

**HERITAGE MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE
RĀJARĀJĪSWARAM TEMPLE,
THE WORLD HERITAGE MONUMENT AT THANJAVUR:
A FEW SUGGESTIONS**

V. Selvakumar*

ABSTRACT

The Brihadhāswara or Rājarājīswaram temple is a medieval Cōḷa monument which has been declared as a world heritage monument by the UNESCO. This monument plays an important role in the heritage landscape of Tamil Nadu. This paper argues the context and the landscape around the monument need to be enhanced for better heritage management.

Keywords: Heritage Management, Thanjavur, Cōḷas, Archaeology, India

I. Introduction

In a sense, archaeology is a much older discipline than heritage management, which is gaining importance across the world in the age of globalization. During the age of Renaissance in Europe, and in the pre-World War I scenario, there existed greater interest in idealistic, intellectual pursuits; and as a result, several academic branches of social sciences and humanities developed. The cultural developments in the twentieth century, after the two World Wars, were dominated by various concepts and practices such as communism, democracy, nation states, industrialization, commercialization, welfare state and capitalism. During the course of this era, science and technology, human development and economic progress were given more importance. In the post-1980s, capitalism, information technology, cross border movement of people in search of better pastures, and globalization have come to dominate the scenario. Globalization, individualism, commercialization and functionalism have, generally, prevailed over other discourses, during this period. Functionalism and utilitarianism continue to dominate global thinking and perspectives. As a result, there are often questions regarding the use and relevance of the social sciences and humanities including the disciplines of history and archaeology, especially when public money is involved.

Archaeology in India has remained with its core focus on digging and publishing till the late 20th century. The development of the concept of heritage as a resource to be preserved, showcased and managed is a more recent development. In the recent years, marketing and tourism and heritage management have begun to dominate the scenario and the idea of heritage management has gained ground. However, heritage management practices have not taken serious roots in the country. There is a need to focus on heritage management issues across India in the context of development in various spheres of life. In this paper, I present a few suggestions for better heritage management of the World Heritage Monument of Brihadhāswara temple and its context, at Thanjavur.

* Department of Epigraphy and Archaeology, Tamil University, Thanjavur 613010, selvakumarodi@gmail.com

Thanjavur: The epi-centre of the Cōḻa Empire

Thanjavur is located in the state of Tamil Nadu, in the Lower Kāvēri Valley (Fig. 1). Vijayālaya is hailed as the founder of the Cōḻa Empire which began in the middle of the ninth century CE. The Tiruvālaḍkāṣu copper plates of the Cōḻa king Rājēndra I mention that Vijayālaya Cōḻa conquered the town of Thanjavur and built a temple for Nicumpacūta, which is identified with a Kāḍi temple at Thanjavur. Thereafter, the rulers who followed Vijayālaya from Ātitya to Rājarāja I moulded the mighty Cōḻa Empire, and the town of Thanjavur, naturally followed the glory of the empire.¹ Although Rājēndra I shifted the capital from Thanjavur to Kaḍkaikoḍḍacōḻapuram, and built his palace and the famous Siva temple, also a World Heritage Monument, there, Thanjavur never lost its glory. Post Cōḻas, Thanjavur continued to be the political capital under the Nāyakas and the Marāḍas till the arrival of the British, and now it is a town with rich heritage resources.

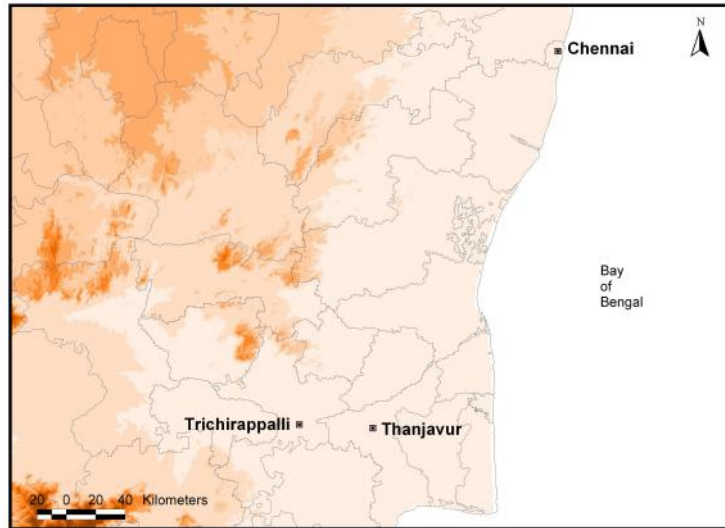


Fig. 1 Location Map of Thanjavur

Rājarājāswaram: An Architectural Marvel

The Brihadhāswara temple (Brihadhāswarā in Sanskrit = "the big Siva") was built by Rājarāja I and it was completed in the year 1010 CE.² The temple stands massively like the mount *mēru*, the Himalayas (Fig. 2). The World Heritage Monument of Brihadhāswara temple completed one thousand years of its glorious history in 2010. Originally named after the builder, Rājarāja I, as Rājarājāswaram, now it is known as Brihadhāswara, because of its large size. The name Rājarājāswaram could mean the temple of Rājarāja or the temple in which Rājarāja himself is *āswara*, the lord Siva. The qualities of the temple include, its massiveness, and its role as symbols of human effort and labour, planning, organization and royalty. It is an architectural marvel, very well designed structure that speaks volumes about the engineering skills of the Cōḻas. It excels in architecture, paintings and sculptures.

