

## Attainment of Moksha in Kashi: A Qualitative Investigation

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*Death-related beliefs and actions have changed over the course of human history. This study is a thematic examination of people who travel to Kashi, the Hindu sacred city, to die at the end of their lives. Pilgrims who arrive in Kashi to die anticipate a specific spiritual recompense called moksha, which is variously interpreted as freedom from rebirth or a good rebirth. This dissertation sought to highlight the sociohistorical epoch defined by a profusion of scholarly literary works on death and dying, as well as a surge in social movements trying to improve the way people die. To acquire a thorough knowledge of the motivations for attaining Moksha, particularly in Kashi, the study utilised a qualitative methodology. Thematic analysis has been used to dive into the perceptions of the participants and present a comprehensive description of their motivation. A semi-structured interview guide based on Indian and western literature reports was employed to obtain data. After interviewing 10 people, theme saturation was reached. Results revealed how Indian philosophical and religious notions, such as Karma, Dharma, Atman, and the concept of rebirth, have a significant impact on Indian perceptions of spirituality at the end of life.*

**Keywords:** Death, Moksha, Spiritual Inclination, Kashi.

### Introduction

*Kashi is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend.* -Mark Twain

Death is an inherent component of human existence and has constantly been a matter of grave worry for all of us. Since the dawn of humanity, the human intellect has contemplated death and sought to unravel its enigmas. Constantly, the unpleasant aspect of dying has been highlighted. According to numerous scholars, even though death is inevitable, humans are unable to conceive of their own demise. Death is the most difficult concept to define. To define death solely from a single standpoint is not only to limit its vast array of meanings, but also to do disrespect to such an important topic in the current context. Berkson (2016) describes Louis Pojman's four approaches to death. From a religious perspective, death is defined as "the separation

of both the body's soul and its body." The second definition of death is "clinical death," which is "the termination of the pulse, blood circulation, and breathing." The third method is known as "whole brain death," or "when the brain is dead, the individual dies even if the lungs and the heart keep functioning." Lastly, this strategy is referred to as "neocortical death," i.e., "in the cortex, the frontal cortex is the location of many of the aspects we associate with our sense of identity and what it is to be a conscious subject in the world. Consciousness or awareness, sensory experience, language, memory, and thinking are included. If this portion of the brain dies, a person will no longer be a subject of experience.

Emphasizing solely the bad aspects of death diminishes both its good aspects and its significance in life. Only when we see death without any preconceived notions can we perceive the positive side of it. In the Hindu religion, for instance, a person attains emancipation only after death. The methodical functioning and order of every civilization would suffer if people did not die. "We should also remember that without death, we would not have this magnificent life.

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Death is vital for the possibility of fresh life. "Death constitutes and sustains our life." "Death is not the issue; rather, dying is feared due to the attendant feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and loneliness." Berkson (2016) has eloquently described both the negative and pleasant elements of death and highlighted its numerous contradictory elements. Death is tragic, but not for the deceased. It is equally necessary to hang on and to let go. There are occasions when ending a life is justifiable; however, it is one of the worst things a person can do. We are justified in our fear of mortality, but we must acknowledge that death is what gives our lives significance. Heidegger (2002), an existentialist philosopher, has examined the concept of death in relation to what he terms "Dasein." Dasein precisely relates to "being there." However, in everyday language, "Dasein" is typically used to refer to the being that belongs to humans. Heidegger argues that dasein (existence or entity) "completes itself in death."

When discussing mortality in relation to Kashi, the majority of the good characteristics of the dying process are found in Kashi. It is intriguing to observe that for many Indians, dying in Kashi is a source of delight. Pilgrims come to bathe in the Ganges, which is particularly potent near Kashi, where it rounds a bend and flows auspiciously from south to north. And pilgrims come because Kashi is the Mahasamadhi, the great cremation place, and to leave one's body there is to attain moksha.

