



Remaking Konark in the 20th Century: Postcolonial Revivalism and the Troubling Persistence of India's Plastic Past

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On January 23, 1988, a new temple was consecrated in the ancient fort-city of Gwalior. Dedicated to the Sun, the temple made a bold claim, articulated publically in a Hindi signpost. Built as an “imitation” (anukṛti) of the renowned 13th-century Surya Mandir at Konark, Orissa, the temple was intended to embody multiple temporalities by producing a supreme vision for the modern era while also commemorating a significant moment in India’s architectural history. In fact, the temple’s makers drew selectively from their earlier model. They recreated the much-praised plan of the original but endowed it with a completely new sculptural program that consciously omitted any trace of the graphically erotic figures that abundantly adorn the Konark Temple’s walls. In this presentation, I suggest that this decision represents more than a mere effort to sanitize the temple for modern consumption. Rather, it calls attention to a deeper intellectual problem of conceptualizing the connections between religious imagery, ritual practice, and the social world of the temple, for the postcolonial present as well as the premodern past.