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The afterlives of repatriation: Heritage, emancipation and violence in Hindu nationalist India

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The afterlives of repatriation: Heritage, emancipation and violence in Hindu nationalist India

In 2021 a statuette of Hindu goddess Annapurna was taken from a Canadian museum to India as an arguably restorative, if not emancipatory, and decolonial achievement for a postcolonial nation. The statuette was enshrined at the Kashi Vishvanath temple in Banaras (Varanasi), a few meters from the Gyanvapi mosque — a longstanding target of Hindu nationalist campaigns for the *mukti* (liberation or emancipation) of supposedly originally Hindu sites. This article brings together Annapurna and the Gyanvapi mosque as two sides of the same story about heritage, emancipation and violence in Hindu nationalist India, and proposes an alternative methodological approach to the under-explored afterlives of repatriation. By combining longitudinal ethnographic research in the neighbourhood where Annapurna was enshrined with analysis of media and legal discourses, it teases out under-explored understandings that returned objects and repatriation itself afford in their post-repatriation locality — both in local responses and broader discussions around heritage restitution. I argue that repatriation cases such as that of Annapurna feed into a Hindu nationalist discursive ecology in which notions of emancipation, decolonisation and restitution are mobilised for majoritarian agendas: as exemplified by controversies around the Gyanvapi mosque, these notions increasingly underpin violent claims against minorities and their heritage.

Keywords: Repatriation, emancipation, *mukti*, Kashi Vishvanath Corridor, Annapurna, Gyanvapi mosque.

Introduction: The afterlives of repatriation

A cheeky artist, the Hindu goddess of nourishment, and an antiquarian who may have helped inspire the character Indiana Jones came together recently at a Canadian museum.

This is not the setup for a joke, but for a story that stretches across a century, from India in 1913 to Saskatchewan in 2020 — and *it all ends* with the repatriation of an 18th-century Indian statue of the goddess Annapoorna (Boucher 2020; my emphasis).

The repatriation in question took place in 2021, but the whole process — from the ‘discovery’ of a misidentified Indian statuette in the University of Regina’s MacKenzie Art Gallery in Canada to its return to India — unfolded over three years. Importantly, contrary to what is stated in the above quote from a North American art forum, the story of the statuette (and arguably of all repatriated objects) did not end in 2021 with her repatriation.

In India, Annapurna was paraded around before being installed in the Kashi Vishvanath temple in Banaras (Varanasi), India’s increasingly politicised ‘heritage city’, in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Just a few meters away is the controversial seventeenth century Gyanvapi mosque — a functioning Sunni place of worship most likely built on the site with part of the material of a previous Hindu temple.

Between 2017 and 2021 the entire area around the temple and mosque was redeveloped into a new Hindu pilgrim complex called the Kashi Vishvanath Dham and Corridor, or locally just ‘Corridor’ (Fig. 1). The Corridor itself is a monumental access path that connects the Ganges’ riverbank to the temple. It materialised through the demolition of a historic neighbourhood and the eviction of its predominantly Hindu residents under the pretext of emancipating heritage from encroachment. The promotion

of the Corridor as heritage — now an established government narrative — neglects the neighbouring Gyanvapi mosque. At the same time, it makes it more exposed to longstanding Hindu nationalist campaigns that target it for the *mukti* (liberation or emancipation) of supposedly originally Hindu places of worship.

This entire area has been my field site for many years now but it was during the period of demolition and construction for the Corridor that connections between emancipation and heritage emerged there for me and, as I will argue in this article, became subsequently reconfigured through the story of the repatriation of Annapurna.

Grounded in ethnographic knowledge of this area and the religio-political controversies around the Gyanvapi mosque, this article brings Annapurna and the mosque together as two sides of the same story about heritage, emancipation, and violence in Hindu nationalist India. I shift attention to the story that *begins* (rather than ends) with the return of the statuette and propose an alternative methodological approach with which to examine a returned object in its post-repatriation context. I do so by thinking with and extending the concept of afterlives (Cherry 2013), which I introduce in the next section.

Proponents of repatriation of looted heritage objects often frame it in public and scholarly debates as a decolonial achievement for a postcolonial nation and as restoring a lost order disrupted by colonialism's violence. Indeed, in its subversion of power relationships repatriation can arguably be seen as emancipatory. However, this article argues that repatriation can also reinforce political agendas that are detrimental to already marginalised minorities, and not at all emancipatory, as in the case under discussion. Through the lens of the afterlives of the Annapurna statuette's repatriation, we will see that notions of emancipation, decolonisation, and restitution of heritage are mobilised, not in pursuit of global social justice, but rather to pursue majoritarian

agendas. When they are mobilised, though, these are not just adaptations or distortions of Eurocentric notions; rather they build on and reconfigure preexisting usage locally and in the broader Indian political discourse.

In drawing attention to the afterlives of repatriation this article examines micro-scale understandings of both returned objects and repatriation itself among residents and frequenters of the neighbourhood around the Kashi Vishvanth temple and the Gyanvapi mosque. It also questions the roles and uses of these returned objects at the macro scale, precisely in the national and transnational discursive ecology around the restitution and emancipation of Indian (and more often Hindu) heritage. Far from supporting arguments that reject repatriation in favour of a supposedly universal mission of (Western) museums, this article suggests that taking into account the afterlives of repatriation is crucial for understanding the, at times, paradoxical outcomes of emancipatory agendas.

Methodological approach, research material and roadmap

Building on work that draws attention to the many lives of South Asian images, objects and sites and their various mediations — be it ritual or curatorial — and to the social life of ancient sites and monuments (Appadurai 1986; Davis 1997; Guha-Takurta 2004;), Cherry (2013) proposes the concept of afterlives as a tool to capture ‘the plurality of survivals’ of a site or object. By applying it to repatriation, this article complicates narrations in which the return of the object to its original location is seen as the end of the story.

Scholarship on repatriation and restitution of heritageⁱ has focused on the diversity of interpretations of repatriation and repatriated objects (Turnbull and Pickering 2010), and the concept of ritual has even been used to shed light on the various performative acts of museums, indigenous communities, and other stakeholders

during the process of repatriation (Peers, Reins and Shannon 2017). With the exception, however, of a lively discussion about the impact of digital repatriation and the circulation of indigenous knowledge after digital materials are made accessible at ‘home’ (for instance Bell, Christen and Turin 2013), most scholarly concerns remain with the *before* and *during* of repatriation, rather than the *after*. This is perhaps understandable given the ethical dilemmas involved in repatriation, and the importance of advancing discussion on decolonisation and rethinking the role of museums (Kramer 2017; DeBlock 2020; Adams 2024). Losson (2022) has also shown that addressing the lead-up to restitution can illuminate the politics of repatriation in the country of origin of an object, suggesting the possibility of violent fallouts when repatriation is combined with nationalism. However, much remains to be said about returned objects once their official journeys ‘end’.

Since 2014, I have been conducting in-depth ethnographic research in the neighbourhood surrounding the Kashi Vishvanath temple and Gyanvapi mosque. This qualitative research undergirds this analysis of the afterlives of the repatriation of the Annapurna statuette in Banaras. My work initially focused first on Hindu ritual specialists and changes in local urban pilgrimage (Lazzaretti 2019 and forthcoming), then on inter-religious frictions and the containment of religious offence (Lazzaretti 2021a, 2021b and 2022) and more recently on the politics of heritage and security during the Corridor redevelopment (Lazzaretti 2021c and 2024). This longstanding research used embodied spatial experiences, in-depth conversations, deep hanging out, open interviews and participant observations among Hindu residents and shopkeepers of the temple bazaar, Hindu ritual specialists and pilgrim guides, Muslim shopkeepers, mosque frequenters, and both Hindu and Muslim religious authorities, as well as the police on duty at the checkpoints and at various booths around the temple and mosque.

