

The Buddha's Journey 2

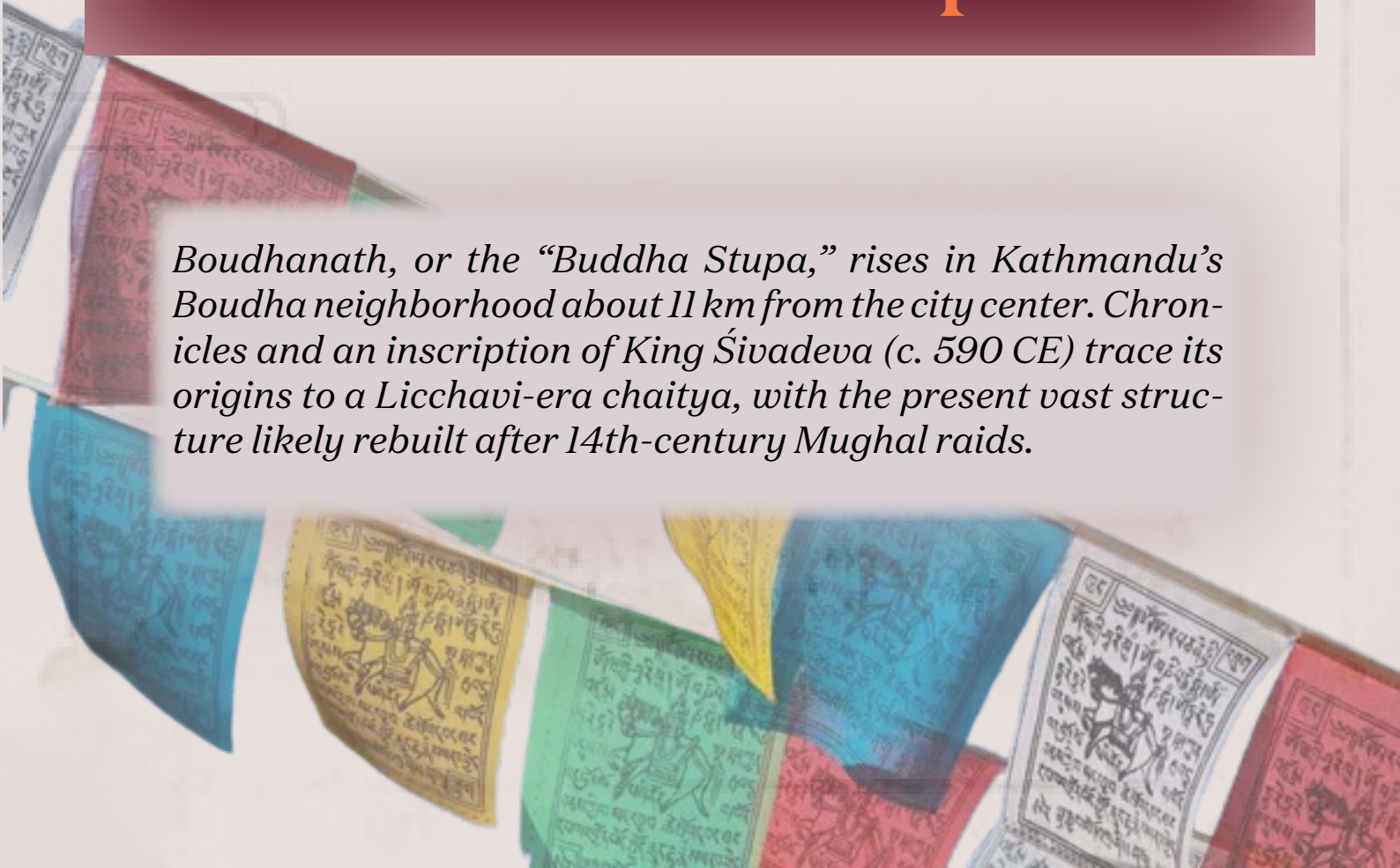


BUDDHIST CACHE




7. Buddha Stupa

Boudhanath, or the “Buddha Stupa,” rises in Kathmandu’s Boudha neighborhood about 11 km from the city center. Chronicles and an inscription of King Śivadeva (c. 590 CE) trace its origins to a Licchavi-era chaitya, with the present vast structure likely rebuilt after 14th-century Mughal raids.



