CHAPTER-III

FESTIVALS
FESTIVALS

Celebration of festival is the integral part of Indian culture. Woven into the very fabric of Indian life and ethos are fairs and festivals that have come down to us today, spanning hundreds and even thousands of years in our history and culture. Fairs and festivals are not merely events for merry making but have a vastly deeper significance in our lives, connected as they are to our ancient religion and mythology and what is perhaps not so evident, to the changing rhythms of the six seasonal divisions of the year.\(^\text{183}\) Festivals are occasions which give full expression to the social and religious instincts of the people. The land granted by the kings for this purpose was known as ‘Thiruvilappuram’.\(^\text{184}\) An important activity in the Madurai temple is celebration of a number of festivals either by the temple or at the instance of the king or devotees.

Festivals came into exist from the rites and ceremonies performed by the early people.\(^\text{185}\) They united the people and strengthened their religious beliefs. According to Sekizhar, a renounced Tamil poet, the purpose of the birth is two. The first one is to feed the monks or sanyasis and the next one is to witness a temple festival.\(^\text{186}\)

\(^\text{183}\) Lavkush Mishra, Religious Tourism in India, Mohit Publications, New Delhi, 2000, p. 170.
\(^\text{184}\) Inscription of Pudukottai State, Part I, No: 38.
\(^\text{185}\) Kalai Kalanji, vol IX, p.419.
\(^\text{186}\) Somalay, Koil, Muvendhar Achagam, Chennai, 1972, p. 375.
Definition

“Festivals or Feasts are periodically days and seasons set aside by a community for rest from labour, for the observance of sacred celebrations and religious solemnities. These may be joyful occasions or commemorating the lives of heroes. Festivals besides helping to knit together the body politics, stimulated rivalry in music and the drama and this laid the foundations of great aesthetic triumphs. P.F. Collier states “Feasts and Festivals, celebrations, also known as rest days, memorial days, holydays and holidays is derived from the Latin word ‘festum’ (bright, rejoicing). A sharp distinction between the two terms cannot be drawn. A distinction may be made between feasts, as celebrations at which food and drink are served and festivals, which do not include eating and drinking, as a music festival for example. Such a differentiation however is quite arbitrary. Many ancient festivals included sumptuous banquets. The new Encyclopedia Britannica states: Feast, also known as festival, day or period of time set aside to commemorate or ritually celebrate events or time periods (agricultural, religious or socio-cultural) that give meaning and cohesiveness to an individual and his community. The term derives from the fact that such days or periods generally

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originated in religious celebrations or ritual commemorations that included social communal meals: ‘feast is the opposite of “fast”.\textsuperscript{189}

Festivals possess an educational and social as well as religious character. In primitive cults having no written records, seasonal recital of mythology at festival time serves the function of transmitting traditional lore within the tribe. Festivals bind a religious group into a unity that transcends family and local ties.\textsuperscript{190}

In the anthologies, the term festival (\textit{Vila}) denotes any act of rejoicing and uproar. Even marriage is referred to as \textit{Vatuvai Vila}. It is used in a very general sense, to devote occasion of varying importance from ordinary religious rites such as velan veriyattu to grand social functions such as \textit{venil Vila}. To think of the current usage, even the anniversaries of greatmen are referred to as \textit{Vila}. Similarly in ancient days, the laying of the hero stone- \textit{Nadukal} – was celebrated in a grand manner an occasion noted for its fervor and festivity. In this contest it is worth mentioning that the anniversary or centenary celebrations or erecting of \textit{Nadukal} cannot be considered occasions of despair and desolationness. They fit in as celebrations which are more in the nature of appreciating one’s greatness and chivalry; deserving posterity’s following them, than expressions of dismay.\textsuperscript{191}

Considering all these factors, one may safely conclude that a festival in a general sense is an act of gathering of people with feelings of pleasure or pride. Major

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{191} S. V. Subramanian, K. D. Thirunavukkarasu (ed), Historical Heritage of the Tamils, International Institute of Tamil Studies, Madras, 1983, p. 539.
Festivals are called in Sanskrit as *Brahmotsava* and *Mahotsava* (maha-grand; ut-high; sava-five works of Siva). *Brahmostava* means ‘Major Festival’.  

The Ritual Calendar

Festivals are the nodes around which the ritual calendar is organized. They occur on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis. A yearly calendar of events known as a *Panchankam* is now fixed and printed for public use by specialists who consult astrological books, almanacs and calendars. Dates for festival events are fixed in two ways: with reference to one of the 14 days in the bright or dark half of the moon in a given month, or with reference to *nakshattiram* (lunar asterisms), the 27 named positions that the moon moves through during a month. Tamil months begin on the 14th to the 18th of months in the Gregorian calendar and they are one month later than those in the Sanskrit calendar. In the Sanskrit calendar, for example, the month of *Chithirai* (April-May) is March to April.

The time, place and nature of events which make up particular festivals are provided in leaflets or invitations. These are published and distributed by the temple office. (Appendix-II)

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CLASSIFICATION OF FESTIVALS

The Madurai temple festivals are of two categories-Festivals celebrated with flag hoisting and Festivals celebrated with Rakshabandan.¹⁹⁴

Flag Hoisting

Flag hoisting festivals are of two kinds: flag hoisting for Lord Sundareswarar and flag hoisting for Meenakshi. Five festivals are celebrated with hoisting flags for Lord Shiva: Chithirai festival, Avani Mula festival, Kartigai festival, Float festival and Masi Mandala festival. During Avani Mula festival five flags are hoisted and at Mandalotsavam, eight flags are hoisted. For Goddess Meenakshi during Aadi Mulaikottu festival flag is hoisted.

Rakshabandan

For Lord Sundareswarar Rakshabandan festivals are held during Vasantosavam, Unjal festival and Kodai Vasantam festival. For Goddess Meenakshi Rakshabandan festivals are held during Navarathri festival, Kolattam festival and Ennaikkappu festival.

Apart from this the procession of Lord Nataraja on the day of Ani Uttiram and of Thiuvathirai in Margali is performed. On the birth star of all the sixty three Nayanmars festivals are held and the idol is taken on procession in the templeprahara accompanied by Othuvars singing the story of each Nayanmar. For Bhairavar two festivals are celebrated in the month of Cttirai and Aippasi.

¹⁹⁴ The Priests tied a band around their wrist indicative of their bondage to Lord to ensure the proper performance of the festivals as scheduled.
S- Sundareswarar Festival

M- Meenakshi Festival
S- Sundareswarar Festival
M- Meenakshi Festival
Different Stages of Festivals

Festival is also known as *Utsava*.\(^{195}\) God, the Almighty performs five kinds of works namely Creation, Protection, Destruction, Concealment and Grace. These five works are shown in the ten days festivals of the temple. Bringing sand, sprouting and flag hoisting denotes the God’s work of creation. Procession of deities, *yagas* and sacrifice denotes the work of protection and the car festival, *pari vettai, santhanithal* denotes the work of destruction. The following are the different stages while celebrating the festivals.\(^{196}\)

1. *Anukgnai* (getting permission)
2. *Vastu Santhi* (Sanctification)
3. *Miruthsangraha* (bringing of sand)
4. *Angurarppanam* (Sprouting the grains)
5. *Rakshabandanam* (tying of holy thread)
6. *Idaba velvi* (Nandhi (bull) sacrifice)
7. *Dhwajarohanam* (Flag hoisting)
8. *Berithadanam or Thudikottal* (beating a kind of musical drum like instrument)
9. *Velvi* (Fire sacrifice)
10. *Thiru Ula* (Perambulation)

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\(^{195}\) Ut = Great, Sava = Five kinds of work

11. *Pari Vettai* (controlling animal qualities of man)

12. *Samanar Kaluvetram* (winning the Jains)

13. *Sakthi Oodal* (playful anger of Goddess Sakthi)


15. *Avarohanam* (Lowering of flag)

16. *Thirthavari* (holy bath)

**1. Anukgnai**

The first stage of the festival is to obtain permission from the God and Goddess to perform the rituals by the priest and also to announce the devotees that the priest is eligible to perform the rituals. Then Lord Vigneswar (Lord Vinayaga) is worshipped to protect the ensuing festival from the entire obstacle.

