

Kapilavastu as Living Heritage: India-Nepal and the Quest for World Heritage Site

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Abstract

The debate of identifying the ancient Kapilavastu is one of the most captivating and contested inquiries from archaeology and Buddhist historiography perspective. This city holds profound religious, historical, and cultural importance because according to Pāli Tipiṭaka, it was the capital of the Śākya kingdom and the early residence of Siddhārtha Gautama from his birth to renunciation. It was within the confines of Kapilavastu that Siddhārtha spent the formative twenty-nine years of his life, nurtured in the royal luxury of the Śākya court, before he renounced worldly life to seek spiritual awakening. Locating this ancient city is not merely an academic endeavor; it has significant implications for Buddhist pilgrimage traditions, national heritage narratives, and cross-border cultural diplomacy. Over the past century, scholarly and archaeological attention has focused on three primary contenders for ancient Kapilavastu (Tilaurakoṭ in Nepal, and Piprahwā and Ganwaria in India) and each of these sites presents compelling material evidence and historical connections. Tilaurakoṭ, situated in the Kapilavastu District of southern Nepal, has been the focus of extensive excavations led by Prof. Basanta Bidari and Robin Cuningham and claimed a fortified city with gates, moats, streets, continued habitation, and punch-marked coins of 6th century BCE. On the basis of urban settlement near Lumbini, supports its claim for the historical Kapilavastu. In contrast, India's Siddharth Nagar, Uttar Pradesh claim for ancient Kapilavastu is based on evidences found at Piprahwā and Ganwaria. Peppe in 1898 excavated a stupa near Piprahwā, inside of which he found an inscribed casket which refers to the Śākyas of Kapilavastu and the relics to be of the Buddha. Later excavations led by the Archaeological Survey of India have uncovered monastic structures, stupas, and settlement remains dating from the 3rd century BCE to the early Common Era. Ganwaria, just a few kilometers away, has yielded further archaeological evidences, suggesting its functioning as a residential quarter of the same settlement complex. The above mentioned ancient sites in India and Nepal have historical and cultural legacy and this common legacy could become a model of transnational heritage collaboration by recognizing the Buddhist cultural and heritage landscape as the cradle of Buddhism. Here in this research paper, I am going to highlight textual and archaeological evidences in the context of Tilaurakoṭ, Piprahwā, and Ganwaria in the present context to examine the narrative of Siddhārtha Gautama's early life and assesses their potential as components of a unified, transnational heritage zone that embodies the shared spiritual and cultural roots of India-Nepal.

Keywords: Kapilavastu, Tilourakota, Piprahwā, Ganwaria, Faxian, Xuanzang, Śākya, Maurya, Asoka, Lumbini, UNESCO, World Heritage.

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Introduction

The identification of ancient Kapilavastu, the capital of the Śākya kingdom and the early childhood home of Prince Siddhārtha, remains a contested debate among scholars of Buddhist Studies and archaeologists, with supporting evidences between two significant Buddhist heritage site namely Tilaurakoṭ situated within present day Nepal and Piprahwā-Ganwaria in Indian part often framed within national narratives, resulting in fragmented interpretations.

