



## Architectural History Of Stupa

Wasfi Fatima

Research Scholar

BBAU Lucknow

Professor Shura Dararpuri

Department of History

BBAU Lucknow

### Abstract

The Indian subcontinent is famous for its different types of structures and monuments. Buddhist architecture was home to some of the most notable and historically significant works of art that date back centuries. The beautiful architectural buildings belong to different dynasties.

The word stupa is described in the Vedic literature of the Rig-Veda, the Vajansayi samhita, the Atharveda, etc. However, the modern perspective of Stupa is related to Buddhism. Buddhism and stupas are interchangeable terms. The oldest architecturally-based object of worship in India is the Stupa. Initially the shape of the stupa was like an uplakar, bulbulakaar and dhanyakar. This well-built platform houses the Buddha's and his disciples' physical remains. In a Buddhist text, Angutarnikaye Mahatma Buddha said the Stupa could be built on the remains of Tathagata and the Chakrabarti king. This deep dialogue between Mahatma Buddha and Anand, related to the Buddhist Stupa, is described in Buddhist text as the Mahaparinirvana Sutta.

The word Chaitya is also used for Stupa in literature, but Stupa is directly related to remains, and Chaitya had an imagination of the remains. After the Mahaparinirvan of Mahatma Buddha in Kushinagar, Drona divided his relics into eight parts, and eight state rulers received his body relics and built the Stupa on their remains. There are five main categories of Stupa based on their form and functions. Throughout India, the Mauryan Emperor Asoka built many brick-built stupas. The remains of this Stupa have been covered in Pakistan and Afghanistan, in addition to several locations in India, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab etc.

**Keywords** – Subcontinent, monuments, dynasty, Stupa, Tathagat, Chaitya.

**Background:**

The human species has been progressive since Ancient times in the World. After that, humans socialize with other people. Archaeological evidence shows that humans have started wearing clothes, invented fire, and eating food after roasting since ancient times. After that, man's curiosity increased to know anything, and he gradually started thinking deeply about everything and burying his relative after his death. Archaeological evidence shows that the dead body is in a grave at Sarainahar Rai, Mahdaha, Damdama in Pratap Garh, district of Uttar Pradesh. In Sarainahar Rai, the human burials occurred in the shallow, oblong graves which had been dug into the hard soil of the habitation area. Skelton's were found in an extended supine position and oriented east-west, with skulls to the west. Both single and multiple graves were found. One grave contained four individuals buried at the same time, with two males and two females together buried at the same time.<sup>i</sup>

In the Neolithic period, Burjhome was a famous site. This site's archaeological evidence shows that total and semi-full burial remains have been found in the region. The ochre colour was smeared on the bodies before graves, which is the main factor. This could have been proof of blind faith or a tradition. Dogs, goats, and other domestic animals were buried with the human remains.<sup>ii</sup>

After that, Megalithic culture underwent several changes in the funeral process. In this period, archaeological evidence shows different tombs, such as Dolmenaid, Carin circle, Menhir, Umbrella stone, Hood stone, etc. A Dolamenaid cist found a hole through the material that must have been poured on the special occasion. Human remains have been discovered in these, where the bodies were stored after death. Most likely, the ashes of the deceased were taken from the grave. These ash-pots' bases were composed of animal bones from sheep or elephants. These types of cemeteries were excavated from Koldihwa, Khujrai, Magha, Chadauli and Kotia.<sup>iii</sup>

We have also found the graves from the ancient Harappan civilization in which the remains of the body have also been found; bones of domestic animals or ornaments were also found in these graves from Dhaulavira.

It illustrates the evolution of preserving the cremation artefacts with the deceased. Various stones of various types were stored over these burials to enable easy identification of the tombs from a distance. This shows how the human of those times kept their remains for the memory of their relative in their death.<sup>iv</sup>

Archaeological evidence has yet to be found in the Vedic period. We only get information about the Stupa in the Vedic period from the Vedic text. The Mahajanapada period has the earliest known evidence of stupas; at that time, Stupas were constructed on the death of respected people like a king, and a Stupa was made on their remains, which was for their respect.

