

### THE ARDHAMANDAPA AND THE SIDE GATEWAYS

An *ardhamandapa* is in front of the *garbhagriha*. It also served as the bathing hall of the deity, as is seen from the *snapanam* platform (bathing dais) in the centre of the hall. The *ardhamandapa* is approached from the sides as well as the front; the side gateways are imposing. As the *adhishtana* of the temple is very high, the floor of the *garbhagriha* and of the *ardhamandapa* is almost about 6.1 ms from the floor level of the outer courtyard and these two gateways on the north and south walls of the *ardhamandapa* are approached by imposing flights of steps, one on each side. The steps are in two stages, the first flight being from the courtyard level to the top of the *upapitham*; there is a small landing there, followed by the second flight of steps reaching up to the threshold of the gateway. Massive sinuous and ornamental balustrades flank these flights. Both these gateways are flanked by huge imposing *dvarapalas* carved in the true Rajaraja style. Over the lintel of the southern gate is a brief inscription which reads: "Svasti sri Vikrama solan tiru-vasal"—the sacred gate of Vikrama Chola, which was a surname of Rajendra I.\* We will do well to remember here that Rajendra I had been a co-ruler for two years or more when the details of all grants and donations made to the temple were ordered by Rajaraja I (who was still alive) to be engraved on stone. One could presume the active participation of the son in this sacred and unprecedented building venture of the father and the association of his name with the temple. There is a reference to the existence of a gateway known as the *Anukka tiru-vasal*, which has not been identified so far. If one keeps in mind the close association of Rajendra I with Anukkiyar Paravai Nangai (of Tiruvarur and Panayavaram fame), one could reasonably presume that the northern gateway to the *ardhamandapa* (opposite the *Vikrama solan tiru-vasal*) was the *Anukka tiru-vasal*.†

\* ARE 414 of 1924. This Vikrama Chola refers not to the son of Kulottunga I, but to Rajendra I (also see verse 113 of the Tiruvalangadu Plates).

† Since *anukka* means proximity, this gateway could also have been so named due to its closeness to the palace which lay to the north of the temple.