

## Contribution of Buddhism in Architecture of India

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### Introduction

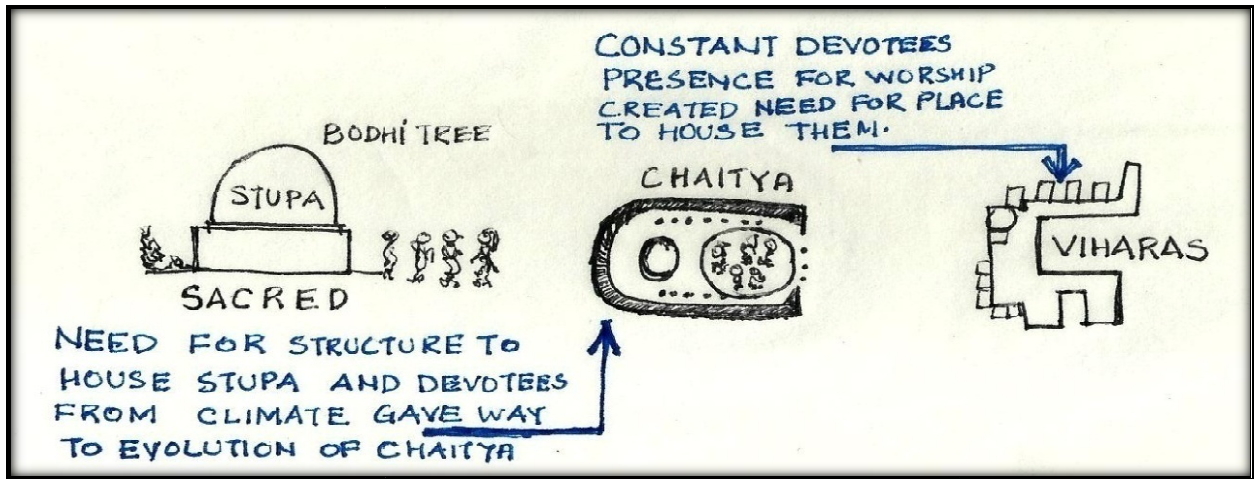
Buddhism has its roots deeply planted in Indian soil. The places in India connected with four principal events of Buddha's life viz. birth, enlightenment, first preaching and decease took place respectively at Lumbani, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath and Kasia. So these places are regarded as holy by the followers of Buddhism. Buddhism is a religion and philosophy encompassing a variety of traditions, beliefs and practices mainly based on teachings of King Siddhartha later known as Lord Gautama Buddha after attaining Nirvana. With the decease of Lord Buddha structures were built using traditional material like mud, burnt bricks and stone to keep the relics of the Master at the centre of a domed structure. The Buddhist Architecture received recognition with development of places of worship which were more ornate and built forms were domes with cardinal entrance points. The structure built had close resemblance to Hinduism and Hindu Architecture if choice of material for construction is concerned. The intricate decoration and identifiable dome of stupa gave it a new identity. Thus stupas were differentiable form a traditional temple form.

Emperor Ashoka made great contribution towards the growth and spread of Buddhism. He is credited for construction of pillars, stupas and rock cut caves. Basically three important types of structures were built and used by followers of Buddhism namely **Stupa, Chaitya halls and Viharas**. Stupa were erected to preserve relics(leftover) of Lord Gautama Buddha, Chaitya halls were large congregational spaces meant for group prayers and worship which housed stupa, Viharas were monasteries constructed of bricks or excavated out of rocks where monks stayed and studied in cells built for them.

### Evolution of Three Built Forms

The Stupa is be believed to have evolved from the need for a place to burry the relics of Lord Buddha, thus being a funerary mound carrying object of worship, having sacred value.

Later on with the increase in number of follower of the religion, need for a separate building must have been felt to accommodate Stupa and provide shelter to people to perform their religious rites. This requirement gave birth to Chaitya Halls. The trend of worshipping a built form would have given birth to practice of Idol worship and temples as places of worship in Buddhism. Constant presence of devotees must have aroused the need for a place where priest can stay and worship at regular intervals. This may have given birth to Viharas or monasteries.