**2. Vastu Santhi**

*Pujas* performed to sanctify the festival, mantras and the place is called *Vastu Santhi*. It is performed to protect the festival from *Vastu Purushan* (a demon or an Ashura who had got a boon of never ending life) and to satisfy the *Devas* including Brahma.

**3. Miruthsangraha**

This stage is meant for bringing sand. *Pujas* are conducted to the Goddess earth, the protective deities including Indira, and *Ashtathik* (eight directions)
Balagars and Brahma, the chief to get permission from them and sand is brought.\textsuperscript{197}

4. Angurarppanam

*Angurarppanam* means sprouting of grains. Grains are sprinkled with milk and sprouted in 12 pots. The healthy growth of these grains is the sign of the smooth functioning of the festival. Each day *pujas* are performed to these sprouted pots both morning and evening.

5. Rakshabandan

Tying of a yellow thread is called *Rakshabandan*. A priest ties a thread, which is smeared by turmeric powder, in the wrist of his right hand to protect him till completing the festival without any hindrance.

6. Idaba Velvi

The *Nandhi* (bull) in front of the Lord’s sanctum sanctorum is worshipped for getting permission from Him. *Pujas, Abhishekam* and *velvi or yaga* are conducted to *Nandhi Bagavan*.

7. Dhwajarohanam

On the first day of the festival after doing the above mentioned *pujas*, the flag hoisting ceremony is observed in the morning. A flag is brought on an elephant and kept in front of the *Nandhi*. Assuming *Nandhi Bagavan* is in the flag (picture of *Nandhi* is drawn on the flag) to represent all the *Devas* and permission

\textsuperscript{197} *Ibid.*
is sought from them to celebrate the festival. *Upakara Puja* with 16 types of lamps and recitation of *Thirumurai* hymns are performed under the *dhwaja stump* (flag staff) and flag is hoisted in an auspicious time.\(^{198}\)

**8. Berithadanam or Thudikottal**

*Suthu Mathalam* and *Birma Thalam* (a kind of musical instruments) are kept in front of the flag staff and the priest himself beats the instrument to make known the inauguration of the festival. The deities of eight directions are worshipped in the procession at night. This is called as *Dhiku Bandanam*. It depicts that worshipping these deities to conduct the festival in a well manner.

**9. Velvi**

Fire sacrifice is performed at the *yaga sala* (fire sacrifice hall) on the second day of the festival.

**10. Thiru Ula**

The *utsava* deities are taken in procession in and out of the temple walls during the festival days. The philosophy behind the procession of the *utsava* deity is to safeguard the whole world and to bless the people without discriminating as illiterate, indiscipline, disabled etc.\(^{199}\)

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\(^{198}\) Interview with Chandra Sekara Bhattar, Meenakshi Temple, Madurai, 7. 6.2010.

11. Sakthi Oodal

Lord Siva got the help of Lord Vishnu instead of Goddess Parvathi (sakthi) to disguise as ‘Mohini’ to subdue the sage of Tharuga forest. So Sakthi got Oodal (playful anger) with Lord Siva. This incident is performed during the temple festival in Madurai.

12. Samanar Kazhuvetram

The incident of ‘Thirugnana Sambandar defeating the Jains through debate’ is enacted at this stage and it is called as Samanar (Jains) Kazhuvetram.

13. Pari Vettai

It is also called as ‘Miruka Yatirai’ (traveling of animal). The literal meaning of Pari Vettai is Pari – horse, Vettai – hunting. But philosophically it means that the Utsava is performed requesting Lord Siva to subdue the animal like qualities of man such as arrogance, adamant etc.

14. Soorna Utsavam

This ritual is performed to send off all devas as a sign of the ending of the festival.

15. Avarohanam

The flag is lowered down on the last day of the festival at night. On this day ‘Mouna bali’ (silent sacrifice) is performed and it is also called as Mouna Utsavam.
16. Thirthavari

The festival is ended with a *Thirthavari* i.e a bath in the holy water source. The *Utsava* deities are bathed by holy water which denotes the end of the festival.

**Temple Procession**

The procession of the deity was one of the temple rituals referred in the inscription. The deity was taken into procession daily with in the prakara of the temple which was called as *Tiruch chennadai*. *Sribali* also seems to be a ceremony of carrying of image around the temple. Special offerings were made on that day. If *pujas* are daily rituals, festivals are annual. The principal and most exciting components of most of the festivals is the procession (*purappadu* or setting forth) held on the morning and evening of everyday. Every Hindu temple in South India, there is two icons for the deity. One is made of stone and fixed in the *garbhagraha* and the other is made of *Panchaloha* (an alloy of five metals consisting of gold, silver, copper, tin and brass). The stone idol inside the *garbhagraha* is called ‘*Mulavar*’ and the *Panchaloha* idol of (five metals) is called *Utsavar* which means the icon meant for festival. This icon will be taken in procession on certain important days. The procession of the deities during the festivals helps the old people, the sick and the others who could not go to the temple to worship Him and during the procession God Himself go to the people.

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200 *ARE* of 271 of 1963-64.
and bless them.\footnote{Somalay, \textit{Op.cit}, p. 359.} The procession may be confined to the prakaras inside the temple or may be taken outside the temple, once a year. The intra-temple procession will be taken in a small palanquin in case of small temples with meager income or on the back of an elephant in case of big temples with rich resources, so that they can maintain an elephant.\footnote{M. P. Besbarvah (ed), \textit{Fairs and Festivals of India}, Gean Publishing House, New Delhi, 2003, p. 291.} On some occasions the deities may be enshrined on a simple canopy, but on others, they ride on silver or gold vehicles (\textit{vahanas}) such as horses, elephants or most auspiciously, huge silver bulls on a decorated motorized carts. In case of extra temple procession the deity is taken on a huge \textit{Rata} (temple – wooden car). This is called \textit{Ratotsava} or \textit{Brahmotsava}.\footnote{Raju Kalidos, \textit{Temple Cars of Medieval Tamilaham}, Tanjore, 1989, p. 223.}

Each procession is accompanied by officiating Brahmins, temple employees bearing royal insignia, umbrella, silver staffs and at night, flaming torches. The entourage is invariably proceeded by the penetrating orchestra of \textit{tavil} (barel drum), hand symbals and the distinctive \textit{nathaswaram} (a double – read, oboe-like wind instrument) for which the Madurai area is particularly famous.

Processions circumambulate clockwise inside the temple and may leave its precincts, starting from the east entrance, passing along the \textit{Chithirai, Avani mula} or \textit{Masi} Streets and on special occasions such as the floating festival (days 10 and 11 of the \textit{Teppa} Ceremonies), leave the centre of the city altogether local and visiting pilgrims crowd the streets for darshan, a view of the deities. The evening
processions, weaving through the starlit night are undoubtedly the most atmospheric.  

