# Daily Pūjās and Annual Festivals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Pūjās - Pūjās, food offerings, sandhis, abhishēkam &amp; ceremonial bath.</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Annual festivals - Chitthirai, Vaikāsi, Ṭañi, Adi, Āvani, Purattasi, Aippāsi, Kārthikai, Mārgāli, Thai, Māsi and Paṅguṇi.</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DAILY PŪJĀS AND ANNUAL FESTIVALS

SECTION - A

PŪJĀS

Idol worship is characteristic of the Hindu ritual of worship. It is conducted according to the Āgamaś. 1 Āgama is a manual giving details of religious formalities, offerings and the rituals of the temple. The Āgamaś classify pūjās into two categories, namely, those observed in houses for the welfare of the family and those performed in temples for the welfare of the general public.

There is a wide difference between household worship and temple worship. Temple worship is elaborate and conducted four to six times a day. The daily worship is considered essential to preserve the sanctity of the temple.

The daily pūjā is based on the belief that the idol inside the temple is the very incarnation of God and therefore, pūjās are offered to Him. The Siva Temples in Tamilnādu follow the Āgamic system of worship and they include the numerous Upachāraś or services to Him from the early waking up ceremony to the retirement at night and rests at Palliṅārai. 2

There are two kinds of pūjās such as Nityaṁ pūjā and
Naimittika pūjā. The day to day pūjā is called Nitya pūjā while ceremonies on special occasions are called Naimittika pūjās which are conducted for some specific purposes.³

Nitya pūjā

In the Agneeśwarar temple the daily pūjā is conducted six times a day. They are known as Ushhakkālam, Kāla sandhi, Uchchikkālam, Sāyarakshai, Ittukālam and Ardhalāmam. The daily pūjā starts with Ushhakāla pūjā at 6 A.M., when the priests would go to paliyarai (the bed chamber) and wake up the God and Goddess by chanting Mantras and verses. This is called Thiruppāḻi Yezhuchchi. Nityapūjā in the morning commences with the worship of the sun. Abhishekaṃ is done only to the Main God and the Main Goddesses but food offering is made to all the deities.⁴

The second Kālam is known as Kāla sandhi performed at 8.30 A.M. with pūjās to all deities and the abhishekaṃ is done to the Main Gods, Goddesses and the Parivāra dēvatās. The Parivāra dēvatās include Sūryā, Gaṇeśa, Dwārapālaka (Sanctum), Natarājā, Śrīśrīkānṭā and other sub deities in the temple.

The Uchchikāla pūjā commences at 12 noon. During the midday worship abhishekaṃ is done only to the Main
Gods and the Main Goddesses. Food offering is made to all. Immediately after this the temple is closed and is again opened at 4 P.M. The Sāyarakshai starts with abhishēkam to the Main Gods and Goddesses at 5.30 P.M.

The Irandām Kālam is performed at 8 P.M. and abhishēkam is done only to the Main Gods and the Parivāra devatās. At 9.30 P.M., the ardha jāma pūjā is performed. There is no abhishēkam to any of the deities. But food offering to Main Gods, Goddesses, Ganesā, Subramanyā and Natarājā are made. Then the Utsavamūrthya (metal icon) of the main deity is brought to the sacred bed room.

From the inscriptions of this temple it is noticed that during the Chōlā period pūjas were conducted from morning to night at specified times. An inscription of Rājādhirājā I mentions the early morning pūjā and registers a sale of land by the residents of Thoṭṭakkudhi to the temple for providing offerings to the main deity during that time. Further, an inscription of Rājarāja I mentions the midday pūjā and the donation of paddy and money by one Aṅgikumāraṇ of Vīranārāyanā Chaturvedimaṅgalam for offerings to the deity during the midday. Another inscription of the same ruler mentions the evening pūjā and the donation of some quantity of paddy, rice and money used for the offerings. Two more inscriptions of Rājarājā I describe the night services with food offerings and the provision for lighting the
twilight lamp.\textsuperscript{9}

**Food Offerings**

Generally food is offered to the deities during all the six Kālams. The type of food varies from one Kālam to another Kālam. The food offered to the deities of Agneeswarar temple are as follows:

- **Ushakkālam** 6 A.M. Vepohgal (cooked Rice & Dhal).
- **Kālasandhi** 8.30 A.M. Mahāneivēdyam (White rice).
- **Uchchikkālam** 12 Noon ThayirAmudhu (curd rice).
- **Sāya Ratcha** 5.30 P.M. Pōngal, Puṭṭu, Vaḍai and Appam.
- **Irāndāmkālam** 8 P.M. Mahā Neivēdyam (white rice).
- **Ardhajālam** 9.30 P.M. Sambhā (Pepper rice) Dōsai.\textsuperscript{10}

