

## To curate in the field: archaeological privatization and the aesthetic 'legislation' of antiquity in India

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This paper strives to pluralize notions of taste in relation to the canonized category of the *Hindu* or *Indian* temple. I put 'Hindu' in italics because I include Jain temples in my discussion and I put 'Indian' in italics because the architecture I discuss predates India as a nation-state and in the twenty-first century includes buildings in South and Southeast Asia as well as the Diaspora. Through a discussion of the Archaeological Preservation Aesthetic (APA) and multiple variants of the Ritual Renovation Aesthetics (RRA), new ways of looking emerge. This paper seeks to reconcile the hegemonic assumptions about art historical taste and the temple within an increasingly global environment. The main argument is predicated on temple users' practice as a form of curatorial practice in the field and provides a deep description of the multiplication of aesthetics due to increasing privatization of temple administration in India. The tenth-century cluster of temples from the Medapata region (Southern Rajasthan) serves as case study for a widespread phenomenon of putting ancient temples 'back' into worship during the second half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

**Keywords:** heritage; temple architecture; India; aesthetics

This paper seeks to pluralize monolithic assumptions about taste. Concrete examples and new theoretical models illuminate both modern aesthetics and ancient temples in India. Early works about Hindu temples focused on the key linking of formalist descriptions to bodies of primary source texts (Brown 1965; Kramrich 1946; Michell 1977; Dhaky 1998; Granoff 1997). The next body of works about these temples strove to determine more about the relationship between the rich sculptural ornamentation and the architectural frame of the temple wall (Mason 1993, 1995), whereas subsequent studies used diachronic approaches, ethno-history and anthropological models (Meister 1995, 1998). Recent works have turned towards ritual to reanimate the temple with both those who made the monuments through architectural expertise as well as those who made the monuments through the actions of their praxis (Sinha 2000; Hardy 2007; Ghosh 2005; Branfoot 2007; Willis 2000). Postcolonial scholars have critiqued how we used to look and how we look at temples today (Mitter 1992; Thapar 2005; Guha-Thakurta 2004). Tapati Guha-Thakurta, for example, asks today: why are we returning to ritual in new forms of museum display (2005)?

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What are the politics of recovering ritual in the museum setting and what are the alternatives? What happens aesthetically now – at a time some have rather haphazardly described as ‘global’ – when people curate temples outside the institutional framework of the museum, in-situ from the field? Though the ‘global’ can be understood as an essentializing, monolithic cultural force – often misused as a flimsy euphemism for ‘non-western’ – a secondary meaning of globalization commonly underscores intensified fragmentation (Davis 2010; Flood et al. 2010; Flood 2009; Summers 2003; Moxey 2003). Intellectual writings about the ‘Indian Temple’, or alternatively the ‘Hindu Temple’, can now find their curatorial equivalent in the sparring forms of preservation and renovation practices found in the field at temples in situ.

The economic trend of privatization in India results in clear-cut aesthetic changes to the country’s heritage. Temples that had been abandoned have suddenly become centres of modern attention. People transform these structures for contemporary religious, ritual and political aims. Sites undergo visual changes due to politically charged historical and tourist usage as well. Large or small, these changes spark debates – expressed both visually and legally – about the relative authenticity of old or new.

Legislated throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries largely by the Archaeological Survey of India, the Devasthan department for living religious monuments, and state-run archaeological surveys, the administration of temples is rapidly changing. Privatization abounds. Due to long-standing financial pressures on the government in India, the cost and responsibility for heritage stewardship has recently been offered for a privatized collaboration through the Adopt-a-Monument<sup>1</sup> scheme, where a private entity assumes financial responsibility for a temple included on a government list. The government must ensure that no other private party is already administering these sites. Corporate-chosen and government-approved consultants must be engaged for ‘conservation, restoration, face-lift and maintenance of the monuments, including landscaping, signage, conveniences etc.’.<sup>2</sup> Over a 10-year period the sponsor agrees to cover all costs including electricity and security. The project is specifically pitched to encourage collaboration between government, non-resident-Indians and non-resident-Rajasthanis, and corporations in India. The government promises: ‘the Department for Art & Culture/consultants approved by the government (project wise) will ensure that the conservation plan is implemented in letter’.<sup>3</sup> The temple patron and the government become two powerful bodies in dialogue with one another. Exactly what kind of role will the corporation have in the planning of restoration, the organization of preservation activities, and/or the hiring of organizations and/or personnel to accomplish heritage management under the Adopt-a-Monument scheme? Only time will tell.

Two case studies from Southern Rajasthan – the Ambika Temple dedicated to the goddess Amba Mata in Jagat and the Eklingji Temple Complex dedicated primarily to Shiva in Kailashpuri – are not yet an active part of the Adopt-a-Monument scheme. These two sites do reveal how law impacts temple praxis and the way temples look visually. Both temples belong to a larger multi-sectarian group of tenth-century temples from the Medapata region.<sup>4</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century, both the Ambika temple and the Eklingji temple complex continue to serve as active religious, political and tourist centres where the past is imagined and the future is defined. More than any other temples

within their cohort, these two sites stand out for their complex diachronic histories and because of the intensity of contemporary use.

This paper will question how law impacts upon the interaction of a diverse range of people with the material remains of temples. We will focus on the period from 1941, when the Jaipur Ancient Monuments Act was enacted before Indian independence, through 2009, when I most recently conducted fieldwork in Southern Rajasthan. Recent ethnographic and aesthetic data reveals that the Ambika temple and the Eklingji temple complex rely on different portions of the Indian Legal Code due to their wildly different modes of temple administration. This paper will explore the visual impact of those legal and administrative differences on the articulation of taste.

