

## BRIHADĪŚVARA TEMPLE, TAÑJĀVŪR

Tañjāvūr attained prominence under the Choḷas in the ninth century, Vijayālaya, the first great ruler of the dynasty (850-71), having captured it and made it his capital. The Bṛihadīśvara temple is a symbol of the greatness of the Choḷa empire under its author, emperor Rājarāja (985-1012), whose splendour it reflects. The long series of epigraphs incised in elegant letters on the plinth all round the gigantic edifice reveals the personality of the emperor.

The Bṛihadīśvara temple (pl. I) is a monument dedicated to Śiva, whom the emperor established here and named Rājarājeśvaram-uḍayār after himself. As we gather from the inscriptions running throughout the plinth, the king, on the two hundred and seventy-fifth day of the twentyfifth year of the reign (A.D. 1010), presented a gold-covered finial to be planted on the top of the *vimāna* of the temple.

The temple is the most ambitious of the architectural enterprises of the Choḷas and is a fitting symbol of the magnificent achievements of Rājarāja. The endowments that he made for this temple were numerous, and in this munificence he was joined by not only the members of his family but high officials and noblemen. Several large images in bronze and gold were presented to this temple, and their ornaments, described in detail in the inscriptions, give a vivid picture of the contemporary jeweller's art. Even though most of the images and all the jewels have now disappeared, there are still some exquisite bronzes, representing Naṭarāja, Tripurāntaka, Devī and Gaṇeśa, to give an idea of what great art-treasures were originally housed in the temple. True to his surname, *Śivapādaśekhara*, Rājarāja spared nothing for embellishing

and endowing the great institution, and in this his sister Kundavaī and other members of his family fully associated themselves. The endowments, together with the mention of even small weights and measures, the custom and method of receiving, maintaining and paying amounts or interest on amounts of donation for the regular conduct of special items of worship or for burning a lamp and similar details, give a vivid idea of the economic conditions of the time.

Fine arts were encouraged in the service of the temple: the sculptures, the paintings in the dark passages of the sanctum and even the inscriptions in elegant ChoĻa Grantha and Tamil letters give an idea of the great art that flourished under Rājarāja. Dance and music were greatly cultivated and were equally employed to serve the temple: every evening it was at once an entertainment and a ritual that the townsfolk, assembled in the *mandapa*, witnessed and enjoyed during the ceremony of the waving of lights and the chanting of the Veda and Devāram hymns. Cooks, gardeners, flower-gatherers, garland-makers, musicians, drummers, dancers, dance-masters, wood-carvers, sculptors, painters, choir-groups for singing hymns in Sanskrit and Tamil, accountants, watchmen and a host of other officials and servants of the temple—all are referred to in the inscriptions as having been endowed with adequate grants of land. Taking just a single fact, that Rājarāja constructed two long streets (*talichcheri*) for the accommodation of four hundred dancing women attached to the temple, we can well imagine the lavish scale on which he endowed the temple and its functions. The annual income from the lands set apart for the temple alone is estimated as one hundred and sixteen thousand *kalams* of paddy. The emperor's presentations in silver, gold and cash,