

2. Resuscitating Heritage: Community-Based Approach

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Abstract

Temples dot the landscapes of many of the towns and villages in South India and they are a part of the religious activities of the people living around them. Migration of people, poor maintenance, age of the structure and lack of adequate funds are the main reasons why the ancient temples are neglected and allowed to fall into ruins. To restore the temples to their ancient condition and also involve the people in their structural and religious maintenance, the Dharmasthala Manjunatheswara Dharmothana Trust, Dharmasthala, Karnataka, under the stewardship of Shri Veerendra Heggade, undertakes the restoration of the ancient temples. The motto of the Trust is 'Giving back to posterity... What history bequeathed us'. This paper highlights the community-based approaches of the Dharmasthala Manjunatheswara Dharmothana Trust leading to sustainable cultural heritage development.

Keywords: Heritage Management; Community-based Heritage Management; Karnataka; Dharmasthala

Temple building in India was a multifaceted activity involving art, science and religious components and every village in India has a temple of its own, small or big. With the loss of royal patronage, migration of people from villages and small towns to cities, poor maintenance, age of the structure and lack of adequate funds, the maintenance of these temples became an arduous task and many of the temples have fallen into neglect (Bhadreenath 2014).

Most of the important temples and famous religious centres are under the control of the state governments, while the maintenance of historically and archaeologically important temples is under the control of the Departments of Archaeology, both at the Central and state level. Monuments of such category are often not neglected as they are

under the custody of the government agencies. The others that were once temples of local importance, but are not under the custody of the government at the present are the totally neglected lot.

Some private trusts and organisations are striving hard to redeem this stalemate and to restore the ancient temples to their former status. One such significant contribution towards the rehabilitation and management of ancient temples is undertaken by the Sri Dharmasthala Manjunatheswara Dharmothana Trust, Dharmasthala, Karnataka. This paper highlights the community-based approach of the Trust, leading to sustainable cultural heritage development.

The President of this Trust, Padmabhushana Dr. Veerendra Heggade, who had already initiated projects for rural improvement, health and educational institutions, was ‘pained to see’ the beautiful monuments that once basked in glory being trampled by time and forgotten by humanity to lie in ruins, uncared and unheard of’ during his many travels into the hinterland of Karnataka.



*Fig. 1. Lakshminarayana Temple, Tagadur (before conservation),
Source : author.*



*Fig. 2. Lakshminarayana Temple, Tagadur (during conservation),
Source : author.*



*Fig. 3. Lakshminarayana Temple, Tagadur (after conservation),
Source : author.*

Added to this was the fact that when he was invited for the *pratishthapanas* (inauguration) of various religious centres and temples, he noticed that the old structures were demolished and rebuilt using brick and mortar. He longed to restore the former glory of these beautiful architectural monuments.

Such a thought saw the birth of the Trust with the motto ‘Giving back to posterity...What history bequeathed us’. The Trust was formed in 1991 at Dharmasthala and has dedicated itself to the restoration and revival of our ancient culture. While preserving ancient architecture is one of its main objectives, it also promotes the classical traditions and methodologies of worship, *bhajans* (religious renderings) and *pujas*. The Dharmothana Trust has been created to identify the ruins of temples and restore them as close as possible to their original glory.

The Method

An advisory board of eminent personalities in the fields of art, religion, culture has been constituted with the overall vision to restoring ancient heritage. The actual work of restoration is handled by a team of dedicated professionals like engineers, archaeologists, historians and *sthapatis* (architects).



Fig. 4. Nishkameshwara Temple, Hosakote, Source : author.

The local people approach the Trust with details of the temples in their villages that are in a dilapidated condition. If the temple is more than 200 years old, and also non-living, a team of experts is deputed by the Trust to assess the condition of the temple. The locals are involved both in monetary contribution towards the renovation of the temple and also in providing manpower during execution.

Only on the condition that the locals would fully cooperate, the work is identified as a potential project. Once the team certifies that the renovation would meet the guidelines of the Trust, the President Veerendra Heggade himself interacts with the local populace. The local people are requested to form a committee, collect 20% of the amount required and start the preliminary work to establish their genuineness. The next team surveys the site and formulates the report to take up the execution of the work. On detailed documentation and preparation of estimate and on the basis of *vastusastra*, the renovation work is undertaken.

The locals are involved for two reasons. First, they are better aware of the local topography and the folklore of the area, which indirectly aids the restoration process. Second, by involving them, the Trust instils in them a sense of responsibility and pride by which they would proudly preserve and maintain the temple. As financial partners, their involvement is further established.

Initially for nearly a decade, the Trust was contributing a substantial amount for the renovation process. Subsequently, its efforts were appreciated by the government of Karnataka, which also decided to join hands with the Trust. Today, the Trust and the government contribute 40% each and the balance 20% is the contribution of the locals. Even though the government decided to become partners, it does not interfere with the work of the Trust, which has retained its freedom of execution.

Over the last two decades, the Trust has renovated around 190 temples all over Karnataka. Some of the temples renovated include the Sri Someshwara temple, NAL, Bangalore district; Sri Shanthinatha Basadi,

Bangadi, Belthang taluk, D.K. district; Sri Chandralapameshwari temple, Honagunte, Chithapura taluk, Gulbarga district; Sri Laxminarasimha temple, Doddakunche, Holenarasipura taluk, Hassan district; Sri Nishkameshwara temple, Hosakote, Pandavapura taluk, Mandya district; Sri Lakshminarayana temple, Tagadur, Nanjangud taluk, Mysore district, to name a few. In all these restored temples, the historicity and original features have been maintained.

On completion of the restoration work, the temple and the deities are consecrated as per the *Agamic* principles and handed over to the villagers in all pomp and glory. The responsibility of the Trust ceases and the mantle of ensuring the maintenance of the temple and performing the rituals are transferred to the local people.

As a part of field study, I had visited two temples that were restored by the Trust: Sri Nishkameshwara temple, Hosakote, Pandavapura taluk, Mandya district and Sri Lakshminarayana temple, Tagadur, Nanjangud taluk, Mysore district. The temples have been conserved as per the *Agamic* principles and most of the old materials have been reused. The place has also become a centre of vibrant activity. The locals with whom I interacted were also very proud of their temple and also about their contribution in reviving their totally lost temple.

In certain instances when the villagers themselves request for intervention, the Trust intervenes and associates itself with the *puja* activities. A case in instance was that of the Jain temple at Ullala situated to the south of Mangalore in a predominantly Muslim locality. The temple was renovated but no priest could be identified to perform the daily *puja*. When the Trust was approached, a person was suggested for performing the *puja*. As the income was insufficient for the priest, the Trust donated a rickshaw to him to earn his livelihood. The temple has today become a landmark of the town and has fostered religious harmony.

The Trust is, however, very clear in its principles of confining its activities to restoration work and does not involve itself in any of the religious activities subsequently.

Positive Outcome

The outcome of this community-based approach has started to pay dividends and these centres have now turned into active places of worship. Sometimes village functions and fairs also are held in its premises. The temple has become an integral part of the daily life of the village and some have also started attracting tourists. The initiative of the Dharmothana Trust has created awareness among the people even in remote areas about the architectural marvels that one has inherited and the necessity to safeguard such places. By restoring the ancient temples, the dilapidated architectural remains and sculptures are once again brought back under worship, indirectly preventing the theft and smuggling of sculptures or architectural wealth.

In fact, it has become a people's movement with a large number of the local people involving themselves in the revival of culture and cultural wealth.

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References

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