CHAPTER IV
FAIRS AND FESTIVALS IN TAMIL NADU

Fairs, festivals, ceremonies, celebrations and rituals are aspects which assist the preservation of customs. They assist the society to be self conscious, united, purposive, and prosperous and progressive. By fairs and festivals unity and integration could be achieved among the people of different components of a society. On the basis of religion and principles behind them they are to be understood to estimate the cultural heritage of India. Fairs, festivals and rituals pave the way for the introduction of customary practices. They are as sacred as the religion itself. They stand for ceremonies and observations. The people have the staunch and unshakable faith over the adoption of specific rituals which will bring about marvelous results in this materialistic world. To gain the grace of God by way of appeasing him the people conduct various rituals and festivals. Every individual observes rituals and participate in fairs and festivals with the belief that they will do him good. They are also tradition-oriented. Intense devotion towards deities and religion paved the way for the conduct of rituals and festivals. So many rituals are included in the day to day life of the individuals as observances of religious practices. “Any amount of bodily discomfort and suffering would be put up with to satisfy the requirements, imposed upon the observers of the customs, rites and ceremonies and that too gladly, patiently and calmly”. From time immemorial the Hindus have undertaken various auspicious ventures which form the basis for rituals and festivals. Being a
land of religious devotion and beliefs India is also known for its festivals. Due to the availability of different kinds of religions varieties of festivals are celebrated by every religion during different periods.

The festivals are significant because they bring people of various sects, castes and classes nearer to each other. They bring unity and solidarity amidst multifarious diversities. They make the people to be happy. "They bring fun and laughter and good feeling to people whose lives might otherwise be drab and dull and they remind people, year after year, of a special event or happening something that might otherwise be forgotten as the years go by". Without any exception people of all religious orders celebrate various festivals according to their tastes and conveniences. It must be remembered that fasting and feasts are also associated with the festivals. In addition to that it is evident that festivals have caused the introduction of specific ceremonies, customs and traditions. The Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Parsees and others have their own religious festivals. They celebrate them according to the principles of their own religious faiths. Without any deviation that are celebrated in a particular month in auspicious and appropriate days.

The festivals in India manifest the living force pulsating in its culture. The Indian mind carved out three categories of festivals. They are Vrata, Parva and Tyohars. The first being essentially an occasion to fast, the second one is the commemoration of the sanctity of notable events and the third
one is a sheer celebration. Mahatma Gandhi divided these overlapping of Indian festivals in two categories as *Kamya* and *Nitya*; the first pre–supposing special desire and the latter having no desires but love and devotion. The festivals of India enshrine and keep alive men and ideals that have left their impression over the history of the race. A survey of festivals celebrated by various communities in different parts of the country would require a considerable volume. Therefore, the most important festivals of Tamil Nadu, which represent each community and almost every region of Tamil Nadu, are being described in this chapter.

Tamil Nadu has perhaps the largest number of religious celebrations every year. Most of the temple festivals take place during September – October and in the post-harvest months of March – June. The duration of each festival is from three to ten days more. The main deity is draped in colorful bright costumes and adorned with valuable and rare items of jewellery of the distant past. The deity is mounted on specially constructed mounts called ‘*Vahanams*’ and taken round the temple in processions.

Tamil Nadu is a land of temples. The temples and festivals go together. Festivals are not only religious occasions but also cultural and commercial landmarks. They are part of the life of the people. They help family re-unions. People meet at festivals which are designed to ensure individual happiness commingled with social joy and domestic éclat. At *Ekadasi* and *Skanda*
Shasthi festivals, devotees undertake constant fasting. All the other Hindu festivals are occasions of great feasting.

The seasons of the Tamils are called Kar, Kuthir, Munpani, Pinpani, Ilavenil and Mudhuvenil. Each of them have two month duration and they denote the cloudy, rainy and chill weather respectively.

The year is also divided into two periods of six months each 1) Uttarayanam, the period of longer days and shorter nights (mid January to Mid July ) and 2) Dakshinayanam, the period of shorter days, longer nights and inclement weather (mid July to mid January). The first is the chosen period for festivities. The second is generally avoided for them. In the beginning of the Dakshinayam, spiritual heads and monks observe Chaturmasya halting at a particular place, preaching and practicing a life of intense devotion and meditation. The festivals are divided into three categories i.e., Religious festivals, Temple festivals and Central festivals and such aspects are described in detail in this chapter.

Religious Festivals

Religious festivals are divided based on thee major religion in Tamil Nadu-Hindu festivals, Muslims festivals and Christian festivals.
HINDU FESTIVALS

Pongal Festival

In the month of January, on the first day of the Tamil month Thai (January 14th or 15th), Tamils celebrate Pongal. This is their most significant festival and is now often called Tamizhar Tirunal or the festival of the Tamils. After a good harvest, people celebrate pongal as thanks giving to the Sun God.1 It is celebrated for four days. On the first day, Bhogi, houses are cleaned and white washed and all unwanted things are burnt in bonfires that burn through the night. This also symbolizes the destruction of evil and the ushering in of the good. It was celebrated last days of Tamil month Markazhi.2 On the second day is called Surya Pongal (Pongal of the Sun). In Pongal, people wear new clothes and worship the Sun God with offering a sweet pongal (a dish of boiled rice and pulses mixed with Jaggery),3 sugarcane and turmeric. In rural areas, the worship is held out in the open and the Pongal is cooked on open fires in new clay pots. In city homes, the worship is held inside, facing east, where the sun’s rays fall on the floor and usually involved a new metal utensil and the gas stove. This occasion is called Makara Sankranti in rest Tamils.4

