

THE WORKERS SURPASSED THEMSELVES.

A BROOMSTICK CAN GO INTO EACH OF THE TINY HOLES WHICH ARE PLACED AT EQUAL DISTANCES.

WHAT GEOMETRIC PLANNING!

LOOK AT THE HORSE'S BRIDLE IN THIS PANEL. THE STONE IS CARVED TO LOOK LIKE A REAL ROPE.

THE 18-FOOT HIGH DWARAPALAKAS OR GATEKEEPERS ASTOUNDED ALL.

IT IS BIGGER THAN A FULL-GROWN ELEPHANT!

IT IS SAID THAT THE CAPSTONE OF THE TEMPLE WAS MADE OF A SINGLE STONE WHICH ORIGINALLY BELONGED TO A COWHERDESS.

I WISH I COULD GIVE THIS STONE TO THE BIG TEMPLE.

YOUR WISH SHALL BE COMMUNICATED TO THE KING.

DID THAT VOICE COME FROM HEAVEN?

THE CAPSTONE WAS READIED, AND THEN -

LET A LONG RAMP BE BUILT FROM THE WOMAN'S HOUSE TO THE TOP OF THE TEMPLE.

BRILLIANT IDEA! AND ELEPHANTS SHALL PULL THE STONE UP.



HOWEVER, IN REALITY THE CAPSTONE IS MADE OF SMALLER STONES PUT TOGETHER. WHAT IS AMAZING IS THAT THE STONES ARE HELD TOGETHER WITHOUT USING CEMENT OR ADHESIVE OF ANY KIND!

A HUGE STATUE OF NANDI STANDS AT THE ENTRANCE. THERE IS A STORY THAT ONCE RAJA RAJA STOOD QUIETLY WATCHING THE SCULPTOR AT WORK.



WHEN THE STATUE WAS DONE -

IS IT MY IMAGINATION OR HAS THE NANDI GROWN BIGGER SINCE I SAW IT LAST?

YOUR MAJESTY, A LIVE TOAD IS TRAPPED IN THE STONE WHICH CAUSES IT TO GROW.

THEN YOU MUST RELEASE THE CREATURE.



IT WILL BE SAFE IN THIS SACRED POND.



I WANT YOU TO INSCRIBE ON THE WALLS A LIST OF THE GIFTS GIVEN BY ME, MY FAMILY AND MY PEOPLE TO THE TEMPLE.

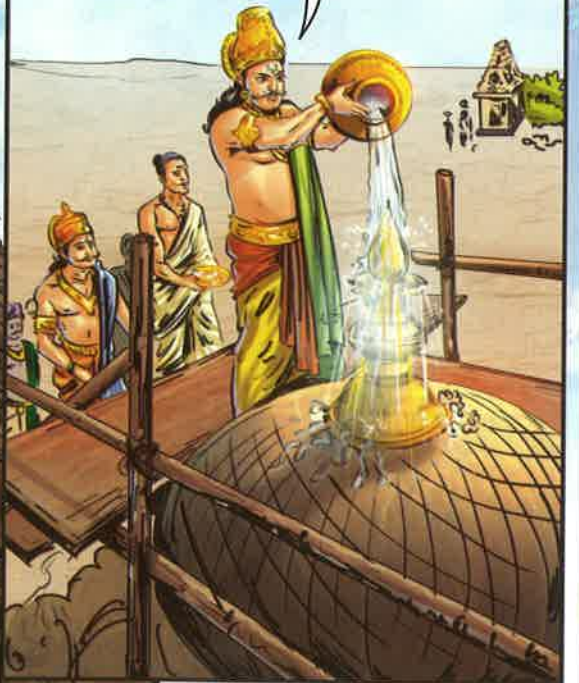


THE INSCRIPTIONS GIVE DETAILS ABOUT THE REIGN OF THE CHOLAS.

THE TEMPLE WAS FINALLY COMPLETED IN 1010 CE.



TODAY, 25 YEARS AFTER BECOMING THE KING, I CONSECRATE THE BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE WITH WATER FROM THE SACRED RIVERS.



