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Book Author(s): JENNY HUBERMAN

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# PART 1

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## Introductions



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## Children, Tourists, and Locals

Our lives are a stream of encounters with other human beings. Many of these encounters fade into the background of everyday life, demanding little of our attention or concern and bearing little consequence. Others, however, press themselves upon us like an itch that requires constant scratching. We return to them again and again, seeking to decipher their structures, outcomes, and significance. In so doing, we often come to suspect that the immediacy of human encounters, even when face-to-face, is in fact an illusion, and that between ourselves and others, myriad forces and relations are at work. Yet, what are they? What kind of imagination does it require to grasp their articulations?

These were the kinds of questions that initially led me to study anthropology, and at the most general level, they are the ones that animate this book. This book provides an ethnographic study of encounters between Western tourists and some of the children who worked as unlicensed peddlers and guides along the riverfront of Banaras between the years 2000 and 2001. Specifically, it focuses on the lower-class and lower-caste children who worked near the city's "Main Ghat," Dasashwamedh. From expressions of adoration and amusement, to pity, anger, or disgust, tourists' responses to the children were rarely neutral. Similarly, people in Banaras also had strong reactions to the children, variously casting them as admirable, self-sacrificing youths or as disruptive deviants. The aim of this book is to examine why these children elicited such powerful reactions from travelers and locals in their community, while also exploring how the children themselves experienced their work and rendered it meaningful. In the pages that follow, I demonstrate how the children emerged as polyvalent symbols that enabled tourists and locals to express and experience a range of desires and concerns. Yet I also show how the children played upon adult fantasies and fears, thereby actively shaping the outcome of these encounters.

Traveling between anthropological studies of childhood, tourism, consumption, and exchange, I use this particular case study to address the following questions: How do children come to be valued and devalued within the global sphere? Why do children so frequently emerge as sources of anxiety and debate? What role do children play in configuring people's experience of socioeconomic change? How do children actively navigate their lives? What might it take to more effectively inscribe their efforts within the anthropological record? How and why have children increasingly become objects of the tourist gaze? And finally, what can these encounters teach us more generally about the highly mediated and often ambivalent nature of human interaction? How are we to trace and theorize the complicated interplay of intimate and social realities?

### **The Anthropology of Childhood**

Not surprisingly, many of these questions have been pursued within the growing literature on the anthropology of childhood. One of my goals, therefore, is to further these efforts. As an international tourist destination, the riverfront of Banaras provides a very compelling site for exploring the multiple and often conflicting ways that children come to be defined and valued within the global sphere. Indeed, the reactions that Western tourists exhibited toward the children are interesting, in part, precisely because they put these differences on display. Oscillating between "premodern" and "postmodern" conceptions of the child as a "miniature adult" (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998, 13), and Romantic conceptions of the child as a "noble savage" (James, Jenks, and Prout 1998, 13–15), tourists variously praised the children for their savvy business sense; scorned them for their apparent corruption; indulged them for their playfulness and innocence; or alternatively, pitied them as neglected "street kids." What are we to make of these varied yet patterned reactions?

As will be seen, tourists' reactions to the children on the riverfront were shaped by multiple determinations. They were influenced by varying discourses on children and childhood, by the tropes and themes through which tourists came to know India, by the ways that tourist actively read and interpreted the space of the ghats and, of course, by children themselves. However, I also propose that their reactions were reflective of unconscious defense mechanisms (Klein [1955] 1987, 1975) that enabled tourists to better cope with the anxieties and guilt that the children and the surrounding environment so often evoked in them. Drawing upon concepts from psychoanalytic theory, I show how processes of splitting, idealization, and denial variously led tourists to embrace these youngsters as "innocent children" or, alternatively, castigate them as "little adults masquerading in kids' bodies." This leads me to conclude that the classification of children should not be reduced to an exclusively social or

cultural phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> Psychodynamics also animate these processes and by attending to them in this analysis, I hope to deepen our understanding of the complex ways that children are affirmed and denied in different contexts.