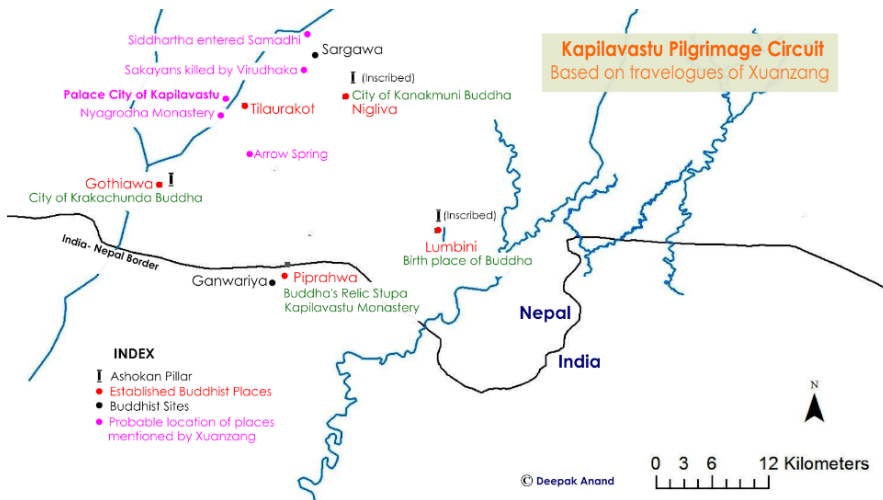


Figure 1: Map of Kapilavastu Pilgrimage Circuit

In spite of enough textual and archaeological sources on both sides of the Indo-Nepal border, scholarly debate has largely treated these sites in isolation, limiting a holistic understanding of Kapilavastu as an integrated capital complex, including prospects for a collaborative UNESCO World Heritage nomination. Addressing this, the article aims to reassess Kapilavastu's identification by examining Tilaurakoṭ, Piprahwā, and Ganwaria as interconnected shared Buddhist cultural landscape, seeks to analyze early Buddhist literature and pilgrim records to re-construct Kapilavastu's historical and geographical narrative, compare archaeological evidence from the three sites in relation to early historic urban characteristics, evaluate the potential of Kapilavastu functioning as a regional capital complex rather than a single urban entity, and explore a joint Indo-Nepal heritage framework supporting a cross border UNESCO nomination. Employing an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates textual analysis, archaeological interpretation, and heritage studies, the article critically examined the available sources, alongside comparative assessment of published excavation reports, material culture, stratigraphy, and urban features, contextualized within UNESCO frameworks and case studies of successful cross-border nominations. While the research is limited by reliance on published reports,

chronological gaps, and interpretative ambiguities in inscriptions, relics, and pilgrim distances, it offers a conceptual and cultural heritage framework that synthesizes diverse evidence, providing a balanced and integrative perspective that contributes meaningfully to debates on Kapilavastu and Buddhist heritage diplomacy.

The debate of identifying ancient Kapilavastu is one of the most captivating and contested inquiries from archaeology and Buddhist historiography perspective. This city holds profound religious, historical, and cultural importance because according to *Pāli Tipiṭaka*, it was the capital of the Śākya kingdom and the early residence of Siddhārtha Gautama from his birth to renunciation. It was within the confines of Kapilavastu that Siddhārtha spent the formative twenty-nine years of his life, nurtured in the royal luxury of the Śākya court, before he renounced worldly life to seek spiritual awakening. Over the past century, scholarly and archaeological attention has focused on three primary contenders for ancient Kapilavastu (Tilaurakoṭ in Nepal, and Piprahwā and Ganwaria in India) and each of these sites presents compelling material evidence and historical connections.

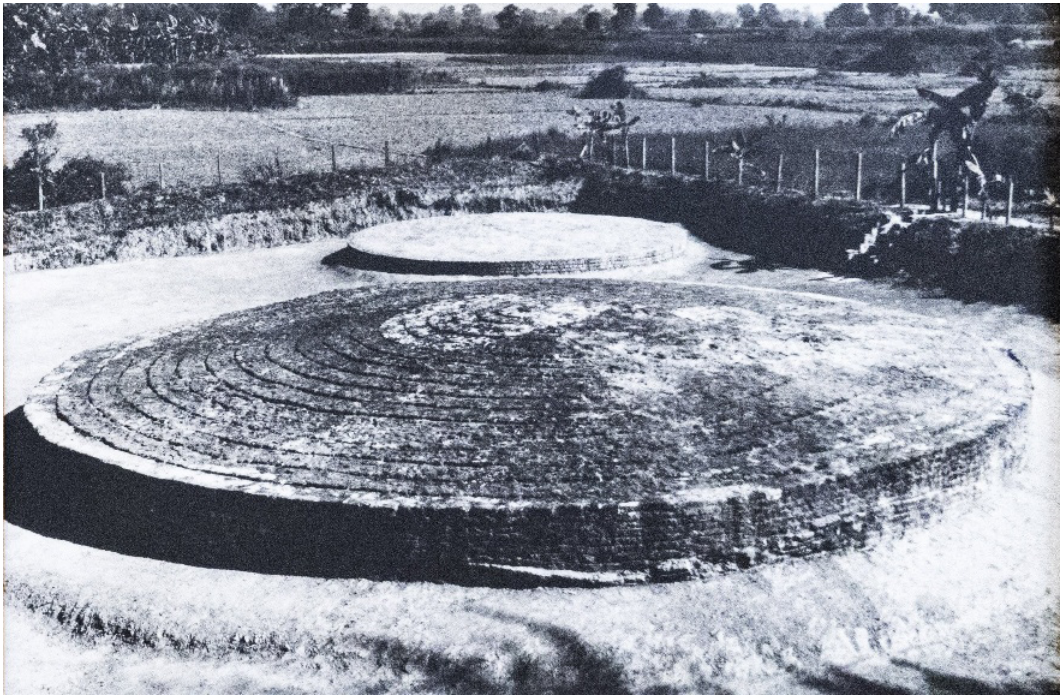


Figure 2: Kapilavastu Stupa

Tilaurakoṭ, situated in the Kapilavastu District of southern Nepal, has been the focus of extensive excavations led by Prof. Basanta Bidari and Robin Cuningham and claimed a fortified city with gates, moats, streets, continued habitation, and punch-

