

THEME: What Local Organizations can do for Temples management

**INDIVIDUAL'S EFFORT IN RENOVATING DILAPIDATED ANCIENT TEMPLES**

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ABSTRACT

There are more than two hundred million small and large temples spread across the Indian land. In Tamil Nadu, apart from the temples governed under the Department of HR&CE, Government of Tamil Nadu, there are thousands of big, medium and small temples needed immediate renovation and reconstruction. While some large temples are maintained well, most of other temples are not in good condition due to non-availability of fund. The author being retired scientist from CSIR, has taken up self-effort, by spending his money in renovating two ancient temples in Tamil Nadu: i) Theni Thirthathotti Murugar Temple and ii) Surandai Andukondan Pillaiyar Temple. Theni Thirthathotti Murugar Temple is more than 300 years old and it has a sacred non-stop waterfall in temple complex. Author has taken up the construction in five stages: (i) Stone Pavement and construction of steps, (ii) Marriage Hall, (iii) Compound wall all around, (iv) Entrance Arch and (v) Five tier *Rajagopuram*. The *Kumbhabhishekam* was conducted in May 2018. Surandai Andukondan Pillaiyar Temple is again more than 300 years old and many *Siddhars* (Saints) were frequently visiting this temple those years for doing meditation. *Andukondan Siddhar* (Saint) lived here and attained *Jeeva Samadhi*. The temple was lying in dilapidated condition amidst bushes and poisonous insects. Author has taken up reconstruction of the entire temple with number of Sannathis and three tier entrance *Rajagopuram*. This paper presents how an individual can participate in renovating the old temples, drawing the financial budget, preparing the Master Plan, planning stage-wise construction, bringing up construction without financial hitches, identifying committed temple Stapathis, interaction with stake holders and successfully completing the mission.

Temples are the sacred places, make human being to realize - purpose & path of living, morality in life, helping fellow human, allowing other creatures to live and the existence of Eternal Power (*Para Prahmam*). Living with Temples is a cultural identity of Indian life. It is a great heritage to observe that each and every dwelling places in India are located with ornate temples. Priests, florists, musicians, gardeners, cooks and sculptors have bestowed themselves serving for the temples. In the ancient and medieval period, temples were maintained in a dignified manner using grants and donations received from Kings, Landlords and Wealthy Individuals. Today there are many big, medium and small temples in Tamil Nadu, which are left in dilapidated condition and puja are not being performed regularly. This paper mainly focuses on the temples in Tamil Nadu, their status and how an individual can contribute to the renovation and rehabilitation of old temples.

Tamil Nadu was ruled by the Great dynasties like Cheras, Cholas, Pandiyas and Pallavas. During their rule, the kings built numerous temples with splendid architecture. Cholas have built more Shiva temples all over Tamil Nadu and also in east Asian countries. Those days, most of the temples were managed by the Royal emperors with the objective to bring a model framework that - stop bureaucratic interference, protect assets of the temples, maintain them neat & clean, keep financial reserves, invoke spirituality and spread Hinduism. Subsequently, the temples had come under the superintendence and control of the Government even during the days of the East India Company. Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Board was established in the year 1925. Hindu temples, Charitable Endowments and Holy Mutts were then supervised by a Board. On the other hand, there do exist numerous temples in India which do not come under the control of the Government. Among them, some are run well but most of them remained in the state of ruin.

After the Indian Constitution came into force in 1950, the then Madras Government act for temples takeover was repealed and a new Act XIX of 1951<sup>(1)</sup> came into force. The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Board was abolished in 1951, paving way for functioning as a Government Department. In order to rectify certain difficulties during implementation and to integrate various amendments, the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) Act 22/1959 was enacted again in the year 1959. This Act of 1959 underwent various amendments suitable for the needs from time to time. Through this Act, it was enabled to supervise Temples and Charitable Endowments by widening administration and defining the jurisdiction of powers of Commissioner and Subordinate Officers. This also enabled the creation of the HR&CE Department in Tamil Nadu (<https://hrce.tn.gov.in>).

There are 46,014 Hindu Religious and Jain Temples under the control of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment in Tamil Nadu (HR&CE). Of those temples, 32,935 were found to be in good condition and 6,414 required minor repair works. However, 530 temples are identified to be partially dilapidated and 716 are in severely dilapidated condition. The department is in the process of restoring and renovating the dilapidated temples by indexing as heritage temples as per UNESCO norms. The department is expected to assess the damage by the teams comprising of Structural Engineers, Conservation Architects and *Stapathis* who will prepare the Detailed Project Report (DPR). These reports have to be approved by the heritage screening committees at the local, regional and state level before commencing the restoration work without affecting the architectural integrity of the ancient temples. It is needless to mention that there will be an inordinate delay expected in each and every stage of these reapprovals.

In case of dilapidated temples, day to day pujas are not performed and there are no special schemes to renovate and organise to perform atleast one puja in a day. In Tamil Nadu, apart from these temples governed under HR&CE, there are thousands of big, medium and small temples come under the control of Village management and Community based management. It is very common to see many street temples are built and managed by residential associations. It is difficult for the Government to focus on each and every such temples which are not falling under the jurisdiction of HR&CE and to renovate the dilapidated temples due to non-availability of financial resources. On the other hand, if an Association, Village groups, Industrialists, Landlords or Individuals come forward in adopting such ruined temples for doing the renovation, then it would help to restore the ethical structure and integrity of Hindu temples.