The different ways that tourists and locals classified the children also affected the way they transacted with them. In many instances, the sale or refusal of postcards and souvenirs, or alternatively, the granting or withholding of a mother's praise and affection, was predicated upon a child's ability to satisfy adult demands for "innocent" or "obedient" subjects. And yet, while access to resources frequently involved conforming to adults' expectations, the children were also capable of carving out spaces where they could exercise some degree of power and control (James, Jenks, and Prout 1998, 87).<sup>2</sup>

This book traces how the children creatively engaged the institutions, structures, and people that shaped their everyday lives, as well as how they were constrained by them. Over the last few decades, there has been a sustained attempt within anthropology to reclaim children's perspectives and agency, and this study certainly contributes to such efforts. It does so in part, however, by questioning the analytic utility of concepts such as "children's culture."<sup>3</sup> Instead of suggesting that children occupy an autonomous realm of meanings and practices, insulated from adult society (Opie and Opie 1969, 1977), my goal is to show how the children on the riverfront came to sequester spaces and produce meanings within the larger ambit of social, cultural, and economic relations that structured this transnational contact zone.

### Tourism and the Turn Inward

As tourism has emerged as a global industry, children in many parts of the world have been drawn into socioeconomic relations and spaces that are increasingly transnational in nature. Even if we have not had the experience ourselves, many of us know friends or family who have come back from their vacations abroad with animated tales and endless photographs of the children whom they encountered on their travels. Often, these tales highlight a particular child who "made the trip so memorable!" In other cases, we hear "horror stories" about the "dreadful" or "pestering kids who just wouldn't leave us alone!" And yet, despite their prominence in tourist narratives and economies, very little attention has been paid to the role children play in the global tourism industry. No one has asked why children so frequently become objects of "the tourist gaze" (Urry 1990).<sup>4</sup>

Although I pursue this question, I also argue that many of the tourists in this study wanted much more than just to gaze at these children. Many tourists sought to develop personal connections with the children, which in turn, would provide them with a more "authentic" or "extraordinary" experience of India.

The desire for authenticity has been widely noted and debated with the literature on tourism and tourist motivations.<sup>5</sup> Some scholars have theorized tourists' preoccupation with authenticity as a response to the alienating conditions of modern social life. As Dean MacCannell has argued, modern-day tourists are "contemporary pilgrims," "seeking authenticity in other 'times' and other 'places' away from that person's everyday life" (MacCannell 1976, 147). Others have suggested that the search for the authentic has more to do with a desire for distinction, as it provides the discerning traveler with a highly valued form of cultural capital that reflects his or her good taste (Edensor 1998; Tucker 1997).<sup>6</sup>

Both of these motivations influenced tourists' attempts to establish personal connections with the children on the riverfront. However, these connections also took on significance because they made tourists feel as though they were having more *intimate* experiences. The desire to be seen and recognized as unique people or, as tourists frequently put it, as "more than walking dollar signs" was, in many cases, a central part of tourists' quests. Therefore, paradoxical as it may seem, in this book I propose that some tourists travel halfway around the world not necessarily to discover an authentic Other, but rather to have the Other discover and acknowledge them. That is, within such encounters, it is often the tourist's self that is pursued and cathected as the ultimate object of desire.<sup>7</sup>

What does this reorientation in both the mode and object of touristic consumption suggest about the changing nature of travel experiences, as well as the desires and subjectivities of twenty-first-century leisure-class subjects?<sup>8</sup> Coining the concept of *the touristic turn inward*, I theorize tourists' desires for personal relationships and recognition as a psychosocial response to the ongoing commodification of places and peoples that has accompanied the expansion of the global tourism industry and the spread of global capitalism more generally. The touristic turn inward not only represents another manifestation of the increasingly flexible nature of commodity production and consumption within the context of late capitalism (Frank 2002; Harvey 1990; Urry 1990, 1995). It also suggests that contemporary leisure-class subjects may be driven more by narcissistic needs than by modernist longings to overcome a sense of alienation (Lasch 1978; Sennett 1976, 1998).

