

Preface

Sometime back, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) launched two projects under its programme of *Kṣetra Sampadā*. These projects envisaged not only a set of a specific place or a temple and its units, but its impact on culture of the people surrounding it, the process of interlocking of the devotional, artistic, geographical, socio-political and economic aspects of a particular centre. Two areas identified for such integrated studies were Tanjavur in South and Vrindavana in North India. These in-depth and multidimensional studies of identified areas and monuments resulted in the publication of *Tanjavur Bṛhadīśvara: An Architectural Study*, by Pierre Pichard, in 1995; and *Govindadeva: A Dialogue in Stone*, edited by Margaret Case, in 1996.

Concurrently, started as part of the programme on Chola architecture, undertaken some years back by École Française D'Extrême - Orient (EFEO), Pondicherry, the architectural study of the Bṛhadīśvara temple found a wider meaning in the comprehensive project launched by Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, then Academic Director, at the IGNCA, to investigate the multi-layered and multi-dimensional personality of the Bṛhadīśvara temple. The temple at Tanjavur is unanimously regarded as the greatest masterpiece of Chola architecture. The artistic excellence of the temple lies in the perfect balance of the parts and the whole, the architecture, sculpture, painting, the stone and bronze images, the idols within, and reliefs without. The temple was constructed roughly between A.D. 995 and 1010 by King Rajārāja I, who ruled from A.D. 985 to 1014.

The temple at Gangaikondacholapuram (henceforth designated as Gangai) was built 20 years later by Rajārāja's son King Rājendra I. The latter in his endeavour to extend the limits of his kingdom despatched an army on a daring raid to the north to the banks of the river Gaṅgā. He decided to construct a royal temple at the new capital some 60 kilometres to the north-west of Tanjavur which was named Gangaikondacholapuram, 'the town of the Chola who took the Gaṅgā'. The temple at Gangai is closely related to the Bṛhadīśvara temple by its architectural composition and they both represent a pair in Chola architecture.

Coordinated by Dr. R. Nagaswamy, a standard code was devised so that all subsequent studies under the project would follow it. One of the inter-related modules of the project includes iconographical study of sculpture, stone reliefs, bronze images and mural paintings. Accordingly, Dr. Françoise L'Hernault of EFEO was entrusted with the task of photo documentation of the icons of the Bṛhadīśvara temple. She photographed each icon on each face of the main temple tower and other shrines. She completed the assignment in 1994 and based on nearly 600 photographs of the icons, she prepared a monograph indicating location of these images as a catalogue for the identification of the iconographical forms on the Bṛhadīśvara temple. The monograph prepared by her sheds illuminating light on the iconographical forms of the two capital sites of the Cholas — Tanjavur and Gangai.

Unfortunately, Dr. Françoise L'Hernault passed away in 1999, before her findings, analyses and the beautiful photographs she took, could be published. It was decided to publish her monograph after careful editing; the format, design, etc. are the same as that

of its companion volume *Tanjavur Bṛhadīśvara: An Architectural Study*.

We are grateful to Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, who conceived and directed execution of the whole project; Dr. N.R. Shetty, Member Secretary, extended all encouragement for the publication of this monograph; and Ms. Krishna Dutt, who had coordinated the entire project with EFEO. Lastly, Mr. Vikas Arya, our co-publisher, is to be thanked for bringing out this beautiful illustrated book.

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