

Spectrum statescan

Shrouded in mystery

HERITAGE A centuries-old temple in the heart of Malleswaram? **Hema Narayanan** revisits the temple that was unearthed as late as the 1990s and finds that the mystery surrounding it is intact.

Any Bangalorean need not go as far as Rome or as reasonably-near as Talakad to see an excavated site of architectural marvel. Just make a visit to the old-time locality of Malleswaram in the heart of Bangalore, and here on 17th cross, an excavated marvel stands proud and tall.

It was in the late 1990s, that I heard about this unbelievable find. Living just round the corner, I made a visit to this place, and the excavated structure wrapped me in a whiff of disbelief. "How can such an ancient structure be found after these many years in Malleswaram?" Twelve years hence, the mystery still remains unexplained and demystified.

The architectural find is the Nandeeshwara Temple. This temple was discovered accidentally in the year 1997 during an underground excavation for the construction of a house. It is not clear when the temple got submerged under layers of soil, but it has stood a trying 7000 years (according to some versions) at the same spot. What is even more marvellous is the fact that, its aura has not diminished much, even after being buried for years. According to residents living nearby, the temple was buried in its entirety by layers and layers of ground, and the land above it was a straight and flat stretch.

Story behind the excavation
The story is fascinating and goes as follows - in 1997, there were plans to sell away the plot on which the temple now stands. People in the neighbourhood objected to it on the grounds that the land should first be dug up to see if they could find anything deep under, before selling it.

After some hesitation from the person who wanted to sell it away, the digging work did begin, and as they dug deeper and deeper, they unearthed something magnanimous which donned the shape of a temple. And to people's amazement, it indeed was a temple, buried underneath in a near-perfect condition, preserved by the thick layers of soil.

Even the surrounding stone-cut courtyard which was enclosing this underground temple was in a good condition. The courtyard was supported by ancient stone pillars and at the far end; one could see a statue of a Nandi, which was carved out of black stone with eyes painted in a golden hue.

What made it mysterious was the sight where people saw clear water pouring continuously, from the mouth of the Nandi's statue, on to the top of the *shivalinga's* idol, which was right below it.

The *shivalinga* was also made out of the same black stone, and was one level lower (two-tier structure). The positioning is also distinctly different compared to the usually seen images in a Shiva temple - where the Nandi is right opposite the idol of *shivalinga*, outside the temple, at a distance.

From this *sanctum* there were steps that led to a small pool (tank) called the *Kalyani*. Located in the centre of the courtyard, this *Kalyani* was intact. This is where the water flowed down from the *shivalinga* and got

collected. People could even see the 15-feet-deep whirlpool at the centre of the *Kalyani* soon after the excavation. It is a wonder how most parts of this temple survived damage or destruction.

State of the temple today
Everything remains the same even today. And the mystery is as fresh and unexplored as it was in 1997. No one knows how there is a continuous flow of water from the Nandi's mouth to the idol. No one knows about the source of water to its mouth and how it passes from the mouth on to the *shivalinga*. No one knows how the whirlpool came into being.

Everything here remains a mystery - the source of water, the passage, the sculptor, and even the time during which this temple was built. Many hypotheses exist. Some say the water source could be the Sankey tank as it happens to be directly in the line of, and at a higher level from this temple, and when it comes to the period of its construction, some say the temple was built by Chatrapathi Shivaji, while others say, it is older than that.

Regardless of these, the one thing that they were sure of was that, the temple had remained untouched over the years. It was believed that the temple was exactly as it might have been before it was covered by soil. The controversy surrounding it did lead to a legal case initially; however since it was an ancient temple of great heritage, the government took over and preserved it.

I could see the subtle, yet appropriate improvements that have been made to this structure between 1999 and now.

The walls which had leakages and had started rotting have all been plugged and painted again. The area is cleaner and better maintained with the smell having faded away.

The best part is that no one has tampered with the original structure. Even the *Kalyani* is not cleaned of its green moss - there are quite a few turtles swimming around too.

Owners' pride
Though Malleswaram boasts of many temples, none of them are as mysterious and attractive as the Nandeeshwara temple. Huge crowds come to see the temple all day long - and it gets overwhelming on the day of Shivaratri.

