

Research Article

Restoring heritage buildings in Karnataka – challenges and remedies

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Abstract

This paper discusses the key challenges faced in restoration of heritage buildings and focuses on remedial mechanism to meet the restoration challenges. Karnataka is a repository of vast historical past. Karnataka is land to countless historical artefacts and monuments survived since ages reflecting the historical evolution of the region. Several royal dynasties have left countless models of their unique structural engineering techniques through buildings, forts, palaces etc. These Heritage buildings serve as tangible embodiments of the historical past as they carry intricate narratives of the evolution of history, culture, art and architecture of Karnataka. These historical structures need conservation because they suffer from natural decay, neglect, urbanization influences and most of the time damages done deliberately. As these challenges offer threats of survival to the historical buildings, restoration of the buildings becomes more and more important. The buildings not only need preservation but also need measures to safeguard cultural heritage for posterity. Restoration of heritage buildings includes highly intricate processes involving ultra-modern techniques and scientific approaches. In Karnataka, heritage buildings are in various forms and various architectural styles. Hence, restoration needs are to be dealt differently. Bureaucratic hurdles, governance sponsored delays, poor stake holder participation, skill gaps, financial constraints etc, pose serious threat for taking up restoration. But, Government of Karnataka has collaborated with Private conservation agencies and is successfully taking up restoration activities amidst several challenges.

Keywords: Karnataka heritage buildings, Restoration, challenges remedies.

Introduction

Karnataka is a land of vast historical past. From pre-historic times to present day, Karnataka has heralded rich traditions and cultural extravaganza. There are innumerable heritage structures in Karnataka heralding the opulent history.

Challenges in heritage conservation:

1. **Authentic materials** - conservation of temples are challenged by problems of acquiring authentic materials needed for conservation. Matching the original construction materials and techniques and aesthetics is a very great challenge. Preservationists must balance the need for authenticity with the practicality of sourcing and using traditional materials sometimes resorting to innovative solutions of synthetic substitutes.
2. **Bridging Skill gaps**- restoring heritage buildings often requires specialised skills and extraordinary craftsmanship. But ancient temples in Karnataka are built with special traditional procedure and dexterity. But finding skilled artisans who can match the

expertise of the ancient architects is very difficult. These days such distinctive experts are unavailable. Finding them for restoring heritage structures becomes a complex issue which further delays the work of restoration. Thus, training the next generation of preservation experts and skilled artisans and transferring traditional knowledge and techniques is essential for the long term sustainability of heritage restoration.

3. **Changing environmental conditions-** Several Heritage buildings in Karnataka are vulnerable to environmental factors such as humidity, dampness, temperature fluctuations, contamination, pollution and natural disasters. Climate change aggravates these risks leading to accelerated corrosion of heritage structures and gradually weakening their exteriors. The primary chemicals which pollute heritage structures are sulphur di oxide, nitrogen and carbon di oxide. They are produced as a result of vehicle fumes and emissions from industries. These chemical cause severe damage to stone exteriors and lead to corrosion and surface deterioration.
4. **Ethical considerations and preserving historical authenticity** - balancing competing interests such as preserving historical authenticity versus accommodating contemporary needs or addressing past injustices leads to several complex problems. Preservation experts become pressurised to navigate these ethical considerations with sensitivity and inclusivity. Reflecting universal respect and admiration for conservation activities from ethical perspectives is very hard to achieve. Despite these challenges, the preservation of heritage buildings remains a vital endeavour. Preserving tangible links to past fostering cultural identity and enriching built environments for future generations poses bigger challenges.
5. **Financial constraints** – in Karnataka, conservation of heritage structures are challenged by issues of raising sufficient funds and financial support. The temples require substantial financial resources because conservation calls for specialised support from expert conservationists, archaeologists and Chemical engineers. Securing funds for restoration poses a big challenge. The district or local governments are dependent upon state government for funds and are often unable to create their own financial resources. The support from state government often lacks consistency and regularity.
6. **Legal hurdles-** conservation of heritage buildings are challenged by multifaceted legal procedures. There are several Laws which are framed for the protection of heritage structures. But, gaining a legal clearance for commissioning restoration work is a delayed process consuming time and money.
7. **Public perception and stakeholder engagement** - convincing stake holders including property owners, public, neighbourhood of Heritage structures, government authorities, NGOs, private conservation agencies, local governance committees, local communities and area developers about the heritage value of the restoration is a very challenging task. Several questions will be raised by stake holders about restoration procedures. Finding a balanced stake holder engagement poses a bigger challenge.
8. **Public unresponsiveness** - misconceptions about the costs and benefits of restoration creates instability. Public become unresponsive about restoration initiatives. Besides, conflicting interests may hinder efforts to garner support for preservation initiatives.
9. **Regulatory Hurdles** - conservation of heritage structures are challenged by regulatory hurdles. There are several stringent regulations and preservation laws aimed at protecting the monuments of invaluable historical and architectural significance. Negotiating bureaucratic redtapism and obtaining required permits is a highly time consuming and complicated process. These bureaucratic delays hamper restoration work.

