

**Economy as a driver of functional continuity of living religious heritage: the case of Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple at Srirangam.**

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**Thesis submitted to Wildlife Institute of India, Saurashtra University**

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**July 2021**

**Executive Summary**

Temples are important heritage assets to which several economies, or in simpler terms, livelihoods, are linked. They can be directly linked to the temple, or occur around the temple, while some may not be directly linked to the temple but are dependent on the temple for livelihood, while others may be linked but occur far away from the temple. In most cases, the temple is the leading economy in the area. Temples are also living that is, they have an element of continuity in terms of original use/function, community associations, cultural expressions, and care/maintenance through established or traditional means. Continuity is also maintained through the core economies directly or indirectly linked to the temple, thereby ensuring the conservation of the temple's tangible and intangible elements. Hence, the temple is a heritage asset, capable of giving rise to a flow of goods/services that sustain itself and the core economy. On the other hand, the core economy supports/enables cultural expressions integral to the temples' character.

The study was carried out in the Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple, Srirangam, India. The rationale behind this choice is that the temple is its historical prominence and continuity as a living heritage site. A core community exists around the temple with strong cultural connections. Apart from the resident core community, the temple is also a primary pilgrimage site and attracts many visitors from other regions. The temple is a major economy and contributes to the socio-economic development of the region. It is also listed on the Tentative Lists of World Heritage for the state party India. The researcher used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods in analysing the data collected. The reason is that some findings needed to be described due to the nature of information, while some could be analysed using quantitative tools resulting in tabulations and graphs.

The results outline the living heritage of Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple, Srirangam. They make up the cultural values that the temple possesses, and this is listed out in the subsequent section. The Temple is primarily administered by the Hindu Religious & Charitable Endowments (H.R. & C.E.) Department, Government of Tamil Nadu, along with a Board of Trustees. The Temple's financial administration has not changed over the years, and it continues to receive funds from traditional sources such as temple lands, donations from devotees, and hundial collections. However, most rituals and festivals are carried out through offerings by donors to the Temple. Most donors are also hereditary, i.e., they have an obligation to donate to the Temple. Hence, a change in the structure of

the financial administration of the Temple will significantly alter the cultural values as they are linked together. On the other hand, through interviews with local shopkeepers, it was evidenced that the Temple has helped business establishments to flourish due to its significance as a pilgrimage site attracting several devotees and tourists alike.

Temples have a unique economic model that can also be considered as heritage. The financial transaction of the temple remains similar to past generations and continues to function in a similar fashion. The allegiance of people previously associated with the temple may change, but the model remains as long as the community adopts it. A change in the Temple's economy will also significantly alter the cultural values of the Temple. It is a sign in many temples in Tamil Nadu today. The lack of an economy has resulted in temples turning into abandoned sites. Hence, economy is a driver of functional continuity of living religious heritage as evidenced from the case of the Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple, Srirangam.