

## **Kaushambi and Buddhist Temple: A Historical and Architectural Analysis**

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### **Abstract:**

Kaushambi, an ancient city in India, holds significant historical and archaeological importance, particularly in the context of Buddhism. This research paper aims to explore the rich history and architectural legacy of Kaushambi, focusing on its association with Buddhism and the development of Buddhist temples in the region. Through a multidisciplinary approach encompassing historical research, archaeological findings, and architectural analysis, this paper seeks to shed light on the cultural, religious, and artistic significance of Kaushambi and its Buddhist temples. By examining primary sources, archaeological excavations, and scholarly interpretations, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolution and characteristics of Buddhist temples in Kaushambi, elucidating their role in shaping religious practices, architectural styles, and cultural landscapes in ancient India.

**Keywords:** Kaushambi, Buddhist Temple, Cultural Landscape, Historical, Architectural

### **Introduction:**

The ancient city of Kaushambi, located in present-day Uttar Pradesh, India, holds immense historical, archaeological, and cultural significance, particularly in the context of Buddhism. Kaushambi was one of the prominent cities during the time of Lord Buddha and played a crucial role in the spread and development of Buddhism in ancient India. The significance of Kaushambi and its Buddhist temples can be understood through various dimensions, including its historical importance, religious significance, architectural legacy, and cultural contributions.

Historically, Kaushambi dates back to the Vedic period and finds mention in ancient Indian texts such as the Rigveda and the Mahabharata. It was one of the important centers of trade, commerce, and culture in ancient India, strategically located on the banks of the river Yamuna. Kaushambi's strategic location facilitated its growth as a bustling urban center and a hub of intellectual and religious activities. Kaushambi's significance in the context of Buddhism is paramount. According to Buddhist scriptures, Lord Buddha visited Kaushambi several times during his lifetime and

delivered discourses to both laypeople and monastics. It was in Kaushambi that Lord Buddha performed many miracles and conversions, leaving an indelible mark on the city's religious landscape. The city became a major center of Buddhist learning and monastic life, attracting scholars, monks, and pilgrims from far and wide.

The Buddhist temples in Kaushambi serve as tangible evidence of the city's rich religious heritage and architectural prowess. These temples, known as viharas and stupas, were centers of Buddhist worship, meditation, and scholarly activities. The architectural features of Kaushambi's Buddhist temples reflect a blend of indigenous styles with influences from other regions, showcasing the artistic ingenuity and craftsmanship of ancient Indian artisans.

The Ghositarama Monastery, one of the most renowned Buddhist establishments in Kaushambi, is believed to have been founded by the wealthy merchant Anathapindika, a devout follower of Lord Buddha. This monastery served as a residence for monks and a place for teaching and meditation. Its architectural grandeur and spiritual ambiance made it a revered destination for pilgrims and devotees. Another notable Buddhist temple in Kaushambi is the Anandakuti Vihara, which is believed to have been built by King Udayana of Kaushambi. This vihara was dedicated to the cultivation of spiritual virtues and the propagation of Buddhist teachings. Its intricately carved pillars, ornate stupas, and serene surroundings provided a conducive environment for contemplation and introspection.

The significance of Kaushambi and its Buddhist temples extends beyond mere historical and architectural realms. These sacred sites serve as living testimonies to the enduring legacy of Buddhism and its profound impact on Indian civilization. They symbolize the ideals of compassion, wisdom, and inner peace espoused by Lord Buddha, inspiring generations of devotees to embark on the path of spiritual enlightenment. Furthermore, Kaushambi's Buddhist temples have played a pivotal role in fostering intercultural exchange and dialogue. They attracted scholars and pilgrims from various regions, facilitating the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and religious practices. The cosmopolitan atmosphere of Kaushambi nurtured a spirit of tolerance and inclusivity, transcending linguistic, ethnic, and social barriers.

