

EARTH TO ETERNITY

An Exhibition on Brhadisvara

12th Oct. 1993 - 20th Oct. 1993

Government Museum, Egmore, Madras

In the course of history certain regions have developed into cultural centres attracting people from all parts of India. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) has visualised a multi-disciplinary research revolving round a particular region or cultural complex in its programme called **Kshetra Sampada**. They have served as central places, provided space and motivated mobility and interaction. Often a temple or a mosque is the physical or notional centre of such a place. So far these religious and cultural centres have been studied unidimensionally from the point of view of chronology, history, religion and economics, but they have not been taken as totality from which emanates a multiplicity of creative artistic activity.

The Kshetra Sampada, therefore, envisages a study of not only a specific place or temple and its units, but also of its impact on the culture of the people surrounding it. The aim is to understand the entire interrelationship of the devotional, artistic, geographic, social and economic aspects of a particular centre, and to identify the factors that renew it and maintain it as a living presence.



The Brhadisvara Temple was built by Rajaraja I of the Chola Dynasty in 1010 AD. It has been acclaimed as the finest achievement of Chola art. Its artistic excellence lies in the perfect balance of the parts and the whole: the architecture, sculpture, painting, stone and bronze images, the idols within, and the relief without. Its design has been compared to that of a bio-organism in which each part is related to the whole.

The temple has served as a centre of social, economic and political life. A wealth of inscriptions enables reconstruction of the long history of temple administration and provides a vast corpus of economic, social, cultural and organisational information over a span of many centuries.

An attempt has been made to have a complete documentation of the temple with scale drawings of the ground plans, elevations and sections and photographic details of the sculptures and paintings in relation to the architectural programme. The project has been initiated with a view to investigate the multi-layered and multi-dimensional personality of Thanjavur and the temple as a physical and cultural presence. The architectural monument is the centre around which all aspects of the project revolve.

The exhibition for the first time, displays, Brhadisvara as a living organism, as revealed through architectural drawings and photographs. It attempts to portray the complexity of the temple from the inner sanctum, in expanding circle, so that, each part is seen as an individual unit at the same time forming part of the totality of monumental vision. In addition to the architectural and sculptural disposition, the other elements of the temple like the paintings and the epigraphs are illustrated in their proper perspective.

The epigraphical wealth, revealing various historical aspects of the temple meticulously documents, the administration of the temple, provisions made for daily worships, festivals, numerous metal images consecrated, number of jewels made of gold, precious stones, utensils, land endowed in different villages, Tevaram singers, number of dancing girls, musicians, etc. These are illustrated through original estampages.

Some original objects like copper plates of the age of Rajaraja, Chola bronzes of Thanjavur region and

coins of the period were also exhibited.

The exhibition was organised jointly by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Government Museums, Egmore, Madras.