It is very common in Tamil Nadu that celebrities and rich people sponsor and do the temple improvement, additional construction or total renovation. On the other side, there are many community based temples being newly constructed and old temples are being renovated. Most of the communities like Adi Dravidars, Devars, Nadars, Nattu kottai Chettiars, Gownders, Naidus, Vanniyars etc. have built very big temples in their respective regions particularly Amman Temples and Shiva Temples and they are being maintained very well.

The author, who is a retired scientist from CSIR – National Institute of Oceanography, Goa has taken up the self-efforts to renovate two dilapidated ancient temples: (i) Thirthathotti Murugar Temple in Theni District, Tamil Nadu during 2011 - 2017 and (ii) Shri Andukondan Pillayar Temple, Surandai,

Tenkasi District, Tamil Nadu during 2019 – 2022. The renovations have set a cultural boom among the local people and the daily pujas are being done with profound happiness.

### **Problem Areas**

The Tamil Nadu Government through the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) department, in its reply to Madras High court in the year 2020<sup>(2)</sup> has mentioned that nearly 37000 temples do not get enough revenue to appoint more than one priest and that around 12000 temples cannot afford expenses for performing even one puja per day. Only about 7000 temples are financially stable which could take care of their needs from their own sources of revenue and in that only 1000 temples had surplus funds invested in banks. The major problems which left the Tamil Nadu temples in difficulties are - non availability of financial sources to perform regular pujas, required continuous maintenance of temple structures, theft of idols and encroachment into temple land.

### **Focus**

As per the Hindu culture and in the context of Tamil Nadu, there are many weekly and monthly festivals like, *Pradosham & Full moon days* for Shiva; *Shasti and Kirthigai* for Murugar; *Chathurthi* for Ganesh; *Ekadasi* for Venkateshwara; and *New moon days* for Amman. Besides these, annual festivals like *New year day, Vaikunda ekadasi, Sivarathiri, Thai Poosam, Panguni Uthiram, Rama Navami, Adi Perukku, Mahamagam, Gokulashtami, Vinayagar Chathurthi, Varalakshmi Viratham, Avani avittam, Ayudha Puja, Vijayadasami, Karthigai deepam* etc. are also celebrated in the temples.

In addition to the capital expenditure of temple renovation, it also needs sufficient fund to meet regular maintenance. With the experience of the author, it is realized that for a middle size temple, it needs around Rs. 50,000/- to Rs. 1,00,000/- per month to perform normal pujas on a regular basis for meeting the salary of priest as well as cleaner and cost of puja materials. Generating this fund is one of the major concern and the main focus of this paper is how to solve this financial problem by generating the fund from consistent resources.

## Steps need to be followed by an Individual donor

In Hindu tradition, temple renovation (*Kovil thiruppani*) is considered as one of the most sacred acts that not only dissolve ancestral curses but also bless next seven generations with *Punniya*. When an individual is proposing to renovate the temples belonging to HR&CE, he is forbidden to raise any form of funds from outside. It is also in practice that temple renovations are being carried out voluntarily by devotees as donor, subject to the supervision of the HR&CE Department.

The volunteering individual who is interested in renovating dilapidated temple has to follow the following steps:

- Identify the temple to suit his ethical and financial conveniences.
- Identify under whose control the temple exists.
- He has to initiate a discussion with the concerned group about the history of the temple, reasons for lying dilapidated and whether the locals are interested in getting the temple renovated.
- He should also assess, once the temple is renovated, whether the locals will take care of the maintenance of the temple and proper fund will be generated to meet the day-to-day puja expenses.
- The volunteering individual who is planning to take up the renovation has to prepare a *Road Map* and take a decision based on SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) analysis.
- He should decide whether he can comfortably proceed with the project of renovation without any stand offs in between till completion.
- The individual has to prepare a Master plan in consultation with *Stapathis*, local people and firm decision has to be taken up on: conservation, restoration, repair and reconstruction. Preservation of ancient temples is a very long arduous task and needs to be done with expert guidance. The road map begins with choosing the right Stapathi who is authorized for the temple designs.

- Then comes the consultation with Sthapathis, stake holders and local village heads. This meeting is all about the objectives, costing, time frame and implementation of the renovation.
- The *Stapathi* has to clearly provide the information on the sequence, time schedule, efficiency and expected costs, including the follow up costs for maintenance with different options. Finally, the individual donor with the support of the local community will select the most suitable renovation road map together with them. Stapathi will then make the plan with layouts and designs for the approvals.
- The important step comes next is to obtain permissions from HR&CE with the finalised layouts and designs prepared.
- On obtaining the necessary permissions, the execution of the work, where the most precise engineering with the ideal proportions to create a sense of harmony and balance of all, has to be brought out by the Stapathi.
- The unforeseen hassles during the construction stage including the nonavailability of quality materials, lack of skilled labourers, bad weather and break in the continuous flow of money for the construction have to be considered as challenges.
- The timely supervision of the renovation work followed by frequent discussions with the Stapathi and the temple committee members formed for this purpose have to be carried out for the actual implementation of the renovation work as per the *Agama Sastra* and prevailing statutory rules.
- The final consecration of the deity by performing the *Kumbhabhishekam* on an auspicious day makes the efforts completed.