Provision for offering food during the pūjaḷ was made even during the time of the Chōḷās as evident from the Chōḷā inscriptions. There are two inscriptions of Rājarājā I,\textsuperscript{11} one inscription of Rājadhirāja I\textsuperscript{12} and three inscriptions of Kulōttunga I which mention the provision made for food offerings.\textsuperscript{13}

The inscriptions of Kulōttunga I describe the food offered to the deity as Kariyamudhu (Vegetable rice), Neyyamudhu (Ghee rice), and Thayir amudhu (curd rice)\textsuperscript{14} and Milagu amudhu (Pepper rice).\textsuperscript{15}
Sandhis

(Sandhis or special services were instituted in temples during the early, middle and later periods to invoke the blessings of the deities for the general welfare of individuals, specially kings, nobles and ministers. These were special offerings in addition to the routine pūjās. Such Sandhis were instituted in large numbers in the 12th and 13th centuries and they were often named after the donors.) There are three epigraphical records of the Pāṇḍyās referring to the Sandhis. One of the earliest of Sandhis was the Kōthandarāma Sandhi. The Sandhi was instituted in honour of the king Jatavarma Sundara Pāṇḍyā who was also known as Kōthandarāman. So the Sandhi was recorded as Kōthandarāma Sandhi. The first inscription refers to a Sivabrāhmanā of this village by the name Udayan who was conferred the right of conducting the special services of the above said Sandhi.\textsuperscript{16}

Again, the second inscription of the same ruler refers to the provision made for conducting the same Sandhi. It is mentioned in the record that the income from about 49 Vielis of land from the nearby village was allotted for conducting the Sandhi.\textsuperscript{17}

The third inscription belongs to the Pāṇḍyā ruler Vīra Pāṇḍyā. It refers to another Sandhi instituted in
this temple during the reign of Vīra Pāṇḍya (1258 A.D.)
It was known as Vīra Pāṇḍya Sandhi. Vīra Pāṇḍyā was the
co-ruler of Jatavarma Sundara Pāṇgyā. It was probably
instituted in honour of Vīra Pāṇḍyā. The record further
states that the income from about ten Vēlis of land
(located between Arislāru and Mudikondān river) was to
be utilized for the Sandhi.¹² The above cited Sandhis
were probably instituted for the welfare and longevity
of the rulers concerned.

Abhishēkam

At present the abhishēkam (holy bath) is not
elaborately done in this temple. Usually, the abhishēkam
is performed for the Mūlavāri, Ambāl and the ancillary
deities with mere water fetched from the well found in
the inner Prakārā. On special occasions and at the
request of individual devotees, special abhishēkam is
done to the deities with different items like oil, milk,
turmeric powder, sandal paste, honey, coconut water,
rose water and lemon juice.) During the Chōlā period two
men were specially appointed for fetching water from the
Cāuvēry for daily abhishēkam of the main deity of this
temple. This is recorded in an epigraph of Kulōttunga I
(1095 A.D) and the persons are named as Cāuvēryij
Than[naj] mudhu Vaippur Iruvar[kku].¹⁹
Ceremonial Bath

The Ceremonial bath is known as Nīrāduthal in Tamil. In this temple the ceremony takes place on the first day of every month and year, during new moon day, fullmoon day and on the concluding days of the festivals like Sadayam festival, Appar Thiruvila, Vaikasi Visiṣṭam festival, Ani Thirumāṇjanam, Āciṟṟum, Āvaṇa Mūlam and other festivals. On these occasion the deity is taken to a nearby river bank or tank and is given a bath. Afterwards, the devotees receive the sacred water from the priest. This practice was in existence in the ancient period also.) For instance, an inscription of Kulōttuṅgā I (1116 A.D.) records that this ceremony was conducted on the new moon day of every month. It is described in the text as Amavāsai Thōrum Nīrāduthal Seyyavum.

SECTION - B

ANNUAL FESTIVALS

Festivals are religious practices intended to create group feeling and participation. They contribute to the all round prosperity of the people. According to the religious texts, they are meant to renew the sanctity of the deities worshipped. With the result, they promote people's prosperity and prolonged life. There have been endowments provided for this purpose in Agneēswarar temple.
There are three kinds of festivals in the Śiva temples in general. One is Nityā (routine annual festivals), the other is Naimittikā (occasional for pacification during eclipse, earthquake, threat of war etc.) and the third is Kāmyā (to accomplish the cherished goals of the people, commemoration of birth days etc.).