**History of Buddhist Stupa:**

The beginning and development of the Stupa started with simple monuments and temples in memory of the dead person. Distinctive figures or famous names of the society were built, not for every dead person. The earlier burial of the dead person must have utilized the same reality. There would not have been a burial for everyone who died during the Stone Age and the following era.

The term Stupa is described in Rig-Veda, Vajasaneyi Samhita, Atharvaveda, Taittiriya Samhita, and the Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary, which says it a "knot or tuft of hair, the upper part of the head, crest, top, summit, a heap or pile of earth or bricks etc."<sup>v</sup> The Rig-Veda mentions the Stupa, constructed by

ruler King Varuna, on top of a jungle in an area without a foundation.<sup>vi</sup> The word estuka is also used in a similar sense in the Rig-Veda and it is probably that time anything raised from the ground like a heap/pile might have been known as Stupa.<sup>vii</sup>

The Buddhist Stupa (Sanskrit), Thupa (Pali), and Anglo-Indian 'tope' are mounds or tumuli. Initially, they had funerary-related mounds containing the remains of the dead collected from the funeral pyres.<sup>viii</sup> Since it was initially on Indian soil. The Stupa is now found in virtually every Buddhist establishment throughout Asia, where it is known by several regional names such as Caity (Nepal), Dagoba (Sri Lanka), Candi (Indonesia), Zedi or Chedi (Southeast Asia), Chorten (Tibet) and the most popular Pagoda (East Asia)<sup>ix</sup>.

In ancient Buddhist texts, Mahaparinirvana Sutta describes the Stupa. This book describes the deep dialogue between the Buddha and his favourite follower, Anand, just before the Buddha entered Mahaparinirvana. Anand asked of Buddha.

**Anand** - Oh Bhante. How should we honour the artefacts and relics of the Tathagata?

**Buddha** - Oh Anand! Don't worry about worshipping Tathagat's body. Oh, Anand, remember the virtues instruction propound by the Tathagata.

**Anand**- Oh Bhante, what is the proper way to honour Tathagat's body and object?

**Buddha**- Oh Anand! The body of the Tathagata should be cherished in the same manner as the relics of the Chakravatin king.

**Anand** – Oh Bhante, In what way should the remains of the Chakravartin king be honoured?

**Buddha** – For Chakravartin king, a stupa should be built over the intersection where the four roads connecting the four highways meet. A Tathagata stupa has to be erected above a comparable Chatushmhaapathe.<sup>x</sup>

In this conversation, it was clear that the Stupa was built earlier for the Buddha and accepted it. Together with it, Stupa represented the Chakravartin king and Buddha. Therefore, Buddha encouraged people to continue the tradition of building Stupas.

The primary purpose of the Buddhists building the Stupa was to use it as a monument enclosing relics of Buddha or Buddhist saints, which were stored in reliquaries enclosed in stone coffers of the Stupa's construction. Some, nevertheless, contained no relics but were merely honours of essential events in the Buddha's life. When they included relics, the shrine was known as a Dhatugarbha (Pali, dhatugabho; Sinhalese, dagaba); and as most stupas were erected over relics (dhatu), the entire construction came to be called a Dagaba. The early Stupa was lower circular brick mounds that resembled their modest pre-Buddhist predecessors.<sup>xi</sup>

The textual evidence clarifies the scene in which the Buddha's body becomes unwell, and he is reminded of his mortality. The Buddhist text Mahaparinirvana sutta in "Dirghnikaye" was tranquil long after the death of Mahatma Buddha. It describes the occasion that people were unfortunate after the death of Buddha, and the dead body of Buddha was ritually cremated.<sup>xii</sup> After that, his body relics were divided into eight parts, and eight states received his body relics and built Stupas on the remains.

Kapilvastu	-	Shakya
Alpakkam	-	Buliya
Rajgrih	-	Ajatshatru
Ramgam	-	Koliya
Pava	-	Malla
Kushinara	-	Malla
Vaishali	-	Lichchhavi
Drona	-	Vethadweep <sup>xiii</sup> .