After 1959 it became the heart of Tibetan Buddhism in exile, surrounded by more than fifty monasteries. A 2015 earthquake cracked the spire, but local monks and laypeople quickly raised funds to restore and gild the monument, reopening it in 2016.

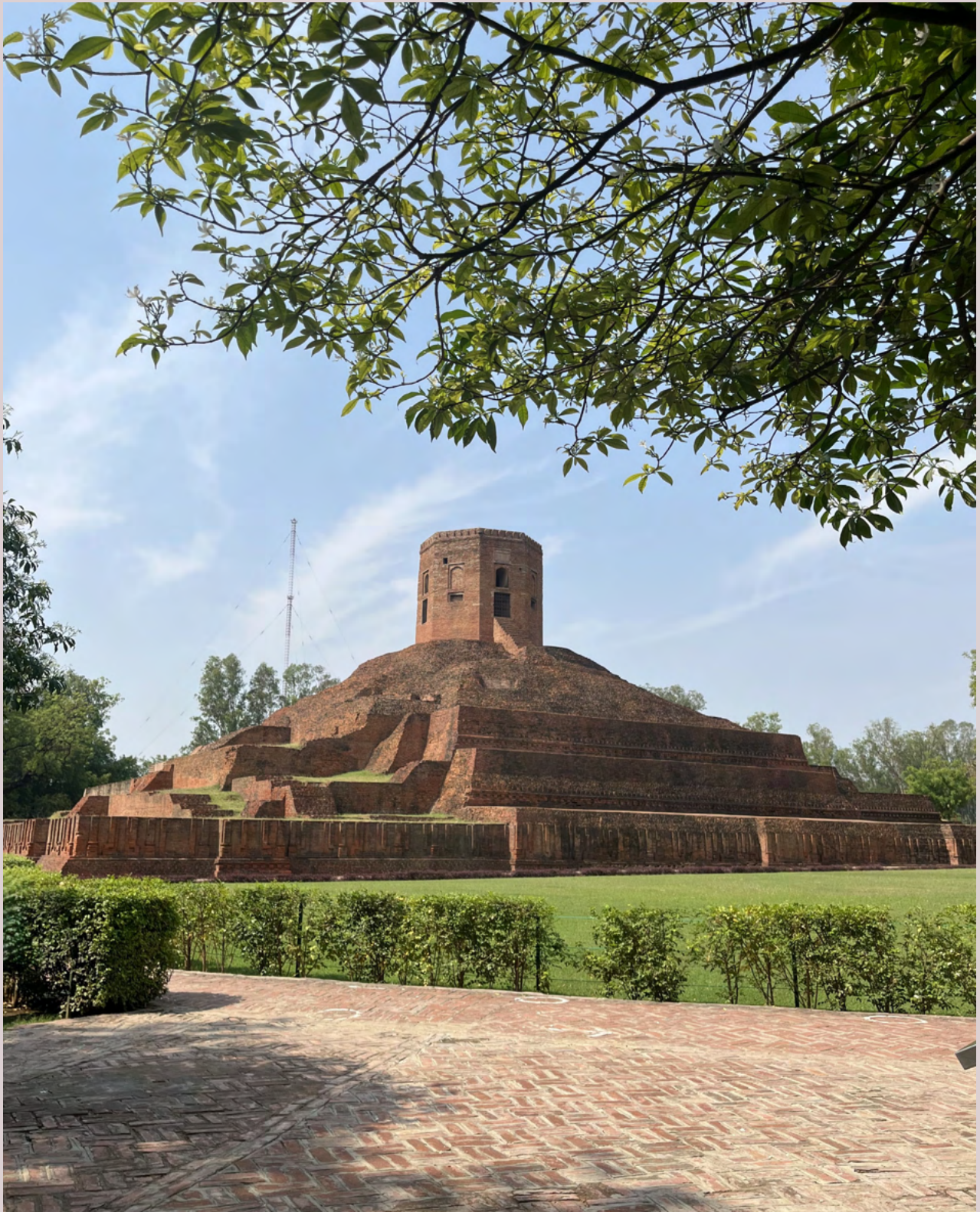




The stupa is Nepal's largest, a 36 m high white dome encircled by three mandala-like plinths and crowned by thirteen gilded tiers beneath the Buddha's "all-seeing eyes." Pilgrims spin 108 prayer wheels while performing clockwise kora around the base, amid incense, butter lamps, and chanting. A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1979, Boudhanath remains a key Himalayan pilgrimage hub and a living example of community-driven cultural resilience.

