

The provision of free food is an important part of the festivities in the temple and is a regular practice. On such occasions additional staff are engaged to oversee distribution and cleaning. However, as the number of devotees has increased, arrangements for this practice to be performed in adjacent areas is being worked out in a way that will not offend religious sentiments.

The *sadaya vizha* is a big event, but is well controlled. The important festival (*annaabhisheka*) at the temple at Gangaikondacholapuram is performed with great enthusiasm, but the event is well managed.

Tourist facilities

Even though they are living temples that are actively used for worship, the Great Living Chola Temples still attract a large number of tourists/visitors, who come to experience the spectacular buildings created by a single dynasty within a span of 150 years. To cater to this class of visitors, basic facilities such as drinking water, clean and well-maintained toilets, and approachable pathways have been provided. At Thanjavur, a small structure blending harmoniously with the temple complex provides a place for the safekeeping of footwear, a cafeteria, a souvenir centre, a cloakroom and a shop for the sale of articles required for worship. In addition, there are small, informative panels outlining the importance of the various structures.

A thousand years since its construction, the temple of the Chola Emperor Rajaraja I still fascinates visitors (Figure 7). An Interpretation Centre helps visitors understand the temple, its architecture and the activities of the ASI. Entry to the exquisite Chola murals painted in the narrow circular passage around the sanctum (*garbhagriha*) is restricted, bearing in mind the fragile nature of the paintings (Figure 8). It is also difficult to appreciate them in the dark humid narrow passageway. Photographic reproductions of the paintings are displayed in their original dimensions in the interpretation centre so they can still be appreciated by the general public. The dance reliefs (*karanas*) found in the upper circular passage are also exhibited here as fibreglass reproductions. A touch screen providing detailed information on the Cholas and a bookstore will be provided soon. A sound and light show (*son et lumiere*) is also planned at Thanjavur.



Figure 7. View of the temple from the south east - then and now - Thanjavur.