

The Tamil Nadu Temples: Continuity and Conservation with Agamashastra

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In the current scenario of mass conservation works being undertaken for the Temples at Tamil Nadu, several questions have emerged regarding the methods and processes being used. The range of diverse experts and agencies involved in these temple conservations including the bhaktas and their devotional contribution to such activities needs to be understood in greater depth. While often references are made to Agama rituals and application of Shilpashastras in temple works, the situation on ground is far more complex with diverse voices and interpretation to the traditional texts, their meaning and actual practice.

This paper draws from author's experience as part of a UNESCO evaluation mission on temple conservation works in 10 temples of Tamil Nadu in 2017. The mission also included recommendations for conservation based on several interviews and a workshop with Agama experts, sthapthies, archaeologists and conservation professionals. The paper further presents an ongoing research for the temple towns of Madurai and Kumbhakonam in progress by DRONAH Foundation in association with Cardiff University and School of Planning and Architecture, Bhopal where the author is involved as a Co-investigator. How can the issues of temple conservation be informed by well-researched history of the architecture, urban settings, and phases of renewal of temple structures in Tamil Nadu? What do the texts say, do they all agree, and how have they been used in practice historically and today? What are the views of the devotees (*bhaktas*) who visit the temple for daily rituals? How can the competing narratives be encapsulated?