



# **The Influence of Indian Buddhist Architecture on Cambodian Buddhist Architecture: Vihāra, Chaitya, and Stupa**

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## **ABSTRACT :**

The Buddhist architecture features important monuments and stupas that originated during the Buddha's lifetime, continuing through the Asoka period and various Indian dynasties in architectural history. Indian art and architecture extended throughout Southeast Asia, shaping premodern monuments and architecture for centuries. Buddhism develops art and architecture to serve as visual aids for spreading religious concepts in Southeast Asia. Buddhism has long been a vital source of art, architecture, and cultural values in Cambodia. The Kingdom of Cambodia has embraced Buddhism since the mission of Asoka in the 3rd century BCE. Cambodia has a rich architectural heritage in Southeast Asia, from Funan to Chenla and then to Angkor. The art and architecture of Angkor have been symbols of national identity. The Vihāra, Chaitya, and Stupa provide valuable insights into the architectural design of Cambodian Buddhism, which has been influenced by Indian concepts and philosophies derived from the teachings of the Buddha. Monastic architecture embodies the deep faith and commitment of the community, serving as a center of remarkable craftsmanship in contemporary Cambodian architecture.

**Keywords:** architecture, art, Influence, Buddhism, evidence, inscription, culture, temples, monuments, monasteries, India, Cambodia, relations, perspective, style, concept, chaitya, stupa, relic,

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## **Introduction :**

This paper explores the influence of Indian Buddhist architecture on Cambodian Buddhist architecture, which has occurred for centuries. Buddhism has profoundly influenced the cultural heritage of Southeast Asia since its introduction to this new territory, which has been referred to in the inscription as the Suvannabhumi or "Golden Land." The introduction of Buddhism in Cambodia can be traced back to the 3rd century BCE, primarily as a result of the missionary efforts of King Dhammāshoka of India. Since then, Buddhism has become embedded in the way of thought of Cambodians, playing a vital role in moral education and establishing its presence in society. Consequently, they regard these teachings of the Buddha as their refuge. The religious practices within Cambodian society have experienced multiple phases of evolution, spanning from the Funan period to the Angkor period. From the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Theravāda Buddhism has remained the state religion to this day. The influence of religions originating from India significantly contributed to the development of a sophisticated belief system within the local cult of Cambodia, which became the advanced society of faith in the region. Historically, the people practiced their own religious customs centered around the veneration of sacred forests, mountains, and ancestral spirits. This tradition persisted for centuries throughout the Mekong Delta.

Moreover, it illustrates the development of Cambodian culture and civilization as influenced by Indian culture, emphasizing the adaptations of Indian epics, specifically the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, within a Cambodian context, and it is so influential in the society learned by Royal families, high ranks, ordinary people. Therefore, it can be said that Cambodian culture and civilization are the offspring of Indian influences, which are evident in nearly all facets of Cambodian society and historical development. The construction of a temple or public building for religious ceremonies symbolizes devotion to a Buddha, deities, or Bodhisattvas. Additionally, construction stages must follow the rituals set by the masters (gurus) or Brahmins. According to Chhom Kunthea, the term "vihāra," which translates to "monastery," is recorded in twenty inscriptions dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. Interestingly, in 503 A.D., Chinese records indicate that the stupa was a gift from Funanese kings to the Chinese Emperor after sending monks as an embassy there, stating that "two ivory stupas and a coral Buddha." Similarly, the purpose of the stupa construction is dedicated to relics of the Buddha and noble persons in Buddhism and others; therefore, the stupa is India's earliest architectural symbol of reverence to the Buddha or his disciples and keeping their relics inside. It is the only form of Buddhist memorial. When the Buddha was cremated, his ashes and relics were divided and enshrined in Chaitya or Chedi.

Indian art and architecture influenced Southeast Asia, shaping premodern monuments and artifacts. Many findings resemble the artistic styles of the Indian Amaravati and Gupta Schools of Art. Furthermore, archaeological excavations in Beikthano, Myanmar, unveiled a Buddhist stupa with a design similar to one in Amaravati, indicating established trade networks between South and Southeast Asia by the sixth century. Tamil merchants were prominent among the earliest Indian traders in Southeast Asia, with inscriptions showing connections between locations, resources, and maritime routes. They were drawn by the region's abundant spices, resins, forest products, and precious metals, particularly gold.