The problem of aesthetics, a branch of philosophy specifically focused on beauty, provides a rich frame for this material. We need not return to Kant to understand that taste is subjective, or more colloquially put, that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. The politics of how art looks – its appearance – changes according to the curatorial stewardship of those who administrate, control and use a monument. As the title suggests, this paper argues that all those who use the temples are involved in acts of curating the site in situ, where the architecture sits in the field. This departure from the institutional and physical location of the museum transforms the curatorial act of a single authority figure under the administrative web of an institution into a rather open competition for the power to control the monument, both physically and ideologically through display.

### **Competing aesthetics and temple administration in Southern Rajasthan**

For the purpose of providing working aesthetic categories for the Medapata temple cohort, let us begin with two basic aesthetics. The first aesthetic, an Archaeological Preservation Aesthetic (APA) is a philosophical outlook about beauty predicated on ruin, with temporal rupture as the ensuing version of history. Sites that have lost their indigenous caretakers (either priestly, royal or community sponsors) over time often fall into this category, since they were adopted by archaeological surveys founded in the colonial era – a time known for taxonomy and positivist empiricism. Many of the more ancient Vaishnavite sites fall into this category.<sup>5</sup> Scholars and tourists alike have traditionally preferred this APA aesthetic because it seems to offer a window into the way things may have looked in the past. An APA provides documentation about history.

The Archaeological Preservation Aesthetic is almost exclusively the result of administration through public government agencies. In contrast, the majority of temples that fall under a Ritual Renovation Aesthetic are privately administered through temple trusts, with the fascinating exception of the Devasthan department for living temples. This department administers living religious monuments as part of a secular state government with an appointed government employee as the chief administrative officer.

A Ritual Renovation Aesthetic (RRA) does not select a singular moment in time for display, or alternatively substitutes present practice for the eternal. Whereas an Archaeological Preservation Aesthetic may gate off an ancient site from use, charge admission, landscape with lawns and bougainvillaea, and placard with historical information, an RRA may limit access to a site in other ways. The RRA has many different appearances based on which sect administers the site, which specific trust

administers the site, and the antiquity of both site and religious practices established there. The RRA is predicated on a model of time that is continuous. Does history require change rather than permanence?

Although historically and in the present the Archaeological Preservation Aesthetic was produced, espoused and actively disseminated within India by Indian administrators, officials, scholars and secular intellectuals alike, at its origin it is a Post-Enlightenment European view of history and the monument. The APA suggests a Ruskinian worldview rooted in an era known for the expansion of tourism, the idea of monuments and patrimony, the birth of the museum as we know it. All of these nineteenth-century pursuits are predicated on privileging a totalizing notion of singular moments in time at the expense of others. Given the historical location of the APA, I think it is fair to argue that the RRA could be contrasted most simply as indigenous aesthetics. India took the APA and made it its own, but the very origins of the RRA lie in India itself.

### **An Archaeological Preservation Aesthetic (APA) at the Sun temple in Tusa**

Among temples from Medapata, the Sun temple at Tusa and temples dedicated to Vishnu at Nagada and Iswal follow an Archaeological Preservation Aesthetic. Admired first and foremost for their formal beauty, with a secondary emphasis on the rich religious, cultural and artistic history they can provide, these temples are not regularly worshiped.

Just a few miles from modern-day Udaipur, the tenth-century temple in the town of Tusa is dedicated to the Sun god, Surya. The exquisite bracket figures of the carved ceiling at Tusa have been the recent victims of theft for the international art market (Beech et al. 2003). These statues of celestial musicians were decorative, rather than icons in worship, and have not been replaced. Instead, a large sheet of perforated metal provides a locked cage against theft and creates the painful aesthetic of jailed beauty, precious and impossible to protect (Figure 1).<sup>6</sup>

### **A ‘Jain’ Ritual Renovation Aesthetic (RRA) at Ghanerao and Ahar**

Prior to the 1960s, Ghanerao and Ahar would have fallen under an APA aesthetic and remained in the hands of publicly administrated government agencies. Michael Meister has astutely suggested that it was after M.A. Dhaky’s scholarly work in the 1960s about the importance of ancient Jain sites, that private Jain trusts – such as the Shri Anandji Kaalyanji Pedh – began to take interest in administering these old buildings; after which, an RRA began to dominate visually (Meister 1998, 13 and 1995). The tenth-century Jain temples at Ghanerao and Ahar share aesthetics akin to those found at the famous Jain centers of Ranakpur and Mt. Abu.

A modern ‘Jain’ aesthetic for Ghanerao and Ahar privileges intact, fully repaired, architectural elements devoid of any hint of ruin, disrepair or discoloration. Unfortunately, photography restrictions at both sites prohibited me from providing a visual example of this aesthetic. The Jain Ghanerao temple is administered by the same trust – the Shri Anandji Kaalyanji Pedh – as the Jain Sacciyamata temple in Osian (near Jodhpur), and yet Ghanerao looks nothing like the colourful, mirrored Sacciyamata temple (Figure 2). Despite administration by different trusts – one private and one public – it is the Jain portions of Ahar that share a similar aesthetic to Ghanerao. This aesthetic, often found at Jain temples, usually lends a very white,



Figure 1. Caged ceiling and bracket figures, c. second half of the tenth century, Surya Temple, Tusa, © Author.