While I had followed the story of the Annapurna statuette in online news during the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time in which international travel was restricted, I began to take a serious interest in her subsequent installation as a result of conversations I had with longstanding interlocutors in autumn 2022 and winter 2023, when I returned to the city after a pandemic-induced fieldwork break of almost two years. As detailed below, even then, in 2023, two years after her return, the deity (and her repatriation) still sparked strong reactions in the neighbourhood.

Before returning to that in a later section of this article, it is necessary first to outline the research gaps this article intends to address in the section ‘Emancipation and heritage: Connecting the dots ’and then to provide some context. Initial context is offered in the section ‘*Mukti* in Banaras and beyond ’which provides background about how notions such as *mukti* (liberation or emancipation) have become pivotal in postcolonial India’s heritage politics. Matters related to the on the ground context will then be provided in the section ‘Emancipation and heritage at the time of the Kashi Vishvanath Corridor’, in which I draw on ethnographic material gathered on research visits between 2014 and 2020, each lasting between two and five months, to tease out contrasting uses of *mukti* and heritage at a time of unprecedented transformations and contestations in the neighbourhood. I then briefly trace the repatriation journey in the section ‘Annapurna’s journey from Canada to India’ and present the official narratives around it, based on news reports and other publicly available sources. This provides further context for the installation of the statuette in the Kashi Vishvanath temple, before the article moves on to the section ‘The afterlives of repatriation’.

To detail these afterlives, I first draw on four months of fieldwork in 2022 and 2023 to chronicle local responses in Banaras (through the voices of my interlocutors) to the enshrinement of Annapurna. I focus particularly on arguments *against* the goddess’s

repatriation that are absent from official narratives. I then broaden the gaze to track the afterlives of repatriation beyond the micro-scale of local responses and contestations. Finally, I examine how this and other cases of repatriation are framed within India, more generally, and track the convergences of repatriation narratives with other, more assertive, calls for the restitution of Hindu heritage, analysing news and social media posts from accounts and campaigns for such restitution, as well proceedings centred on the Gyanvapi mosque. In so doing, I shed light on a Hindu nationalist discursive ecology in which the two notions of heritage and emancipation are drawn together and combined with other purportedly emancipatory notions and processes, such as repatriation and restitution of heritage. A concluding section pulls all this together and summarises my argument and the contributions of the article.

Emancipation and heritage: Connecting the dots

Discussions surrounding decolonisation and reparative justice have intensified in the last couple of decades thanks to postcolonial and decolonial thinkers (e.g. Mignolo and Escobar 2010; Mignolo 2011; Mbembe 2021), Indigenous peoples in Australia and the Americas and movements against racial inequality in postcolonial societies: terms such ‘repatriation’, ‘restitution’, ‘reclamation’ and ‘reparation’ are currently foregrounded in public debates and heritage research on museums and cultural property (Appiah 2006; Roodt 2013; Björnberg 2014; Colwell 2015; Matthes 2017; Hicks 2021). Although little has been written that explicitly connects heritage with emancipation,ⁱⁱ all these ‘r’-terms do pertain to heritage and can be seen as part of an emerging emancipatory vocabulary and sets of practices capable of pushing the scope of heritage beyond mere participation (De Cesari and Dimova 2019; Mozaffari and Jones 2020; De Cesari 2020) towards a more ambitious agenda that can contribute to the decolonisation

of the European mind (Turunen 2020) and connect heritage practices more closely with the liberation or emancipation of oppressed people.

However, like heritage itself, repatriation and the other ‘r’ terms above can have equivalent or substitutes in other languages and be mobilised for purposes that might not be emancipatory at all. Since De Cesari and Herzfeld’s (2015) invitation to go further in unpacking heritage through ‘explorations of equivalent terminologies elsewhere in the world’ that ‘will eventually also illuminate the circumstances under which heritage becomes the victim of, and the pretext for, structural, epistemic, and physical violence.’ (Ibid.: 171), research on the adoption and adaptation of heritage beyond Europe has intensified, showing how vocabularies and functions of heritage are reinvented across the political spectrum (Nakamura 2014; Zetterstrom-Sharp 2015; Bloch 2016; Santos 2017; Muzaffari and Jones 2020; Panetta 2019; De Cesari 2020; Hammami and Uzer 2022). However, while we grapple with multiple heritage notions and uses, the variations and reconfigurations of apparently emancipatory terms such as restitution of heritage, repatriation and decolonisation have not received the same attention. This article begins filling this gap by examining how such notions overlap with preexisting situated vocabularies in India, reconfiguring them and being reconfigured by them, to serve Hindu nationalist agendas.

In doing so, the article concomitantly builds on and expands emerging work on Hindu nationalist uses of an emancipatory or social justice vocabulary. This work has, however, come from and to some extent been focused on the United States. Scholars have shown, for instance, that many upper-caste American Hindus mobilise this vocabulary to style themselves as vulnerable and speak up against racism in America, while at the same time downplaying discrimination against religious minorities and vulnerable people back in India and South Asia (Shambuka 2021). Other scholars have

tended to see variations in otherwise uncontested and inherently positive emancipatory vocabulary — particularly of the notion of decolonisation — primarily as the result of conscious distortion by Hindu nationalist intellectuals and politicians as part of their rewriting of history (Sundaram 2022; Truschke 2022).

This article, however, expands the work of such scholars by teasing out ethnographically the variations of a purported heritage emancipatory vocabulary at the core of Hindu nationalist India. It shows that Hindu nationalist usage also builds on and reconfigures local preexisting notions of emancipation. Indeed, part of my argument is that attending to the local and vernacular variations of these terms is pivotal for a more nuanced understanding of a global heritage emancipatory vocabulary and its paradoxical outcomes.

This leads me to the third contribution of this article. Definitions of emancipation as the process through or state of affairs in which one breaks free from repression and subverts power relations (Taylor 2009; Wojciechowska 2019) have recently come under critical scrutiny: Blühdorn, Butzlaff and Haderer (2022), for instance, point to the ‘emancipatory paradoxes’ found in the increasing appropriation of emancipatory tropes and rhetorics by right-wing populist movements in Europe, and raise an alert regarding the morphing of progressive emancipatory movements into new orthodoxies that become upheld by elites, rather than serving the original purpose of liberating the oppressed. In this reasoning, however, there seems to be an assumption again about emancipation as a given concept that points to a positive outcome and that is, subsequently, appropriated and distorted by right-wing forces and given new perverted meanings. My article, on the other hand, furthers an ethnographically grounded understanding of emancipatory paradoxes beyond Europe.

Looking at the afterlives of the returned object in an increasingly fraught city and nation, then, means being attentive to how repatriation articulates with, and reconfigures, what anthropologists have called the reverberations of violence (Navaro et al. 2021). Thinking violence as something that reverberates means moving our gaze beyond open conflicts, televised riots and wars to search instead for the everyday traces left behind over time by those ‘critical events’ (Das 2007). It also means understanding violence not as an exception, or outburst of the irrational or the uncivilised, but as a sociopolitical form generating its own effects in a continuum (Scheper-Huges and Bourgois 2003), and leaving behind remnants and lingering effects and affects (Stewart 2007; Navaro-Yashin 2009). In the specific context of Hindu nationalist India, in which violence (spectacular or subtle) does not need any further exposure (Chatterjee 2023), it only makes sense to track how it unfolds and reverberates, sometimes in unexpected ways and places. We will see precisely how it does so through repatriation. The article, thus, also expands an investigation of repatriation in authoritarian contexts by proposing that the perspective of the afterlives allows for an examination of how repatriation may refract or resurface violence.