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1 P.V.Jagadisa Ayyar, South Indian Festivals, New Delhi, 1982, pp.8-9.
Pongal Festival

Alanganallur Jallikattu
On the third day, **Mattu Pongal** is celebrated to venerate the cattle and to worship them.\(^5\) This is specially significant in villages where cattle are not only wealth but provide sustenance to the family with their milk or their labour. The cattle are bathed, their horns are brightly painted and they are garlanded. Turmeric and vermilion are applied to their foreheads; they are ritually worshipped and given pongal, sugarcane and other choice food to eat. On the **Mattu Pongal** day, **Eru taluvudal** or **manju virattu** games are held in several villages in and south of Madurai, in Tamil Nadu. These "fights" are called **Manju virattu** (in which the bull is chased over a long stretch and subdued) and **Jallikattu** (in which the bull is subdued in confined space),\(^6\) the triumphant young men who participate in them, return with whatever is draped on the bulls-dhotis, banknote garlands, or gold coin/Necklaces. In Madurai District, **Jallikattu** is conducted at Alanganallur, Paravai, Avaniyapuram, Vadippatti and many places. But Alanganallur a village near Madurai, is world famous for its bull fight.\(^7\) Many young men get hurt in this valorous sport; sometimes even members of the audience get gored. Tourists are coming from abroad to see the race.

**Rekla** race or Bullock cart race is held on 17\(^{th}\) of January on the Madurai Melur Road. Crowds gather to see the exciting race of the bullocks. Sheep fighting and cock fighting are also conducted by the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation

\(^6\) S.Muthiah, (ed.), *op.cit.*, p.81.
\(^7\) "Martial Arts of Tamil Nadu - India", Department of Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu, Chennai, 1994.
every year during the time of Pongal festival.\textsuperscript{8} Sheep are allowed for dual fight and while they are fighting, they should not turn their backs lest. They are treated as losers. The master of winner sheep takes the money. In cock fighting, the cocks are being trained for fighting purpose. A small knife is tied at every cock’s leg while they are fighting if any one sustains injuries and fall down, it is declared a defeated one. The wounded cock is taken by winner as his prize.\textsuperscript{9}

The day after \textit{Mattu Pongal} is called \textbf{Kaanum Pongal} (literally, "seeing" \textit{pongal}). On this day, families go on picnics, visit relatives and generally take in the sights. During Pongal festivities, almost everything else comes to a halt because it is the State holiday for four days.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{Thaipoosam}, full-moon day in the Tamil month of Thai, is celebrated in Palani, Madurai, Tiruchendur, Thirupparankundram, Swamimalai, and all Saivaite temples. In Palani the devotees as a vow carry miniature \textit{Kavadis} and the temple car is dragged and also the silver \textit{Ratha} is drawn round the town temple in \textit{Thai poosam} day.\textsuperscript{11} In Madurai, the image of God and Goddesses of Lord Sundareswarar and Meenakshi are floated on a raft round the \textit{Vandiyur Teppakulam}(Tank) twice in the morning and one in the evening. This festival was started by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{8} "Madurai - A Nector City", Department of Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras, 1996.
\item \textsuperscript{9} "Festivals of Tamil Nadu, India", (From January to December)”, Department of Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras, 2000.
\item \textsuperscript{10} S.Muthiah, (ed.), \textit{op.cit.}, p.81.
\item \textsuperscript{11} R.K.Das, \textit{Temples of Tamilnad}, Mumbai, 2001, p.97.
\end{itemize}
Tirumalai Nayakkar after he built the Teppakulam. It is celebrated to commemorate the anniversary of his birthday.\textsuperscript{12} Another important festival in Tamil month of Thai is Thai Amavasai Festival is arranged at Kaveripoompattinam, Vanagiri and Poompuhar in Thanjavur district, for the period of three days commencing one day before the amavasai day and ending one day after the amavasai day.\textsuperscript{13}

The beginning of the month of Adi (mid-July) is the start of the festival season in earnest. All the Fridays of this month are considered especially auspicious and thousands of devotees visit Sakthi temples on these days. Adi Perukku, which occurs on the 18\textsuperscript{th} day of the month Adi is a celebration of the first flood of water in the river Kaveri, which feeds Thanjavur district, the rice bowl of the state. Rural families, all along the banks of the sacred Kaveri, worship the river, set afloat little lamps on it and picnic on the river banks.\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{Adi Amavasai festival} also is celebrated at Kaveripoompattinam, Vanagiri and Poompuhar, Thanjavur district for the period of three days commencing one day before the amavasai day and ending one day after the amavasai day in the month of Adi Every year.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} W.Francis, \textit{Madura Gazetteer}, Madras, 2000, p.35.
\textsuperscript{14} S.Muthiah, (ed.), \textit{op.cit.}, p.82.
Mahasivaratri Festival

Mahasivaratri is another Hindu festival observed by the Saivites on the night of the fourteenth day of the dark half in the month of Masi in Tamil, corresponding to the English months of February-March. It is observed in honour of Siva. The action of the men, who fasted and offered sacrifice to the lingam during the night consecrated to Siva is treated as a meritorious one. It is believed that such actions will be offered a honoured and respectable place in Kailasa i.e., heaven. This feast of Sivaratri or night of Siva is having a legendary story behind it. "In commemoration of the fortunate 'loya', the devotees of Siva spend the night and the proceeding day in fasting and without sleep, entirely observed in worshipping God, in offering sacrifices and presenting him with the better leaves of the Margosa tree as neivedhya which they after words eat." So it is evident that both Siva and Vishnu are worshipped in an identical fashion in the form of festivals of night.