The author who is a Ph.D. holder in Civil Engineering had planned his two prestigious renovation projects by preparing the following order of plan.

- Arrangement of Electricity and Water supply,
- Various God *Sannathis* need to be added,
- Type of *Raja Gopurams* and number of tiers,
- Construction is to be in bricks or stones or mixed type,
- Structure needs only repairs or reconstruction,
- Flooring - stones or tiles,
- Construction of compound walls to avoid encroachments,
- Preparation of temple drawings by *Sthapathi* following *Agama Sastra*,
- Geotechnical tests and design of foundations,
- Identify Idols having historical and archaeological values,
- Approvals if any needed from the Statutory Authorities like HR&CE,
- Estimation, Costing and confirmation with the availability of fund,
- Duration of execution,
- Ensuring the continuous flow of money during construction,
- Subsequent financial resources for the maintenance of the temple.

The final plan has to be sent to HR&CE, if the temple comes under them or to the local organisation if it belongs to the local body. The Individual should be supported by a volunteering group of that local area: comprising of senior persons, qualified people and local villagers preferably forming a minimum of 6 persons.

*To ensure that temple renovations are carried out in accordance with standards prescribed in Agama Sastra, persons practising this art, learnt traditionally from their ancestors and those possessing a degree or a diploma in sculptural arts have been approved as Stapathi. They have to be used for the design of the temple renovation.*

## Case study of the two temple renovations

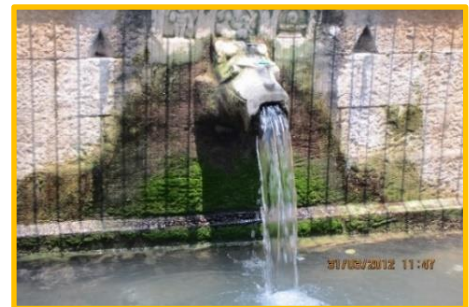
The author has taken up self-effort in doing two ancient temple renovations: i) Thirthathotti Murugar Temple, Theni District, Tamil Nadu during 2011-2017 and ii) Shri Andukondan Pillaiyar Temple, Surandai, Tenkasi District, Tamil Nadu during 2019 - 2022.

### Case (i) –Thirthathotti Murugar Temple, Theni District, Tamil Nadu<sup>(3)</sup>



This is an ancient temple of more than 350 years old having Lord Murugar as the main deity. It is located along Theni – Bodinayakanur Road along the National Highway 85 in Tamil Nadu. It was located amidst the bushes steep down from the road.

The speciality of the temple is, there is a nonstop waterfall called *Thirthathotti* in which always there is a flow of spring water irrespective of the seasons. This non-stop waterfall still flowing in the temple complex is considered as a *Sacred Thirtha*.



**Thirthathotti**

This temple is under the control of HR&CE, Government of Tamil Nadu. There are many temples under the control of HR&CE, Government of Tamil Nadu and this temple falls under the small temple category of HR&CE. The department does not have sufficient fund to do renovation and building up of basic facilities. The main temple is located about 20 m steep down from the Highways.

Prior to the renovation, this temple was not having a proper approach way for elderly people to reach the temple. There were no common facilities like mandapam, bath room, rest room etc. The people from surrounding villages were facing difficulties even to organise marriages in the temple.

The author, who is the native of nearby town Theni, took the initiative to renovate this Thirthathotti Murugar temple and augment the requirements. During his childhood days, i.e. in 1950 - 1960, he used to visit this temple often with relatives and later migrated to Goa on job. When he visited this temple after lapse of 50 years in 2010, he found the temple remained in the same state with ruined condition. There was no proper walk way to descend down to the main temple and the path leading