In contemporary times, the significance of Kaushambi and its Buddhist temples lies in their potential to promote cultural heritage preservation, tourism, and interfaith harmony. Efforts to conserve and safeguard these ancient monuments not only safeguard our shared cultural legacy

but also provide avenues for socio-economic development and cultural exchange. Kaushambi and its Buddhist temples occupy a unique place in the annals of Indian history and civilization. Their historical, religious, and architectural significance underscores the profound impact of Buddhism on the cultural landscape of ancient India. As custodians of our shared heritage, it is incumbent upon us to cherish, preserve, and celebrate the legacy of Kaushambi and its Buddhist temples for posterity.

### **Historical Overview of Kaushambi:**

**Early Settlements and Urban Development:** Kaushambi, an ancient city situated on the banks of the river Yamuna in present-day Uttar Pradesh, India, traces its origins back to antiquity. Archaeological excavations and historical records indicate that Kaushambi was inhabited as early as the Vedic period, making it one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the Indian subcontinent. The early settlements in Kaushambi were primarily agrarian, with farming and animal husbandry forming the backbone of the local economy. Over time, the strategic location of Kaushambi, at the confluence of trade routes traversing the Gangetic plains, contributed to its growth as a bustling urban center. The city became a hub of commercial activities, attracting merchants, traders, and artisans from neighboring regions.

Urban development in Kaushambi flourished during the Mauryan period (circa 4th to 2nd century BCE) when it served as an important administrative and political center of the Mauryan Empire. The reign of Emperor Ashoka saw the expansion and embellishment of Kaushambi with the construction of roads, public buildings, and irrigation systems. The city's prosperity and cosmopolitan character during this period are evident from archaeological remains such as fortifications, palaces, and granaries unearthed in excavations.

**Importance in Ancient Indian Literature:** Kaushambi finds prominent mention in ancient Indian literary sources, including the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and various Buddhist texts. In the Mahabharata, Kaushambi is described as a flourishing city ruled by King Udayana, renowned for its opulence, cultural patronage, and scenic beauty. The city is also associated with mythological narratives and legends, adding to its mystique and allure in ancient Indian literature. Buddhist scriptures, particularly the Pali Canon and Jataka tales, provide detailed accounts of Lord Buddha's visits to Kaushambi and his interactions with the local populace. According to Buddhist tradition, Kaushambi was frequented by Lord Buddha during his preaching missions, where he delivered

sermons, performed miracles, and engaged in philosophical debates with scholars and ascetics. The Ghositarama Monastery, founded by the wealthy merchant Anathapindika, became a renowned center of Buddhist learning and meditation, attracting pilgrims and disciples from far and wide.

**Socio-Political Significance:** From a socio-political standpoint, Kaushambi played a crucial role in shaping the political landscape of ancient India. As a prominent urban center, Kaushambi exerted considerable influence over neighboring territories and forged diplomatic ties with other kingdoms and city-states. The city's strategic location along trade routes facilitated commercial exchanges and cultural interactions, fostering a cosmopolitan ethos characterized by diversity and pluralism. Kaushambi's socio-political significance is further underscored by its association with prominent rulers and dynasties, including the Mauryas, Shungas, and Kushanas. The city served as a regional capital and administrative headquarters, overseeing governance, taxation, and law enforcement. Its prosperity and stability attracted ambitious rulers eager to expand their territories and consolidate power in the Gangetic heartland.

The historical overview of Kaushambi highlights its evolution from a modest agrarian settlement to a thriving urban center of political, cultural, and economic significance in ancient India. Its early settlements, literary references, and socio-political dynamics offer valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of urban life and statecraft in the Indian subcontinent. As a crucible of civilization and a custodian of cultural heritage, Kaushambi continues to inspire awe and fascination among historians, archaeologists, and enthusiasts alike.

### **Kaushambi and Buddhism:**

**Buddhist Connection: Historical Evidence:** Kaushambi holds a profound connection with Buddhism, dating back to the time of Lord Buddha himself. Historical evidence suggests that Lord Buddha visited Kaushambi on several occasions during his lifetime, making it a significant pilgrimage site for Buddhists. The city's association with Buddhism is corroborated by archaeological findings, inscriptions, and references in Buddhist scriptures. According to Buddhist texts, Lord Buddha visited Kaushambi during his preaching missions, delivering discourses to both lay followers and monastic communities. The Jataka tales, a collection of stories recounting the Buddha's past lives, contain narratives set in Kaushambi, highlighting the city's importance in

Buddhist tradition. These accounts depict Kaushambi as a thriving urban center where Lord Buddha performed miracles, converted followers, and engaged in philosophical debates.

