

RESTORING THE SUN TEMPLE'S EXQUISITE CARVINGS

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Historical monument: A worker engaged in restoration work on the 13-century temple
Special Arrangement

Visitors to the Sun Temple in Konark, Odisha, will soon be able to see the newly carved stones on the northern side of the *jagmohan*, or the assembly hall, of the World Heritage Site. The restoration work is likely to be completed within a month, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) officials said this week.

The pilot project started in 2019 with a study of the stones at the temple and an analysis of the historic drawings and photos from the 19th century onwards. The work on the site began in 2021, Arun Malik, ASI Superintending Archaeologist (Bhubaneswar Circle), said. Local artisans are busy making the mouldings for the section being restored. Khondalite stones were procured from the ancient quarry at Tapang, Mr. Malik said.

Starting in 1901, the British government had placed plain stones across the site and filled the *jagmohan* with sand to preserve the structure of the 13th century temple. The ASI carried out conservation works after the site was handed over to it in 1936. Mr. Malik said the temple that visitors see today remains standing due to the conservation efforts over the years. Over the years, till 1986, plain stones were placed in order to keep the temple's structure secure as the conservation policy, which was drafted in 1915, only allowed for additions to be made for structural reasons. In 2014, however, the ASI brought out a new conservation policy that allowed for restoration and recreation of destroyed elements of monuments as long as they were in keeping with the history and authenticity.

Architectural value

"Restoration may be undertaken on monuments with high architectural value and only in parts of a monument wherein there are missing geometric or floral patterns, or structural members of a monument which have been damaged recently," according to the National Conservation Policy (2014).

Mr. Malik said the motifs for the pilot project were selected after researching old glass negatives of photos and the designs visible on the temple. He said the scaffolding around the northern side would be removed and the portion would be open to the public for a closer look within a month, though visitors have been able to see the ongoing work.

ASI spokesperson Vasant Swarnkar said the project would be assessed after completion before any decision is taken for further restoration work at the temple.

He said independent experts would also be invited to study it.

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