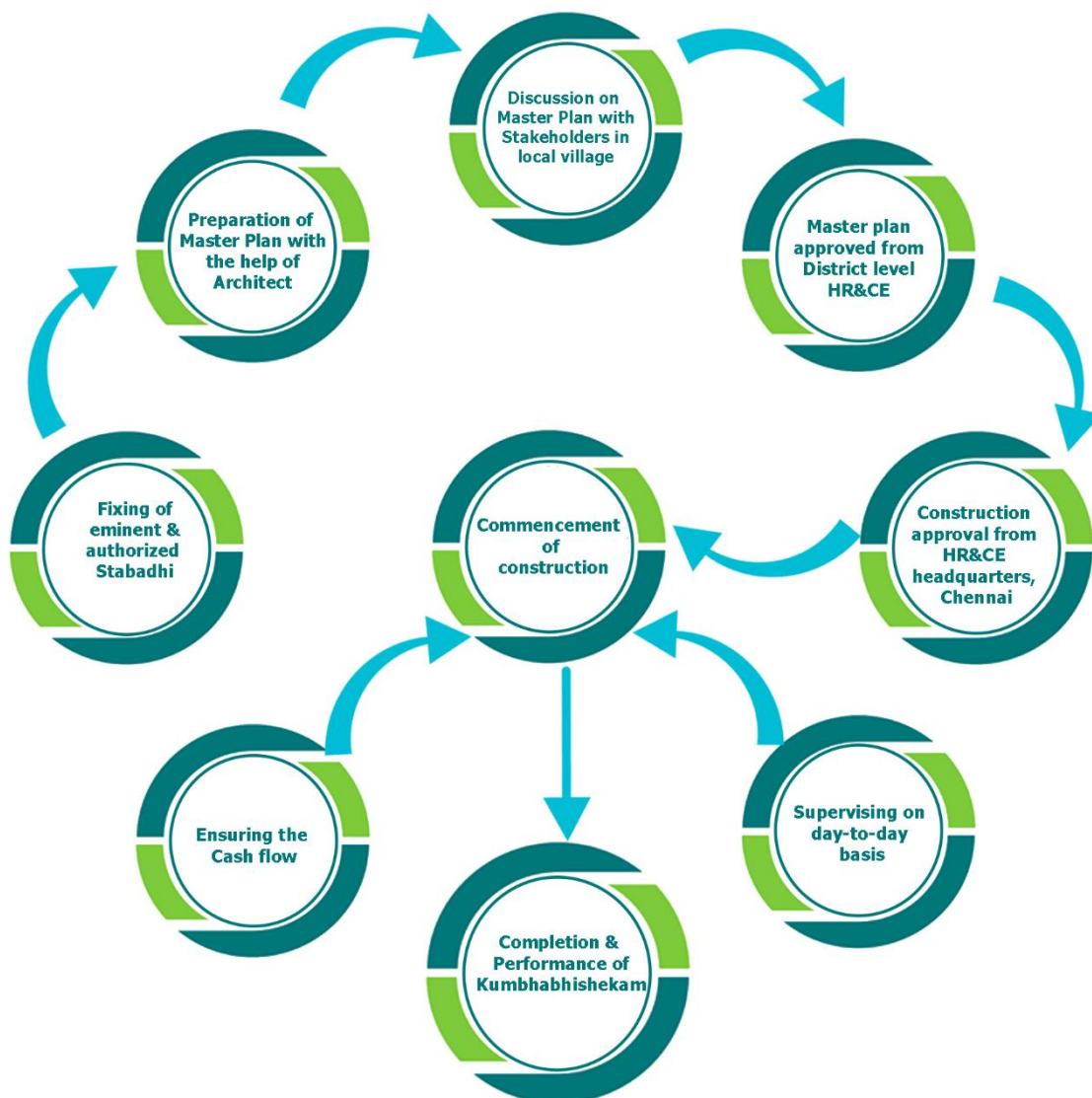
to waterfall was found in a slippery condition. On the same night, a *Siddhar* (Saint) appeared in his dream and asked to take up renovation of the temple. The author immediately on the next day met villagers, Executive Officer HR&CE at Theni and Joint Commissioner HR&CE at Madurai. Everyone had expressed tremendous support for the noble cause and gave him green signal to proceed with the procedures and take up the renovation of the temple.



As a first step, in consultation with the villagers, HR&CE and Stapathi, the author framed a Master Plan as shown in the above figure and proposed to renovate the temple in five stages as indicated in different colours.

- (i) Laying of stone *Pavement* and construction of steps
- (ii) Construction of *Marriage Hall*
- (iii) Construction of decorated *Compound wall* all around the temple
- (iv) Construction of *Entrance Arch* and
- (v) Construction of Five tier *Rajagopuram* (which was the major contribution).

The following procedures were followed in getting the permission from HR&CE.



1<sup>st</sup> stage: Laying of stone Pavement and construction of steps:

The granite stone pavement work commenced in August 2011 and was completed in January 2012. The granite stones were fixed covering an area of about 7000 sq. ft. Steps were constructed from Highways till down the temple and further extending them to the sacred water falls. The quality granite stones were transported from *Kanchipuram* to Temple over 450 km lead distance by trucks. The front corridor of the temple was paved with these dressed stones. After completion of stone pavement, the devotees including the senior citizens and children could able to descend down and climb up easily and safely.



**Construction of stone pavement in progress**



**After completion of stone pavement**

2<sup>nd</sup> Stage: Construction of Marriage Hall:

The author also felt the need for building a Marriage Hall mainly to support the lower income people in the surrounding eight villages (*ettupatti gramams*) so that they can perform small functions and marriages. The basic amenities like bathrooms and toilets were also built by the side. The villagers were very happy as they could combine divinity in their functions and they started performing most

of the small functions in this marriage hall. The construction of Marriage Hall commenced in 2012 and was completed in 2013.



**Stage inside Marriage Hall**



**Outer view of Marriage Hall**

3<sup>rd</sup> stage: Construction of Compound wall all around the temple:

When the devotees want to visit the temple, they could not easily identify the temple as there was no Compound wall. The absence of Compound wall also encouraged the miscreants to encroach into the temple land by constructing thatched houses and shops. The author was suggested by HR&CE to construct a compound wall all around the temple. The construction of compound wall commenced in 2013 and completed in 2014. The compound wall was running all around a length of 1000 feet.



**Before the construction of Compound wall**



**After the completion of compound wall**

4<sup>th</sup> stage: Construction of Entrance Arch and decoration of compound wall on the road side:

Decorative entrance Arch with decorative construction of road side compound wall commenced in 2015 and was completed in 2016. It depicted the six forms of Murugar, Ganesh, Shiv shakti, Vishnu and Saraswathi.