In Kashi, Indian/Hindu residents view the dying process in a strikingly distinct manner. Here, they have no fear of death. Contrarily, in Kashi, death is a source of joy. Not only do residents of Kashi view death differently, but so do residents of other Indian states when death is discussed in conjunction with Kashi. This is a stunning truth. Kashi- Khanda of the Skanda-Purna depicts Brahm stating about Kashi that 'people who practise religious ceremonies, even if they are small, shall attain nirvana'. In Kashi-Khaa of the Skanda Pura, it is said that surrendering one's body in Kashi is considered Dana (religious gift), Tapas (penance), and Yoga. These truths complement the elation of Nirvana (salvation) in Kashi. Hindus from all over the world flock to Varanasi to die, get cremated, and scatter their ashes in the river. Individuals from all over the world not only anticipate their deaths in Kashi, but also fantasise about it. It is said that this city is "as old as time itself." Due to the fact that this is the site

of "cosmic creation," it is claimed that time began here. Because cosmogony is an infinitely repeating occurrence, the current moment in this location is also the moment of origination. This city is said to be the "origin" and "microcosm" of the universe. Although it is supposed to exist outside of time and space, it contains all space (Parry, 1994). In contrast to other cultures, where death is feared, residents in Kashi view it as "a long-awaited guest." In other regions of India, death is viewed as polluting, yet in Kashi, it is regarded as holy and auspicious. In Kashi, death is a "certain gate to moksha, the rarest, most valuable, and most difficult-to-attain of spiritual aspirations," yet in other places, it is a common, inevitable, and unavoidable aspect of human existence (Eck, 2015). Casting off one's body in Kashi, however, is evidence of "a lack of worldly desire and a serene indifference to prosaic existence" (Parry 1994). In Svargakhaa of the Padma-Purna, the lord (Mahdeva) proclaims that Kashi is his most enigmatic and pious city. It supports every creature in navigating the ordinary river of existence. His dwelling, Kashi, is located in "intermediate space" and is not related to the earth. Popular belief is that three powers, namely Yamraj, i.e., the lord of death, Yamdut, i.e., Yamraj's emissaries, and the Kali Age, i.e., the debauchery aeon in which "most of the universe has plunged," will never have access to this city. It is believed that the world has been formed and destroyed here, at the beginning and end of each cosmic cycle. Kashi is considered sacred due to the fact that individuals approach this city with the aim of dying and being cremated here, as both death and cremation place it in the omphalos of the cosmos while transcending time and space (Parry 1994). People currently maintain that sinners will be punished in their current incarnation. Punishment will be inflicted on the sinner in the form of a "lingering and horrible" death or a "miserable existence" prior to his death. Certain individuals assert vehemently that only those who have committed good deeds deserve to die in Kashi. Numerous examples demonstrate that sinners enter Kashi with the sole aim of dying, even if they perish elsewhere. The message of these narratives is that in this city, "karma cannot be deceived." "A sinner is supposed to receive his punishment "by postulating a period of expiatory suffering" after his death or before his soul attains moksha (Parry 1994). It is thought that cruel individuals cannot die here. In the final instant, something transpires, and they die somewhere. A

person will not perish here by “chance.” A “big sinner” will not be executed in Kashi. Numerous individuals arrive with the intent of dying. Nevertheless, some of them must leave this city prior to their mortality, whether by chance or divine design. It is also interesting that we are unable to decide if a particular individual is a saint or a sinner based solely on his current existence, as his fate is determined not only by his actions in this incarnation but also in all of his prior lives. Therefore, we are not to argue that “the beggar or swindler is not deserving of death” in this context (Eck, 2015). People currently maintain that sinners will be punished in their current incarnation. Punishment will be administered so that vicious individuals cannot die here. In the final Kashi-Khaa of the Skanda-Purna, it is explicitly stated that individuals who commit crimes must avoid Kashi if they wish to attain moksha. This city must not be visited by anyone who is accustomed to defaming others, anyone who desires fornication with another man’s wife, anyone who desires riches by accepting monetary gifts or other people’s riches through deception, anyone whose demeanor causes scourge to others, anyone who desires carnal pleasure, anyone who reproaches Lord Shiva, anyone who mocks the Vedas.

