



Spaces of Death as Heterotopias in The City of Good Death

Renuka Yadav¹, Prof. Sunita Murmu²

Research Scholar, Professor

Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gorakhpur University, Gorakhpur, U.P., India.

ABSTRACT:

This paper examines Priyanka Champaneri's *The City of Good Death* (2021) through Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopia. The analysis explores how spaces of death, mourning, and ritual in the novel – especially the cremation ghats, the Shankar Bhavan death hostel, and funeral ritual sites – function as heterotopic places. These spaces are simultaneously real and symbolic, sacred yet mundane, personal yet communal. Champaneri's portrayal of Varanasi's deathscape exemplifies Foucault's idea of heterotopias, where everyday life and spiritual meaning collide. Drawing on Foucault's "Of Other Spaces" (1967), it becomes evident that Magadha Ghat and Manikarnika Ghat operate as liminal heterotopias of "deviation" and "suspended time," unsettling the city's promise of a "good death." Shankar Bhavan is read as a crisis heterotopia, a structured death hostel that blends life and afterlife, shaping its inhabitants' subjectivity. Funeral rituals are depicted as communal heterotopic performances that blur boundaries of time and identity. The analysis demonstrates that in *The City of Good Death*, the sacred geography of Kashi is pervaded by heterotopic dynamics: sites of dying serve as "other spaces" that both isolate and expose the contradictions of societal beliefs about death and rebirth.

Index terms: Heterotopia, Liminality, Sacredspace, Profane, Heterotopia of deviation, Ritual.

Introduction

Priyanka Champaneri's novel *The City of Good Death* is set in Varanasi (Kashi), the holiest city on the Ganges, where dying is believed to guarantee spiritual liberation. The novel opens with a startling scene at Magadha Ghat: two low-caste boatmen discover a dead man's body on the riverbank. This incident – recounted in the novel shows the tension between the sacred ideal of a *moksha*-granting death and the profane realities of gossip, caste, and uncertainty. The corpse, later revealed to be Pramesh's cousin Sagar, becomes a catalyst for the novel's exploration of how death and mourning reshape social space. Key locations – the river ghats, the Shankar Bhavan death hostel, and the sites of funeral rites – emerge not merely as backdrops but as active, liminal spaces where the community negotiates life, death, and destiny. Foucault's notion of heterotopia provides a rich framework for understanding these spaces. In "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" (1967), Foucault describes heterotopias as "other" real places that juxtapose incompatible sites and meanings, often revealing the contradictions of the society that produces them. Heterotopias are real and material, but they function symbolically to contest or invert ordinary social space. Importantly, Foucault distinguishes heterotopias of crisis (spaces reserved for those undergoing a transition or taboo status) and heterotopias of deviation (spaces for individuals whose behavior deviates from the norm). He

also notes that heterotopias often involve a kind of “counter-positioning” of time: they may accumulate “pieces of time” or enact a “pure symmetry of heterochronisms”, so that time and meaning are refracted rather than linear.

In Varanasi, the ghats along the Ganges – especially the famous Manikarnika and cursed Magadha ghats – function as open-air cremation grounds and spaces of purification. These are sites of collective ritual, but they are also public marketplaces of rumor and spectacle in Champaneri’s narrative. Shankar Bhavan, the death hostel run by Pramesh, is a liminal dwelling where the dying come to complete their rituals. These heterotopic spaces are sacred in the sense of fulfilling spiritual promises, yet deeply administrative and regulated (by casteed funeral customs, hospital-like rules, or civic authorities). They are intensely personal: each death has a family context and inner grief, but also communal: the city at large observes, speculates, and demands spectacle (as in the crowd gathered for Sagar’s funeral).

