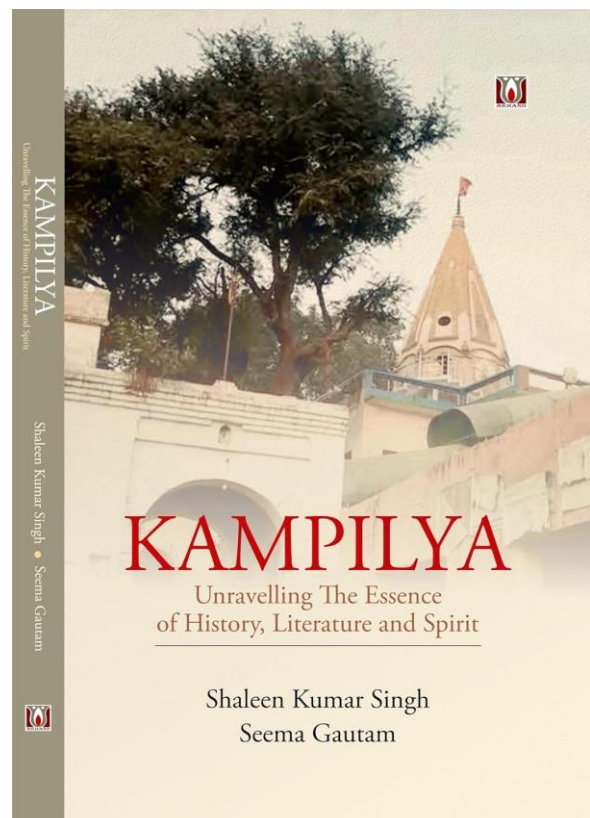


Kampilya: Unravelling the Essence of History, Literature and Spirit
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Most readers outside Uttar Pradesh will not recognise the name Kampilya, and that is precisely the gap this book sets out to close. Kampil, a modest village in Kaimganj tehsil today, was once the ancient capital of Panchal, a city that Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists have each claimed a piece of over the centuries. Editors Shaleen Kumar Singh, who heads the English Department at Swami Shukdevanand College, Shahjahanpur, and Seema Gautam, an Associate Professor of History at Sahu Ramswaroop Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Bareilly, have pulled together eleven essays that try to hold this scattered inheritance in one place. It mostly works.

The pairing of editors is worth noting before getting into the essays themselves, because it shapes the book's whole approach. Singh comes from literature and criticism - he has edited more than two dozen volumes on poetry and literary studies and runs the journal *Creative Saplings* - while Gautam is a historian of medieval Indian art and culture with three books and over twenty-five papers to her credit. A collection edited by two people from adjacent but distinct disciplines tends to either fall apart at the seams or end up more interesting than either discipline could manage alone. This one leans toward the second outcome. The essays move fluidly between textual scholarship and historical argument in a way that a single-editor volume, pulled in one direction only, usually cannot.



The book opens on solid Jain ground. The first essay ties Kampilya to Vimalnath, the thirteenth Tirthankara, and lays out the scriptural and historical basis for the city's sanctity in Jain memory. It is a careful, source-heavy opening, the kind that establishes credibility early rather than saving the strongest material for later. From there the collection widens out - a comparative essay reads Kampilya through both Hindu and Jain sources side by side, and a third piece sets the Digambara and Shvetambara accounts against each other, which is where some of the book's more interesting friction shows up. The two Jain sects do not agree on much regarding Kampilya's spiritual geography, and watching the essay work through where they diverge and where they quietly overlap is one of the stronger stretches of the volume. It would have been easy to flatten this disagreement into a single tidy narrative. The essay resists that temptation, and the book is better for it.

The middle section shifts from doctrine to ground, literally. There is an essay on Kampilya's sacred geography within the wider Panchal region, one devoted to Kampilyapur Teerth as a living pilgrimage site (contributed by Shri Bhanwarlal Nahta), and - this is the piece I found most useful - a reprinted extract from Alexander Cunningham's 1875-76 and 1877-78 Archaeological Survey of India tour report. Having Cunningham's original nineteenth-century fieldwork sitting next to twenty-first-century scholarship is a smart editorial choice, and not a common one in collections like this. It lets the reader see how the identification of Kampil with ancient Kampilya was actually built, brick by brick, rather than just being told it as settled fact. Cunningham was working from village names, local tradition, and whatever ruins were still visible in the 1870s, and reading his notes alongside the later essays makes clear how much of the "established" identification of Kampil rests on inference rather than certainty. That is not a criticism of the book. If anything it is the most honest moment in it. The following essay on Kampil, Pargana Kampil, Tehsil Kaimganj carries that thread into the present, describing the village as it stands now and closing the distance between the mythic city and the dusty, real place a visitor could actually drive to.

The literary essays are where the book earns its subtitle. One traces Kampil's presence in Indian literature and its ties to Panchal's ancient civilisation; another looks specifically at Kampilya in India by Bhagwan Singh Suryavanshi; and a translated piece by Jyotiprasad Jain, rendered from the rare Hindi text *Kampil Kalp*, gives readers who cannot access the original Jain scholarship a way in. This last one deserves particular mention. Translation work of this kind rarely gets credit, but making a rare Hindi text available to an English readership is exactly the sort of unglamorous labour that keeps a field like this alive. A chapter on folklore and oral tradition rounds this section out by asking how local stories - the kind that never make it into a survey report - have kept Kampil's memory alive at street level, separate from whatever the texts say. It is a shorter essay than most of the others, and it could have gone

further, but its instinct is right: written scripture and oral memory do not always agree, and a book claiming to cover a city's "spirit" needs both.

The final essay is the most ambitious of the eleven: it tries to read Kampil across Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain literature at once, which is a lot to ask of a single chapter, and it does not fully resolve the tensions between the three traditions so much as lay them next to each other. That is a fair criticism of the book as a whole, actually - it is better at assembling perspectives than reconciling them. Whether that counts as a flaw depends on what you came for. A reader wanting a single settled account of Kampil will be frustrated. A reader interested in how a city gets remembered differently by different communities, and why those differences never quite got ironed out over two and a half thousand years, will find that plurality is the whole point rather than a shortcoming.

There is a striking essay on Kampil in Ayurvedic and epic literature at the very end that gives an afterthought relative to everything before it. The connection between Kampil and Ayurvedic tradition is exactly the kind of angle that could have opened up a different reading of the city - medicine and epic narrative sitting alongside religious geography - and a fuller treatment of it might have rounded out the collection rather than trailing off at the edge of it.

On production and structure, the book does what a scholarly edited volume needs to do without much fuss. The two editors' introductions and preface give enough context for a reader unfamiliar with Kampil to follow the essays without getting lost, and the essay titles themselves - some quite long, several nearly identical in scope - could have used tighter editing. A reader skimming the book might struggle to tell essay six and essay ten apart at a glance, even though the essays themselves are distinct once you are inside them.

The book's real strength is method, not argument. Singh and Gautam have gathered textual analysis, archaeology, and comparative religion under one cover instead of picking a single lane, and the Cunningham extract in particular gives the volume a kind of primary-source backbone that a lot of regional-history collections lack. As a resource for anyone working on Panchal, Jain sacred geography, or the history of pilgrimage sites in the Ganga-Yamuna doab, this is a useful and fairly thorough starting point. It will find its readers among scholars of South Asian religion and history rather than a general audience, and to its credit, it does not pretend otherwise.