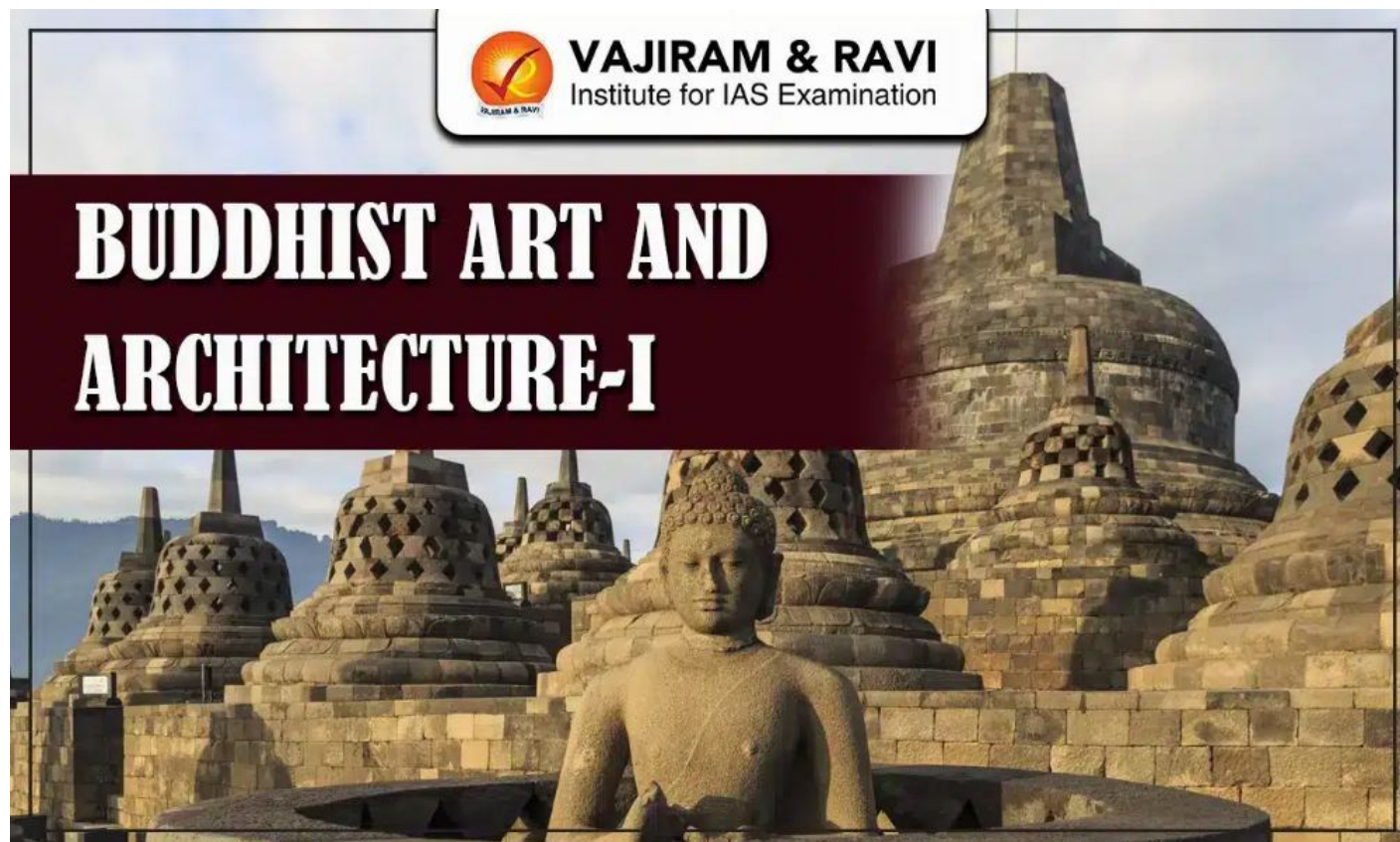


Buddhist Art and Architecture-I, Major Stupas, Structure, UPSC Notes

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Stupa

Indian Buddhist architecture includes a variety of styles, from the simple and austere designs of the early stupas to the more elaborate and ornate designs of later temples and monasteries.



Image of Stupa

A stupa is a **hemispherical** or dome-shaped structure that contains **relics of the Buddha or other sacred objects**. Stupas are a fundamental element of Buddhist architecture and have been built across the Buddhist world for thousands of years.

Structure

- **Shape and size:** Stupas come in various sizes and shapes, but they typically have a **hemispherical** or dome-shaped structure.
- **History of stupa architecture:**
 - The stupa was **originally a funerary mound** in ancient India, but it gradually evolved into a religious monument associated with the Buddha and his teachings.
 - The **earliest** stupas were simple hemispherical mounds of **earth or brick**, but they later **became more elaborate** and were decorated with carvings, reliefs, and sculptures.