This paper argues that *The City of Good Death* portrays Varanasi’s deathscape as a network of heterotopias. Providing vivid examples: Magadha Ghat becomes a heterotopic rupture that unsettles the city’s cosmology of good death; Shankar Bhavan operates as a crisis heterotopia where life and death coexist in an ordered “suspended time”; and the funeral rituals enact a heterotopic liminal space where social norms are momentarily transformed. The following section first outlines Foucault’s theory of heterotopia, then analyzes how each of these spaces in the novel embodies heterotopic dynamics, illustrating how they are “real spaces that are outside of all places” but deeply connected to Kashi’s sacred identity.

Theoretical Framework: Foucault on Heterotopias

Michel Foucault introduced the concept of **heterotopia** in his 1967 lecture “*Of Other Spaces*”. He contrasted heterotopias with utopias, describing them as “absolutely different spaces” that exist in reality and “exert a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy”. In Foucault’s formulation, every society has heterotopic places – “a constant feature of all human groups” – but their form and function vary. He proposes several principles to characterize heterotopias:

1. **Universality and Variation:** The first principle is that heterotopias are universal: no society fails to create *some* other spaces. However, their specific form depends on historical and cultural context, so there is no single universal template. Heterotopias can be classified broadly; for example, primitive societies had heterotopias of crisis, reserved for individuals in transitional or liminal states (adolescents, menstruating women, the dying, etc.). In modern societies, Foucault notes, many crisis heterotopias have disappeared (boarding schools and the honeymoon as historical examples). Instead, modern heterotopias often fall into his category of deviation: places for people whose behaviour or state is deemed deviant by society. These include prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and other institutions that isolate and regulate those considered “different”. Foucault explicitly labels these “heterotopias of deviation” and enumerates examples like rest homes, asylums, prisons, and even the special zones beyond the city where debauched pleasure could occur.
2. **Historical Transformation:** The second principle is that the function of a given heterotopia may change over time. “Each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society,” but as history unfolds “the same heterotopia can... have one function or another” depending on cultural context. Foucault illustrates this by examining the cemetery: once central and sacred within the city and church, it was later marginalized to the outskirts. He shows that Western cemeteries became heterotopic “other places” that connected all families to their dead, and then gradually acquired new meanings (the modern “cult of the dead” as secularization took hold). This demonstrates that heterotopias are not static curiosities but dynamic sites whose social meanings evolve.
3. **Juxtaposition of Incompatible Spaces:** The third principle is that heterotopias juxtapose several incompatible spaces in a single real place. As Foucault famously says, heterotopias are “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible”. In practical terms, a heterotopia may contain microcosms of other places or worlds that would normally be separate (for example, a garden containing symbols of empires). The effect is that the heterotopia overlays conflicting meanings: the sacred and the profane, life and death, private and public, all at once.
4. **Heterochrony – Contested Time:** The fourth principle involves time. Heterotopias often create “slices of time” that differ from ordinary chronology. Foucault describes a “pure symmetry of heterochronisms”: they accumulate or juxtapose different ages and temporalities. For instance, a cemetery embodies a “strange

heterochronism” – it is bound up with the cessation of life and the “quasi-eternity” of death. Foucault points out that some heterotopias (museums, libraries) accumulate time indefinitely, while others (fairs, carnivals) are temporary and cyclical. In each case, the heterotopia bends or suspends normal time.

5. **Opening and Closing:** The fifth principle is that heterotopias have a system of opening and closing, making access controlled by ritual. They are not freely accessible in the same way as public space; entry often requires special permission or ceremony. (Foucault’s examples include sacred rites of purification or initiation.) This openness/closure underscores their otherness.
6. **Function in Relation to Other Space:** The sixth principle concerns the relationship of the heterotopia to all other spaces in society. Heterotopias can function in two opposite ways: they can expose all “real” spaces as illusion (a brothel, for example, that makes the rest of society appear virtuous by contrast) or they can serve as compensatory perfect places (ideal colonies or monasteries). Either way, a heterotopia sets itself off against the normative space of society to highlight differences.

