

All these efforts have resulted in the grandeur of the temple being restored, strengthening its foundations and vastly improving its environment and approach ways.

At Gangaikondacholapuram, the entrance tower (*mahadvara*) of the temple, which was in ruins, has been conserved with the available stones. The fortification wall has been strengthened and the temple complex has been cleared of debris and landscaped. The tower (*vimana*) was treated to prevent the infiltration of water.

At Darasuram, unevenness in the floor of the corridor (*mandapa*) was rectified and the entrance (*gopura*) doorway of the temple was restored to its original height. The high water table in the temple courtyard is now controlled by pumping and draining the excess rainwater.

A careful balance had to be maintained during the scientific conservation process so as to respect the continuity of worship. Meanwhile the routine and daily maintenance of the temple and its environs are attracting more tourists to the temples.

### Religious use

The religious activity of any 'living' temple involves daily, weekly, monthly and annual cycles of worship. Important festivals attract a large number of devotees and also a wide range of associated cultural activities.

The religious management of the temple is administered by the Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department and follows a set of well-thought-out principles that are a tradition in such temples. They include accounting for income, the appointment of priests and other staff, and interacting with the public on the functioning of the temple and its various festivities. In the temples at Thanjavur and Darasuram, the hereditary trustee is the owner of the temple and is the decision-maker for all aspects of the rituals and festivals connected with the temple. However, the trustee is bound by agreement with the ASI. Apart from the daily observances, all special *pujas* (festivals) require prior permission from the ASI.

In the past, even if temples were actively used for religious purposes, such activities were restricted to daily *pujas* only. Annual festivals were a mere formality (Figure 5). However, thanks to the wide-reaching conservation efforts of the ASI and the grand ritual consecration (*mahakumbhabhishekam*) of the temple at Thanjavur in 1980 and 1997, participation is continually increasing. This has resulted in the revival of special *pujas* on a very large scale:

1. *pradoshapuja* for the *Nandi* (the vehicle of *Siva*) enshrined in front of the main temple once every fortnight;
2. special worship for *Dakshinamurthy* (an aspect of *Siva* as a guru) every Thursday;