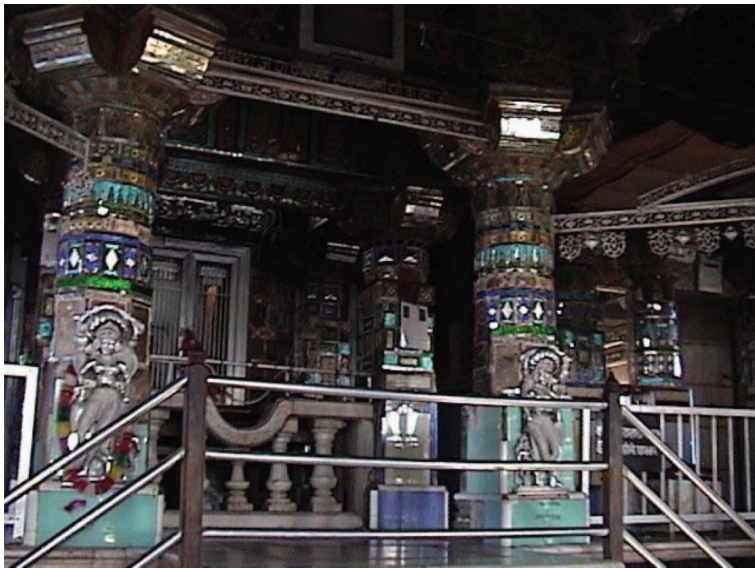


Figure 2. The mirrored interior of the Sacciya Mata temple suggests a Ritual Renovation Aesthetic, Osian, © Author.

chiseled, clean look, which reflects an interest in the formal perfection of Thirtankar saints' sculptural bodies and their architectural abode. Privatization led to a shift away from an APA aesthetic and towards an RRA; however, within the Ritual Renovation category many different visual styles ensue.

Despite the fact that Ghanerao and Ahar share a re-chiselled sparkling white, serial museum-like display of same-scaled sculptural icons of saints, a Jain temple administered by the same trust as Ghanerao displays a very different appearance – one that suggests a stronger emphasis on ontology, or the existence of the deity/icon as a living being. At Osian, the Sacciyamata temple's complex syncretic history has been carefully charted by Michael Meister, John Cort and Alan Babb – a goddess that once ate meat became a vegetarian. Sacciyamata found her followers among Jains and Hindus alike. The Shri Anandji Kaalyanji Pedh treated this hill temple not only under an RRA, but with an ontological emphasis focused on the deity's life and home through fancy mirrorwork, clothing, colour and rich multi-sensory ephemeral traces of ritual practice. The deep involvement of a priestly community and a large body of both Hindu and Jain devotees suggests that aesthetics often reflect the users as much as, or more than, the patrons.

Osian's hybrid style is more akin to the type of indigenous aesthetic found at Shakta and Shiva temples in Southern Rajasthan today. With both a Ritual Renovation Aesthetic (RRA) and a clear ontological bias, contemporary curatorial practice in the field at these sites tends to prefer to treat temples as the abodes of living deities. This RRA with an ontological focus often results in both repair and veneration, and leaves both lasting and ephemeral aesthetic marks on the buildings. Within the Medapata cohort, Eklingji, Unvas and Jagat fall into the RRA category. Rajputs, in cities and in villages, with title and without, have rallied to collect funds for the upkeep of these Shaiva and Shakti temples technically governed and/or previously governed by archaeological departments. Broadly speaking, these are 'Hindu' temples in modern terms, but, more specifically, temples dedicated to Shiva or the Goddess.

### **A 'Shaiva-Shakti' ritual renovation aesthetic at Eklingji and Jagat**

The RRA found at Shiva and Goddess sites is often funded by erstwhile nobles, who may or may not use the sites regularly. At Eklingji, all clergy and staff are on the payroll of trusts run by H.H. Shri Aravind Singh Mewar, inheritor of the title Maharana of Mewar. Furthermore, in Jagat – albeit with very different means and degree of noble rank – it was nonetheless Rajputs who organized to raise funds for the installation of a new goddess icon when the previous one was stolen. Ancient Shiva and Goddess temples have become the confluence of contemporary politics and religion more than any other sectarian heritage. Both temples in our case study fall into this category and represent two very different examples of how an ontologically informed RRA is produced and how it actually looks in situ.

At the Ambika temple, the main goddess icon was stolen in the year 2000 and replaced in May of 2002 (Figure 3). In Kailashpuri, Shri Eklingji, a four-faced emanation of Shiva in the form of an impressive polished black stone *lingam*, receives offerings (*arthi*) no less than four times at day (Figure 4). At both sites, massive fundraising efforts and even private trusts sometimes vie with state authorities and at times collaborate with state authorities for the privilege of temple administration. A wide variety of agents curate these sites through the creation of colourful displays of 'pomp and pageantry'.<sup>7</sup> Among them are the Home Minister of Rajasthan, the postcolonial Maharana/CEO<sup>8</sup> of Mewar, guild and clergy members, the Thakur's family in Jagat, and many members of the public in infinite combinations.



Figure 3. New Amba Mata installed, icon frame c. 961, icon made in Jaipur 2002, an example of a Ritual Renovation Aesthetic at the Ambika Temple, Jagat, © Author.

### Two case studies in curatorial authority and aesthetic choice in the field

Eklingji and Jagat each reveal complex visual webs of competing claims within single sites. At Eklingji, a Maharana/CEO defines postcolonial kingship via claims to the archaeology of the state as private property in temple trusts. In Jagat, villagers in rural Chhapan curate mediaeval remains of Southern Rajasthan in situ through their practices, inviting luminaries such as the home minister of Rajasthan to an installation ceremony for a replacement sculpture for the stolen goddess. Both temples display an RRA, which can loosely be defined as the treatment of the temple as a living, and hence changing, abode for an animate deity. Those deities, both legally and in practice, own their property and exercise agency through their caregivers, who curate from the field – whether or not they have a clear legal mandate to do so (Davis 1992, 1997; Sontheimer 1965).