Taken together, these characteristics show that heterotopias are *real, physical places* that also serve symbolic purposes. They are “outside of all places,” yet they reflect and contest the spatial order of their society. Notably for our purposes, Foucault explicitly mentions *cemeteries* as heterotopias – places of death that are both separate from ordinary life and integral to the social world. This makes his theory especially apt for analyzing Varanasi’s death-related spaces. Scholars have also noted the usefulness of heterotopia in literary and cultural studies. In particular, Santra and Tiwari observe that Foucault’s heterotopias have been used in contemporary Indian fiction to explore “otherness” and contradictory identities. They summarize Foucault’s view that heterotopias “juxtapose in a single real place several spaces... that are in themselves incompatible” and argue that Indian narratives often contain such heterotopic zones. This cue is followed: Champaneri’s novel, with its vivid depiction of Kashi’s sacred geography, naturally invites a heterotopic reading. The analysis draws on Foucault’s principles, applied closely to the novel’s scenes. In each case, the aim is to show how the site in question embodies the tension between sacred meaning and mundane reality, personal grief and communal ritual, life and death – in other words, how it functions as Foucault’s “other space”.

Ghats as Heterotopias of Death and Deviation

The ghats (riverfront steps) of Varanasi are the primary setting for death in the novel. Champaneri’s narratives juxtaposes two ghats: the cursed Magadha Ghat on the outskirts where a stranger’s body is found, and the esteemed Manikarnika Ghat, the traditional cremation ground in the old city. Both act as heterotopias, in different ways.

Magadha Ghat as Heterotopia of Deviation

In the opening scene, two Dom boatmen discover a naked corpse at dawn on the sandbank of Magadha Ghat. The narration quickly marks Magadha as a site of fear and “cursing”: villagers consider it impure, since dying there means rebirth in a low caste. Thus the dead body lying there is immediately a source of local anxiety. The boatmen casually discuss whether to dump the body or try to profit from its jewellery (even joking that a gold necklace would have to be sold after cremation). They share the view that dying outside the “circle of salvation” of Kashi is a bad omen. This conversation itself is set on the ghat, mixing mundane concerns (the boatmen’s poverty and opportunism) with religious lore about cursed death. In Foucault’s terms, Magadha Ghat operates as a heterotopia of deviation: it is a place where the normal ritual script of Kashi’s sacred death is violently disrupted. By finding the body in this excluded locale, the story turns the holy geography of the city upside down. As one priest in the narrative angrily explains, those who die by suicide or outside blessed grounds cannot be cremated; their unpurified bodies must be floated away by the river. Sagar’s body thus lies at the literal border between the holy (Kashi’s river) and the profane (outer Magadha).

This situation embodies Foucault’s insight that heterotopias of deviation “are occupied by individuals whose behavior deviates from the current average or norm”. The dead man (and anyone who dies on Magadha) is treated as a deviant: he is excluded from normal rites, gossip and moralizing fill the space, and the ghat itself is “neither

holy nor cursed... certainly not a good death". The community's response: from coarse jokes to solemn pietism – spills into this space, exposing it as a heterotopic rupture. The sacred promise of salvation is put in crisis: those gathered at the ghat fear "the fear that the ritual script has been violated and that salvation may no longer be assured". In other words, the discovery of a body at Magadha Ghat fractures the city's heterotopic order, turning a liminal geography into a contested, heterotopic site.

Magadha Ghat's physical placement outside the central city echoes Foucault's example of the cemetery: an "other place" that is connected to the city in spirit but lies beyond its living space. In Western culture, cemeteries were originally at the heart of town but later moved to the suburbs – much as Magadha sits beyond the sanctified ghats. Foucault notes that the cemetery is tied to all families (since each has a relative buried there). Likewise, Magadha Ghat is an "other" death-place linking into Kashi's system: everyone in Varanasi believes that where one dies determines one's fate, so Magadha forms an ominous part of the city's sacrificial geography. Sagar's death at Magadha instantaneously attracts citywide attention and rumor, drawing crowds and officials to this space. The ghat thus knits together public and private meanings: it is at once a physical spot on the map and a symbolic breaking of the city's sacred promise.