marked coins of 6th century BCE (1-38). On the basis of urban settlement near Lumbini, supports its claim for the historical Kapilavastu (Bidari 47). In contrast, India's Siddharth Nagar, Uttar Pradesh claim for ancient Kapilavastu is based on evidences found at Piprahwā and Ganwaria. Peppe in 1898 excavated a stupa near Piprahwā, inside of which he found an inscribed casket which refers to the Śākya of Kapilavastu and the relics to be of the Buddha (Falk 9). Later excavations led by the Archaeological Survey of India have uncovered monastic structures, stupas, and settlement remains dating from the 3rd century BCE to the early Common Era. Ganwaria, just a few kilometers away, has yielded further architectural and artefactual evidence, suggesting its functioning as a residential quarter of the same settlement complex. The above mentioned ancient sites in India and Nepal have historical and cultural legacy and this common legacy could become a model of trans-national heritage collaboration by recognizing the Buddhist cultural and heritage landscape as the cradle of Buddhism. Here in this research paper, I am going to highlight textual and archaeological evidences in the context of Tilaurakot, Piprahwā, and Ganwaria in the present context to examine the narrative of Siddhārtha Gautama's early life and assesses their potential as components of a unified, transnational heritage zone that embodies the shared spiritual and cultural roots of India-Nepal.



Figure3: Piprahwa-Ganwaria, Twin Buddhist Site

Kapilavastu: Historical and Literary Evidences

As the capital of the Śākya kingdom, Kapilavastu was not only a political and economic hub but also the site of Siddhārtha's formative experiences. Early Pāli texts provides a huge description of layered narrative of Kapilavastu along with minutest of the details like Buddha's lineage, social customs, and religious and spiritual condition of the time (Walshe 213-15). At the same time, the Faxian, Xuanzang, and I-tsing corroborated with archaeological evidences are helpful in identifying and interpreting the location of ancient Kapilavastu. As mentioned in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the Kapilavastu was the capital city of Śākya Kingdom of King Śuddhodana, whose son, Siddhārtha Gautama was brought up the three palaces built around the capital city to keep him away from the realities of human sufferings.

Further elaborations are found in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, which preserves details about the Buddha's monastic discipline but also contains biographical information. It records Siddhārtha's early experiences, including his martial training, marriage to Yaśodharā, and the birth of his son Rāhula, all events situated within Kapilavastu which indicates that the Buddha has not only spent his early days till great going forth (Horner 28-36). The *Mahāvastu*, a Sanskrit text of the Lokottaravāda school provides even more elaborate account of the Buddha's early life that includes descriptions of the architecture of Kapilavastu, its royal processions, and the emotional turmoil Siddhārtha experienced as he encountered old age, sickness, and death for the first time and places Kapilavastu as the center of Śākya and made these above mentioned texts as significant source of information in identifying its ancient location (Jones 45-53).



Figure 4: Tilaurakot eastern gateway

The early Buddhist texts laid the narrative groundwork, while the travelogues Chinese monks namely, Faxian (5th century CE) and Xuanzang (7th century CE) also provides important historical and topographical understanding of Kapilavastu. Faxian's *A Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms* is brief yet valuable account in the context of identification of Kapilavatthu. He mentions that Kapilavatthu lay in proximity to Lumbinī and contains the remains of the royal palace, and monasteries still inhabited by monks (Legge 32) but his descriptions lacks detailed measurements or geographical locations and at the same time his mention of religious complex suggests that Kapilavastu continued to serve as a site of Buddhist pilgrimage. Xuanzang in his travelogue "*The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*" provides far more elaborate information in which he describes traveling approximately 50 *li* from Lumbinī to reach Kapilavastu where he found the ruins of the palace, city walls, and monasteries still occupied by monks. He also saw *stūpas* at key locations related to the Buddha's *Mahābhīṣṭikramaṇa* (Great Renunciation), the bathing tank, and the location where the Buddha preached upon returning to his parental home after enlightenment (Li 64-67). His writing align closely with the geography and archaeological features discovered at Tilaurakot in Nepal, strengthening the argument that this site corresponds to ancient Kapilavastu.