**Entrance Arch**



**Entrance Arch with compound wall**

5<sup>th</sup> stage: Construction of Five tier Rajagopuram:

Rajagopuram forms as an important and prominent feature of the Hindu temples which has Kalasa Kumbhams at top. The author planned for the five tier Rajagopuram and the Architect has planned as per the *Agama Sastra*. The ancient *Mahabalipuram - Pallava* architecture was followed in the design of the Rajagopuram. The construction of Rajagopuram commenced in 2015 and was completed in 2018. The foundation was designed by the retired professor of Indian Institute of Technology Madras. The pest control treatment was done for the foundation. The Five tier Rajagopuram was constructed with *Kalharam, Adistanam, Stambam, Kabothagam*, including *Salahara Arches* at both sides. The painting was carried out with selected Panchavarnam water colours of *Asian paints*. The lightening arrestor has been installed in order to protect the temple from natural disaster.

On successful completion of the Rajagopuram, the *Kumbhabhishekam* was organised on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2018 with the Chief guest being the then Deputy Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Shri O. Panner Selvam (OPS).



**Entrance without Rajagopuram**



**Entrance after construction of Rajagopuram**

The above entire renovation was done by the author with his own effort under the guidance and support of HR&CE department, temple staff and local village people and more over it has been followed as per *Agama Sastra* guided by Stapathi.

In order to preserve the existing architecture and sanctity of the temple, the author engaged Sthapathi Jayaraman, the official sthapathi of HR&CE for the entire renovation of the temple. Sthapathi Jayaraman is well known Architect with sound knowledge in *Agama and Silpa sastras* and also carries required degree of B.E. in *Sculptural Arts* and more importantly he descends from a family of traditional temple architects.

After the renovation, the author is still maintaining the temple by taking care of the expenditure, cleaning the temple and Community Hall, providing garland for God and providing provisions for doing daily prasadam in Temple. HR&CE department is happy and from their fund, now they are providing daily *Annadanam* for 50 people. More and more devotees are visiting this temple now and the Hundi Income for the temple has considerably increased after the renovation done by the author. In fact, before renovation, the devotees visiting temple were around 20 – 40 in a day which increased to 400 – 500 now. On the eve of special puja days, like Tamil New year day, earlier only around 1000 people used to visit this temple and now after renovation, more than 50000 people visit in one day with all elaborated arrangements by HR&CE including police *Bandobust*. Most of the neighbouring villages conduct the marriages in this Temple Marriage Hall.

## Case (ii) - Shri Andukondan Pillaiyar Temple, Surandai, Tenkasi District, Tamil Nadu<sup>(4)</sup>



**Shri Andukondan Lord Ganesh**

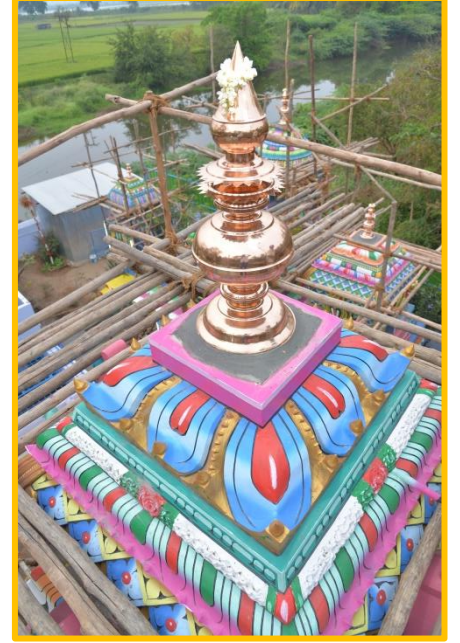
Shri Andukondan Pillaiyar temple is more than 300 years old located in village Surandai, Tenkasi District, Tamil Nadu. It is located on the bank of Hanuman river at the outskirts of the village amidst the forest. Those days, many *Siddhars* (Saints) frequently visited this temple for doing meditation and receive *Astama siddhi* (eight forms of power). One of the Siddhars named *Andukondan* lived in this temple from 1926 to 1962 and attained *Jeeva Samadhi*. The main deity of the temple is *Lord Ganesh*. After the Siddhar attained Jeeva Samadhi, the temple was left unattended as there was no one to take care. The temple ran into a dilapidated condition with bushes and infested with poisonous insects.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2018, the *Siddhar* appeared in author's dream and invited to do total reconstruction of the temple. On the next day itself, Author travelled from Chennai to Surandai, which was his first visit to this village. He discussed about the reconstruction with the village people. He also understood that the temple does not belong to any particular stake holders or the HR&CE. The local villagers expressed their solidarity to the author and their happiness for reconstruction.

The plan for reconstruction of this temple was drawn in the year 2019 by engaging *Stapathi* Shri T. Vairamuthu, who completed B. Tech. in Civil Engineering and subsequently done B.E. in Temple architecture from Mamallapuram. His father was an eminent Sculptor worked in Srivilliputtur *Andal Sannidhi*. The Rajagopuram of Srivilliputtur Andal temple represents the logo of Government of Tamil Nadu. The *Sthapathi* carries ample experience to build the Hindu temples with *Vimanas*, *Gopurams*, *Pillars*, *Garbhagrahas* (inner sanctum), erecting the idols as per the *Ahama sastra* by maintaining the sanctity.

The following reconstruction works have been planned and done in the Andukondan Pillaiyar temple.