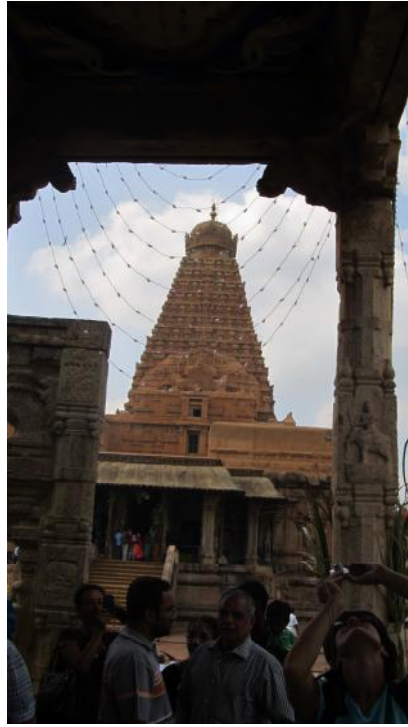


Fig. 2 View of the Brihadhiswara Temple, Thanjavur

The temple is a simple, but bold architectural edifice. It has two *gōpurās* (tower above the gateway) in front, and a fortification wall and moat that were constructed by the Nāyakas. It has a huge courtyard, with the main shrine, two *maṅḍapās* and a portico in front on a plinth. The shrines of Amma , (consort of Siva), Subrahma , ya and Ganēsha are later additions to the temple. The *nanti* (bull, vehicle of Siva) in front, considered to be a Nāyaka contribution, is the second largest example in India. The original *nanti* is said to be in the southern *prakāra maṅḍapa* of the temple; a few researchers say the original *nanti* has been taken away elsewhere.

The sculptures of the *dēvakōśa* (niché) are very wonderfully carved and appear solid. The images of Harihara, Artanāri, Tripurāntaka and Lakshmi stand testimony to the sculptural talents of the Cōḷa artists.

The original Cōḷa paintings which were covered by the later Nāyaka paintings were exposed in the circumambulatory passage around the *sanctum sanctorum*. They depict several stories, e.g. *Tripurāntaka* story (destroyer of three forts) associated with Siva. Further above in the circumambulatory passage are the 81 complete *karōas* of Bharatanāḍyam illustrated in the representations of Siva. Other 27 *karōas* (dance postures), out of the total 108 *karōas*, are left incomplete.

Donations and Inscriptions

The inscriptions all around the temple, engraved very elegantly, neatly record what was given to the temple, which had its own treasury. We do not know where exactly it was located. These inscriptions specify the length, weight, nature of the jewellery very graphically with all technical details. Their material value would run in millions of rupees, while antique value is unimaginable.

The sheep that were given to the temple were donated to the shepherds, who in turn agreed to donate a specific amount of oil/ghee to the temple daily for lighting the lamp. Rājarāja symbolically lashed the temple to the far away territories, as the temple was given lands as far as SrĀ Laōka, perhaps to symbolically unite his empire.

Temple Servants

The temples also had four hundred women servants called *tēvaraÇiyars* (servants of god). They were given a specific amount of salary and they were housed around the temple. There were brought from different parts of the Cōḅa Empire. The temple has now been inscribed in the World Heritage Monument (Cultural) list by the UNESCO.

II. Heritage Management Issues

The temple is being conserved very well by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), and it is a living monument. The structure and the landscape within the fortification are maintained by the ASI. Araōma , ai Dēvastā , am Trust, and Tamil Nadu State Hindu Religious Charitable and Endowment Department are responsible for the performance of the *pūjas* (worship and rituals and festivals) and festivals. Its conservation is being taken care by the Archaeological Survey of India. This paper primarily focuses on the heritage management of the temple.

Archaeological conservation activities should not be limited to a monument alone, and they should cover the context and the landscape. The monument is now a part of a bustling, expanding town, and it is surrounded by thick settlements and civilian facilities. Very nearby the monument stands a railway flyover, and in front of the temple runs a main road, which witnesses heavy traffic and congestion, creating difficulties for the visitors to enter monument smoothly.

The Moat

The moat around the temple was dug perhaps during the late Medieval period, when fortifications were part of defence strategy. On the southern and western sections of the moat flows the Grand Anicut irrigation canal from the river Kāvēri. The moat in front of the temple remains unmaintained (Fig. 3). This area has uncontrolled growth of plants, and this area can be maintained by raising a park with lawn.



Fig. 3 View of the Moat around the BrihadhĀswara Temple, Thanjavur

Congested Access

The access to the temple is through the main road in front, with heavy traffic; often there is traffic congestion nearby the temple. The parking area is in front of the temple, and as a result visitors find it very difficult to cross the road to reach the temple.

Front Area Maintenance

The area between the temple and nearby the main road is not being well designed and maintained. It has not been paved well. The existing front-area appearance does not suit the monument's World Heritage Status.