In addition, another aspect of the history of death in Kashi and the likelihood that people travelled to Kashi in the past to commit religious suicide have been examined in this research. Although suicide is typically forbidden in the Dharmashastra scriptures, there are exceptions in the smritis, epics, and puranas, according to Kane (1973). The Padma Purana states, “A man who knowingly or unknowingly, willfully or unintentionally dies in the Ganges attains moksha,” and the Skanda Purana states, with reference to Kashi, “He who abandons his life in this holy place in some way or another does not commit the sin of suicide but attains his desired objects,” both of which are cited in the Bhagavad Gita (Kane, 1973). People are said to travel to Kashi with the intention of committing suicide at the Kashi Karvat shrine in order to attain Moksha. The Kashi Karvat Temple is situated in a tangle of crowded alleys next to the Vishvanath Temple, a region frequented by Kashi’s pilgrims. The temple’s interior is centred on an opening in the floor that leads to a large cavernous space below. On the floor of this room, some 30 feet below the entryway, lies the Shiva Linga that spontaneously sprang from the ground. The lower floor was the historical elevation of the city of Kashi,

before a large population settled there and the level was progressively raised. The temple derives its name from the karvat (weapon or saw) that once resided in the room immediately underneath the entrance. Prior to the arrival of the British, individuals would acquire moksha by hurling themselves down the hole and onto the blade, therefore committing suicide. As there is a direct water connection between the Ganges and the temple below this room, they would ascend directly to heaven.

The karvat appears to have come from a Skanda Purana story. One day, Lord Krishna rode his tiger to challenge a certain king. The couple had only one child. Krishna ordered that they sacrifice their son to feed his ravenous tiger. It was crucial to never send a guest away hungry, and they agreed after learning it was a test. On opposite ends of a saw, husband and wife butchered their son and fed him to the tiger. Krishna was content. The king was rewarded, his son was resurrected, and the saw gained notoriety as a direct link to Krishna. Exactly this scene ended up at the Kashi Karvat temple. Soon thereafter, the British outlawed this systematic suicide technique. In addition, they transported the Kashi Karvat to a museum in Britain. Almost certainly, the legend of Kashi Karvat is a relatively contemporary version of older tales. Whether contemporary folklore or ancient history, pilgrims who visit Kashi hear tales that are now part of its lore and contribute to its reputation as a place to die. This exemplifies the continuous transformation of Kashi into the holiest of sacred cities for many Hindus.

*Rationale of the study*

This paper attempted to highlight the sociohistorical era characterised by a proliferation of academic literary works on death and dying, as well as a rise in social movements seeking to alter the way in which individuals can die. In general, the misgivings and initiatives are centered on what some have termed “death with integrity” (Roy, 1988) and aim, in part, to make death more “allowable” (Marshall, 1895). In recent years, thanatological literature has attempted to clarify the perspectives of those who have travelled to Kashi for the accomplishment of Moksha in light of the current preoccupation with death. However, studies addressing the benefits of a good death in Kashi for attaining Moksha do not appear to have a place in the current pandemic literature.

Supposedly, the unique experiences, and the staunch belief system regarding the historical perspective of

attaining Moksha in Kashi have been understudied. This article is a narrative of people who travel to Kashi, the Hindu holy city, to die at the end of their lives. Pilgrims who arrive in Kashi to die anticipate a specific spiritual incentive, i.e., Moksha, which is variously interpreted as freedom from reincarnation or a good rebirth. The present study was conducted in Kashi and in institutions that provide accommodation for the dying, where an attempt was made by the researcher to understand the perceptions and perspectives in their respective social and cultural contexts that linked dying in Kashi and Moksha.

### **Method**

The study adopted a qualitative approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of people's reasons for attaining Moksha, particularly in Kashi. We used thematic analysis to delve into the participants' perceptions and provide a detailed account of their inducements. A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data, based on Indian and western literature reports. Theme saturation was achieved after interviewing 10 participants.

