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Dispute Over Restoration of Konark Sun Temple

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The 13th century Sun Temple at Konark (Odisha) has entered into controversy over allegations that the stone carvings on the outer surface are being replaced with plain blocks of stones causing irreplaceable loss to the uniqueness of the temple.

- As per a regional news report, it is alleged that 40% of the artistic stone carvings of the existing Konark Sun Temple have been replaced by ASI with plain stones.
- It is alleged that the stones used in restoration do not match the quality of the original stone blocks, which are still available nearby.
- UNESCO guidelines on restoration of World Heritage Sites mandate that when an original stone carving is lost, it cannot be replicated. The understanding is that as monuments deteriorate, if one keeps on replicating then nothing original will remain.
- However, ASI has denied the allegations of replacement of artistic stone works at the world heritage monument.

About Sun Temple at Konark

- The Sun temple at Konark was constructed by the **Eastern Ganga ruler Narasimha Deva I** in about 1250 A.D.
- The name of Konark temple is an amalgamation of two words-Kona meaning corner and Arka meaning the Sun. That is to say that the Sun god worshipped in Ark Kshetra is called Konark.

Architecture of the Temple

- The temple was also known as '**BLACK PAGODA**' due to its dark colour and used as a navigational landmark by sailors to Odisha.
- It is carefully **oriented towards the east so that the first rays of sunrise strikes** the principal entrance. The temple is built from **Khondalite rocks**.

- A masterpiece of creative genius in both conception and realisation, the **temple represents a chariot of the Sun God**, with **twelve pairs of wheels drawn by seven horses** evoking its movement across the heavens.
- The original temple had **Vimana** (the structure over the Garbhagriha or inner sanctum) which was supposedly 229 feet (70 m) tall. But it has fallen off.
- The **audience hall (Jagamohana)**, which is about 128 feet (30 m) tall, still stands and is the principal structure in the surviving ruins.
- Among the structures, which have survived to the current day, are the **dance hall (Nata Mandira)** and **dining hall (Bhoga Mandapa)**.
- The sanctum sanctorum and the Jagamohana together stand on a lofty platform, richly ornamented by friezes of elephants, decorative ornaments interspersed with figures sculptures, often of a highly sensuous character.

Significance of the Temple

- The Sun Temple is directly associated with the **idea and belief of the personification of the Sun God**, which is represented in the **Vedas and classical texts**.
- Directly and materially linked to the Brahman beliefs, Konark is the invaluable link in the history of the diffusion of the **cult of Surya**, which **originating in Kashmir during the 8th century**, finally reached the shores of Eastern India.
- It is embellished with sophisticated and refined iconographical depictions of contemporary life and activities.
- The plinth of the temple between the wheels is entirely decorated with reliefs of fantastic lions, musicians and dancers, and erotic groups.
- The Sun Temple is the culmination of Kalinga temple architecture, with all its defining elements in complete and perfect form.
- It was declared a **UNESCO world heritage site in 1984**.

Other Important Sun Temples in India

- Modhera Surya temple, Gujarat
- Martand Sun temple, Kashmir
- Katarmal Sun Temple, Uttarakhand
- Dakshinarkaa temple Gaya, Bihar
- Bhramanya temple, Unao, Madhya Pradesh
- Surya Prahaar temple, Assam
- Suryanar Kovil Temple at Kumbakonam in Tamil Nadu
- Suryanarayana temple at Arasavalli, Andhra Pradesh

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

- ASI is the premier organization for the archaeological research, scientific analysis, excavation of archaeological sites, conservation and preservation of protected monuments.
- It is an attached office under the Department of Culture (**Ministry of Culture**).
- ASI was founded in **1861** by **Alexander Cunningham** who became its first Director-General.