### **Consumption, Exchange, and the Pursuit of Value**

If it was not just postcards and souvenirs but rather personal relationships and recognition that constituted one of the central objects of consumption for many Western tourists, then how exactly were these "objects" produced, consumed, and valued? What happens when the object of consumption is not a "sign object" that already exists within a code of differences, ready to be "appropriated" by

the consumer—as the theorist Jean Baudrillard has famously argued (1981, 64–65)—but is, rather, an intangible relationship or experience that is produced through the ongoing interactions and (mis)interpretations of human beings? How do we theorize the forms of production, consumption, exchange, and value that emerged in this less rationalized, informal economy? Finally, how and why did some tourists in Banaras experience this informal economy as a space of intimacy where they felt they could transcend their status as mere tourists or “walking dollar signs,” while others regarded it as a threatening space in which the apparent lack of rules and regulations filled them with anxiety and recurring suspicions that they were being taken advantage of?

Although we tend to feel rather awkward about putting children and sex in conversation with each other, one of the areas that I turn to for insights into these matters includes the research that has been done on female adult entertainers and sex workers (Allison 1994; Bernstein 2007; Brennan 2004; Frank 2002). Anthropologists and sociologists have raised provocative questions about the object of consumption in these service industries. Moreover, they have provided us with very rich ethnographic accounts of the performative dimensions that enable female workers to fulfill their male clients' desires for erotic experiences, companionship, authenticity, self-aggrandizement, and even recognition. In drawing upon their work, therefore, I consider how these encounters on the riverfront also involved the articulation of material and libidinal economies, and I suggest that in many cases, the children did engage in particular forms of “emotional labor” (Hochschild 1983).

This is also to say that in their attempts to earn money from foreign tourists, many of the children learned to intuit tourists' desires, and modify their sales strategies and presentations of self accordingly. By paying close attention to these efforts, and by exploring the various ways that tourists responded, I seek to emphasize the way that markets and market transactions unfold as “lived experiences.” Arguing for the need to “reaffirm the significance of place” (and I would emphasize performance) in economic life, Daniel Cook reminds us that “something irreducible occurs in the public, face-to-face encounters of buyers and sellers, of observers and participants, in the terrestrial market” (Cook 2008, 2).<sup>9</sup> As he suggests, “It is the tensions pertaining to the comingling of economic exchange value with other values like sentiment, love, care and belonging” that make these transactions so experientially fraught, and so analytically interesting (3). This book contributes to these efforts to take place and performance seriously while also exploring the articulations between different registers of value.

For instance, the children's pursuit of profit was far from an unbridled affair. Their participation in this economy was primarily shaped by dominant gender norms and expectations. Whereas girls were more or less limited to



selling low-priced items on the riverfront, where their behaviors and activities could be monitored by kinsmen and neighbors, boys were free to wander about the city and engage in the more lucrative enterprise of guiding and commission work. This informal economy was also structured by long-standing cultural expectations regarding everyone's "right to earn." I explore how the children relied on a set of informal rules, as well as an informal division of labor, to mitigate excessive competition. Although the rules were not always adhered to in practice, in principle at least, this informal economy was supposed to operate as a "moral economy" predicated upon everyone's right to subsistence (Scott 1976; Thompson 1971). Finally, by participating in this informal economy, and by regulating their behavior in accordance with different social norms and expectations, the children ultimately sought to produce *themselves* as valued and respected subjects. It is precisely by attending to these efforts that this book contributes to larger attempts to foreground the experiences and perspectives of children within the anthropological record.

### **The Ambivalence of Modernity**

Despite their varying efforts to perpetuate a moral economy, people in Dasashwamedh often suggested that the children, particularly the boys, were engaged in *immoral* activities. In fact, when I first began telling people in Dasashwamedh that I was doing research for a book about encounters between Western tourists and the children on the riverfront, I received puzzled, and often disappointed, reactions. There were several permutations, but the usual response ran along the lines of: "You should be writing about our priests, our religious practices, our sacred traditions! Why do you want to spend your time with those hippies and uneducated children who just cheat people?" Instead of contributing to the greater glory of the city, as other notable anthropologists had done (Alter 1992; Kumar 1988; Parry 1994), it seemed that I would be broaching a topic that might actually increase its infamy. "No one will want to come here if you tell everyone about the way these children cheat tourists!"