### **Participants**

For this study, a homogenous sample of 10 participants was chosen. The technique of criterion-based purposive sampling was needed to assess and select the participants. We initially contacted the administration departments of different old age centres and requested their cooperation in conducting this study. With their permission, we requested that they give us the names of the participants who had been staying in their centers. Once the list was compiled, prospective participants were contacted in person, briefed about the study's purpose, and asked for their permission to participate. Those who agreed to participate in the study were then asked questions based on the guidelines for inclusion and exclusion that had been determined beforehand. Based on this data, participants who met the selection criteria (i.e., those who were over 60 and had come to Kashi for the attainment of moksha) were contacted and asked to schedule an in-person interview.

### **Procedure**

Participants were informed of the purpose, significance, and importance of the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to their participation. All participants were assured that their responses and identities would remain private. On receiving their consent, participants were asked to provide a

convenient time for the interview. Interviews with a semi-structured format were used to investigate the participants' reasons for coming to Kashi for the attainment of Moksha. A schedule of non-directive, open-ended interview questions was prepared. There was no predetermined order of questions; they were modified and re-modified in accordance with the flow of conversation with each participant. Among the most important questions prepared for the semi-structured interviews was, "According to you, what is the meaning of Moksha?" "Do you believe that being here would help you to attain Moksha?" "Why have you chosen Kashi to attain moksha?" "What are the things here in Kashi that make it significant to attain moksha?" "What is the significance of attaining moksha in Kashi?" "Was the decision to come here your own?" "How much satisfaction did you have in your life before coming to this place?" "What are your experiences here?" As the need arose, additional probing questions were added to the individual interviews. All interviews were conducted in either Hindi or English, depending on the comfort level of the participants. With the participants' permission, the interviews were recorded. The interview duration ranged from 20 to 30 minutes. The researchers transcribed and then translated every single interview conducted in Hindi. The translated interviews were then proofread for accuracy and consistency by a native English speaker.

### **Result and Analysis**

All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Then, the transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis to discover the participants' reason for coming to Kashi: to free themselves from the cycle of birth and rebirth. The data was analyzed using a sequence of steps. Initially, the analysts read the transcripts multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences as reported in the transcripts. The analysts listened to the oral records of the individuals while reviewing the transcribed data to acquire the closest possible grasp of the data. In the subsequent step, attempts were made to turn the transcribed document into a theoretical foundation that was closely tied to the participant's actual verbatim to detect emerging themes (see Table 1). After recognizing the themes that emerged, the transcripts were re-read to group these themes based on their fundamental similarities. During this procedure, a few overarching themes arose, under

which sub - themes were integrated. Table 1 shows important themes that describe the participants' perceptions and perspectives in their respective social and cultural contexts that linked dying in Kashi and

Moksha. Furthermore, the themes and subthemes, as well as pertinent extracts from the participants' experiences, are discussed in the following section.