Manikarnika Ghat as Heterotopia of Ritual

In contrast, the Manikarnika Ghat – the famed cremation ground in old Benares – is introduced moments later when Sagar's body is carried there for rites. This site functions as a heterotopia of ritual and "suspended time." Hundreds of residents and pilgrims gather to witness Sagar's cremation, even though it is ostensibly a private rite. The novel depicts an unbelievable crowd: "Perpetual clusters of foreigners, pilgrims, urchins, Dom children playing cricket... scattered ne'er-do-wells... leaned out of high balconies... to witness the day's cremations at Manikarnika". Despite of belonging from different castes and social classes people press on the steps and balconies to see the dead man's final rites. The text observes that the onlookers "watched out of a desire as simple and instinctive as thirst: they needed a grand finale to the dead man's story, which had festered on their lips for the last two days". In other words, the city turns the funeral into a public spectacle, a performance of death.

This scene makes Manikarnika a paradigmatic heterotopia of ritual. Foucault explicitly notes that some heterotopias are linked to time in special ways. In a heterotopia, time is not linear but suspended or segmented. The Manikarnika gathering resembles Foucault's description of certain heterochronies: a solemn ceremony that "has the power of juxtaposing incompatible spaces" (sacred cremation and public entertainment) and creating a "time out of time" situation. The cremation itself follows strict ritual scripts (the Sanskrit chants and the symbolic breaking of the skull), but it unfolds under the gaze of a secular crowd. The novel even invokes Turner's anthropological insight that ritual is transformative but can become "stuck in liminality" when overly public. Indeed, Sagar's last rite is not completed peacefully: the arrival of spectators and gossip keeps the soul's transition in limbo. Viewers speculate wildly about his death ("A love letter, most probably... Always a woman to blame... Debts, more likely."), turning the sacred rite of passage into fodder for rumour. As Foucault would say, the funeral site exposes "every real space... as more illusory," since the imagined privacy of grief is shattered.

Manikarnika Ghat, therefore, is heterotopic in that it is both *itself* a deathly sacred space and *also* a stage for communal drama. The crowd's presence makes time and meaning fluid: the priest's instruction to detach from grief ("The soul is gone, the body is burnt... Do not look back.") is recited against a backdrop of human curiosity and theatricality. Foucault's observation that heterotopias can "enter into full function when [people] find themselves in a sort of total breach of their traditional time" is apt: at Manikarnika the usual passage from life to death is prolonged and complicated by collective attention. Once the pyre is lit, the crowd will disperse and "the city... pass from one story of death to the next", the ritual washes away from one narrative and prepares for the next. Manikarnika Ghat thus embodies a heterotopic "suspended time" – a place where salvation and sensationalism coexist, and where the river Ganges, normally the agent of purification, becomes part of a social spectacle.

Sacred and Profane in the Ghats

Crucially, both ghats illustrate the merging of sacred and profane. Mircea Eliade's idea that sacred space is set apart from the ordinary is subverted here. Magadha Ghat, which should be cut off as cursed, is nonetheless filled with everyday life (boatmen bargaining for bribes), and the priests at both ghats respond with profanity and blame instead of solemn ritual. Conversely, Manikarnika is meant to be a purely sacred space of liberation, yet it resonates with secular noise (monkeys, cricket games, bystanders) and even violence (the physical act of skull-breaking). In Champaneri's depiction, the ghats are continuously negotiated spaces where the holy architecture of Kashi meets quotidian chaos. This reflects Foucault's notion that heterotopias often contain contradictory meanings simultaneously. In one page, the narrative describes the Magadha ghat as "majestic and ethereal... the Ganga so calm and serene... temple bells jingling" and immediately layers on "the messiness of everyday life... priests collecting coins, a drunk man on the stairs". The ghats thus "juxtapose in a single real place" the saint and sinner – exactly Foucault's image of heterotopia.

