kedāra.

[9] For an account of the Pāśupatas and their role in ancient Varanasi see Bakker and Isaacson 2004.

[10] KKh 77.41.

in Kāśī one can obtain seven times the result acquired by undertaking a pilgrimage to the Kedāranātha in the Himālaya (KKh 77.46); devotees willing to perform the Himalayan pilgrimage should be advised just to touch Kedāreśvara *liṅga* in Kāśī once, in order to get greater results (KKh 77.60).

The KKh narrative tradition about Kedāreśvara informs us about the popularity of the Himalayan form at the time of the composition of this text; at the beginning the myth describes the pilgrimage to Kedāranātha as a meritorious practice and details the results to be obtained (KKh 77.4–12). As a consequence, the greatness of Kedāreśvara in Kāśī derives from it being a transposition of a well-established and notable divine form. A first level of localization is identifiable in the text, which we could also describe as a sort of Sanskritization within pan-Indian traditions: the local and newly established form acquires power and fame through the appropriation of the qualities of an 'original' pan-Indian divine form. As seen in the myth, however, this appropriation is far from being a simple duplication and reproduction of the famous reality; the local form is described as superior to the so-considered pan-Indian one, in a striking inversion of 'original' and 'replica'. It will be seen that this inversion will be further stressed in later material and contemporary transmission and become a sort of *topos* in local *māhātmya*s of the city.

The textual tradition about Kedāreśvara in Varanasi is enriched by a later glorification text, the *Kāśīkedāramāhātmya* (KKm). The KKm is dated around the 16th–17th century (Eck 1993), which indeed coincided with the time of the construction, or resettlement, of the shrine at Kedāra *ghāṭ*. The temple, in fact, is considered to have been erected by a Śaiva Siddhānta disciple from Tamilnadu, the poet Kumāragurūparar,[11] together with the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh. According to the legend, the saint wanted to re-establish the worship of

[11] Moticandra (Moticandra 1985: 219) settles the establishment of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh during the reign of Akbar; however, other sources about the life and work of the poet settle his life in the 17th century and his

the ancient deity, whose previous temple was ruined; the Maṭh was established to host pilgrims from the South, manage the shrine and diffuse the teachings of its founder. The institution is today still officially in charge of the daily ceremonies; the *pūjārī*s receive a monthly salary from the Maṭh and the rituals performed belong to the Southern tradition.

The reshaping of the myth about the origins of the local Kedāreśvara as narrated in the KKm testifies to a second layer of localization, which we could also describe as a sort of deshification of the previously Sanskritized local form. The text consists of thirty-one *adhyāya*s and is centred on the description and glorification of the Kedāra *khaṇḍa*, the southern section of the city, with its variety of shrines. The main narration, however, deals with Kedāreśvara itself; it illustrates the origin of Kedāreśvara in the Himālaya, the manifestation of the *liṅga* in Kāśī and the relationship between the two forms. In this way the foundation of the local Kedāreśvara as a transposed deity, already sanctioned by the KKh, is further strengthened, together with the superiority of the local form; however, the myth of transposition narrated in the KKm is curiously totally different from the one collected in the previous glorification. As will be shown, the KKm re-elaborates material both from the ŚP tradition and from the KKh in order to glorify and establish the power of the Kedāreśvara as a local powerful divine form.

Two fundamental myths in the KKm illustrate the transposition of Kedāreśvara to Kāśī by establishing a new level of localization and appropriation of previous, revisited material. The first myth appears as one of the first episodes in the text (KKm 1.60–103) and tells of a visit of Brahmā to Kedāranātha, the origin of the Himalayan Kedāreśvara, the subsequent journey of Brahmā to Kāśī and the eruption of the *liṅga* in the city. The myth draws on the well-known motif of the rivalry between Śiva and the creator.

trip to Varanasi during the reign of Dārā Śikōh (Zvelebil 1975: 229–230, Arunachalam 1990 and Ghosh 1991).