RAJA RAJA CHOLA HAD ALSO ORDERED THE WALLS OF THE TEMPLE TO BE ADORNED WITH FRESCOS.



THE MOST MAGNIFICENT OF THESE PAINTINGS IS THAT OF SHIVA AS TRIPURANTAKA*.



THE STORY GOES THAT ...

... ONCE, THREE ASURA BROTHERS, KAMARAKSHA, TAARAKAKSHA AND VIDYUNMALI PERFORMED INTENSE PENANCE TO BRAHMA. AFTER MANY YEARS, BRAHMA APPEARED TO GRANT THEM A BOON.



GRANT US THREE CITIES THAT CANNOT BE DESTROYED.

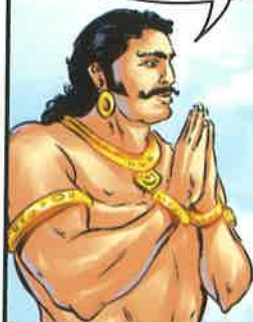
NOTHING LASTS FOREVER.

THEN LET IT BE THAT THEIR DESTRUCTION IS CAUSED ONLY BY A SINGLE ARROW.

THE THREE CITIES WILL BE IN DIFFERENT WORLDS AND MADE OF GOLD, SILVER AND IRON.

THEY WILL MEET ONLY ONCE IN A 1000 YEARS.

I GRANT YOUR WISH.



* THE FORM IN WHICH SHIVA DESTROYED TRIPURA

THE THREE CITIES WERE JOINTLY CALLED TRIPURA.



FILLED WITH A SENSE OF POWER, THE BROTHERS LET LOOSE A REIGN OF TERROR.

NO ONE CAN TOUCH US. WE HAVE BRAHMA'S BOON!

HELP!

HELP!

I MUST DESTROY THESE THREE.



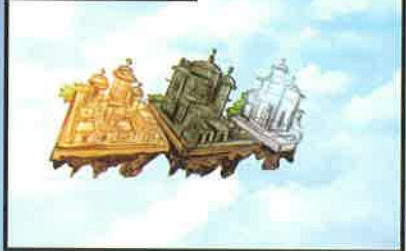
MOUNT MERU SHALL BE MY BOW, VASUKI THE SERPENT ITS STRING AND VISHNU THE ARROW, WITH AGNI AT THE TIP AND YAYU AT THE END.

I, VISHWAKARMA WILL MAKE BRAHMA YOUR CHARIOT AND FOUR DEVAS SHALL BE YOUR HORSES.

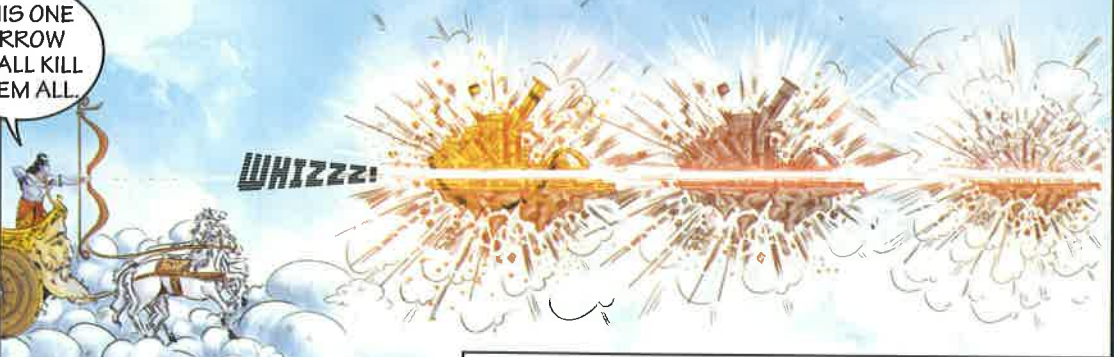


SHIVA WAITED FOR THE BROTHERS TO MEET AFTER A 1000 YEARS. WHEN THEY DID MEET ...

... AND THE THREE CITIES CAME INTO LINE -



THIS ONE ARROW SHALL KILL THEM ALL.