8. Chaukhandi Stupa

Chaukhandi Stupa stands on a low hill at Sarnath's northern edge, about 8 km from Varanasi. Built between the 4th and 8th centuries CE, it marks the spot where the Buddha, arriving from Bodh Gaya, first met the five companions who would hear his First Sermon.



In 1588 a Mughal patron added the distinctive octagonal brick tower to honor Emperor Humayun's visit, preserving the earlier terraced core beneath. British explorers investigated the mound in the 19th century, and the Archaeological Survey of India began stabilisation in 1920; it was declared a Monument of National Importance in 2019 and remains on UNESCO's Tentative World Heritage list.



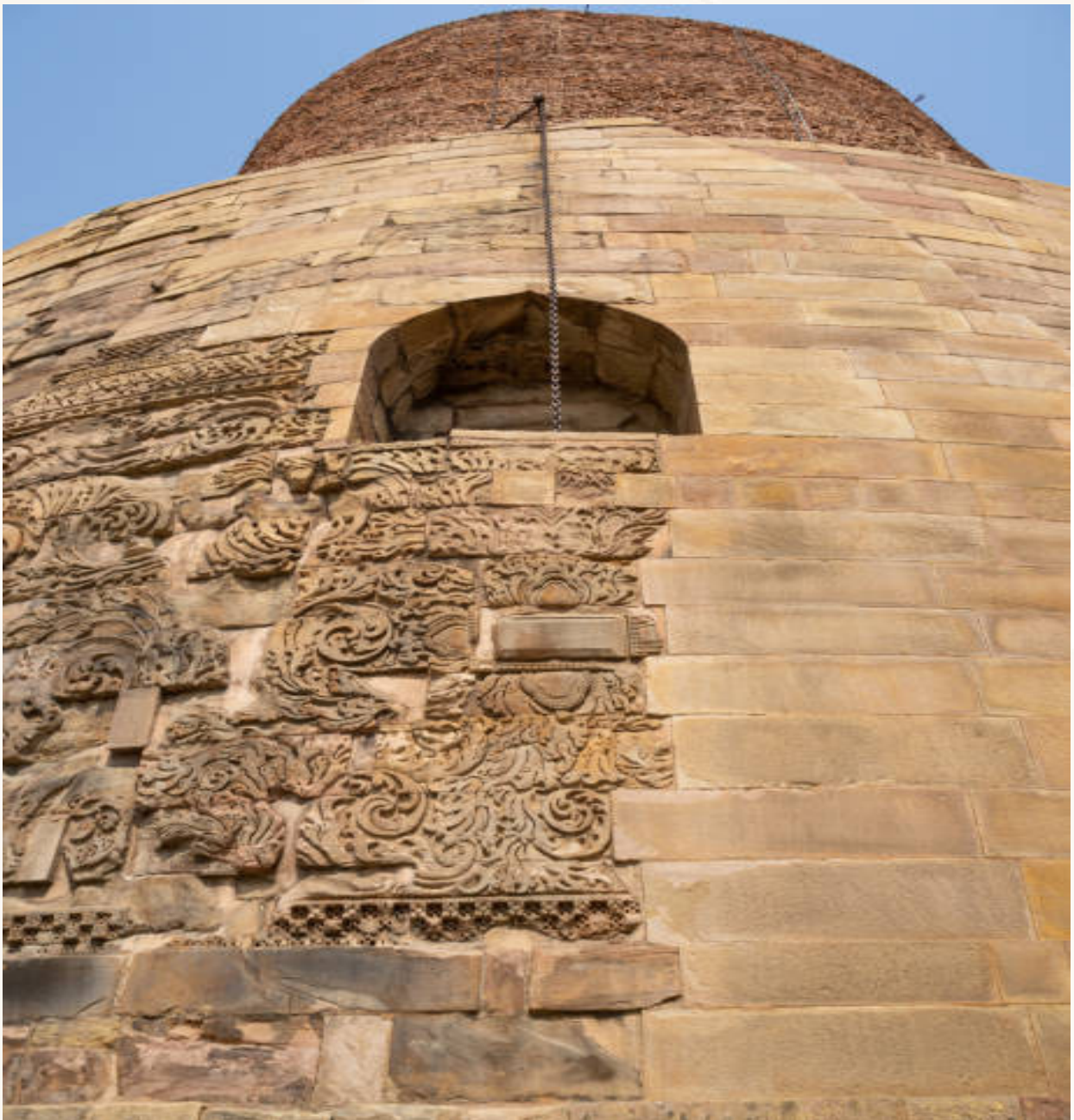
CHAUKHANDI STUPA

THIS LOFTY BRICK STRUCTURE IS A TERRACED BUDDHIST STUPA KNOWN AS CHAUKHANDI BECAUSE OF ITS FOUR ARMED PLAN. IT WAS CONSTRUCTED DURING GUPTA PERIOD (CIRCA 4TH-5TH CENTURY A.D.) AND MARKS THE PROBABLE SPOT WHERE LORD BUDDHA MET HIS FIVE FIRST - WHILE COMPANIONS AFTER ENLIGHTENMENT. THIS STUPA ALSO FINDS MENTION IN THE ACCOUNTS OF HIUEN TSIANG, THE CELEBRATED CHINESE TRAVELLER OF 7TH CENTURY A.D. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS CONDUCTED IN 1835 AND 1904-05 BROUGHT TO LIGHT THIS 93 FT. HIGH BRICK STUPA LAID IN MUD MORTAR HAVING THREE DIMINISHING SQUARE TERRACES EACH ABOUT 12 FT. HIGH AND 12 FT. BROAD. EACH TERRACE IS SUPPORTED BY AN OUTER AND INNER WALL WITH A NUMBER OF CROSS WALLS TO STRENGTHEN THE STRUCTURE. THE OUTER WALLS OF THE TERRACES ARE ORNAMENTED WITH A SERIES OF NICHES SEPARATED BY PILASTERS. THE IMAGE OF