

Historical Perspective Of Varanasi City Development

Key Words: *Agglomeration economy, spatio-temporal study, immigration, complex mosaic*

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Cities grow initially, benefiting from the increasing agglomeration economy, but after a certain stage due to congestion and crowding diseconomies set which has resultant in widening gap between available resources and their demand in urban areas. Every city is looking like a living organism. It takes birth, grows, prosper, make identity of its own and then exist for long period of time or get turn down due to negligence of its society or by the natural Disasters. Varanasi is one of the seven sacred cities of India, records a settlement history since ca. 1000 BCE.

This article is an attempt to analyze the historical development of Varanasi City from ancient period to post independent period and to highlight that this city is the complex mosaic of old and new religious culture and civilization. An attempt has been made to identify its individuality, appearance, problems, and precious suggestion for long-lasting enhancement of its uniqueness.

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Varanasi is one of the seven Hindu sacred cities of India. It enjoys a commanding position on the crescent shaped left bank of the River Ganga (Lat 25° 18' N and 83° 01' E). It lies at a distance of 797 km from Delhi and 143 km from Allahabad. The Grand Trunk, GT Road (National highway No.-2) passes through the city. The airport near Babatpur is 27 Km away north-west from Varanasi on the Varanasi-Jaunpur road (NH-56) links the city by air. The highest level is found in the northeastern portion over an area known as Rajghat plateau recording height of 83.29 meter above sea level. The city is 76.21 meter above sea level (fig 1).

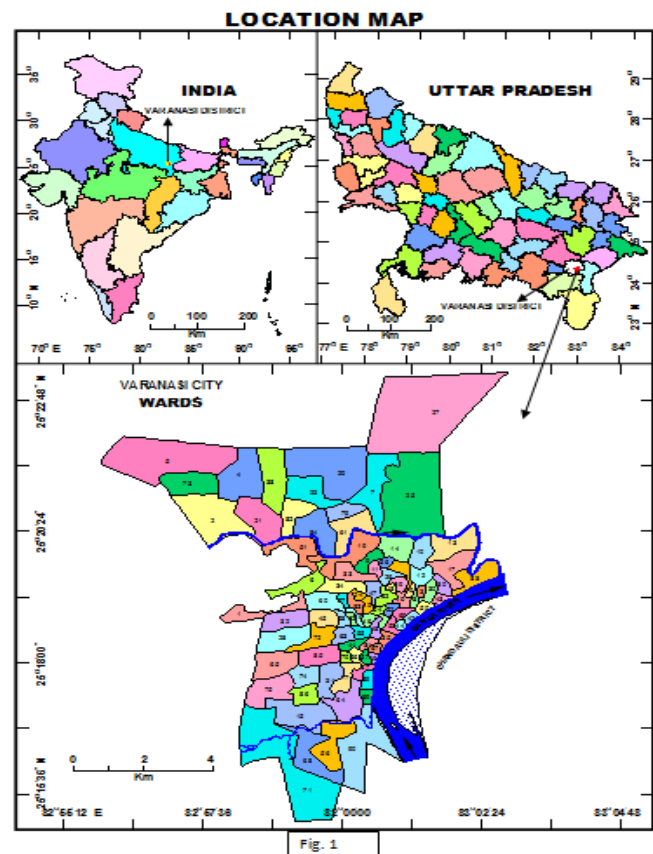


Fig. 1

Administratively, the city was divided in 90 wards as 2001 which was 40 in 1981 & 1991, and 27 wards in 1961 & 1971. The city spread over a small area which was 34.452 Km in 1951 now only 82.102 Km.

Objectives

It is usually seen that cities are growing initially, benefiting from increasing agglomeration economy, but after a certain stage due to congestion and crowding diseconomies set in resulting the urban sprawl into the adjoining area. The monocentric urban structure become multi-centered and dominated the rest of the urban system. This article entitled "Historical perspective of Varanasi City Development" is modest attempt. Essentially the major objectives of this study are given as under:-

1. Analyzing the historical development of Varanasi city from ancient period to post independent.
2. To know the spatial expansion of the city.
3. To understand the deep rooted religious cultural structure and historicity of Varanasi city.
4. Analyzing the pressure of population and related problems for securing its identity.

Methodology:

The present study contains spatio-temporal study of Varanasi city. This study based on data procured from the secondary sources starting from ancient period to post independent by several cartographic and statistical methods. The result are presented through various maps and tables generated in ArcGIS.