AND THUS SHIVA ENDED THE TYRANNY OF THE THREE ASURAS.

ANOTHER FRESCO TELLS THE STORY OF SUNDARAR, A SHAVITE* SAINT.



SUNDARAR WAS THE ADOPTED SON OF THE CHIEF OF A LOCAL KINGDOM. AT HIS WEDDING -



STOP! THIS MAN SUNDARAR IS MY SLAVE. I HAVE THIS PALM SCRIPT SIGNED BY HIS FOREFATHERS TO PROVE IT.

SUNDARAR FOLLOWED THE OLD MAN TO A TEMPLE.



ALAS, SUNDARAR! WHAT THIS MAN SAYS IS TRUE. HE IS NOW YOUR MASTER.

ENOUGH CHATTER! NOW FOLLOW ME.



* FOLLOWER OF SHIVA



SUDDENLY -

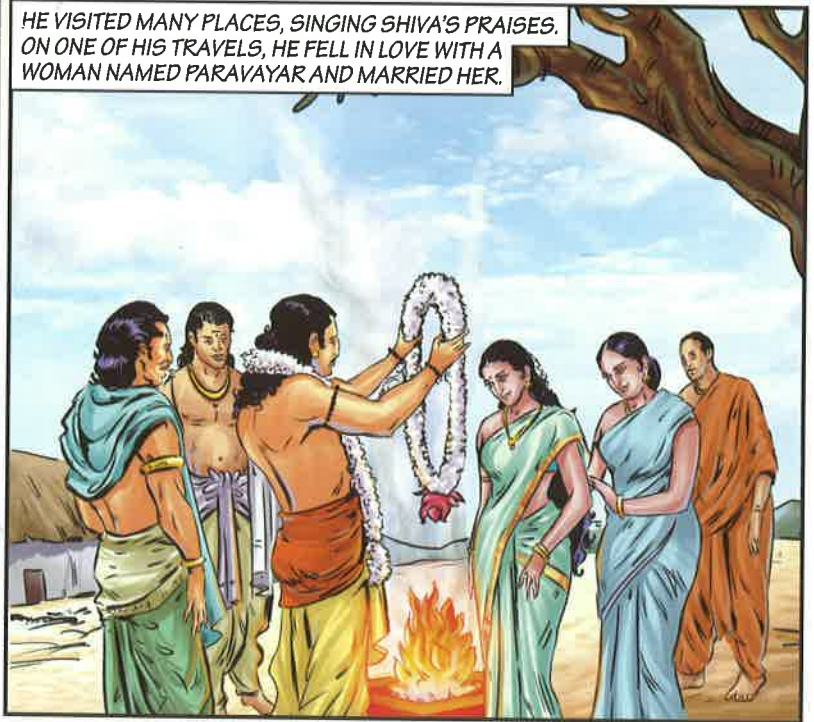
HUH?
WHERE DID
HE GO?

I WAS THE
OLD MAN, SUNDARAR.
I HAVE CHOSEN YOU TO
COMPOSE DEVOTIONAL
SONGS FOR ME.

I AM
HONOURED,
O LORD!

SUNDARAR COMPOSED MANY
SONGS AND WROTE ABOUT
THE SHAIVITE SAINTS.

HE VISITED MANY PLACES, SINGING SHIVA'S PRAISES.
ON ONE OF HIS TRAVELS, HE FELL IN LOVE WITH A
WOMAN NAMED PARAVAYAR AND MARRIED HER.



AFTER SOME YEARS HE MARRIED ANOTHER WOMAN CALLED SANGLIYAR.

YOU HAVE SINNED BY MARRYING TWO WOMEN! YOU WILL BE BLINDED FOR THIS SIN.