After applying, they get a portion of the relics. The Moriyana Piprahwa received some ashes from the burial mound, which they used to construct the Stupa, which is named Piprahwa Stupa. During the reign of the great king, Ashoka broke down these Stupa and constructed a lot of Stupa.<sup>xiv</sup> He could not open the stupas in Ramgam because the Naga were defending the stupas. Protecting the Naga could imply that the Stupa was under the watchful eye of the strong Naga dynasty emperors.<sup>xv</sup> This was an entirely new revolution in stupa construction.

Numerous large stupas were constructed in various locations during the reign of Emperor Ashoka. During the rainy seasons, Buddha preached at Sarnath, Nalanda, Sankisa, Rajgriha, Sravasti, Bodhi Gaya, and Vaishali. Therefore, stupas were built in this location. During his reign, Emperor Asoka led the worship of stupas. The explanation was that Lord Buddha used four main symbols to convey the significant moments in his life.

1. Elephant represented the birth of Buddha.
2. A Buddha tree that symbolizes enlightenment.
3. A Chakra representing Dharma.
4. A statue showing Parinirvan.

### **King Ashoka established the Stupa at two kinds of places:**

- 1- The Stupa is a location associated with the life of Buddha.
- 2- The places related to Buddhism<sup>xvi</sup>.

The proposal to give the Stupa a permanent form was carried out during the Sunga era, or the second century A.D. Stone covered the stupas of Bharhut and Sanchi. The wooden railings were assumed by the stone railing and were beautifully decorated.

The Gupta dynasty came to prominence in the fourth century. They belonged to the Vaishnavist sect. During their rule, they built the stupas at Sarnath, Sravasti, and Kasia. After the Gupta period, the construction of Stupa became limited because the post-Gupta period was not peaceful. Hence, it was impossible to build such massive structures as the Stupa.<sup>xvii</sup>



The word Chaitya is used for Stupa in literature. The word Chaitya is derived from the 'Chi' object, which means to choose, as the stone and bricks were selected for the memorial's construction. A memorial is made by keeping the ashes of the pyre in a vessel called a Stupa. A Ramayana cremation has been compared to Chaitya, where monuments named Chaitya are prepared in memory of deceased great men on the cremation ground, so the comparative analysis and mention of Stupa are found in the literature. The building directly related to the remains was called Stupa. The form of the building may also be considered as Chaitya, but in Chaitya, there is an imagination on the remains, but Stupa is directly related to the remains. For this reason, the Stupa has been called Chaitya or Maha Chaitya in the inscription of Amravati.<sup>xviii</sup>

The evolution of Buddhist stupas carries profound philosophical implications within Buddhist thought, reflecting the evolution of ideas and practices over centuries. The Stupa are not only structured but contain deep symbolism. They represent the enlightened mind of Buddha and the path knocked up. The different part of the Stupa corresponds to another aspect of Buddhist teaching.<sup>xix</sup> The evolution of the Stupa underlines the unity of wisdom and compassion in Buddhism. Stupa serves crucial points of meditation and offering, motivating practitioners to cultivate both insight and compassion in their spiritual journey.

There are five main categories of Buddhist Stupa based on their forms and function: Relic Stupa, Object Stupa, Commemorative Stupa, Symbolic Stupa and Votive Stupa.

### **Relic Stupa:**

It began as a location to bury the body of Sakyamuni after his cremation in Kushinagar, in addition to Sakyamuni, other Buddhas, their disciples and saints, including some historical ones, have also been buried in Stupa. Relic Stupa is the most respected of all Buddhist monuments, the Piprahwa Stupa is an example of this type of Stupa.<sup>xx</sup> A complex schema of interconnecting and mutually reflecting symbolism involving numerous themes developed in this study is related to the presence of ashes in the Stupa. An illustration of a combustion that is metaphysically complete is the burning of the Buddha's body. It is the human emulation of a prior spiritual process. The funeral represents sublimation the fire burns away the bonds of identity and liberation is achieved.<sup>xxi</sup>