The scholars like John Strong and Gregory Schopen have emphasized the significance of above narratives not merely as historical chronicles but as religiously meaningful representation of the sites which was not static but it evolved, rebuilt, and re-contextualized as the center of Buddhist heritage (Strong 101-104; Schopen 248-252). The consistency of textual references such as proximity to Lumbinī, presence of fortifications, and historical association with early Buddhist relics and re-discovery of the sites in the 19th and 20th centuries was in many ways indicative enough to the fulfillment of the geographical narratives embedded in ancient texts. Hence, the debate for Kapilavastu is not only an archaeological endeavour but also a literary exegesis. Interpreting above textual information related to Kapilavatthu requires sensitivity to metaphor and myth. Prof. Basanta Bidari, an archaeologist and professor at Lumbini Buddhist University argues that the textual tradition forms "*the skeleton upon which the flesh of archaeology can be layered*" (Bidari 47) that sustains ongoing efforts to locate and preserve the ancient city.

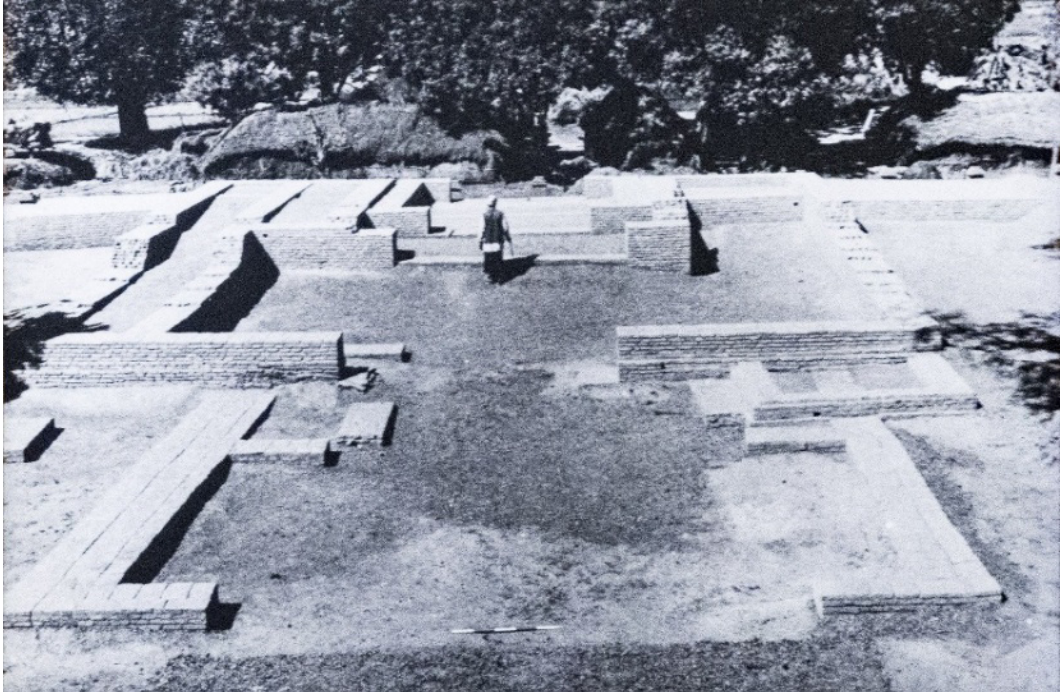


Figure 5: Tilaurakot western gateway

Thus, the historical and literary foundations surrounding Kapilavastu form a dense tapestry of narrative to provide a framework for modern inquiry about the Kapilavastu which remains a deeply evocative symbol of spiritual transformation, a site where royal privilege gave way to renunciation, and where a prince commenced his journey for realizing the ultimate truth.