At the time of procession, it is the king of kings, who is coming out of the temple to see his subjects and receive their petition. So the icon will be decorated as a king, a royal person. In case of annual *Brahmotsava* the pomp and pageantry shows its climax commensurate with the wealth and economic resources of the temple. The grand culmination of the *Chithirai* Festival is triumphant procession of the two gargantuan temple chariots with huge wooden wheels. The chariots, towering far above the houses are moved purely by manpower. Every time the chariots shuddered to a halt, men rush out from houses and pour water over the rope pullers to cool them.

Icons from the temple (special movable images), are taken out and lavishly clothed in silk and decorated with ornaments of all precious stones. When the festival is celebrated both for Meenakshi and Sundareswarar, the contingent is usually led by Vinayaka (son of Siva), as the ‘remover of obstacles’, followed in succession by Subrahmanya (another son of Siva), Sundareswarar, Meenakshi and Chandeshwarar.

The female idol with that of Sundareswarar is Piriyaavidai and the separate idol on the other *Vahana* is that of Goddess Meenakshi. Some said that

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Piriyaavidai was yet another manifestation of Parvathi, while many similed saying that she was the consort of the bridegroom, which they said was not uncommon in those days. If there are two consonants together in a Sanskrit word, in Tamil a vowel often gets inserted in between. So, the first part of the deity’s name could either be ‘Priya’ (affectionate) or ‘Piriya’ (Inseparable).²⁰⁹

The temple doors are closed on four days in a year and pujas are not performed inside the temple. While the procession goes around the Adi, Chithirai, Avani and Masi Streets, the temple doors are not closed. When it goes away from Masi Street, that too not in all the days, the doors are closed, because till the Masi Street, the power of Mulava deity and the Utsava deity is equally presented. When it goes away from Masi Street the power of the Mulava deity is transferred to the Utsava deity. The following are the 4 days.

1. **Puttu Thiruvila** in the month of Avani. On this day the procession goes till Puttu Thoppu near Arappalayam to enact a divine sports- ‘carrying the sand for puttu’ for the sake of manikhavasagar.

2. On the **Attami Chappara Vila** in the month of Markali, the procession goes around Veli Streets.

3. On Float Festival in the month of Thai, the procession takes place to Vandiyur Mariamman temple and tank.

4. When the procession goes to Thirupparankundram to witness the Subramanya Swami’s Panguni Uttira festival.

Except these four days on all the other days the temple doors are not closed even though the procession crosses the *Veli* Streets.

**Divine Sports**

Various incidents connected with the reign of Lord Sundareswarar with Goddess Meenakshi which go by the name ‘*Thiruvilayadal*’ or divine miracles are enacted during the annual festivals. The Lord has on several occasions exhibited His divine powers for safeguarding the city, by warding off evil forces, natural calamities and onslights of enemies. Enemies are once stated to have despatched destructive forces in the shape of an elephant, a cow and a serpent to ruin the city and by His divine will, the Lord turned them into stone which are now identified as *Yanamalai, Pasumalai and Nagamalai*, the rocky hillocks, which are seen on the outskirts of the city. The city of Madurai itself is so called because the effect of the poison vomited by the serpent jewel Lord Shiva was warded off and the city was purified by the rays of nectar (madhu) sprinkled from the crest jewel of the crescent moon worn by the Lord.\(^{210}\) A general account of local festivals associated with the temple is given in the Stalapuranam. The Stalapuranam of the Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple is primarily concerned with 64 divine sports (*thiruvilayadal*) which are said to have taken place in Madurai. As related and dramatized at yearly festivals, these divine sports of Siva associate the temple with various myths of origin, caste- mobility and conflict. Siva’s many sacred games

have been the reason for the sacred geography of Madurai. Yet Meenakshi his consort is regarded as more important and dear to the people though the text gives primary position to Shiva and subordinates Meenakshi to Him.²¹¹ (In the Saiva text, Siva defeats and dominates Meenakshi, but in reality Meenakshi dominates the folk memory in Madurai.)

In the temple rituals Meenakshi is given precedence. In common talks people refer to this temple complex only as ‘Meenakshi temple’ or “Meenakshi Amman temple”. The Meenakshi temple is clearly the geographic and ritual centre of the ancient city of Madurai.²¹²

**MAJOR FESTIVALS OF THE TEMPLE**

Madurai is popularly known as the city of festivals. Festivals are celebrated in all months of the Tamil Calendar. The chief festivals are the *Chithirai* festival, Float festival and *Avani Mulam* festival. The other important festivals are *Vasantham* festival, *Unjal* festival, *Aadi mulai kottu* festival, *Navarathri* festival, *Kolattam* festival, Karthigai Deepam festival, *Ennai Kappu* festival, *Masi Mandala Utsavam* and Summer *Vasantha* festival. Starting of each festival is decided the last day which ends with *Thirthavari*. The tradition of holding festivals synchronizing with Solstices, Equinoxes, New and Full Moon days and

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other days with esoteric significance in all the months of the year grew up in the Meenakshi Temple of Madurai.  

**Chithirai Festival**

*Chithirai* month has its own claim for prominence in the Madurai Temple and the ending of that festival in a Tirthavari on *Chitra pournami* at *Potramaraikkulam* for it was on that day that Indiran worshipped Sundareswarar and founded the Madurai Temple by installing the Indira *vimana* borne by eight elephants. The festival starts one or two days after the new moon day in the month of *Chithirai*.  

On the first day the flag hoisting ceremony is performed. *Nandhi* (*Rishaba*), Thrisulam (*Trident*), *Suryan* (*sun*) and *Chandran* (*moon*) are drawn on the white flag. It is taken as procession on an elephant around the *Aadi* Street and a priest hoists the flag and takes a pledge to follow the *agama* rules during the festival. From the day of flag hoisting to lowering down people will not go out of city. *Pujas* are performed with *suttu matthalam* and *birma thalam* under the flag staff and a priest plays these instruments himself. The priest, who has tied the *Raksha bandanam* performs *pujas* in *yaga sala* both in morning and evening, comes around the *Aadi* Street and conduct the *Enthisai* (eight directions) ritual before the procession of Gods. Each day deities are taken on procession in different *Vahanas* (vehicles). On the first day both Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are  

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213 Interview with Chandrasekara Bhattar of Meeakshi temple on 06.12.2011.  
214 *Chithirai Festival Invitation of 2010*, Published by the temple.
taken on the *Simmasanam* (Throne) and go to kulalar mandapam inside the temple in the morning and around the *Masi* Street in the evening. Lord Sundareswarar comes in Karpaga Viruksham Vahana and Goddess Meenakshi in *Simha Vahana* which are mounted on decorated motorized carts.

On the second day, the procession starts at about 7.30 am goes around the *Masi* Streets taking both Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi in golden car and reaches *Muthuramaiyar Mandapam* inside the temple. At night about 7.00 pm Lord Sundareswarar comes in *Bhootha Vahana* and Goddess Meenakshi comes in *Anna (swan) vahana* around the *Masi* Streets and reaches the temple.

On the third day, the procession starts at about 7.30 am, goes around the *Masi* Streets taking both Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi in golden car and reaches *Kalyana Sundara Mudhaliyar mandapam* inside the temple. At night about 7.00 pm Lord Sundareswarar comes in *Kailasa Parvatham Vahana* and Goddess Meenakshi in *Kamadhenu Vahana* around the *Masi* Streets and reaches the temple.

