

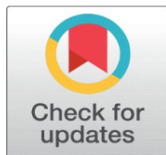
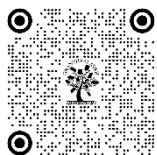


## REFLECTION OF BANARAS IN THE PAINTINGS OF JAYASRI BURMAN

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### ABSTRACT

Banaras is a holy and spiritual city that attracts people from all over the country even writers and artists. Many artists captured the beauty of Banaras in their art. Jayasri Burman is one of those artists whose paintings offer a glimpse into the soul of Banaras. Her art captures the essence of the city's rich traditions, its vibrant colors, and its spiritual fervor. She is known for her Indian mythological paintings. But when the author met her for research work, realized that she has a very close attachment to Banaras. Banaras always attracts her. The spirituality of the city and the faith of the people inspire her. Banaras, Vishwanath Goli, Kashi ghat, Jalyatra, etc. are the examples of Jayasri Burman's paintings where we can see the impact of Banaras, its culture, and mythology. This paper will explore the works of Jayasri Burman and delve deep into the world of Banaras. We will go through the cultural legacy of the city and experience its mysterious charm through the eyes of this renowned artist, from the ghats of the river Ganges to the alleys of the old city.

**Keywords:** Jayasri Burman, Paintings, Banaras, Culture, Mythology, Reflection

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Banaras is known as one of the ancient inhabited cities of the world. Banaras is known for its rich cultural heritage, mystical aura, and spiritual significance that has attracted people from all over the world for centuries. Varanasi, is different from any other city in the world where ash-clad monks meditate on the ghats of the river *Ganga*, countless shrines and temples scattered in winding paths, the echo of chanting, and the beautiful ringing of temple bells. The *Vedas* and *Puranas* of Hinduism, as well as Buddhist tales and Jain texts, attest to the importance of Varanasi. [Sharman \(n.d.\)](#)

The city is famous for its ghats, which are a series of steps leading down to the river Ganges. These ghats are not only the main draw for the city, but they also have a big spiritual significance for the residents. The holy river is where pilgrims gather

to bathe in hopes that it will atone for their sins and grant them salvation. Banaras is also known for its vibrant art scene, with many artists finding inspiration from the city's rich culture and heritage. One such artist is Jayasri Burman, who has been capturing the essence of Banaras through her paintings for several years. Her paintings are a beautiful portrayal of the soul of the city and its rich and diverse culture. She has displayed her artwork in various galleries and museums around the world, earning critical acclaim for her unique style and vision.

Jaysri Burman is a renowned Indian painter who has gained worldwide recognition for her unique artistic style and ability to capture the essence of Indian culture and its mythological universe in her paintings. The essence of her paintings derives their vibrance from the myriad rituals and festivals, and their alluring impressions. Burman is an artist who has been influenced by her many life experiences and the roots she has grown from. These guide her artistic process and serve as the cornerstone of her genuineness and honesty. [Burman \(n.d.\)](#) Jaysri Burman's work is heavily influenced by her upbringing in West Bengal, India, where she was surrounded by the region's vibrant colors and rich cultural traditions. [Nandy et al. \(2015\)](#) She comes from a family of artists and grew up surrounded by art. This early exposure to art and her deep love for mythology is evident in her works, which are a beautiful blend of traditional Indian art styles and contemporary techniques.

## 2. METHOD

The research is supported by primary data sources derived from in-depth interviews with the artist. The interview was conducted on 28/02/2023, at Jayasri Burman's Okhla Studio, in Delhi. This study included secondary data sources in addition to primary data sources, including books, journals, and online sources. In addition, it is based on the study and observation of artists' paintings.