I sat down inside the temple arena watching the serene Nandi for a long time with a deep admiration for the unidentified sculptor's ingenuity. I looked at the pace of the turtles coming out now and then in the hope of being fed by devotees. I pondered over the temple's unknown history and appreciated the 11-member committee in Malleswaram which takes care of this temple relentlessly, ensuring the mystery and the magic are intact!



“THE TEMPLE WAS DISCOVERED ACCIDENTALLY IN THE YEAR 1997 DURING AN UNDERGROUND EXCAVATION FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A HOUSE.”



MISCELLANY



PICTURE-PERFECT The Ganapati temple in Southadka. PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR



Belthangady's hidden gem

It's a unique temple with vast expanses of lush greenery. Sitting cozily in the lap of nature amidst such a tranquil atmosphere is Lord Ganapati. Welcome to Southadka, the abode of Lord Ganapati.

Popularly known as Maha Ganapati Kshetra, Southadka in Belthangandy taluk of Dakshina Kannada district is hailed as one of the many *siddhi kshetras* of the district. Surprisingly, not many from outside the district are aware of the existence of this temple which is located just 20 km away from the pilgrim town of Dharmasthala. Away from the hustle and bustle of the main road, this temple with no formal structure surrounding it, offers a unique experience.

A spacious *goshala* (cow shed), a row of petty shops vending *pooja* materials, a small temple office where seva tickets and prasada can be bought and a modest temple kitchen that dishes up tasty *naivedya prasada* is all that Southadka houses. The idol of Lord Ganesha, installed majestically under the bowers of an ancient tree, is spectacular, to say the least. A shining arch is all that surrounds the beautiful idol in black stone and, of course, huge brass lamps. Right in front of the Lord's idol are rows of brass bells tied to wooden beams for devotees to sound them during the pooja. These bells in various shapes and sizes are a great attraction among children. If a temple without walls sounds intriguing, equally fascinating are the stories that the temple relates.

According to the *sthala purana* of Southadka, a Ganapati temple revered by a royal family was once destroyed by enemies. Not to let the enemies destroy the beautiful idol of Ganapati that was at the

temple, cow herds of the place carried it along with them and installed it in a place where cucumber was grown in plenty. Since *southe* means cucumber and *adka* means meadow in Kannada, the place soon gained popularity as Southadka. The farmers of the place reaped huge harvests of cucumber, offered it to Lord Ganapati and even wished to build a temple there. But, according to a popular belief, Ganapati graced their dreams and asked them not to build a temple for him at Southadka as that would mean restrictions on devotees visiting the place to seek his blessings. The Lord expressed his wish to remain in open air with no formal structure surrounding him so that devotees could access him round-the-clock. Lord Ganapati's wish was the farmers' command and to this day the Lord sits majestically in the lush green surroundings of Southadka, blessing his devotees 24/7.

According to temple authorities, of the many *sevas* offered at the temple, the most popular one is the *avalakki panchakajjaya seva* (a delicious mixture of beaten rice, jaggery, til, coconut, honey and banana) performed on a regular basis. The *laddu prasada* too shouldn't be given a miss. One word of caution though: whoever performs the *avalakki panchakajjaya seva* has to share a fair amount of Lord's *prasada* with the many cows around.

How to get there
Southadka is 20 km from Dharmasthala, 45 km from Subrahmanya, 82 km from Mangalore and 2 km from Kokkada. From Bangalore, Southadka can be accessed on the road between Nelyadi and Dharmasthala. About 13 km before Dharmasthala is a huge arch on the left side of the road that leads to Southadka after a drive of about seven km.

Chethana Dinesh

Taking yoga to state schools

The recreational activities of today's children are synonymous with their watching television shows. With play-time coming down because of a thrust on academics, the physical activities of present-day children have been reduced to zilch. The lethal combination of sedentary lifestyles and junk-food culture is wreaking havoc with their physical health, besides spawning obesity-related problems in many children. One sees them carping about excruciating knee-pain, backaches etc, even at a young age.