On the fourth day morning at about 9.00 am both Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken in golden palanquine through *Therku Vassal* (South Gate) to Villapuram *pavakkai mandapam*. There *Divya Deeparathanai* is performed. In the evening the procession starts from there comes through *Therku Vasal, Chinnakadai* Street, around the *Chithirai* Streets and reach the temple in the golden palanquin.
On the fifth day morning at about 8.00 am Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi come in golden car around the Masi Streets and reach Ramayana Chavadamandapam in North Masi Street. In the evening Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi come in separate kuthirai (horse) vahana to North Masi Street and reach Meenakshi Nayakkar mandapam inside the temple. There ‘Vedar Pari Leelai’, a divine sport is enacted.215

On the Sixth day morning at about 7.30 am, the procession of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi is taken place around the Masi Street in golden chariot and reach to Sivagangai Raja mandapam inside the temple then at about 7.00pm the procession of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi go around Masi Street each in separate Rishaba Vahana and return to the temple. (In the evening at 6.00 pm in Yanai Mahal a temple Othuvar tells the story of Thirugnana Sambandars’ establishment of the Saivite religion.

On the seventh day, in the morning at 8.00 am Lord Gangalanathar alone is taken in Simhasanam Vahana around the Masi Streets the images of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken to Meenakshi Nayakar mandapam inside the temple at about 12 noon. In the evening at 7.00 pm Lord Sundareswarar in Nandhikeswarar vahana and Goddess Meenakshi in Yali vahana come around the Masi Streets and reach Thiru Rasu Pandaram sons’ ‘Pushpa Singara Thirukkan’ in Ashta Sakthi mandapam. There a pair of Soda Sobasara Deeparathanai is shown to the deities and then return inside the temple.

215 Temple visit on 27.04.2012

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On the eighth day morning at about 10.00 am the procession of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi in golden Palanquin goes through East Chithirai Street, South Chithirai Street and reach Thirugnana Sambanadar SwamigalAatheenam Kattu Chetti mandapa padi at West Masi Street and stay there till 3.00 pm. Then they return to the temple through the same way. In the morning the divine sport of ‘Sakthi Udal’ is enacted. In the evening, Pattabishekam for Goddess Meenakshi is performed in six pillared mandapa at Goddess Meenakshishrine. She wears a crown and garland made of neem flowers as a sign of Pandya Princess and scepter is given in Her hand. Then the Chairman of Trust Board receives the scepter from Goddess Meenakshi and with all honour from Meenakshishrine, he goes around the second prahara of Sundareswarar shrine and return to the Meenakshi shrine and gives the scepter to Goddess Meenakshi. Then at about 8.00 pm the procession of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi in Velli Simhasanam (silver throne) is taken place around the Masi Streets and return to the temple.

On the ninth day at 8.00 am the procession of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi in Maravarna Chapparam (colourful wooden car) goes around the Masi Streets and reach Shivagnangai Raja mandahapadi inside the temple. Then at about 6.00 pm Meenakshi Amman’s Digvijayam is performed. Goddess Meenakshi is taken in Indira Vimana Vahana to Lala Sri Renga Chattiram Thirukkan mandapam at the juncture of North and East Masi Streets.
On the tenth day, the celestial wedding of the Pandya Princess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareswarar is celebrated. The major highlight of the Chithirai Brahmostsavam festival is the ‘Meenakshi Thirukalyanam’ or celestial wedding of Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareswarar on the tenth day of the festival. The celebration starts with Vigneswara Puja and Brahma homam. The Mangalya Puja is performed. Lord Subramanya Swami and Lord Pavalakkanivai Perumal come from Thirupparamkundram to attend the celestial wedding. Lord Muruga of Thirupparankundram, as king Ukrapandya washes the feet of his parents and holy thread (kappu) is tied in the hands of Lord Sundareswarar, Priyavidai Amman and Meenakshi.

A priest from Kulasekara Bhattar family assumes as bride groom and another from Vikrama Pandya Bhattar family as bride perform the garland exchanging ceremony and the Hindu marriage rituals are performed like coming around the fire pit, sprinkling fried rice and stamping on Ammi (a stone used for grinding). The women devotees also tie the turmeric dipped holy thread (thali) around their neck. Turmeric, the holy thread, viboothi, kumkum are distributed to the devotees as prasadham. Devotees give money as marriage gift (moi) after taking the marriage feast.

On the eleventh day Therottam or car festival is celebrated. Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi come to Theradi mandapam. Two separate cars (thers) kept in Theradi mandapam are decorated elegantly. Pujas are

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Temple Visit on 02.05.2012

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216 Temple Visit on 02.05.2012
performed to these Cars and Lord Sundareswarar is seated in a Car and Goddess Meenakshi is seated in another one. In front of these two cars Lord Vinayaga and Lord Murugan come in two smaller woorden cars. Priests perform Pujas and Deeparathani and when the Chairman of the trust board wave the white flag, the V.I.Ps and other officials and devotees pull the rope of the cars and Therottam is held. The procession goes around the four Masi Streets and reaches the Theradi mandapam in East Masi Street. Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are tied parivattam217 (a white silk cloth around the head) during the procession and at the end both Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are crowned. A person from Ramnad Samasthanam is getting the first honour at this time. Then the God and Goddess return to the temple. In the evening the trust board members, religious endowment members, Government officials, police personals and VIPs are honored by tying Parivattam. At night both the deities of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken in a ‘Sapta VarnaChapparam’ around the four Masi Streets. Thirupparankundram Lord Murugar comes in Peacock (Mayil) Vahana.

On the twelfth day a divine sport of ‘Indira absolved of his sin’ is performed in the golden Lilly tank, at the Uchikala Puja. He performs Devendra Puja with white lotus flowers and gets rid of his sin. This is called as Thirthavari. At night Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken in Idaba Vahana around the four Masi Streets and reach 16 pillared mandapa. There they

217 According to the Madras University Tamil Lexicon, P.2518, Parivattam has three related meanings: 1. Vestment of a deity tied around the head of a devotee as a mark of honour; 2. Robes given by a king to a minister upon appointment to office; 3. Head-dress worn by a select dependent (usually a servant) of a deceased person for the purpose of mourning.
give send off to Lord Subramanya Swami and Pavalkkanivai Perumal. Then the flag lowering ceremony is held and with this the Chithirai festival comes to an end.

Each day of this festival, during the procession crackers are exploded; musical instruments like Nathaswaram and Pancha Vathyam are played; camel, elephant, umbrella, surutti, theevatti (a fire torch) proceed in front of the cars; and Vedas are recited by Shivacharyars and Thevaram hymns are recited by Othuvars.

One of the highlights of the Chithirai Festival is the procession of Lord Kallazhagar or Lord Vishnu, the brother of Goddess Meenakshi, who proceeds from Azhagarmalai to Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple to give away his sister in marriage to Lord Sundareswarar. The procession of Lord Kallazhagar on gleaming golden horse chariot starts from Azhagar Hills, about 30 km from Madurai. Due to a divine play, he was tricked by God Indra and delayed on the way. Meanwhile, the marriage was presided over by a local counter part koodal Azhaghgar. This act angered Lord Vishnu and He returns to Azhagar koil without visiting Madurai. The Kaalazhagar’s entry into river Vaigai is a beautiful sight to witness.

The following Table shows the details of vahanas and routes of the procession of the deities.  