- ❖ Separate Sannathis for *Lord Ganesh, Andukondan Siddhar, Lord Murugar, Lord Balakrishna, Lord Anjaneya and Lord Shiva*
- ❖ Gopurams are built over each Sannathis
- ❖ Construction of Three tier Rajagopuram at the Entrance
- ❖ Pavement of Granite Stone all around the Temple
- ❖ Roof art painting
- ❖ Construction of *Madapalli* for storing and cooking
- ❖ Construction of bathrooms and rest rooms
- ❖ Setting up of Nandavanam and shed
- ❖ Repairing of Compound wall with metal sheets on the top.



The construction started in February 2019 and was completed in December 2021. During construction the author visited the temple every week and supervised the construction work personally in order to maintain the standard of quality of construction. The Temple *Kumbhabhishekam* was done on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2022 with local MLA as the Chief Guest. The entire expenditure for construction was met by author alone.

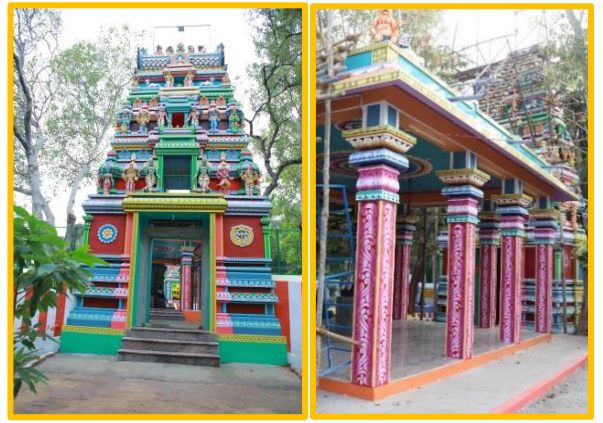
After the construction, in order to maintain the temple, the author made arrangement for generating the funds forming a Trust and registered in the name of *Shri Andukondan Swaminathar Charitable Trust* (Registration No.4/46/2022 & certificate No.IN-TN63894586603353U)

Monthly auspicious days like Full moon day (*Pournami*), new moon day (*Amavasa*), *Kirthigai, Pradhosham, Chaturdhi, Sasti, Ekadeshi* Pujas are being performed by collecting funds from each individual who are interested in performing the respective puja. Weekly puja like Friday puja and Saturdays puja are also being performed by different donors. During Full moon day, the author's brother is donating for *Annadhanam* for nearly 400 people.

Author has appointed a priest to perform daily puja and a cleaner to maintain the temple. Their monthly salaries are being paid by the Author.



**Entrance before renovation of Rajagopuram**



**Entrance after renovation of Rajagopuram**



**Compound wall on earlier days**



**Compound wall at present**



**Shri Andukondan Swamigal Sannadhi  
in earlier days**



**Shri Andukondan Swamigal Sannadhi  
after renovation**



**Shri Andukondan Pillayar (Ganesh) Sannadhi  
In earlier days**



**Shri Andukondan Pillayar (Ganesh) Sannadhi  
after renovation**



**Shri Andukondan Jeeva Samathi**



**Individual shrines for Balakrishna, Anjaneya  
and Karthikeya**



**Prahara Mandapam**

## **Cost**

The total cost involved for the renovation of Thirthathotti Murugar temple, Theni was about Rs. 7 crore and for Shri Andukondan Pillaiyar Temple, Surandai was around Rs. 2 crore. Author did not compromise on the money involved in bringing out the traditional, aesthetic and decorative designs of the temple structures and thus paid sufficient money for retaining temple architecture in these two temples without any hesitation. The *Stapathi* and the sculptors were given a great deal of freedom in the embellishment and decoration of the prescribed underlying principles and formulae of the temple Architecture.

## **Experience Gained**

The author has planned meticulously the following steps for renovating the above two temples.

- drawing the financial budget in line with the estimated availability of funds,
- preparing the Master Plan,
- planning stage-wise construction,
- bringing up construction without financial hitches,
- identifying committed *Sthapathis*,
- interaction with stake holders and
- day to day supervision of the construction.

Some of the tasks which have been personally supervised by the Author during the renovation of the temples have been listed out which helped for quality construction and magnificent appearance.

- ❖ Painting and completion of the Front Gopuram,
- ❖ Fixing Idol and Painting,
- ❖ Painting of all Gopurams,
- ❖ Laying flooring and inner wall Granite fixing,
- ❖ Completion of Steps at all places and Granite fixing,
- ❖ Giving Power connection and fixing Lights and Fans,
- ❖ Roof art painting,
- ❖ Kalvettu and embossing God names,

- ❖ Pavement blocks,
- ❖ Facilities at Madapalli,
- ❖ Constructing of foundation and basement,
- ❖ Shed construction for Annadhanam and construction of bathroom and rest room,
- ❖ Repair of road at outside the temple, and
- ❖ Clearing the garbage of the entire area.

### **Key findings in the effort**

If an individual takes a decision for renovation of a temple then definitely there will be a way as always God is there to help. The God will definitely make him to complete the task and he will find ways to get it done. The systematic planning and sequential execution with the following efforts of the author made him, fulfill his dreams for the renovation of these two temples.