***Mukti* in Banaras and beyond**

The association of Banaras with death and its transcendence is deeply entrenched in both Indian and global imaginaries. The city on the banks of the Ganges river is consistently described as the place where Hindus wish to go and die and, according to Brahmanic traditions, death in Banaras grants emancipation from the cycle of rebirths, or *mukti* (Eck 1983). *Kashyam marnam mukti* (death in Banaras is liberation), a *mantra* that encapsulates this belief, is often repeated in conversations about the city’s qualities and powers.

However, *mukti* is much more than just this and is, I suggest, a productive prism through which to rethink notions of emancipation and heritage. It has come to be used politically by Hindu nationalists, so a little background about this movement is appropriate here, particularly given that the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, or BJP) is currently in power nationally in India as well as in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

The BJP is indeed the party-political arm of a family of organisations promoting what is today widely called Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva — a political ideology that emerged in the 1920s postulating a religious-cultural definition of nationhood and aiming to establish the hegemony of Hindus and Hinduism and make India a Hindu nation (Ahmad 2017; Jaffrelot 2021; Sundar 2023). 'Above' the BJP is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Corps or RSS), a leading organisation of other Hindu nationalist organisations.

Such bodies remained, however, on the fringes of political life in the early postcolonial period and Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, saw them as the Indian brand of fascism (Jaffrelot 2021, 18). They acquired more visibility in the 1980s and 1990s, due to broad socio-economic changes (Kaur 2015; Jaffrelot 2021) but also, and importantly for our concerns, because of a movement for the emancipation of heritage. This was the *Ramjanmabhoomi Mukti Andolan* (Liberation Movement for the Birthplace of Ram), a mass mobilisation by Hindutva organisations for the emancipation or liberation of the purported birthplace of the Hindu god Ram — identified as the location of the sixteenth-century Babri mosque in Ayodhya.ⁱⁱⁱ

As detailed in the report of the subsequent Liberhan Commission, Hindu nationalist leaders (including prominent BJP politicians) orchestrated the Babri mosque's

‘liberation’ on the 6th of December, 1992: it was pulled down by mobs of Hindutva activists, provoking months of Hindu-Muslim rioting across South Asia.^{iv}

Mukti appeared in the title of the ‘liberation’ movement that brought down the Babri mosque, but it is important to highlight that, perhaps for its religious and philosophical capital, *mukti* had already been adopted, somewhat sparsely but variously, in South Asian political discourse. The term was in use in anti-colonial struggles, though leaders more often used the term *azadi* (freedom). Mahatma Gandhi notably intertwined *mukti* with the idea of *swaraj* (self-rule), presenting independence from British colonial rule as not just a political goal, but a moral, educational and spiritual journey toward collective emancipation (Jahanbegloo 2023).

Mukti was also associated with achievable and earthly objectives, rather than only referring to the supreme soteriological end. Prior to independence, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of India's Constitution and a lifelong advocate for Dalit rights, used *mukti* in his famous speech *Mukti Kon Pathe?* (Which way to emancipation?). Delivered in 1936 in Bombay, the speech outlines pathways for the emancipation of marginalised communities and describes the intersection of caste, class and religion within the Hindu society and their oppressive burden on disadvantaged groups (Suradkar 2017). Inspired by Ambedkar, other grassroots movements adopted the term *mukti* to advance emancipatory agendas and so did more recent independence struggles in South Asia.^v

The term thus already had religious and political capital when it was co-opted in the 1980s and 1990s by Hindu nationalists to target the Babri mosque in Ayodhya.

There had been calls for the restitution (*vapsi*, or return) of Hindu temples in Banaras and elsewhere as early as an RSS resolution in 1959, that referred to the ‘gross injustice against Hindus’ but *mukti* is first found in the famous 1984 resolution by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (the World Council of Hindus, another Hindu nationalist organisation)

targeting the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, the Gyanvapi mosque in Banaras and the Shahi Idgah mosque in Mathura.^{vi}

The framing of the destruction of the Babri mosque — a violent event that continues to have repercussions (Ahmed 2014; Lazzaretti and Jacobsen 2024) — as an emancipatory act, does then build on longstanding perceptions that Hindus have endured centuries of oppression in their own land at the hands of Muslims (Udayakumar 2005; Anand 2011; Govindrajan, Joshi and Rizvi 2021). These perceptions, in turn, were recently validated and reinforced by the evolution of the judicial disputes around Ayodhya and precisely by the 2019 landmark verdict by the Supreme Court of India:^{vii} although stating that the demolition of the Babri mosque was an illegal act, the court assigned the entire plot of land on which the mosque once stood to the divine litigant Rama Virajman (the infant form of the Ram) and ordered the central government to hold it in trust for the construction of a Ram temple. Such a temple was constructed and inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2024.

Modi's BJP had won a landslide victory in general elections in 2014, and then an unprecedented majority in 2019. He had chosen Banaras as his parliamentary constituency in 2014, and the city increasingly became a laboratory for what is often termed the 'new India'. After a decade of Modi's rule the 'new India' is a proper 'ethnic democracy' (Jaffrelot 2017)^{viii} in which anti-minority (particularly anti-Muslim) sentiments have become mainstream, while violence against perceived internal and external enemies is performed routinely with impunity in the name of protecting the nation (Sarkar 2019; Chatterjee 2023). The 2024 general election saw a reduced BJP majority and a return to coalition government but, nevertheless, Modi became Prime Minister for the third time and after more than 10 years of BJP rule, the nature of the political order appears to have fundamentally shifted in ways that will continue to affect

the Indian democracy (Vaishnav 2024). The state of Uttar Pradesh, under BJP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath since 2017, can itself be seen as a laboratory of Hinduvta (Pai and Kumar 2018).

The entrenchment of majoritarian ideology and politics continues and this is evident also by how the use of emancipatory vocabulary has taken a step forward and extended to comparisons between the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya and Black, Indigenous and minority activism against colonial and imperialist statues and monuments. The US-based academic Vivek Gumaste has written:

Today, when the razing of the Babri Masjid is viewed through the kaleidoscope of the Black (sic.) Lives Matter movement and the Hagia Sophia controversy, the cloud of shameful questionability that had obscured our perspective then fades away to reveal a sense of confident morality. India was way ahead of the times when it brought down the Babri Masjid. It had stood as a symbol of brutal Islamic domination over Hindu India: A monument deliberately and provocatively erected with singular *schadenfreude* at a site which (sic.) Hindus believed to be the birthplace of their most revered god.^{ix}

Emancipation and heritage at the time of the Kashi Vishvanath Corridor

As seen in the above brief account about Ayodhya, the uses of *mukti* to reconfigure violent claims on heritage and, more broadly, to redefine who and what can belong to the nation, are entrenched in the heritage politics of postcolonial India. In contemporary Banaras, though, this mix becomes even more explosive: the recent redevelopment of the Kashi Vishvanath Dham and Corridor led to demolition, eviction and displacement of humans and deities under the pretext of emancipating heritage.

Although an expansion of the temple area had been rumoured for decades, the project began materialising only after Yogi Adityanath and the BJP took office after a landslide victory in the 2017 Uttar Pradesh state election. Demolition of houses and small shops began, and one of the houses demolished quite soon was that of the Vyas family, with whom I had entertained ethnographic relationships since 2013. This house was located overlooking the area between the Kashi Vishvanath temple and the Gyanvapi mosque. The family elder, Kedarnath Vyas, recounted that the temple managing body, the Kashi Vishvanath Temple Trust, had for years been pressuring them to sell the house and relinquish their control of that very strategic area. Vyas resisted (Lazzaretti 2021a) but demolition took place after the house partially collapsed during the monsoons in the summer of 2017, most likely due to the demolition of neighbouring buildings with which the house shared walls.^x When I met the Vyas family in the winter of 2018, in a house they had subsequently rented not far from the demolished family house, they told me that the administration initially asked them to leave everything behind and abandon the house to enable sealing the area ‘for safety reasons’ and then demolished the building. In the following months, a similar fate awaited the other residents of the neighbourhood, who were predominantly lower-middle class and *savarna*^{xi} Hindus.