### **Object Stupa:**

Significant items of Buddha and his learners, such as the begging bowl, monk robes, Buddhist scripture, etc., are adequately cremated in the Stupa as well. Kesariya Stupa is an example of this type of Stupa, which reportedly covered Buddha's begging bowls. Huen-Tsang also says Kanishka Stupa was initially built over Buddhist scripture inscribed on copper plates after the conclusion of the fourth Buddhist council. Constructing an object Stupa is not merely a physical endeavour but a profound spiritual practice rooted in Buddhist philosophy. It embodies the path to enlightenment, the accumulation of merit, and the aspiration to benefit all beings, making it a central aspect of Buddhist cultural and religious expression.

### Commemorative Stupa:

Additionally, the Stupa was constructed to honour significant occasions in the lives of Buddha and his disciples. After his Buddhist conversion, Emperor Ashoka made multiple pilgrimages to the location connected to the life of Buddha, and to each location, he built a Chaitya to honour such an occasion. Dharmrajika Stupa in Sarnath and the Ashokan Stupa on the grounds of the Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya are examples of his type of Stupa.<sup>xxii</sup> This type of Stupa reflects the intention to generate cheerful Karma and merits. This Stupa represents the Buddhist understanding of Buddhist impermanence and the transcendence of death. The commemorative Stupa is a splendent of positive energy that benefits the surrounding environment and all beings that come into contact with it.

### Symbolic Stupa:

A Stupa was also constructed specially to remind Buddhists of the Buddha and his Dhamma's unseen presence. This type of Stupa had been initially built to inter Buddha's relics and, in the final phase, became the ultimate symbol of Buddha's Parinirvana, with or without his relic inside.

### Votive Stupa:

These Stupa were frequently built as significant pilgrimage sites and monasteries by devoted Buddhists or travellers to remember their exceptional visit or gain virtual better Karma. They typically cluster around an enormous Stupa or Temple and are small and diversified in shape. These types of Stupa can be found several times on the grounds of major pilgrimage centres like Bodhgaya, Lumbini, Sarnath and Kushinagar.<sup>xxiii</sup>



Relic Stupa



Object Stupa



Commemorative Stupa



Symbolic Stupa



Votive Stupa

**Source:**

<https://images.app.goo.gl/CyrJFWeWdntodXG18>

The Buddhist Stupa, a consecrated monument in Buddhism, has several distinctive characteristics that set it apart both architecturally and symbolically. Some components of Stupa are given below.

**Medhi (Base):**

Medhi is a Vedic form. In Yajurveda, Medhi's construction was mentioned. In the Stupa structure, the round platform is called Medhi. On the top of Medhi is the central part of Stupa. In some Stupa, Medhi was used as pradakshinapath and protected from the vedika. In Buddhist philosophy, Stupa's medhi (base) is full of symbolism and significance, representing essential ideas and practices of Buddhism. The Medhi represents the stable base upon which the entire structure of the Stupa. It refers to the basic teachings of Buddhism, such as the four noble truths and the eightfold path, which serve as the basis of spiritual practice and awakening.<sup>xxiv</sup> In terms of structure, the medhi is usually square or rectangular and stands for harmony, stability and order in the universe. It represents the practical foundation of the Buddha's teaching in daily life.<sup>xxv</sup>

**Anda (Dome):**

The central feature of the Stupa is the Dome. In Buddhist architecture, the form and the design of Dome may differ considerably throughout historical eras and cultural regions. The hemispherical Dome is undoubtedly the most traditional type of Dome in Stupa. It is smooth and rounded, representing the vast cosmos and the Dome of Heaven in Buddhist cosmology. This type of Dome is common in ancient Stupa like ones in India's Sanchi and Bharhut. Other domes, like bell-shaped domes, octagonal domes, etc., are found in India and other parts of the world, such as Nepal, Tibet, China, Myanmar, and other Southeast Asian countries.<sup>xxvi</sup> The shape of anda represents the completeness and the harmony of the universe, representing Buddhist ideals of non-duality and interconnectedness. Dome is often built using sacred geometric concepts and certain rites. The measurement and dimension are important because they follow the optimum forms for the Stupa, as described by ancient writings and architectural treatises.