The festival may stretch for many hours, or for a whole day or night or for several days. Sāmbhavā is a festival that is usually over within a day. A three day festival is called Saivā and if the festival stretched for five days it is called Brahmapā.²³ If the festival is celebrated for seven days, it is called Arshā. In the following paragraphs we shall discuss the important festivals that are celebrated in this temple in the course of each month in a year.

To denote the commencement of a festival, a flag made of cloth is tied in the premises of the temple near the flag staff. The flag staff is near the Bali Pithā and behind the Nandi (Bull). The flag usually carries the figure of Indra (the King of Gods). After offering pūjā to the flag, a coconut is tied on it and while the Nādaswaram (a musical instrument) plays, the flag is hoisted. Then follows a ceremony called Ankurārpanam which comprises the sowing 9 or 7 or 5 kinds of pulses
in separate earthen ware pots. This marks the beginning of the \textit{Utsavā} (festival). Rules of conduct of this ceremony are described in \textit{Karanaśamā}. The concluding day is usually a \textit{Theerthavāri} day (immersion of deity in a river or tank). The deity is decorated and kept in the \textit{Kaṭṭamudhu mandapa} (plate 2b). Finally, the flag is lowered. A review of various festivals that are celebrated in the course of the year is given below starting with the Tamil month Chitthirai (April - May).

\textbf{Chitthirai (April - May)}

\textit{Chitthirai} festival, a \textit{Brahmotsavā} festival celebrated for ten days was in vogue since the reign of Kulōttuṅgā I. An inscription dated 1105 A.D. speaks of a land donation to the temple by a resident of Thiruppugalūr for the celebration of the fifth day of the \textit{Chitthirai} festival.

The second important festival of this month is \textit{Chitthirai Sadayam} festival. It is not a common festival. But this festival is celebrated here from the days of the Chōḷās as gleaned from the inscriptions. This festival was celebrated in commemoration of the birth day of the famous Chōḷā king Kālarāja I as well as his consort Pāñchavan Mahādēvi who were born under the constellation \textit{Sadayam}. Hence, the queen made elaborate and permanent arrangements to celebrate this
festival in a grand manner every year. The details of the pūjās and the various items required for this festival have been mentioned in the inscription dated 1001 A.D. of Rājarājā I.²⁶ It is believed that the tradition has been in existence in this temple from the time of the Chōḷās. However, due to financial constraints, now it is not celebrated elaborately.

The third festival is known as Appar Thiruvilā. The festival is celebrated for ten days starting with Śvāthi star and ending in Sadayam.²⁷ Appar, the Saiva Sage died on the day of Sadayam and the festival is celebrated even now.²⁸ The metal icon of Appar worshipped on this day is the same one used during the reign of Rājarājā I.²⁹ At present this festival is conducted elaborately and the villagers take an active part in celebrating this festival.³⁰

The fourth one is celebrated on the full moon day of the month which is known as Chithrā Pournami when the asterism ‘Chitra’ (Virgin) holds its sway. It is a festival to propitiate Chitra Gupthā, the chief accountant of Yamā, the God of death. It is an important festival of this month celebrated in this temple along with the ten day festivals of Appar Thiruvilā. The epigraph of Kulōtthungā I dated 1105 A.D. mentions the arrangement for feeding of Mahēśvarās (Siva devotees)
who attended the Chitthirai festival.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{Vaikāsi (May - June)}

The festival \textit{Vaikāśivisākā} is observed on the day when the asterism \textit{visākā} (Libra) rules in the month of \textit{Vaikāsi} (May-June). It is on the full moon day of the month that the festival is offered to Dharmapūtra, the God of death. The day is also said to be one in which God Subramanīyā incarnated in this world during the asterism \textit{visākā}. Only special pūjās and abhishekams to Somāskandā (Baby Murugā or Subramanīyā) are carried out (plate 20-a) in a simple manner.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{Āni (June - July)}

The festival of \textit{Aṇi Thirumaṇjanam} for Natarājā is conducted during this month (June-July). Abhisheka to Lord Natarājā is performed with turmeric powder and sandal paste mixed with water. This holy bath is known as ‘\textit{Thirumaṇjanā Nīrāṭtu}’. Then the deity is taken in a procession inside the temple premises and food offerings are also made (plate 2c).\textsuperscript{33} This festival is now celebrated in a simple manner.

\textbf{Ādi (July - August)}

\textit{Ādi Pūram} is a festival which is celebrated on the day when the star Pūram falls during this month. It is said that this day is auspicious for Goddess Sakthi who
id to have come to earth on this day to bless the
e. If this day falls on a Friday, it is considered
auspicious. Abhishekaṃ and pujaṣa are conducted
or on a special scale during this day. The main
ss Sri Karundarkulalai is taken to Tiruvindiala
nd the street) at night.