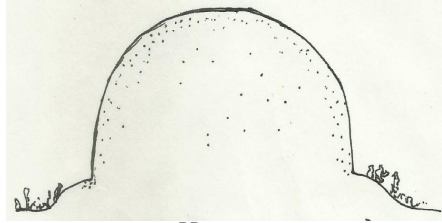
In the construction of Buddhist structure traditional building styles and local material were used but the mode of decoration, which began due to increased support to this new religion set these buildings apart from the rest. The basic Buddhist temple had an entrance with a circular plan. The spherical or sphere over a cylinder was easily identifiable in every form of evolution. The three popular contribution of built form of Buddhist Architecture are explained below.

### **STUPA**

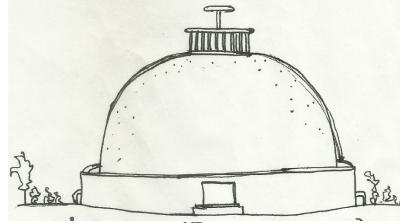
Evolved as a structure for housing the relics of Lord Buddha, Stupa originated as a piled up burial mound symbolizing the decease (parinirvana) of Buddha and became an important object of Buddhist cult worship. The plan, elevation and section of Stupa are derived from circular form. Stupas were categorized into following three types:-

- I. To enshrine the body relics (Saririka)
- II. The personal effects (paribhogika) of Buddha and Buddhist Saints.
- III. To commemorate sports and events of religious significance(uddesika)

The shape of the stupa represents the Buddha, crowned and sitting in a meditation posture on a lion throne. His crown is the top of the spire; his head is the square at the spire's base; his body is the vase shape; his legs are the four steps of the lower terrace and the base is his throne



MAURYAN (3<sup>RD</sup> CENTURY B.C.E.)



INDO-GREEK (2<sup>ND</sup> CENTURY B.C.E.)



INDO-GREEK/INDO-SCYTHIAN  
(1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY B.C.E.)

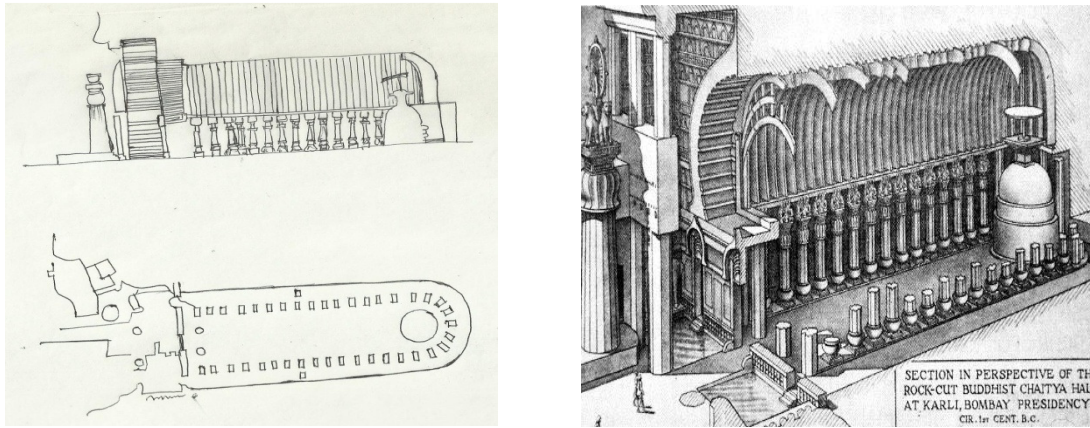
It was built in form of a solid spherical dome (anda), rose on one or more terraces and surrounded by a railed pavilion (harmika) from which rose the shaft of the crowning umbrella (chhatra). There were four gateways oriented in four cardinal directions known as “**TORANAS**”. The stupas had one or more circumambulatory passages (pradakshina-patha) which were hemispherical in shape with low base.

### **CHAITYA HALLS**

The word Chaitya is believed to have originated from word Chita i.e. ashes symbolizing the **ashes worthy of worship**. The original Chaitya hall of worship or shrine of worship may have been in form of a wooden shed with thatched roof and a small stupa at one end. But during monsoon season this proved to be inadequate to shelter large congregation. Thus need must have been felt to build large and permanent structures for shelter. The natural caves must have been initially used in unfinished state. Later on demand based on specific requirement must have given birth to rock cut Architecture and initiated a new trend in Architecture of India.

