

Brihadeeshwar temple – A Marvel of the South Indian

The Brihadeeshwar temple at Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu, is the world's first complete granite temple. Brihadeeshwar temple is the best example of excellent workmanship, grandeur and it has stood the testimony of time with its magnificent central dome which is a great attraction for one and all. The temple has been declared as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



This temple is a tribute and a reflection of the power of its patron *Rajaraja Chola I*. It is an important example of Tamil architecture achieved during the Chola dynasty. Built by emperor *Raja Raja Chola I* and completed in 1010 AD, the temple turned 1000 years old in 2010.

The temple is most famous due to its unique architecture. The temple is said to be made up of about 1,30,000 tons of granite. Granite is not found in the surrounding areas. It is not known where this massive granite was brought from. The absence of a granite quarry within a 100 km radius of the temple requires logistics of epic proportions to get the stone to the construction site. As hard as it was to find, Granite is harder to carve. Yet the great *Chola* wanted a temple to be covered with the most intricate designs.



Thanjavur “Periya Kovil” (big temple) stands amidst fortified walls that were probably added in the 16th century. The temple tower (viman) is 216 ft (66 m) high and is among the tallest of its kind in the world. The Kumbham (Kalasha or Chikharam, the apex or the bulbous structure on the top) of the temple is carved out of a single stone and it weighs around 80 tons. There is a big statue of *Nandi* (sacred bull), carved out of a single rock, at the entrance measuring about 16 feet long and 13 feet high.



On 1st April 1954, Reserve Bank of India releases a 1000 Rupees currency note, which features Brihadeeshwar temple’s panoramic view marking its cultural significance and heritage. Now, these currency notes are popular among collectors.

However, as part of the millennium celebrations, a commemorative coin of 1000 Rupees was issued by the Government of India. The coin, weighing 35 gm, has 80 per cent silver and 20 per cent copper. On the obverse side, the coin bears the emblem of the Lion Pillar with the words ‘Satyameva Jayate’ in Hindi below it. The name of the country and denomination are spelt out in Hindi and English.



On the reverse side, figure of *Raja Raja Chola-I* in a standing posture with folded hands with a figure of the temple and the words depicting the 1,000 years of the temple is written in Hindi and English.

Brihadeeswar temple is also called as *Peruvudaiyar Kovil*, *Thanjai Periya kovil*, *Rajarajeswaram* and *RajaRajeshwara* temple. It is a Hindu temple, which is dedicated towards Lord Shiva. Every month, the day on which the ruling star is *Satabhisham* is celebrated as a festival, as that was the birth star at the time of *Raja Raja*. The other festival is *Krittika* day in the

month of *Kartika*. The annual festival for 9 days is celebrated in the month of *Visakha* (May), during which a drama on *Raja Rajeswara* is also enacted.



The temple has *Chola* frescoes on the walls around the sanctum sanctorum portraying *Shiva* in action, destroying demonic forts, dancing and sending a white elephant to transport a devotee to heaven. The Archaeological Survey of India, for the first time in the world, used its unique de-stucco process to restore 16 *Nayak* paintings, which were superimposed on 1000-year-old *Chola* frescoes. Other significant feature is that the shadow of the *gopuram* (pyramidal tower usually over the gateway of a temple) never falls on the ground.

Having the world's tallest temple tower, 1,30,000 tonnes of granite in the structure and being a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Brihadeeshwar temple is a Marvel and a tribute to the South Indian Architecture.

(Source: PIB)