Indian cultural influences prominently shape Cambodian society. Cambodians selectively adopt Indian concepts to enrich their own culture and traditions. Cambodian architecture showcases diverse styles, reflecting early Indian influence on temple architecture before modern standardization. Ancient Khmer technology shaped iconic temples like Angkor Wat and Bayon, showcasing their advancements in Indian architectural techniques. Art in this realm includes architecture and sculpture, both maintaining ties to their originals. Serene Buddha representations from the seventh century, especially those found in Angkor Borei, reflect Gupta morphology impacting early Khmer art. Pre-Angkorean architecture is present at numerous sites across the Indochinese peninsula, suggesting that Indian influences have been largely assimilated. The remnants of this architecture before the seventh century are challenging to reconstruct. The architectural history of this period, which spanned approximately the seventh and eighth centuries, is most effectively exemplified at two prominent sites: Sambor Prei Kuk and the Kulen plateau.

The remnants of the remarkable Khmer Empire and Angkor civilization are evident in both ancient and contemporary architecture. Khmer art and architecture not only express religious and symbolic stories but also reflect the numerous factors that contributed to the rise of a tremendous Asian empire. This architectural framework exhibits a profound reverence for the rich historical traditions, artistic heritage, and cultural expressions of Cambodian people. Angkor Wat, constructed under the reign of Suryavarman II (1113-1150), stands as a preeminent architectural monument. This expansive temple, dedicated to both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, is surrounded by a broad moat. It expresses the concept of the divine monarch as the focus of the universe. King Jayavarman VII formally declared Mahāyana Buddhism the state religion of his Empire. The Bayon Temple complex represents the apex of Buddhist architectural accomplishment, closely following the precedents set by the Khmer civilization. Buddhist stylistic arts greatly influence Cambodia's central Buddhist heritage, especially in architectural designs, which are vital for understanding the history of architecture and art.

The Vihāra, Chaitya, and Stupa provide valuable insights into the architectural design of Cambodian Buddhism, which has been influenced by Indian concepts and philosophies derived from the teachings of the Buddha. Monastic architecture embodies the deep faith and commitment of the community, serving as a center of remarkable craftsmanship in contemporary Cambodian architecture. As a result, monasteries consistently evolved their architectural styles and designs inspired by the narratives of Buddha's lives, known as Jatakas, along with the Buddha's teachings within the monasteries. This monastic architecture reflects the profound faith and dedication of the people, ultimately establishing it as the focal point of fine-quality craftsmanship. The architectural styles of Cambodian Buddhism are prominently reflected in the traditions, arts, culture, monuments, and sculptures developed in Cambodia for centuries.

Buddhist temples and stupas in Cambodia are exemplary representations of the transmission of Indian artistic elements. The representation of the Buddha relief closely resembles early Indian Buddha images and statues, which subsequently evolved into Khmer art and architecture. The influence of Indian concepts is manifest in numerous temples and monuments across Cambodia. As this influence has shaped Cambodian Buddhist architecture, it has facilitated relationships and collaborations that have culminated in a significant cultural intermingling, thereby establishing a distinctive tradition of Buddhist art in Cambodia. These elements have developed from a synthesis of indigenous and Buddhist practices, tracing back to ancient times and continuing to the present day.

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### **The Buddhist Architecture in India :**

Buddhism originated in India in the 6th century BC and became a major religion of the world. It is one of the most significant religions in South and Southeast Asia and globally, based on the teachings of Buddha, known as Gautama (Skt) Gotama (Pali) Buddha. Siddhartha Gautama was a noble prince of the Shakya clan whose father ruled Kapilavastu (Nepal). After attaining enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Bodhi Gaya, the Buddha traveled across the country, spreading his teachings. The Buddha spent 45 years spreading the Dhamma and passed away at 80. He was supported by King Bimbisāra of the Magadha Empire, who built the first vihāras in Rajagaha. During this time, Rajagaha was important as the capital of the rising Magadhan monarchy. It must have attracted merchants and bankers; however, its commercial significance does not compare with that of Savatthi or Ujjain (Gokhale, 1982). Both Bimbisara and his son, Ajatasattu, were patrons of the Buddha and greatly supported Buddhism. Many Vihāras were built as residences for the Buddha and his disciples in his lifetime. Numerous lay Buddhists were involved in the construction of monasteries, such as merchant Anathapindika, who constructed the Jetavanārāma monastery, which was one of the most renowned Buddhist monasteries (viharas), and Pubbārāma monastery constructed by Upāsikā Visākhā, a key donor in early Buddhism, located in the city of Sāvattthi within the Kosala kingdom (Groslier, 1962). The construction of viharas for Buddhist monks persisted without interruption through the patronage of royal supporters and donors, even following the demise of the Buddha across India.

