



## Preface

The Great temple of *Rājarājēśvara* also called *Bṛhadiśvara* is a visual representation of Cosmic power on earth, that remains according to the pious wish of the builder, so long as the sun and moon lasts. The God who inhabits this abode is said to be seated with his consort on the summit of the metaphysical mountain, surrounded by a circle of peaks in which the divine power descends in diminishing potency as it comes down gradually and takes his abode at the peak of the circle, appropriate to his direction and also the relative importance in the hierarchy. So each *śringa* is a virtual temple. This enables the devotee to see the image of his devotion within his immediate reach. This metaphysical mountain is called the great Mēru – Mahāmēru, which forms the basic concept of the Bṛhadiśvara temple of Tanjore. All the meanings mentioned in ancient Indian literature about Mēru and its encircling peaks are incorporated in the physical temple by Rājarāja, the builder, in the Bṛhadiśvara temple which he called the Southern Mēru, the Dakṣiṇa Mēru. He consecrated two important metal images in this temple, one called “Mahāmēru Viṭankar” and the other called “Dakṣiṇa Mēru Viṭankar” as if emphasizing the concept. Mēru, the mythical mountain is said to be a golden mountain. True to its nature, Rājarāja covered the superstructure of this temple with gold, that made this loftiest golden temple at that time. The images one sees on the upper tiers represented with bow and arrow in their arms are the innumerable Rudras called Sata-rudras, who are said to move in the upper spheres and represent the sun’s rays, a representation unique to this temple. This temple also portrays the five forms of *Pañca Brahmins* – Tatpuruṣa, Aghōra, Sadyōjāta, Vāmadēva and Īśāna, in individual sculptural forms and enshrined in the lower niches. Besides, other manifestations of Śiva, distributed in niches also are the personified weapons *Āyudha-puruṣas* as *Dvārapālas*. With four sides of the sanctum provided with openings and its height exactly double its width at the base, the lofty tower fulfils all requirements of the Mēru type of temple architecture. The Bṛhadiśvara temple locates for the first time in Indian history, the 108 forms of *ṛtta karaṇas* on the upper storey, around the sanctum wall in sculptural form and reflects the concept of cosmic space in which Śiva’s dance takes place. The dance sculptures follow strictly the sequence given in Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra*, are contemporary with the famous Abhinavagupta whose outstanding commentary had not then reached Tanjore at the time of its construction. The available *karaṇas* are discussed in this volume for the first time in the light of Abhinavagupta’s commentary and also the

views of modern scholars. The unique character of the front *maṇḍapa*, and the enclosure and the two *gopuras* are also dealt with.

Interestingly, this royal temple had a few structures added during subsequent centuries like the Amman shrine, Subrahmaṇya shrine, Nāṭarāj shrine and Gaṇeśa shrine which were also built by kings, like the Amman shrine by a Pāṇḍya in 1400 CE, Subrahmaṇya temple by the Nāyaka in 16th century, and the Nāṭarāja and Gaṇeśa shrines by the Marāṭhā ruler in 1800. Thus, it is a total royal temple. The enclosure built by the commander-in-chief of Rājarāja gives the temple a lay out of Śiva Rajadhani. Every structure in the temple is dated with the help of inscriptions. The story is taken through the centuries and its change in meaning and ritual are brought out in this volume which point out what a Hindu temple mean when in full form and through the centuries. The personality of the builder, the role of *Rājaguru* in planning and guidance and also the names of architects who designed and carved the sculptures and executed the lovely paintings are also furnished in this volume which makes it an invaluable work on the temple.

Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, who worked tirelessly for the documentation, study and publication of Indian art and culture, conceived the Bṛhadīśvara project when she witnessed the great *abhiṣeka* performed to that great liṅga Rājarājēśvara at Tanjore. When the milk was poured over the liṅga from hundreds of pots and the milk was descending in waves like the celestial Gaṅgā coming down from *ākāśa* (outer space) it provided the inspiration for the project. Dr. Kapila ji took keen interest in the project that was conceived in several modules like measured architectural drawings, iconographic programme, epigraphic wealth and paintings. The first volume consisting of architectural drawing by Dr. Pichard of the École Française D'Extrême-Orient has already come out. This volume on iconography was in the press when Madame L'Hernault who undertook photography of Tanjore temple suddenly passed away, so the volume on iconography was brought out in her memory. This volume got long delayed, due to causes beyond our control.

I express my profound thanks to Dr. Kapila ji for all encouragement she gave me in this project, and but for whose enthusiastic and scholarly support this project would not have come to fruition. I am glad to note that the present Member Secretary, IGNCA, Dr. Jyotindra Jain is evincing equally great interest and I thank him for this gesture. I am also thankful to Dr. Molly Kaushal, Head, Janapada Sampada Division and Dr. B.L. Malla, Senior Research Officer, for their active support of this work. I thank Shri Vikas Arya for bringing out this volume neatly.

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