Stupa worship, Bharhut

Image of Bharhut Stupa

- **The symbolism of the stupa:**

- The stupa is a symbol of the Buddha's enlightenment and his teachings.
- It represents the path to enlightenment, with the **circular base** representing the **cycle of birth and death** and the **pinnacle representing the attainment of Nirvana**.
- They were constructed over the relics of the Buddha at **Rajagriha**, **Vaishali**, **Vethadipa** and **Pava** in Bihar, **Kapilavastu**, **Allakappa** and **Ramagrama** in Nepal, **Kushinagar** and **Pippalvina** in Uttar Pradesh.

- **Elements of stupa architecture:**

- Stupas typically consist of several elements, including a circular base or platform, a hemispherical dome or **Anda**, a spire or **Harmika**, and a parasol or **Chhatra**.
- The **base** or platform may be decorated with carvings, reliefs, or sculptures, while the harmika may adorn the Buddha's eyes and other symbols.

- **Construction techniques:**

- Stupas were constructed using various materials, including brick, stone, earth, and plaster.
- They were typically **built in stages**, with each stage representing a different aspect of the Buddha's teachings or his life.
- Builders used a variety of techniques to ensure the stability and durability of the stupas, including the use of sloping walls, buttresses, and niches for votive offerings.

- **Regional styles of stupa architecture:** Different regions of India developed their own styles over time.

- For example, the stupas at Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh are known for their elaborate carvings and reliefs. In contrast, the stupas at **Amaravati** in Andhra Pradesh are known for their intricate sculptures. The stupas in **Ladakh** and **Tibet** are often built in a distinctive Tibetan style, with a white dome and colorful banners.