Tilaurakoṭ, Nepal to be Ancient Kapilavastu

The significant archaeological evidence for Nepal's claim for Tilaurako as the Ancient Kapilavastu comes from the excavation reports undertaken a group of archaeologists like Basanta Bidari, Yani Joshi, and Robin Cuningham through the Nepal Government's Archaeology Department under the UNESCO Chair for Archaeological Ethics and Practice in Cultural Heritage. This group has able to discover a city with signs of urban settlement spanning between eighth to second century BCE (Cuningham et al. 1-38). As claimed by Nepal, the most significant discovery is 494 *punch marked coins* datable to the times of pre-Mauryan and Mauryan empire and it were correlate with the time of the young Buddha (Bidari 48) along with artifacts like iron tools, beads, terracotta figurines, pottery shards, and post-holes), used for constructing wooden complexes reflects urban settlement.

The findings at Tilaurakot mirror literary descriptions of Kapilavastu found in early Buddhist texts and Chinese pilgrim records. According to the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, the Buddha returned to Kapilavastu after attaining enlightenment and visited the site multiple times, preaching to his relatives and fellow Śākya.



Figure 6: Tilourakot

The narratives of Chinese pilgrims Faxian (5th century CE) and Xuanzang (7th century CE) are particularly instrumental in bridging the literary and archaeological record. Faxian mentions a city close to Lumbinī, where remnants of the Śākya palace and associated monasteries were still visible (Legge 32). Xuanzang provides a more detailed description in *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions*, stating that the capital of the Śākya was located in the west of Lumbinī, surrounded by defensive walls, and housing several monasteries and stupas commemorating events from the Buddha's life (Li 64-67). These observations align almost precisely with the location and features of Tilaurakoṭ. Robin Cuningham employed advanced archaeological methodologies like geoarchaeology, magnetometry, ground penetrating radar (GPR), and stratigraphic trenching etc. With the help of such methodologies, Cuningham able to claim existence of multi period occupation with continuous layers of habitation particularly the discovery of ancient trade route that converge at the gates of the city gives impression of a structured urban planning (Cuningham et al. 1-38) which correspond with the ceremonial route may be used by the Śākya and there is all possibility that Prince Siddhārtha might have undertaken the same route at the time of his "*Mahābhīṣikramaṇa* (Great Gong Forth)", when he renounced household life in pursuit of enlightenment.

In 1996, recognizing its potential global significance as the the place where the Buddha has spent his early ears, UNESCO included Tilaurakoṭ in its Tentative List of World Heritage Sites. On the basis of this enlistment, Nepal Government submitted an official nomination dossier in early 2025 which was compiled by heritage experts

like D. Marshall, Y. Nishimura, Y. Joshi, and Prof. Basanta Bidari with emphasis on its integrity, authenticity, and universal spiritual significance (Lumbini Development Trust 2025). The dossier is prepared to situate Tilaurakoṭ not only as the geographical Kapilavastu but also as a living cultural landscape that continues to inspire Buddhist cultural heritage and pilgrimage (LDT Dossier). However, despite this robust documentation, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the advisory body to UNESCO for cultural nominations, recommended a deferral of nomination referring to need for enhanced comparative analysis with similar ancient urban. The 47th session of the World Heritage Committee in Paris in July 2025 upheld this recommendation. Unlike India's nomination of the Maratha Military Landscapes succeeded due to diplomatic interventions from Japan, whereas Tilaurakoṭ did not receive a single amendment proposal in its favor, exposing weaknesses in Nepal's heritage diplomacy (Kathmandu Post). Despite deferral, the case of Tilaurakoṭ to be the ancient capital of Śākya Kingdom remains strong. Scholars like Bidari argue that the site represents “*the most intact ancient urban settlement dating to the early Buddhist period*” on the ground that the chronological layering of material culture closely aligns with the timeline of the Buddha's early life (Bidari 2023, 59). Moreover, Tilaurakoṭ's close proximity to Lumbini (a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1997) bolsters its authenticity. As the birthplace of the Buddha, Lumbini is mentioned repeatedly in tandem with Kapilavastu in both pilgrim accounts and Buddhist texts lends geographic coherence to the historical record. Importantly, Tilaurakoṭ's nomination was envisioned not only as a standalone site but also as part of a broader cultural landscape. The *Lumbinī-Kapilavastu-Vedihī Corridor*, which encompasses multiple early Buddhist archaeological zones, holds promise for future trans-boundary nominations. Many heritage professionals now advocate for such integrated nominations, especially in light of the complex cultural geography of the ancient Śākya domain, which spanned across present-day Bharat and Nepal.

