



## **Introducing Religions**

*Varanasi: An important religious site*

### **Narrator**

Varanasi, on the west bank of the river Ganges, is one of the oldest living cities in the world, and it is one of the most important pilgrimage sites in India. For Hindus, the river is nothing less than a goddess. Ganga, or Ma Ganga.

### **Pandit Kishori Raman Dubey**

Ma Ganga is first and foremost a vehicle of salvation. As a believer, when you come to the banks of the River Ganga and you bathe in her, you wash away the sins of many lifetimes.

### **Narrator**

Many people come to the auspicious banks of the Ganges to have rituals carried out for them by Brahmins to fulfil their dharma.

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Aartis are carried out every evening immediately after sunset.

### **Pandit Kishori Raman Dubey**

First of all we light incense. That is to make the air around Ma Ganga fragrant. The next step is to make fragrant the air around the holy mother.

The next stage is light. We burn the various lamps to light up the goddess so that all can look upon her. After that we burn frankincense, that is done for the purification of the atmosphere around the Goddess. Then we offer up fabric, this is used to clean her entire being and to decorate it.

And when the mother sleeps, we use the fan to make sure she is comfortable. And then we use the whisk after that, so that she is peaceful in her rest.

Ma Ganga is a force. She is a Goddess without form.

### **Narrator**

The Chhat puja is observed by women mainly from the state of Bihar. But since a large number of Biharis have settled in Uttar Pradesh, over the years the women of Varansi have also begun to take part in this puja.

It is performed by women for the longevity and prosperity of their sons.

The puja happens once a year, six days after Diwali.

There are three days of fasting. On the evening of the third day, at sunset, women do a puja on the banks of the Ganges.

They make offerings to the Sun god, including fruits, incense, ghee, and then they light an oil lamp that must burn all night. The celebration ends with an offering of milk and water to the rising sun.