1. General Population tables, Census of India, data 1961 to 2001.
2. District census handbooks, 1961-2001.
3. Assessment of Population growth of Varanasi city (Ward level).
4. iQuantitative and cartographic analysis.
5. The results are presented through various maps and tables generated using Arc GIS.

Introduction

Cities are known to have existed in human history since ages. They have flourished and developed as citadel of power, place of religious importance, military colonies, and trading centre. Some of them after rising at the peak started falling with the set of ruling dynasties, changing economies, and social values, while few others survived and continue to exist now. Varanasi is a city of great antiquity, which has been able to maintain its ancient culture and traditions, and has remained the great centre of Hindu culture and civilization. The religio-cultural mosaic of Hinduism, Buddhism entangled with industries, education, transport, and trade and associated infrastructures altogether influenced the people and landscape. Today one can see the "complex mosaic" of old and new side-by-side in this city.

History of Banaras goes back to several millennia, recording a distinct history of people, settling, man-land reciprocity, and continuity of traditions. Scholars referred most of the historical texts in the context of their description of the scenic beauty, political history, story, economy and traditions, but they rarely tackled the population analysis. However, there are some archaeological excavations at Rajghat, Sarnath, Bairat, Baigar (Chakia), and most recently at Akatha; all of this information helped to estimate the pre-historical settlements and population (cf. Jayaswal 2009). It has been proved that the older core of Banaras was established in the north with an elongated projection along the Ganga river to a little north of Rajghat and expanded up to the Gomati river (near village Kaithi). However, later on it concentrates in between the Varana and the Asi, that is how the name derived Varanasi. According to Murdach (1897: 5) Banaras has shifted its position several times. The oldest town occupied at the site of Sarnath and, at the later period, the centre of city lay north of the Varana. Up to the Mohammedan period, the city was close to the southern bank of Varana, whereas the modern frontage faces the Ganga alone. The city occupied different facets in ancient, Sultanate, Mughal and British period in terms of population growth and expansion. However, it is a difficult task to estimate the dimension and enlargement of the city. In view of this reason, Peterson (1975: 227) has criticized the archaeological method of estimating pre-historic population; however, he has accepted its utility to focus light to some extent.

Varanasi, known as cultural capital of India, recorded historical growth and continuity since 1000 BCE. James Prinsep made the first detailed population estimate in 1820s; apart from this, it is difficult task to project the population of the ancient past. However, following a crude method of geometric progression and follow up adjustment of result in accordance to the historical and literary sources, a tentative outline of population growth of Varanasi is proposed (Singh 1993: 279) (cf. Table 1).

Table 1.

Varanasi: Projected Population, 1500 BCE to CE 2001

Year	Population	Growth Rate (per cent)
2001	1,091,918	407.3
1901	215,223	12.9

1800	190,583	12.1
1700	170,966	13.7
1623	110,304	-26.6
1600	150,280	12.2
1500	133,965	11.1
1400	120,540	11.0
1300	108,625	10.7
1200	98,105	11.2
1100	88,245	69.8
1000	51,960	69.8
CE 500	30,595	62.6
0	18,815	54.8
BCE 500	12,150	48.5
1000	8,180	46.1
1500	5,600	-

(Source: Singh, Rana 1993: 279, and ibid. 2009b: 26)

Ancient Period

The early political history of Varanasi region is quite complex; the main sources of information are the Puranas, supplemented by the epics (Mahabharata), the early Jain and the Buddhist texts and classical Sanskrit literature. The vibration of life in Varanasi has existed since time immemorial and the continuous habitation of human since 1200 BCE has been proved by recent excavation (cf. Jaiswal 2009). Mythologically, it is believed that Purarva Aila, a grandson of Manu, founded the earliest known dynasty, which ruled Varanasi, and his grandson Kshatravridha (the son of Ayu, The Aila king of Pratihthana) was the first king of Varanasi (cf. Altaker 1947: 273). The seventh king in the line of Manu dynasty was 'Kasha', after his ruling city the kingdom was named as 'Kashi'. Later on Dhanvantari, father of Indian medical science was crowned as the king of Kashi. His grandson Deodasa was exiled from the city after a great war and he made another capital city. This is described as Markendeya tirtha (holy place) in the Mahabharata (Aranyaka Parva 82.68-70). All this happened some centuries before the Mahabharata war. Soon Banaras became independent state under 'Kashiraj' or King of Kashi, who is mentioned as an ally of the Pandavas in the Mahabharata war.