## 3. THE ATTRACTIONS OF BANARAS

Banaras is not only famous for its ghats but it is also known for its unique culture. A mixture of all religions, heritage, and arts can be seen here. Banaras is called the cultural capital of India, because of its many names depicting each sector of diversity living here. Varanasi's Archaeology, Mythology, Geography, and History, its unique location along the Ganges, its journey through Indian history, and its search to discover is what makes it India's oldest living city. Many religions, places, and kinds of worship may be found here. Even ancient worship cults are still practiced. Additionally, the Buddha, the Jain *Tirthankars*, *Shaiva* and *Vaishnava* saints have a unique position in the city. The city is home to social centers, religious complexes, and ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups. [Sharman \(n.d.\)](#), [Figure 1](#)

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1** Festival of Banaras, Shiv Barat on Shiv Ratri, Bharat Milap, Nagnathaiya

Festivals like *Bharat Milap*, *Nag Nathiya*, *Shivratri*, *Ram-Leela*, etc. are famous in the world for being celebrated uniquely in Banaras where people take out a procession dressed up as mythological characters and complete the rituals. In a way, this festival keeps us connected to our culture and also makes us understand its mythological value. And somewhere it becomes a subject of inspiration for artists also. The city is also a center of attraction for its temples. Here, small and big temples can be seen somewhere along the old streets, where people express their devotion. The cremation at the ghats of *Manikarnika* and *Harishchandra* and the morning and evening *Ganga Aarti* on *Ghat* serves to illustrate the reality of life to the onlookers. Everybody experiences a range of emotions when they view the city of Banaras since it is filled with drama, life, and death. [Figure 2](#)

**Figure 2**

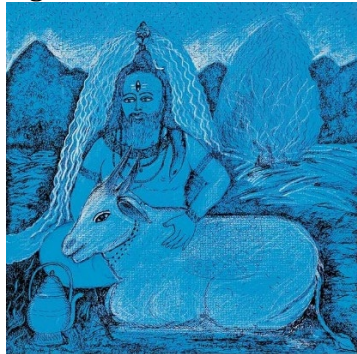


**Figure 2** Street of Banaras, Manikarnika Ghat (Cremation Site), Sandhya Arti at Ghat

#### 4. THE CONNECTION OF JAYASRI BURMAN WITH BANARAS

Jayasri Burman is known for her mythical paintings. The rituals she followed and the mythical stories and folklore she heard in her childhood, somewhere it influenced her art, due to which her inclination towards myths increased and she came to Banaras first in 2000 AD. After coming to Banaras, she got excited. She shared that one day when she visited *Ghat* by boat, that time she saw a cow sitting near *Shamshan Ghat*. To see that she felt that *Shiva* loved that cow. To see the river *Ganga*, the faith, burial site, she started to draw a picture ([Figure 3](#)).

**Figure 3**



**Figure 3** Shantwona, 12" x 12",

Source <https://www.artalivegallery.com/exhibitions/a-mythical-universe.html?viewworks=1>

She said about her painting *Vishwanath Gali* ([Figure 4](#)), when she was heading towards *Kashi Vishwanath* via rickshaw, she saw a voluptuous face woman who had

thick curly open hair, had a big *bindi* on her forehead and was selling *Shivlingams*. Jayasri had imagined her as Parvati. It is the combination of humanity and myths. Jayasri said, “A lady was Selling the *Shivlingams* and earning money for her family. Just like goddess *Parvati*. She is the mother world who looks and cares for us”. [Burman \(2023\)](#) In this way, myths and reality become one in her paintings. That she sees in the streets of Banaras.

**Figure 4**



**Figure 4** Bishwanath Gali, 2015, Watercolor, Pen & Ink on Paper,  
Source <https://jayasriburman.com/artwork.html#painting>

## 5. THE INSPIRATION BEHIND JAYASRI'S BANARAS PAINTING

Jayasri Burman gets inspiration from Banaras. It attracts Jayasri. Many things on the streets of Banaras inspire her greatly. In Banaras, the *Ganga*, the variety of vehicles, and the different people and their beliefs fascinated her. People engaged in everyday activities on the Ghats of Banaras can often be seen as mythical characters in her canvas. Like flower selling women, Saints, devotees, etc. [Figure 5](#)