**Table 1**  
**Major themes and subthemes that emerged from the interviews indicate participants' reason for coming to Kashi for attainment of Moksha**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Sub Theme</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
Belief System	Historical perspective	In our culture, death was not considered the end of life as we understand it. Rather, it was experienced as a conduit to look beyond the gross body to attain and experience higher levels of consciousness. Many yogis over the centuries have showcased Samadhi states that question our basic understanding of leaving our gross body or death.
	Mysticism of Kashi	Kashi is a city at the heart of Hindu tradition, a continuous testament to the diverse and varied culture that has defined the Indian ethos for centuries. The city is known as Moksha-prashika Kashi, the city of light that lights liberation. The Kashi rahasya, which is commonly thought to be an addendum to the Brahmavaivarta Purana and the Five Verses on Kashi credited to Sankara, extends this metaphor to internalize Kashi as Brahman.
	Religious View	According to Hindu beliefs, the soul of an individual who dies or has his or her last rites in Kashi achieves freedom from the cycle of life and death.
Death Preparedness	Life after Death	The existence of higher-order, divine experiences in which death for a person is only a temporary state of affairs and the continuation of life after death
	Moksha	It alludes to the condition of being liberated from the life-death cycle (Samsara) and the constraints of a material existence. Moksha is strongly associated with the concept of cosmic consciousness, in which the self is accepted as one with all of existence. It is thought that achieving moksha is the only way to obtain full freedom, tranquilly, pleasure, and unity with the Divine.
	Seeking for Detachment	It entails decoupling one's drive and enthusiasm while being quietly alert and engaged moment by moment with everything and everyone that captures one's attention and not getting distracted by the short-term gratification.
Influencing variables in Decision Making	Economic independence	This refers to a person's ability to make autonomous decisions regarding their economic future.
	Spiritual Inclination	Spiritual inclination is the awareness of a feeling, sense, or faith that there is something deeper than a person's sense experiences and that the greater whole of which we are a part is cosmological or divine in nature, which brings a person closer to God.

**Belief System**

Nearly every participant reported the historical perspective of Kashi pertaining to death. For example, participant 7 reported that

“One can only get moksha in Kashi; it’s written in the Bhagwad Geeta, and even the saints have said the same thing.” People from different countries come to Kashi for moksha. My parents told me that one should not grieve over death.

The transcribed documents further elucidate the mysticism of death, particularly in Kashi. Death has been observed as a matter of joy in Kashi. People are travelling from different parts of the country in search of Moksha. Participant 4 reported:

“A man who intentionally or unintentionally dies in Kashi attains Moksha.” Previous generations have passed on knowledge about Kashi Karvat... Several people told me that many centuries ago, one used to travel to this city and attempt suicide at the Kashi Karvat temple to gain moksha. “All the brahmins, from a layman to the highest caste of Brahmin, have an integral system of slow evolution towards God.”

The majority of Hindus believe that life is a cycle of death and rebirth known as samsara. The atman (soul) of a deceased person is reincarnated in a new body. Some think rebirth occurs immediately after death, while others believe the atman may remain in other dimensions. Hindus believe that an individual soul might spend a period of time in swarg or narak before reincarnation. Participant 6 reported:

“Just as water unites with water, fire unites with fire, and air unites with air, so the atman unites with the Endless (Brahman) and attains ultimate freedom.”

Participant 4 reported:

“Religious life leads to spiritual life... “Our principal deities are Vishnu, Aditya, Ganpati, and Shiva; all of these deities include every other deity... you worship them through rituals, and gradually you will be elevated to God.”

**Death Preparedness**

The mystery of life after death has captivated humanity with fascination and amazement since time immemorial. Neither rigid belief systems nor enormous scientific advances have resolved the issue. A few of the participants shared their perspectives on what they think happens when a person passes away. There was a wide range of opinions on this particular topic. Some believe that there is “something” contrary to life as we know it, while others believe that once their bodies

expire, there is nothing else beyond that. It seemed that faith played a vital role in the final stages of life. According to participant 1, lives continue to exist after death.

“When anyone dies, it is said that this person is gone.” This is untrue. The person is not who you remember them to be, but they are still very much alive. “After gaining Moksha, the spiritual body will continue to exist even after the physical body has gone, but this depends on how strong the karma was.”

Moksha, also spelled Mukti, is one of the most important ideas in Indian philosophy. “Liberation,” “freedom,” “emancipation,” and “joy” are all possible translations of the Sanskrit word moksha. It is a condition of non-ego, in which the ahamkara disappears and one remains free from all impulses, actions, and consequences while in a total state of wholeness or assimilation. Attachment, desire, and an incapacity to perceive or experience the unity of all existence bind us to the material world. According to the ancient yogis, this link is the major source of human misery. Moksha is the route to achieving emancipation from suffering and self-realization. Through this liberation path, it is possible to encounter transcendental realms of being and a deep sense of bliss.