Chaitya halls for worship were built either of bricks or chiseled from rocks. The construction process must have started at the ceiling level and moved down, thus eliminating the need for scaffolding and shuttering in the initial stages. Many Categories of workers and types of skilled professionals may have employed in the process, rock cutters who did the initial removal of the rocks, masons who executed the more precise cutting and sculptors and polishers who performed the final finishing. The Chaitya hall is a vaulted congregation hall with one end containing a stupa (cut out of a living rock).The hall is divided longitudinally by a double row of

colonnades into a central nave with two side aisles. The elementary form of plan is derived from the sudama cave at Barbar with some modification and establishing a stupa with in. These Chaitya halls in stone are copies of timber structure workmanship which is evident from the design adoption in rock, of many patterns and devices peculiar to wood architecture.

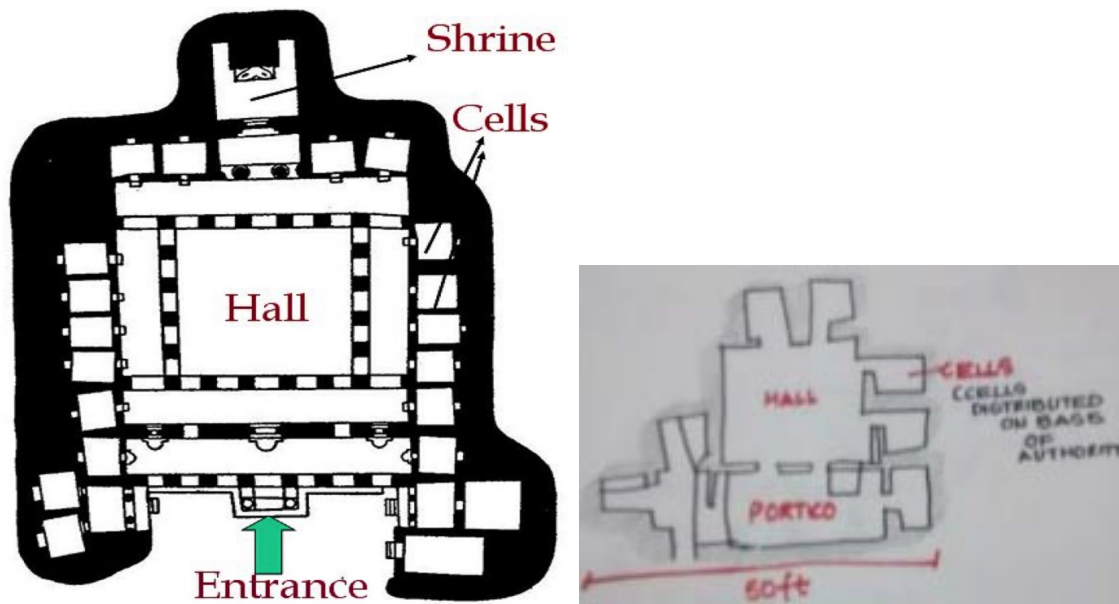


### SECTION & PLAN OF A CHAITYA HALL, KARLI

The most attractive and carefully designed part of Chaitya hall/shrine is the façade which consists of a screen with a doorway or doorways below and a prominent arch window above through which light is admitted into the hall. The façade is relieved with designs of arcade and railing. Occasional sculpture and in some cases a front portico or vestibule is attached to it.

### VIHARAS

Viharas or monasteries were constructed with brick or excavated from rocks. The main hall was approached through a door way, leading to an assembly hall, dinning hall and meditation chamber or prayer hall. These monastic buildings were self contained units consisting of chambers and a Chaitya hall attached to a stupa- the chief object of worship. The chambers were used as dwelling (living) units for the monks. They had platforms cut out of rock, which was used as bed. The column of Viharas were ornamentally carved. Designs of all Viharas were not alike. Stone was chosen because of its permanency in built form. Initially these Viharas were simply dwelling units for monks erected out of thatch and bamboo, generally on trade routes. Later on after 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. these Viharas transformed itself into educational Institutes. The walls of Viharas were covered with paintings depicting stories from life of Lord Gautam Buddha. Some of the important Buddhist Viharas are Bagh and Badami.



**TYPICAL PLAN OF VIHARA**

### **Conclusions**

The Buddhism has significant impact on Indian Architecture by contributing Stupa, Chaitya and Viharas. King Ashoka spread this religion to various parts of his kingdom and erected some great monuments in rocks which stand till date. Other than the Stupa, Chaitya and Viharas, Sthambhs or pillars were also erected popularly known as Ashokan pillar in different parts of India. These pillars had inscriptions from the life and teachings of Gautam Buddha. Thus growth and development of Buddhism gave way to some of the finest structural monuments and development of magnificent educational institutes in earlier times.

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