Archaeological excavations conducted in Kaushambi have unearthed remnants of Buddhist monastic complexes, stupas, and votive structures, providing tangible evidence of the city's Buddhist heritage. The discovery of inscriptions referencing Buddhist monks, donors, and religious activities further attests to Kaushambi's status as a center of Buddhist pilgrimage and patronage.

**Role in Buddhist Scriptures and Traditions:** Kaushambi occupies a prominent place in Buddhist scriptures and traditions, serving as a backdrop for numerous events and teachings attributed to Lord Buddha. The Pali Canon, the earliest extant collection of Buddhist texts, contains references to Kaushambi in the form of sutras, discourses, and parables delivered by Lord Buddha during his visits to the city. One of the most famous episodes associated with Kaushambi is the story of the courtesan Ambapali, who became a devout follower of Lord Buddha after hearing his teachings. Ambapali's conversion and subsequent patronage of the Buddhist sangha (community of monks) exemplify the city's role as a fertile ground for spiritual awakening and religious devotion. Kaushambi's significance in Buddhist traditions is further underscored by its inclusion in the itinerary of Lord Buddha's travels as documented in the Vinaya Pitaka, the Buddhist monastic code. According to these accounts, Lord Buddha traversed the length and breadth of India, spreading his teachings and establishing monastic communities in cities like Kaushambi.

**Patronage and Monastic Establishments:** Kaushambi enjoyed the patronage of rulers, merchants, and wealthy benefactors who supported the establishment and maintenance of Buddhist monastic establishments (viharas) in the city. These monastic complexes served as centers of learning, meditation, and religious practice, attracting monks and scholars from various regions. The Ghositarama Monastery, founded by the merchant Anathapindika, stands as a testament to the city's affluent patronage of Buddhism. This monastery, named after its principal benefactor, provided accommodation and sustenance to monks and served as a venue for religious gatherings and teachings. In addition to monastic establishments, Kaushambi boasted several stupas and relic shrines dedicated to Lord Buddha and his disciples. These sacred sites attracted pilgrims and devotees seeking spiritual solace and merit through acts of devotion and pilgrimage. Kaushambi's

association with Buddhism is deeply rooted in history, scripture, and tradition. The city's role as a center of Buddhist pilgrimage, patronage, and monastic activity underscores its significance in the spread and development of Buddhism in ancient India. Today, Kaushambi continues to evoke reverence and admiration among Buddhists and scholars alike, serving as a tangible link to the spiritual legacy of Lord Buddha and his teachings.

### **Architectural Features of Buddhist Temples in Kaushambi:**

**Structural Characteristics:** The Buddhist temples in Kaushambi exhibit distinctive structural characteristics that reflect the architectural ingenuity and religious symbolism of ancient Indian builders. These temples typically comprise several key elements, including:

**Main Shrine:** The central focus of Buddhist temples in Kaushambi is the main shrine or sanctum sanctorum (garbhagriha), which houses the principal deity or sacred relics. The shrine is often constructed in a square or rectangular shape, with elaborate carvings and decorations adorning its exterior walls.

**Mandapa:** Surrounding the main shrine is the mandapa, a pillared hall used for congregational gatherings, rituals, and offerings. The mandapa may feature intricately carved columns, lintels, and ceilings, depicting scenes from Buddhist mythology, Jataka tales, and celestial beings.

**Stupa:** Many Buddhist temples in Kaushambi feature a stupa, a hemispherical mound or dome symbolizing the enlightened mind of the Buddha. The stupa serves as a focal point for veneration and meditation, with devotees circumambulating it in a clockwise direction as a mark of respect.

**Torana:** Some temples are adorned with a torana, or ceremonial gateway, marking the entrance to the sacred precincts. The torana is often embellished with decorative motifs, auspicious symbols, and narrative reliefs depicting scenes from the life of Lord Buddha.