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219 Chithirai Festival Invitation of 2010 issued by the temple.
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<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Morning</th>
<th>Evening</th>
<th>Vahana</th>
<th>Route</th>
<th>Vahana</th>
<th>Route</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Silver Simhasanam</td>
<td>Kulalar Mandapam</td>
<td>Karpaga Virucham</td>
<td>Lord Sundareswarar</td>
<td>Goddess Meenakshi</td>
<td>Simham Four Masi Streets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Muthuramier Mandapam</td>
<td>Bootham</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Annam</td>
<td>Four Masi Streets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Kalyana Sundaramudha advert</td>
<td>Kailasa Parvatham</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Kamadhenu</td>
<td>Four Masi Streets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Golden Palanquin</td>
<td>Villapuram Pavakkai Mandapam</td>
<td>Golden Palanquin</td>
<td>Golden Palanquin</td>
<td>Golden Palanquin</td>
<td>Therkuvasal Chinnakadai Street, Chithirai Streets and South Gate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Ramayanachavadi North Masi St.</td>
<td>Golden Horse</td>
<td>Golden Horse</td>
<td>Golden Horse</td>
<td>North &amp; East Masi Streets, Amman Sannadhi, Meenakshi Nayakkar Mandapam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Shivagangai Raja Mandapam</td>
<td>Rishabam</td>
<td>Rishabam</td>
<td>Rishabam</td>
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<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Silver Palanquin</td>
<td>Masi Streets, Meenakshi Nayakkar Mandapam</td>
<td>Nandikeswarar</td>
<td>Yazhi</td>
<td>Four Masi Streets, Ashtasakthi Mandapam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Golden Palanquin</td>
<td>East Chithirai Street, South Avani Moola Street, Dindigal Road, West Masi Street, Kattuchetti Mandapam</td>
<td>Silver Palanquin</td>
<td>Silver Palanquin</td>
<td>Four Masi Streets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Maravarna Chapparam</td>
<td>Masi Streets and Shivagangai Raja Mandapam</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Indira Vimanam</td>
<td>Lala Sri Renga Chattram, Thirukkan Mandapam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Vasantotsavam**

*Vasantotsavam* is celebrated in the month of *Vaikasi* (May-June). It is celebrated for ten days from *Thiruvatirai* to *Vishaha Natshatra* (star). Thirumalai Nayak built *Pudumandapam* or *Vasanta mandapam* exclusively for celebrating this festival. Each day the *Utsava* deities Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken on procession to *Pudumandapam*. The life size statue of Thirumalai Nayak is honoured by tying *Parivatam* around the head and then *pujas* are performed to the deities. Every day the deities are taken on procession on *Simhasanam* around the four Masi Streets. On the tenth day alone, they come on *Rishaba Vahana* around the four *Chithirai* Streets. On that day milk, raw mango, *sundal* (boiled pulses) are offered as *nivedhyas* for the God and Goddess. During Thirumalai Nayak’s period, water was filled in the ditch around the four sides of *Pudumandapam* for cool breeze, during the *Vasanta* festival. But now this

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mandapa houses innumerable petty shops of all kinds like books, clothes, novelties, household articles, etc. and spoil the significance of this festival.

**Unjal Utsavam**

This festival is celebrated for ten days in the month of *Ani* (June-July) from *Magam* to *Mula Natchtram* (star). It is celebrated in the 100 pillared *mandapa* inside the temple by Lala Chatra family members. All the 10 days both Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken in wooden *Simhasana* around the second *prahara* of Lord Sundareswarar shrine and reaches the 100 pillared *mandapa* and had no procession in the outer streets. On the tenth day morning, Lord Sundareswarar comes in golden horse *vahana* and Goddess Meenakshi comes in *Simha vahana* around *Chithirai* streets. During this festival the deities of both Meenakshi and Lord Sundareswarar are brought to *Unjal Mandapa* and placed on the swing, kept there when the *unjal* is swung, *Pon Unjal* songs written by Manikkavasakar are sung daily and the devotees worship the God here.

The *Uttara Nakshatra Utsavam* is also performed in this month. Abishekais performed for Lord Natarajar and Shivagami Amman in the early morning and the *Utsava* deities of *Pancha Sabha* (five courts) Natarajar and *Velliambala* (silver shrine) Natarajar are taken on procession around four *Masi* Streets.

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221 Interview with Shivaraj Bhattar of the Madurai Meenakshi Temple, 5.08.2012.
Mulaikkottu Festival

From Ayilya Nakshatra to Kettai Nakshatra in the month of Aadi (July-August), the Mulaikkottu festival is celebrated for ten days. This festival is only for Goddess Meenakshi. The farmers start their cultivation only after this festival. The Utsava deity of Goddess Meenakshi is kept in the Kilikoondu mandapam and worshipped for all the ten days. The deities are taken to various mandapas inside the temple and return to Kilikoondu mandapam. The details of each day celebration are given in the following table.

The first day is the flag hoisting ceremony. At about 8.00 am the flag is hoisted on the flag staff in front of the Meenakshishrine. On this day, 9 types of pulses mixed with milk are sprouted in pots. The deity of Goddess Meenakshi is kept on Simmasanam (Throne) in Kilikoondu mandapam and pujas are performed. At night the deities are taken on procession in Simha Vahana around the four Aadi Streets and return to Kilikoondu mandapam. The first day is called as Kalyana (marriage) Utsava.

On the second day morning, both Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken on procession in Simha Vahana and evening in Velli Anna (Silver Swan) Vahana around the four Aadi Streets.

On the Third day morning the God and Goddess come in Thanga Chapparam (a small golden car) and evening in Kamadhenu Vahana around the four Adi streets. In the noon time at Pooram star, salt, paddy and rice are filled in
three measuring instruments (Nazhi) and both Mulava and Utsava deities of Goddess Meenakshi are performed ‘Dhrishti Kazhithal’\textsuperscript{222} (A custom followed by the Hindus to remove the envious look)

On the fourth day morning Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi come in Thanga Chapparam and evening in Silver Elephant (Velli Yaanai)Vahana around the Aadi Streets and return to Kilikoondu mandapam.

On the fifth day morning, after performing pujas they are taken in Thanga Chapparam from Thirukkalyana mandapam. In the evening they are taken in Idaba Vahana around the four Aadi streets.

On the sixth day morning, the deities are brought in Thanga Chapparam to Thiruvalluvar Kazhaka mandapam in the North Aadi Street and pujas are performed. Then the procession comes around the Aadi Streets and reaches the Kilikoondu mandapam. At night, the deities are taken in parrot (Kili) Vahana to Hindu Virudhunagar Nadar’s mandapam in the North Aadi Street. After doing pujas the procession goes around the four Aadi Streets and reaches the Kilikoondu mandapam.

On the seventh day morning, in Swati Nakshatra, the deities of Sundaramoorthy Nayanar and Seraman Perumal Nayanar are taken in Silver Elephant and Horse Vahana respectively from Avani Mula Street and reach the

\textsuperscript{222} R.Panchannatham Pillai, Madurai Arulmigu Meenakshi Sundareswarar ThirukkovilVaralaru, Meenakshi Amman Temple Publications, Madurai, 1988, p.70.
Kilikoondu mandapam. At night, the deity Goddess Meenakshi is taken in floral palanquin(Poopallakku)around the four Aadi Streets and returns to Kilikoondu mandapam. Then the deity is taken to the Utsavar shrine of the Sundareswarar shrine at the second Prahara and ‘exchanging of garland’ is held.

On the eighth day morning, the deities are taken in Thanga Chapparam from Thirukkalyana mandapam around the four Aadi Streets and reach the Kilikoondu mandapam. At night, the deities are taken to Sooravali Suppaiyar mandapam. Pujas are performed there. Then the procession goes around the four Aadi Streets and reaches the Kilikoondu mandapam.