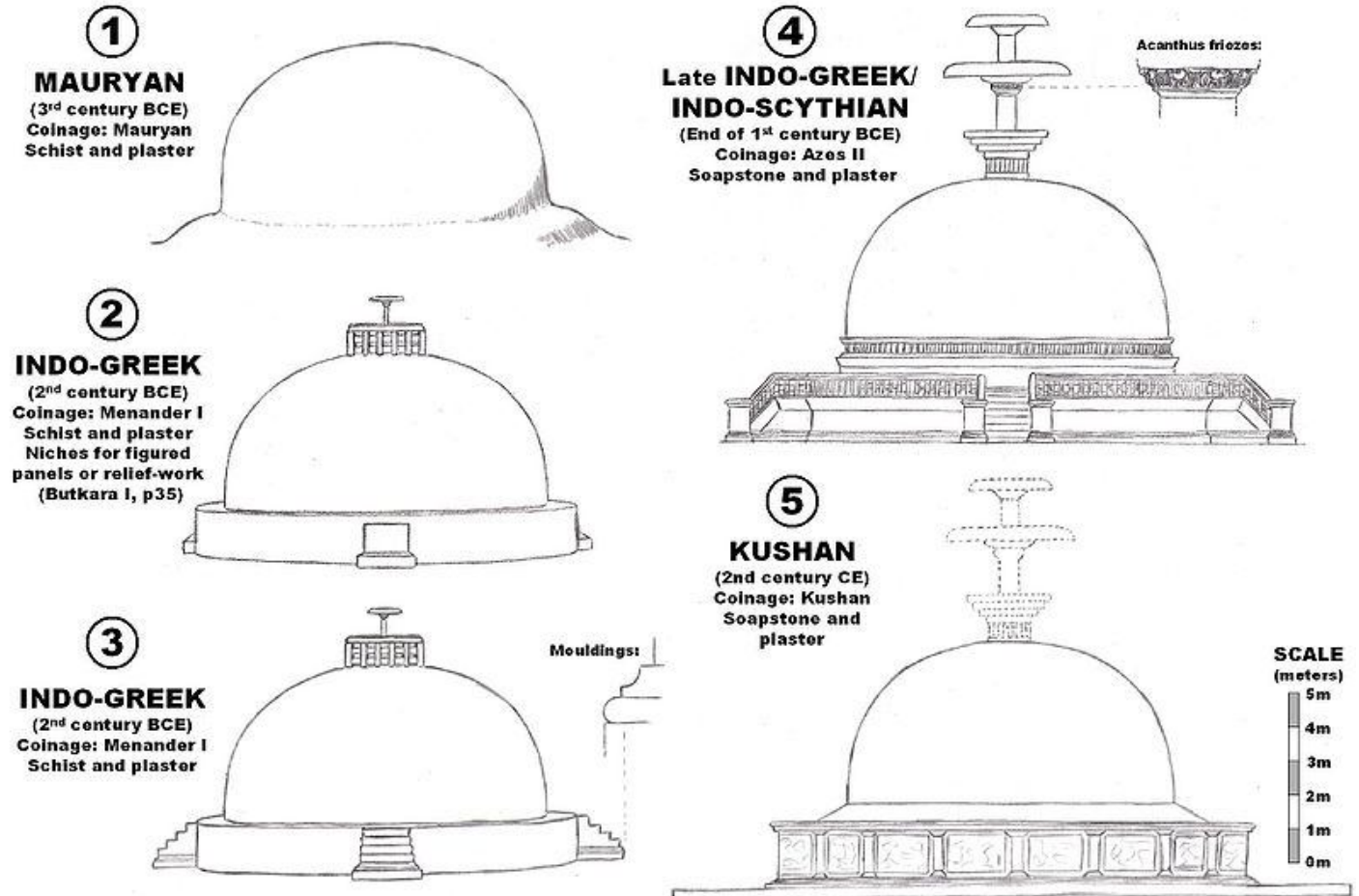
- **Other Features:**

- **Name of Artist:** Very few inscriptions mention the names of artisans, such as Kanha at Pitalkhora and his disciple Balaka at Kondane caves in Maharashtra.

Phases

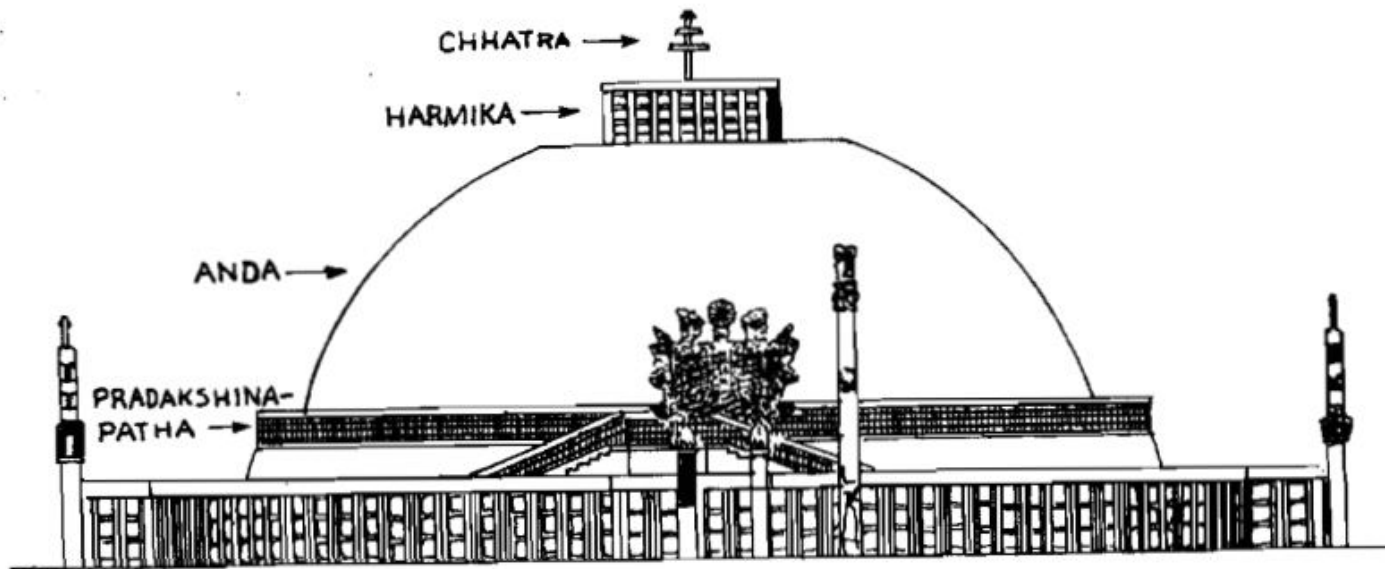
EARLY EVOLUTION OF THE STUPA

(BUTKARA Great Stupa, 3rd century BCE- 2nd century CE)



Mauryan Period

The Mauryan period (322 BCE-185 BCE) in India is considered a significant phase in the development of stupa architecture. During this period, stupas became more elaborate and were decorated with carvings, reliefs, and sculptures.