BUDDHA IN DHARMACHAKRA PRAVARTAN MUDRA AND LEOPARDS WITH SWORDSMEN FOUND AT THIS SITE ARE EXCELLENT EXAMPLES OF THE CLASSIC GUPTA ART. THE OCTAGONAL BRICK TOWER CROWNING THE STUPA IS A MUGHAL STRUCTURE ERECTED IN 1588 A.D. BY GOVARDHAN, SON OF RAJA TODAR MAL, TO COMMEMORATE THE VISIT OF HUMAYUN THE GREAT MUGHAL, EMPEROR TO THIS PLACE, AS RECORDED IN AN ARABIC INSCRIPTION ON A STONE SLAB ABOVE ITS DOORWAY ON THE NORTH SIDE.

The stupa retains its cruciform brick terraces and the 11 m high Mughal tower with slit windows and traces of lime plaster, combining Gupta devotion with later Islamic-period design. Gupta-era bricks, stucco Buddha fragments, and votive seals found on site are displayed in the Sarnath Museum. From the upper terrace visitors can view the entire monastic zone, reflecting both the Buddha's historic reunion with his disciples and over a millennium of evolving Indian architecture and conservation.

9. Dhamekh Stupa

Dhamekh Stupa dominates Sarnath's Deer Park near Varanasi, the very spot where the Buddha delivered his first sermon and founded the monastic Sangha. First raised by Emperor Aśoka around 249 BCE, the original Mauryan core now lies buried beneath a Gupta-era enlargement built in the 5th–6th centuries CE. This 43 m high, 28 m wide cylinder was once ringed by eight niches holding life-size Buddhas and a stone belt of lotus scrolls, geese, and rosettes—masterpieces of Gupta sculpture. Centuries of decline followed, and by the late 18th century many carved blocks had been stripped for Varanasi construction, leaving scars still visible.