- The author has taken the permission from the HR&CE department, Government of Tamil Nadu for the Thirthathotti Murugar temple renovation. Although there was a huge delay to obtain permission, he made continuous follow-ups and got the permission.
- The author has identified proper *Stapathi*. With their full involvement and commitment for timely completion, the renovation of the two temples could be successfully completed.
- The author with the *Stapathi* and geotechnical engineer has assessed the soil characteristics of the temple location as the temples fall near the water bodies. Based on the soil test report, the temples' foundation were designed and constructed.
- The size of the temple and idols were discussed as per *Agama Sastra* along with the local people and Sthapathi. The sculptors are the backbone of the temple architecture and they stayed in the temple site and gave their beautiful carvings of sculptures in various places like Vimanas, Gopuram, the individual shrines etc.
- The author has followed all compliance regulations for both the temples, from getting the permission from the department and following up the *Agama Sastra*.
- The work was carried out on a planned schedule drawn in advance and proper funding was made at the right time to the *Stapathi*.

- The communications were managed by forming a Whatsapp group among the Village Heads, Stapathi, representatives and Author. Each and every development were discussed in the group for the quality and timely completion of work.
- The temple major maintenance after the renovation is taken care by the author himself by forming a trust for the purpose.

### **Policy perspectives for the future**

In case of HR&CE temples, there are many systematic procedures to be followed with many dos and don'ts. Temples having Archaeological values cannot be disturbed. An individual can focus where the temples are not covered under Archaeological importance. He can prepare a plan and submit to the Government for the temple which he has decided to renovate. He should also prove his financial capability. Based on the request, the HR&CE authorities will come, check and then they will finally accord permission. There are two ways of taking up the renovation. One is giving the entire money to the department and they do the construction. That is the fastest process. If the individual wanted to directly spend and do the construction, then the procedure takes some delay. Normally with author's experience, the self-effort can lead to a good quality construction.

For renovating the HR&CE temple, the initial procedure to get permission will take about one year in case if the money is handed over to the department. If the individual directly does the construction with his money, then the permission may take about two years or more. Then the construction work normally takes one year to five years depending upon the quantum of work being planned.

There are many Celebrities taking up temple work of their own in Tamil Nadu. Few examples are: presently in Tiruchendur Murugar temple, Rs. 200 crore renovation work has been taken up by HCL *Shiv Nadar foundation* <sup>(5)</sup>. Yester year actress *Kanchana* <sup>(6)</sup> had donated her property in Chennai to Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanam. Similarly, yester year actress *Sripriya* has donated huge for renovation of *Kumbakonam* temples and *Mangadu Kamakshi* Amman temple. The most praised film music composer *Isai Gnani Ilayaraja* <sup>(7)</sup> had donated for the construction of top four tires of Srirangam temple Rajagopuram, Trichy.

## **How to operationalize the effort**

The very first moment when the control of temples had come under the Government, the people lost feeling of ownership as the financial and expenditure management are tightly controlled and required approvals by the department. Nowadays social awareness has become more among the people and many social organisations, institutions are taking up directly the management of private temples.

There are several industrial institutions who wish to do certain community development scheme under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). They develop charity institutions, help poor, donate for education and medical. Similarly, we shall have to awaken the interest among the people to form a group or association exclusively to work on renovation of temples. There are many individual groups already existing and doing volunteer service for cleaning and renovating the temples.

If a temple has to be every day cleaned and the deepam to be lit, a priest or brahmin is required. The minimum salary for the priest, to visit one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening, to lit the lamp for atleast 6 hours a day and to do decoration of God with flowers - the temple needs minimum Rs. 50,000/- per month. There should be a group to see that this income is ensured. Apart from priest, a cleaning person has to be appointed to clean the temple in and around and also to wash the lamps, God *vastrams* etc. On special occasions like *Pradosham*, *Kirthigai*, *Ekadasi*, etc., a special puja has to be performed and prasadam has to be provided, for which a separate fund is required.

At the outset, it is expected from the individual or the community that the overall revenue of the temples in terms of donations or fees have to follow a better collection mechanism and control, so that the temples can be put under self-sustaining ones with the support of local community.

## **How does it benefit and to whom**

The abundance of temples reflects the intense spirituality and religious faith among the people. Temples are either large monumental structures or small stone buildings; but each temple has its unique significance and greatly influences the livelihood of the people. People consider the temple as a place where they could go close to God. A temple is a structure designed to bring Human

beings and God together through worship, sacrifice and body of divinity. People across the globe visit India to find solutions for their problems in the materialistic world. Further, the construction or renovation of temples attracts tourism. When the temple becomes popular and devotees require rooms to stay by which the hotel industry will flourish. Similarly, the devotees require a proper conveyance to reach the temple, by which the Autorickshaws and Taxis will get their income. Many shops like Garments, Pharmacy including restaurants would emerge around the temple.

A temple is the place where a devotee tries to remain free from the perception of evil of birth, death, disease and entanglement with children, wife / husband, home and rest of the world. It greatly benefits the peaceful living of the people.

Community marriages becoming popular when people meet at temples and thus temples are developing as ideal centres for solemnisation of marriages at low cost. People also visit temples for astrological remedies like performing specific puja based on horoscope of an individual for *Graha Shanti* or doing remedies for any specific affliction (dosha) in the horoscope. Most of the community carry out the first tonsuring of head for their babies in the community temples.