4. Parts of Stupa Sanchi

Image: Parts of Sanchi stupa

- **The early Mauryan stupas:**
 - They were relatively simple hemispherical mounds of earth or brick.
 - The **oldest** known example is the **Piprahwa** stupa in Uttar Pradesh, which dates back to the 4th century BCE.
- **The development of stone stupas:** During the Mauryan period, builders began to use stone to construct stupas.
 - For example, Stupa at Sanchi, this stupa was **built in several phases**, with the earliest phase dating back to the 3rd century BCE.
- **The elaborate decoration of stupas:** The Mauryan stupas were decorated with carvings, reliefs, and sculptures that depicted scenes from the life of the Buddha, as well as other religious and secular motifs.
- **The importance of stupas:** Stupas were not only important as religious monuments but also served as symbols of imperial power and authority during the Mauryan period.
- **Regional variations:**
 - The stupa at Sanchi is known for its elaborate decoration and stone construction, while the stupa at **Bharhut** in Madhya Pradesh is known for its early Buddhist reliefs and carvings.
- **Transition:**
 - During the early phase of Buddhism, Buddha is depicted symbolically through footprints, stupas, lotus throne, chakra, etc.
 - This indicates either simple worship or paying respect, or at times depicts the historicisation of life events.
 - Gradually, the narrative became a part of the Buddhist tradition.
 - Thus, events from the life of the Buddha, the Jataka stories, were depicted on the railings and torans of the stupas.

The Gupta period (320-550 CE)

It is considered a golden age in Indian history. It was marked by a flourishing of arts, sciences, and literature. During this period, stupa architecture continued to evolve and reached new heights of refinement and sophistication.

- **Emergence of new styles:** During the Gupta period, new styles of stupa architecture emerged, with more elaborate decoration and greater attention to detail. The **Dhamekh Stupa in Sarnath**, for example, is a fine example of Gupta stupa architecture, with intricate carvings depicting Buddhist themes and motifs.
- **Decorative elements:** Stupas during the Gupta period were often decorated with ornate elements such as lotus petals, garlands, and various mythical creatures such as yakshas, kinnaras, and Gandharvas. These decorative elements were often arranged in a symmetrical pattern, creating a sense of balance and harmony.
- **Construction materials:** Stupas during the Gupta period were often constructed using bricks and stone, with the outer surface covered in plaster or stucco.
- **Influence on other art forms:** Stupa architecture during the Gupta period had a profound influence on other art forms such as sculpture and painting. Many of the techniques and motifs used in stupa decoration were adapted and applied to other forms of art, resulting in a rich and diverse body of work.

Post-Mauryan period

The post-Mauryan period in India (around 200 BCE - 300 CE) saw the continuation and further evolution of stupa architecture. During this period, various dynasties and kingdoms emerged, each with their own distinct style and approach to stupa construction.

- **The Satavahanas:**
 - They built several important stupas, including the **Amaravati Stupa** in present-day Andhra Pradesh. This stupa was known for its elaborate carvings and sculptures that depicted various Buddhist legends and stories.
- **The Kushanas:**
 - They were patrons of Buddhism and built **Kanishka Stupa** in present-day Afghanistan. This stupa was known for its large size and elaborate decoration, which included thousands of carved stone panels and sculptures.
- **The Andhras:**
 - The Andhras were a dynasty that ruled parts of southern India during the post-Mauryan period. They built **Nagarjunakonda Stupa** in present-day Andhra Pradesh.
 - This stupa was known for its unique style, which featured a circular base and a square top. It was also decorated with intricate carvings and sculptures.

Major Stupas

- **Mahabodhi Stupa:** It is located in Bodh Gaya, Bihar. This stupa marks the spot where the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment. It is one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Buddhists worldwide.
- **Jetavana Stupa:** (Shravasti, Uttar Pradesh)

- This stupa is said to have been built on the site where the Buddha spent 24 rainy seasons, teaching and meditating.
- **Dhamekh Stupa:** (Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh)
 - It is believed to mark the spot where the Buddha gave his first sermon, known as the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta.
- **Sanchi Stupa:** It is one of the oldest and most well-preserved stupas in India. This monument is located in Madhya Pradesh. It was originally commissioned by Emperor Ashoka of the Mauryan Empire in the 3rd century BCE.
- **Vishwa Shanti Stupa:** (Rajgir, Bihar)
 - It was built in the 1960s to promote world peace and is one of the tallest stupas in India.
- **Ratnagiri Stupa:** (Ratnagiri, Odisha)
- This stupa is believed to have been built by the **Gupta dynasty** in the **6th** century CE.
- **Amravati Stupa:** (Andhra Pradesh)
 - It is believed to have been built by the **Satavahana** dynasty in the 2nd century BCE.
 - It is known for its intricate carvings and sculptures, which depict scenes from the Buddha's life and teachings.

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