

# Reminiscing the edifices of Prehistoric times

Chinmayi Saxena

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, BMS School of Architecture, Bangalore

\*\*\*

**Abstract** -Sir Norman Foster, one of the exalted names in the architecture fraternity, quoted long ago- “As an architect, you design for the present, with an awareness of the past for a future which is essentially unknown”. For the nonce, laying aside the architecture of the future which offers plenty of reasons to get thrilled about the future of built environments because of recent architectural trends and emphasizing only on the architecture of prehistoric times. The Paper commences with a quick elucidation of prehistory times and the importance of exploring the architecture of the past. The main focus of the paper throws light on few of the edifices of prehistoric times – megaliths, Stonehenge and CatalHoyuk, pondering about the existence of these prodigious architectural structures and their construction techniques.

**Key Words:** Edifices, Pre history, Megaliths, Stonehenge, CatalHoyuk

## 1. Introduction to Prehistoric times

Prehistory period in a usual dialect can be understood as the time that marks the commencement of appearance of human beings that is around five million years ago. This period ends with the invention of writing i.e. around six thousand years ago. This is the period before humans began to write. This period can be marked as the beginning of human life on Earth

## 2. Importance of exploring the architecture of the past.

“Today I am accused of being a revolutionary, yet I confess to having had only one master: the past; and only one discipline: the study of the past.” These words cited by Le Corbusier, a pioneer in the field of architecture, are a foundation of the importance of architectural history. The present architectural praxis is a procedure that has been built over time. To comprehend the procedure of architectural praxis requires a historical background. Architectural history comprises of the ideas, philosophies, concepts, and disquisition that modeled the architectural praxis. Architectural history cherishes particulars about the various approaches that blossomed at different periods. Architectural history doesn’t just tackle with dates and design, it diligently recollects the philosophies and concepts that shaped history. It would be incorrect to quote that all the buildings of the past were lucrative for the field of architecture. The documentation of unsuccessful ones is equally imperative as those of the successful ones. In the course of history, innovations in architecture are followed by the evolution of technology. A study of architectural history shows how, the modifying trends in technology and construction, commenced the new architectural visions. History is paramount to be prepared for the future.

Pre-historic times depict the era of movement from wandering to settling. The period exhibits the beginning of dwelling within confined spaces as a community that eventually became cities. Locales such as Stonehenge, CatalHoyuk, depict the conception of architecture as paradigmatic

## 3. Famed edifices of Pre historic times

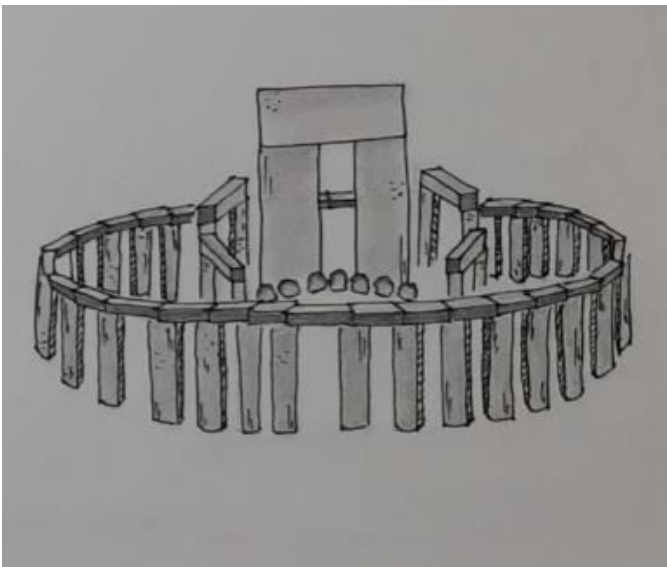
**Megaliths** - This is a large stone that was utilized to construct a structure or monument, either alone or together with other stones. Megaliths would weigh up to fifty tons measuring approximately nineteen feet by nine feet with two feet thick. Many kinds of megaliths were explored by archaeologists few of them to be mentioned are menhirs, dolmens, cromlechs, etc. A Menhir is a tall, vertically placed standing stone, whilst a Dolmen is a table-like structure comprising a large slab laid horizontally on two smaller stone supports. The purpose of menhir remains enigmatic. With no documentation of that era, it can be presumed by archaeologists and historians that menhir could have been a landmark, a signal, route map directions, or indeed a memorial to a notable event in that place in the past. Dolmens were assumed to be tombs. The accurate meaning behind the construction and existence of megaliths remains unknown to date, though many of them possessed great significance. Megaliths are spread all across the world. The doubt which remains unclear is that how the ancients moved these enormous stones from one place from another in the time when the wheel was not invented.



**Fig -1:** Sketch showing Menhir



**Fig 2:** Sketch showing Dolmen



**Fig 3:** Sketch showing Cromlech

**Stonehenge** – This is the world’s most celebrated prehistoric monument. Deep in the heart of England stands a massive stone monument that has mystified tourists for millennia. This edifice is so ancient that there is no written record of its construction or its original purpose. Stonehenge is approximately five thousand years old, and its construction was spread across hundreds of years. The exact purpose of its existence is unknown. The findings of archaeologists state that this locale could have been used as a place of burial, or maybe as a calendar or a place to study the movements of stars and worship the sun and moon. Mostly believed this could have also been used for religious purposes.