The temples considered specially holy for the worship of Iswara on Maha Sivaratri nights are those at Tiruvaikavur near Papanasam in the Tanjore District, Omampuliyur near Vaithisvarankoil in the South Arcot District, Srisailam and Kalahasti in the District of Kurnool (A.P).

On the west wall of the central shrine in the Ratnachaleswara temple at Ratnagiri, Thiruchirappalli district, there is a record of

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16 P.V.Jegadisa Ayyar, op.cit., p.37.
18 P.V.Jagadisa Ayyar, op.cit., p.40.
Chola King Rajaraja III making a gift of 1000 *kasus* for the expenses incurred on the *Sivaratri* day.

In the temple of Nagesvaraswami at Vijayamangalam, Coimbatore District, there is a record,\(^{20}\) of Virarajendra (1207-1252 A.D.) making offering and gifting 90 lamps on the day of *Sivaratri* in the 14\(^{th}\) year of their reign.

On the doorpost of the entrance into the Tambrattiamman temple at Solamadevi, Coimbatore district, there is a record \(^{21}\) datable to 24\(^{th}\) regnal year of Vikrama Chola (1005-1045 A.D.) which mentions a gift of money for *Sivaratri* festival to be observed at the temple of Rajaraja-Iswaram-Udaiyar in Kadappadi alias Virasolapuram.

**Tamil New year Day**

Tamil New Year’s day or *Varushapirappu* as it is called is celebrated on the first day of the Tamil month of Chitrai, which falls in April.\(^{22}\) While the Keralites celebrate it as *Chitrai Visu* the Tamilians celebrate the New Year with a grand feast. Though the feast has several delegacies, an important dish is a mixture of neem flowers and jaggery of bitter and sweet taste signifying that the year ahead may contain both enjoyable and distasteful events which have to be taken in the stride. All Hindus visit the temples on this day, where special *Poojas* are offered.

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\(^{22}\) [www.tamilnadutourism.org](http://www.tamilnadutourism.org).
Pillayar Chaturthi

In the month of *Avani* (August-September) *Ganapathi* or *Pillaiyar*, the elephant headed God, is worshipped in a festival called *Pillayar Chaturthi*. While in states such as Maharashtra and Karnataka this festival is conducted on a massive public scale. In Tamil Nadu it has traditionally been a private celebration. Each family gets its own small idol of Pillaiyar in clay, adorns it with flowers and *arugampul* (a kind of grass) and worships it with offering of rice sweet called *mothakam* or *Kozhukattai*. On the following day the clay idol is dropped into a well or waterway or the sea. Of late, following the North Indian trend, massive idols of Ganapathi are being worshipped in public places in Madras and other cities of Tamil Nadu and these are taken out in procession, after several days of worship to be immersed in the sea, tank or river. It is hard now to remember that when the British banned public assemblies in 1894, Ganapathi as we know it today was Lokmanya Bal Gangadhara Tilak’s way of spreading freedom message through a legitimate religious festivals.\(^{23}\)

Gokulashtami

Following close on the heels of *Pillayar Chaturthi* comes *Gokulashtami*, known as *Janmashtami* elsewhere in the country. This is a celebration of the birth of Lord Krishna.\(^{24}\) It was observed on the eighth lunar day in the dark fortnight of the Tamil month of Avani (August & September). The festive day is

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\(^{23}\) Lavkush Mishra, *Cultural Tourism in India*, New Delhi, 1999, p.194.

\(^{24}\) *Idem.*
Vinayaka Chaturthi Festival

Navarathri
known by different names, some call in *Krishna Jayanthi* day. A few call it *Janma Asthami* day, while a many of the people call as *Gokula Ashtami* and *Shri Jayanthi*. Women draw tiny baby feet with wet rice flour from the entrances of their homes to their *puja* rooms to signify the arrival of the divine child. A great variety of sweets and snacks are offered to the deity along with freshly churned butter, curd and milk.

**Navarathri**

The next major festival, which arrives either in September or early October, is *Navarathri*, which is called *Dussehra* elsewhere in the country. This is a nine day festival in which the goddess, in all her forms, is worshipped. On the first three days, she is worshipped as Durga, on the next three as Lakshmi and on the last three as Saraswathi. The last day of *Navarathri* is celebrated as *Ayudha Puja* (the *Puja* of implements), when all machines, roles, implements and books are worshipped both at home and at place of work.

Ayudha Puja day is traditionally known as Saraswathi Puja day in homes and on this day books and musical instruments are placed before the Goddess of Learning, a *puja* is performed and Her blessings are sought. The day following *Saraswathi Puja* is called *Vijayadasami*. It is customary that children begin their education on this day or art is commenced or any new business or industrial venture started.