The stupa's lower 11 m of finely carved Chunar sandstone contrast with the plain brick above, revealing an unfinished superstructure. Empty radial niches evoke the Noble Eightfold Path, while nearby ruins—votive stupas, monastic platforms, and the fragmentary Ashoka Pillar—recreate the ancient pilgrimage setting.



Protected and stabilized by the Archaeological Survey of India, Dhamekh remains the spiritual and historical centerpiece of Sarnath, embodying the “First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma” and the evolution of Indian Buddhist art and architecture.



10. Dhamma Chakka Pavattana Sutta



Seven weeks after his enlightenment, the Buddha delivered his first sermon at the Deer Park in Isipatana (modern Sarnath) to his five former ascetic companions, thus founding the first Sangha. This discourse, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, (setting in motion of the wheel) lays out the Middle Way, the Four Noble Truths, and the Noble Eightfold Path, forming the foundational framework for all Buddhist teachings. It marks the transformation of the Buddha from a private seeker into a public teacher sharing the path to liberation.

The sermon site became an important pilgrimage destination, commemorated by Ashoka's early stupa and later by the monumental Gupta-period Dhamekh Stupa. Artistic representations, such as 5th-century relief panels and lotus motifs on the stupa, visually encode the teachings of the sutta, allowing pilgrims to engage with its message even if they could not read. The text exists in multiple Pāli, Chinese, Tibetan, and Gandhāra versions, showing a stable doctrinal core with minor stylistic variations.



Historically, the sutta is regarded as the “first turning of the Wheel of Dhamma,” establishing the Sagha as the vehicle for transmitting insight. Its influence extends across ritual, monastic practice, art, and architecture, shaping 2,500 years of Buddhist tradition and global heritage. The Deer Park and its associated monuments remain central to pilgrimage and India's Buddhist Circuit, reflecting the enduring significance of this single discourse.

11. Mulagandha Kuti Vihara



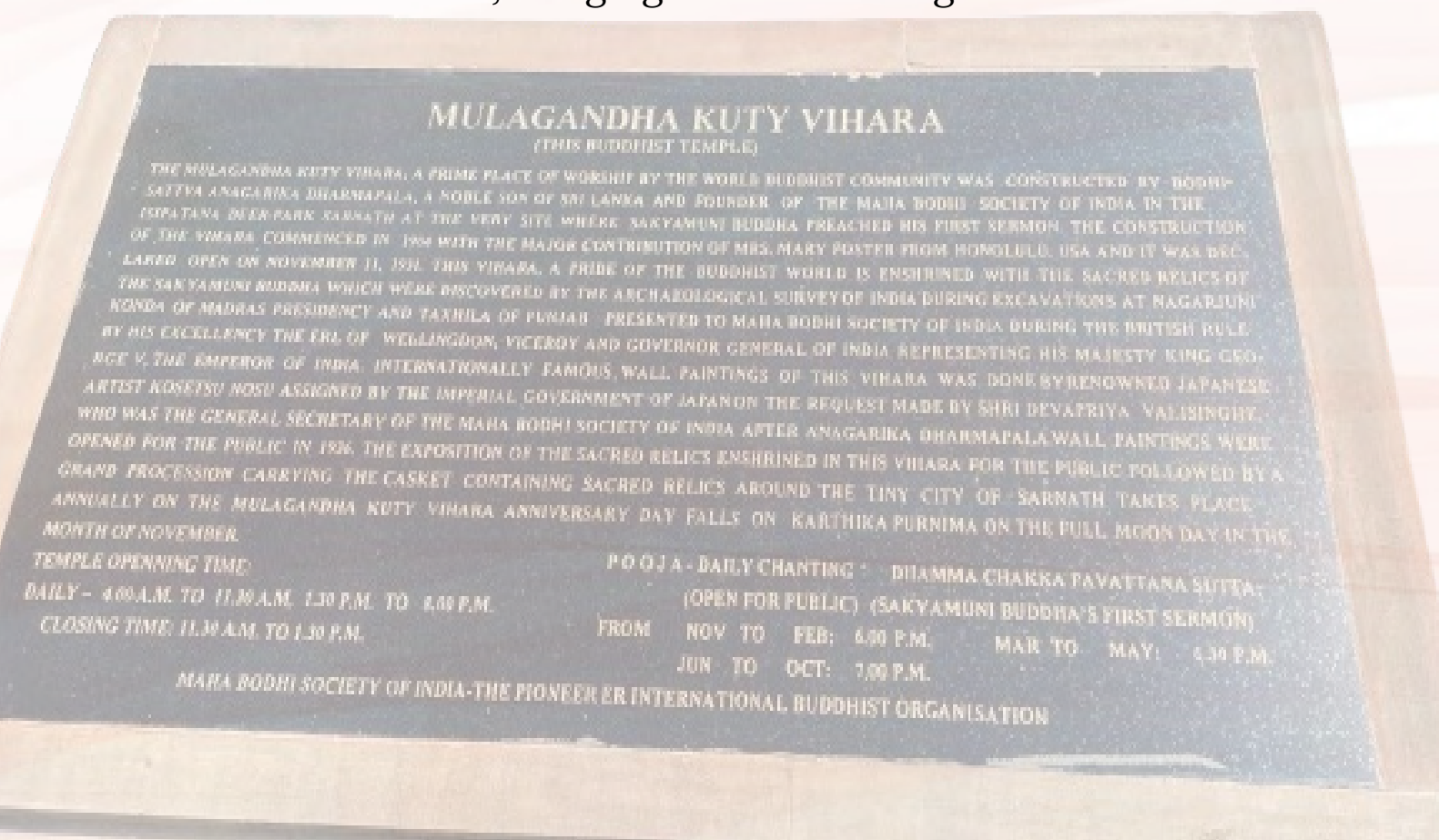
Mulagandha Kuti Vihara, located inside the Deer Park at Sarnath, revives the ancient Mulagandhakutī where the Buddha is said to have meditated during his seasonal visits. The site was first noted by the Chinese monk Xuanzang in the 7th century, though only brick footings remained. In 1922, Sri Lankan reformer Anagārika Dharmapāla laid the foundation for the modern red sandstone vihāra, which was completed and consecrated in 1931 as a centerpiece of the Maha Bodhi Society's restoration efforts.