At Eklingji, the contemporary curatorial eye animates a version of Sisodia lineage history, which is historically grounded closer to the fifteenth century than the tenth century. The most popularly known temple of the Shri Eklingji complex dates to the late fifteenth century and houses a four-faced Shiva *lingam*. This deity, named Shri Eklingji, traditionally holds the office of ruler of Mewar, with the Maharana acting as his regent (*diwan*). The visual emphasis at this archaeological site is, thus, on the fifteenth-century Shri Eklingji temple (Figure 5). There, a twentieth-century



Figure 4. Shiva in the manifestation of Shri Eklingji, ©ASI, photo taken in the 1950s, Eklingji. This photograph displays an Archaeological Preservation Aesthetic in the documentation of a deity as a sculpture with specific physiognomy and material properties. The renovation of the sanctum in silver and fresh traces of worship, such as flowers on the icon, suggest a Ritual Renovation Aesthetic existed in situ but was not yet powerful enough to prohibit photography of the deity on ontological grounds.

sculpture of the Sisodia lineage progenitor, Bappa Rawal (Figure 6), stands in permanent adoration in front of the deity and ruler of Mewar, the form of Shiva known as Shri Eklingji.

The aesthetic power of a somewhat obscure lineage debate is evident in a twentieth-century French sculptor's rendition of Bappa, housed within a structure generally attributed to the patronage of fifteenth-century Maharana Kumbha. This modern statue of Bappa articulates the claims of the Maharana Mewar website, where the eighth-century Bappa is linked to the eighth descendant of the Guhila line named Prince Kalbhoj.<sup>9</sup> There, in the same vein as Colonel Tod's versions, Bappa is described as the founder of Mewar who received spiritual instruction from the Shaiva acetic, Harit Rishi (Tod 1920). Bappa became a devotee of Shri Eklingji, and was named by his spiritual teacher, Harit Rishi, as the first regent (*diwan*) of Mewar, in the service of the divine ruler of Mewar, Shiva in the manifestation of Shri Eklingji. The





Figure 5. Shri Eklingji Temple, c. sixteenth century, Eklingi © MMRI. This photograph by the Maharana Mewar Research Institute espouses an Archaeological Preservation aesthetic in the recording of historical architecture devoid of ritual traces.

House of Mewar and a large majority of the Mewari population continue to view Shri Eklingji as the legitimate leader of Mewar, even in the post-independence era of the nation-state, where kingship is no longer officially recognized.

In contrast to the ontologically dominated RRA put forth visually by the glossy corpulent rendition of Bappa Rawal in front of the icon of Shri Eklingji as the ruler of Mewar, the oldest and most important archaeological evidence of the site dates back to the tenth century. Dating back to 971, the Lakulisha temple and inscription records a debate that took place between Buddhists, Jains and the Pashupata Shaivas.<sup>10</sup> Given that the Lakulisha temple is dedicated to the Pashupata patron saint, the Pashupatas are said to have won and the inscription firmly links this sectarian victory to the Guhila dynasty. A lineage is set forth – one that does not list Bappa Rawal as the progenitor of the royal line, in contrast with post-fourteenth-century records.<sup>11</sup>

This tenth-century inscription and temple dedicated to the key saint of the Pashupata Shaivas retain an APA in contrast to the strong ontologically based RRA at the Shri Eklingji temple in the lower part of the compound. The upper layer of the complex is closed to visitors other than the Maharana and researchers granted permission by the Maharana Mewar Research Institute (MMRI). This area includes many, but not all, of the oldest remains at the site, including the Lakulisha temple with its 971 inscription. The Shri Eklingji Temple Trust curates half of the site under an RRA and the other half under an APA. Preservation and restoration is privately financed and carried out at this site currently contested in the courts. Court documents are not yet available to reveal the ongoing litigation between the private trust, the Devasthan department of Rajasthan, and the Archaeological survey of India.



Figure 6. Bappa Rawal, by a French sculptor, c. second half of the twentieth century, Eklingji, © Author. The sculpture clearly suggests a Ritual Renovation Aesthetic whereby an enlivening of a centuries-old myth in modern times is more important than the historical reconstruction of this mandapa as it may have been seen in Kumba's time, or left empty to privilege the built environment's historicity.

In Jagat, a smaller temple has been put 'back' into use more recently (Figure 7). Lacking in many of the major legal battles found at Eklingji, the curatorial administration of this goddess temple falls to whoever chooses to use it and raise money to maintain it. Curatorial power in the field slips fairly seamlessly between different groups of people – few of whom are invested with any distinct institutional authority. The Mina and Bhil women, who visit the goddess on their way up the adjacent hill to see her sister goddess Mallar Mata, perform an ontologically based aesthetic so strong that it hardly requires any figuration or renovation at all (Stein 2010). The historical trace of goddess worship remains sacred in its own right. The archaeological offices in Udaipur unquestioningly authorize any renovation undertaken by groups fundraising to replace a stolen icon. The erstwhile royal house of Ravala ritually participates in installation of modern icons in archaeological remains – as did the Home Minister of Rajasthan in 2002.