The literary sources of Pre Buddhist and Buddhist period say that the city was well known as capital of Kashi kingdom (Digha Nikaya 2.14, 16,

18). The Pali and Jain literature describe the glory of the city and indicates that the city was densely occupied since the 6th century BCE. During two or three centuries, preceding the birth of Mahavira and Buddha the whole India was divided into Sodasha Mahajanpadas (sixteen states). Wherein, the kingdom of Kashi was the most prominent and extended 160 km to the east and about 400 km to the northwest of the city of Varanasi (Joshi 1965). The traces of old buildings, extended from the north of Banaras towards Sarnath, and there are the relics of the old Buddhist city, which sprang up around the spot, made sacred by the association of Buddha's first preaching. The 'Mrigadava' (deer park, Sarnath) did exist even before the rise of Buddhism and was definitely an important centre that attracted the Buddha (Vishwakarma 1987: 190).

The two Chinese travellers Fa-Hüin (CE 405) and Hsuan-tsang (CE 645) had described the city as the neighbourhood of congested houses occupied by the rich persons and filled up with valuables (cf. Vishwakarma 1987: 190). This precedent growth in mass and density had historical link. By the CE 3rd century, the Buddhist township of Rishipattana (the present Sarnath) had grown and by the CE 490 the 'Vishveshvara' (Vishvanatha) temple had already been built. In the CE 6th century, Jangambari Matha was already established (cf. Fig. 2).

The people hold that Banaras has three divisions, viz. (1) Banaras, (2) Kashi, and (3) Kedar, all of these were grown up in different periods; where the most ancient is said to be Banaras, the northern part of the present city. Towards the south of this is Kashi, which is younger than Banaras, while to the south again lays Kedar, which was densely populated only in relatively recent times (cf. Singh, R.L. 1955: 31).

Sultanate Period

In this period the city was mainly governed by several kings of Pratiharas, Kalachuris, Gaharwalas, Chandelas, Chahamanas, Ghori, Tughlaq and Lodhi dynasties. During the rule of Pratiharas (9th century) a peaceful harmonic life pattern flourished. During CE 01-1000, the city recorded very high growth of population. From about 8000 inhabitants in BCE 1000, it went up to about 90,000 in CE 1100 (Table

1. This time city extended southwards and was divided into many neighbourhoods. The 11th century (of Kalachuries dynasty) was acknowledged as the golden era in the city's history. The Gaharwalas were the protectors of Hindu 'tirthas' (pilgrimage

centres) of which Varanasi was the most prominent. The most famous Gaharwala king, Govindchandra was the worshiper of Vishnu, however his two queens espoused and patronised Buddhism. In this period, the centre of the capital was Rajghat plateau (Fig. 2). This period was also famous for learning of the Vedas, Sanskrit grammar, philosophy, and medicine. When the Muslims came, they settled mostly in suburban areas mainly on the north side corresponding to present Jaitpura and Adampura wards ruthlessly destroying the Hindu structures (cf. Singh, R.L. 1955: 32). In the CE 1013, Ahmed Niatagin invaded the city and demolished many temples. However, again during the 12th century under Gahadavalas the city got freedom from strife and destruction. In 1194 Qutb-ud-Din, in 1197 Sultan Ahmed, in CE 1248 Mohammad Ghori, in 1375 Firoj Shah and in 1526 Ibrahim Lodi invaded and demolished many temples in Varanasi. At the time of Aibak (1206) main Shiva's temples like Vishvanatha, Hiranyaksheshvara, Avimuketshvara, Kalabhairava, Adi Mahadeva, Siddheshvara, Kumbhishvara, and many other notable ones were demolished. This was continued in the period of Iltutmish also. In fact, the process of demolition and construction was together going on parallel (cf. Motichand 1985: 182). In the 14th century, the city was divided into two parts, the 'Deva Varanasi' inhabited in the south with Hindu dominancy while the 'Yavan Varanasi' was in the north with Muslim majority (Singh, Rana 2009a: 11). In 1623, the city had badly suffered to plague and according to literary sources, one third of the population had died (cf. Motichand 1985: 210). In this period Tulasi, who was known as a great Rama worshiper poet, also died. According to an estimate the population of the city in 1600 was around 150,280, which fell down to 110,304 in 1623 (loss of 26.6 per cent, due to severe calamities). However, in the following years the population recorded unprecedented growth and by 1700 CE reached up to 170,966 (cf. Table 1). In late 17th century, communications with the Deccan improved and a large body of Deccan and western Indian teachers began to come and settle in Varanasi (cf. Bayly 1983: 186).