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One special way in which Tamils celebrate *Navarathri* is the *golu* or display of dolls. Wooden steps are erected in each household and these are covered with cloth or coloured paper. On the steps are displayed a multitude of clay, peppier mache, wood and plastic dolls, usually representing deities. *Kolus* are arranged even in the major temples, and devotes flock to see them. Nowadays, the *Kolu* has become a social occasion. The guest is merely expected to visit the house, admire the *golu*, sing devotional songs, if able, and leave a few minutes, when she is given *sundal* (boiled pulses), petal leaves and coconuts.

**Deepavali**

*Navarathri* is followed, in late October or early November, by *Deepavali* (The festival of lights).\(^{28}\) There is a considerable difference between the ways this festival is celebrated. In North India, where it is called *Diwali*, and in Tamil Nadu, it is even celebrated for a different reason. In North India, *Diwali* is considered auspicious to Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, and is also a celebration of the return of the epic hero, Rama, to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile in the forest.\(^{29}\) Tamils celebrate *Deepavali* to mark the destruction of the demon *Narakasura* by Lord Krishna. A dying and penitent Naraka asked Krishna for the boon that his death anniversary should be celebrated as a joyous festival forever afterwards. Thus it is a pan Indian festival.

\(^{28}\) Lavkush Mishra, *op.cit.*, p.197
\(^{29}\) P.V.Jegadisa Ayyar, *op.cit.*, p.145.
Karthikai Deepam

*Karthikai Deepam* is celebrated on the full moon day in the Tamil month of *Karthikai* (November-December). During this festival a lovely display of clay or brass lamps is arranged both in temples and in homes. This is a festival of great beauty, sacred to Siva. In Tirvannamalai, where Siva is supposed to have revealed himself as a column of fire, a great *Jyoti* (light) is lit on the hilltop above the temple, in the evening on this day. *Karthikai Deepam* also celebrated at Tirupparankundram and devotees gather in their thousands to see this flame. The other important places for the observance of *Karthikai Deepam* festivals or *Karthikai Viratam* are Tiruchengodu, Palani, Vedaranyam and Tiruchendur. In almost all the Murugan shrines of Tamil Nadu this festival is celebrated.

On the north wall of the central shrine in the Kalahastisvara temple at Kalahasti, there is a record relating the 12th year of the Chola King, Rajendra Choladeva I (1011–1043 A.D) mentioning a gift of Gold for celebrating the festival of *Kritika-dipa* (*Kartikai Deepam*). Thus it was a festival of light.

**MUSLIM FESTIVALS**

The two most important festivals among Muslims are *Ramzan (Id-ul-fitr)* and *Bakrid (Id-ul-zulha)*. The former is celebrated after fasting for thirty days; each day the fast commences from well before dawn and lasts till dusk, during which period nothing is eaten or drunk,

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30 S.Muthiah, *op.cit.*, p.84.
33 Madras Epigraphical Department of Annual Report No.291 of 1904.
not even a drop of water is consumed. The end of the month, and of fasting, is signaled by the sighting of the New Moon and festivities begin the next day after the *Id-ul-fitr* prayer.\(^{34}\)

*Id-ul-zulha* is celebrated to commemorate the sacrifice of a son that one of the Prophets of Islam was ready to make in the name of God.\(^{35}\) Those Muslims who can afford it sacrifice sheep after the special prayers on this day. One third of the meat is retained by the family, and the rest is distributed among friends, relatives and the poor. Irrespective of the sect, school or group people belong to all Muslim groups celebrate these two festivals.

A festival that has a special significance for the *Shia Muslim* is *Muharram*.\(^{36}\) It is a ten day period of intense mourning in memory of Hosseinein, the grandson of Prophet Mohammed. The mourning period is for ten days, but some orthodox Shias mourn for forty days. Tazias, highly decorated floats, are taken around in provision, and the climax is when bands of youth inflict injuries on their person with whip-lashes while chanting the names of the Prophets Grandson and son in law.

Another important Muslim occasion is the birthday of Prophet Mohammed. The celebration of which is known as Milad –in-nabi.\(^{37}\) These are all common festivals of Muslims of the world.

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\(^{35}\) Interview with Hajee A.Shahul Hameed, Leading Charchole Merchant, Madurai, dated 11.10.2005.


\(^{37}\) Interview with Hajee Razak, Father of the Researcher (Scholar), Kariyapatti, dated 10.10.2005.
CHRISTIAN FESTIVAL

There are several Christian festivals celebrated in Tamil Nadu. In every Christian household, *Christmas* is celebrated with much value. People decorate Christmas tree at home and attend the midnight mass prayer in the church. They wear new clothes and exchange gifts.\(^{38}\)

Another important festival, *Easter* is a spring time festival celebrated as the religious holiday commemorating the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the son of God. On the third day after his death on the cross, Easter is observed by the churches on the first Sunday following the full moon that occurs on or following the spring equinox (March 21). So Easter becomes a movable feast which can occur as early as March 22nd or as late as April 25th. Easter celebration starts with Good Friday, which marks the fructification of Jesus Christ.\(^{39}\) Christians attend mass at the church and have a feast rejoicing thereafter.

