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## Sun-Temple at Modhera (Gujarat)

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Published in Vihangama - Vol. IV July - August 2002



SUN-worship in Gujarat is known from remote antiquity as in whole of India. In Gujarat prevalence of the sun-cult is indicated by the number of inscriptions found. This is further strengthened by the distribution of monumental remains as also the discovery of a number of stone sculptures of the pantheon from various parts of Gujarat dating from about 5th century B.C. to late mediaeval period.

The temple at Modhera is the most important of all sun-temples built in the whole of Gujarat. It enjoys the same significance as other two well known sun-temples in Kashmir (Martand) and Orissa (Konark). The remains of this magnificent architectural monument still reflect the glimpses of elegance and testify the sanctity of the site.

Modhera or Modherapura also known as Mundera is said to have been the original settlement of modha Brahmans. Having its legendary past relating to the Ramayana it is further believed that modha Brahmans received Modhera as a *krsnarpana* on the occasion of the marriage of Rama and Sita. According to the *Skanda Purana* (3.2.40-67) after defeating Ravana, Lord Rama consulted Muni Vasishtha to show him a place of pilgrimage where he could go and purify himself of the sin of Brahma hatya (the slaying of a Brahman). The Muni showed him dharmaranya.

In *dharmaranya*. Lord Rama settled at a village called Modherak and performed a *yajna* there. Thereafter he established a village and named it Sitapura. It is believed that the village Modherah mentioned above, later came to be known as Modhera. The Sitapura village is about 8 km from Becharagi. Once a flourishing town and seaport, Modhera stands 24 km south of Anahitapataka (Patan) on the left bank of Pushpavati river. And the famous sun temple was constructed to the west of this river probably in 1026-27 A.D. during the reign of Chalukya King Bhima I (1022-1063 A.D.)

As has happened with the rest of the temples in India this temple also suffered from the fundamentalist ravages. "The Muhammadans not content with defacing the figure sculptures of this Modhera temple, are said to have placed bags of gunpowder in the underground shrine and blew it with the upper cell destroying *sikhara* or tower." A monument of incomparable beauty, this temple has been constructed in accordance with the *shilpasastra*. The appearance of the whole scheme with its architectural setting including its accessories, show that as in all good buildings, the needs and the conveniences of the undertaking are counted equally essential as its aesthetic treatment.

The whole structure standing on a *kharasila* (basement) consisted of the *garbhagrha* (shrines) and *guha-mandapa* (a hall), a *Sabha-mandapa* or *ranga-mandapa* (assembly hall or outer hall/theatre hall), locally known as Sita Chavadi. In front of the temple is the *kunda* (sacred pond) now called the Ramakunda. Originally, there were some small subsidiary shrines, which have been destroyed.

The general structure of main body of the temple enclosing the *mandapa* (hall) and *garbhagrha* (sanctum sanctorum) is rectangular, with its length inside the walls 51 feet 9 inches which is almost exactly double of its width of 25 feet and 8 inches. Thus the total area of about 1275 sq.ft is divided into nearly two equal halves. The inner half occupies the *garbhagrha* and the front one the *mandapa* (hall). The *sanctum sanctorum* is 11 feet square inside. Between the outer walls of the *sanctum sanctorum* and that of the temple is the *pradakshina-marga* or *bhrama* (the circumambulatory passage). This passage was roofed with flat slabs laid across and carved with rosettes on the undersides and above this, rose the *sikhara*.

The *mandapa* as usual is peristylar with an octagonal nave covered by a splendidly carved dome. The inside walls are bare but broken by niches in each bay, containing figure of Surya. The plain walls are more than compensated by the exquisitely carved pillars and the architraves portraying scenes from the Ramayana. The exterior of the temple is also profusely sculptured but perhaps the most elegant and ornamental feature of this temple is the beautiful *sabha mandapa* (the assembly hall). It is carved with scenes from the Mahabharata. On its outside walls are some representations of amorous couples similar to that at Konark.

Outside this *sabha-mandapa* are two pillars of a *torana* from which the arch is missing. From the *torana* a flight of steps leads down to the *kunda* in front of it. The Surya-kunda also known as Ramakunda is rectangular and measures 176 feet north to south, by 120 feet east to west. It has many terraces and steps leading to the water level. On its sides and corners are various small shrines with the images of gods and goddesses namely Jalasayi Vishnu, Trivikrama, Goddess Shitala etc. "In viewing the Modhera temple as a whole the aesthetic sense at once responds to the elegance of its proportions, the entire composition being lit with the living flame of inspiration. But apart from its material beauty, its designer has succeeded in communicating to it an atmosphere of spiritual grace. The temple faces the east so that the rising sun at the equinoxes filters in a golden cadence through its openings, from doorway to corridor, past columned vestibules finally to fall on the image in its innermost chamber.

In its passage the rays of the heavenly body to which the shrine is consecrated, quiver and shimmer on pillars and archway giving life and movement to their graven form, the whole structure appearing radiant and clothed in glory. To see this noble movement with its clustered columns not only rising like exhalation but mirrored in the still waters below, is to feel that its creator was more than a great artist, but weaver of dreams."

There exists famous temple of Matangi Madeshwari Mata, the original temple being in the ancient step-well. Various Modha communities worship the *Mata* as the family deity. Around the temple a large dharmashala has been constructed to accommodate pilgrims on *Mahasud* 13, when a big fair is held. It is attended by the pilgrims from Patan, Ahmedabad, Nadiad etc. On the *chaitrapurnima* day the *sangha* of the Modha ghanchis come here for worship. Fairs are also held on the *sravana vad* 30 and the *adhika mas vad* 30. A special fair is also held on the *Mahotta parva* i.e. conjunction of Monday,

Vad 30 and a particular planet. Thousands of people from India and abroad visit the place every month.

### **Select Bibliography**

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