

## **FIELD VISIT TO AKSHARDHAM TEMPLE 17/3/23**

On the 17th of March, 2023, at 1pm, the students of the School of Heritage Research and Management gathered near the entry point of Akshardham Temple. It was a field visit arranged for the students to know about the various facets of Indian temple architecture.

An excellent lecture was delivered on the chosen topic by Dr. Anand Burdhan, explaining the major and minor details of the temple. The foremost fascinating fact that the students came to know about was that the Akshardham is not a temple per se. It is a memorial built for a great spiritual guru, namely Swami Narayan. The Akshardham can actually be called a 'Swargaarohan prasad', the meaning being very identical to a memorial. As the group moved to the main entrance of the temple, different sculptures were explained by Dr. Burdhan. Major architectural elements like the windows with lattice work or the 'vatayanas', the entry gates or the 'toranas', the posture of the large images and so on were witnessed. These features, which are otherwise just an imagination in a classroom lecture, were now very practically understood. Moving in towards the facade of the memorial, the students found out that the temple does not have a very ethnic Indian way of construction. It belongs to neither Nagara, nor Dravida nor Vesara style. Its dome is actually a Florentine dome. A circumambulatory path was taken round the building before entering the main sanctum. The walls have numerous carvings on mostly sandstone. Although, seemingly the norms of Hindu iconography weren't followed very strictly, there were ample examples to understand the same. The imageries, as explained by Dr. Burdhan instilled real interest in the fascinating intermingling of Indian art with architecture. At last, everyone entered the main hall where a considerably large image of Swaminarayan ji was installed under the main dome. Besides, there were idols of different other deities, notably of the Vaisnava sect. Again, on entering also, lucid explanations were provided about each detail of the structure and the imagery created. Finally, out of the memorial and moving towards the canteen area, the students found out a very vivid example of Buddhist stupa architecture. The features of Ajanta caves have very well been depicted in the structure.

To conclude, it must be said, although the Akshardham is not a real example of an Indian temple, it has features of major Indian schools of architecture. The pan-Indic features are a delight to every student of heritage and architecture. The visit eventually ended into a very insightful experience which a classroom lecture only couldn't have provided.