It re-elaborates the origins of Kedāranātha in the Himālaya as told by the ŚP;[12] however, the main character here is Brahmā and not the Pāṇḍavas, and the manifestation of the Himalayan form, as well as the local one, are here connected with the creator's strong desire to have the *darśana* of Śiva Kedāreśvara. Śiva initially wanted to hide himself from Brahmā, because the creator had been arrogantly showing off his superiority; Śiva took the form of a buffalo and followed a group of these animals to confuse Brahmā. However, the latter recognized him and tried to catch him while Śiva, in a buffalo form, entered the earth. The god allowed then that in the Himālaya Brahmā and men could obtain the *darśana* of his buffalo form; however, Śiva explained that his supreme *liṅga* is not visible in the Himālayas but will manifest later in Kāśī, after the creator had made reparation for his sins.

The episode's chronology is quite strange: Brahmā goes on a pilgrimage to Kedāreśvara because he has heard about the greatness and power of that place and its various *tīrtha*s; however, he seems to be the cause of Śiva's hierophany as Kedāreśvara, in this first case only in the buffalo form. The same series of events seems to determine the eruption of Śiva Kedāreśvara, now in the supreme form of the *liṅga*,

[12] The ŚP reports two different versions of the origins of Kedāranātha. The first is narrated by the *Jñānasaṃhitā* (JS), the earliest collection of *jyotirliṅga* stories and links the origins of the *liṅga* with the Nara and Nārāyaṇa. The later *Koṭirudrasaṃhitā* (KS) introduces a second myth, which is apparently the source of the KKm: here the Pāṇḍavas are looking for Śiva in his Himalayan abode and they provoke the manifestation of Kedāra as the back of a buffalo. For a full account and comparison of the two versions, see Fleming 2006: 81–84. According to my research in Kedāranātha, the myth of the Pāṇḍavas is the most diffused narration around the contemporary shrine; moreover, the temple's walls are carved with images of these heroes. The particular form and size of the worshipped stone at Kedāranātha do not resemble a common *liṅga* at all; instead it could be easily compared and linked to the back of a buffalo. However, even those worshippers who confirmed that they knew the myth of the buffalo also consider the form a *jyotirliṅga*, without showing any apparent contradictions.

in Kāśī. In this first myth, however, the Kāśī manifestation is not described but only predicted by Śiva. It is important to note that the compiler of the KKm does not use the term *jyotirliṅga* to refer to the Himalayan Kedāreśvara, even if he seems to know and to be able to adapt the myth linked to the origins of the light form of Śiva, as narrated by the ŚP in the collection of the stories related to the group of twelve.[13]

The local *māhātmya* indeed reshaped the myth of the Pāṇḍavas and the manifestation of Kedāranātha and transformed it into the prelude to the supreme hierophany in Kāśī. Moreover, the role of Brahmā is crucial in drawing on and further localizing the already established tradition of the KKh about the god in the city; Brahmā was said to have performed ten horse sacrifices in the context of Divodāsa's myth,[14] which is one of the fundamental and framing episodes of the KKh. Also the KKm describes Brahmā's *daśāśvamedha* but, instead, inserts the episode in the context of the creator's need to make reparation for his sin against Śiva, in order to obtain the manifestation of Kedāreśvara as *liṅga* in Kāśī. As we will see, this is not the only example of re-adaptation and further localization in the KKm of an already locally established tradition, as represented by the material in the KKh.

The second fundamental myth of the KKm is that of Māndhātā (KKm 19–21, in particular 19.31–78, 20.26–55), which explains the origin of Kedāreśvara, now as a local and powerful form in Kāśī. The story goes that king Māndhātā, after leaving his kingdom to his son, went to practice *tapas* in the abode of Kedāreśvara, eager to obtain the *darśana* of the *liṅga*. He spent one hundred *yuga*s there, but he still could not achieve his desire. The Lord appeared to the king and explained to him that because of Brahmā's misbehavior he had decided that in the Himalayan Kedāreśvara there would be no possibility of having the vision of the supreme form and invited him to go to Kāśī, the only place where he could have the *darśana* of the *liṅga*.