Piprahwā-Ganwaria as the Ancient Kapilavastu



Figure 7: Piprahwa Stupa

The twin Buddhist Heritage Sites of Piprahwā-Ganwaria in Siddharthnagar district of Uttar Pradesh, India, situated across the international border from Tilaurako of Nepal at the distance of less than 20 kilometers which was claimed by India as the actual ancient city of Kapilavastu which once the home of Prince Siddhārtha where he spent his early childhood days till his *Mahabhiniskramana*. India's claim is based on number of important archaeological evidences unearthed in the late 19th century which is reinforced by continued excavations and scholarly interpretations of the discoveries. The pivotal moment for the Indian claim occurred in 1898 when Peppe unearthed a large brick stūpa at Piprahwā on his family estate and discovered a soapstone casket containing bone fragments, crystal objects, and a reliquary bearing an inscription in Brāhmī script dated to around the 3rd century BCE, refers to the relics of the Buddha and the donation of these relics by the “Śākya of Kapilavastu” (Falk 9). This is the matter of debate among archaeologists and historians that it refers to a division of the Buddha's relics among his kinsmen, the prevailing view supports the authenticity of the relics and associates Piprahwā with the ancient Śākya domain. The presence of Buddhist relics, combined with the inscriptional reference to the Śākya, elevated Piprahwā's significance and prompted the Indian Archaeological Survey to undertake more extensive excavations at Piprahwā and the nearby site of Ganwaria. The multiple excavations revealed construction phases indicative of a flourishing Buddhist settlement. Particularly notable are the large brick structures built in concentric phases, consistent with Buddhist architectural practices that involved encasing older stūpas within newer constructions (Sharma 41). Ganwaria, situated close to Piprahwā, complements the findings with evidence of residential and civic architecture. Archaeologists have unearthed remnants of brick-built dwellings, drainage systems, and terracotta artifacts that suggest long-term habitation and urban planning. There is possibility that Ganwaria might be the residential complex of Ancient Kapilavastu, on the other hand Piprahwā may be its religious center. The findings at Piprahwā-Ganwaria (coins, ceramics, beads, and figurines), belongs to the period ranging from the Mauryan times to the Gupta times which affirm that this area continued to be an active and important religious and cultural hub for centuries.



Figure 8: Piprahwa-Ganwaria, Twin Buddhist Site

The Archaeological Survey of India during 1970s-80s, conducted excavations at Piprahwā and Ganwaria under K. M. Srivastava that has uncovered relic caskets under the stūpa complex which dates back to as early as the 5th century BCE (Srivastava 1986). He also identified *punch marked* coins, Northern Black Polished Ware, and Rouletted Ware that are significant evidence of early trade and urbanization. Arguing that Piprahwā was both a commemorative and socio-religious Śākya center of the Gangetic Plain, Srivastava's stratigraphic and architectural analysis shaped later interpretations of the site and its possible identification with ancient Kapilavastu, despite scholarly debate. While the archaeological evidence at Piprahwā and Ganwaria is compelling, the sites also gain credence through their alignment with descriptions provided by Chinese pilgrims Faxian and Xuanzang. Xuanzang described the location from Lumbinī, including monasteries, stūpas, and the remains of the royal palace, were still visible (Li 64-67). Although the exact distances and directions in the pilgrim accounts have been interpreted differently by scholars, proponents of the Indian claim argue that Piprahwā and Ganwaria fall within the plausible radius described in Xuanzang's travelogue. India has heavily promoted Piprahwā as the location of Ancient Kapilavastu and developed the site as a national heritage park around the stūpa and surrounding ruins to reinforce its site of Buddhist Heritage of significance.



Figure 9: Piprahwa-Ganwaria, Twin Buddhist Site

The identification of Piprahwā and Ganwaria as ancient Kapilavastu is not without contention on the basis of material remains are too late to reflect the early life and times of the Buddha. The structural remains date from the 3rd century BCE onward which suggests that the stūpa and surrounding structures were built posthumously, possibly as commemorative monuments rather than direct evidence of the capital of the Śākya kingdom (Schopen 248) whereas other scholars points out that the presence of relics and inscriptions does not necessarily confirm that Piprahwā was the actual ancient Kapilavastu. Rather, it may have been one of several Śākya settlements or even a secondary site used for ritual purposes. But these criticism doesn't deterred

Indian claim from affirming the site's significance and it from Indian perspective of the ancient capital city of Kapilavastu.