Between 1932 and 1936, Japanese master painter Kōsetsu Nosu led the creation of over fifty fresco panels depicting the Buddha's life, combining Ajanta-style iconography with Japanese brushwork, forming one of the world's rare Indo-Japanese Buddhist art suites. The vihāra also houses a three-ton Japanese bronze bell, a life-size gilded Buddha on a marble lotus, and a sapling from the original Bodh Gaya tree planted in 1931, linking devotion across three continents. A silver casket containing a corporeal relic of the Buddha from Nagarjunakonda is enshrined in the crypt and displayed during major festivals.



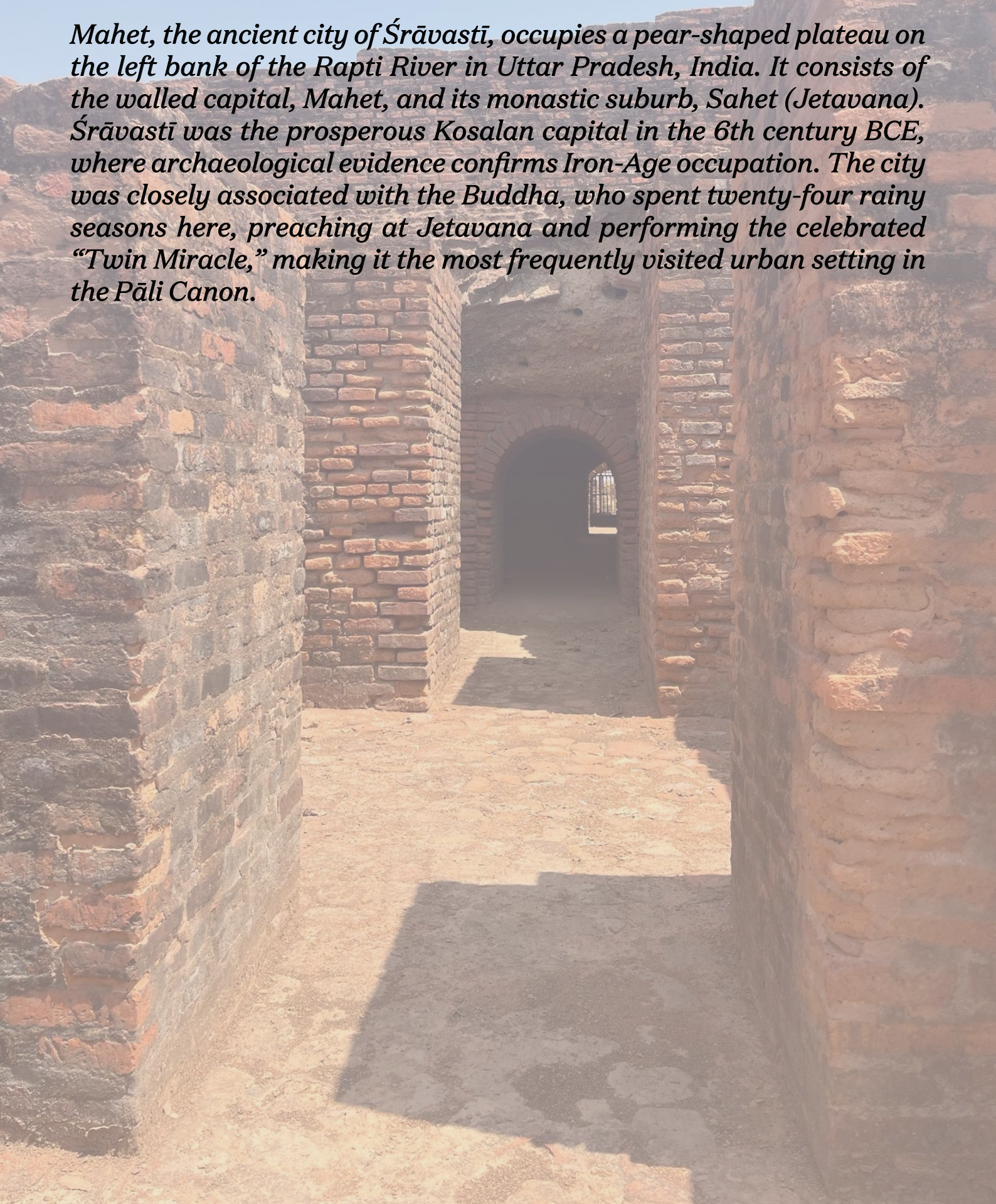


Mulagandha Kuti Vihara represents the 20th-century revival of Buddhism in India and exemplifies trans-Asian Buddhist solidarity, combining Sri Lankan, Japanese, and Indian contributions. It stands near the Dhamekh Stupa, allowing pilgrims to connect with the Buddha's first sermon, meditate under a living Bodhi tree, and experience vibrant murals that continue to communicate the teachings to a global audience. The vihāra is also included in UNESCO's Tentative List for Sarnath's ancient Buddhist sites, bridging modern heritage with historical ruins.