The tenth-century Ambika temple is best known to scholars as the earliest example of a goddess temple in regional style from North India and, like Eklingji, the Ambika temple visually competes for different versions of history (Rajan 1963; Agrawala 1964 (I), 1964 (II), 1965; Dhaky 1968, 1998; Hardy 2007; Dhar 2010). As of May 2002, when a new twenty-first-century icon was installed in the sanctum of the tenth-century Ambika temple, both an APA and an RRA existed side by side in a single temple experience (Figure 3). The villagers of Jagat collected money for two years to save enough to pay for the eight-day installation ceremony held in Jagat in the wake of the theft of the deity in the year 2000 (Stein 2010). The stolen icon was not original and had been in situ only briefly in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The majority



Figure 7. Ambika Temple, c. 961 CE, Jagat, © AIIS. This photograph gives a clear picture of a beautiful temple in an Archaeological Preservation Aesthetic style.

of women who were the primary users of the site continued to worship Amba Mata without her body, so the question remains: why replace the icon at all? But the icon was indeed replaced in a climax of intensifying re-use. Like the Eklingji temple, the contemporary RRA gained footing from the 1970s onwards, with intensified interest in the 1990s, and culminating in the installation ceremonies at Jagat in 2002, and ongoing legal disputes between the Shri Eklingji private trust and various government agencies regarding ownership and administration rights at the temple.

### **Hybrid aesthetics and the rich complexity of multiple mandates**

Let us close this unraveling of protean aesthetics with perhaps the most famous site from Medapata. Nagada is a multi-sectarian site that provides an interesting example of what was left under state administration with an APA and what was removed to become the disputed property of a private trust with an RRA. At Nagada – a site controlled by the Archaeological Survey of India – the Sas-bahu temples dedicated to Vishnu remained on an original platform in a cluster of multi-sectarian temples in an excellent state of repair. An elegant *torana* frames this archaeological cluster, visited by tourists and scholars alike, in celebration of early eleventh-century history and aesthetics. Unlike many of the ancient Jain sites sponsored after M.A. Dhaky's 1960s publications, most of the older Vaishnava temples, such as the Sas-bahu, have not been sponsored by trusts and continue to be administered through the archaeological survey. Generally this leads to an APA for early Vaishnava sites, with trusts supporting later sites, such as Nathadwara, and resulting in a stronger RRA and a different appearance due to heavy religious use.

But before Nagada passed to the state and the Shri Eklingji temple complex became part of a private trust in 1973, the back of one temple was moved from

Nagada, just a few kilometres away, and installed at the entrance of the Eklingji Complex (Figure 8). This fragment displays a fierce form of the dancing Shiva as the ferocious Bhairava in the main niche, which probably would have corresponded to the icon in worship in the temple's inner sanctum. The display of this fragment from Nagada at the entrance to Eklingji no longer allows for circumambulation or any access to an inner icon. Instead, this new installation turns the main deity of the central back niche (*bhadra*) of the temple into a stationary icon. This figure holding a skull staff now greets devotees at the entrance to Eklingji, but no longer stays on powerful architectural axis with the architecturally bifurcated original inner sanctum. When Nagada was declared public and Eklingji was declared private, only this fragment dedicated to Shiva was severed from Nagada and reinstalled at Eklingji. A closer look at the sites of Eklingji and Jagat may reveal more about why the Vaishnavite remains continued in an APA form to remain in situ at Nagada, whereas the Shaivite fragment was recontextualized within an RRA at Eklingji.

#### **Privatization of archaeology: shift from state to religious trusts and/or ownership through praxis**

Both the claims of the Maharana/CEO of Mewar to the Eklingji complex and the claims of the villagers to the ancient archaeological site of the Ambika temple argue for ownership. The second half of the twentieth century marks a shift from the socialist ideals of the nascent nation towards the free-market economics of the global present. As Michael Meister has suggested to me, changes in tax laws of the 1970s changed the economic stakes of a temple trust being considered private or public.<sup>12</sup> A family temple, as the Maharana of Mewar claims of the Eklingji temple, is private. On the other hand, a *pratishta*, or installation ceremony such as the one



Figure 8. Back of temple from Nagada now located in Eklingji temple complex, c. early eleventh century, Eklingji, © Author.

held in Jagat in the wake of a stolen icon, can be used to claim the Ambika Temple is public.

One could associate the ASI with an APA, bound by historical interpretations of past heritage, such as these images of celestial maidens as examples of tenth-century sculpture (Figure 9). In contrast, one could associate the Devasthan department with the privileging of living icons over archaeological historicity (Figure 10) – an RRA, and yet this public government department tends to be milder in conservation interventions, not as well funded, and more egalitarian in administration. In 2002, the senior Devasthan officer in Udaipur was Poonam Sagar, an astute young woman, who emphasized that many clergy are not part of the Brahmin ‘priestly’ caste and that historically also this was the case – just as many who use the temples are neither Rajputs nor members of the *ksetriya* ‘warrior’ caste. Her emphasis on the divorce between pious praxis and caste politics reflects a state-mandated affirmative action where those negatively impacted by the caste system have the right to reserved spots in government and public life. Poonam Sagar’s analysis was perfectly aligned with what I found in situ at both Eklingji and Jagat, where ‘tribal’ Meenas and Bhils, Mali gardener and Lohar iron-worker castes all played important roles in daily temple practice; however, almost universally, it was Rajputs who were in charge of collecting funds for building and/or icon installation projects that would leave permanent or