**Figure 5**



**Figure 5** A Flower-Selling Woman on Ghat

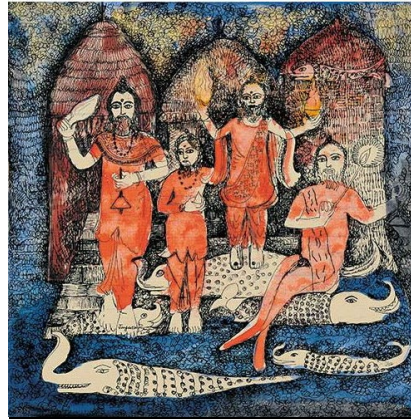
In her interview with the author at her Okhla studio on 28 February 2023, she said, that *Kashi* or Banaras is such a place that enchants us to forget everything and where we go into a myth. In some streets of Banaras, some people celebrate the festival by dressing up as *Rama-Laxman*, while in some streets we can see people feeding the cows and someone playing with snakes. Anywhere we looked, we saw stories. [Burman \(2023\)](#), [Figure 6](#)

**Figure 6****Figure 6** Jalpari Boat on Banaras Ghat

She considers Banaras, where the *Ganga* runs through the historic pilgrimage center of Varanasi, myths and memories as it travels, overflowing during monsoon season and shrinking to a trickle throughout summer. The gods and humans who live at the ghats and temples on its banks draw the pious from sunrise to dusk. The temple bells that summon the faithful to prayer have an unending chant-like sound. The faithful take daily baths in the *Ganga* River because they think that doing so will purify their bodies and souls of all their sins. In the city sacred to Hindus, the fine *Banarasi sarees* have been woven by Muslim weavers for generations. As they work on their looms, creating gossamer gauzy fabrics, the rest of the holy town goes about its work. *Kirtans* are sung on the 88 ghats in celebration of the gods and the burned bodies of those seeking a place in heaven after death. Through the songs, vendor's calls, the ringing of bells, the murmur of prayers, life goes on and by the banks, a collage of colorful activities unfold, much like a tableau, as the bereaved tonsured heads bowed take a dip in the river, children splash about in gay abandon, while others just sit around mesmerized by the magic of Varanasi. [Mitter et al. \(n.d.\)](#)

After visiting Banaras her vision of mythology got more flourished. *Shiv-Parvati, Lakshmi-Narayan, Ganga* there are so many stories that were inspired by Banaras. Observing the river *Ganga* during her visit to Banaras served as the inspiration for her "River of Faith" series.

## 6. THE REFLECTION OF BANARAS IN JAYASRI'S PAINTING

**Figure 7****Figure 7** Aaroti, Watercolor, Pen and Ink on Board, 12"x12",

Source <https://www.artalivegallery.com/exhibitions/a-mythical-universe.html?viewworks=1>

When the author analyzes the paintings, the author notices that there are many elements of Banaras visible in her paintings. The boats, flags, cows, flower-selling women, temples, *sadhus*, and *Ghats*, as well as the mythical elements, rituals, and stories of Banaras, become alive in her paintings. Jayasri realized the continuous stream of *Ganga*, its purity and playfulness only after coming to Banaras. Due to this, later on, she created innumerable painting series related to rivers. Burman (n.d.) She has brought alive the mythological beauty of the *Ganga* in her paintings. She envisioned *Ganga* as a liberated woman as well as a mother who is free from all attachments for the good of her children. She is a compassionate mother and is pure even after absorbing all the impurities in herself. She has tried to display the magnificence and divinity of *Ganga Aarti* performed in Banaras through her selected colors. In *Sandhya Aarti*, the scene similar to yellow golden rays appearing at the time of sunset gives a spiritual feeling whose essence is also seen in her paintings.