**Harmika:**

Harmika was an essential part of Stupa. The shape of the Harmika was a square or rectangular platform. It was found at the top of Stupa in India and other parts of Asia. It is also known as the "harmya" or "harmyeka" in Sanskrit.<sup>xxvii</sup> The means of the Harmika was a place of Gods. It was built of ashes pot, which was built for the ashes of Buddha or assumed residence of Buddha. At the beginning of Stupa's construction, there was a lack of harmika in Stupa, but after that, the development of it started to be constructed. The harmika typically supported a central pole or umbrella-like structure called a chattra or chhatra representing the axis mundi or the cosmic axis in Buddhist cosmology.<sup>xxviii</sup> It fulfils both symbolic and practical purposes in Buddhist architecture, signifying the axis between heaven and earth, and distributes a focal point for ritual offering rites.

### Vedika (Railing):

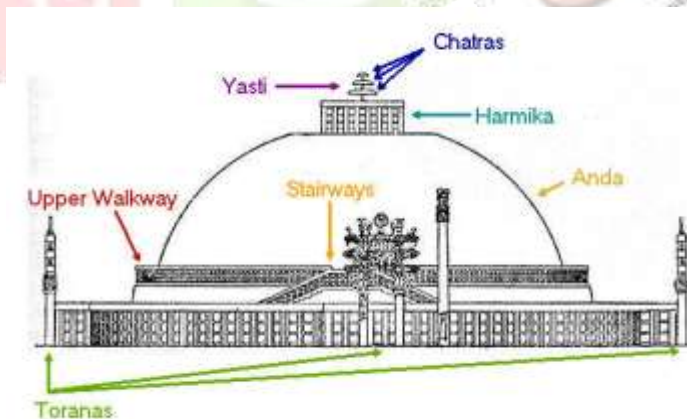
The railing that surrounds the Stupa is called a vedika. In Buddhist Stupa, the construction style of Vedika was very famous and was founded in almost every Buddhist Stupa. It functions like a human barrier or protection, symbolically separating the mundane from the physical world and guiding a holy expedition to the path around the Stupa to properly worship the holy relic inside. This ground railing(vedika) consist of and is kept connected by the vertical pillars (stambh) and horizontal bars (suchi) set at a regular point and capped with cope (usnisa) with the circumstance of the stair and medhi vedika having two suchi each all other vedika three suchi.<sup>xxix</sup> Mauryan period stupa was built by the Ashoka at that time to protect Stupa sanctity. The king built a vedika around the Stupa. In earlier times of the Mauryan period, the vedika was constructed with bamboo. After that, it was built with stone.

### Torana(Gateway):

Torana was built on four sides of Vedika. These four directions were considering the four rulers. East side's Dhritrashta, west side's Virupaksh, north side's Kubair and south side's Virudhak. The development period of Stupa Torana was built with wood. After that the Torana was built of stone. The Torana is considered two squarish pillars with capital supporting a framework of three curviform architraves with valuated ends. Four square blocks are placed three upright between the architraves divided from one another. The interspaces are decorated with figures of riders or elephants and horses. Toranas are beautifully adorned with detailed sculptures and carvings. These frequently show images from the life of the Buddha, other celestial beings, and mythological creatures signifying the journey to enlightenment and spiritual goals.

### Sopan:

The base of Stupa was usually high; hence, stairs were made to climb up and down it. It is called sopan. In Sanchi, Stupa sopan was made south side<sup>xxx</sup>.



### Components of Stupa

#### Source:

<https://images.app.goo.gl/PDk74XiGd39G>



## Conclusion:

It is clear from the above analysis that the word Stupa came from Rig Veda. In Rig Veda, the Stupa is briefly described, and other Sanskrit literature describes a detailed description of the Stupa. There are different names for Stupas in various countries. In the Buddhist text Mahaparinirvan sutta, Mahatma Buddha told his scholar Anand about the Stupa. In ancient times, the Stupa was conceived as a simple mound where Buddha's relics were kept. The evolution from simple mounds involved structure symbolizing Buddhist cosmology. Genesis with the monumental Stupa of ancient India such as Sanchi and Amravati, its form increased across Asia, adapting to the diverse cultural contexts in countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Cambodia. Each region gives up a unique component in the Stupa. Modern explanations continue to blend tradition with contemporary design, highlighting the Stupa's enduring significance as a sacred Buddhist monument and architectural icon.