On the ninth day morning, the deities are taken in Chattather (a small wooden car) to Meenakshi Nayakkar mandapam. After performing pujas the procession goes around the four Aadi Streets and returns to Kilikoondu mandapam. At night from Meenakshi Nayakkar mandapam the procession starts on ‘Poochapparam’ (a small car decorated with flowers) and goes around the four Aadi Streets and returns to the temple.

On the tenth day morning the deities are taken on Thanga Chapparam around the four Aadi Streets. At night they are taken on Kanaka Thandiyal Vahana around the Aadi Streets and return to the Kilikoondu mandapam. On this day the grown pulses, which were sprouted on the first day, are put into the water in Golden lotous tank. Then Thirthavari is performed. The Aadi Mulai Kottu festival is ended by lowering the flag.
The details of each day celebration is given in the following Table

### Adi Mulaikkottu Festival

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Vehicles of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi</th>
<th>Route</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>Evening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1(^{st}) day</td>
<td>Flag Hoisting</td>
<td>Simhasanam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2(^{nd}) day</td>
<td>Simha Vahanam</td>
<td>Silver Annam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3(^{rd}) day</td>
<td>Golden Chapparam</td>
<td>Kamadhenu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4(^{th}) day</td>
<td>Golden Chapparam</td>
<td>Silver Elephant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5(^{th}) day</td>
<td>Golden Chapparam</td>
<td>Idabam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6(^{th}) day</td>
<td>Golden Chapparam</td>
<td>Parrot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7(^{th}) day</td>
<td>Golden Chapparam</td>
<td>Poopallakku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8(^{th}) day</td>
<td>Golden Chapparam</td>
<td>Golden Horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9(^{th}) day</td>
<td>Chatta ther</td>
<td>Poochapparam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10(^{th}) day</td>
<td>Golden Chapparam</td>
<td>Kanaka Thandiday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Avani Mula Festival

This festival is meant to celebrate the coronation of Lord Sundareswarar. It is held in *Avani* (Aug- Sept). As the God is dressed as a worker and taken to the *Puttu Thoppu* on the banks of river Vaigai,\(^{223}\) it is also known as *Puttu Utsavam*.

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Avani Mula festival, ending with Avitta Nakshatra, is celebrated for 18 days. This festival starts by hoisting five flags. First six days are celebrated for Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareswarar. According to the Hindu belief there are two forces working in the universe, one favoring the evolution of souls and the other hindering it there are intelligences working in both these currents of influences. As the universe is governed in strict justice, certain periods are under the control of one force and certain periods are under the others. The night hours between midnight and 4.00 o’clock are said to be favorable for the play of forces adverse to human spiritual progress. Similarly this month under the influence of the Asura Nimiti has a preponderable of Asuric tendency, not favourable for the progress of human souls. Hence to ward off the harm and evil effects resulting from the asuric tendencies of the Asura Nimiti, human beings are advised to lead a religious life which would enable them to find out and cast off from them the germs of subtle evil influence sown into them by the asuric influences. The Avani Mula festival is said to be under the influence of the asterism Mulam (Scorpio) and its presiding deity is asura named Nimiti.

First Day

In the morning the deities of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken on procession from Kulalar mandapam inside the temple. The procession goes around the four Avanimula streets in golden chapparam. ‘Preaching the black bird’, one of the Thiruvilayadal scenes is enacted on the first
day. At night Lord Sundareswarar is taken in *Karpaga virutcha vahana* and Goddess Meenakshi is taken in *Simha vahana* around the four *Avani mula* streets.

**Second Day**

At about 7.00 am Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken in golden *chapparam* around the four *Avani Mula* Streets, *Amman Sannadhi*, and *Pookadai* Street and reach P.C. Muthu Chettiyar mandapam. One of the *Thiruvilayadal* episode ‘Granting liberation to the crane’ is enacted. At night Lord Sundareswarar in *Bhootha* (demon) *vahana* and Goddess Meenakshi in *Anna* (swan) *vahana* are taken from P.C. Muthu Chettiyar mandapam to the temple through *Pookadai* Street, East *Masi* Street, *Amman Sannadhi* and *Avani Mula* Street.

**Third Day**

In the morning, Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi start from the temple in golden *chapparam*, go to *Kaasukkara Chettiyar’s mandapam* through South *Avani Mula* Street. Then from there to *Ondimuthu Pillai mandapam* in South *Veli* street through *Kansa mettu* street, South *Masi* street, *Pandya Velalar* street. At night from there Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi come to the temple in *Kailasa Parvata vahana* and *Kamadenu vahana* respectively, through *Pandya Velalar* Street, West *Masi* Street and *Avani Mula* Street. At *Arya Vaisya mandapam* in *Kansa mettu* street, ‘The selling of manikkam’, one of the *Thiruvilayadal*’s episode is enacted.
Fourth Day

In the morning, the deities are taken in golden chapparam around the four Avani Mula Streets and reach the temple. From there again the deities are taken on procession to Ramasami Pillai mandapam in North Avani Mula Street through Chithirai Street and East Pattamar Street and halt at Meenakshi Nayakkar Mandapam inside the temple. There ‘Giving purse of gold to Dharumi’, a divine sport is enacted. At night, Lord Sundareswarar in Golden Chapparam and Goddess Meenakshi in Elephant vahana go on procession around the four Avani Mula Streets and reach the temple.

Fifth Day

In the morning, the deities of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken on procession in Golden Chapparam around the Avani Mula Streets and reach the Karuppana Pillai Mandapam inside the temple. The priest of Madurai Veeran Swami temple brings the ‘Ulavak kottai’ and Ulavakkottai Aruliyathu’,\(^\text{224}\) one of the divine sports of Lord Sundareswarar is enacted. At night, Lord Sundareswarar in Nandhikeswara vahana and Goddess Meenakshi in Yali vahana start from the temple, go on procession around the four Avani Mula Streets and return to the temple.

Sixth Day

In the morning, Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi go on procession in *Golden Chapparam* around the four *Avani Mula* Streets and reach *Meenakshi Nayakkar Mandapam* inside the temple and then go to *Pudu mandapam*. At *Pudhumandapam*, ‘Pananukku Angam Vettiyathu’, one of the divine sports is enacted. At night, the action of ‘Thirugnana Sambandar establishing the supremacy of Saivism’ is performed. Then deities are taken on procession in *Rishaba vahana* around the four *Avani Mula* Streets and return to the temple. The idols of Gnana Sambandar, Mangaiyarkarasi and Kulachirai Nayanar are also taken on the procession along with the God and Goddess.

Seventh Day

In the morning, the deities are taken on procession in Golden Palanquine to Shivagangai Estate *Mandapam* in Arulmigu Immayil Nanmai Tharuvar Temple in West *Masi* Street. The procession goes through *Avani Mula* Streets and reaches the mandapam. There ‘Selling the Bangles’, a divine sport is enacted. In the evening, the procession starts from there go through West *Masi* Street, West *Gopura* Street, *Thanappa Mudaliyar Agraharam* and *Avani Mula* Street and reach the temple. In the Six pillared *mandapam* inside the temple *Pattabishekam* (Coronation) to Lord Sundareswarar is performed. The chairman of the temple Trust Board Committee gets the scepter and goes around the second *prahara* of the Sundareswarar shrine and then hands over the scepter in the hands of the Lord. Special *pujas* and *deeparathanai* are performed. Arulmigu Subramanya Swami
and Goddess Devayanai from Thiruparankundram and Arulmigu Manikkavasaka peruman from Thiruvathavur come to the Madurai temple to witness the Pattabhishekam of the Lord. Lord Murugan acts as the Pandya king in the Thiruvilayadal scenes of ‘Foxes turn to Horses’ and ‘Carrying soil for Puttu’.