Participant 4 stated that

“Moksha means that now you have become the creator... “Now you can create the universe as now you have become the owner of the destiny... people are born to pursue 4 things in life... ahara, nidra, bhaya, and maithuna... there is no dissection of matter or energy... it can disappear but not be destroyed... matter can neither be created nor destroyed but can be transferred from one energy to another.

Participant 7 reported that

“Those who do good work will get good results, but those who achieve moksha will not have to return to this world... you will be free from coming and going.”

Similarly, participant 6 said that

“We have got the body to free ourselves from coming and going from this world... But while we are here in this world, we should help society, provide food to people, and help ourselves.

Likewise, another participant (2) clearly stated that

“If I die in Kashi, I will get Moksha, and I will have to never come back again in this world... I am so satisfied with this life that I don’t want to come back... I’m afraid if I don’t get this life back... If I don’t get these people around me... Also, when I listen to

speeches by gurus, they also say, “If I die in Kashi, I will get Moksha.”

It is evident from the above statements that the participants have come to Kashi in the hope of attaining Moksha, i.e., to ultimately free themselves from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Furthermore, it has also pointed out the importance of Karma.

Salvation, broadly construed as emancipation, liberation, or a state of eternal happiness, is a difficult topic that has challenged thinkers since the dawn of time. A further statement made by the participants highlighted the concept of detachment from a world filled with so many sins and the need to liberate oneself from the absurdities of life by acknowledging that the body is more than the flesh and mind and that one is a part of a cosmic order that transcends this worldly chaos. The above statement could easily be understood from the verbatim of the participant.

“I am not influenced by anyone.” I feel so sad that I am not attached to anyone, not even myself. One should not attach to anything but God. (Paused for a while.) Nothing is there in this world; it’s full of pain and struggles. People are not good. “There are a few people who are good who are helping to run the world.”

Participant 1 also said that

“Attachment doesn’t hold us; we hold on to attachment. It does not have the power to hold us if we are too determined and have self-control. Nobody can make us do anything.”

Also, participant 4 stated that

“One must give up all worldly pleasures and surrender to God... but first, you must fulfil all your desires... you must work hard to fulfil your desires... suppose you want sweet, you must work hard to buy that sweet (laughs)...the mind actually pampers the body... it does not allow you to work hard... you must control your mind.”

Influencing variables in decision-making

In the labyrinthine alleys of Kashi, which are “older than history, older than tradition, and even older than mythology,” there is a structure at its busiest intersection where chambers are allocated for the dying.

Kashi is home for the elderly who aspire to spend their final days seeking spiritual emancipation. The desire to come to Kashi and wait to attain Moksha is primarily motivated by the pursuit of economic freedom. On asking the participants how they decided to come to Kashi by leaving their families and whose

decision it was, many participants cited economic independence as an important factor. Participant 6 said that

“We have a big house, a car, and every facility, but I prefer to come here because I don’t have to depend on anyone for anything. Nobody is going to ask me anything, and I wouldn’t care about people. Initially, my family wanted me to be with them, but they understood me. I wanted to build a house but then did not do it, thinking about the taxes I had to pay... “Here I am happy... I have everything, and I want to die here until my last breath.”

Moksha is the most common term used by Hindus to refer to ultimate or final emancipation. It is also the highest state (Parandhama) to which a mortal creature (Jiva) can aspire. It is also described by the Sanskrit words Mukti, Kaivalya, Laya, Moksha, Nirvana, Siddhi, and Samadhi. Emancipation is not the liberty of the body or mind, but rather the liberty of the soul. Moreover, it is its natural condition (sahaja). The participants also referred to their spiritual inclination since birth and how it helped them travel to Kashi for liberation.

Participant 6 stated that

“Nobody is happy in this world... “If we see someone very beautiful, it is temporary... whatever is in this world is for a few moments and then it is scattered... one should always get attached to one’s higher self, then everything will seem to be happy... if you are spiritually inclined, you will understand that after you die, you will go to heaven and everything is calculated based on your deeds... there is nothing in this world that is permanent.....”