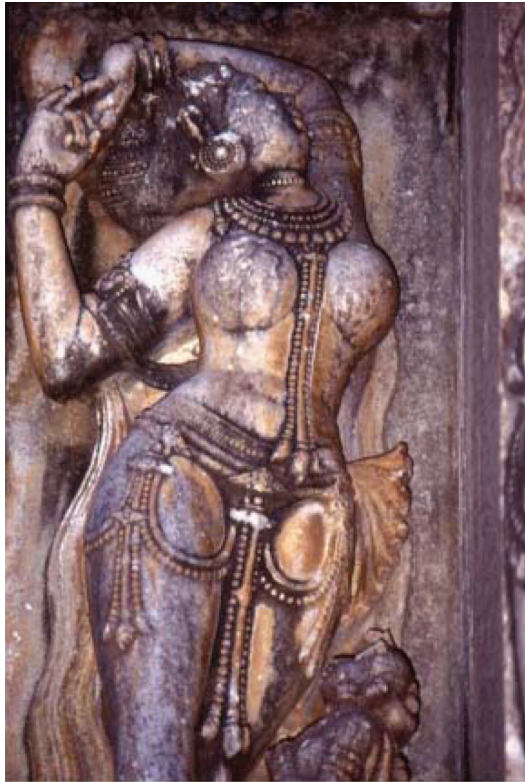


Figure 9. Surasundari (Beautiful Maiden) as exemplary of an Archaeological Preservation Aesthetic, c. 961 CE, Ambika Temple, Jagat, © Author.



Figure 10. Goddess parade with Amba Mata icon as exemplary of a Ritual Renovation Aesthetic, May 2002, Ambika Temple, Jagat, © Author.

semi-permanent aesthetic changes to the temples. Both Eklingji and Jagat display the APA and RRA aesthetics side by side and yet, both claim independence from state administration through the curatorial practices in the field. It then becomes a question of control on the ground, in the law books, and the relentless mediation of the two.

### **To curate in the field: legal mandates and aesthetics in Eklingji and Jagat**

Three legal acts and one private temple trust act govern these two sites. The legal mandates include: (1) the Jaipur Monuments Act, 1941, (2) the Bombay Trusts Act, 1950, (3) the Rajasthan Monuments, Archaeological Sites and Antiquities Rules of 1968, and (4) the Shri Eklingji Temple Trust. The Shri Eklingji Trust primarily follows the Bombay Trusts Act to argue for private temple control for administrative reasons and public trust status as a tax shelter. Technically, the Ambika Temple in Jagat is governed via the local archaeological museum in Udaipur, where the only legal document in the library is the pre-independence Jaipur Monuments Act of 1941. However, it is the more recent Rajasthan Monuments Act of 1968 that best corresponds to the melange of preservation and renovation aesthetics found at the Ambika Temple.

### Eklingji and Bombay Trusts Act

The Maharana claims the Eklingji temple is a family temple in a private trust. According to the *Declaration about Trusts*,

His late Highness Maharana Shri Bhupal Singji Bahadur by virtue of the constitution granted by him as Sovereign to the then people of Mewar on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of May, 1947, had also given a formal shape of a Trust to such properties, and since that date the various properties were separated from the Devasthan Department and were since then held as a separate Trust for the maintenance and upkeep of various religious institutions. (1973, 1–28)

The Declaration about Trusts, dating back to the last quarter of the twentieth century, emphasizes independence from the Devasthan department, a.k.a. independence from the state as a private entity.

If we then compare this private Declaration about Trusts with the national Bombay Trusts Act law of 1950, indeed, we learn that family temples are not public. According to the Bombay Trusts Act (1950),

It is not unusual for rich families to install their deities in the temple for the worship of the family members. Such temples are located within the premises of the bungalow or residential quarters. It is settled law that such family deities may be endowed with property without any question of a public trust or such rich families may make a sort of permanent provision for the *Puja, Archan, etc.*, and for the upkeep of the temple. Family deity may even be a permanently installed idol. Merely because the members of the public are allowed to visit the temple freely, that does not go to show that they visited the temple *as of right*. Our High Court as well as Privy Council held that, Hindu sentiment does not permit anybody to prevent the devotees from visiting the private temple. Such temples are called *Ghar Derasars* and are not public trusts as defined under the Act. (Shah 1974, 75)

According to dated photographs of Eklingji in the ASI photo archives in New Delhi, as of the 1950s before the private Declaration of Trusts was created in 1973, the temple seems to have been conceived of as public and under the administration of the Archaeological Survey of India (Figure 4).

The Maharana/CEO is not the only one to understand Eklingji as the ruler of Mewar. Rituals such as the tailor's fair display the yearly races to run cloth from the Bappa Rawal icon, all the way up the hill adjacent to the complex and back down into the sanctum of the god Shri Eklingji (Figure 11). These are the ties that bind and the impressions of guild members about the private character of the temple matter according to the Bombay Trusts Act [Section 2(13)] 19:

Distinction between public and private trust: – Recently the Supreme Court held that the origin of the temple, the manner in which its affairs are managed, the nature and extent of the gifts received by it, rights exercised by devotees in regard to worship therein, the consciousness of the manager and the consciousness of the devotees themselves as to the public character of a temple are the factors that go to establish whether the temple is public or private. (Shah 1974, 69)

So if the public and their practices perceive the temple as private it may be considered private by the law. Records dating back to the nineteenth century in the Maharana's archives date the expenditures at Eklingji back at least a century, and to this day the trust makes explicit that all Eklingji donations go to the Charitable Trust



Figure 11. Tailor's fair, 500 metres of cloth tied to Bappa Rawal, run up the opposite hill, and back into the shrine to Shri Eklingji, 2002, Eklingji temple complex, Kailashpuri © Author.

for public works and not directly to the temple trust responsible for maintenance, temple staff and offerings.