#### Figure 7

Banaras is a religious place where many deities, symbols, and beliefs of many religions have emerged and found shelter. Banaras is also known as the name of *Kashi*. "According to *Puranas*, *Kashi* is the favorite place of *Shiva*. *Shiva* created *Kashi* and after that, he never wanted to leave it. Here, not only *Shiva*, according to a legend, all the gods and goddesses who used to come to *Kashi* used to have a desire to stay in *Kashi*." Nirupam (2014) It is not only *Shiva* but the temples of many other gods and goddesses like *Hanuman*, *Ganesh*, etc. are found on the streets and squares. Jayasri sees *Shiva Parvati* or *Lakshmi Narayan* in pairs of devotees who come here to worship. She presents the characters in her paintings, in which many mythological characters like *Shiva*, *Parvati*, *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati*, *Hanuman*, *Ganesh*, and *Kartikeya* come alive on her canvas by presenting a beautiful composition as a family. We can see in the *Kashi Ghat* painting in the background *Ganga* has been shown, In the front part all deities *Shiva Parvati*, *Ganesh*, 7 headed *Sheshnag*, *Lakshmi*, *Narayana*, *Brahma*, *Saraswati*, *Kartikey*, *Hanuman* are shown as hybrids form the lower part of deities are shown as a swan that is jayasri's imagination. In the middle of all deities, a flower-selling woman is depicted. Which is often seen in Banaras. In this painting, warm and cool color tones balance the painting. Give a balancing and divine impact. (Figure 8)

#### Figure 8



Figure 8 Kashi Ghat, 36"x48", Watercolor Pen & Ink on Board

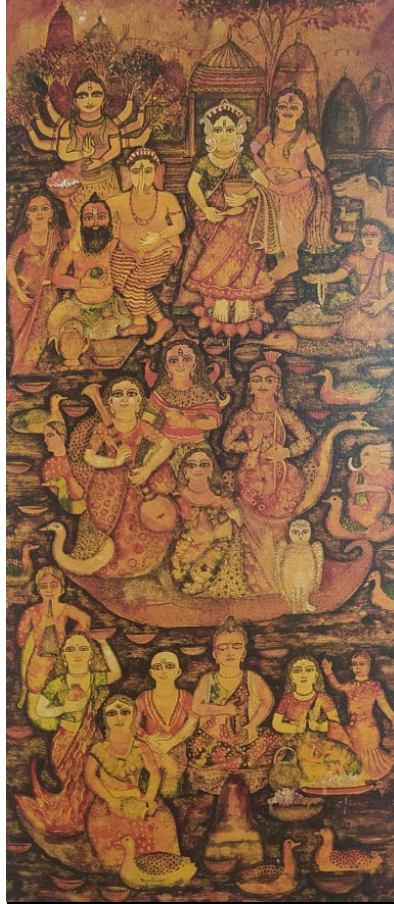
Source <https://www.artalivegallery.com/exhibitions/a-mythical-universe.html?viewworks=1>

In the painting *Ghat* (Figure 9) we can see the floating swan and half-human figures, just like the *Jalpari* boat. They are representing *Shiva*, *Parvati*, and *Nandi*. In the background ghat, temples, flags, and boats are seen.

**Figure 9****Figure 9** Ghat, 10" x 48", Pen & Ink on Board

Source <https://www.artalivegallery.com/exhibitions/a-mythical-universe.html?viewworks=1>