Another festival during the month is the 'Ādi
ku' or Ādi 18th day festival in which Uchchikāla
for the Main Goddess is performed. After the pujaṣa
s taken in procession to the Muḍikondān river to be
the Theertham (ceremonial bath) but nowadays due
adequate funds it is celebrated in a very simple
r. 35

(August-September)
The day the star 'Mūlam' appears is celebrated as
Mūlam' in this temple. The presiding deity of
star is stated to be an Ṣuṣrā (a demon) by name
uthi. 36 Therefore, this day is considered to be
spicious for spiritual progress. On this day the
of Sōmāskanda (Baby Subramanyā) with Sivā and
uthi (plate 27a) is taken in a procession to the
Muḍikondān and sand is thrown in to the river.
ual pujaṣa and abhishekaṃ are carried out to the
. At the end, the food offerings (baked sweetened
flour) is distributed to the devotees in one of the
Another festival of this month is *Vināyaka Chathurthi*. This festival is observed on the fourth day in the bright fortnight of the month Āvāni (August - September). Special pūjās and abhishēkams are performed to Vināyakā in a simple manner. In the evening of the same day the idol of Vināyakā is taken in a procession around the village.\textsuperscript{38}

**Puraṭṭāsi (September - October)**

An important festival celebrated in the month of Puraṭṭāsi (September - October) is *Navarāthri*. The term Navarāthri indicates nine nights (Nava - nine; rāthri - nights). The festival for nine nights is dedicated to the three forms of the Goddess namely Durgā, Lakshmi and Saraswathī. Of the nine nights, three nights are dedicated to each one of these goddesses.\textsuperscript{39}

Agneśwarar temple celebrates this festival with flag hoisting, sowing seeds as in the case of Brahmoṭsava (10 days festival) and special pūjās and decorations on each of the nine nights to the Goddess are conducted as in the case of other Sivā temples.\textsuperscript{40} On the tenth day, the deity is taken in a procession during the night around the village (plate 3a).
Aippasi (October - November):

The common festival of this month is Skanda Sashti. This festival is to propitiate Lord Subramanya (also known as Skanda), the second son of Lord Siva who destroyed the Asura by name 'Sura Padma.' It is celebrated for six days in this month.

During this month it is a custom to offer a bath to Siva with Annabhishekam (cooked rice) for which five Kalams of rice had been allotted by the temple authorities of the day.

Karthikai (November - December)

A significant festival of this month is Karthikai Deepam. It is a festival of lights which is celebrated on the full moon day of this month. On this day, special pujaas and abhishekams (holy bath) are conducted for the main deities and other minor deities in the early morning and Pañchamūrti (five deities Siva, Ambal, Vinayaka, Subramanya and Chandikeswara) are taken in a procession during the night. During the festival the temple complex is illuminated with traditional earthen lamps of oil and wick.

The importance of this celebration is to propitiate the five major elements of nature, specially Agni (fire). It is said that Lord Siva himself appeared in
the form of fire and the flag staff of this temple is intended to symbolise the pillar of fire.

A preparation of *Pori* (bubbled or popped rice) is offered to the Lord on this day. King Bali of mythological fame is said to have offered the above preparation in order to get rid of the burning sensation all over his body.

On all Sundays of this month, Lord Subramanya is taken in a procession to Agnitheertham for Theerthavari (the ceremonial bath).

On all Mondays of this month 'Sankhābhishēkam' (bath by the water kept in 108 conches) is conducted and pūjās and offerings are carried out. These festivals are now celebrated in a simple manner due to financial strain.

Mārgali (December - January)

Ārudrā festival is observed in the month of Mārgali (December - January). The asterism 'Ārudrā' (Thiruvādirai) holds sway on that day. This occasion is specially associated with Natarāja, the dancing aspect of Sivā. Worshiping Nataraja on this day is supposed to purify the coarser emotions in a man. In this temple Ārudrā festival is celebrated with special pūjās. On the
eve of the Ārudrā day (Festival), a grand abhishekaṃ to Lord Natarāja is performed and on that day, Lord Natarāja with Sivakāmi is taken in a procession around the streets in the Pushpaka vimānaṃ, the Flower vehicle⁴⁶ (plate 3b).

During the whole of this month, Mārgaḷi 'Dhanuvrākṣa pūjā' (daily early morning pūjās and offerings) for Natarājā is performed as in the case of other Śiva temples.