At Jagat, a different situation exists. Papers written in the 1960s suggest a historic temple, fallen out of use for hundreds of years. In R.C. Agrawala's seminal 1964 paper describing the site as the 'Khajuraho of Rajasthan', the sanctum appears empty altogether and so the stolen icon must therefore date to after that time. An image dated to the late 1960s from the American Institute of Indian Studies archives shows the stolen icon in situ, giving the modern image a rather brief installed life somewhere between 1965 and 2000.<sup>13</sup>

### **Jagat and Jeerna**

The archaeological office library in Udaipur, from which R.C. Agrawala administered the site of Jagat for many years, had only a copy of a law that predates independence. The Jaipur Ancient Monuments Act of 1941 makes two claims: (1) a place of worship must not be used for 'any purpose inconsistent with its character' and (2) when a protected monument is used for religious worship, it should be protected from pollution or desecration (*Indian legal code* 1941, 4). Section five makes a provision for maintenance including 'fencing, covering in, repairing, restoring and cleansing of a protected monument' (*Indian legal code* 1941, 1). The act



seems to provide for an RRA and an APA both. But the APA attitude towards the Ambika temple faded with R.C. Agrawala's retirement. He was no longer present to save sculptures by taking them from the site to Udaipur for the archaeological museum. Important archaeological fragments with references to early mediaeval tantra were probably carried up the hill from the Ambika Temple and now their tenth-century iconography seems to have melted under a layer of freshly offered foil and vermilion (Figure 12).

At Jagat, despite the Jaipur Monuments Act of 1941, the colonial APA gives way to an RRA at the close of the twentieth century. Legally, the renovation of a temple in a public religious trust requires no permission of the charity commissioner. According to the Bombay Trusts Act [Section 2(17)] 20,

The essence of the building is its structural coherence and the building must be said to have attained the condition of '*jeerna*' when time has seriously impaired such coherence and consistency. Where it is found that a temple is in a state of disrepair and decrepitude in many respects, it is a fit one for complete renovation. (Shah 1974, 107)

The complete renovation required by '*jeerna*' (old, in a state of disrepair) contrasts with the preservation of historical evidence required by an archaeological model. While the law mentions the removal of a temple and its image for the continuation of worship after a state of '*jeerna*' has occurred, no provision is made for deity installation into an old temple after theft of a sculptural icon. The painting of ancient sculpture metallic gold or a sanctum metallic silver as a part of the *pratishtha* (a rite of installation whereby a deity comes to inhabit a sculptural body) also falls outside the realm of civil law (Figure 13). The law espouses a view of renovation which privileges new consecration over preservation of old, damaged elements. 'Damage' refers to both physical aesthetic damage and to damage such as that incurred by the affront to a deity's honor during theft. Why this shift in the last quarter of the twentieth century?



Figure 12. Mallar Mata foil fragments, original sculpture tenth century, photo 2002, Ambika Temple, Jagat, © Author.



Figure 13. Silver sanctum, original c. 961, silver paint 2002, Ambika Temple, Jagat, © Author. A Ritual Renovation Aesthetic privileges the treatment of the sanctum as the abode of a living god rather than as a historical record of tenth-century practice.

### **Tax law and aesthetics**

Michael Meister has suggested that tax law is responsible for this rise in reuse of archaeological sites for religious purposes.<sup>14</sup> The Finance Act of 1972 made tax deductible ‘voluntary contributions received by a trust created wholly for charitable or religious purposes,’ on the condition that audits were provided to register trusts before 1 July 1973, or within one year of their creation (Shah 1974, 19). The Shri Eklingji Trust Declaration of 1973 makes explicit the distinction between private patronage of the temple by the royal family and public donations for charity made by devotees. Changes in tax law may account for some of the aesthetic symptoms of reuse found in the last quarter of the twentieth century. By sheltering charitable trusts

and public temples, the government encouraged temple renovation. The Bombay Trusts Act of 1950 already privileged new construction over the preservation of antiquity.

Less decisive, the Rajasthan Monuments, Archaeological Sites, and Antiquities Rules, enacted on 24 April 1969, prohibit interference with either preservation or practice. On the one hand, ‘any act which causes or is likely to cause damage or injury to any part of the monument’ is prohibited (*Indian Legal Code* 1968). On the other hand, actions that ‘violate any practice, usage or custom applicable to or observed in the monument’ are also not allowed (*ibid.*). The underlying question remains of who owns the Ambika temple. If the deity owns the temple, one must wonder which material form of the goddess holds the ontological rights: the goddess as the *bhopa*, or shaman, the goddess as the twenty-first-century sculpture (Figures 3 and 10), or the goddess in water pots waiting for transfer. As for Amba Mata’s, regent or ‘*diwan*’, will the Archaeological Survey of India continue to fulfil that role as it did under R.C. Agrawala? Should the responsibility be shared with the Devasthan department for living temples now that a twenty-first century icon installation ceremony (*pratishta*) has taken place? Or, does that *pratishta* ceremony give new authority to those who organized it as trustees of a tax-deductible public trust? Any one of these three contenders for Amba Mata’s chief administrator may have legitimate challenges to a corporate entity which chooses to sponsor temple ‘no. 214’ through the Rajasthan state ‘Adopt-a-Monument’ scheme, or, ideally, all four could cooperate to redefine temple administration at a complex diachronic site like Jagat.

