



# MODHERA

## POETRY IN MOLTEN GOLD

One of the most amazing facts about India is that it is home to more temples dedicated to the Sun-God or Surya as compared to any other country. After its more famous kin, the Konark temple in Orissa, the sun temple at Modhera is considered to be one of the most sacred sites for worshippers of the sun. A visit to the Sun temple at Modhera on a "Guru Purnima" day to pay obeisance to the rising sun is considered auspicious. We started from Ahmedabad in the wee hours of the morning. The 110 km drive took us through the industrial suburb of Kalol and the well manicured highway took us to Modhera through the industrial town of Kadi and the bastion of the farmers of North Gujarat, Mehsana.

The drive through Gujarat during the post-monsoon is a soothing experience. Mornings in Gujarat are extremely pleasant and the cool breeze of at the break of dawn is soothing balm to your senses. The drive in the early hours of the morning takes no more than 150 minutes. The experience of driving through the

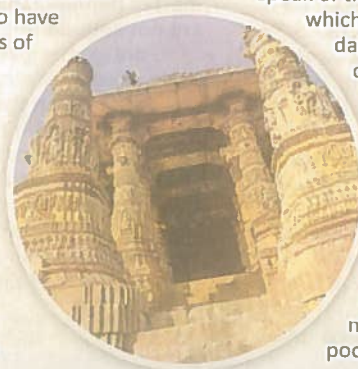
rural areas of Gujarat is deeply spiritual and moving. The greenery of the trees is accentuated by the rust coloured background and sand-dunes that dot the arid landscape of north Gujarat. The traditional Gujarati rustic cuisine, coupled with the hospitality and warmth of the local-folk gives tourists a once in a lifetime experience at every stop on the way. The traditional ukalo or black tea flavoured with ginger and black pepper is the nectar I constantly sipped along the way, sitting outside the traditional huts of the rabaris who have settled on the outskirts of Ahmedabad.

We were lucky to reach the temple exactly at the moment; the first rays of the morning sun were peeking behind a few scattered clouds. As the darkness faded, we could see a monument sculpted in

golden sandstone. It is deeply moving to see this magnificent 11th century creation appearing and disappearing as the sun played hide and seek with the clouds on an overcast day. This grand temple to the Sun God was conceived and built by King Bhimdev I in 1026. As in the Sun Temple at Konark, this temple was so designed that the rays of the sun would fall on the image of Surya at the time of the equinoxes. The torans in the temple and the intricate carvings on the outside speak of the splendour of this shrine,

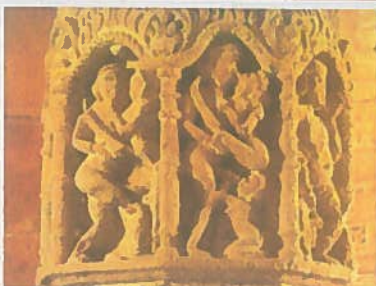
which still is home to the Modhera dance festival featuring dance celebrities in performance in a natural setting.

The walls of the temple are decorated with sculptures of the Sun God wearing a peculiar West Asian belt and boots. The huge tank in front of the temple with its multitude of images is bigger than many Olympic-sized swimming pools. In front of the temple is





The majestic Sun Temple at Modhera



The intricate stone carvings at Modhera



a colossal tank, which was once known as Surya Kund or Rama Kund. The tank has a series of carved steps leading to the bottom. Several miniature shrines adorn the steps of the tank, which is an art gallery in itself. The temple has a sanctum, a pradakshina patha and a sabha mandap in front. This Sun Temple was built during the same period as the Jain temples at Mount Abu and the temple at Somnath.

The Sun temple at Modhera is magnificent. The mandapa in front of the sanctum has beautifully carved pillars with exquisite toranas adorning the entrances. The exterior of this temple is intricately carved. Innumerable gulmohar, asopalav and neem trees dot the manicured lawns that surround this golden pagoda. The

main idol of the Sun-God at Modhera has a more than coincidental resemblance to the ones at the Sun temples at Gaya and Konark.

Sun temples were ancient sites for healing and health. It was believed that the first rays of the rising sun had miraculous healing properties and villagers with a variety of skin illnesses used to visit the temple to bask in the first rays of the rising sun. However, scientific research also points to the fact that the first morning rays are absent in harmful ultraviolet radiations. One can spend hours admiring the innumerable sculptures that dot the temple or circumambulate the giant tank along its edges. If there is one place which is a

photographer's delight, it is here.

The endearing quality of this temple is the absence of guides, professional photographers, antique sellers or hordes of tourists at this relatively low profile sun temple located in a non-descript village in a quiet corner of Gujarat. Thus for serious tourists wanting to get transported into a bygone era, a visit to the ancient sun temple at Modhera promises to leave indelible imprints in your unconscious.



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