It was this concern that led S N Omkar to do something revolutionary, for the overall well-being of today's children.

That is how Yoga Mandir Trust, the brainchild of Dr S N Omkar, veteran yoga expert and Principal Research Scientist at Indian Institute of Science took shape. Being the Founder Trustee, he has conceptualised the SURYA programme (Student Upliftment And Rejuvenation through Yoga) for the benefit of today's youngsters.

This erudite scientist, who has shuttled all over the globe, disseminating yogic knowledge through his lectures and demos, is currently on a whirlwind tour travelling across the State teaching yoga to school children, without fees.

This apart, over 36,000 books on *suryanamaskar* authored by him, have been distributed among children, all free of cost. In his lectures, he

even incorporates moral lessons (gleaned from the stupendous work of spiritual scientist Patanjali), thus creating a positive impact on young, impressionable minds.

Yoga for free in the districts
Omkar, who has conducted many yoga camps for India's cricket stars, and trained many Kannada film actors in yogic techniques, explains, "Recently we covered Gadag, T'Narsipura, Kushal Nagar, etc, enlightening school children about the importance of practising yoga and *suryanamaskar* in particular. The positive attributes of this physical exercise is that, it can be practised anywhere, even in a ground! You needn't have to fritter away big bucks, unlike in the case of a gym where you have to spend on gadgets. And you can drastically burn calories. It's a holistic health regimen, which strengthens the joints and muscles."

He continues, "By adopting this fitness regime, one can buffer oneself against many ailments such as backache, knee-pain, cardio-vascular diseases etc, even circumvent age-related problems like osteoporosis, and also pre-empt onslaught of diabetes, hypertension, et al.

"As children have malleable minds and have the alacrity to learn, it's easy to push them into a fitness groove. The values that we ladle out keep their minds calm and unpoluted," he says.

This multifaceted person, who has



FREE EDUCATION Yoga expert Omkar (inset) has conducted camps in Bashettihalli, T Narasipur (above left) and Magadi (above right).

bagged prestigious awards like Rajyotsava Award, Kempegowda Award, etc, has also earned titles like *Yoga Ratna* and *Gnana Ratna*.

He has over 1600 yoga shows on Kannada television channels to his credit, apart from taking up many philanthropic activities. The proceeds from four of his recently released DVDs on yogic techniques, apart from books authored by him and the lectures/work-shops on stress-management in corporate circuits, are all channeled towards the welfare of underprivileged children.

Omkar has also been instructing yoga to

physically and mentally challenged children without fees.

The yoga expert's equally munificent wife, Vanishree (Managing Trustee of Yoga Mandir) also regularly arranges free food for the inmates of an old-age home and a mentally-challenged centre. She even donates saris and *mangalyas* to needy women as part of mass-marriage programmes. But what's also laudable is the fact that this wonderful couple is shortly planning to adopt eight mentally-challenged girls.

Omkar's work on yoga is available on yogaonweb.com

Meera Seshadri

Chitradurga's fort still a major draw among tourists

The Chitradurga fort is a marvel of military architecture made impregnable by the Palegars or the local rulers. It has 19 gateways, 38 entrances, a palace, a mosque, granaries, oil pits, four secret entrances and water tanks. Amidst rocky surroundings inside the fort complex on the hill are many temples. But the history of the place dates back to the time of Emperor Ashoka, if a rock edict dating back to his

time near Brahmagiri is to be believed. The edict reveals that Chitradurga was part of the Mauryan Empire. The fort has stood tall during subsequent reigns. But there are two personalities who are still remembered for their bravery and courage. Madakari Nayaka as a ruler and Onake Obavva as a defender of the fort.

There were clashes between Marathas and Hyder Ali to take control over Chi-

tradurga. After three sharp clashes with Chitradurga in the 1760s and 1770s, Hyder Ali finally took the fort in 1779 and the region became a Mysore province. Madakari Nayaka was imprisoned at Srirangapatna, where he died. The fort remains strong, but the brick walls of the storehouses and granaries built more than 200 years ago are crumbling. Yet, it is an important tourist attraction.

V L Prakasha

