



SPECIAL FEATURE

INTERESTING ASPECTS OF BRIHADHEESWARAR TEMPLE IN TANJORE, TAMIL NADU, INDIA

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INTRODUCTION



- Konark Temple

Brihadeeswarar Temple also known as, **Peruvudaiyar Kovil, Periya Kovil, Rajarajeswara Temple** is a Hindu Temple dedicated to Lord Siva. This temple is constructed in Thanjavur in the basin of **Kaveri** (Cauvery) River in Tamil Nadu India. It is one of the larger temples in India and is a true example of Dravidian architecture and built during the chola period.

Though the history of Thanjavur dates back to the Sangam age, it was between the 10th and 14th centuries that Thanjavur reached its zenith, becoming the centre of Tamil learning and culture. Modern Thanjavur is a fertile plain which is often referred to as the **rice bowl** of Tamil Nadu. The Cholas were great temple builders and Thanjavur bears witness to this, being dotted with no fewer than 74 temples, the most famous of which is the Brihadeeswarar temple.

The Brihadeeswarar temple built by Raja Raja Chola is Thanjavur's greatest landmark and dominates the landscape for miles around. Also known as the **big temple** and acclaimed as **the grandest temple in South India**, it is an outstanding example of superb chola architecture and craftsmanship. The imposing vimanam (the tower over the inner sanctum) is the most striking feature of this temple. It rises perpendicularly to a height of 15m from a square base of 29m and tapers off to a total height of 65.4m. Topping the tower is a monolithic cupola. The structure is made from a granite block weighing about 80 tonnes. It is said that this massive stone was moved into position on a 6km long inclined plain. A gigantic Nandi (bull), the mythical mount of Lord Siva guards the portals of the shrine. It is the second largest monolithic sculpture of its kind in the country. In the inner courtyard of the temple are some superb frescoes reminiscent of the cave paintings of Ajanta.

Arulmozhiarman, a Tamil emperor who was as popular as **Rajaraja Chola I** laid the foundations for the Brihadeeswarar temple during 1002 CE. This was the first among other great building projects by the Tamil Chola Kings. This temple was completed in 1010 AD. This temple is part of the **UNESCO World Heritage Site** known as the Great Living Chola Temples, the others being the

temples in **Gangaikonda Cholapuram** and in **Airavatesvara Temple**. It is also called as the **Dakshina Meru** (Meru of the South). **Mount Meru**, also called Sumeru (Excellent Meru) is considered to be the center of all physical, metaphysical and spiritual beings on earth. **Meru** is the most important **mountain** in Hindu traditions and has clearly mythical aspects that make no comparison with reality.

ABOUT THE TEMPLE



- Birds Eye View of the Temple

This temple stands amidst fortified walls that were likely added in the 16th century. The **Vimanam** (temple Tower) is **216 ft. (66 m)** high and is the tallest in the world. The **Kumbam** (the apex or the bulbous structure on the top) of the temple is carved out of a single rock and weighs around **80 tons**. There is a big statue of **Nandi** (sacred bull), carved out of a single rock measuring about **16 ft. (4.9 m) long and 13 ft. (4 m) high** at the entrance. The entire thing is made out of granite and the nearest source of which is from **Tiruchi**, about **60km.** to the west of Thanjavur. This temple is one of the most visited tourist attractions in Tamil Nadu. A symmetrical and axial geometry rules the layout of this temple. The temples from the same period and the two following centuries are expressions of Tamils Chola power, artistic expertise, and wealth. Emergence of these types of features, such as multifaceted columns along with projecting signals of square capitals signifies arrival of Chola style, which was new at that time.

It is one architectural exemplar, which showcases true form of Dravidian kind of architecture in temples and is a representative of ideology of Chola Empire and South India's Tamil civilization. Brihadeeswarar Temple testament to Chola's brilliant architecture, painting, bronze casting and sculpture.

It is said that after seeing **Pallava Rajasimha**

Temples in Kancheepuram, Empire Rajaraja Chola had the dream of establishing such a huge temple for Lord Siva. Brihadeeswarar Temple is the first among all buildings which make use of granite fully and it finished within five years from 1004 AD to 1009 AD. The greatest Chola **Emperor Rajaraja I** (985 AD – 1012 AD) the son of **Sundara Chola (Parantaka II)** and **Vanavan Mahadevi** built this magnificent temple at Thanjavur, the capital of the **Chola Dynasty**. The inscriptional

evidence, it is known that Rajaraja I started building this temple on his 19th year and completed it on the 275th day of his 25th year. It took just six years to complete this work and on 1010 AD.

The inscriptions and paintings on the walls of the Brihadeeswarar temple record the rise and fall of the city's fortunes. Lord Siva's representation is as a **Gigantic Stone Lingam**. This is covered by a **Vimanam** that extends to **216 feet**. It is built with stones that are bonded and notched without any mortar. The top most stone, an engineering marvel, weighs about **80 tons**.