## Conclusion

Through a detailed examination of the Medapata cohort, differences emerge between Vaishnava, Jain, Shaiva and Shakta temples that could lead readers to confuse pluralized aesthetics as sectarian aesthetics. Differing aesthetics for two temples of the same sect administered by the same temple trust could serve as evidence to downplay the role of patronage, thus giving clergy and devotees a larger voice in the way temples look, and yet, all of these constituencies curate in the field in India. People curate through their actions, whereas private temple trusts and government departments curate via the law. Whether the god himself, such as the powerful Shri Eklingji (Figure 4) is understood to rule, or a group of Rajput men reacts to the theft of a goddess in rural Rajasthan at a temple like the Ambika temple in Jagat, increasing privatization impacted temples and heritage administration visually at the turn of the twenty-first century in India. Temples increasingly display a Ritual Renovation Aesthetic rather than an Archaeological Preservation Aesthetic.

As India moves from postcolonial methods of heritage administration into an era of global patrimony through world heritage, mass tourism, and an increasingly global art market, a clearer vision of how aesthetics are made and the impact of these visual politics should lead to debate about how we deal with history in the present. Many art historians turn to contemporary art production with the hope that temporal access to artists as agents can facilitate their curatorial and scholarly practice. The ancient temples of India will lie in situ whether or not scholars engage with them. As art history undergoes a massive shift, our continued engagement with the past allows for an informed involvement with both past and present. The agency of current rural users – outside the traditional and urban institutional confines of

stewardship – must be included in the curatorial spectrum in India. With this case study from southern Rajasthan, I hope to open a scholarly dialogue about the future of the previously canonized category of ‘The Hindu Temple’ in contemporary art historical debates – debates about monuments that echo art historians of a century ago (Reigl 1903/1982).

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### Notes

1. Carol Henderson first brought the Adopt-a-Monument programme to the attention of the Rajasthan Studies group in 2005 (email communication to Listserve, 31 May 2005). A paper the following year mentions the adoption of a monument in Jaipur by a bank. The bank, in turn, acquires the rights to use the monument as a logo (Hindu Business Line 2006). Hardgrove (2007) discusses various modes of ‘adoption’, including a ‘heritage army’ of school children as example of one such adoptive patron. The Ambika temple, which I will discuss below, is listed as no. 214 under the Adopt-a-monument programme offered by the Rajasthan government (Rajasthan Foundation n.d.).
2. AAM: ‘Project that is sponsored’ (Government of Rajasthan n.d.).
3. ‘Benefits to donors under the AAM scheme’ (Government of Rajasthan n.d.).
4. This area is known for the architectural stylistic idiom called ‘Maha-Gujara’, which is characterized by architectonic buildings with fewer images and perfected placement of those images (Dhaky 1975, 148).
5. More famous examples of APA ancient Vaishnavite temples include the Gupta-era sites of Deogarh, Eran and Udaigiri.
6. In Jagat, elaborate eight-day installation rites were held for a new twenty-first-century marble deity (which wasn’t even original or mediaeval). On the other hand, the Ganesha sculpture in the same temple was gated in metal like the ceiling at Tusa. This demonstrates how RRA and APA can co-exist in the same location, even in the same temple sanctum.
7. Deborah Sutton has recently argued that in the first half of the twentieth-century temple administrative choices in colonial India, reflect the clash of a more reserved ‘Protestant’ taste, rooted in the history of iconoclasm, with a perceived effervescent ‘excess’ imagined as somehow too ‘Catholic’ within a European aesthetic towards religious architecture (Sutton 2010).
8. I use the term Maharana/CEO because technically after independence the monarchy no longer exists in India’s democratic government. Shri Arvind Singh Mewar’s current occupation is to manage a large estate of heritage hotels and trust foundations. This form of postcolonial kingship uses tourism as a continuation of the hospitality of court culture

- and stewardship as a form of postmodern *dharma* – where ancient kingly duties are performed in contemporary ways.
9. The most recent Mewar Encyclopedia produced by the House of Mewar identifies Bappa with Kalbhoj (eighth in Guhila dynastic lineage) and more accurately navigates the uncertainties through a description of the relationships between legend and history (*Mewar Encyclopedia* n.d.).
  10. Line five of the Lakulisha temple inscription mentions Bappa and line 15 references Eklingji (Mishra 2000a; Bhandarkar 1905). This 1905 article assumes the 971 inscription as proof of why Bappa remains so important to the Maharana's of Mewar. The Atpur inscription of 977 clearly lists the early lineage of the Guhila line as: (1) Guhudatta, (2) Bhoja, (3) Mahendra, (4) Naga, (5) Syeela, (6) Aparajit, (7) Mahindra, (8) Khalbhoj (associated by some with Bappa), (9) Khoman, (10) Bhirtirpad, (11) Singse, (12) Sri Ullut, (13) Nirvahana, (14) Salvahana, (15) Sectikoomar (Tod II.924; Mishra 2000b). More recently, Tryna Lyons mentions the Bappa debate in her paper (1999).
  11. Sircar situates the elevation of Bappa from 'petty Rawal' to 'one of the greatest heroes India ever produced' in folklore as a response to status earned from 'the struggle with the Mughals in the sixteenth century A.D.' (Sircar 1965, 30).
  12. Meister, personal conversation, 1 April 2005; and Lawrence A. Babb, John E. Cort, and Michael Meister, Building Temples, in *Desert Temples: Sacred Centers of Rajasthan in Historical, Art-Historical, and Social Contexts* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2008), 72–76.
  13. The statue was probably installed in 1965 or 1966, given that a photograph of the stolen statue, undressed, exists on the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS) photo archive website and was taken in December 1966 (see also Vandana Sinha, AIIS director, personal communication, 26 November 2009).
  14. See Note 12.

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