After the Buddha passed away in the third century B.C., the Mauryan emperor Asoka embraced Buddhism as a consequence of his deep remorse over the loss of life resulting from his conquest of Kalinga on the eastern coast of India. After this, Asoka advocated for promoting Buddhism across South Asia through inscriptions that articulated Buddhist doctrine and endorsed Buddhist institutions. This catalyst facilitated the transition of Buddhism from a significant South Asian religion toward a trajectory that would ultimately culminate in its proliferation throughout Asia (Fogelin, 2003). Around the mid-first millennium BCE, the Indian subcontinent witnessed the emergence of territorial kingdoms known as *Janapadas* in North India. This development progressed towards the consolidation of smaller kingdoms into larger states (*Mahājanapadas*) such as Kosala and Magadha. This trajectory ultimately culminated in the establishment of the Maurya Dynasty around ca. 320 BCE. This dynasty effectively constructed a vast empire covering the larger part of the subcontinent by the reign of Emperor Asoka (268-233 BCE) (Eggermont, 1962; R. Thapar, 2012).

Stone cutting was brought to India in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, and Buddhist architecture was the first to use stone as a building material. Buddhist religious architecture, which flourished under the patronage of Emperor Ashoka, reflects the concept of meditation and worship, integral to the religion's rituals of prayer. It can be classified into three main types, based on the three cornerstones of Buddhism: first, the Buddha, an object of veneration, architecturally

expressed in the stupa; second, the Dharma or religion, based on worship, which found expression in chaitya halls or sanctuaries; and third, the Sangha or community of monks, whose monasteries were called vihara (Shimada, 2012).

There have been many studies on the architecture of India since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with many inscriptions and archaeological evidence interpreted to illuminate the historical development of Indian architecture. Sacred landscapes in Asia have typically been examined concerning the architectural features and imagery of the monuments, as well as concerning chronology and patronage. More recently, such studies have been situated within the framework of debates surrounding the generation of colonial knowledge. Colonial and nationalist studies of Indian architecture are often contrasted. The colonial approach, led by James Fergusson (1808-1886), focused on precise delineation and documentation of architecture. In contrast, the nationalist perspective emphasized aesthetics and spirituality, as reflected in the works of Anand Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) (Ray, 2008). The assertion of a purported dichotomy between the Western scientific examination of architecture and the Indian or nationalist inclination towards Sanskrit treatises presents an oversimplified depiction of the intricate legacy of colonialism, which endeavored to establish a monotheistic religious identity upon fundamentally culturally pluralistic societies in Asia.

No unambiguous Buddhist architectural remnants have been identified in India from the period of the Buddha (c. 400 BCE) (Fogelin, 2015). The earliest Buddhist architectural concepts may be discerned in the Buddha's discourses (Sūtras) or within the monastic disciplines (*Vinaya*). However, the challenges associated with accurately dating these texts and the potential for their recension or compilation result in their limited utility as reliable sources for architectural history (Schopen, 1994). An architectural history of Indian Buddhism can only begin in the reign of the Mauryan emperor Asoka (r. c. 272–232 BCE). This period of Indian history is predominantly recognized for the extensive issuance of imperial "edicts" that were inscribed across the subcontinent by this monarch on stone slabs and pillars. These inscriptions are not equally distributed: the pillar inscriptions are almost exclusively found in the Ganges Valley, and no Asokan inscriptions have been found south of the Krishna River Valley, with only a single inscription has been found east of the Asokan capital at Pataliputra (Patna) (Fogelin, 2015). Architecture dating to this period is scarce and often found in the foundations of later structures, such as in Stūpa one and Temple 40 at Sanchi Hill in Madhya Pradesh (Shaw, 2016). I will provide a brief description of stupas, chaityas, and vihāras, which are the primary structures of this topic to this discussion in the paper.

### *Stupa*

The stupa is India's earliest architectural symbol of reverence. Stupas and Buddhism are essentially synonymous, as all known stupas belong to the Buddhist tradition (Rawat & Hameed, 2019). The concept and evolution of memorials, or stupas, started with simple memorials for every individual. Gradually, sculptures and temples were constructed to honor notable figures or prominent individuals in society, though not for everyone who passed away. Initially, similar practices were likely employed for the burial of ordinary individuals. Buddhists in South Asia concentrated a significant portion of their rituals and worship on stone or brick mounds known as stupas, which contained the relics of the Buddha. Certain stupas were located within expansive, open-air complexes that served as primary pilgrimage sites for the Buddhist laity (Fogelin, 2003). The places connected with the four principal events of the Buddha's life, namely his birth, enlightenment, first sermon, and passing, occurred in Lumbini, Bodh-Gaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar, respectively. These sites are venerated with the utmost sanctity. Four other locations closely linked to his life—Sāvātthi (Sravasti), Sankissa (Sankasya), Rajagaha (Rajagriha), and Vesāli (Vaisali)—were incorporated, thus designating these eight sites as sacred places (Deva, 1974).