Although these warnings and criticisms were a bit discouraging, as I listened to people in Dasashwamedh talk about the children who worked on the riverfront, I became increasingly convinced that I was indeed on to something. Some spoke bitterly about how the children were being corrupted by their involvement in the foreign tourist economy, whereas others seemed quite hopeful that their access to foreign wealth would make new opportunities possible. Over time, I also came to realize that the ambivalent reactions that locals had to the children were also symptomatic of a more pervasive feeling tone and climate of opinion that permeated the city of Banaras during the time of my fieldwork. In newspapers, films, political debates, and in everyday conversations,

people were struggling to come to terms with some of the larger, not yet fully metabolized, changes brought on by Indian modernity and the joint forces of globalization and economic liberalization that emerged with renewed strength in the 1980s. Whereas some saw these developments as cause for celebration, many others pointed to a list of widespread social ills which, rightly or wrongly, were attributed to India's growing involvement with things foreign and things new: rapacious consumerism, Westernization, the unceasing pursuit of money and luxury, a seemingly pathological individualism, and an overall loss of traditional values.

Such concerns were often voiced in rather abstract or rhetorical terms, but for people in the neighborhood of Dasashwamedh, they also found more concrete expression in narratives about the boys who worked with Western tourists. The boys were frequently criticized for their corrupt and wayward behavior. In contrast, the girls who worked in this informal economy often elicited admiration and praise. By subordinating their behavior and desires to traditional gender norms and expectations, they proved themselves to be virtuous daughters and provided people with the hope that although life might be changing, it was not changing too much. Thus, as will be seen, gender not only played a decisive role in shaping the children's experiences but it also influenced how they emerged as particular kinds of evocative symbols for locals in the city.

### The City and Riverfront

As is the case with most iconic places, it is virtually impossible to describe the city of Banaras, and India more generally, without perpetuating a cliché, particularly an Orientalist one.<sup>10</sup> The adjectives and imagery usually associated with this "ancient," "sacred," "bustling," "chaotic," "crowded," "exhilarating," "overwhelming," "temple-topped," "spirit-seeking-tourist," and "pilgrimage" town are both exhausted and inadequate. And yet, admittedly, in some cases, they still seem appropriate for trying to provide the unfamiliar reader with at least a preliminary idea of the scenes and sensations that have both repelled and attracted Western visitors to Banaras over the years. Undoubtedly, this is one reason why, despite being tired, and criticized, clichés persist.

Stretched along the gently curving banks of the Ganga or Ganges River, the city of Banaras, also known as Kashi and Varanasi, is located in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. It has a population of approximately 1.27 million people (Singh, Dar, and Pravin 2001). Dating back to the sixth century BC, it is one of the oldest living cities in the world and one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Hindus (Eck 1983, 5). Every year, millions of pilgrims arrive in the city to visit its sacred temples and crossing points (*tirthas*); to bathe and cleanse themselves in the purifying waters of the holy Ganga; to die and be cremated,