Comparative Assessment

The city is traditionally identified with Tilaurakoṭ in present-day Nepal, but archaeological remains in Piprahwā and Ganwaria in India suggest that the extent of the Śākya capital likely transcended modern national boundaries. The presence of multiple palace sites and relic-related structures in this transborder region necessitates a rethinking of Kapilavastu's geography as depicted in Buddhist and even earlier Vedic traditions. The *Pāli Tipiṭaka*, the canonical scripture of Theravāda Buddhism, repeatedly references Kapilavastu (Pāli for Kapilavatthu) as the chief town of the Śākyas. It was here that Siddhārtha Gautama was raised as a prince, surrounded by luxury, before his eventual renunciation. The *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, and *Vinaya Piṭaka* all reference Kapilavastu in the context of the Buddha's early life, his return after Enlightenment, and his teachings among the Śākyas. While going through canonical literature, we came across with the reference of three palaces ordered to be constructed for Prince Siddhartha by King Suddhodana namely *Ramma for winter*, *Suramma for summer*, and *Subha for the rainy season* (Walshe 14) *without explicitly the precise location implies that the Śākya capital had spread beyond a single fortified city*. Additionally, texts like the *Apadāna* and the *Buddhavaṃsa* refer to the kingdom as being located in the *Majjhimadeśa*, a term whose conceptual reach in ancient Indian geography covered much of the Gangetic plains and adjacent regions supports the theory that Kapilavastu was part of a culturally interconnected region stretching across present Nepal and India.



Figure 10: Ganwaria

Although the *Vedas* do not mention Kapilavastu by name, the broader regional geography in which Kapilavastu was situated is referred to in terms like *Uttara Kuru*, *Kumāra*, and *Madhyadeśa* in later Vedic literature such as the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. The region corresponding to the eastern Gangetic plain, bordered by the Himalayas, was known for small republics (*Gaṇasaṅghas*) like the Śakyas and Koliyas that resembled the republican assemblies mentioned in Vedic and post-Vedic texts. The *Baudhāyana Dharma Sūtra* describes sacred and ritually significant territories that include the central Himalayan foothills, suggesting the cultural relevance of the area during Vedic traditions and this intersection supports the argument that ancient Kapilavastu was located in a region of both spiritually and geo-politically significant region. Here, it is important to consider that the delineation of territorial boundaries in ancient times was fluid and did not correspond to modern cartographic fixity. Hence, identifying Kapilavastu purely within the political limits of a single modern nation state does not do justice to its historical and spiritual scope. Among the strongest arguments for Kapilavastu's transnational location is the spread of archaeological sites in the Terai belt. Archaeological excavations by

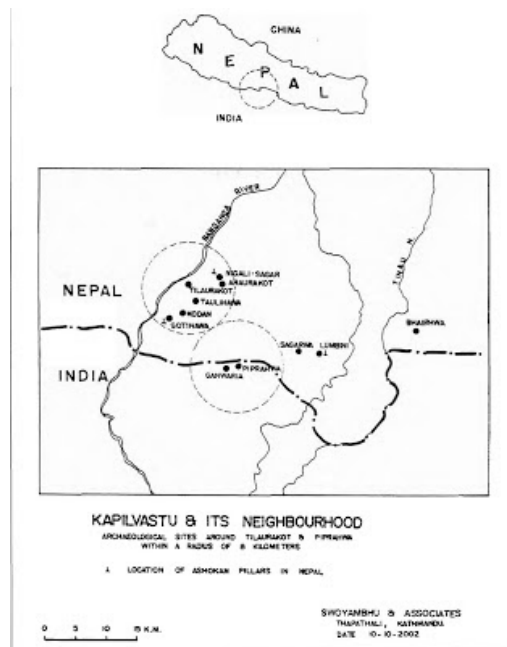


Figure 11: Map of Kapilavastu

Nepali, Japanese, and UNESCO sponsored teams have revealed extensive urban fortifications, gates, monastic structures, and artefacts dating back to the 6th-5th century BCE (Dhungel 44). Tilaurokot has a well-defined city plan, suggesting it may be an administrative capital of the Śakya Kingdom whereas Piprahwā has yielded

extraordinary archaeological remains which suggests that the area was either part of or closely affiliated with the Śākya kingdom and its polity. These findings are indicative enough to house seasonal palaces as depicted in the Canonical literature or have been part of the extended Kapilavastu urban-agricultural complex. On the basis of above facts, about Tilaurakoṭ, Piprahwā, and Ganwaria, a compelling hypothesis emerges that the three seasonal palaces namely *Ramma*, *Suramma*, and *Subha* might have been spread across these different sites. The practice of constructing seasonal palaces or pavilions was not uncommon in ancient Indian royal traditions. In this context, the palaces may have served not only as luxurious retreats but also as administrative centers of the Śākya Kingdom.