TEMPLE FESTIVALS

*Vaikunda Ekadasi*

*Vaikunda Ekadasi* is a special worship set apart for Vishnu.\(^{40}\) For the sake of achieving immortality, they conduct *pujas*. On the *Ekadasi* day, which comes during the Tamil month *Margali* (December-January), the devotees keep awakened throughout the night. On the dawn of the day, they visit the Vishnu temple where the way to

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\(^{38}\) Interview with Dr. Antony Paul, History Professor, Arul Anandar College, Karumathur, dated 5th January 2005.


\(^{40}\) Abbe Dubois, *op.cit.*, p.701.
heaven (*Sorkka vasal*) will be kept opened for the devotees. Generally *Ekadasi* falls on the 11th day of the moon in significant for them. The devotees end the night of the eleventh day in a temple dedicated to Vishnu. The devotees fasts for the whole of the day, eating and drinking nothing. It is a custom among the Hindus to remain together in the presence of God and remain awake with all the members of the family. All the temples dedicated to Vishnu are important for the observance of *Ekadasi*, yet the Ranganatha temple at Srirangam in Tiruchirappalli district is considered specially important.

**Arudra Festival**

Arudra festival is observed in the Tamil month of *Margali*, Corresponding to the English months of December-January. The occasion is one specially favorable to propitiate the dancing aspect of Siva (Nataraja). Though this festival is observed in all places considered sacred for the worship of Siva, at Chidambaram in Cuddalore District it is said to be of a special importance. The other places held sacred for the worship of Nataraja and for the observance of the *Arudra* festival are Perur near Coimbatore, Courtralam near Tenkasi, Tirunelveli, Madurai and Tiruvalangadu near Chennai. At Tiruvorriyur near Madras, in the temple of Adipurisvara, there are a number of lithic records, relating to gifts for the observance of the festival.

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44 P.V. Jegadisa Ayyar, *South Indian Shrines*, pp.204-205.
47 *A.R.E.*, 104 and 109 of 1912.
Kumbakonam : Maha Maham Festival

Arubathamoovar Festival
Mahamagam Festival

The Mahamagam festival, which comes off once in twelve years, when Jupiter passes the constellation of Simha or Leo, draws pilgrims from all parts of the country and a bath in the Mahamagam Tank at Kumbakonam. This usually happens on the full moon day of the Tamil month of Masi (February – March). The tank is situated in the heart of the town and covers an area of twenty acres. There are sixteen mandapas along the banks and they are dedicated to various deities. It is believed that on this auspicious day the tank receives supplies of water from the Ganges and eight other holy rivers and all the deities are said to remain present here on that occasion. To the north of the Mahamagam tank there is a shrine dedicated to lord Siva under the name Kasi Viswanatha. It is said that lord Kasi Viswanatha, at the instance of the Navakarnikas, i.e., nine virgins namely Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Narmada, Saraswathi, Kaveri, Kumari, Payoshni and Sarayu, came down to Kumbakonam and stayed with them. Temples for all the Nava Kannikas have been built here. The Mahamagam tank Mandapams are stated to have been built in the year 1542.

Arubathumoovar Festival

The Arubathumoovar festival (the festival of the 63 saints) is celebrated in Kapaleeswarar temple in Mylapure, Madras. During the March, last ten days, the roads around the temple are closed to traffic. During each evening, the presiding deities of the temple are taken out

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49 M.P. Bezbaruah, (ed.), op.cit., p.326
52 S. Muthiah, (ed.), op.cit., p.84.
in procession on a different Vahana (mount). The Vahana could be a silver bull, or horse, or elephant. On the ninth day, the deities are taken out in the massive temple car, which is pulled by devotees along the four streets surrounding the temple. The next day, the idols of the 63 Saivite saints (arupathumoovar) are taken out in procession. On this day, much of Madras turns out in Mylapore to witness the procession.\textsuperscript{53} A sort of fair springs up around the temple.

**Panguni Uthiram**

*Panguni Uthiram* falls on the full moon day in the Tamil month of Panguni (March-April).\textsuperscript{54} This day is considered to be specially favorable for the worship of Siva. The festival is also known as *Kalyana Varata* since goddess Meenakshi is said to have wedded god Sundaresa at Madurai on this day.\textsuperscript{55} This festival is specially observed in Madurai and Tiruvarur\textsuperscript{56} in the Tanjore District as well as in other places such as Conjeevaram,\textsuperscript{57} Vedaranyam,\textsuperscript{58} Tirunelveli,\textsuperscript{59} Perur\textsuperscript{60} and Valparai\textsuperscript{61} in the Coimbatore District.

\textsuperscript{53} *Idem*.
\textsuperscript{55} P.V. Jegadisa Ayyar, *op.cit.*, p.49.
\textsuperscript{58} *Ibid.*, p.41.
\textsuperscript{59} *Idem*.
\textsuperscript{60} P.V.Jegadisa Ayyar, *op.cit.*, pp.49-50.
Madurai Chitrai Festival

*Chitrai* festival is celebrated for twelve days in Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple. On the tenth day celestial weddings takes place in the temple. On the eleventh day is the car festival. The god and goddess have been taken out into procession separately by car (*big ratha*), in four Masi Streets. On the twelfth day the festival is shifted to river *Vaigai*. Alagar (Vishnu) of Alagarkovil, the brother of Meenakshi, comes to attend his sister's wedding. But the marriage is over before his arrival. With disappointment, He crosses or entering the river on “*Chitra Pournami*” and it is observed on the full moon day in the Tamil month of *Chitrai* and finally he returns back to Alagarkovil. The festival comes to an end on that day. During the time of *Chitrai* festival the TTDC conduct various cultural programmes of Thirumalai Nayak palace and organised a fair in Thamukkam Ground. A large number of tourists and devotees attend this festival.