In short, the ghats of Champaneri's Kashi function as heterotopic loci. Magadha Ghat is a heterotopia of deviation: it sits outside the city's salvific order and triggers a crisis of meaning. Manikarnika Ghat is a heterotopia of ritual: a layered space where time and identity are momentarily suspended and communal mythmaking occurs. Both sites bring together the living and the dead, the profane and the sacred, exhibiting Foucault's heterotopia of real yet "absolutely unreal" space. They reveal how Varanasi as a whole is a city "suspended without past or future" – an exemplar of a heterotopic city where "sinner and saint alike could achieve the same goal" (the promise of ultimate salvation).

Shankar Bhavan: The Death Hostel as Liminal Heterotopia

Beyond the riverbank, the novel's other primary setting is the Shankar Bhavan death hostel, where Pramesh Prasad works. This is a modest building on a side street of Benares where dying pilgrims are admitted to await their final breaths. Shankar Bhavan is depicted as a crossroads of life and death: it houses the terminally ill from many walks of life, under the care of Pramesh, his young family, a priest (Narinder), and an assistant (Mohan). The hostel serves ordinary worldly functions (beds, meals, rituals) but also the city's ultimate sacred function – delivering a "good death." Shankar Bhavan itself emerges as a heterotopic space of crisis in Foucault's sense, a liminal zone reserved for those at the threshold of life's end. Foucault described crisis heterotopias as places set apart for individuals in states of transition or marginality – traditionally rites of passage such as boarding schools, military barracks, or pilgrimage temples. In *The City of Good Death*, the only patrons of Shankar Bhavan are the dying or near-dying: people who have journeyed to Kashi precisely because they are terminally ill. They have left behind families, jobs, social roles – entering, in effect, the same "crisis" state that Foucault associates with heterotopia. Pramesh himself describes his arrival: "I hadn't been anywhere like Kashi... I wanted to do that work" (Champaneri 33), acknowledging that Shankar Bhavan is not just a job but a spiritual calling. The hostel is removed from "ordinary reality" – it is a domain where life and death coexist and the boundary between them blurs. Pramesh notes that life at the Bhavan is "suspended between past and future, with no burden from past experiences and no story to unfold". These descriptions echo Victor Turner's concept of liminality, but they also resonate with heterotopia: this space is detached from the profane world and governed by a special logic.

Shankar Bhavan's very structure is a collage of contradictory spaces. Within it unfolds a microcosm of society: novices dying in their beds, family members grieving, local Doms and priests conducting rites, foreign volunteers, and old-timers sharing ghost stories. It contains "both life and death, past and present, familial estrangement and spiritual reunion". As one character observes through Foucault's lens, Shankar Bhavan "juxtaposes in a single real place several spaces... incompatible". It is a house of Shiva (God of death), yet furnished with everyday accoutrements; a communal home, yet filled with individuals facing utter solitude. Pramesh's own cousin Sagar arrives as a corpse, turning the Bhavan into the literal site where a long-estranged family history is revealed. In effect, Shankar Bhavan is an *intersection* of several worlds – precisely the sort of heterotopic mixing that Foucault identified as distinctive to heterotopias.

The time within Shankar Bhavan is also heterotopic. Foucault writes that heterotopic places often warp time into “slices” or periods of utter differentness. In the Bhavan, every hour is structured around death. Narinder the priest chants detachment verses to each dying person: “*The soul is gone, the body is burnt, the time is past. Do not show your attachment... Do not look back.*” (Champaneri 50). This incantation is repeated day and night, creating an atmosphere of ritualized suspension. In the novel, this liturgy has a numbing effect on both the families and the staff. Pramesh notes how the words are deliberately designed to “numb a person’s emotions and mould them into an institutional routine”. Thus the Bhavan enforces a temporal logic distinct from ordinary life: grief must be transformed into detachment, and every moment is measured against the inevitability of final rites. In Foucault’s language, Shankar Bhavan is a space of “suspended time” governed by death, rather than by clocks or social calendars.