Among the prominent voices in this debate, Prof. Basanta Bidari offers a compelling and methodologically grounded approach and emphasizes that the identification of Kapilavastu should not rely solely on the presence of Buddhist relics or inscriptions, but rather on a comparative civilizational framework based on the characteristics of early historic capital cities from the period of the sixteen *Mahājanapadas*. Piprahwā and Ganwaria offer epigraphic and ritual affirmations of early Buddhist commemoration. Each site, rooted in centuries of history, deserves preservation and recognition. Hence, there is all possibilities that *one or two of these palaces were located either at Piprahwā or Ganwaria, while the principal palace or administrative centre was at Tilaurakoṭ and it fits with both the textual description of three distinct palaces and the archaeological distribution. So, I am of the view that there is need for interpreting Kapilavastu not as a single entity but as a regional capital complex, a pattern consistent with early Indo-Gangetic urbanization.*

The Way Forward and Conclusion

The Buddha and his story begin from the land of the Śākyas, hence, it can offer the world a shining example of what it means to be remembered together. The road to a successful World Heritage nomination will require effort, compromise, and vision. But if Nepal and India choose to walk that road together, it will do more than secure international recognition for their sacred sites, it will give new meaning to the timeless message of the Buddha and inspire generations to come. I have no hesitation in recommending strongly to the idea of a joint Indo-Nepal UNESCO World Heritage nomination to recognize Tilaurakoṭ, Piprahwā, and Ganwaria as part of a singular cultural landscape of Ancient Kapilavastu that transcends national identities. It is the sacred land where the Buddha experienced the early years of his life, where he witnessed the *four sights* (*Diseased Person, Old Man, Dead Body and an Ascetic*) that inspired his renunciation (*Mahābhīṣkramaṇa*), and where he returned after attained the Enlightenment (*Nibbāna*) under the *Bodhi Vṛkṣa* at

Uruvelā (present Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India) to teach the Dhamma to the Śākyaans (Family, relatives and friend). The entire region is a living testimony to the origins of Buddhism and merits transnational preservation. UNESCO's own emphasis on trans-boundary sites and cultural diplomacy offers the institutional tools to support such collaborations. Precedents for this approach are numerous such as *The Struve Geodetic Arc*, a 19th century chain of triangulations by ten countries from Northern and Eastern Europe, *The Silk Roads*, recognized jointly by China, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, and the *Jesuit Missions of the Guaranis* (between Argentina and Brazil). The above these examples of joint nominations demonstrate strong political will and inclusive narrative framing, collaborative heritage recognition is feasible and beneficial. In the case of Kapilavastu, similar international recognition as a “*transnational sacred landscape*” rooted in Buddhist history deepen people-to-people ties through cross-border Buddhist circuits, enhance religious tourism, and reaffirm the shared Buddhist cultural identity between Nepal and India. It would serve as a soft power initiative grounded in mutual respect and reverence for the Buddha's birthplace and formative legacy. Kapilavastu is a model of Buddhist diplomacy in action. Its shared custodianship by Nepal and India is not merely a matter of archaeological interest but a profound testament to cultural unity.

Recognizing this shared Buddhist legacy through a joint heritage nomination is not merely an academic necessity but cross-cultural nature of Buddhist cultural heritage to ensure *the legacy of Buddha's early life remains as a bridge between nations rather than a boundary*. Kapilavastu, the ancient capital of the Śākya clan and the formative home of Prince Siddhartha Gautama before his renunciation, holds immense spiritual and historical significance for the global Buddhist community. Today, its archaeological remains lie across the international boundary between Nepal (Tilaurakot) and India (Piprahwa-Ganwaria) which collectively reflect the broader religious and cultural landscape of ancient Kapilavastu. This shared Buddhist heritage legacy presents a unique opportunity for Buddhist diplomacy, where cultural cooperation and spiritual heritage transcend borders to foster peace, dialogue, and mutual recognition. Hence, a joint path by both nations is need of the hour to initiate dialogue, collaborate for UNESCO World Heritage nomination and prepare a joint dossier as “*Buddha's Childhood Home and the Śākya Capital: A Shared Buddhist Heritage of Kapilavastu*” which provides a unifying framework that emphasizes civilizational continuum over territorial claims, defusing long-standing nationalist tensions.

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