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Somnath Amrit Mahotsav: 75 Years of Temple Reconstruction

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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Somnath Amrit Mahotsav: 75 Years of Temple Reconstruction

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WHY IN NEWS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the **Somnath Amrit Mahotsav** on **May 11, 2026**, at **Prabhas Patan, Gir Somnath district, Gujarat**, marking **75 years since the reconsecration of the Somnath Temple** on May 11, 1951, by President **Dr Rajendra Prasad**. The Mahotsav featured a **first-of-its-kind Kumbhabhishek** for the current temple structure, a commemorative postage stamp, a commemorative coin, and a fly-past by the **Suryakiran Aerobatic Team** of the Indian Air Force.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: A TEMPLE OF MANY RESURRECTIONS

The Somnath temple – the **first of the twelve Jyotirlingas** of Shiva – sits at the western edge of the Saurashtra peninsula on the Arabian Sea coast. Its history is a continuous cycle of construction, destruction, and rebuilding.

PERIOD	EVENT
Pre-7th century	Earliest temple, mentioned in puranic literature
7th-8th century	Reconstructed by the Maitraka rulers of Vallabhi
1026 CE	Mahmud of Ghazni's raid – temple looted and destroyed
11th century	Rebuilt by the Solanki (Chaulukya) king Bhima I
1297 CE	Destroyed during the Khalji invasion
14th-15th centuries	Repeated cycles of damage and repair
1665 CE	Demolition order under Aurangzeb
1783 CE	Maratha and Holkar-era reconstruction by Ahilyabai Holkar
1947-1951	Reconstruction post-Independence, led by Sardar Patel

SARDAR PATEL, K M MUNSHI AND THE RECONSTRUCTION (1947-1951)

The decisive impetus came from **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel**, Union Home Minister, who visited the ruined site on **November 13, 1947**, immediately after the accession of Junagadh – the princely state in which Somnath fell – to India. He pledged its reconstruction with the consent of Cabinet and Gandhi.

- **K M Munshi**, scholar, ICS officer, and Founder of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, was tasked with the project. The **Somnath Trust** was formed in 1949.
- The Government of India did **not** fund the construction; resources were raised through public donations and the Junagadh administrator's office.
- The new temple was designed in the **Maru-Gurjara (Chaulukya) style** – the architectural idiom of the medieval Solanki temples of Gujarat.

The Reconsecration of May 11, 1951

On **May 11, 1951**, President **Dr Rajendra Prasad** performed the *Pran Pratishtha* (installation) of the Jyotirlinga at the rebuilt temple – defying the reservations of Prime Minister **Jawaharlal Nehru**, who held that the President's attendance risked confusing the secular function of the head of state with religious participation. Dr Prasad's view was that the Constitution did not bar a citizen-President from attending a religious ceremony.

This event is now studied as a foundational episode in the secularism debate of independent India.

THE AMRIT MAHOTSAV 2026: HIGHLIGHTS

ELEMENT	DETAIL
Date	May 11, 2026
Venue	Somnath Temple, Prabhas Patan, Gir Somnath, Gujarat
Anniversary	75 years since the 1951 reconsecration
Mahapuja	Performed by PM Modi
Jal Abhishek	Sacred water poured on the Jyotirlinga
Dhwaj Puja	Flag installation at the temple's spire
Kumbhabhishek	First-ever for the present structure
Commemorative Stamp	Released by India Post
Commemorative Coin	Released by Ministry of Finance
Air Display	IAF Suryakiran Aerobatic Team

The **Kumbhabhishek** – a periodic ritual purification of a Hindu temple in which sacred water from a *kumbha* (pot) is poured over the sanctum's *kalasha* – is performed every 12 years in most South Indian traditions; it is being conducted for the first time at the current Somnath structure since its 1951 reconstruction.

SOMNATH IN INDIAN CIVILISATIONAL MEMORY

- **First of 12 Jyotirlingas** of Shiva enumerated in the *Dwadasa Jyotirlinga Stotra*
- Other Jyotirlingas: Mallikarjuna (AP), Mahakaleshwar (MP), Omkareshwar (MP), Kedarnath (UK), Bhimashankar (Maharashtra), Vishwanath (UP), Trimbakeshwar (Maharashtra), Vaidyanath (Jharkhand), Nageshwar (Gujarat), Rameshwaram (TN), Grishneshwar (Maharashtra)
- Sea-facing temple; arrow pillar (*Baan Stambh*) on the shrine points to a meridian with no landmass between Somnath and Antarctica
- Featured in colonial Orientalist debates: Lord Ellenborough's "Proclamation of the Gates" (1842) episode

MARU-GURJARA ARCHITECTURE

A regional temple style of Gujarat and Rajasthan, also called **Solanki style**:

- Highly carved exterior with multiple offsets (*rathas*)
- Pillared *mandapa* with intricate ceiling work (*samatala vitana*)
- Tall *shikhara* with a sequence of smaller subsidiary spires
- Notable examples: **Modhera Sun Temple, Rani-ki-Vav (UNESCO WHS, 2014), Dilwara Temples (Mount Abu)**

The new Somnath built in 1951 was a deliberate revival of this idiom – a continuity with the medieval Solanki temples that preceded the destructions.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 1 – Art, Culture, Modern History

- Temple architecture: Nagara, Dravida, Vesara; sub-styles including Maru-Gurjara
- Post-Independence integration of princely states; Junagadh accession
- Sardar Patel's role in nation-building

GS Paper 2 – Polity

- Secularism debate: Nehru vs Rajendra Prasad on the President's attendance, 1951
- Religious institutions and public funding – Article 25, 26, 27

GS Paper 4 – Ethics

- Public office holders and religious participation
- Heritage conservation and constitutional propriety

Mains Angles

- 1 “The reconstruction of Somnath in 1951 tested the boundaries of Indian secularism.” Discuss.
- 2 Trace the evolution of Maru-Gurjara architecture with reference to surviving examples.
- 3 Examine Sardar Patel's role in integrating the princely states. Was the Junagadh case unique?

FACTS CORNER – KNOWLEDGEPEDIA
SOMNATH TEMPLE:

Location: Prabhas Patan, Gir Somnath district, Gujarat; on the Arabian Sea

First of 12 Jyotirlingas of Shiva

Architectural style: Maru-Gurjara (Chaulukya / Solanki style)

Most famous destruction: Mahmud of Ghazni, 1026 CE

Ahilyabai Holkar reconstruction: 1783

Modern reconstruction led by: Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel; project overseen by K M Munshi; Somnath Trust formed 1949

Reconsecration by President Dr Rajendra Prasad: May 11, 1951

PM Modi's Amrit Mahotsav: May 11, 2026 – 75 years

Features: Baan Stambh (arrow pillar) pointing meridian-south

OTHER JYOTIRLINGAS (12): SOMNATH (GUJ), MALLIKARJUNA (AP), MAHAKALESHWAR (MP), OMKARESHWAR (MP), KEDARNATH (UK), BHIMASHANKAR (MAH), VISHWANATH (UP), TRIMBAKESHWAR (MAH), VAIDYANATH (JHK), NAGESHWAR (GUJ), RAMESHWARAM (TN), GRISHNESHWAR (MAH).

ARTICLES INVOKED: 25 (FREEDOM OF RELIGION), 26 (MANAGE RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS), 27 (NO TAX FOR RELIGIOUS PURPOSES), 28 (NO RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN STATE-FUNDED SCHOOLS).

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