

It is the grandest achievement of the Indian craftsmen. That this monument has so splendidly survived for about a millenium now, in spite of the ravages of time, the political vicissitudes and the utter misuse to which the temple campus was put during the wars between the French and the English, is itself a tribute to the skill and attainment of the Dravidian *sthapati* in building a stone structure so solid, so perfect and of such magnitude.

The *garbhagriha* rests on a high-moulded *upapitham* and *adhi-shthanam*. The *upapitham* measures 140 cms in height and the *adhi-shthanam* measures 360 cms; the entire basement thus measuring 500 cms. In the *sanctum sanctorum* is a monolithic Linga of giant proportions rising to the full height of the two storeys of the *garbhagriha*. There runs a corridor between the outer (*bahya-bhitti*) and the inner (*antara-bhitti*) walls of the *garbhagriha*; in this respect the temple resembles the Pallava Kailasanatha temple at Kanchi. The inter-space is again two storeyed, corresponding to the storeys of the *garbhagriha*; in the lower storey, the vestibule is adorned with three stone sculptures of exquisite workmanship. Both faces of the walls of the vestibule are covered with mural paintings of great artistic merit and co-eval with the monument, with an overlaid layer of paintings of the seventeenth century when the city served as the capital of the Nayakas of Tanjavur and the temple received considerable attention from these rulers.

In the corridor corresponding to the second storey of the *aditala* (of the vertical wall portion) of the *srivimana*, there is a set of panels of stone sculptures in high relief depicting 81 *karanas* of *Bharatanatyam*, out of the total of 108; this would really mark the first (known) plastic representation of these *karanas* anywhere in India. Against the remaining unrepresented *karanas*, there are mere blank blocks of stones. Labelled sculptures of all the *karanas* prescribed in Bharata's *Natya Sastra* are found in the *gopurams* of the later Cholas—the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram in the inner faces of the gateways and the Sarangapani temple at Kumbhakonam on the upper tier.

There is a small seated Bhogasakti in bronze by the side of the north jamb of the doorway of the *garbhagriha*.