## References:

- <sup>i</sup> Kennedy, K. A., Lovell, N. C., & Burrow, C. B. (1986). *Mesolithic human remains from the Gangetic plain: Sarai Nahar Rai*. Ithaca (NY): Cornell University.
- <sup>ii</sup> Bhat, S. A., & Dubey, M. C. (2008). Burzahom (Burzohama) is a Neolithic Site in Kashmir: *education*, 111.
- <sup>iii</sup> Settari, S., & Korisettar, R. (2002). Indian Archaeology In Retrospect Volume I Prehistory Archaeology of South Asia. *New Delhi: ICHR and Manohar*.
- <sup>iv</sup> Balkrishna, D. (2015). Dholavira report (Preliminary).
- <sup>v</sup> Rawat, B., & Hameed, M. Origin and Development of Buddha Stupa: an Overview of Textual Narratives.
- <sup>vi</sup> Rigveda, ed., Sripad Damodar Satavalekar, Swadhyay Mandal, Pardi, Bombai
- <sup>vii</sup> Jaiswal, S., Agrawal, A., & Raman, G. (2019). Genesis of Stupas.
- <sup>viii</sup> Mitra, D. (1971). Buddhist Monuments. Sahitya Samsad, Calcutta.
- <sup>ix</sup> Phouc, L. H. (2010). Buddhist Architecture. Grafikol.
- <sup>x</sup> Sankrityayana, R. and Kashyap, J. (1979). Hindi tr. Dighanikaya.
- <sup>xi</sup> Longhurst, A. H. (2012). The Story of the Stupa. Asian education service. New Delhi.
- <sup>xii</sup> Pal, J. (2018, January). Professor Sr Das Memorial Prize Paper. In *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (Vol. 79, pp. 791-798). Indian History Congress.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Kosalyayan, B. A. (1942). Mahavansh. Hindi Sahitya sammelan. Prayag.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Cunningham, A. (1854). *The Bhilsa Topes: Or, Buddhist Monuments of Central India: Comprising a Brief Historical Sketch of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of Buddhism; with an Account of the Opening and Examination of the Various Groups of Topes Around Bhilsa*. Smith, Elder.
- <sup>xv</sup> Pal, J. (2018, January). Professor Sr Das Memorial Prize Paper. In *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (Vol. 79, pp. 791-798). Indian History Congress
- <sup>xvi</sup> Rawat, B., & Hameed, . Origin and Development of Buddha Stupa: an Overview of Textual Narratives.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Mitra, D. (1971). Buddhist Monuments. Sahitya Samsad, Calcutta.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Upadhyay, V. (1972). Prachin Bharti Stupa Guha and Mandir. Bihar Hindi Granth Akademi. Patna.
- <sup>xix</sup> Murthy, K. K. (1993). Buddhist Ideologies Transmuted in Stūpas. *The Tibet Journal*, 18(4), 49-55.
- <sup>xx</sup> Mitra, D. (1971). Buddhist Monuments. Sahitya Samsad, Calcutta
- <sup>xxi</sup> Snodgrass, A. (1985). The Symbolism of the Stupa. Cornell Southeast Asian programme, New York. Pp 354.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Mitra, D. (1971). Buddhist Monuments. Sahitya Samsad, Calcutta
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Snodgrass, A. (1985). The Symbolism of the Stupa. Cornell Southeast Asian programme, New York. Pp. 110 170.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Phuoc, L. H. (2010). Buddhist architecture.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Snodgrass, A. (1985). The Symbolism of the Stupa. Cornell Southeast Asian programme, New York.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Phuoc, L. H. (2010). Buddhist architecture.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Ibid.