- Five Rupee Stamp to Commemorate 1000 yrs. of Brihadeeswarar Temple

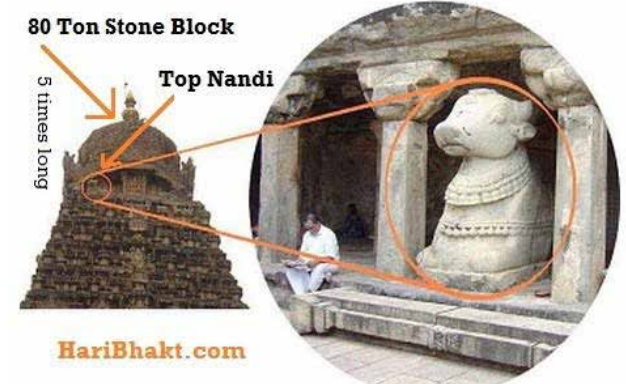
SPECIAL FEATURE



- Nandhi

The precincts of this temple are surrounded with cloisters covering an area of 120m by 240m and are also surrounded on the outside with heavy brick walls for an area of **350 square meters** including a large tank (reservoir).

There is a **Nandi Shrine**, two continuous extensive **Mandapams** (worship rooms), an **Antarala** (ante-chamber), and a **Vimanam** with a high tower all in line on the east-west axis. On the same axis stand Gopuram (temple gateway) of the early phase at the eastern centre of the cloister and the brick wall. They are the sole entrance spots to the temple precincts. Though they are embellished with sculptures, they took much lower than Gopurams of huge temples in South India, as the height of the Vimanam is great in contrast. The second Gopuram on the line of the cloisters is **24 m** in both width and height, lower than the first Gopuram, but its sculptures are larger, with a pair of



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Thanjavur: At top, 80 ton cap stone is 4 times long and 10 times heavier than Nandi below.

- Vimana on temple

Dwarapalakas (Gate keepers) on both sides of the door way.

In the cloisters surrounding the precincts is line of Lingas, symbol of Lord Siva, and wall paintings from the Nayaka period on the rear walls delight the eye of the pilgrims. The Brihadeeswarar temple made of granite and brick is the greatest work of the Dravidian style in its grand scale and high degree of perfection, alongside of the great temple in Gangaikondacholapuram. The development of stone temples in the South Indian style, having



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started at the small temples at Mahabalipuram, reached their summit here. It became the model of the temples to be built in South India and Southeast Asia in the Chola Dynasty period. This Thanjavur Periya Kovil is the greatest creation of the Cholas and it is visible from any area in Thanjavur, perhaps the only temple with such a characteristics.

This temple became popular all over the country on its **1,000th birthday** in September 2010.. In its commemoration, a **one Rupee postage stamp** featuring the 216 feet tall Rajagopuram (Vimanam) was released by the Indian Postal services. A **5 Rupees coin** was released by the Reserve Bank of India. A



- Rs. Five Coin

1,000 Rupees commemorative coin with the same picture as was on the 5 Rupees coin of the Thanjavur periya Kovil was released by the Republic of India Coinage, but was not for public circulation. In April 1954, the Reserve Bank of India had released a 1,000 Rupees currency note with the panoramic view of the temple. But later during the Indra Gandhi rule, all 1,000 Rupee notes were demonetized to curtail black money.

Thiruvarur, the most important **Sapta Vitanka Sthalam**, which had the patronage of the Cholas right from the days of **Manuneehdhai Cholan** and **Musukuntha Cholan** was also nearby. So were numerous temples referred to as **Paadal Petra Sthalangals**, the temples where the Saivite Saints, **Appar**, **Sundarar**, **Sambhandar** and **Manickavasagar**, also popularly called the **Nalvar**, had sung **Thevaram Hymns** (religious hymns praising the deeds of Lord Siva). Then, what made Raja Cholan build a massive temple in his capital city? Few centuries before, the **Pallavas** had given a new dimension to art and architecture. Under their patronage rose

the **Majestic Rathas**, **Shore Temple** and **Yali Caves** at **Mamallapuram**. **Rajsimha Pallavan** built two splendid temples in **Kancheepuram** **Parameswara Vinnagaram** and **Kailasanathar Kovil**. The latter dedicated to Lord Siva, held Rajaraja Cholan's dreams and aspirations were always huge. The visionary he was in all matters, there is no wonder that he envisaged a huge temple to celebrate the power of divinity. By building all these, did he want to stamp his authority and tell the world, Look what I have accomplished? May be the reason was simple. He wanted to show the whole world the towering presence of God that is everlasting against human life that is highly evanescent.

Some Interesting things near this temple The Palace

Near the temple is the palace built partly by the Nayaks sometime around 1550 and partly by the Mahrattas. These buildings have huge corridors and spacious halls. The armoury and observation towers are visible from all parts of the city.

Art Gallery

The palace houses an interesting art gallery which contains several granite and bronze statues from the 9th and 12th centuries.

Library

The Saraswathi Mahal Library in the Palace dates back to about 1700 and has over 30,000 palm leaf and paper manuscripts in Indian and European languages.

Hall of Music

The Sangeetha Mahal in the Palace is an acoustically perfect music hall that is remarkable for its engineering skills.



- RBI Launched 1000 Rupee Coin in India Recently

Schwartz Church

Towards the east of the palace is a church that was built in 1779 by **Raja Serfoji** as a token of affection and esteem for the Rev. Schwartz of the Danish mission.

The Tank

The Sivaganga tank nearby was built in 1777 and is well known for its sweet water.



- RBI Launched 1000 Rupee Currency in India