[13] For an account about the formation and transposition of the *jyotirliṅga*s in Varanasi see Lazzaretti forthcoming.

[14] KKh 52 narrates the origins of Brahmā's *tīrtha*s in the city.

Māndhātā settled in the city but he still did not obtain the vision and kept visiting the Himalayan abode every day through the power of his *tapas* because he could not stay one day without seeing the Lord. He became old and tired but still he was strict in performing the daily journey. He prayed to the Lord to give him the liberating *darśana* of the *liṅga* soon because he was feeling more and more sick. Śiva suggested that he cook and eat before starting his journey in order to be stronger and Māndhātā, after many doubts about the possibility of breaking his daily routine, decided to follow the Lord's advice. He cooked a plate of *khicṛī* and, after dividing it in two parts, was waiting for a guest to come in order to share his food, as a good action, before leaving for his journey. Māndhātā was getting worried as nobody seemed to be around and he feared that he might not be able to perform his pilgrimage; finally, Śiva, the compassionate, appeared next to him in the guise of a beggar and asked for food. Māndhātā went to take the portion for the guest but when he tried to do so he saw that both parts of the *khicṛī* had become stone and he started crying desperately because he could not satisfy his guest and his own desire to go to the Himālaya soon. The Lord then disappeared by entering the food-stone and a celestial chariot with Śiva himself, his family and attendants came from the sky to take Māndhātā to the Lord's divine abode. First, though, Śiva showed again to the incredulous king that he was coming out from the food-stone in the supreme form of a *liṅga* and told him to ask for a boon as he was the best of devotees.

This myth is particularly important as it represents a further layer of localization: the local form of Kedāreśvara is here explained with an *ad hoc* narration that does not seem to consider or re-adapt the previous transposition myth of the KKh. As will be illustrated in the following section, this is the main textual tradition still being orally transmitted in the contemporary shrine; furthermore, the manifestation of the local Kedāreśvara as narrated in the KKm is annually re-enacted in the contemporary shrine of Kedārjī and acquires on this occasion further localized elements.

Further localized versions of Kedāreśvara: The contemporary shrine

Apart from its textual importance, the shrine occupies a prominent role in the city and is a place of encounters: it is a crowded destination for pilgrims, especially those from the South, who know about the link of the temple with Kumāragurūparar and whose specific localized views on Kedāreśvara would need to be further investigated; it is also one of the main Śiva temples for the inhabitants of the city and especially for those of the neighbourhood. Moreover, the temple is shared and contested by two groups of sacred specialists: one group consists of the *pūjārī*s, who come from Tamilnadu and are maintained by the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh to celebrate the four official ceremonies (*ārtī*). They represent the formal institution that has charge of the temple and of the daily rituals taking place for the deity. However, these *pūjārī*s are in charge of the inner cell and the surrounding space only during *ārtī*s, while the rest of the time they are not supposed to manage the inflows of devotees and to directly collect donations.

The other group is represented by the *paṇḍā*s, who belong to local families which claim hereditary rights over the temple's property, and are in charge of the pilgrims' activities, inflows and offerings. *Paṇḍā*s, whose dubious reputation seem to be well known,[15] act as sacred specialists in charge of organizing rituals for pilgrims and putting their clients in contact with the other ritual specialists. The presence of the *paṇḍā*s' families in Kedāreśvara, although not linked to daily rituals, seems to be widely recognized by devotees and tolerated by the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh. Indeed, this second group of Brahmans, whose roles and links to the temple seem to be more precarious because of a lack of institutional recognition and entitlement to perform daily rituals, emerges as the more active in the transmission of mythological traditions about Kedāreśvara. Their views, ways of

[15] About *paṇḍā*s in Varanasi see Vidyarthi *et al*. 1979, Melhotra 1993 and Parry 1994. Other studies dealing with this category of sacred specialists are, for example, van der Veer 1989, Lochtefeld 2010 and Aukland forthcoming.

appropriation and use of the textual tradition represent further layers of localization through which to explore the temple's reality and tradition.