Skanda Shashti

Skanda Shashti is one of the important festivals associated with the cult of Murugan. It is celebrated in the Tamil month of *Ayppasi* on the first day after the new moon and ends on the sixth day (*shashti*). There are many legends associated with the celebration of this festival. The most widespread among these are related to the epic battle between the demon Sura Padhman and his brothers with Lord

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65 *Dinamalar*, Madurai 22nd April 1997, p.11.
Madurai: Chitrai Festival

Car Festival
Murugan. As per legend, Sura Padhman a demon was given a boon by Lord Shiva. Emboldened by this he started terrorizing all forms. Unable to bear his torment the Gods as well as humans beseeched Lord Shiva to deliver them from the atrocities of the demon and his brothers Tarakasura and Singhamukhasura. Lord Shiva acceding to their entreaties and created Lord Murugan to destroy the demons. The battle between the forces of good and evil is the central theme of the Skanda Shashti festival.

For five days, elaborate pujas and fire rituals are conducted. On the sixth day, the idol is taken out in procession and a mock battle is enacted. The demon Sura Padhman and his brothers are depicted in the form of a wooden image whose head is detachable. The demon is first fitted with an elephant head to represent Taraka Sura. Next it is fitted with the head of a lion to represent Singhamukhasura and finally Sura Padhman is represented in various forms. Lord Murugan is seen to vanquish all these forms and finally return to his abode in triumph riding atop a peacock and bearing a flag with the symbol of a rooster. The peacock and rooster are supposed to be the domestic forces that the Lord has subdued. Lakhs of devotees assemble to witness this festival day at Tiruchendur.

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67 *Idem.*

 Vaikasi Visaka

The festival *Vaikasi Visaka* is observed in the Tamil month of *Vaikasi* (May-June).\(^{69}\) It is a full moon day and Dharmaputra, the god of death, is worshipped. The day is also to be one on which god Subramanya incarnated in this world, making it doubly important and meritorious.

The observance of this festival at Tirumazhuvadi near Tanjore is considered specially important for the reason that Siva had once performed a Mazhu or lance dance at this place on the *Vaikasi Visaka* day. Further, it is said to be the place where Siva's sacred bull had its incarnation or this festive occasion.\(^{70}\)

Alwartirunagari, in the district of Tirunelveli is the next important place for observing this festival. Once there lived a famous Vaishnava saint called Nammalwar. He is said to have rendered the sacred Vedas of the Hindus into Tamil. As he was born on the Vaikasi Visaka day at Alwartirunagari, the observance of this festival attained significance.\(^{71}\)

Car Festival

The annual car festival of Sri Thiyagaraja Swamy Temple of Tiruvarur is one of the popular celebration that attract lakhs of devotees from all over Tamil Nadu. Tiruvarur was the capital of the Chola Kingdom.\(^{72}\) Legend says that the idol (*Marakata Lingam*) was

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\(^{70}\) P.V.Jegadisa Ayyar, *South Indian Festivals, op.cit.*, p.68.


\(^{72}\) [www.tamilnadutourism.org](http://www.tamilnadutourism.org).
brought from Indra to the Tiruvarur.\textsuperscript{73} It is one of the seven sacred places of Lord Thyagaraja. The others are Tirumaraikkadu (Vedaranyam), Tirunagai (Nagapattinam), Tirukkolili, Tirukkadan malai, Tiruvanmiyoor and Tirunallar.\textsuperscript{74}

The unique, majestic car of this temple is called 'Aazhi Ther' and the tank as big as the Temple is called "Kamalayam".\textsuperscript{75} Record of the car festival area available since the 17th century. The magniation car is a marvel on wood with exquisite carving depicting incidents from the Puranas.

The car's weight is 300 tones after decoration and the height is 30 meters. Four long ropes are used to pull. It is used to take even six months for the car to reach the destination as the car was pulled only by people. Now the bulldozers are also used to push the car from behind. Today engineers are deputed to monitor the maneuverability of the car. The melodious music from 'Bari Nadaswaram' unique to the temple and the Thevaram versions rendered by the Odhuvar enhance the divine atmosphere. The important occasion is a temple festival is the day of the car festival which is usually on the seventh day other important car festivals are celebrated at Kancheepuram, Maduari, Triunelveli, Palani, Srivillputhur and Ariyalur.\textsuperscript{76}

**Garudotsavam**

*Garudotsavam* or *Garuda sevai* forms part of the annual *Brahmotsavam* of every Vaishnavite shrine in South India. This

\textsuperscript{73} R.K.Das, *op.cit.*, p.162.
\textsuperscript{75} [www. tamilnadutourism.org](http://www. tamilnadutourism.org).
\textsuperscript{76} Idem.
festival falls usually on the third day of the *Brahmotsavam*, when the Lord gives *darsan* to his numerous devotees assembled on the occasion, seated on his favourite *vahanam* of *Garuda.*

**Garudotsavam** festival of Kanchipuram Varadarajaswami temple is a grand sight. On *Vaikasi Visakam* day, which is the birthday of Nammalwar, the Lord visits the Nammalwar shrines and blesses him. Among the temple's jewels is a valuable gold necklace, said to have been presented by Robert Clive. It adorns the deity during the Garuda festival.