The earliest structural remains in India linked to Buddhist communities are stūpas, mounds believed to contain Buddha's relics. The first dateable stūpas appear in the third century BCE, though the relics may be older. Monumental stūpa sites were constructed in central and southern. The inception and evolution of the Stupa commenced with simple monuments and temples erected to commemorate the deceased. Noteworthy individuals or prominent figures within society were honored through such constructions rather than every deceased individual. Earlier burial practices probably adhered to this same principle. During the Stone Age and subsequent periods, it is likely that not all deceased individuals received formal burials. 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 honors of essential events in the Buddha's life. The concept of the stupa is mentioned in the Mahāparinibbana-sutta during a dialogue between the Buddha and his principal disciple, Ananda, after his demise. In this discourse, Ananda inquires on two occasions regarding the appropriate actions to be taken concerning the Buddha's physical remains after his passing. The Buddha initially advised, "Ananda should not concern himself with his physical remains, urging instead a focus on meditation and the attainment of nirvana. Upon further inquiry, the Buddha instructed that his physical remains should be honored as if they were those of a chakravartin, a king with religious legitimacy. He specified that his remains were to be entrusted to devoted lay followers, cremated, and placed in a large stupa to facilitate reverent worship" (Burnouf, 2010; Rhi, 2010).

The term 'stupa' comes from the Sanskrit, meaning "to heap." It is the earliest form of religious architecture in India, originally a funerary mound of earth and rubble meant to enshrine the Buddha's remains. Subsequently, sacred relics and the remains of several disciples were interred beneath similar structures made of brick, featuring elaborate designs, chhatris (umbrellas on top), and railings (vedika). Over time, many stupas were built, some small enough to be carried by pilgrims. Emperor Ashoka himself commissioned the construction of 84,000 stupas, with the famous 3rd-century BC stupa at Sanchi being the most renowned. In its original form, this significant structure gradually deteriorated. It was not until the early 19th century that it was rediscovered, leading to the British's extensive restoration efforts, resulting in its current preserved state. Other notable stupas in India include those found at Bharhut, Sarnath, and Nagarjunakonda, culminating in the Great Stupa at Amravati, where only the base remains and Emperor Ashoka also first built the Mahabodhi Temple in the third century BC. The temple dates from the 5th or 6th century AD. It is one of the earliest brick Buddhist temples still standing in India (Tribhuvan, 2024).

### ***The Chaitya***

The original chaitya hall of worship, derived from the Vedic term 'chaiti,' meaning "sacred place," initially consisted of a simple wooden structure topped with a thatched roof and a small stupa at one end. Nonetheless, this arrangement proved insufficient for adequate shelter during the monsoon season, prompting the monastic congregation to relocate to venues providing more suitable protection. Individuals pursued such spaces in natural caves, which have been used by ascetics (sadhus) for centuries. These caves, referred to as varshavatika or rain shelters, represent the initial instances of permanent chaitya. The logical progression from these structures to rock-cut architecture signifies one of the most distinct architectural traditions of India (B. Thapar, 2012). The earliest examples of rock-cut chaitya halls can be dated to approximately the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. The incomplete caves provide valuable insights into the rock-cutting process, which began at the ceiling level and progressed downward, thus obviating the need for scaffolding during the early stages.

### ***The Vihara or Monastery***

In the history of Buddhism, *Veluvanarāma* (Bamboo monastery) was the first monastery constructed by King Bimbisara, the King of Rajagaha at that time. Over time, Buddha saw the number of monks increasing. He realized the growing interest of people in the Dhamma was more remarkable than had been anticipated. This growing interest created a situation that led Buddha to lay down new provisions for its guidance to monks. Buddha considered the conditions necessary for members of the Sangha to live harmoniously in communities. In Sanskrit, the term 'monastery' is called 'Avāsa,' meaning a place of sojourn or residence. But, in Pali, the word 'Arāma' conveys a sense of delight and fondness (Davids & Stede, 2015). The Buddha stated, "Monasteries ought to be established in areas that are neither excessively close to nor excessively distant from any village or town, to facilitate not only the monks' daily rounds of alms-seeking but also their daily requirements." (Kumar, 2018) The vihara, or monastery, was a permanent resident of the monastic community or Sangha or shrine for praying hall in Buddhism.

