

MAHABODHI TEMPLE COMPLEX

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Context:

A geospatial analysis utilising satellite images and ground surveys has found evidence of the presence of “huge architectural wealth” buried in the Mahabodhi temple complex and its surroundings in Bihar’s Bodh Gaya.

Background:

In the context of philosophical and cultural history, Mahabodhi Temple Complex is of great relevance as it marks the most important event in the life of Lord Buddha, the moment when Prince Siddhartha attained Enlightenment and became Buddha, an event that shaped human thought and belief.

About Mahabodhi Temple Complex:

1. It is one of the four holy sites related to the life of the Lord Buddha, and particularly to the attainment of Enlightenment.
2. The Mahabodhi Temple Complex is the first temple built by Emperor Asoka in the 3rd century B.C., and the present temple dates from the 5th-6th centuries.
3. It is one of the earliest Buddhist temples built entirely in brick, still standing, from the late Gupta period and it is considered to have had significant influence in the development of brick architecture over the centuries.
4. The present Mahabodhi Temple Complex at Bodh Gaya comprises the 50 m high grand Temple, the Vajrasana, sacred Bodhi Tree and other six sacred sites of Buddha’s enlightenment, surrounded by numerous ancient Votive stupas, well maintained and protected by inner, middle and outer circular boundaries.
5. A seventh sacred place, the Lotus Pond, is located outside the enclosure to the south.
6. The most important of the sacred places is the giant Bodhi Tree, to the west of the main temple, a supposed direct descendant of the original Bodhi Tree under which Buddha spent his First Week and had his enlightenment.
7. To the north of the central path, on a raised area, is the Animeshlochana Chaitya (prayer hall) where Buddha is believed to have spent the Second Week.
8. Buddha spent the Third Week walking eighteen paces back and forth in an area called Ratnachakrama (the Jewelled Ambulatory), which lies near the north wall of the main temple. Raised stone lotuses carved on a platform mark his steps.
9. The spot where he spent the Fourth Week is Ratnagar Chaitya.
10. Immediately after the steps of the east entrance on the central path there is a pillar which marks the site of the Ajapala Nigrodh Tree, under which Buddha meditated during his Fifth Week, answering the queries of Brahmans.
11. He spent the Sixth Week next to the Lotus Pond and the Seventh Week was spent under the Rajyatana Tree, to the south-east of the main temple, currently marked by a tree.

12. Next to the Bodhi Tree there is a platform attached to the main temple made of polished sandstone known as Vajrasana (the Diamond Throne), originally installed by Emperor Asoka to mark the spot where Buddha sat and meditated.

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