

## UPSC Civil Services Examination

### UPSC Notes [GS-I]

#### Topic: Sanchi Stupa - Know About Lion Capital [Art & Culture Notes for UPSC]

##### Sanchi Stupa - Lion Capital, Sarnath

- One of the finest examples of Mauryan sculpture.
- Located at Sarnath, near Varanasi. Commissioned by Emperor Ashoka. Built-in 250 BCE.
- Made of polished sandstone. The surface is heavily polished.
- Currently, the pillar is in its original place but the capital is on display at the Sarnath Museum.
- It was commissioned to commemorate the first sermon of the Buddha or the Dharmachakrapravartana at Sarnath.

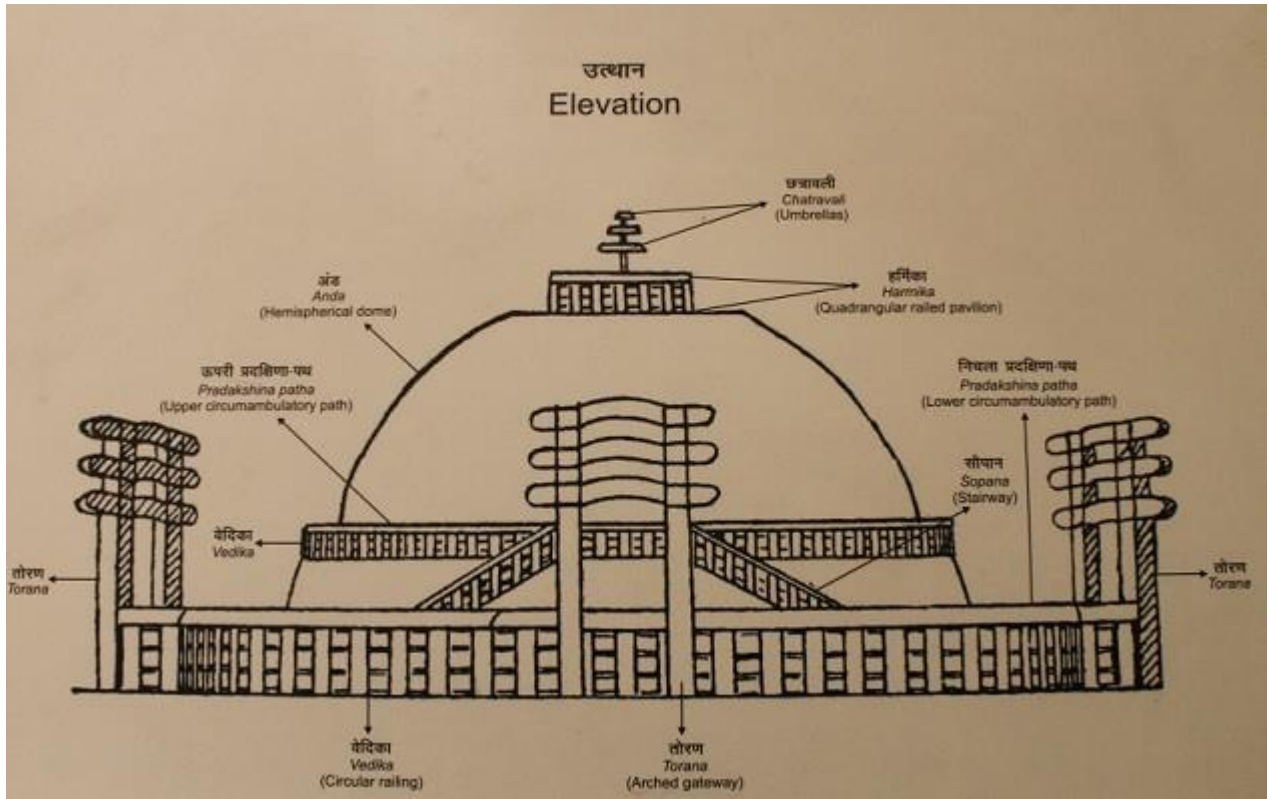


- Originally, the capital had five components:
  - The shaft (now broken into many parts)
  - A lotus base bell
  - A drum on the base bell with 4 animals proceeding clockwise (abacus)
  - Figures of 4 lions

- The crowning part, a large wheel (this is also broken and displayed at the museum)
- The capital was adopted as the National Emblem of India after independence without the crowning wheel and the lotus base.
- The four lions are seated back-to-back on a circular abacus. The figures of the lions are grand and evoke magnificence. They are realistic images and the lions are portrayed as if they are holding their breath. The curly manes of the lions are voluminous. The muscles of the feet are shown stretched indicating the weight of the bodies.
- The abacus has four wheels (chakra) with 24 spokes in all four directions. This is part of the Indian National Flag now.
- The wheel represents Dharmachakra in Buddhism (the wheel of dhamma/dharma). Between every wheel, there are animals carved. They are a bull, a horse, an elephant and a lion. The animals appear as if they are in motion. The abacus is supported by the inverted lotus capital.

## Sanchi Stupa

- Sanchi Stupa is a UNESCO world heritage site since 1989. Sanchi is in Madhya Pradesh.
- There are many small stupas here with three main ones – stupa 1, stupa 2 and stupa 3. Stupa 1 is also called the Great Stupa at Sanchi. It is the most prominent and the oldest and is believed to have the Buddha's relics.
- It was built by Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE.
- Originally, it was smaller than its present dimensions. It was expanded in later periods.



- The original structure was made out of bricks. Later on, it was covered with stone, **vedika**, and the **torana** (gateway).
- There are four gateways to the stupa with the southern one being built first. The others were later added. The gateways are adorned with beautiful sculptures and carvings. Each torana consists of two vertical pillars and three horizontal bars on top. The bars contain exquisite carvings on front and back. They contain images of *shalghanjikas* – lady holding the branch of a tree. Stories from the Jataka tales are carved here.
- The structure has a lower and upper **pradakshinapatha** or circumambulatory path. The upper pradakshinapatha is unique to this stupa.
- On the southern side of the stupa, the Ashokan Lion Capital pillar is found with inscriptions on it.
- The hemispherical dome of the stupa is called the **anda**. It contains the relics of the Buddha.
- The **harmika** is a square railing on top of the dome/mound.
- The **chhatra** is an umbrella on top of the harmika. There is a sandstone pillar in the site on which Ashoka's Schism Edict is inscribed.
- The original brick dome was expanded into double its size during the reign of the Shunga dynasty with stone slabs covering the original dome.