Eighth Day

In the morning, Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken on procession in Golden Palanquin through East Masi Street, Yanaikkal Street and reach Chellaperumal Pillai mandapam. In the evening, they return to the temple and at 16 Pillared mandapam in the Aadi Street, ‘The Foxes turn to Horses’, a divine sport is enacted. At night the deities are taken on procession in Golden horse vahana around the four Avani Mula Streets and return the temple.

Ninth Day

In the morning, Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi, seated on the Silver Throne, are taken through four Chithirai Streets and East Masi Street and reach the old Chokkanathar temple. Then the procession goes to Puttu Thoppu VanipaVaisya mandpam near Arappalayam on the bank of river Vaigai. On the way they halt at Virudhunagar Nadars’ mandapam, Gurusami Sastrigal mandapam and Mahalingayyar Kattalai mandapam. At Puttu Thoppu ‘Puttukku man sumanda leelai’ (carrying soil for puttu) one of the divine sports of Lord

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225 Nagappa Nachiappan, Verkottam-Thirupparam Kundram Koil, Dhamayanthi Pathipagam, Chennai, 1989, pp.149-50
226 Interview with Deiva Sigamani alies Prakash, a Bhattar in Meenakshi Amman Temple (acted as Lord Siva as a horse merchant) on 17.08.2013.
Sundareswarar is enacted by priests. Then ‘man sathuthal’ (applying sand) event is taken place. At night, the deities are taken on Rishaba Vahana from Puttu Thoppu to the temple through Ponnaharam Broadway, Krishnayyar Theppakula Street, Naicker Puthu Street, Vakkil Puthu Street, East Masi Street and Amman Sannadhi. Arulmigu Subramanya Swami in horse vahana from Muthambala Mudhaliyar Mandapam in Puttu Thoppu and Manikkavasaga Swamigal from Thanappa mudhaliyar mandapam on horse vahana also participate the procession with the main deities.

**Tenth day**

In the morning Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken on procession on the Golden Chapparam around the four Avani mula streets and reach Thirukkalyana mandapam inside the temple. There “selling of Fire wood” one of the divine sports of the Lord is performed. At night, after performing pradhosa puja, Meenakshi Sundareswarar, Subramanya Swami and Manikkavasaga Swami are taken on procession around the four Avani Mula streets and reach the temple.

**Eleventh day**

In the morning the deities are taken on procession in ‘Chatta Ther’ (small wooden car) around four Avani Mula Streets and return the temple. Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are crowned. At this time sikaram kaval mirasThiraviyam pillai & brothers are honoured by tying Parivattam. Then the
deities are taken to *muthambala mudhaliyar katalai mandapam* in the *kalyana mandapam*. At night the deities are taken on procession in *Saptavarna Chapparam* around the four *Avani Mula* streets and reach the temple.

**Twelfth day**

In the morning *Thirthavari* is performed in the *Thirthavari mandapam* and the deities are taken to the *Thirukkalyana mandapam*. In the evening Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken in *Rishaba vahana* to the 16 pillared *mandapam* at *Adi Street* and they give send off to Arulmigu Subramanya Swami and Manikkavasaga Swami. The two deities are taken on procession in horse *vahana* to Thirupparam kundram and Thiruvadavur respectively\(^ {227} \). With this the *Avani mula* festival comes to an end.

The following table shows the *Thiruvilayadals*, processions, *vahanas* and the streets, where the procession held\(^ {228} \).

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\(^ {227} \) *Temple Visit* on 21.08.2013.

\(^ {228} \) *Avani Mula Festival Invitation* of 2013 issued by the temple.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Morning</th>
<th>Evening</th>
<th>Thiruvilayadal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vahanam</td>
<td>Route</td>
<td>God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Golden Chapparam</td>
<td>Avani Mula Streets</td>
<td>Karpaga Virutcham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Golden Chapparam</td>
<td>Avani Mula Streets</td>
<td>Bhoota</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Golden Chapparam</td>
<td>West Masi Street, Avani Mula street</td>
<td>Kailasa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Golden Chapparam</td>
<td>Four Avani Mula Streets</td>
<td>Golden Chapparam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Golden Chapparam</td>
<td>Avani Mula Streets</td>
<td>Adhikara Nandhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Golden Chapparam</td>
<td>Avani Mula Streets</td>
<td>Idabam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Golden Pallakku</td>
<td>West Masi Street, West Gopuram, Thanappa Mudaliyar Agraharam, Avani Mula Streets</td>
<td>Golden Palanquin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Golden Pallakku</td>
<td>Avani Mula Streets</td>
<td>Golden Horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; day</td>
<td>Silver Simhasanam</td>
<td>Ponnakaram, Broad way, Krishnarayar Theppakulam, Nayakkar Pudu Street, Vakkilpudu Street, East Masi Street, Amman Sannadhi</td>
<td>Idabam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vinayaga Chaturthi

In the month of Avani (Aug-sep) Vinayaka or Pillayar, the elephant headed God, is worshipped in a festival called Vinayaka Chaturthi. While in states like Maharashtra and Karnataka this festival is conducted on a massive scale, in Tamil Nadu it has traditionally been a private celebration. Each family gets its own small idol of pillayar made of clay, adorns it with flowers and arugampul (a kind of grass) and worships it with offering of rice sweet cake called mothakam or kozhukattai. On the following day the clay idol is dropped into a well or waterway or sea. Of late, following the North Indian trend, massive idols of pillayar are being worshipped in public places in many 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.

In the second prahara of the Sundareswarar shrine, facing south and opposite to the Nadukkattu gopurm there is an eight feet height image of Mukuruni Vinayagar. It is said that this image was found when Thirumalai Nayakkar was digging the Vandiyur Thепpakulam. In the Thируvalaventusayudайyar koil
Thiruppanimalai it is stated that this image was installed by Kantha Podi Bethu Chetty.

In the month of Avani, on Vinayagar Chathurthi day a silvar Kavacha is covered for the deity and special pujais performed. A single kozhukkattai is made from Mukkuruni measure approximately 19 kg of rice flour mixed with dhal, grated coconut and jaggery and boild in a specially prepared vessel. It is offered to the Lord Vinayaga on this day and hence this deity is called as Mukkuruni Vinayagar.

Navarathri Festival

The next major festival, which arrives in purattasi (Sep-Oct.), is Navarathri, which is called Dusehra elsewhere in the country. This is a nine day festival in which the Goddess in all her forms is worshipped. Navaratri is a combination of many concepts, with the common theme of the victory of good over evil. One concept is that Vijayadashami or Dusehra is celebrated on the day Rama kills Ravana in the Rama-Ravana war. Another concept is that, Durga, Goddess of power and vitality who is believed to have nine forms called Navadurga, taken a new-form on each of the nine days (celebrated as Durga Puja) with the arsenal of weapons to ride a lion and fight the demon Mahishasura. The 10th day, on which the Goddess kills Mahishasura, is celebrated as Dusehra or

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229 Kuruni is a unit of measure.
231 Lavkush Mishra, Op.cit, p.194
*Vijayadashami* as the victory of good over evil. Lord Rama is said to have worshipped the Goddess, seeking the blessings in order to overpower the evil force of Ravana, the abductor of his beloved Sita.232

The object or aim with which it is observed is said to be to propitiate the Goddess symbolizing every possible kind of energy in the universe, with a view to obtain perpetual happiness and prosperity. The reason for choosing nine days as the duration for the observance, neither of this festival and neither more nor less is interesting and deserves examination. The digit or numeral nine contains within it all the other number of one digit but it contained in none of them. So Devi or Goddess contains within Her the whole universe and no finite form or forms with limitation can contain Her who is without any limitation. This fact is emphasized by the duration nine days fixed for the observance of this festival.233

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 Pujato 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, Saraswathi, a *puja* is performed and Her blessings are sought.234 On the tenth day

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233 P.V.Jagadisa Ayyar, *South Indian Festivities*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1989, p.135
falls *Vijayadashami* or *Dusehra* (Dusehra literally means that which takes away ten sins). It is customary that children begin their education on this day or art is commenced or any new business or industrial venture started.