Similarly, participant 9 reported that

“I think my inclination towards spirituality will help me attain moksha soon because, when I do chanting, I find myself in a very different state, which helps me understand my life decisions better and also helps me connect with God.”

Therefore, it is clearly apparent from the line of inquiry alluded to in the previous section that a person’s “spiritual sense” may refer to his or her sensation and experience of spiritual enlightenment—for example, the evidence of having briefly travelled into an unfamiliar land to realise life after death.

## **Discussion**

Death is unavoidable for all humans. Death is a natural phenomenon that is pervasive, permanent, and so incomprehensible that no one can adequately define

it (Firestone, 1994). Death occurs regularly among humans owing to a multitude of causes, including natural disasters, war, disease, and ageing; no individual or group is immune. According to Chambers-Klein (2012), despite the fact that death is the sole thing that unites all people, thanatophobia, or the fear of death, is widespread, and individuals frequently learn to cope with this anxiety by avoiding it. According to Coon (2004), “for some, death is a sudden catastrophe, while for others it is a long-awaited release.” “In any event, death—the final phase of life—is something that everyone must face.” Therefore, it is impossible to avoid death regardless of how much one tries to entirely disregard or seek out attainable survival and avoidance techniques.

When it comes to death in Kashi, the city has a plethora of positive aspects of the dying process. It is intriguing to note that for many people in Kashi, death is a source of pleasure. Pilgrims come to bathe in the Ganges in Kashi, where it runs auspiciously from south to north and around a curve. Pilgrims come because Kashi is the Mahasamasham, the great cremation site, and leaving one’s body there is a prerequisite for achieving moksha. This article sought to highlight the sociohistorical epoch defined by a profusion of scholarly literary works on death and dying, as well as a surge in social movements trying to improve the manner in which people die.

The findings of the paper disclosed that the participants believed that they had lived a long, fulfilling life and that their demise was unavoidable, which was found to be consistent with the existing literature by Lloyd-Williams et al. (2007). Findings also revealed that the pathway to moksha is present in the cultural roots of the holy city of Kashi, which was clearly stated in the research conducted by Kavitha (2017) and Sivaraman (1973). The participants also mentioned the theology of Kashi, which connoted the existence of the Kashi-Karvat shrine, also known as religious suicide, which helped them attain Moksha rapidly. This finding is consistent with the earlier studies (Justice, 1994; Parry, 1994; Nordin, 2009; Hossain, 2018; Alam, 2018).

Another factor identified as contributing to their decision to travel to Kashi to obtain Moksha was their belief that if an individual dies, their physical body is destroyed and not the subtle body. The participants reported that the gross body perishes at the conclusion of each rebirth, but the subtle body survives and

accompanies the casual body and soul till freedom (Flannelly et al., 2006; Thalbourne, 1996). In addition, the findings revealed that most interviewees possessed a spiritual predisposition. A participant will be the happiest person on earth if he or she learns that everything in the world is temporary and if he or she is simply attached to God and detaches oneself from all worldly pleasures only after fulfilling one’s desires (Inbadas, 2018; Adiswarananda, 2007; Cobb, 2001). According to the findings, considering the significant connection between Indian spirituality and Indian culture, it is necessary to understand the philosophical roots of components of Indian thought and perspective that influence the concept of divinity at the end of life.

### Conclusion

Conclusively, the present study’s findings shed light on the finality of death and provided an explanation for why so many people from all over the world make the long journey to Kashi in search of Moksha. The elderly participants in this study held firm beliefs about death and dying; they recognised its inevitability, were content with their lives up to that point, and anticipated passing away peacefully and with honor. The interviewees said that their cultural beliefs about Hinduism and Moksha, the mysticism of Kashi, their curiosity and hope that there is life after death, and feeling one with God by giving up all the pleasures of the world with the help of spiritual practises were all reasons why they made this choice for their own lives.

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