**Kandoori Festival**

The Kandoori or *Santhana kudu* festival (Sandal car festival) is celebrated at the *Nagore Dargah*, *Ervadi Dargah*, *Mohaideen Andavar Dargah* in Madurai South Gate, *Goripalayam Dargah* in Madurai and also at the ancient Mosque in Pottalpudur. Many of the ceremonies are similar to those performed in the Hindu temples. Holy ash made turmeric, ghee and sandal. Sandal are distributed at this festival time to devotees. Devotees offer their prayers and make contributions in silver models of limbs, eyes etc, to thank God for fulfillment of their vows. Devotees who have some bodily ailments appeal to the *Andavar* and take vows that on restoration to normal health. Sandal paste prepared in large quantities is offered to *Andavar*.

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79 Interview with Dr.Amanullah, Ex-Correspondent, Wakf Board College, Madurai, dated 15.10.2005.

and then distributed to the egger crowds of the Hindu and Muslims devotees. 81

**Velankanni Festival**

The most important festival associated with a Christian Shrine Mary at Velankanni dedicated to virgin Mary at Velankanni. It is celebrated for ten days from August 28 to September to every year and draws vast crowds of Catholics, other Christians and even numbers of the other religions from all over India and Malaysia. Prayers to Virgin Mary are believed to be very effective of Miraculous healing powers. Thousands of pilgrims belonging to the various castes and communities flock daily to this 'Lourdes of the East'. 82

**Margazhi Festival**

The entire Tamil month of *Margazhi* (December -January) is a period of early morning bath, prayer and temple worship completed before dawn, is spite of the chilly weather. The songs of *Thiruppavai* and *Thiruvempavai* are sung. In recent times, this is also the time of music festival, when concerts and dance programmes are held in the evenings especially is Madras.

**GENERAL FESTIVALS**

**Summer Festival**

Summer festivals are being organised during May and June at Udhagamandalam, Yercud, Kodaikanal, Elagiri, Kolli Hills, Valparai,

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81 Interview with Thiru. Hajee Heerajan, Manager, Mohideen Andavar Darjah Trustee, South Gate, Madurai, dated 12.3.2006.

82 Interview with Rev. Xavier, Karumathur, dated 12.3.2006.
Summer Festival

Contrallam: Saral Festival
Javvdhu Hills and Silver Beach in Cuddalore. During the summer festivals time cultural programmes, adventure sports, boat races, flower shows and fruit shows add to the splendour of the festival in Hill area. They are of unique attractions to the tourists.

**Saral Festival in Courtallam**

The waterfalls at Courtallam, the spa of India receives an influx of visitors, tourists and excursionists. The water falls on rocks and tiny droplets are sprinkled into the air. The monsoon brings happiness. Thus it gives a fog like appearance. The breeze carries this fog far. The phenomenon is called *Saral* in Tamil. During the *Saral Festival*, tourists come in plenty from all over the country to participate in the ritualistic bathing. The falls are known for its therapeutic value. The *Saral Festival* is replete with cultural programmes, competitions, fun and frolic, make this festival remarkable. Hence that is appealing to the tourists.

**World Tourism Day**

During September 27 is usually celebrated as World Tourism Day all over the world every year. Such a declaration is expected to create the proper atmosphere for and awareness about tourism and its importance and the need for its further development among the people and the several agencies concerned with it, meetings, seminars and also tour are being arranged on the tourism day at national and international levels.

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83 [www.tamilnadu tourism.org](http://www.tamilnadu tourism.org).
India Tourism day

The Government of India announced January 25 as the India's Tourism Day. The Ministry of Tourism presents the Annual National Tourism Awards to the industry's best performers. The Honourable Prime Minister of India will give away the awards. The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India from January 19 to January 25 or in every year is celebrating India Tourism Week.

Cape Festival: Kanniyakumari

Kanniyakumatri is surrounded by the Indian Ocean, the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian sea. The Hindu considers a bathe in this confluence as very sacred. Cape Festival will be held in October for three days and it is marked by a series of cultural programmes. This is a rare opportunity to flock at cape during that time.

Chettinad Heritage seminar and Festival

Chettinad, rich in cultural heritage, art and architecture, today is a well known for its houses, embellished with marble, and Burma teak, wide courtyards, specious rooms. The grand and wonderfully embellished houses reflect the prosperity of the Nagarathar community. During 2003, the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, stressed the need to develop lesser known tourist centres like Chettinad. Accordingly, Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation has taken several steps to give world wide publicity to the heritage value of Chettinad. With this idea, a Chettinad heritage seminar and festival was conducted at Karaikudi on 3rd and 4th March 86

86 The Indian Express, Madurai, 25th January 1998, p.4.
87 The Hindu, Article "Focus on Kanniyakumari District", 5th May 1998, p.1
Chettinad Heritage House
The event included audio visual presentation on Chettinad heritage areas, cultural programmes, symposium etc. This too had attracted many tourists.