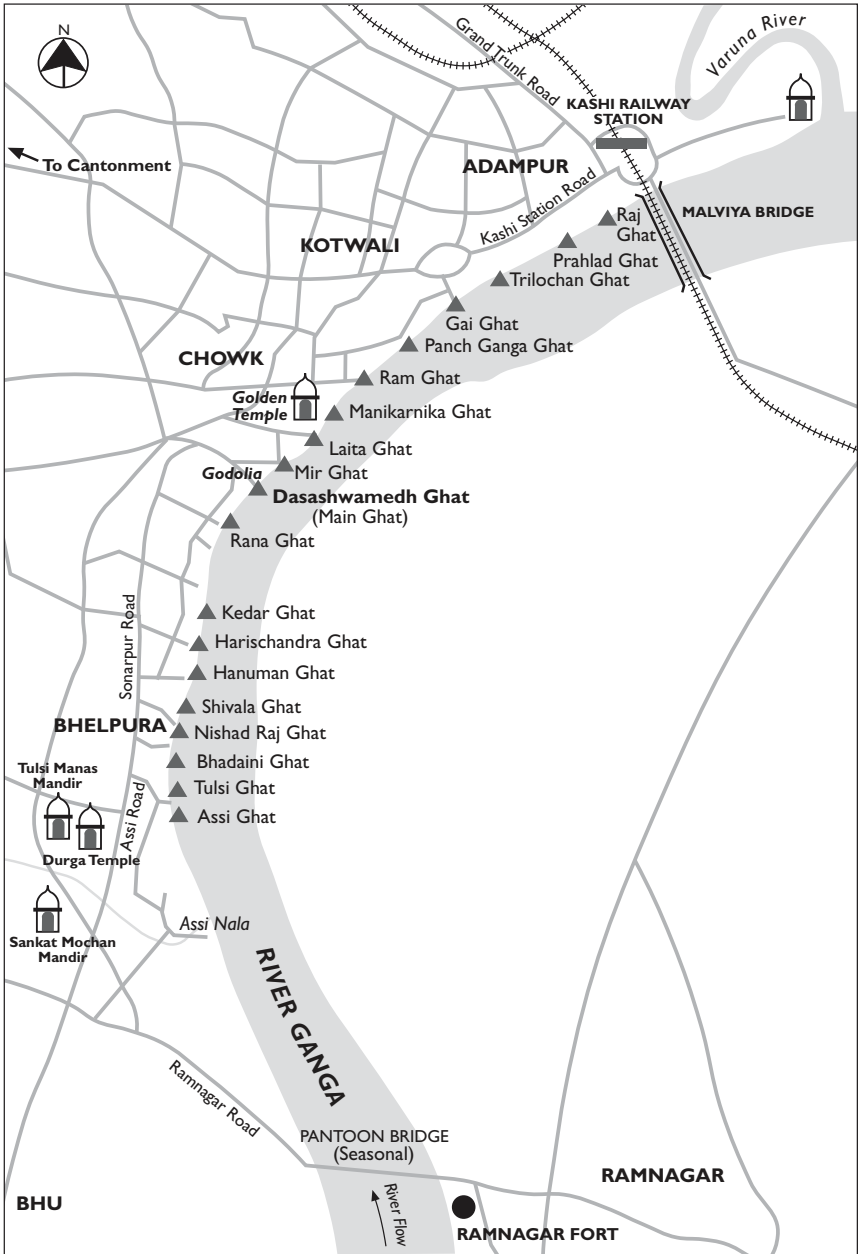
or to dispose of their dead. Many Hindus still believe that death in Banaras, known also as the sacred city of Kashi, brings liberation (*moksha*) from the cycle of rebirth. As Jonathan Parry has shown in his brilliant ethnography *Death in Banaras*, this has made both pilgrimage and death booming industries there. A cadre of ritual specialists make their living from servicing the mortuary needs of the city's residents and pilgrims alike (Parry 1994).

The religious and ritual significance of the riverfront is therefore its most celebrated and often studied feature.<sup>11</sup> In this book, however, I explore the riverfront of Banaras as an iconic site within the international tourist imaginary. The riverfront of Banaras graces innumerable travel brochures, postcards, and guidebooks of India. Before most visitors ever arrive, they are familiar with the colorful façades of buildings and the contiguous chain of large stone landings or steps known as *ghats* that stretch almost four kilometers along the river's edge. There are over seventy bathing ghats along the riverfront, each with its own history and ambiance. At the northern end of the city, where the Malviya Bridge arches across the horizon, one finds few of the tourist accommodations and trappings that service the steady stream of itinerant backpackers near Dasashwamedh. Alternatively, at the southern end of the riverfront, Assi Ghat and the neighborhood surrounding it have emerged as popular stomping grounds for long-term "scholarly tourists."

### ***Dasashwamedh Ghat***

One could write a fascinating book about the tourist scene in Assi, but from my perspective, the most interesting tourist encounters occurred at Dasashwamedh Ghat. As Assa Doron has noted in his study of the boatmen of Banaras, "it is somewhat misleading to speak of Dasashwamedh ghat as one ghat, as its territory actually consists of several distinct ghats . . . Shitla; Dasashwamedh; Prayag; and Prachin Dasashwamedh" (Doron 2008, 100). For tourists as well as many locals, however, this general territory is usually referred to as Dasashwamedh or, alternatively, as the Main Ghat.

Located beneath the Godolia shopping bazaar, Dasashwamedh has long been a center of ritual and commercial activity, as well as a focal point on the Western tourist itinerary. Aside from being one of the key tirthas, or crossing points, that Hindu pilgrims are supposed to visit, more recently the ghat has become host to an evening ritual ceremony (*puja*), which has emerged as another major attraction for Western tourists and residents alike. It is also one of the favored places for tourists to arrange boat rides down the river, and it is one of the only ghats in the city that is accessible by car—a feature that has rendered the ghat a popular place for staging cultural programs. Most of the time, the main road leading to the ghat is closed to automobile traffic, and visitors must either make their way through the congested bazaar on foot or, as I most often did, approach the ghat by walking along the riverfront.



The riverfront of Banaras.

Map by Michael T. Southern.

### *Children and Locals*

Over several months of almost daily visits to the ghat during my initial stay as a language student, I came to know many of the children and adults who worked and played at Dasashwamedh, and who, subsequently, became integral to my research. Most of the people I knew belonged to the Mallah or boatman caste and lived in the nearby neighborhood *mohalla* of Manmandir. Located just a few minutes' walk away from the ghat, Manmandir is characteristic of most neighborhoods in the "old city." The narrow multistoried buildings seem close enough to touch each other, and are arranged around a winding maze of cobbled, labyrinthine lanes called *galis*. The neighborhoods in the old city stand in stark contrast to the more recent, upscale residential "colonies," where broad boulevards and sprawling bungalows have become the fashion of the day. In Manmandir, it was quite common for families with two, three, and even four children to share a single-room dwelling that was either rented or allocated to them as part of an extended family home.

The people whom I came to know at Dasashwamedh were mostly from low-caste, uneducated, poor families. Although these were not the only terms in which they defined themselves, they were central ones, and they were usually offered to me as explanations for why their lives were difficult: "We are low people" (*ham nich log hain*). "We are poor people." "We are uneducated" (*ham pardhey likhey nahin hain*). "What shall we do?" (*ham kya karey*)? Most of the men on the ghat made their living by taking pilgrims and tourists out for boat rides on the river. Those who owned their own boats were able to earn more than those who worked for others. Yet, aside from a few successful boatmen who had established long-term relations with upscale hotels from the Cantonment area or with pilgrimage companies, most of the men complained that their earnings were meager, totaling little more than thirty or forty dollars a month. Some of the women I came to know tried to compensate for their husbands' limited incomes by selling garlands to pilgrims or by working as domestic servants in middle-class homes. However, working outside of the home also carried a stigma that for some was unbearable, no matter what the financial advantages might be.

The boys and girls who worked on the ghat, who became the focus of my research, were mostly between the ages of seven and fourteen. During the tourist season, from early October through late April, there were usually between twenty and thirty children working in the area, selling small floating lamps (*diyās*), postcards, boxes of colored powders, and souvenirs. Boys also offered their guiding services to tourists. Although boys usually referred to themselves as "guides" rather than commission agents (*dalals*), most of their earnings came from commissions they received by delivering tourists to various shops, restaurants, or hotels in the area.

## The Tourists

Although the children did earn money from the organized tour groups that visited Dasashwamedh, I do not attend to these interactions or these tourists in this book. When tourists came with a group, they were usually ushered onto the ghat under the careful supervision of a tour leader and then quickly loaded onto a boat to view the riverfront from a more scenic and safe distance. As such, their interactions with the children were very limited, and from my perspective, they were of far less interest. The tourists whom I focused on actually spent time at Dasashwamedh and, whether they wanted to or not, found themselves interacting with the children who worked there. Most of these tourists were self-proclaimed “backpackers” or “independent travelers” who were between twenty and thirty-five years old. They came from America, Australia, Europe, and Israel, and their stays in the city usually ranged from a couple of days to one or two weeks.<sup>12</sup>

Within the last few decades, there have been numerous studies of backpackers.<sup>13</sup> Surveying this literature, Darya Maoz writes:

The studies generally define backpackers as self-organized pleasure tourists on a prolonged multiple-destination journey with a flexible itinerary. They are often keen to experience the local lifestyles, attempt to ‘look local,’ and cite ‘meeting other people’ as a key motivation. Their recreational activities are likely to focus around nature, culture, or adventure. This pattern is consonant with the tendency of backpackers to travel more widely than other tourists, seeking unusual routes. Many travel under a strictly controlled budget, often due to the relatively long duration of their journey. They are described as people who search for authentic experiences, a search based on exclusion of other tourists. (Maoz 2007, 123)

Maoz acknowledges that these studies have played a useful role in delineating backpackers from other kinds of tourists. However, like other scholars, she suggests that more attention needs to be paid to the “heterogeneity in the backpacking phenomenon” and how it “is manifested in terms of nationality, purpose, motivation, organization of the trip, age, gender and lifecycle status” (2007, 124).<sup>14</sup> Clearly, this is an important point and one that may seem to be sidestepped in this text, for although I am very aware that these different factors influenced tourists’ experiences and behaviors, in this book, I do often speak as though I were referencing a homogenous group. By invoking the terms “Western tourist,” “Western traveler,” and “Western backpacker” I inevitably open myself up to charges of essentialism. And yet, it is a critique I am willing to accept, for what ultimately interested me and what provides the departure point for this analysis was precisely the fact that, in spite of their

different backgrounds, cultural upbringings, motivations, and stages in the life cycle, tourists' reactions to the children who worked along the riverfront frequently followed a set of patterns. There was, as I have already noted, a shared repertoire of responses, ranging from feelings of adoration to expressions of outrage, and the terms in which tourists described the children were often very similar. Understanding why this was so is one of the main goals of this book.

### **Methods, Data, and Positioning**

When I returned to Banaras in January of 2000 to officially begin my fieldwork, I rented three rooms on the second floor of a low-budget guest house in Dasashwamedh. One served as my bedroom, another was used as an office, and the third room was designated for cooking and entertaining. Although named after the goddess of wealth, my accommodations at the Laxmi were far from luxurious. Still, there were important benefits to living there. First, the Laxmi was conveniently located just a minute's walk away from the ghat and next to one of the city's central markets. Second, considering the fact that most of the families I knew in Dasashwamedh shared a very small, single-room dwelling, it would not have been feasible for me to move in with a family. The Laxmi, therefore, seemed like a good alternative because it provided me with the space to do my work while simultaneously granting me access to the daily round of activities and goings-on in the neighborhood. It was also one of the few guest houses in the neighborhood that catered to both Western and Indian visitors, which was important to me for both practical and principled reasons. Premji, the owner of the guest house, was a friend and mentor to many of the children and young men who became my closest friends and informants during the time of my fieldwork. Like other guest house owners, he relied upon these young guides to bring him customers. However, unlike most others, Premji did permit these boys to visit their customers in the guest house and dine with them on the rooftop restaurant. Moreover, from the outset, he also agreed that the children would be allowed to visit me whenever they desired, and, as the months passed, my rooms at the Laxmi became a familiar hangout for some of the children and older guides who worked at Dasashwamedh. Finally, the Laxmi also provided me with a place to interview tourists without too much disruption. There were many occasions when I felt that my office had morphed into a therapeutic space, where tourists seized the opportunity to share their fears and fantasies about traveling in India.

By staying at the Laxmi, therefore, I was able to move between the lives and experiences of the children, tourists, and locals with relative ease. However, methodological challenges did come with trying to position myself between



a diverse group of itinerant Western tourists, on the one hand, and a diverse group of Dasashwamedh residents, on the other. First, I was confronted with the fact that the tourists were not people I could come to know intimately through the traditional anthropological methods of prolonged participation observation and complete immersion in their everyday lives and environments. However, if by intimacy we mean a relationship where people disclose or share usually private parts of the self with others, then prolonged periods of time and everyday familiarity are not necessarily the criteria for its production. Indeed, in many cases I felt that the tourists whom I met and interviewed were more forthcoming with their feelings precisely because of their itinerant and “liminal” status.