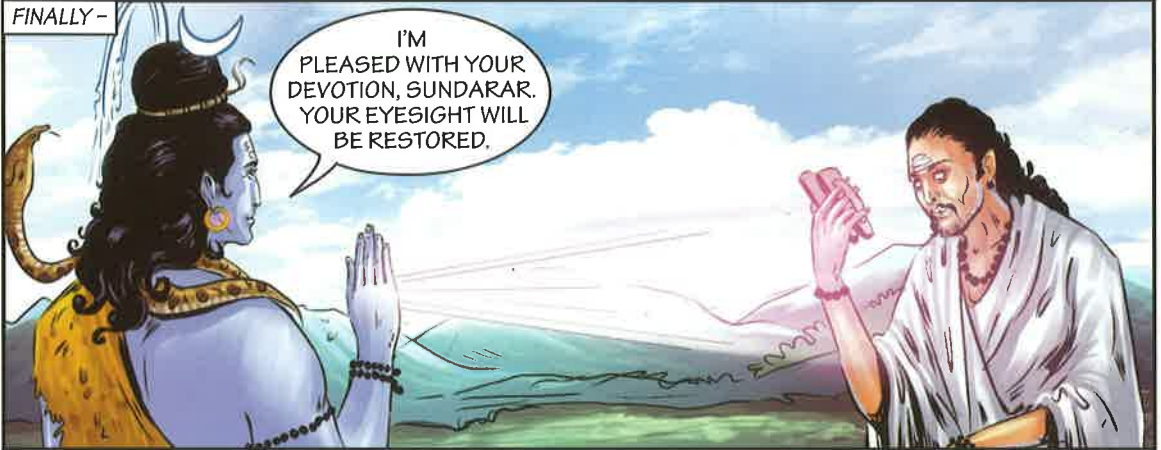
AAH!

THOUGH HE WAS BLIND, SUNDARAR CONTINUED TO SING SHIVA'S PRAISES.



FINALLY -

I'M PLEASED WITH YOUR DEVOTION, SUNDARAR. YOUR EYESIGHT WILL BE RESTORED.



MANY YEARS LATER -

IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO LEAVE THE EARTH, SUNDARAR. I HAVE SENT INDRA'S WHITE ELEPHANT TO FETCH YOU TO MY ABODE ON MOUNT KAILASA.

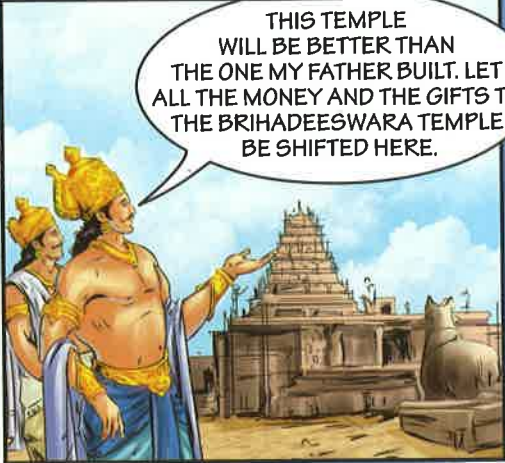


RAJENDRA CHOLA CONSTRUCTED A HUGE ARTIFICIAL LAKE AT GANGAIKONDA CHOLAPURAM.



I WANT THIS 'LIQUID PILLAR OF VICTORY' TO BE FILLED WITH WATER FROM THE HOLY GANGA BROUGHT HERE BY THE KINGS I HAVE DEFEATED.

HE ALSO BUILT A TEMPLE THERE.



THIS TEMPLE WILL BE BETTER THAN THE ONE MY FATHER BUILT. LET ALL THE MONEY AND THE GIFTS TO THE BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE BE SHIFTED HERE.

UNDER RAJENDRA CHOLA, THE CHOLA EMPIRE REACHED ITS ZENITH, ITS INFLUENCE REACHING AS FAR AS DISTANT JAVA AND SUMATRA.