### ***The Buddhist Architecture in Cambodia***

Cambodia is a country steeped in history and culture, and one of its most remarkable features is its architecture. Khmer architecture, notably, has made a considerable impact on Southeast Asia, characterized by its unique synthesis of Hindu and Buddhist elements, intricate carvings, and magnificent temple complexes. Cambodian architecture has enthralled audiences globally with its beauty and grandeur, from the renowned Angkor Wat and Bayon to the ancient ruins of Banteay Srei and Preah Vihear Temple. Khmer architecture extends beyond just temples and religious buildings; The temples and structures built during the Khmer Empire (9th to the 15th centuries) are some of the most iconic examples of ancient Khmer architecture. These architectural marvels are situated within the Angkor Archaeological Park, which encompasses an expanse of over 400 square kilometers and contains over a thousand temples, shrines, and various other structures. Monumental Khmer architecture first appeared at Sambor Prei Kuk in the early seventh century (Koller, 2017).

The Kingdom of Cambodia, known as Kambujādesa or Kampuchea, is located in the Lower Mekong area of Southeast Asia. Cambodians practice Theravāda Buddhism, with 95% of the population identifying as Buddhists, enshrined in Article 43 of the 1993 National Constitution Cambodia, which states that "Buddhism is the state religion of Cambodia." The law provides for freedom of belief and religious worship, and such freedom neither interferes with others' beliefs and religions nor violates public order and security (Ratana, 2019). The law does not allow non-Buddhist denominations to proselytize publicly. In 2024, Cambodia had 5,146 monasteries and 71,174 monks.

Buddhism was introduced to Southeast Asia after the Third Buddhist Council held at Pataliputra, during which Emperor Asoka dispatched nine missionaries to disseminate the teachings of the Buddha both within India and beyond (Geiger, 1908). One of these nine missionaries was sent to *Suvannabhumi*, the Golden Land, which refers to the Southeast Asian region (Cambodia, Burma, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand). In the fifth century CE, the monarch of Funan dispatched a Buddhist monk named Nagasena to the court of Emperor Wudi, accompanied by two ivory stupas, among numerous other gifts intended for the Chinese emperor. For subsequent centuries, Funan had sent several additional embassies to China (Hazra, 1982).

Indian culture has strongly influenced several Southeast Asian countries, including Cambodia, fostering a peaceful atmosphere due to the trade activities conducted by Indian mercantile groups in the early Christian era. Numerous inscriptions recorded their activities in peninsular India and neighboring countries across the Bay of Bengal. The connection between India and Southeast Asia has existed for many centuries. The historical examination of the Kalinga-Cambodia cultural and commercial rapprochement offers significant insights into the transnational trade networks, cultural exchanges, and religious diffusion during the ancient and medieval periods (Mukherjee, 2023).

The remarkable architecture of Angkor Wat and the Bayon temple within the Angkor Thom complex exemplifies the profound cultural and civilizational advancements of the Khmer civilization spanning from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries during the Angkor kingdom. Therefore, it can be said that Cambodian culture and civilization are significantly shaped by Indian influences, which are evident in nearly all facets of Cambodian society and historical narrative. However, archaeological works and studies on inscriptions reveal the depth of Indian characters and their influence on ancient Cambodia. Indeed, Cambodian culture and society were deeply influenced by Indian culture. It was the centuries-long phenomenon known as Indianization in which elements of Indian culture were absorbed or chosen by the Cambodian people (Chandler, 2018). Therefore, Indian culture was considered superior to the local culture in terms of religion, epic, religious law, and language. Because of such a language, Indian cultural expansion is sometimes called 'Sanskritization.' Similarly, some anthropologists have regarded the interactions between the new and the existing cultures as 'the Great and others or the "little traditions." The former concerned India, Sanskrit, the courts, and Hinduism, and the latter was the local Cambodian Khmer, villages, and folk religion.

The Indian cultural influences are prominent in various facets of Cambodian society. The Cambodians have selectively adopted Indian concepts and elements to enhance their existing culture and traditions, sometimes even enriching the originals. Cambodian artists have developed the art and sculpture from Indian style as annals of the Laing (502-56), written in the seventh century, mention the statues of deities with multi heads and arms (consistent with the possibility that travelers from India had brought religions as well as trade to the area). The remarkable ancient Khmer technology used in the construction of iconic Angkorian temples, such as Angkor Wat and Bayon temple, exemplifies how the Khmer advanced the Indian architectural techniques they adopted. Additionally, the sculptures and Sanskrit inscriptions reveal profound Indo-Khmer connections (Bunthorn, 2022).

Funan, the earliest kingdom of Cambodia, located in the lower Mekong Delta, was an Indianized state in Southeast Asia. Chinese historical accounts suggest that it started embracing Indian cultural influences around the beginning of the Common Era. Evidence shows trade links between Eastern India and Southeast Asia, where Indian traders and seamen migrated to Cambodia and other areas. This resulted in kingdoms that adopted Indian arts, religion, and customs, using Sanskrit as a sacred language (Coedes, 1975). The evidence of Sanskrit is found in the Vo-Canh inscription dated to the third century A.D. (Chutiwongs, 2002). In its early phase, Cambodian Buddhism integrated elements of Theravada, Mahayana, and Hinduism using Sanskrit until the 13th century CE. Throughout the Funan Kingdom period (100 BCE-500 CE) and extending into the reign of King Jayavarman VII (1181-1219), Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism coexisted alongside under royal patronage (Gyallay-Pap, 1996). Since the 13th century, Theravada Buddhism has been adopted and practiced as the state religion using the Pāli language, which replaced Sanskrit. Theravada Buddhism emphasizes individual liberation through following the Pāli Canon. It focuses on the path of personal enlightenment and primarily took hold in mainland southeast Asian kingdoms (Kumar, 2000).

Cambodia, and most of Southeast Asia, has been significantly influenced by pervading Indian culture. The earliest evidence of Indianization within the region can be traced back to the common era (Keyes, 1994). Cambodia has strong ties to India from pre-Angkor to Angkor (802-1431) and post-Angkor. Key sites like Angkor Wat and Bayon Temple enhance heritage tourism. Ancient Cambodia embraced two religions from India, fostering a syncretic tradition that established many Buddhist sites for religious practices and rituals. Monastic centers are vital for spiritual activities in Cambodia, using the traditional Pāli language for rituals and chanting. Evidence of the Khmer Empire and the Angkor civilization is preserved in both ancient and modern art and architecture, illustrating the historical chronicle of Cambodia in the past and inspiring the new generations to learn from it. Khmer art and architecture not only express religious and symbolic narratives but also stand as a testament to the numerous factors that contributed to the emergence of a tremendous Asian empire (Ochoa, 2012).

The landscape of ancient Cambodia (6th–14th centuries CE), was marked by numerous religious buildings, some of which were designated by various terms derived from Sanskrit and Pāli as indicated by the stone inscriptions that have been unearthed at the locations of these structures. The text refers to either Buddhist or Brahmanical institutions, wherein the names of the edifices often indicate their religious affiliation. For example, the reign of King Yasovarman (889–c. 915 CE) is renowned for the establishment of one hundred *āśramas* “hermitage. In Sanskrit, the term ‘monastery’ is called ‘Avāsa,’ meaning a place of sojourn or residence. These *āśramas* are named according to their religious affiliations, namely, Vaiṣṇavāśrama (the *āśrama* of the devotees of Viṣṇu), Saugatāśrama (the *āśrama* of the Buddhists), Māheśvarāśrama (the *āśrama* of the devotees of Śiva), and Brāhmaṇāśrama (the *āśrama* of the Brahmins) (Chhom, 2023; Pou, 2002).

In Khmer architecture during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, one can observe the limitations of the vaulting technique as architects endeavor to create larger interior spaces, such as the ‘halls of dancers.’ Within these structures, vaulted galleries create no more than the illusion of a large covered hall (Koller, 2017). One of the most famous and awe-inspiring examples of ancient Khmer architecture is Angkor Wat, built in the 12th century as a Hindu temple and later converted into a Buddhist one.

### **Angkor Wat**

The Khmer civilization, which was centered in Angkor, exerted dominance over mainland Southeast Asia during the period spanning the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries. Angkor Wat, as with most Angkorian temples, was situated at the heart of a large walled enclosure. A considerable amount of scholarship is available regarding the art history and architectural details of Angkorian temples; however, insufficient emphasis has been placed on the structure and functionality of the extensive rectilinear spaces that encircle them (Stark et al., 2015). Most of the Angkorian state’s most significant temple monuments were dedicated to specific Hindu gods, including Vishnu (Fletcher et al., 2015). Angkor Wat was an elaborate ritual, iconographic, and cosmological construction (Roveda, 2013).

Angkor Wat, the magnificent Hindu temple, has been regarded as one of humanity’s most remarkable and lasting architectural accomplishments. It was constructed by the Khmer Emperor Suryavarman II, who reigned from AD 1113 to 1150. Among the numerous temples built from AD 879 - 1191, Angkor Wat emerged during the zenith of the Khmer civilization-power (Kak, 2001). Angkor Wat constitutes the largest temple complex in the land area. It is situated in Siem Reap province, located in northwestern Cambodia. The temple was constructed by King Suryavarman II of the Khmer Empire (1113-1150 CE) as both a personal mausoleum and a temple dedicated to the Hindu god Visnu. The original name of Angkor Wat was “*Paramavisnuloka*.” The dedication to Brahminism and, later on, to Buddhism around the 16<sup>th</sup> century and becoming a pilgrimage site in Southeast Asia. The original religious motifs associated with this temple were derived from the Brahmanist concept, and the temple was dedicated to Tridev (Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Maheś) (Śiva). Later on, at the end of the 12th century CE, it was converted into a Buddhist temple during the reign of Jayavarman VII (1181-1218 CE) (Chatterji, 1939; Nietupski, 2019).

The Khmers produced Angkorian architecture, ancient Khmer architecture during the Angkorian era of the **Khmer Empire**, which flourished from approximately the 9th to 15th centuries. During the period of Angkor, non-religious buildings such as dwellings were constructed using poorly exploited materials like wood, whereas temples and other religious buildings were built using stone. Therefore, all the remaining Angkorian buildings are religious sites in nature. The emphasis of Angkorian architecture’s study is necessarily on religious architecture.

The Khmers skillfully embraced the Indian concept of a temple-mountain, resulting in a distinctive representation that is now synonymous with Khmer architecture. During the early Angkor period, the kings asserted their sovereignty through the construction of temple-mountains. These temples derive their symbolic significance from Hindu mythology, serving as an earthly replica of Mount Meru, the divine residence of the deities. The notion of the temple as a microcosm of a central mountain was a fundamental concept that significantly influenced Khmer art. As the country embraced Theravāda, the emerging religious movement integrated the ancient cultural elements of the country. During the intervening period, Cambodia transformed its belief system by both literally and figuratively assimilating its ancestral heritage. The temple of *Preah Palilay* represents one of the earliest and most notable examples of this transitional form, wherein a pre-existing Angkorian structure has been integrated into the new Theravādin cult. Based on architectural and stylistic criteria, it is determined that the tower and sandstone terrace are ascribed to the twelfth century. At the same time, the gopura, characterized by its notably Theravādin reliefs, is predominantly dated to the thirteenth century or later ([Thompson, 1998](#)).

### ***Vihara or Monastery***

Theravada Buddhism is the official national religion of Cambodia, commanding the sincere and devoted allegiance of the Khmer peasantry. However, the religious and ceremonial life within the village can be more accurately characterized as a synthesis of elements derived from Buddhism, Hinduism, and traditional indigenous folk religions ([Ebihara, 2018](#)). The term *vihāra* comes from the Pali word, *vihara*, which means permanent residence for monks. Today, in the Buddhist concept, a *vihara* means a monastery structure that serves many functions for Buddhist ceremonies ([Coningham, 2002](#)). Monks and laity use it for assemblies, meetings, religious teaching, and preaching. Buddhist monastery plays an essential role by creating an environment for religious and spiritual growth, serving as a study center in the Buddhist field, and serving as a meditation center. Moreover, Buddhist monasteries become the center of social affairs, building hospitals, schools, and public water supplies for the community. A monastery serves as a sacred site for Buddhist teachings and the promotion of Buddhism's virtues. Various structures were constructed to honor Buddha, his Dhamma, and his noble disciples. A significant proportion of religious buildings in Cambodia are presently associated with Buddhism. Buddhism has prospered in this region since the reign of Jayavarman VII and has continued to thrive from the Angkor Period to the present day.

A Buddhist monastery was traditionally established on the outskirts of towns during the early period, primarily in conjunction with the adjacent villages. Its fundamental structures included the stupa, Uposatha hall, and *vihara*, which is designated for the installation of images of the Buddha. Hinduism, once dominant in some of the ancient kingdoms (but perhaps never fully understood and accepted by the masses), survives only as discrete elements of ceremonials, symbolism, and cosmology. But the folk religion, which is the oldest religion of the Khmer, offers a variety of supernatural beings, as well as rituals and other practices, that are still firmly espoused in village life. In Sanskrit, the term 'monastery' is called 'Avāsa,' meaning a place of sojourn or residence. But, in Pali, the word 'Arāma' conveys a sense of delight and fondness.