Mughal Period

During this period, the great Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605) and his two senior ministers Todarmal and Man Singh gave fresh stimulus towards the reconstruction and building activities in the city. During the period of his successors, viz. Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb many temples

were demolished. Again, Dara Shikoh was the best maintainer and protector of Hindu temple of Banaras. In 1659, Aurangzeb ordered, "according to the Islamic rules no old temples should be destroyed; however, no new temples should be built. Such arrangement should be made that no one illegally interferes in the religious activities of the (Hindu) Brahmins" (Sarkar 1928, vol. 3: 249-250). According to Singh, 'consequently, the importance of Banaras greatly declined so much that it will not be wrong if we regard the Muslim period as the 'dark age' in the history of Banaras' (Singh, R.L. 1955: 9). In the same time, many social reformers like, Ramananda, Kabir, Tulasi, Raidas, and Chaitanya, came forward to save the city and society by social reforms in their own way of devotionalsism (bhakti).

The early Muslim settlers were settled in southern portion particularly in the present Shivala Mohalla (neighbourhood). The westward limit of urban growth during these centuries was marked by the present Durgakund-Bhelupura Road and Ramapura and Godaulia-Jagatganj Roads and on the north by the Varana river. Before the arrival of Muslims, the Hindu city lay only to the east of the present Assi-Godaulia and Godaulia-Jagatganj road. This time the industrial and commercial sectors were flourished by the Muslim settler in the Adampura, Alipura, Madanpura and Aurangabad Mohallas of the present city. The crafts of spinning and weaving of silk, cotton and wool in the city reached their zenith in the Mughal period.

British Period

After the decline of Mughal period the rise of Maratha, Kashiraj, and Sikh power came in existence. Moreover, many palatial buildings, riverfront ghats, and temples were constructed during this short period of Banaras Raj. Maratha also helped to re-establish the City's pristine glory. "The rapid increase of the present city, a restoration of its temples and the embellishment of its ghats must be dated from the period of Maratha ascendancy" (Prinsep 1833: 11). Banaras was one of the fastest growing cities during the years 1750-90 (cf. Varady 1989: 231). It became the commercial capital of north India after the decline of Murshidabad and the collapse of the Jagat Seth in Bengal in 1757. It received immigrant merchant capital from the whole of north India and stood astride the growing trade route from Bengal to the Maratha territories. Yet this was also a city which benefited from the sustained agricultural performances of the rich and stable tracts which

surround it (Bayly 1983: 104). By the early nineteenth century, Varanasi grew to be one of the northern India's largest cities (cf. Vardy 1989: 231). In 1775, Banaras passed under the influence of British East India Company and in 1794, brought under the direct administration of the company.

In early period of British rule, Banaras remained the prominent centre of commerce. Later on, the construction of rails and roads parallel the loss of river transport. In 1800, the four routes towards Jaunpur, Ghazipur, Chunar, Mirzapur and G.T. Road were just narrow tracks. By middle of the 19th century condition of all the roads were improved and local tracks were constructed. The city became the nodal when it linked with Gorakhpur, Lucknow, Allahabad, and Mirzapur with the railway. At the same moment in time, many educational institutes were established because of the social reformers. Vedic learning came with Maharashtrian Brahmins who settled here from the 17th century.

In the 19th century, the area of Banaras continued to expand along the riverfront southward and westward. Many tanks like Machhodari, Benia, Maidagin, and Godaulia Nala (drains) were converted

into parks and streets. Roads became widened through the demolition of houses. Masonry bridges were built on the river Ganga and the Varana (Fig. 2).

Many occasions came with the intention of showing harmonious integration of Hindu and Muslim community. Some areas were very famous for commercial and business activity, like general market of Chauk, cloth market of Kunj Gali, grain market of Trilochan and Khojwa, vegetable market of Choukhamba, grocery market of Dinanath Gola, hardware market of Thatheri Bazar, basket market of Raja Darwaja, Harha Sarai (market) in Aurangabad, meat market in Khasi Tola, Ghee (clarified butter) market of Gheehatta, and Pan (betel) market, and even today these are prominent in the respective landscapes. The major source of Company income was tax obtained in the name of Municipal Board. Soon on the 15th October 1850, the State of Banaras completely merged into the state of India.