Let us consider now what remains of the varied textual material within the actual shrine. In the temple, in the neighbouring market and in other areas dense with pilgrims' stalls and shops selling devotional goods, written material about Kedāreśvara is not found. To my knowledge modern *māhātmya*s, pamphlets or specific guides about the temple's mythology do not exist, while they are common in the case of other major shrines of the city. The only relatively accessible written source for devotees is the recent edition of the KKm, which, however, is not sold in the bookstalls next to the temple. It can be requested from the editor of the book, Candra Shekar Pandey, who is a leading member of the temple's *paṇḍā*s, as well as the founder of the Śrī Kāśīkedārakhaṇḍa Adhyātmika Sansthā. This association, which can be seen as a counterpart of the Kumārasvāmī Maṭh set up by local *paṇḍā*s, is devoted to the revitalization of the temple through the publication of the text and, according to its founder,[16] charity and upgrading of the *paṇḍā*s' families. Among the people I interviewed, however, only a few devotees said that they possessed or had read the KKm. Some knew about it, but many others mentioned, on the other hand, the KKh and the ŚP as authoritative sources, even if only in the abstract because they hardly knew the actual myths about Kedāreśvara collected in these sources.

The transmission of knowledge about Kedāreśvara thus happens principally through oral narration, evidence represented by the shrine as a visual text and by the *liṅga* itself, and through performative celebration of the god's origins enacted by the *paṇḍā*s. The oral transmission is provided by sacred specialists, who as will be explained, choose and shape the focal points of their narratives according to the listener. The temple acts as a vehicle for knowledge transmission both as the arena in which the narration takes place and as a visual text; its walls are covered by inscriptions which report parts of the myth

[16] Personal communication with Candra Shekar Pandey, January 2010.

in various regional languages, such as for example, Bengali, Hindi and Tamil, details of diverse donors, and the calendar for daily and special celebrations. Only a few visual elements are also displayed, such as a portrait of Kumāragurūparar, the iconographic image of the Himalayan *liṅga*, and a small *mūrti* of king Māndhātā; they represent fragments of the narration.

The *liṅga* itself, with its specific form and marks, is said to represent the evidence about its origins. Devotees seem to consider this form as uncommon and not installed recently by humans; here they can see and touch the narrated events. The *liṅga* is indeed a particularly marked stone with a clear line in the middle that divides it into two portions, as told by the myth, and its texture apparently displays the forms of rice and lentils' grains. The double nature is explained in the text and understood by devotees as the presence of both Śiva and Gaurī in the *liṅga*; moreover, as he manifested himself from food, Kedāreśvara is said to embody Annapūrṇā as well, who is more usually connected to Viśvanātha, the main deity of the city.

All these non-textual fragments of narration, especially the *liṅga*, are crucial in transmitting knowledge about Kedāreśvara. In fact, even if the versions of the myth collected during fieldwork sometimes differ, there are some commonalities that inform us about the meanings and role of the local form. As previously mentioned, none of the interviewees referred to the transposition myth collected by the KKh, but all of them know at least something which derives from the Māndhātā episode. Kedāreśvara is always qualified as a *svayambhūliṅga*, a self-manifested divine form, which is a quality associated with most of the transposed shrines in the city and represents the will of gods and goddesses from elsewhere to dwell in Kāśī; moreover, what almost everyone knows about this god is that he manifested himself in a plate of *khicṛī*. Even those who have a poor knowledge about the myth referred to the coming of Kedāreśvara from food.