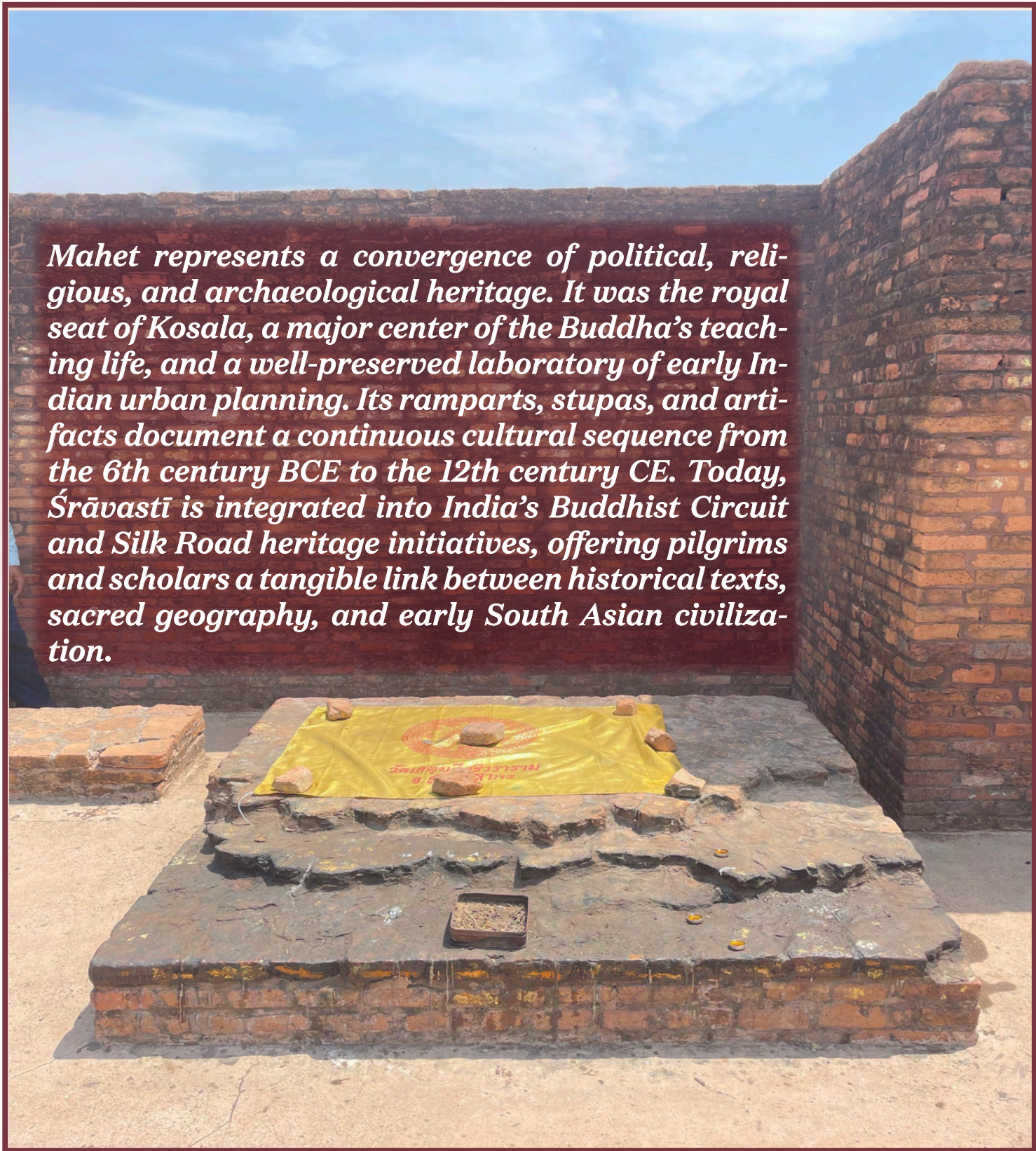
12. Mahet-Ancient City of Sravasti

Mahet, the ancient city of Śrāvastī, occupies a pear-shaped plateau on the left bank of the Rapti River in Uttar Pradesh, India. It consists of the walled capital, Mahet, and its monastic suburb, Sahet (Jetavana). Śrāvastī was the prosperous Kosalan capital in the 6th century BCE, where archaeological evidence confirms Iron-Age occupation. The city was closely associated with the Buddha, who spent twenty-four rainy seasons here, preaching at Jetavana and performing the celebrated “Twin Miracle,” making it the most frequently visited urban setting in the Pāli Canon.



The city flourished under Mauryan to Gupta rule, with Ashokan brickwork, Kushan coins, Gupta inscriptions, and monastic complexes attesting to continuous civic and religious activity. Chinese pilgrims Faxian and Xuanzang recorded its rich stupas and monasteries in the 5th–7th centuries CE, even as the city gradually declined due to political shifts and Rapti River floods. Modern excavations since the 19th century have uncovered street grids, drainage systems, monastic cells, and major stupas like Pakki Kutti, Kachchi Kutti, and the Sudatta Stupa, revealing a vibrant urban and sacred landscape.





Mahet represents a convergence of political, religious, and archaeological heritage. It was the royal seat of Kosala, a major center of the Buddha's teaching life, and a well-preserved laboratory of early Indian urban planning. Its ramparts, stupas, and artifacts document a continuous cultural sequence from the 6th century BCE to the 12th century CE. Today, Śrāvastī is integrated into India's Buddhist Circuit and Silk Road heritage initiatives, offering pilgrims and scholars a tangible link between historical texts, sacred geography, and early South Asian civilization.