**Chaitya Hall:** In larger Buddhist complexes, such as monastic viharas, a chaitya hall may be present, serving as a prayer hall for monastic assemblies and religious ceremonies. The chaitya hall typically features a semi-circular apse containing a stupa or a sculpted image of Lord Buddha.

**Iconographic Elements:** Buddhist temples in Kaushambi are adorned with a rich array of iconographic elements that convey the spiritual teachings and mythological narratives of Buddhism. These include:

**Buddha Images:** Sculptures and images of Lord Buddha are ubiquitous in Buddhist temples, depicting him in various mudras (hand gestures) and poses such as the meditation posture (dhyana mudra) and the preaching posture (dharmachakra mudra).

**Bodhisattvas and Deities:** Alongside images of Lord Buddha, Buddhist temples in Kaushambi feature statues and reliefs of bodhisattvas (enlightened beings) such as Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, and Tara, as well as celestial deities and guardians.

**Lotus Motif:** The lotus flower, symbolizing purity and enlightenment, is a recurring motif in Buddhist iconography. Lotus petals often adorn the bases of Buddha statues, stupas, and architectural elements, signifying spiritual awakening and transcendence.

**Dharma Wheels and Dharmachakras:** The dharma wheel (dharmachakra) is a prominent symbol in Buddhism, representing the Buddha's teachings and the path to liberation. Dharmachakras are depicted in various forms, including stone carvings, metalwork, and paintings.

**Floral and Geometric Patterns:** Intricate floral and geometric patterns adorn the walls, pillars, and ceilings of Buddhist temples, reflecting the aesthetic sensibilities and artistic skills of ancient Indian craftsmen. These decorative motifs imbue the temple interiors with a sense of beauty and harmony.

**Artistic Styles and Influences:** The artistic styles of Buddhist temples in Kaushambi exhibit a synthesis of indigenous traditions with influences from neighboring regions and foreign cultures. Key artistic styles and influences include:

**Gandharan Influence:** During the Kushan period (1st to 3rd centuries CE), Kaushambi experienced the influence of Gandharan art, characterized by Greco-Roman motifs, realistic human figures, and Hellenistic architectural elements. This artistic fusion resulted in the emergence of hybrid styles exemplified by the depiction of Buddha in a Greco-Roman attire.

**Mathura School:** The Mathura school of art, known for its sculptural mastery and emotional expressiveness, left a significant imprint on the artistic landscape of Kaushambi. Mathura-style sculptures, with their soft contours, sensuous forms, and intricate detailing, adorn many Buddhist temples in the region.

**Local Traditions:** Indigenous artistic traditions, rooted in the cultural ethos of ancient India, also flourished in Kaushambi. Local artisans employed traditional techniques such as stone carving, relief work, and stucco molding to embellish temple facades and interiors with scenes from Buddhist mythology and daily life.

**Evolution over Time:** The architectural and artistic evolution of Buddhist temples in Kaushambi reflects the changing socio-political dynamics and religious sensibilities of successive periods. Over time, temples underwent stylistic transformations and structural modifications influenced by prevailing trends, patronage patterns, and technological advancements.

**Early Period:** In the early centuries BCE, Buddhist temples in Kaushambi were characterized by simple, austere designs, reflecting the ascetic ethos of early Buddhism. These temples often consisted of modest brick structures with minimal ornamentation, serving as places of meditation and communal worship.

**Golden Age:** During the Mauryan and Gupta periods (3rd century BCE to 6th century CE), Buddhist architecture in Kaushambi reached its zenith, with the construction of grand viharas, stupas, and monastic complexes. The Ghositarama Monastery and other prominent temples exemplify the architectural splendor and religious fervor of this golden age.