During that winter of 2018 and spring of 2019, I spent days in the progressively collapsing neighbourhood with residents and shopkeepers who had been (or were in the process of being) displaced for the Corridor. In our daily conversations, and in gatherings they organised to protest the Corridor in the name of the protecting their neighbourhood’s heritage (*dharohar*), they discussed the ongoing destruction as an irretrievable and violent catastrophe, like an earthquake or, even the death of what they saw as a living organism (Lazzaretti 2021a). They were particularly outraged by the fact that, during early waves of demolition, many *murtis* — the term, sometimes translated as ‘idol’, refers to

consecrated images of Hindu deities — had been lost. These *murtis* had been presiding over wayside shrines or domestic temples but had now been buried, destroyed or looted. At best, some had been removed and put away, waiting to be reinstalled in a projected museum. Stories about broken deities had spread widely through social media, along with images: these ‘haunting scraps’ (Lazzaretti 2021a) were ‘remnants of violence’ (Navaro et 2021) that outraged many interlocutors, who accused the BJP government (seen by them as claiming to be a Hindu government) of being temple desecrators par excellence. Years later, while exploring the new Corridor in 2023, I met Mukesh, one of the participants in the protest. In recollecting that period, he said: ‘The only *murtis* that you see today in the Corridor from previous times are the ones we fought for day and night, never leaving them unwatched, otherwise they would have buried them too’. He also proudly informed me that it was he who chose the name for the protest movement: the Dharohar Bachao Sangharsh Samiti (Save Heritage Struggle Committee). But Mukesh added: ‘*Dharohar* for us was not that of the big temples, but a way of living, not like in this cement jungle’ pointing in all directions around us at the Corridor. Because of their role as protectors of *murtis* and the neighbourhoods’ living heritage, residents like Mukesh in that period saw themselves as ‘real’ Hindus as opposed to government officials, politicians, and urban authorities. They were incredulous that what they called a Hindu *sarkar* (government) would destroy their heritage.

In January 2019, months before the Annapurna statuette was ‘discovered’ in Canada, I visited the house and shop of Prakash, one my interlocutors whose home had not yet been demolished. He knew he had to give up soon but he was still resisting, perhaps trying to negotiate greater compensation or simply trying to find a place for his whole family to live. His father sat with us, and his only worry was for the goddess shrine next to their house. Prakash’s father was not a Brahman but he had been the caretaker of

the tiny shrine for decades and was terrified about the fate of many *murtis*: ‘she cannot be destroyed or lost’! He repeatedly mumbled: ‘we have to protect her and the others’.

There were months of confusion about the breath and scope of the Corridor, which had up to this time been advertised as a development project.^{xii} Soon, however, officials began crafting a narrative that progressively became dominant — one in which the Corridor was not so much about development but ultimately a heritage conservation and protection project. I detail the making of the Corridor as heritage elsewhere (Lazzaretti 2021c) but here I focus on a turning point in the construction of this narrative, in which not only heritage but also *mukti* became irretrievably connected to the Corridor.

When laying the foundation stone for the Corridor in March 2019, Prime Minister Modi spoke of the Kashi Vishvanath temple as a place always targeted by enemies. In doing so he was rehearsing a well known narrative but importantly he went on to describe the Corridor as a step towards the temple’s emancipation, or *mukti*:^{xiii} in so doing, he was at the same time identifying the residents, their houses, and the neighbourhood as an ‘encroachment’^{xiv} upon a heritage site. The imperative of clearing such encroachments rehearses global patterns of neoliberal heritage-led urban redevelopment in which inhabitants and heritage bearers are often evicted and displaced because, in a neo-colonial fashion, they are considered unsuitable carers for their own heritage (De Cesari and Herzfeld 2016; Herzfeld 2017; De Cesari and Dimova 2019). Most importantly, by using the word *mukti*, the Prime Minister was evidently nodding to campaigns targeting the neighbouring Gyanvapi mosque. Let us briefly look more closely at the basis for these campaigns.

In 1669 Mughal emperor Aurangzeb apparently ordered the demolition of a previous Kashi Vishvanath temple and parts of it were then used to construct what is now the Gyanvapi mosque.^{xv} Portions of what is probably the original building remain visible,

however, at the back of the mosque, which has since been in use by Sunni Muslims as a *juma masjid* (mosque for the Friday congregation). A ‘new’ Vishvanath temple (the one on which the Kashi Vishvanath Dham and Corridor is centered) was built around 1777, just meters away, after the failure of repeated attempts by regional Hindu patrons to have Gyanvapi demolished (Desai 2017, 58 and 81–83).

While the temple and mosque continued to be at the centre of (mostly) local disputes throughout colonial and postcolonial times (Lazzaretti 2023), these frictions jumped scale when, during the *Ramjanmabhumi* movement, the site was explicitly identified as the next target for ‘liberation’ as in the RSS and VHP resolutions mentioned above. As a consequence of this, Gyanvapi, and eventually the whole area, began to be supervised by security forces, whose presence in the following decades irretrievably changed the neighbourhood and paradoxically enhanced a sense of insecurity among local Muslims (Lazzaretti 2020 and 2021c).

Threats to the mosque intensified when demolitions began in 2017. Until then, it had been almost entirely hidden from public gaze, screened as it was by residential buildings and security barriers, but suddenly it stood out as the most imposing structure in the area (Fig. 2). After Modi’s words about the Corridor being a step towards the emancipation of Kashi Vishvanath, many felt that the time was ripe for the mosque to go, and when a 1991 lawsuit requesting the restitution of Gyanvapi to Hindus was reopened in 2019 Hindu and Muslim interlocutors alike were not surprised.

Leaving the mosque aside for a moment, it did not take long for the use of the term *mukti* to sink in among residents. Indeed, soon after Modi’s speech, residents mockingly began appropriating the term *mukti* as a synonym for the ongoing destruction of their neighbourhood. They began listing local deities that had disappeared and, as they would sarcastically put it, whose *mukti* had occurred. They also applied *mukti* to

demolished buildings: ‘the library’, or ‘the house of that family’ has been emancipated or liberated, they would say. In sarcastically counter-using *mukti* as a way to describe the horror of the ongoing destruction, residents were advancing a critique of the purported heritage emancipatory policies of the government, and linking them instead with violence, dispossession and disrespect of Hindu traditions.

It is against this backdrop that, in 2021, the statuette from Canada was restituted and triumphantly enshrined as a new Annapurna deity.

Annapurna’s journey from Canada to India

Let us now look at the timeline of Annapurna’s journey, and the various narratives that emerged during it, drawing on media reports and online news in which the voices of stakeholders and politicians are reported.

In Saskatchewan: The North-American art forum report

In autumn 2019, New York-based radical art forum Hyperallergic^{xvi} reported that when conceptual artist Divya Mehra was preparing her show *From India to Canada and Back to India (There Is Nothing I Can Possess Which You Cannot Take Away)* at the University of Regina's MacKenzie Art Gallery, she noticed a statuette that had been misidentified as a representation of Vishnu. She identified it instead as Annapurna, the popular Hindu goddess of nourishment, represented with a spoon in one hand and a bowl of rice in the other. Mehra's research is said to have revealed that Annapurna had been most likely taken from an otherwise unidentified temple near the Ganges in Banaras in 1936, or possibly in 1913. In any case, she encouraged the MacKenzie Art Gallery to repatriate the apparently stolen statuette.

A year later, in autumn 2020, Mehra exhibited her work at the MacKenzie, including a piece inspired by Indiana Jones and Annapurna's story, and the repatriation began with a Zoom ceremony in which the University of Regina's Interim President and

Vice-Chancellor, the Indian High Commissioner to Canada and representatives from the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Global Affairs Canada, and Canada Border Services Agency participated.^{xvii} All parties reportedly worked together harmoniously and stressed the necessity of righting historical wrongs and strengthening transnational relationships.

To Delhi and from Delhi to Banaras: Official narratives and ritual celebrations

At first, Indian mainstream media reiterated the above art forum report.^{xviii} Soon, though, the forthcoming repatriation of Annapurna was being framed in government narratives as an example of the decolonising efforts of the Modi government. The Prime Minister announced it in 2020 and the chronicle of what Modi reverentially called ‘*mata*’ (‘mother’, a common appellation for female deities) was the lead item in his popular monthly radio program *Mann ki baat*^{xix} on 29th November. The PM said that ‘this idol was stolen from a temple of Varanasi and smuggled out of the country around 100 years ago’. He continued: ‘Just like the idol of Mata Annapurna, a lot of our invaluable heritage has suffered at the hands of International gangs. [...] India has also increased her efforts for their return’. He added: ‘There is a coincidence attached with the return of the idol of Mata Annapurna... World Heritage Week was celebrated only a few days ago. World Heritage Week provides a wonderful opportunity to the lovers of culture to revisit the past and to know about the history of these important milestones’.^{xx}

Almost two years after Mehra’s discovery, Annapurna reached Delhi and began to be treated as a *murti* — a term that had already been used by the Prime Minister in the Hindi version of his speech. When delivered to the Uttar Pradesh government, though, the transition from statuette to deity was performed publicly: Annapurna was paraded across the state, reaching Banaras on the 15th of November. There, Chief Minister Adityanath shouldered the deity’s silver palanquin and presided over her enshrinement

on the premises of the Kashi Vishvanath temple, alongside five other deities that had been removed during works for the Corridor.^{xxi}

The processions and installation ceremony were widely covered by the media, and several politicians released statements praising Modi's unmatched commitment to repatriating Hindu heritage.^{xxii}

The afterlives of repatriation

I now turn to Annapurna's afterlives and first chronicle local responses to her repatriation in Banaras among my interlocutors. I then widen the gaze to track how Annapurna's 'successful' repatriation story is framed within, merges into and refashions assertive campaigns for the emancipation of Hindu heritage.

Repatriating one, destroying hundreds

The goddess Annapurna is especially beloved in Banaras: the city, considered to be Lord Shiva's earthly and forever abode, likes to worship his spouse in this form and a prominent Annapurna temple lies just meters from Kashi Vishvanath. It is particularly popular because of its *annakshetra* (Food Field), where thousands of free meals are served every day to pilgrims.^{xxiii} Importantly, another *murti* of Annapurna was already located inside the premises of Kashi Vishvanath, alongside other ancillary deities, meaning that the 'Canadian' one became the *third* Annapurna in the area. Her return soon sparked controversies.

The 'Canadian' Annapurna was enshrined in 2021. Her repatriation, though, was still reverberating in local conversations when I returned in late 2022. In January 2023, for instance, I conversed with Vishal and Vinit, whose Brahman family had been in charge of the Kashi Vishvanath Temple before its management was taken over by the Kashi Vishvanath Temple Trust in 1983, by an act of parliament. Other interlocutors

who had also taken part in protests against the Corridor were by then publicly silent, and some were looking for new roles in the refashioned pilgrim-tourist economy. Unlike them, Vishal and Vinit remain outspoken, although only Vinit does so in public venues. Stressing his role as a temple authority, he calls the repatriation a ‘fraud’ and mentioned that they had to fight hard to have the preexisting Annapurna *murti* installed together with the ‘Canadian’ one, otherwise, it would have been discarded or left somewhere after it was removed during works for the Corridor. The result, though, is not very satisfactory:

We already had one Annapurna here next to Vishvanath... Why do we need another one here? There shouldn't be more than one central deity in a sanctum sanctorum and there shouldn't be two *murtis* of the same deity. Now there are two: one small and one big... what is it, an Annapurna convention (*Annapurna ji ka sammelan hai kya*)?! They are playing with god!

In this and other conversations, Vinit and Vishal stressed that according to ritual texts, moving deities from place to place is against Hindu norms, as is the consecration of broken *murtis*: the ‘Canadian’ Annapurna, described as ‘chipped’, was considered by them to be ritually inappropriate and an unwanted imposition.

In private, other interlocutors pointed to the fact that the repatriation and installation of Annapurna in the Corridor by the temple trust was a way of promoting the new *Kashi Vishvanath Annakshetra*, a feeding facility with a mega temple kitchen that had been inaugurated by the Prime Minister in early 2020. The scale of the endeavour was compared by the media with other large feeding facilities for pilgrims in India, but not with the neighbouring and long-established one at the nearby Annapurna

temple.^{xxiv} Vishal was not enthusiastic and saw it as just another episode in the longstanding competition between the Annapurna and Kashi Vishvanath temples. He and others like him anticipated that it would be a flop and rehearsed a popular conception of Shiva as a deity from whom devotees should only accept *prashad* (sacred foodstuffs offered to the deity but later distributed to devotees): ‘Nobody will eat eagerly from a kitchen run in the name of Shiva; you should only take *prashad* from Shiva, not food! For them [the temple trust], the new kitchen is just a new way of making money. It’s a new business!’. According to Vishal, the Annapurna *annakshetra* attracted large donations, making the neighbouring Kashi Vishvanath Temple Trust envious. According to this interpretation, having the Canadian Annapurna in the premises of Kashi Vishvanath would enhance the possibility of the new feeding facility to be successful, and attracting large donations.

It remains, however, the lack of interest by authorities in the fate of the many minor deities lost or displaced by the Corridor that many informants find most disrespectful of the neighbourhood’s affective geographies of worship. They compare it with the political and media attention given to Annapurna. For instance, Prakash, whom we met earlier, recalls the fate of the goddess shrine previously managed by his family:

Remember how we fought for our goddess and my father didn’t want to let her go? He was right! She hasn’t been destroyed but was left in a store room with rubble for two years [...]. Now they have built a new temple for her, but who performed the ceremonies for her for two years? Any deity left like this loses her power, it will take time for her to be awake again. And what about this Annapurna from Canada?! Left for ages in a museum, how can she be a deity now? So much fuss around her and no one cared for the hundred of *murtis* here. I tell you one thing, this Canadian Annapurna is just an election stunt!

To other interlocutors, including Muslim shopkeepers also involved in the pilgrim-tourist economy, the repatriation of Annapurna was just another ingredient in the

transformation of Kashi Vishvanath and Hinduism into a successful and remunerative business. Indeed, visual depictions found at central places (Fig. 3) during my last visit in 2022-23, invite pilgrims specifically to visit the ‘Canadian’ Annapurna’s pavilion in the Kashi Vishvanath complex. As I observed, it seems now to be a canonical stop in priest-led tours of the temple, confirming the use of the statuette-turned-deity as an asset by temple management.

I asked a priest of the neighbouring ‘original’ Annapurna temple, what he thought about the ‘Canadian’ Annapurna. He replied, ‘we tell pilgrims who come here that this one is the real Annapurna and not any other. But the problem is that the Kashi Vishvanath priests don’t send pilgrims here and tell them that the one from Canada is the oldest and real Annapurna!’

Beyond Annapurna and Gyanvapi: Assertive claims about Hindu heritage

Beyond local politics, the story of Annapurna merges with and strengthens an official rhetoric that frames any recent repatriation (irrespective of the object and its story) as the result of ‘efforts by the Modi Government to bring back our antiquities and artefacts from across the world’.^{xxv} Meanwhile, volunteer associations combatting the still thriving trafficking of Indian antiquities (Ahuja 2008; Mathur 2020) have attracted widespread support. The India Pride Project (IPP) is a case in point: described in its Twitter (now X) account at @IndiaPrideProj as ‘a global effort to track and reinstate India's stolen heritage’, the IPP was founded in 2014 by art enthusiasts Anuraag Saxena and S. Vijay Kumar to track international trafficking of Indian art through social media.

Although the IPP maintains a seemingly apolitical profile, and it has undoubtedly contributed to the repatriation of looted or stolen objects,^{xxvi} its rhetoric often seems to align more or less explicitly with assertive Hindu nationalist claims about Indian heritage. In 2017, for instance, IPP started the popular online petition

#BringOurGodsHome.^{xxvii} But by mentioning ‘gods’ in the plural, that hashtag seems to emphasise Hindu rather than any other Indian heritage. As well, #BringOurGodsHome is widely used in explicit calls for the *mukti* of mosques by so-called ‘internet Hindus’—a term used to describe ‘young, often urban, middle-class/upper-middle-class followers of Hinduism residing in India (and abroad), [...] who aggressively voice their right-wing political views and support for Narendra Modi on social media platforms’ (Mohan 2015). Increasingly, internet Hindus play a crucial role in popularising ideological discourses of Hindu nationalism, spreading fear of cultural appropriation and loss of Hindu identity and maintaining the momentum of often violent campaigns (Udupa 2015; Bhatia 2022). Art historian Regina Höfer finds the IPP communication strategy ‘populist and inflammatory’ and writes that it ‘falls back on certain heavily emotionalised stereotypes’, for instance about Muslims and Mughals as temple desecrators.^{xxviii} In addition, Saxena has said that he draws inspiration from Vikram Sampath, a writer characterised by the independent research initiative Hindutva Watch as using ‘the politically acceptable rhetoric of democracy and decolonisation to make Hindu domination sound reasonable’.^{xxix}

Internet Hindus continue unequivocally to incite violence against Muslims and their mosques,^{xxx} and the Gyanvapi mosque is a principal target. Official descriptions describe the Corridor as ‘a government initiative for the safeguarding of cultural heritage’,^{xxxi} a heritage interpreted by many as particularly Hindu heritage, and this, taken together with Modi’s use of *mukti* in connection with the Corridor as discussed above, is a basis for the ‘emancipation’ of Gyanvapi to appear just and legitimate.

Internet Hindus have no doubt about this. Consider, for instance, the posts and comments in Fig. 4, 5 and 6, that emerged from an unsystematic screening of prominent social media accounts @LostTemples and @ReclaimTemplesMovement (including

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, now X). The newly refurbished Kashi Vishvanath, and the smaller surrounding temples that were spared demolition, stand out as the original Hindu heritage in need of protection against the ‘illegal encroachment’ of the mosque. Similarly, my analysis of lawsuits (Lazzaretti 2023) has shown a progressive shift in the definition of Gyanvapi from ‘mosque’ to ‘alleged mosque’ and then from ‘disputed structure’ to ‘illegal and unlawful structure’ encroaching upon Hindu heritage.^{xxxii} These readings are popular not only among militant internet Hindus, but have been explicitly endorsed by politicians: Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has even declared that Gyanvapi should not be called a mosque in order to avoid hurting Hindu sentiments.^{xxxiii} In political discourse, online, and even in the courts, then, Gyanvapi has become the ultimate ‘illegal encroachment’. The discourse around the repatriation of Annapurna and the efforts of organisations such as the IIP serve to reinforce and give new traction to assertive campaigns for the emancipation of Gyanvapi and other mosques.

Heritage, emancipation and violence in Hindu nationalist India and beyond

This article demonstrates that the often-overlooked afterlives of a repatriated object can be at least as worthy of the attention of scholars as the repatriation event itself. In particular, focusing on Annapurna’s afterlives as a statuette-turned-deity in Banaras recasts the repatriation of heritage as generative of paradoxical outcomes and possibly even violent reverberations.

Studying such afterlives of repatriation requires the presence of the researcher for extended and repeated periods in the places to which objects are returned. Only in this way can we achieve fine-grained documentation of both local talk and the wider discursive ecology and enhance our understanding of how, beyond official negotiations

and intellectual debates, repatriation of heritage can be paradoxically both emancipatory in some senses but at the same time threatening or discriminatory for others.

At the transnational scale and according to official narratives, the repatriation was smooth and emancipatory, as a postcolonial nation regained its heritage through an act of restorative justice. As revealed by the ethnography presented above, however, things were actually much more complex once the 'Canadian' Annapurna reached India. In Banaras, Annapurna enhances longstanding disputes around temple authority and negotiations of Hinduness but also refracts violence, since through her enshrinement a recollection of dispossession, demolition and the discarding of human and divine remnants is resurfaced.

In and beyond Banaras, then, I have used the story of the 'Canadian' Annapurna to track important emancipatory paradoxes in Hindu nationalist India, showing how this and other repatriation cases are framed within and reconfigure a Hindu nationalist discursive ecology in which notions of emancipation and restitution of heritage are mobilised to normalise, make appealing and advance a majoritarian ideology. And then repatriations, together with the wider discourse on restitution and apparently apolitical appeals such as by the IIP to 'reclaim' Indian heritage, in the end merge with assertive claims for the 'emancipation' of mosques. The use of the term *mukti* in an act of violent destruction is not new in postcolonial India, as demonstrated by the case of the Babri mosque. As shown in the discussion on the Gyanvapi mosque, though, it is becoming normalised through nodding to a global heritage emancipatory vocabulary mobilised in struggles for social justice, making a thorough investigation of the vernacular and preexisting variations of these terms more urgent than ever.

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Figure 1. The Kashi Vishvanath Corridor, October 2022, my picture.

Figure 2. The imposing Gyanvapi mosque amidst ongoing demolitions for building the Corridor, February 2019, my picture.

Figure 3. A poster on one of the gates to the Kashi Vishvanath temple premises stating that 'All devotees are welcome to the pavilion of *mata* Annapurna', October 2022, my picture.

Figure 4. Facebook post @LostTemples, 13 December 2021.

Figure 5. Comments to the Facebook post @LostTemples, 13 December 2021.

Figure 6. Facebook post @Reclaim Temple Movement, 16 June 2018.

ⁱ I use these two terms sometimes interchangeably as a reflection of their use in the Indian discursive ecology I deal with in this article; however, they both have specific connotations in museum and legal discussion (see Losson 2022). Repatriation, however, is the term used mostly when referring to the return of human remains and religious objects to indigenous and native communities (and not to national museums): it thus

seems appropriate for the case in question and is also the one mostly used in articles on Annapurna.

ii A recent article by Fryer (2023) theorises heritage as liberation.

iii The Hindu nationalist view is that the Babri mosque was constructed on an earlier Hindu temple for Ram. There is no consensus regarding the results of excavations in 2003 by the Archeological Survey of India, however, even among archaeologists and parties who were present at the time (Menon and Varma 2010).

iv The Liberhan Commission can be accessed here: <https://xn--i1b5bzbybhfo5c8b4bxh.xn--11b7cb3a6a.xn--h2brj9c/en/about-us/commissions-committees/liberhan-ayodhya-commission>.

v Notably by the Mukti Bahini, the guerrilla movement active in the Bangladeshi liberation war in the early 1970s and the Jharkand Mukti Morcha, a regional political party founded in 1972 that advocated for the rights of the indigenous population and demanded a separate state of Jharkhand, which was eventually carved out of Bihar in 2000.

vi ABPS 1959 Resolution: Issue of Temples Turned into Mosques <https://www.archivesofrss.org/Resolutions.aspx>, accessed 25 November 2024. A report on the 1984 resolution can be found here: <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/special-report/story/19940430-dharma-sansad-emerges-as-flagship-of-hindutva-movement-809078-1994-04-29>, accessed 2 February 2025.

vii The judgement is known as *M Siddiq (D) Thr Lrs v. Mahant Suresh Das & Ors.*

viii The expression derives from Israeli sociologist Smootha (2007) who used it to indicate a democracy in which an ethnic group is recognised as forming the core nation, while non-core groups are perceived as a threat and, although granted some individual and collective rights, are controlled by the core-nation.

^{ix} <https://www.rediff.com/news/column/was-babri-masjid-demolition-justified/20200804.htm>.

^x <https://www.livehindustan.com/uttar-pradesh/varanasi/story-order-to-demolish-vyas-bhawan-1235671.html>.

^{xi} *Savarna* indicates those who fall within the caste system and belong to one of the four main cast groups of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The others are the outcasts, including Dalits (literarily ‘the oppressed’) and Adivasis (the indigenous people of the subcontinent).

^{xii} In Lazzaretti 2021b I analyse the local reports in Hindi newspapers to find that the buzz words associated with the Corridor initially were *vikas* (development) and *adhigrahan* (expansion).

^{xiii} The video and transcript of the speech is available at <https://www.narendramodi.in/hi/text-of-pm-s-speech-at-kashi-vishwanath-temple-in-varanasi-uttar-pradesh-544171>.

^{xiv} The term ‘encroachment’ has a long judicial history associated with illegal housing and occupation of public land (Ghertner 2015). The term, however, also appears more recently in contexts of heritage preservation in India and elsewhere and seems increasingly to be utilised in opposition to heritage and its advocates (Shepherd 2012; Nakamura 2014; Bloch 2016).

^{xv} The dismantling of a Vishvanath temple in 1669 is one of the few (but still very poorly) documented demolitions perpetrated by Aurangzeb: the record of an order by the emperor to destroy the Vishvanath temple is found in a sentence in the *Maasir-i-Alamgiri* (Khan 1947, 55). Stylistic analysis of the mosque has backed conjectures about its construction (Asher 1992: 254).

^{xvi} <https://hyperallergic.com/604586/artists-research-leads-mackenzie-art-gallery-to-restitute-an-18th-century-statue-acquire-her-work/>.

^{xvii} <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/artist-divya-mehra-stolen-statue-mackenzie-art-gallery-1.5743526>.

^{xviii} See for instance the article in Hindustan Times on 20th November 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/canada-to-return-18th-century-annapurna-statue-to-india/story-3EQAbghVUq5yWf3vunmpeO.html>.

^{xix} *Mann ki baat* (loosely translatable as 'Talks from the heart') is broadcast widely through popular channels such as All Radio India and sees the PM directly addressing citizens while discussing day to day governance and promoting government initiatives. All episodes are available on the PM's personal website.

^{xx} https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/news_updates/pms-address-in-the-18th-episode-of-mann-ki-baat-2-0/. Emphasis mine.

^{xxi} A short video of the ceremony can be seen here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6mOHG1-qD0>.

^{xxii} For instance: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/goddess-annapurna-idol-brought-back-canada-108-years-temple-varanasi-1877105-2021-11-15> ;
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/varanasi/yogi-installs-retrieved-18th-century-goddess-annapurna-idol-at-kvt/articleshow/87724048.cms>;
<https://www.opindia.com/2021/11/idol-of-maa-annapurna-returned-by-canada-handed-over-to-up-govt/>; and <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1768992>.

^{xxiii} <https://kashiannapurnaannakshetratruster.org/>.

^{xxiv} <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/travel/eating-out/much-awaited-kashi-vishwanath-anna-kshetra-opens-to-feed-thousands-of-pilgrims-in-varanasi/articleshow/74176372.cms>

^{xxv} The PM's website mentions 157 artefacts and antiquities returned from the US (announced in September 2021): <https://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modi-to-bring-home-157-artefacts-antiquities-from-the-us-557458>. Another 101 antiquities, also from the US, were reportedly returned in July 2023: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/us-hands-over-105-antiquities-to-india/article67091585.ece>.

^{xxvi} <https://theprint.in/india/how-stolen-art-detectives-india-pride-project-tracked-down-265-artefacts/889814/>.

^{xxvii} <https://www.hoppock.net/restoring-indias-heritage>.

^{xxviii} <https://boasblogs.org/dcntr/bringing-home-our-gods-nationalistic-and-populistic-dangers-in-debates-about-heritage-restitution-in-india/> accessed 3 February 2025.

Höfer's article deals with the ideological orientation of the IPP in much more detail than is possible here.

^{xxix} This is gathered from Saxena (@anuraag_saxenato, 21 Sept. 2023)'s reply to a Tweet by Dr. Rajeev Ranjan Chaturvedy, associate professor at Nalanda University and the BJP supporter (at @rrchaturvedy, 21 Sept. 2023), in which he mentions the IIP and Saxena in connection with Sampath's lecture 'Reimagining Bharatiya Itihasa'. On Vikram Sampath see <https://hindutvawatch.org/how-historian-vikram-sampath-uses-decolonisation-rhetoric-to-make-hindu-domination-sound-reasonable/>.

^{xxx} See, for instance, *Boom*, 26 May 2022 [https://www.boomlive.in/decode/impact/gyanvapi-mosque-alt-right-trads-edgelords-troll-meme-violence-extreme-18016?fbclid=IwAR0YHM5CQOqPvymffAxOLzZZ3VNje5xQ86Po9_UhDTheJ6H8tsFsGW1FtaQ]

^{xxxi} <https://culturalheritageofvaranasi.com/>

^{xxxii} This emerges from comparison of two important suits: *Din Mohammad and Others vs. the Secretary of State for India Council through the District Magistrate and Collector Benares*, CWP no. 62 of 1936 in the Court of Additional Civil Judge of Benares, and appeal no. 466 of 1937 in the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad and *Ancient Idol of Swambhu [sic.] Lord Vishweshwar & others versus Anjuman Instezamia Masjid & another*, Suit No. 610 of 1991, In the Court of Civil Judge (Sr. Div.8/Fast Track, 2019).

^{xxxiii} [https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/its-controversial-to-call-
gyanvapi-a-mosque-yogi-adityanath/articleshow/102291862.cms?from=mdr](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/lucknow/its-controversial-to-call-gyanvapi-a-mosque-yogi-adityanath/articleshow/102291862.cms?from=mdr).







श्री काशी विश्वनाथ मंदिर घाट
माता अन्नपूर्णा दरबार
में आये हुए सभी
भक्तों का
हार्दिक स्वागत एवं अभिनन्दन



Lost Temples · Segui

13 dicembre 2021 · 🌐



Today is the grand opening of the Kashi Viswanath corridor project.

As all eyes focus on Kashi today, & as we celebrate the grandeur of the Kashi corridor project, let us also not forget the broken temple behind the Gyanvapi mosque.

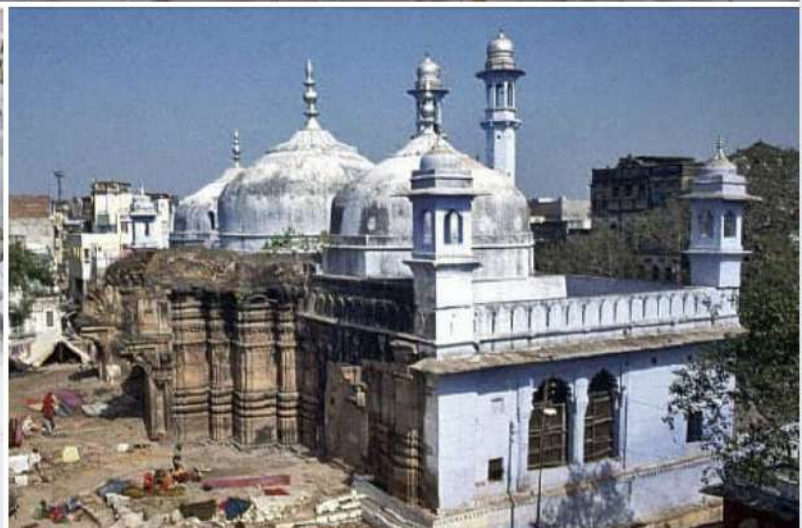
We have lost just too many people to retain & get back temple spaces that were rightfully ours.

Har Har Mahadev 🙏🚩

#TeamLostTemples

#hindutemple #incredibleindia #sanatandharma #hinduism #UttarPradesh

#KashiVishwanathCorridor #KashiVishwanathTemple



Post di Reclaim Temples Movement

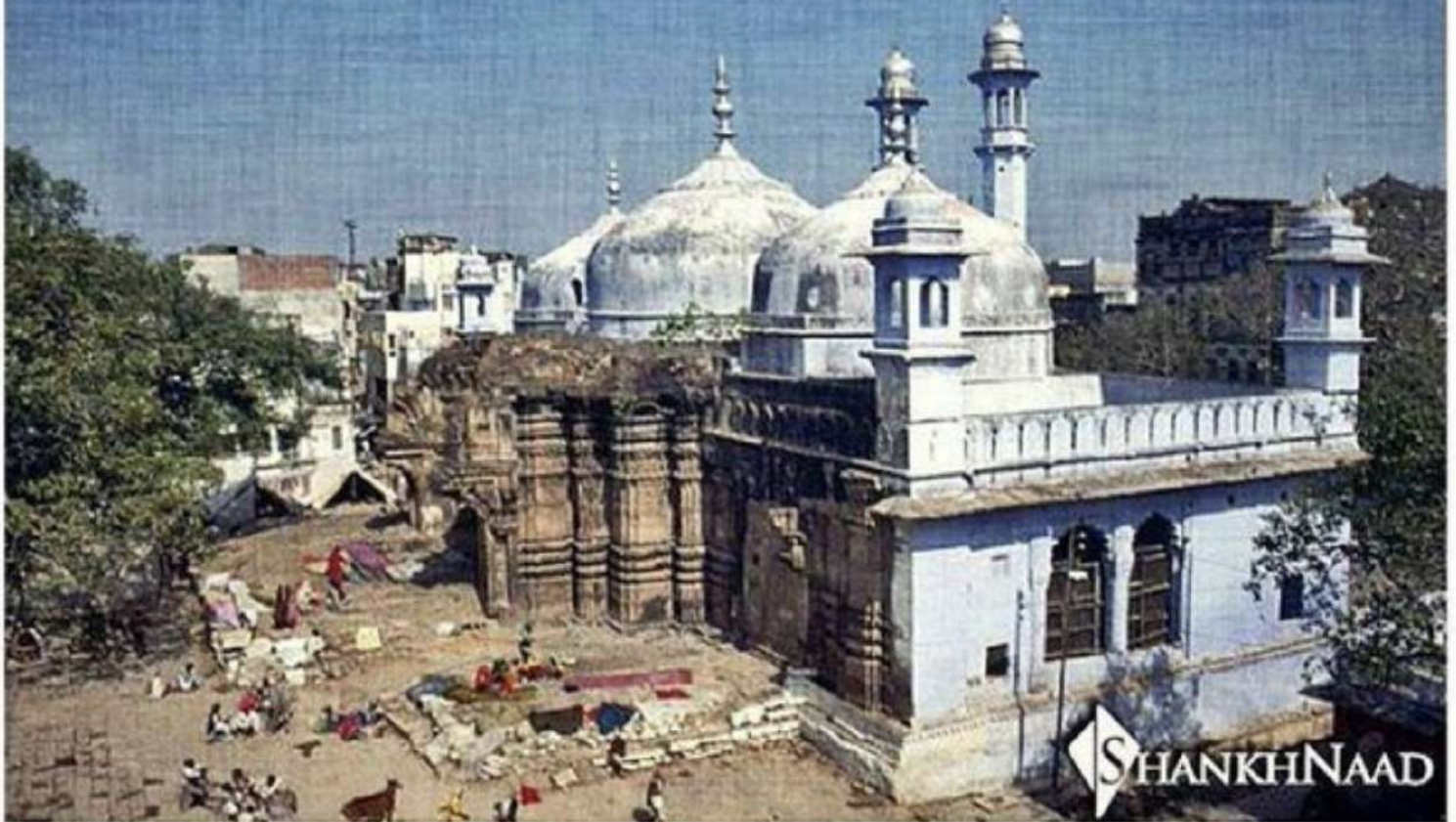


Reclaim Temples Movement · [Segui](#)

16 giugno 2018 · 🌐

Gyanvapi mosque built by Aurangzeb in 1664 after destroying the Kashi Vishwanath temple.
[#ReclaimTemples](#)

**Gyanvapi Mosque built by Aurangzeb
in 1664, after destroying original
Kashi Vishwanath temple on the site**



**India is the only country
which preserves the trespasses of
Invaders as Historic Monuments**

Post di Lost Temples



Why can't Muslims give it back if they're so secular!

1 a Mi piace Rispondi Modificato



Rami Dasari



1 a Mi piace Rispondi



Mansa Reddi

But why is there a mosque at such close proximity to an ancient Hindu temple

1 a Mi piace Rispondi



↳ Visualizza tutte le 7 risposte



En-Mansa Dakshin Vyas

It's not broken temple behind mosque
The mosque is built on the temple walls.....

1 a Mi piace Rispondi



↳ Visualizza tutte le 2 risposte



Ram Kumar Sharma

We will definitely takeover our Gyaanvapi our original Temple as Ram Janmabhoomi

1 a Mi piace Rispondi



Ramdas E Rao

An auspicious day for the whole of India.

1 a Mi piace Rispondi



💎 Fan più attivo

Yes...What you said is right.. at least let it start with Kashi temple Corridor first.. 🙏
Well designed.. ❤️

1 a Mi piace Rispondi



↳ Visualizza tutte le 2 risposte



Ramona Kanchi Khetta

There is a n eyesore left to be taken out

1 a Mi piace Rispondi



↳ Visualizza tutte le 2 risposte

Captions for the images of the article

**The afterlives of repatriation: Heritage, emancipation and violence in
Hindu nationalist India**

Vera Lazzaretti

Fig. 1: A view of the Kashi Vishvanath Dham and Corridor, October 2022, @Vera Lazzaretti

Fig. 2: The Gyanvapi mosque becomes visible after demolitions for the Corridor, March 2018, @Vera Lazzaretti

Fig. 3: A poster placed on the monumental gate of the Kashi Vishvanath temple and Gyanvapi mosque compound that invited pilgrims to Annapurna's pavilion, November 2022 @Vera Lazzaretti

Fig. 4, 5 e 6: Screenshots of Facebook/Instagram posts of the pages @LostTemples and @ReclaimTemplesMovement.