10. Structural degradation - conservation of heritage structures are challenged by structural degradation. This includes deterioration, weathering impact on buildings, their extended opening to chaotic weather conditions, their survival elongation, degradation of materials due to longevity, their endurance limitations etc hamper the restoration activities. Identifying and addressing structural deficiencies while preserving the buildings historical integrity, requires specialised engineering expertise advice and meticulous planning. Present day conservationists and engineering cannot conceptualise the inherent considerations of primordial technology and conventional techniques of conservation.

Restoration considerations- The following procedures are followed by - Before undertaking any restoration activity it is needed that the stake holders are convinced about

1. **Need for archival research-** Building's historical significance architectural details and structural conditions. This calls for initiating with archival research. A minute archival research becomes necessary to understand the buildings' blue print correctly. The restoration experts need to undertake several onsite inspections to comprehend the scientific analysis of materials used and assess the impact of new materials which will be replaced. The experts will get ideas about buildings' historical precedence, its construction plan, its endurance, techniques used for its survival after a systematic research. This supports them to identify and prioritise areas which require immediate restoration intervention.
2. **Planned Surface treatment-** Heritage structures of Karnataka are built with various ancient techniques. Hence, surface treatments become necessary. Removing dirt, stains, pollutants, superfluous green plant growth etc occupying the interior and exterior of the structure needs a premeditated management. The restoration experts often opt for gentle washing, use of mild detergents, chemical wash, cold compress application procedures etc. Depending on the surface type and soil nature, chemicals have to be chosen. Heritage buildings in Karnataka are constructed with stone, wood, brick, plaster and metal, hence the treatment needs to be chosen very effectively. Restoration experts employ masonry repair work, reinforcement with steel application of carbon fibrous materials etc.
3. **Reconstruction-** restoration of heritage buildings cannot be taken up without replacement. Sometimes restoration experts observe that original building elements are missing or sometimes they are damaged beyond repair. They strive to apply traditional materials and techniques but find it very difficult to bring originality. Ensuing compatibility with existing style is very hard.
4. **Future options-** The heritage building conservationists expect their restoration repairs to survive for a longer duration. Hence, the considerations towards environmental control become all the more significant. Applying Moisture barriers, pest management strategies, environment friendly chemical applications, etc to prevent future degradation. This is a crucial step because the restoration should last long and needs to be resilient. Besides restoration does not end with repairs and re installation measures, they need regular maintenance, monitoring and awareness creations strategies.

Conclusion: Thus, restoration of heritage buildings carries immense historical significance. Even though it is a very multifaceted issue which is gaining significance following increased instances of decay and decomposition. In Karnataka, heritage buildings are in various forms and architectural styles, each architectural style is different in form, pattern and model and needs different approaches in conservation. The government of Karnataka is seeking the support from all stake holders and private conservation agencies, to support restoration of the rich legacy of Karnataka.

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