Thai (January - February)

Makara Sankrānti festival is celebrated on the first day of the month Thai (January - February). On this day, it is the custom in this temple to light the lamp with ghee instead of oil. In the night the icon of Sōmaskand is taken in a procession. On the second day of this month Lord Subramanya is taken in a procession with special pūjās.⁴⁷

Another festival of this month is Thai Pūsam.⁴⁸ It is an important and remarkable festival of this month. When the moon is in asterism Pūsam during the month of Thai (January - February), this temple observes Thai Pūsam which is considered to be a Brahmotsava (a 10 day festival). Thai Pūsam is also specially for Lord Subramanya and his 'Vēḷ' (Lance), an invincible weapon,
given to him by Goddess Parvathi, his mother, on this
day. Special pūjā to Subramanya is performed. The Sthala
Purāṇa of the Agneeswarar temple describes this festival
as follows:

Around 4 P.M. on the Thai Pūsam day Sōmāskandā
(Baby subramanya with his parent) is taken in a
procession in a palanquin, to Arasalāru Uttara Vahana
(north flowing river) to give Theertham (Holy water to
the devotee) at Purakkudi. After given a bath in the
river water the deity is decorated on the Kishābha
Vāhanam (bull-vehicle). On this occasion people from
different parts of the village as well as from the
neighbouring villages to offer worship to the God to
seek His blessings. On the same day Sōmāskandā is taken
back to the temple in a procession. The Thai festival is
celebrated on a moderate scale now

Māsi (February - March)

The festival celebrated in the month of Māsi
(February - March) is known Māṣu Magam. It is celebrated
on the day when Maga asterism falls, particularly on the
full moon day of the month. The significance of the
festival lies in the fact that worshipping Jupiter on
this specific day would result in the fulfilment of the
desires of the devotees. Special pūjās and abhisheka
are conducted for all the main deities in the temple of
Agneeswarar from early morning on 'Māsi Magam' day.
Mahāsivarāthri is another major festival of this month. It falls on the fourteenth day of the dark half of Māsi (February to March) and is celebrated in honour of Sīvā. Special pūjās, abhishekams, ārādhanais and special food offerings to the main deity during all the four jāmams (one jāma is three hours) are as follow:

The vedaś are recited during these jāmams in the order of Rig veda, Yajur veda, Sāma veda and Athāryaga vedaś.

Different types of flowers and leaves are offered to the deity on Mahāsivarāthri day. The flowers include Nilothphalam or Sengaluni (Lotus). The leaves offered are Thulasi and Bilwam. The food offerings are Poŋgal (Two varieties of Poŋgal, rice with Dhai and rice with pepper) and Pāyasam (a sweet porridge like preparation). People from neighbouring villages and the residents of Thiruppugalūr come in large numbers to the temple to worship during Mahāsivarāthri festival.

Paṅguni (March - April)

Paṅguni Uttram falls on the full moon day in the Tamil month 'Paṅguni', when the moon is in the asterism of 'Uttiram'. Most of the Sīvā temples of Tamilnādu observe this festival in a grand manner but due to the deplated finance of this temple, at present, this festival is celebrated in a very simple and restricted manner.
REFERENCES


4. Interview with the temple priest Pranatharthi T. Sivakumar Gurukkal by the scholar on 22 12. 92

5. Interview with Pasupathy Gurukkal on 7.5.1990


10. Interview with the temple priest Sivarama Gurukkal on 5.5.1990.


13. A.R.E., 102, 105 & 90 of 1927-28


22. TNSPA., 316 of 1978.

23. There is no Dwajārōhanam or nūlērum (flag hoisting ceremony) for one day, three day and five day festivals. For other festivals it is necessary to have the Dwajārōhanam ceremony.
24. The temple priest, Pasupathy Gurukkal interviewed by the scholar on 05.05.91.


See Appendix V.

27. Details of the programme are furnished in Appendix VI.


29. Oral traditions prevalent in the area.

30. See Appendix VI.


32. Jagadisa Ayyar P.V., South Indian festivities, p.75.

33. Oral traditions prevalent in the temple.

34. Jagadisa Ayyar, op-cit., p.79.

35. Oral tradition.


37. The temple manager was interviewed by the scholar on 30.04.89.

38. Ibid.


40. Oral traditions prevalent in the village.


42. Oral traditions prevalent in the temple.


44. Oral traditions prevalent in the area.


46. Oral traditions prevalent in the village.

47. Ibid.


51. 628 of 1904., *M.E.D.* No.700 p.199 Vol II M.P

52. The temple priest Sivarama Gurukkal interviewed by the scholar on 02.01.1994.


54. Oral traditions in the village.