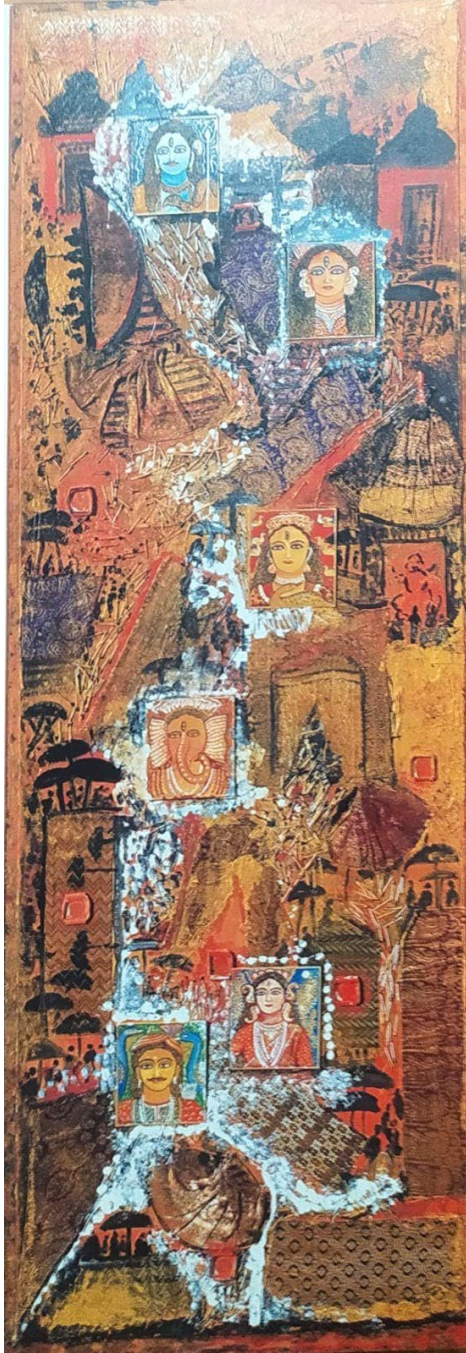
Deeply imbued with the spirit of Banaras, Jayasri clicked a typical 'selfie' on the *ghats* along the banks of the *Ganga*. But in the 'selfie' there are figures we recognize from memory: the Kashi *Vishwanath* temple floats in the distance, and we see *Shiva*, *Parvati*, and *Ganesha* on the ghat. As well as a flower selling women also depicted. Apart from this, Lakshmi is on a boat with her attendants and owls. In the foreground, monks make offerings to the *Shiva-linga*, and devotee women are shown to worship and express their faith in God. The *Shehnai*-playing man and dancing woman figure, a representation of Banaras' traditional art, can be seen behind them. Through all this the spiritual spirit of Banaras influences everyone. Nandy et al. (2015), (Figure 10)

**Figure 10****Figure 10** Jalyatra, Watercolor, Pen and Ink on Arch Paper, 84"x36"

Source Artist Collection

By utilizing various types of textures, materials, and an ochre color scheme, she produces an old rustic style that evokes the ancient vibe of the city. The temples and ghats in the background are exquisitely designed. The prints from a *Banarasi saree* are also visible; they were applied directly to the board. She has used a matchbox and stick, and the vermillion (*Sinduri*) colour here. It creates the impression of a temple that we can get from any old Varanasi temple. *Shiva, Parvati, Lakshmi, Ganesh, Saraswati, and Kartikey's* portraits are pasted on the front. It illustrates how exquisitely *Shiva* and his family resided in *Kashi*. (Figure 11)

**Figure 11**



**Figure 11** Banaras, Mixed Media on Board, 73"x23"  
Source Artist Collection



She also captured the daily life movement of Banaras in her sketches. (Figure 12) Her art express her view of Banaras. Through her paintings we may explore the culturure and mythical universe of Banaras.

**Figure 12**



**Figure 12** Sketch of Banaras, Pen, and Ink on Paper

**Source** Artist Collection

## 7. CONCLUSION

Beginning with *Ganga Aarti* at sunrise and ending with *Sandhya Aarti*, Banaras, a city full of grand ghats situated on the banks of the Ganges, is not only a city of religion and salvation but has also been a place of inspiration for artists. Many wonderful subjects are found while walking in every street of Banaras. Jayasri has tried to capture not only the beauty of Banaras but also its soul in her paintings. She has presented the abstract and imaginative spirit of Banaras in a concrete form. By connecting the city of *Shiva, Kashi* full of mythology with her imagination, she has created a divine feeling through a beautiful combination of reality and myth. She captured Banara's small things the devotion of its people, and the harmony of different cultures that coexist in Banaras and displayed them in a unique form in her paintings. Her artwork beautifully captures the essence of this ancient city, its vibrant culture, and its people. Through her paintings, we can experience the magic of Banaras and feel a deep connection to its soul.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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