National Pilgrim Festival at Rameswaram

Rameswaram is a major pilgrim center in the country. Notable tourist spots at Rameswaram are Ramanathasamy temple, the bathing ghat, *Ganthamathana Parvatham*, Kothandaramar temple, Kurusadei Islands etc. In order to attract more tourists proposed to give wide publicity about Rameswaram by conducting a national pilgrim festival. During the festival time, Rameswaram and other tourist attractions of Tamil Nadu are highlighted through audio visual presentation, cultural programmes, symposium, exhibition etc.\(^89\)

Natyanjali Dance Festival

The Natyanjali festival dedicated to the cosmic dancer (Lord Shiva) is celebrated on the auspicious occasion of *Maha Sivaratri* every year during February-March. It starts from the day of *Maha Sivaratri* and goes on for five days. Lord Nataraja, according to Hindu mythology is the cosmic dancer. He is called the *Lord of Dances*.\(^90\) The *Natyanjali* festival, which brings all the prominent dancers in India, together on the same platform. It is performed at the *Prakara* of the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram and the dancers, full of intense bliss and devotion, with their evocative *abhinaya*, offer their dance to the great divinity, Lord Nataraja. *Natyanjali* festival is jointly

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\(^88\) *Tourism Policy Note: 2005-2006*; Government of Tamil Nadu, 2005, p.68.


\(^90\) *Idem.*
Chidambaram : Natyanjali Festival

Mamallapuram : Dance Festival
organised by the Department of Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and The Natyanjali Trust, Chidambaram. It is designed to promote a universal message of 'Unity in Diversity' conveyed in the universal language of Music and Dance.

Mamallapuram Dance

The Dance festival starts on the 25th of December every year is conducted on all Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Government holidays, up to 31st January. It is held at the venue of Arjuna's Penance, a bas-relief sculpted panel on the face of two enormous adjacent rocks in Mamallapuram. Exponents of classical dance like Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Kathak, Kathakali, Odissi, Folk etc perform in an open air stage against the magnificent backdrop of the Pallava rock sculptures. Besides classical, folk dances are also performed. Dancers from different parts of India perform during this festival. The renowned festival is organised by the Department of Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu and supported by Ministry of Tamil Nadu.

New Year's Day

Though New Year's Day is a Christian festival, it is celebrated by people of all religions. Just like Christians attend the midnight mass, Hindus also visit the temple at midnight, where special Pujas are

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92 "Mamallapuram Dance Festival", Department of Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras, 2000.
offered. The New Year's day is known for meeting and greeting friends and relatives.

**Mango Festival**

Krishnagiri is the venue of the famous mango varieties and they are kept on display. It is also an event for the buyer and sellers to meet. During June, mango festival is celebrated cultural programmes and also contact the exhibition is regularly.

**Tea and Tourism Festival**

Tea and Tourism festival celebrate in three days during the month of January at Hill stations like Uthagamandalam and Coonoor. Varieties of tea are on display and also available for tasting. Cultural extravaganzas, cuisines of the South and the pleasant climate adds more attraction of the tourists.

**Thiyagaraja Arathanai Festival**

Thiruvaiyaru, the fertile region of Kaveri, located in Thanjavur District Tamil Nadu for nearly 2000 year the Tamil people have regarded the Kaveri as the sacred source of life, religion and culture. As a result, many scholars, artists, poets and musicals settled in the region, under the enlightened patronage of the rules of Thanjavur.

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94 Interview with Thiru. S.M. Bose, dated 1.1.2006.
96 *Idem*.
Thiruvaiyaru in more renowned for its association with Saint Thiyagarja (1767-1847), who along with Muthusami Dikshitar and Shyama Sastris, comprises the Trinity of Carnadic music.\(^{100}\) His songs are known for their melody and the *Pancha ratna* (Five gems) composed by him is a treatise the history of this small town is thus deeply linked with the growth and development of south Indian classical music.

On the banks of the river, was built the *Samathi* (Tomb), to commemorate the last resting place of the saint Thiyagaraja.\(^{101}\) A musical festival is held here every year on the anniversary of his death, which falls, according to the Tamil calendar Thai, in January.\(^{102}\) Hundreds of music connoisseurs, musicians and critics are participate in front of the anoint the shrine and sing Thiyagaraja's Songs at his memories from morning till midnight for a whole week.\(^{103}\)

Thus the different fairs and festivals are celebrated throughout the year on specific asterisms. As they are all celebrated in a grand manner they are of general attraction of tourists other than the respective devotees. If not on par with Hindus, the Muslims and Christians also conduct their festivals in a grand manner. Some of them include the Indian traditions and customary practices also. They all serve as means for tourist gatherings. The indigenous nature, the rituals and specific ways and means employed for the conduct of a festival draw the attention of the tourists to the specific spot of the festival at the appropriate day and hour.

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\(^{100}\) R.K.Das, *op.cit.*, p.163.

\(^{101}\) www.tamilnadutourism.org.

\(^{102}\) Tamil Nadu Splendour of India, Government of Tamil Nadu, Chennai, 2003, p.49.

\(^{103}\) P.V.Jagadisa Ayyar, *South Indian Festivals, op.cit.*, p.49.