**Decline and Revival:** With the decline of Buddhism in India from the 7th century CE onwards, many Buddhist temples in Kaushambi fell into disrepair or were repurposed for other religious practices. However, in recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the preservation and restoration of these ancient monuments, reflecting a growing awareness of their historical and cultural significance. The architectural features of Buddhist temples in Kaushambi reflect a rich tapestry of artistic expression, religious symbolism, and cultural synthesis. From the humble brick structures of antiquity to the grand monastic complexes of the Gupta era, these temples bear testimony to the enduring legacy of Buddhism and the artistic genius of ancient Indian craftsmen. Through their structural diversity, iconographic richness, and historical continuity, Buddhist temples in Kaushambi continue to inspire awe and admiration among devotees, scholars, and visitors alike.

**Religious Practices and Rituals:** Buddhist temples in Kaushambi are centers of spiritual activity, where devotees engage in a variety of religious practices and rituals aimed at fostering personal



growth, communal harmony, and spiritual enlightenment. These practices encompass worship, devotional offerings, meditation, and the observance of festivals and ceremonies.

**Worship and Devotional Practices:** Worship and devotional practices form the cornerstone of religious life in Buddhist temples in Kaushambi. Devotees pay homage to Lord Buddha and other enlightened beings through acts of reverence, prayer, and offerings. Common worship practices include:

**Puja:** Devotees perform puja, or ritual worship, by offering flowers, incense, candles, and food to images of Lord Buddha and bodhisattvas. Puja ceremonies may also involve chanting of sutras (sacred texts), recitation of mantras, and circumambulation of stupas as a mark of respect.

**Prostration:** Devotees demonstrate their reverence for Lord Buddha and his teachings by performing prostrations, bowing down with folded hands and touching their foreheads to the ground. Prostration is considered a gesture of humility, surrender, and devotion in Buddhist tradition.

**Meditation:** Meditation is an integral part of Buddhist practice, with devotees engaging in mindfulness meditation (vipassana) and concentration meditation (samatha) to cultivate inner peace, insight, and spiritual awakening. Buddhist temples in Kaushambi provide tranquil settings conducive to meditation, with serene surroundings and sacred imagery inspiring contemplation.

**Offerings:** Devotees make offerings of flowers, fruits, candles, and other symbolic items as a gesture of gratitude and generosity. Offerings symbolize the practitioner's commitment to the path of dharma (righteousness) and the cultivation of wholesome virtues such as generosity, kindness, and compassion.

**Festivals and Ceremonie:** Buddhist temples in Kaushambi observe various festivals and ceremonies throughout the year, marking significant events in the life of Lord Buddha and the Buddhist calendar. These festivals provide opportunities for communal worship, fellowship, and spiritual renewal. Some of the prominent festivals and ceremonies observed in Buddhist temples in Kaushambi include:

**Buddha Purnima:** Also known as Vesak or Buddha Jayanti, Buddha Purnima commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and parinirvana (passing away) of Lord Buddha. Devotees gather at temples to offer prayers, participate in meditation sessions, and perform acts of charity and compassion.

**Asalha Puja:** Asalha Puja, also known as Dhamma Day, commemorates the first sermon (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta) delivered by Lord Buddha to his five disciples at Deer Park in Sarnath. Devotees recite sutras, listen to dharma talks, and engage in acts of merit-making to honor the teachings of Lord Buddha.

**Kathina Ceremony:** The Kathina Ceremony marks the end of the Vassa (rainy season retreat) for Buddhist monks and nuns. Devotees offer robes and other requisites to monastic communities as a gesture of support and appreciation for their spiritual dedication and renunciation.

**Uposatha Observance:** Uposatha is a monthly observance day for Buddhist laity, during which they undertake precepts (sila) and engage in intensive meditation and reflection. Devotees gather at temples to listen to dharma teachings, participate in group meditation sessions, and renew their commitment to ethical conduct and spiritual practice.

**Contributions to Buddhist Thought and Philosophy:** Buddhist temples in Kaushambi have made significant contributions to the development of Buddhist thought, philosophy, and spirituality. Monastic establishments serve as centers of learning, where monks and scholars engage in the study and propagation of Buddhist teachings. Some of the key contributions of Buddhist temples in Kaushambi to Buddhist thought and philosophy include:

**Scholarly Discourses:** Buddhist monks and scholars residing in Kaushambi engage in scholarly discourses and debates on various aspects of Buddhist doctrine, ethics, and psychology. These discussions contribute to a deeper understanding of Buddhist philosophy and its practical applications in everyday life.