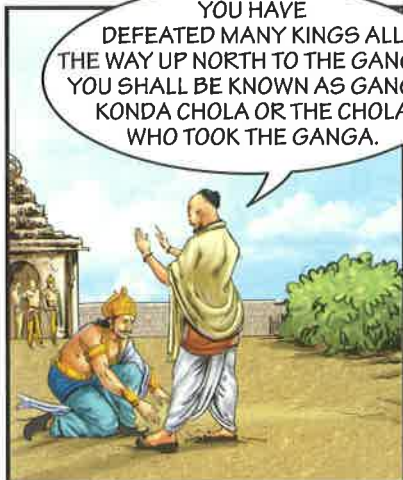


THOUGH THE CHOLA EMPIRE ENDED IN 1279 AD, THE MONUMENTS THEY BUILT IN AND AROUND THANJAVUR CONTINUE TO ENTHRALL THOUSANDS OF VISITORS FROM AROUND THE WORLD.

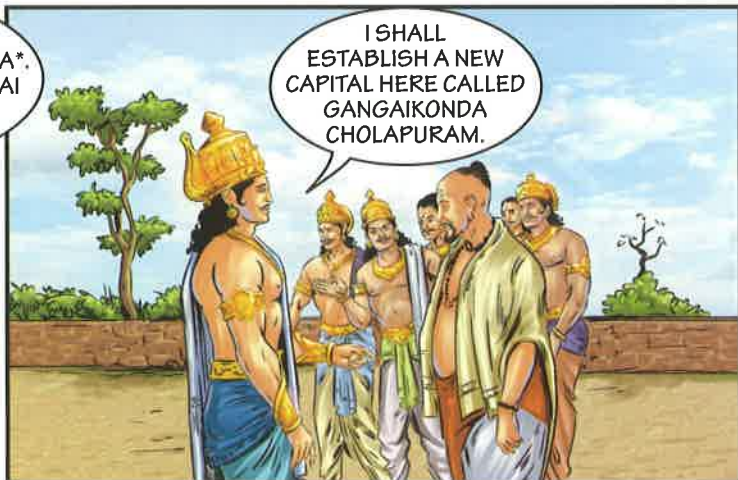
WHEN RAJA RAJA DIED, HIS SON RAJENDRA CHOLA FURTHER EXPANDED THE EMPIRE.



YOU HAVE DEFEATED MANY KINGS ALL THE WAY UP NORTH TO THE GANGA*. YOU SHALL BE KNOWN AS GANGAI KONDA CHOLA OR THE CHOLA WHO TOOK THE GANGA.



I SHALL ESTABLISH A NEW CAPITAL HERE CALLED GANGAIKONDA CHOLAPURAM.



* THE RIVER GANGA

MORE ABOUT THANJAVUR



THE MARATHAS AND THE NAYAKS WHO RULED THANJAVUR IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD CONTRIBUTED GREATLY TO ITS RICH HERITAGE. THE SUBRAMANYA SHRINE IN THE BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE COMPLEX HAS A PORTRAIT GALLERY OF THE MARATHA RULERS OF THANJAVUR.

THANJAVUR PAINTINGS ARE FAMOUS FOR THEIR UNIQUE STYLE. EARLIER, STRIPS OF REAL GOLD AND GEMS WERE USED IN THE PAINTINGS.

THANJAVUR IS ALSO KNOWN FOR ITS BRONZE SCULPTURES. THESE CAN BE SEEN IN THE ART VILLAGE WHERE THEY ARE MADE USING TRADITIONAL METHODS.



THE RAJAGOPALA CANNON IN THANJAVUR IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST AND LONGEST GUNS. THIS CANNON WAS CALLED THE AGNIYANTRA OR FIRE-BREATHING WEAPON IN MARATHA TIMES. IT WAS MADE IN THE 1600S DURING THE REIGN OF RAGUNATHA NAYAK AND HAS NEVER BEEN MOVED FROM WHERE IT WAS ORIGINALLY PLACED! DESPITE BEING IN THE OPEN THE CANNON HAS NOT RUSTED.

IN 1931, S.K. GOVINDASWAMI, A YOUNG LECTURER, WAS EXPLORING THE DARK NARROW PASSAGE SURROUNDING THE SANCTUM OF THE BRIHADEESWARA TEMPLE WHEN HE FOUND SOMETHING BENEATH THE CRACKED PLASTER OF THE WALLS. IT WAS THE CHOLA FRESCOES WHICH HAD BEEN HIDDEN FROM SIGHT FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS!