

STŪPA WORSHIP IN EARLY BUDDHISM: EVOLUTION, RITUALS & SIGNIFICANCE

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Stūpa worship in Buddhism began with the *mahāparinibbāna* of the Buddha when eight Stūpas were built with his body relics. However evolution of the Stūpa has been traced to earlier period. In the Rigveda it is related to burial mound of the clan head or a king. It is still a matter of debate that the Buddha has his own vision of the Stūpa or he envisaged it from early existing traditions. It was debated that for whom the Buddha recommended Stūpa worship and is *sairapuja* could allow in form of the Stūpa. Aśoka transformed the structure when he excavated relics from seven of original Stūpas and distributed it in newly constructed 84000 Stūpas. With prolific expansion of Stūpa worship since the Mauryan age, various rituals and significance were added into it. Architecturally all significant parts of Stūpa viz *harmika*, *anda*, *yasti*, *chatra* were developed in the Mauryan age. However it was changed and remodelled many times during Kushanas and Early Guptas. With the emergence of the Mahāyāna some new dimension were embedded with existing worship.

The paper will try to examine all these dimensions with primary sources and traditions.

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