**Scriptural Studies:** Monastic communities in Kaushambi undertake the study and recitation of Buddhist scriptures, including the Tripitaka (Three Baskets) and commentarial texts. Through meticulous study and analysis, monks preserve and disseminate the teachings of Lord Buddha for future generations.

**Meditative Practices:** Buddhist temples in Kaushambi provide a conducive environment for the practice of meditation, with monks and lay practitioners engaging in mindfulness, concentration, and insight meditation to cultivate wisdom and compassion. Meditation retreats and intensive practice sessions offer opportunities for spiritual transformation and inner awakening.

**Cultural Exchange:** Kaushambi's role as a center of Buddhist pilgrimage and scholarship fosters cultural exchange and dialogue among practitioners from diverse backgrounds. Monastic communities welcome visitors from different regions, facilitating the exchange of ideas, experiences, and perspectives on Buddhist practice and philosophy. Religious practices and rituals in Buddhist temples in Kaushambi encompass a wide range of devotional activities, ceremonies, and contemplative practices aimed at fostering spiritual growth, communal harmony, and ethical conduct. These practices reflect the rich tapestry of Buddhist tradition, philosophy, and culture, inspiring devotees to lead lives of wisdom, compassion, and inner peace.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, the historical and architectural analysis of Kaushambi and its Buddhist temples reveals a rich tapestry of cultural, religious, and artistic heritage that spans millennia. From its early settlements and urban development to its profound connection with Buddhism, Kaushambi has played a pivotal role in shaping the socio-religious landscape of ancient India. The architectural features of Buddhist temples in Kaushambi, characterized by their structural elegance, iconographic richness, and artistic diversity, stand as testament to the ingenuity and craftsmanship of ancient Indian builders. Throughout history, Kaushambi has been a beacon of spiritual enlightenment and intellectual exchange, attracting pilgrims, scholars, and devotees from far and wide. The city's association with Lord Buddha and the Buddhist tradition is evident in the numerous monastic establishments, stupas, and relic shrines that dot its landscape. These sacred sites serve as tangible reminders of Kaushambi's illustrious past and its enduring legacy as a center of Buddhist pilgrimage and scholarship.

Moreover, the architectural evolution of Buddhist temples in Kaushambi reflects the dynamic interplay of indigenous styles, regional influences, and external cultural currents. From the austere brick structures of antiquity to the grand monastic complexes of the Gupta period, Kaushambi's temples have evolved in response to changing socio-political dynamics, patronage patterns, and religious sensibilities. Yet, amidst this evolution, they have retained their timeless

allure and spiritual significance, continuing to inspire awe and reverence among devotees and scholars alike. Furthermore, the religious practices and rituals observed in Buddhist temples in Kaushambi underscore the enduring vitality of Buddhist tradition and its relevance in contemporary times. Devotees engage in worship, meditation, and acts of devotion, following in the footsteps of countless pilgrims who have sought solace and spiritual renewal in these sacred precincts. Festivals and ceremonies mark the rhythm of religious life, providing opportunities for communal worship, fellowship, and reflection.

In the face of modern challenges and pressures, efforts to preserve and safeguard the cultural heritage of Kaushambi and its Buddhist temples are more critical than ever. Conservation initiatives, archaeological research, and community engagement play vital roles in ensuring the continued survival and appreciation of these ancient monuments. By cherishing and nurturing our cultural heritage, we honor the legacy of Kaushambi and its Buddhist temples, preserving them for future generations to cherish and admire.

In conclusion, Kaushambi and its Buddhist temples stand as enduring symbols of India's rich cultural and spiritual heritage, embodying the timeless values of wisdom, compassion, and inner peace. As custodians of this heritage, it is incumbent upon us to protect, preserve, and celebrate the legacy of Kaushambi for the benefit of present and future generations. Through our collective efforts, we can ensure that the sacred legacy of Kaushambi and its Buddhist temples continues to inspire and uplift humanity for centuries to come.

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