Shankar Bhavan’s regulations and atmosphere are simultaneously sacred and bureaucratic. The hostel is overseen by established rules – for example, guests are reminded “The rules are clear: someone must be with [the dying person] at all times” – reflecting a strict protocol. At the same time, the place is suffused with spiritual meaning: pilgrims recite mantras, priests perform fire rituals, and many believe their soul will be purified by the Bhavan’s prayers. This dual character – “sacred yet administrative” – is a hallmark of heterotopia. The space is deliberately set apart (by religious purpose) yet also highly organized (by human authority). In Foucault’s terms, it is a heterotopia that functions “in relation to all the space that remains”: it does not exist outside society, but it inverts social life by making religion and bureaucracy coincide.

Furthermore, Shankar Bhavan acts as a site of both personal and communal transformation. For each dying visitor it is deeply personal: the confinement in that room, and the rituals performed, determine whether one achieves the mythic promise of liberation. Yet it is communal insofar as it is a public institution: families share the waiting room, strangers listen at bedsides, and town officials (like Officer Bhudev) circulate in search of answers. The building stands in for the city’s collective hope that Kashi will fulfill its vow of free salvation. In this way, the Bhavan resembles what Santra and Tiwari describe as a heterotopia “where characters can explore their own identities and values, as spaces of imagination, where characters can create new worlds and possibilities”. Inside Shankar Bhavan, Pramesh and the other staff confront secrets, haunting, and moral duties that force them to reimagine their beliefs. The hostel is outside normal life, but it reflects the deepest truths of it: the meaning of duty, memory, and redemption are enacted here.

In summary, Shankar Bhavan in *The City of Good Death* exemplifies a heterotopic structure. It is a crisis heterotopia in that it is reserved for those in the crisis of impending death. It is a space where time is differently ordered and where life/death binaries blur. The Bhavan’s functions are sacred (preparing souls) yet also institutional (following protocols). It “exists outside of normal societal structures yet reflects deep truths about them” – exactly as Foucault says heterotopias do. By housing life-and-death in one place, Shankar Bhavan materializes the idea that Varanasi itself is a sacred site that transforms identity and destiny.

Ritual Spaces and the Politics of Mourning

Beyond the fixed locations of ghats and hostel, *The City of Good Death* highlights **ritual spaces** – particularly the ritual of the cremation itself – as heterotopic moments. When a death occurs in Kashi, the funeral ceremonies create a transient heterotopia. The novel’s portrayal of Sagar’s cremation at Manikarnika has already been noted; from this, a generalization can be made to the space of ritual in the novel’s first chapter. In the public ritual of burning the body, private grief is paradoxically performed in public. Champaneri’s narration emphasizes that even though a funeral is inherently personal, it becomes a social event. Neighbors and strangers gather at the ghat; conversation and speculation replace silent mourning. The analytic commentary in the novel even compares the ritual to performance: Schechner’s idea of performance as a “broad spectrum” is evoked to show that the funeral slides from sacred ritual into communal spectacle. The effect is heterotopic: the cremation space becomes a **festival-like zone outside normal order**. It is as if the community steps outside everyday time to witness and make sense of death.

This aligns with Foucault's insight that certain ritual occasions function as heterotopias of "celebration" or "ritual," where time is "viewed as celebration". For example, he mentions fairs and carnivals as heterotopic in that they occupy an "empty zone outside the city limits" for limited periods. In the novel, every cremation (especially a notable one like Sagar's) momentarily turns Kashi into a carnival of death. Time slows: people pauses their morning routines to pack the ghat steps. Murmurs replace bells; the presence of the crowd makes the event stretch over hours. As Foucault notes about cemetery rites, the end of life creates a "strange heterochronism" – a quasi-eternal instant. Champaneri shows this: onlookers are described as needing "a grand finale to the dead man's story", as if the few hours of the cremation stand apart from daily chronology. The funeral rite, which is meant to send the deceased beyond time (to liberation), instead collapses past rumors and future fates into this one gathering.