The first known Census of the city was carried out in the year 1800 by the City Kotwal (Inspector) which reported 30,000 houses and 582,000 inhabitants. This was published in the appendix of Lord Valentia's travel in India. In 1828-29, James Prinsep took detail census of the city; this was mainly based on the register of Behri (a type of levy) with the help of security guards of the beat, servants and neighbours (cf. Singh, Rana 2010: 263). Prinsep also tried to cross-check with the consumption of salt. According to him, there were 30,250 houses scattered in 369 mohallas and the gross population was 118,482, excluding 18,968 inhabitants of Sikraul (cantonment). Thus, altogether the total population reached up to 200,450. Prinsep classified houses based on the building material and storey (Table 2 and 3).

Table 2.
Varanasi: Types of Houses, 1828-29.

Sl. No.	Type	Number	Per cent	Persons per House
1	Puckka	11,325	37.5	7.0
2	Kuchha	16,552	54.8	4.5
3	Mixed	2,328	7.7	5.8
Total		30,205	100.0	6.0

(Source: Singh, Rana P.B. 1993: 281)

Prinsep also made a detail survey of the caste structure of the city. According to his study, results 67.5 per cent were Hindus, 17.2 per cent Muslims,

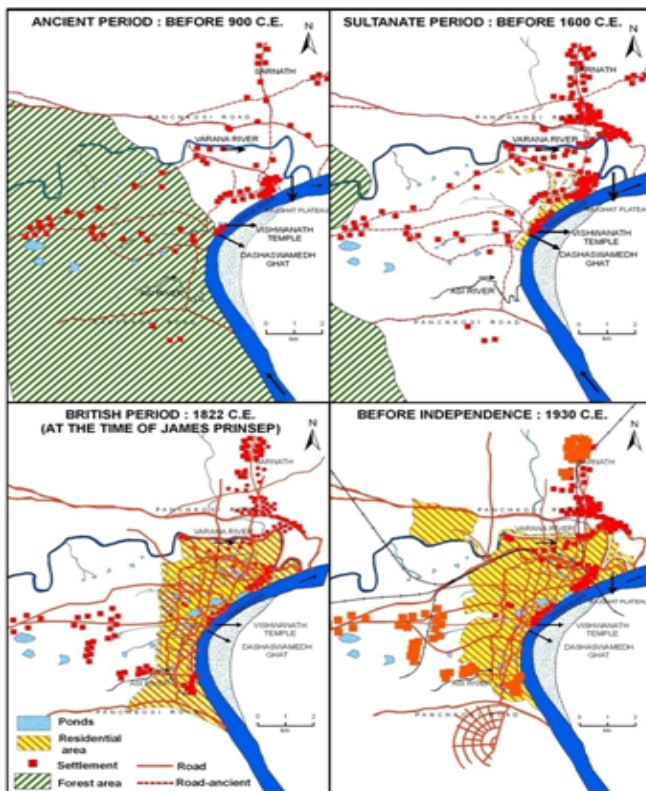


Fig. 2

and 14 per cent children and rest of the population was included as visitors. At that time, Hindus were divided into five groups and Muslims were divided into four groups (cf. Table 2 and 3).

Table 3.
Varanasi City: Caste Structure, 1827-28

Religion / Caste	Persons	Per cent
Hindus:	122,446	67.5
Brahmins	32,381	17.8
Kshatriyas & Bhumihars	14,292	7.9
Vaishyas	8,300	4.6
Shudras	60,302	33.2
Hindu Fakirs	7,171	4.0
Muslims	31,248	17.2
Sheikh, Saiyyad, and Pathans	10,000	5.0
Jullahas	10,000	5.5
Fakirs & Chandals	1,200	0.7
Others	10,048	5.5
Children & Visitors (not mentioned)	26,387	14.5
Omissions	1,401	0.8
Total	181,482	100.0

(Source: Singh, Rana P.B. 1993: 281)

Table 4.
Houses by storeys: 1827-28

Storey	Number	Per cent
I	12,590	41.7
II	11,838	39.2
III	2,996	9.9
IV	1,019	3.4
V	200	0.7
VI-VII	8	-
Unspecified	1,554	5.1
total	30,205	100

(Source: Singh, Rana P.B. 1993: 281)

The next census was taken in 1853, recording total population of 185,984 inhabitants that showed a slight decrease. Twelve year later, in 1865, the

population was recorded to 173,352 showing a further decline. After this rough estimate, the first reliable census was prepared in 1881.