III. Suggestions for Better Management of the Landscape around the Temple

The landscape around a monument is very important for its management and conservation. If a monument is in an area without any settlement around, maintenance of its landscape would be easier. However, we cannot curse the human settlements around any monument. A monument which is not visited by people cannot possibly have any use. In a country like India, management of the area around the temple should be very carefully planned. Often there is public outcry, when a monument is taken over by the government, and taking the local people into confidence before developing the area around the monument is very important.

Heritage Management Plan

While the monument (Big temple) is well maintained by the ASI, the surrounding area needs to be managed more carefully. The government and the local bodies should develop a heritage management plan for maintaining the surroundings of the Thanjavur temple. This area should be kept clean and it can be maintained with gardens and the use of plastic bags could be banned.

More heritage management vision is essential in showcasing these monuments for the public. Apart from the Archaeological Survey of India, the Thanjavur Municipality and the state government should also devote interest in developing the monument. I remember a case in Taiwan, where even an old beer factory is managed and maintained beautifully. Compared to such later period vestiges, the World Heritage Monuments including the RājarājĀswara temple deserve very special attention.

Role of Local Bodies

Local bodies should realise that they have the rare chance of possessing a World Heritage Monument in their area, and its surrounding should be maintained very carefully. The local body at Thanjavur should take care in planning and beautifying the area around the monument very well.

Shifting the of road in front

The road that leads in front of the RājarājĀswara temple could be shifted. It can be directed on the southern side of the canal and a road can be built across the Rājā Mirasdar Government Hospital, which is located about 500 m east of the temple. A flyover could be constructed combining this area with the roads around the Thanjavur Bus Stand (Fig. 4). Currently a heritage walkway is planned in this area, and the existing road could be diverted nearby the heritage walkway. Similarly a road opening could be created west of the Srinivasapuram, a locality west of the big temple, linking the Medical College Road. This can reduce the traffic congestion in the area around the temple. The idea should be to divert public traffic away from the temple vicinity, so that the temple can be visited by people and the tourists peacefully.



Fig. 4 GoogleEarth Map of Thanjavur. White line indicates the suggested new road

Development of a Museum of Cōḻa History

Although Thanjavur has an art gallery, and a museum and a park at Maḍima, Çapam, there is no dedicated museum on Cōḻa history. A separate museum of Cōḻa history can be created to holistically showcase the activities and achievements of the Cōḻa Empire.

Use of the area around Collector's Bungalow

The government is planning to shift the Thanjavur district Collectorate away from the current location in 2013. This area should be used for the Heritage Management activities related to the Brihadhāswara temple. The parking area in front of the temple could be shifted to this location and the entire area in front of the temple could be left open with a park.

Tourism and Monuments

Unrestricted tourism and related activities should also be avoided in the vicinities of heritage monuments, as they can lead to vandalism and damage of the monuments as seen at a few monuments. Tourists can be educated about the importance of the heritage.

Public Awareness and Heritage Education Campaigns

Recently there were issues at Mahapalipuram when a temple was to be taken by the ASI. ASI is not against the people; its aims only to protect the monuments and its surroundings. Public awareness campaigns and heritage education in schools can contribute to the development of awareness among the public. More focus, thought and deliberations are necessary for the management of the area surrounding the archaeological monuments of India.

Conclusions

India is very rich in heritage monuments; however there needs to be more focus and thought in heritage management planning. More planning and organization is necessary to showcase the heritage monuments for the public. The focus should not only be the monument, but also the areas and the landscapes around the monument. Only when the monument context is enhanced it becomes more presentable and further, the management of monument context is also a kind of personality statement of the nation's approach and respect for heritage. Involvement of various local stakeholders is very important for better upkeep and maintenance of a monument's surroundings. Heritage education and awareness initiatives should also be planned in the schools. The various stakeholders need to work together to take care for establishing the surrounding of the temple and its landscape in a more planned fashion. Heritage tourism should be done in a sustainable manner and it should never harm the heritage resources; only certain categories of monuments should be opened for tourism. In the process of heritage management, the interests of people living in the vicinities of the monuments and the stakeholders should not be ignored, while at the same time strict measures are necessary to maintain the monuments and their surroundings. One of the heritage management issues concerns the area immediately around the heritage monuments across the country and detailed deliberations and policy level discussions are necessary for managing this area, without harming the interests of the local people and the monuments.

End notes

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- ¹ Nilakanta Sastri, K.A. 1955. *The Cōḷas*. Madras University Historical Series, no. 9. Madras:University of Madras.
- ² S. R. Balasubrahmanyam, 1975. *Middle Chola Temples Rajaraja I to Kulottunga I, A.D. 985-1070*. Faridabad: Thomson Press (India), Publication Division, 1975; Pichard, P. 1995. *Tanjavur Brhadisvara: An Architectural Study*, New Delhi:Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts; George Michell and Indira Viswanathan Peterson. 2010. *Great Temple At Thanjavur*. New Delhi:Marg Publications; Balasubramanyam, K. 2009. *Thanjavur*. Thanjavur:Agaram Publications.