The manifestation of Kedāreśvara from food is re-enacted and celebrated every year at Makar Sankrānti (14th January); the pan-Indian festival, which marks the transit of the Sun into Capricorn (*makar*), is celebrated

all over the country as an auspicious day and as a new beginning of all sorts of activities, such as marriages, businesses or pilgrimages, which were interrupted during the previous inauspicious month. In Varanasi the day is spent on the roofs of houses, flying kites and eating special food prepared for the occasion. Particularly, in the Southern *mohallā*s of the city, from Kedāreśvara to Assī, the day is known as *khicṛīkā din*, the day of the *khicṛī*. Indeed *khicṛī* is considered an auspicious food to be cooked on this day elsewhere in the city as well, and further research about the symbolism of *khicṛī* is ongoing; but what principally suggests the link of Makar Sankrānti with it is the annual celebration that takes place in Kedārjī on this occasion. The foundation of the shrine through Māndhātā is celebrated by preparing in the temple's *maṇḍapa* a large quantity of *khicṛī*, which will be offered to the god and later given to the devotees as *prasāda*, together with the sweet *khīr*. The celebration involves also a special decoration (*śṛṅgāra*) of the *liṅga*, which usually consists of a panel made up of interwoven *bail* leaves, flowers and other offerings. The panel is positioned beside the *liṅga*, easily visible to the devotees, who stand queuing in front of the cell for the divine vision; in the middle of it there is a mask of the god as an anthropomorphic face, which is half male and half female. This divine representation, different from and added to the normally accessible one, further represents and embodies both god and goddess. The organization of the festival, through the collection of donations, preparation of food and entertainment is managed by one of the *paṇḍā* familes, the Dubeys, who, together with their employees, seem to take over the temple management for the festive period. A special *ārtī* is performed to the beautifully decorated image not by the common officers of daily ceremonies, but by the head of the *paṇḍā* family. Such an extraordinary *ārtī* seems to invert both the ordinary timing of ceremonies and the usual roles and positions of the two groups of sacred specialists; in doing so it challenges, as well as confirms, ordinary roles, time and space,[17]

[17] Much anthropological literature on rituals and festivals stresses liminality and the inversion of social roles as crucial characteristics of such

in an attempt that could be seen as cultural creativity and a spark of social change (Picard 2015).

The celebration attracts a vast number of devotees, who come to have the vision of the god's special decoration, receive and consume the sacred food and take some home in metal boxes for their families. The festival, apart from recreating and displaying through its performance the essence of the origins of Kedāreśvara, surely helps in diffusing the knowledge of its myth and fixing it in the devotees' memory through the process of food preparation and consumption. Moreover, the festival makes use of and transforms a pan-Indian occasion into a celebration of locality. No presence of the official authority of the temple is palpable during this occasion. *Pūjārī*s, although not absent from the celebration, do not actively participate and wait until their role in the ritual routine is re-established.

As far as the link of the local form with the Himalayan Kedāreśvara is concerned, only very few devotees seem to be aware of it; those who know about it would mention it only if explicitly questioned about the 'original' Himalayan form. The local temple is also rarely spontaneously called a *jyotirliṅga*. On the contrary, when talking to the author, a foreign researcher, or to pilgrims coming from other regions, both *pūjārī*s and *paṇḍā*s stress the transposition episode and the possibility of having the supreme *darśana* of the 'original' Kedāreśvara only in Kāśī, as the glorification insists. Local devotees and inhabitants, though, mostly see Kedāreśvara as a powerful self-manifested and all-encompassing form of Śiva, who came from a simple food to please and nourish them.