Post-Independence Period

At the time of independence, the area of the Banaras Estate (Kashiraj) and the city of Banaras merged, thus a new district was formed. In 1961, Diesel Locomotive Works (D.L.W.) was established with the collaboration of USA as a big asset to this city. Between 1960 and 1970, Institute of Tibetan studies and many Buddhist monasteries (Chinese, Japanese, Thai, and Vietnamese) were set up in Sarnath. Five educational institutes got official status of Deemed University. Trade, religion, and political importance of the city were the main reasons for the growth and attraction of population towards city. Although the year 1948, 1978, and 1982 were memorable for severe floods, however population reached to 355,777 person in 1951 (first census after independence) and the growth rate was 62.8 per cent over 1881. The two wards of the Varanasi city, Chauk and Kotwali, show the highest concentration of population among the total wards. Respectively, the density of population of this area was 370 and 356 persons/ ha. Lowest density was in the outer zone of Sikraul ward 47 persons/ ha followed by Bhelupura, Adampura, Chetganj, Jaitpura and Dashashwamedh with 94, 136, 143, 166 and 178 persons/ ha, respectively due to a smaller amount variation in economic and religious activities. The growth of the outer zone was more than the centre of the city new dwelling. This represents that the expansion of the city was towards North, South and Western side.

Concluding Remarks

Obviously one can say that the population changes and religio-cultural mosaic of inhabitants and changing scenario of industrial, educational, transportation, trade and associated features are threading this city since pre-historic and historic period that superimposed and transformed different facets in culture and its spatial affinity if different periods. Different literary sources indicate that the vibration of life is present in Varanasi since time immemorial and continuous existence of human habitations since ca 1000 BCE. The older establishment was sited at Sarnath, later on the centre of city shifted to north of the river Varana; in Mohammedans period, the city lay close to south bank of the Varana and now the modern frontage faces the Ganga alone. Although population growth of city has been continuously increasing since 17th

century but this trend was not maintained the growth trend from 1891 to 1921. However, it is discernible that the early growth rate of Varanasi shot up from negligible (i.e., 1.67 per cent) in 1931 to 25.75 per cent in the decade ending 1941. Thereafter, until the decade ending 1951, 1961 and 1991 the population growth rate was rather frightening 33.65 per cent to 37.87 per cent and 31.13 per cent, respectively. This appears due to continuous increment of economic activities, decline in death rate in comparison to birth, establishment of infrastructural facilities and above all large immigration of migrants from surrounding areas.

The spatial pattern of population growth shows significant population increase in peripheral wards through urban sprawl. In the early decades of 1961 and 1971, growth of inner wards was high but due to congestion, crowdedness and saturated economic opportunities negative growth pattern appeared in wards of core area of the city. However, the outer wards of the city showing high population growth rate continuously. Two social-religious groups, viz. Hindu (65%) and Muslim (32%), in the city mainly dominate the religious composition of the city.

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शोधसारांश का ई-प्रकाशन E-Publication of Research Abstracts

अपने पी.एच.डी./डी.लिट. अथवा स्वतंत्र शोध कार्य की संक्षिप्तिका का ई-प्रकाशन कर अपने कार्य को वैश्विक शोध संदर्भों से जोड़े। निम्न प्रारूप में शोधसार (अधिकतम 5000 शब्दों में) बनाकर संपादकीय कार्यालय में प्रेषित करें। शोधसारांश के प्रकाशन हेतु सम्पादक के नाम पत्र होना चाहिए, जिसमें स्पष्ट रूप से शोध-पत्र के सम्बन्ध में "मौलिक एवं अप्रकाशित" शब्द लिखा होना चाहिए। प्रत्येक पृष्ठ पर हस्ताक्षर करें।

1. शोध शीर्षक Title
2. शोधकर्ता Name of Researcher
3. शोधपर्यवेक्षक Name of Research Supervisor
4. संबद्ध विभाग (पी.एच.डी./डी.लिट. के लिए) Concerning Department
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