### ***Chaitya or Chedei, Stupa***

In Khmer, *Chedei* or *Chaydei* means stupa. The word comes from the Pali word *chaitya*, which means grave, mound, tumulus, or funeral pyre. Another definition of "Chaitya" is a prayer hall and a place of worship designated for Buddhist monks. Chaityas often have a stupa at one end, which serves as the principal focal point of veneration. Although the word has almost the same meaning in Khmer, the *Chedei* is larger and more beautiful than the stupa in the context of Khmer architecture.

This construction preserves the remains of the dead. Chaitya or Chedi originated as mounds over graves, transforming into burial mounds in India before extending to Cambodia for centuries. Chedei was the only form of Buddhist memorial or reverence. When the Buddha was cremated, his ashes and relics were divided and enshrined in Chedei. However, over 2500 years, his bodily relics and personal effects were subdivided so that now most Chedei structures do not hold any actual relics. They have become replicas of structures that may once have contained relics. Therefore, the Chedei constitutes the most revered and, thus, significant structure within a wat. Commonly utilized synonyms for the Chedei are Stupa and Pagoda. Certain Chedei are believed to enshrine a relic of the Buddha, specifically a fragment of the corporeal remains of a revered person. Additionally, Chedei often houses the ashes of prominent monks or abbots and rulers.

There are four distinct types of Chaityas or Chedi in Buddhism.

1. *Dhammachetiya* in Pali refers to 84000 Dhamma in Tipitaka, including manuscripts and Pali commentaries.
2. *Dhatuchetiya* in Pali refers to the relics or remains of the Buddha or those of his disciples.
3. *Uttisikachetiya* in Pali serves as "indicative reminders and replicas" that commemorate various events or enshrine other objects of veneration, such as statues of the Buddha and images.
4. *Paribhogachetiya* in Pali houses personal possessions of the Buddha, such as his alms bowl or fragments of his robe. These chedi mark the four most important sites in the life of the Buddha: those of his birth, his enlightenment, his first sermon, and his death.

Ultimately, the ashes of distinguished individuals were permitted to be enshrined within a chedi. As outlined in the Mahāparinibbana Sutta, four categories of individuals were authorized to receive such a funeral cairn: the historical Buddha; dhamma, or non-preaching Buddhas; senior disciples of the Buddha; and chakravartin, or sovereign rulers.

## Conclusion :

The architectural legacy of Buddhism, which reached its zenith under Emperor Ashoka's patronage, epitomizes the principles of meditation and worship that are fundamental to the religion's rituals of prayer and remembrance. The stupa represents India's earliest architectural symbol of reverence and the preservation of relics. Stupas and Buddhism are essentially synonymous, as all known stupas are attributed to the Buddhist tradition.

Khmer architecture has made a significant impact on Southeast Asia, and it is distinguished by its unique synthesis of Hindu and Buddhist elements, intricate carvings, and magnificent temple complexes. Cambodian architecture has enthralled audiences with its beauty and grandeur, exemplified by the renowned Angkor Wat and Bayon, as well as the ancient ruins of Banteay Srei and Preah Vihear Temple. Furthermore, Khmer architecture extends beyond just temples and religious structures.

Stupas, chaityas, and vihāras hold significant importance within Buddhism, serving as symbols of reverence and sacred sites, including residences for monks. These monuments have been decorated with paintings, images, sculptures, etc., which portray various sceneries of the Buddha's life from birth to death. Further, his former life stories or the Jātakas are also a significant source for this depiction. Stūpa, the symbol of a tomb, represents the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha and his disciples and others. Another representation of *parinibbāna* is the actual scene of the death in which the Buddha has been shown lying on the deathbed.

The relationship between India and Cambodia is exemplified by the remarkable architecture of Angkor Wat and the Bayon temple within the Angkor Thom complex, which illustrate the profound cultural and civilizational advancements of the Khmer civilization that occurred from the ninth to the fifteenth centuries during the Angkor period kingdom. Cambodian culture is profoundly influenced by Indian elements, visible in many aspects of society and history. The historical and cultural relationship between India and Cambodia has strengthened bilateral ties since the early 20th century. Indian architectural styles have significantly impacted Cambodian architecture, illustrating the interconnection between the two cultures for centuries.

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