Other aspects stressed by the *paṇḍā*s, repeated by daily devotees, and which draw on the KKm are the antiquity and secrecy of the local Kedāreśvara. Both the text and the oral narrations introduce a comparison with major sacred places of the city; these are indeed most meaningful to local devotees, who are less keen to detail the transposition

events; see for example van Gennep 1960, Falassi 1987, Caillois 2001, Turner 1969, Scarduelli 2000.

from the Himalayan pan-Indian site. A striking example of *local* appropriation of already *locally* established sacred space and narrative is that of Gaurī *kuṇḍa*. The area of Kedāreśvara includes the *ghāṭ* where Gaurī *kuṇḍa* dwells. This is a sacred pond, whose name recalls and acts again as an element of pan-Indian transposition; in fact, Gaurī *kuṇḍa* is also the name of the tank situated in the namesake village, which lies at the start of the pilgrimage to Kedāranātha, and is indeed the first stop.

The local *kuṇḍa*, however, is often called by a different name, which is Prācīna Maṇikarṇikā or Ādi Maṇikarṇikā; this qualifies it as the ancient and original Maṇikarṇikā, this being the name of the most famous urban cremation ground and liberation field, as well as of the *kuṇḍa* situated there. The KKm describes Gaurī *kuṇḍa* as Ādi Maṇikarṇikā, the original cremation ground of the city, and transforms the myth related to the best known Maṇikarṇikā, in the north part of the city, to explain the origins of the new but, according to this narration, more ancient Maṇikarṇikā, near Kedāreśvara. The KKh had settled the origin of Maṇikarṇikā at the time of the primordial creation, which of course happened in Kāśī according to the glorification. This is the place where Viṣṇu performed austerities for the creation and where Śiva's jewel fell (KKh 26). The place and name are transposed, now only within the urban landscape, to Kedāreśvara *ghāṭ* by constructing a new narration for its origins: Ādi Maṇikarṇikā, namely Gaurī *kuṇḍa*, is said to have emerged from the place where the goddess's earring fell at the time of the bath that precedes the decapitation of Gaṇeśa (KKm 2.21–108). In this way, a pan-Indian myth (the origins of Gaṇeśa's elephant head) is connected with a well-known episode already linked to the city's sacred geography (the fallen earring), and constructs a new localized narration for Kedāreśvara and its sacred geography.

The place is thus anchored to authoritative and recognized events of the mythic past; however, it is narrated as 'original' and superior to its local counterpart, as it was to its pan-Indian counterpart. Maṇikarṇikā represents a name and a place among the most notable

and powerful of Kāśī; the city bestows *mokṣa* and the cremation ground is the symbol of its power and exceptional qualities. The transposition of such a great place into the new location at Kedāra *ghāṭ*, represents a strategy of further appropriation of local meanings and symbols. The claims of superiority and authenticity then result in a new foundation of the city's sacred geography, starting from a new centre. Such claims are often stressed by the *paṇḍā*s, who, through the appropriation of this narrative, further establish their link to the tradition represented by the KKm, while also defining their belonging to such a powerful place.

Another comparison within local sacred geography is that with Viśvanātha, the patron deity of the city, whose prominent role indeed emerged quite late in the glorification texts and was established only by the KKh (Smith 2007).[18] The KKm declares on the one hand the identity of the two shrines, which are said to have the same power and importance; on the other hand, it establishes the superiority of Kedāreśvara, indeed because of its secrecy (the place is defined as *gupta*). This quality is considered to maintain his power intact; in comparison to the popularity and crowdedness of the city's patron, Kedāreśvara is understood to be more powerful (KKm 9.14–18; 13.12–16; 21.5–9). It is possible that at the time of the composition of the KKm, Kedāreśvara was much less frequented than it is today, thus making claims of secrecy more effective. Today, even if the temple is still less busy than Viśvanātha, the idea of secrecy sounds exaggerated, but it still has a powerful resonance with local devotees and is often drawn on by the *paṇḍā*s.