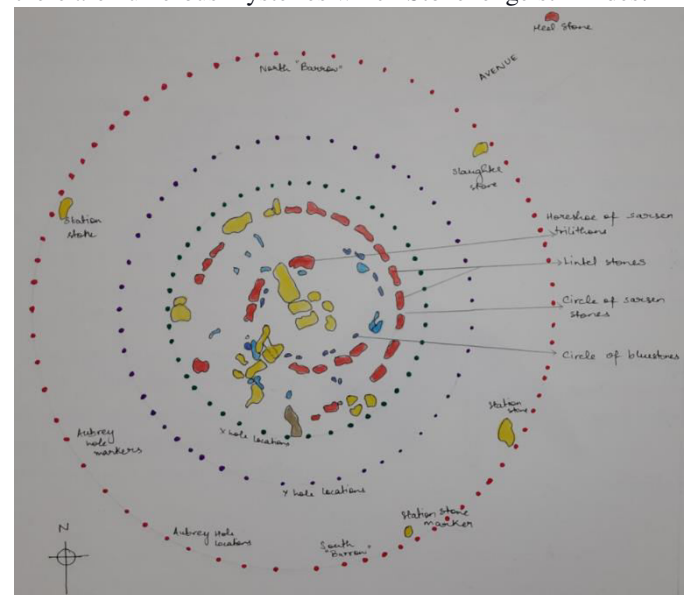
Talking about its awe-inspiring architecture Stonehenge comprises numerous megaliths. The largest stones called “Sarsens” measure up to thirty feet or nine metres tall, and weigh an average of twentytons. It is assumed that these stones weretransported thirty-two kilometers to Stonehenge. Some of the smaller stones called “Bluestones” are believed tohave been bought from Wales, which is more than two

twenty-five kilometers away. Another massive stone “Heel stone” weighing around thirty-five tons and standing five meters tall, stands at the North West. “Slaughter stone” another huge stone is stationed at the site, though this was never used for slaughtering.

Many people were baffled as to how these enormous stones were transported so far without modern technology or even a wheel. As per the readings of archaeologists, it can be stated that these stones were either rolled out on tree trunks or dragged in huge baskets pulled by some animal. Another theory also quotes that stones were moved by boat with the aid of nearby river Avon.

However, the exact method being unknown stones were moved and placed with incredible precision.

A salient feature to be noted here is that certain stones in the ancient circle line up with the midsummer sunrise and the winter solstice sunset marking the longest and shortest days of the year. Today, only eighty three stones are visible. Some of the stones have fallen and many have gone missing. To date, there are numerous mysteries which Stonehenge still hides.



**Fig 4:** Sketch showing plan of Stonehenge

**CatalHoyuk** - CatalHoyuk is one of the world’s oldest known first permanent settlement. It’s location is present day Turkey. It comprised of hundreds of dwellings which accommodated approximately eight thousand people. It’s astonishing to know that humans could have lived in such an organized way so many thousands of years ago. People here lived more sedentary agricultural lifestyle. Catalhoyuk was a part of Neolithic revolution.

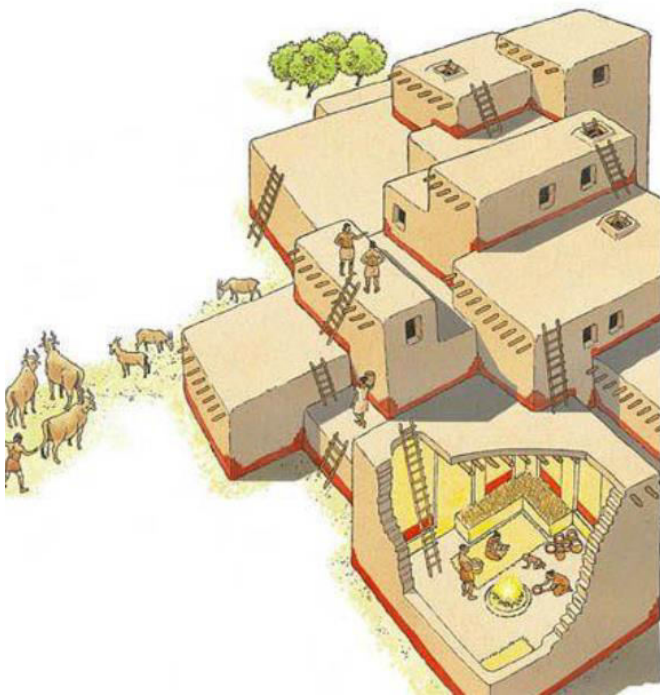
Dwellings clustered together in a sort of honeycomb-like maze. They were so tightly packed together that there were no streets to get inside these houses or dwellings. One would have to enter through holes or openings in the ceilings, and then use a ladder to go down or go up if one wants to leave.

These openings were also the main source of ventilation for every dwelling. The rooftops of the houses were the streets. Inside the house was a basic kitchen area where a small fire could be built, sleeping quarters and in few cases a small room for storage. The smoke from the room would exit through the hole in the ceiling.

All this seems like dire living conditions but it beat living in a tent. Especially, when the weather was bad outside. As construction material used was mud bricks. One more prominent feature of CatalHoyuk is that they had their sanitation system they kept their houses very clean but outside of town had heaps of trash as quoted by archaeologists.



**Fig 5:** Sketch showing plan of CatalHoyuk



**Fig 6** Sketch showing view of CatalHoyuk

**3. Conclusion** - In the hustle and bustle of forwarding towards urbanism and futuristic architecture, the exquisite piece of work is almost forgotten. Hence, reminiscing the edifices of prehistoric times to appreciate the commencement of architecture on Earth and the wonders established which continues to inspire architects to date.