Situating myself vis-à-vis people in Dasashwamedh involved a different set of challenges. These were people whom I came to know over a prolonged period of time and through daily interactions. I spent a good deal of time visiting people in their homes; chatting, sharing meals, drinking tea, watching Hindi films and sitcoms on small black-and-white television sets, and chewing betel nut (*paan*). I also spent a considerable amount of time participating in certain favored leisure activities, which variously involved attending weddings, picnics on the opposite side of the river, raucous whiskey and chicken feasts, which were usually held on a houseboat at night, and mini-pilgrimages that involved journeying, by boat, two and three days downriver.

One of my biggest challenges was balancing my relationships and interactions between the children and the adults I befriended at Dasashwamedh. There were many times when as a researcher I wanted nothing more than to play and talk with the children on the ghat, many of whom referred to me as “Jenny *Didi*” and treated me as an honorary big sister. However, often my older friends would appear and more or less demand that I give them my attention. Because they were older, and because age differences establish one set of terms for hierarchical relations in India, they often felt entitled to steal the spotlight and to shoo the children away. This frequently happened with outsiders, as well. My conversations with children on the riverfront were often interrupted by outside visitors (almost always male), who felt entitled to do so.

The other challenge, however, had to do with the way my presence influenced interactions and relationships between the children and tourists. The children and I developed a working understanding of sorts. They knew I was interested in their customers, and I knew they were interested in how I might be able to make them appear more credible. When they would deliver tourists to my office for interviews, some of the children hoped, and perhaps expected, that I would convince these tourists to assist them financially. This put me in an awkward position at times. For instance, tourists would ask me if a particular child really needed 10,000 rupees to pay for school tuition that year or needed



5,000 rupees for a family member's operation. Even when I knew the tales were fictional, the policy I ultimately adopted and tried to maintain throughout the course of my fieldwork was to plead ignorance. I tried not to disturb the children's chances of earning money from tourists, nor to be an active accomplice in their money-making schemes. Sometimes, I would accompany the children and their customers on sightseeing tours and, of course, in those situations as well my presence influenced what tourists took away from these encounters. However, it seemed like another good opportunity for observing their interactions with the children, so on the occasions when I was invited, I went along.

Much of the data I collected, therefore, came from informal conversations and from endless hours spent on and around Dasashwamedh Ghat observing interactions between children, tourists, and locals. A lot of what I report in this book also comes from taped interviews, however. Over the course of twenty months of fieldwork, I conducted sixty-three taped interviews with tourists and another thirty-five with people in Dasashwamedh. The practical and theoretically thorny issues surrounding taped interviews have been duly noted by anthropologists and sociologists.<sup>15</sup> I found them to be an invaluable source of data, however. These interviews enabled me to recognize responses and patterns of thinking that were not always discernable through other forms of observation. They enabled me to listen more carefully to the terms people used to express themselves and to hear the metaphors, the slips of the tongue, the expressions of frustrations that so frequently animated our conversations. Had I not been able to revisit these conversations on tape, many of the subtle yet illuminating nuances they contained would have slipped by unnoticed. Moreover, although every anthropologist develops her own strategies for trying to stay connected during the long and often frustrating process of writing up, for me, there was something particularly comforting in being able to hear the voices of my acquaintances and the conversations that we had shared.

Finally, in terms of positioning, it seems worth noting that the projects we choose to study, the "baggage" we bring to the task, and the ways we orient ourselves in relation to a set of questions and concerns are never arbitrary. In the process of writing this book, I have often been struck by a recurring childhood memory of being on vacation with my family. I was almost six years old, and my brother and I were seated in the back of a rental car while my father and mother navigated us through a slow-moving traffic jam in a run-down neighborhood in the Bahamas. I recall staring out the window and seeing a local girl, who looked to be about my age, perched on a balcony wearing a tattered dress. She was glaring down at me with a hateful expression. When our eyes met, to me, the moment felt impregnated with feelings and meanings that I could sense were important, but could not fully comprehend. I wanted to escape her gaze. I wanted the traffic to move faster. And yet, as we began to pull away, I also found

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myself turning my head so that I could keep her in my sight. That little girl and her piercing stare have stayed with me for all of these years. Though I never intended it to be so, I suspect that in part, writing this book has been an attempt to understand that fleeting encounter and to grasp the myriad forces and relations that positioned us within that moment.