Conclusions

As shown above, the textual material about Kedāreśvara in Varanasi is rich and varied; it is found firstly in the KKh, a text that usually acts as a sort of authoritative frame to which to refer to in any oral transmissions about sacred places in Varanasi. The narrative is then enriched by the KKm, which is a more specific and further localized

[18] See Moticandra 1985, Bakker 1996 and Bakker and Isaacson 2004 about previous major deities and the emergence of Viśvanātha.

glorification focused on the Southern part of the city and especially on Kedāreśvara. The analysis of this material highlighted that at a first stage of localization the KKh establishes the importance of Kedāreśvara from its link to a previously known form, the Himalayan Kedāreśvara; furthermore, the inversion of hierarchy between 'original' and 'replica' represents a strong tool in the dynamics of authentication and appropriation. The KKm represents then a second layer of localization that enriches the material and strengthens the importance of the local form of Kedāreśvara; it does so by linking the episodes about it with well-known moments and themes of diffused myths, such as those narrated by the ŚP; and by transforming a variety of classical episodes of the city's mythology as diffused by the KKh, and including them in a new frame.

As far as the actual shrine and ongoing dynamics of localization are concerned, the data collected document the multilocality of Kedāreśvara. The term, and the related approach to the study of place, have been theorized (Rodman 1992) as a perspective through which to address the composite, socially constructed and varied nature of place. Place makes sense to different people in different ways; a single place is experienced in a variety of ways and recalls memories and elements of far away locations. In the same way, Kedāreśvara is composed by diverse narrating voices, which address a variety of listeners. Its narrations include strata of references to texts and narrations of other pan-Indian traditions, as well as fragments of local myths which are reshaped around a new centre.

I have, in fact, highlighted that the various sacred specialists draw on a comparison with the pan-Indian Himalayan form especially when the interlocutors are outsiders and they possibly know about that *jyotirliṅga*, or they look for notable geographical links. However, the recall of such a 'great' and distant *tīrtha* is not because of a simple need of authentication; the transmission indeed inverts the hierarchy of 'original' and 'replica' and declares the superiority of the local form, as is common in other transposition examples and as already activated by glorifications. As a consequence, outsiders,

and sometimes local devotees, paradoxically seem to get to know, or be reassured about the greatness and tradition of the 'original' pan-Indian sacred centres through devotion to and by frequenting their local variations, such as Kedāreśvara in Varanasi. Highly localized 'replicas' seem indeed to maintain and diffuse the notability of *tīrtha*s elsewhere, by showing alternative paths to the formation and reformulation of pan-Indian-ness.

The role of *paṇḍā*s as the main agents in the constant reproduction of locality has been further highlighted and is especially evident in the local celebration of Makar Sankrānti. Producing locality seems to be a necessity for the establishment of belonging for such a precarious and independent group of Brahmans, more than for the *pūjārī*s, who are on the other hand supported by an official institution, thus reinforcing the idea of locality as inherently fragile (Appadurai 2001).

A further layer of localization and appropriation has been identified in the comparison with already locally recognized forms and places; we have seen that devotees acquainted with the city's glorifications often compare Kedāreśvara with local counterparts. *Paṇḍā*s are again the major agents in establishing this new hierarchy in which Kedāreśvara represents the major deity within the city's geography by comparing him with other local notable shrines; in this way, when addressing devotees who are less familiar with the pan-Indian reality represented in their eyes by the Himalayan deity, the sacred specialists are able to enhance and elevate Kedārjī by comparing it with other realities that local devotees know well. In doing so they attempt to redefine the centre through the transposition of local major sacred spaces into the geography of the addressed deity.

The case analysed shows that the narration and indeed the tradition of a specific sacred place in a pan-Indian *tīrtha*, such as Varanasi, is constructed by creatively assembling meaningful fragments of locality; these derive from various sources about sacred spaces situated elsewhere, or in the same sacred centre. Localization thus results from resonances and appropriations of both supposedly pan-Indian realities and of already locally accepted and meaningful elements.

Such a multi-layered process can be read, then, as assembling upward and downward movements *within* what now appears to be a strongly localized, creatively reproduced, great pan-Indian tradition.

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