Moreover, the novel suggests that ritual spaces enforce communal rules and discipline, again linking to heterotopia. The breaking of Sagar's skull to release his soul (a sacred duty) is carried out under intense social scrutiny: "the eyes of all the people on ghat were set on him" (Champaneri 54). Pramesh, performing the rite for Sagar, feels the panoptic gaze of the community – reminiscent of Foucault's discussion of how bodies are controlled in institutional spaces. While not heterotopic per se, this detail underlines that ritual zones mix sacred duty with social power. The ceremony demands that family duty and social spectacle be balanced. Thus the cremation space is at once a hierophany (manifestation of the sacred) and a civic forum, again illustrating the "inside/outside" tension Foucault describes.

Finally, ritual spaces in the novel highlight the personal communality of death. Every character's funeral involves others: pilgrims detached from their villages share the ghat with local Doms and priests; family members detach themselves from the corpse following the priest's counsel. "In Champaneri's Benares, 'as the narrator quotes, 'the city promised [death] would be the last – the death to end all rebirths and miseries'" (Champaneri 15)". This belief is inherently communal, a theological promise shared by all who come to Kashi. But the rituals that enact this promise happen in richly layered heterotopias where every observer and participant is in a liminal zone. In sum, the spaces of ritual in *The City of Good Death* – most obviously the cremation ghats – are heterotopic in that they create alternate socio-temporal orders. The sacred ritual of cremation, when observed and intervened in by crowds, becomes an "other space" that reveals how death is both intensely personal and intensely public. These rituals "juxtapose incompatible activities": the holy (liberation of the soul) coexists with the mundane (curiosity, commerce, noise). They exemplify Foucault's heterotopia of ritual or celebration, where normal everyday life is suspended and society confronts its own hidden anxieties (about mortality, sin, salvation).

Conclusion

Champaneri's *The City of Good Death* richly illustrates Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia. By focusing on the novel it becomes evident that the ghats of Kashi, the Shankar Bhavan death hostel, and the funeral ceremonies themselves operate as heterotopias – real, material spaces that encode layered meanings and contradictions. Magadha Ghat emerges as a heterotopia of deviation and crisis, upsetting Varanasi's sacred geography and unleashing gossip that blurs sacred with profane. Manikarnika Ghat becomes a heterotopia of suspended time, where community spectacle and spiritual ritual intertwine. Shankar Bhavan is a liminal heterotopia of crisis, a structured space for death that juxtaposes life and afterlife, and shapes its inhabitants through ritual detachment. Throughout these spaces, Champaneri shows Varanasi as "a city where time did not exist" for its pilgrims – a chronotope in perpetual limbo. Using Foucault's language, Kashi's deathscape emerges as a network of "other spaces" that both reflect and invert the social order. The grief and hope of individuals (personal dimensions) coexist with the community's customs and enforcement (communal dimensions); the ghats and hostel are tangible locales with charred wood and chanting priests, yet they also point to invisible cosmologies of karma and liberation. These heterotopias make visible the tensions in the novel's world: caste prejudice, the economy of death, the clash between rumor and faith. In heterotopia, "every real space... is still more illusory" – and indeed, the characters discover that even a "good death" can slip into doubt.

In conclusion, Foucault's theory illuminates how *The City of Good Death* is as much a spatial narrative as a family saga. Varanasi itself is portrayed as a sacred heterotopia – at once secular city and cosmic liminality – where death is not just an event but a continual reshaping of space. My analysis suggests that any attempt to understand Champaneri's novel must attend to its geography of death. The spaces of dying in the book are *other* places that carry the contradictions of Kashi: they are sacred spaces administered by priests and officials, communal spaces carrying personal anguish, and real places haunted by myth. In these heterotopic spaces, the novel dramatizes the paradox of Varanasi: the promise of ultimate freedom is always intertwined with the messy, earthly reality of living and dying in the holy city.

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