Ultimately it brings a mental peace and also a kind of confidence in facing the difficulties in life. Mostly stress among women folk is commonly seen in both urban and rural circle. They visit temple to get boon for marriage, getting child, to correct husband's indifferent behaviour, good health for family members and to get steady income to maintain the family. Mostly men go to temple for prosperity of the business and to get good job. There are cases where they don't develop confidence and belief in God, end up on committing suicide. Temple priests play a crucial role like psychiatrists to the people making them to get rid of stress and depression.

### **Why by individual initiative**

Most ancient temples of archaeological importance are under the control of the Archaeological Survey of India. There are various reasons for the private individual to renovate the temples, even though it is official task of the Archaeology department.

The Archaeological Survey of India, responsible for the exploration and maintenance of the temples/monuments is mostly understaffed and poorly funded. The department may not have enough resources or funding to undertake renovation projects on a large scale, whereas the

individual could be able to fill that gap. Preservation of historical sites is crucial in maintaining cultural identity and heritage.

Many temples in India refuse to receive any funding from the Government and solely rely on philanthropists. The Architectural masterpieces can be protected by educating the general public about their importance and proper funding to maintain the temples.

Temples that are under some statutory controls are often driven by the pulls and pressures that may not necessarily be that which a stakeholder of the temple actually desires. The individual can able to interact with and take up restoration work of temples in a systematic manner.

In these cases of temple renovation, the author is more innovative and able to bring fresh ideas with sensitivity, respect and adherence to established guidelines to preserve the historical value of the site. With his own interest, in order to preserve the cultural heritage the author has invested his own resources.

Author has planned well and coordinated with all the concerned departments, local people and with proper attention that the required standards and regulations are met. He could able to preserve cultural heritage while also contributing to the local economy. Renovated temples with good facilities can attract tourists, which in turn can bring in revenue for local business such as hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops and also creates job opportunities.

Author has helped to promote community involvement and ownership, leading to a better preservation of the monuments in the long-run. The ownership and management of renovated sites are clearly identified to prevent any conflicts in the future.

### **Preservation of original features of the temples**

The Hindu temples evolved over the years depict excellent architectural evolution which has been derived within the boundaries of strict models derived from religious considerations. The temple architecture is connected to agamas, astronomy and sacred geometry. Temple Architecture is very conservative and a particular form of decorative details persisted for centuries. It has kept the ancient basic proportions and rigid forms unaltered over centuries.

In some cases, poorly executed renovations can harm the temple's cultural value. Whereas the author made it essential to involve experts / Architects in the restoration process and followed established protocols and guidelines of *Agama sastra*. The Author was very clear that it should be very important for the individual to take care to preserve the original features of historic temples, while also ensuring that the necessary renovations or rebuilding work is done safely and effectively.

When renovating historical temples or structures, architects take great care to preserve as many original features as possible. This is done through a process call "conservation", which involves carefully documenting and analyzing the original structure/features to understand its design, materials and construction techniques with a ultimate goal of protecting the cultural heritage of the temple.

In this "conservation" process, the author has used traditional building materials and techniques, made thorough researching and consulting with experts on the history and architectural style of the temple, and incorporated the existing physical evidence into the design and construction process. While renovating the two temples, the author took utmost care in maintaining the delicate balance between the need to recreate the original appearance of the temple structures and with the need to protect and preserve historical significance and physical evidence integrated.

Considering all the factors involved in the architecture and making the temples sacred, author engaged Sthapathi Jayaraman for the Arumuganayanar Thirthathotti temple, Theni district, Tamil Nadu and Sthapathi T. Vairamuthu for Shri Andukondan Pillaiyar Temple, Surandai, Tenkasi district, Tamil Nadu. Both of them knew the *Agamas* well, possessed the high level degrees in temple architect and also practicing traditionally art through their learning from ancestors.

These two Stapathis took a great deal of initiative to maintain the Hindu Temple architecture on the *Vimanas, Gopurams* with different tires, *Pillars, Garbha griha* (inner sanctum or womb chamber), fixing of the idols in right direction and also the *congregation* hall. They took the utmost care in the ritual consecration of the temple and performed the *Kumbhabhishekam* as per the agama sastras.

## **Conclusion**

The Temple Renovation is considered as a noble deed. If an individual gets into a renovation of a temple, Dharma says, it is such an act of a real blessing of God and such opportunity is given to only very few people. Temple renovation is one of the blessed deed (*Punniyam*) which can eradicate any ancestral curses and get God's blessings for next seven generations. The God would see that the individual committed for renovation would get sufficient financial backup till the completion of project. The individual should take it up as a challenge and proceed forward, even if there are different hurdles. There are so many temples - large, medium and small but most of them are lying in dilapidated condition. Although the Government and corporates are trying to renovate the temples, still there is an opportunity that any interested individuals can also take the chance and get the blessing of God. He has to follow the stipulated procedures and statutory guidelines without having any impact on the archaeological importance.

## **Acknowledgement**

The author wishes to express his sincere thanks to his family members for giving him full support to spend the financial components for the construction of temple.

He expresses his thanks to HR&CE, Tamil Nadu for granting permission to renovate Thirthathotti Murugar temple.

He likes to place the acknowledgement to the local community group at Surandai for standing in support.

The author specially thanks Mrs. R. Padma Malathi who has helped in gathering information and preparing this manuscript meticulously.

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