One special way in which Tamils celebrate *Navarathri* is the ‘*golu*’ or display of dolls, toys in large numbers tastefully decorated and arranged on galleries, are exhibited in many Hindu houses with the belief that the Goddess is present on those toys and enjoys the worship offered to her. It is a pleasant sight to see young girls in their colourful dresses and looking very smart and active going from house to house in the evening to invite the maidens and girls to be present in their houses during the *puja* performance and to partake of the daily offerings to the Goddess.

This *Navarathri* festival is celebrated for nine days in the month of *Purattasi* from *poorva patcha Pradhamai* to *Navami* which comes after the *Mahalaya Amavasai* (New moon day). At the Meenakshi Temple ‘*Kappu Kattal*’ (tying the holy thread) is performed for the deities in *mulastanam*. But in other temples it is performed only to the *Utsava* deities. The priest who is performing puja to Goddess Meenakshi also ties the holy thread and starts the celebrations. During the *Arthajama Puja* the *mulava* deity is specially decorated. Then the *Utsava* deity is placed in the *golu mandapam* and each day, Goddess Meenakshi is

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decorated in different form and bless Her devotees at *golu mandapam*. The following are the different forms in each day of the *Navarathri* festival.\(^{238}\)

- Rajarajeswari
- *Manikkavasagarukku Upadhesithathu* (preaching to Manikka Vasagar)
- *Vethathirku Porul Uraithathu* (Teaching the meaning for vedas)
- *Avathar* (incarnation) as Thadathakai
- Marriage of Thadathagai
- Offering food to Gundotharan
- Giving *Vel* to Lord Muruga
- Mahishasura Mardhini
- Siva Sakthi

Golu mandapam is decorated with colourful lights and flowers. The temple authorities organize the cultural feast each day with vocal and instrumental music, dance, and devotional discourse in the evening.\(^{239}\)

On the *Vijayadhasami* day the deities of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are placed in the *Mangammal mandapam*. The victory of the Goddess over Mahishasura on the *Vijayadhasami* day ‘*Ambu poduthal*’ (throwing Arrow) is performed in other temples. But in the Madurai temple ‘*Sadai Kazhuvutal*’ (washing the plats) an event is performed to denote the ending of fast.\(^{240}\) Then the deities are taken on procession inside the temple premises.

\(^{238}\) Flex Board kept in the temple.  
\(^{239}\) *Temple Visit* on 24.10.2012  
Kolattam Festival

A six day festival from *Poorva Patcham Prathamai* to *Shashti*, in the month of *Aippasi* (Oct-Nov) is celebrated as *Kolattam* (stick dance) festival. For the first five days, Goddess Meenakshi is decorated like dancing *kolatttam* and placed on a *chapparam*. After the *Sayarachai Puja* in the evening, the procession starts in the *Aadi* streets followed by *Nathaswaram* and girls dance with sticks in their hands by beating them (*kolattam*) in front of the *chapparam* and it reach *pudhumandapam*. There special *puja* is performed and *deeparathanai* is shown. On the sixth day Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken on procession in *Rishaba Vahana* around the *Aadi* streets.

Pavithra Utsavam

On the fullmoon day in the month of *Aippasi* ‘*Pavithrotsavam*’, a five days festival is celebrated. It is a ritual for purifying the mistakes done, if any, during the daily *pujas* and festivals. On the *pournami* day (full moon) ‘*punool*’ (a sacred thread) is worn to all the *Utsava* deities and *pujas* are performed.

Skanda Sashti Festival

*Skanda Sasti*, a six day festival is celebrated from *Pradamai* to *Sashti* in the month of *Aippasi*. Each day the *Utsava* deity of Lord Muruga is kept in the peacock *vahana* and taken on procession around the second *prahara* of the Sundareswararshrine. *Sura samharam* is not performed in the Meenakshi Temple.

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241 Interview with Shivaraj Bhattar of Marurai Meenakshi Temple on 5.10.2012
Karthigai Deepam Festival

Karthigai Deepam festival is celebrated on the full moon day in the month of Karthigai (Nov-Dec) when the moon is in conjunction with asterism karthigai (plerades). Deepam (lamp) plays an important role in the worship of deities in the Hindu religion. It finds a place in all religious functions. Karthigai Deepam is an important festival in the Hindu culture. This festival is celebrated in the houses of Hindu community by lighting the lamps in the evenings. On the pournami day with Bharani star, Bharani Deepam and on the next day with Karthigai star, Karthigai Deepam and Annamalai Deepam are very important and a popular celebration in the Siva temples.

The peculiar custom of burning heaps of dry leaves, twigs etc going by the name of Chokkappanai infront of the temple deserves its rational explanation. The custom appears to have originated from the incidents recorded in the myth where in Lord Siva is said to have burnt the Chariots of certain Asuras who were harassing the sages and others on the earth. The Chokkappanai is symbolical form of the aerial cars of Asuras burnt by the fire emanating from the third eye of Siva.

Starts with flag hoisting on the Sataya Nakshatra in the month of Karthigai (Nov-Dec) this festival is celebrated for 10 days. For the first 5 days the deities of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken on procession in Rishaba Vahana around the four Aadi streets, on the Thirukarthigai day, Chokkapanai is

\[242\text{ ARE } 422\text{ of } 1929-30\]
burnt in East Masi Street at night. The deities of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken in Simha Vahana around the Aadi streets. On the eighth and ninth day and on the tenth day Thirthavari is performed. On this day morning, the deities are taken in Rishaba vahana around the four Aadi streets.

The Margali Festival

The entire Tamil month of Margali (Dec-Jan) is a period of early morning bath, prayer and temple worship completed before dawn, in spite of the chilly weather. The hymns of Thiruppavai and Thiruvempavai are sung. A note worthy feature of the month in the Madurai Temple is the stoppage of the recitation of Vedic hymns and the rendering of only the Panchapuranams and Thiruvempavai songs during the fortnight prior to the Thiruvatirai star in the month by the Othuvars of the temple. Thiruvempavai festival is celebrated for 10 days in the Madurai temple. Each day morning the idol of Manikkavasagar is taken on procession around the Aadi streets.

Ennaikkappu Festival

A ten day Ennaikkappu festival is celebrated in the month of Margazhi, for Goddess Meenakshi from Sadhaya Nakshatram to Thiruvathiri Nakshatram. The unmarried girls undertake nonpu (religious observance) for prosperous marriage life. On this day morning the Utsava deity of Goddess Meenakshi is placed on the Vasanta mandapam in Pudumandapam. Shivacharyar performs an act of giving Amman a golden stick for brushing teeth, applying oil for bathing (Ennaikappu-
applying oil) and gives beetle leaves. Then Amman is decorated in a grand manner. *Parivattam* is tied to the statue of Thirumalai Nayakkar and *puja* is performed to Amman. Then the deity is taken on procession around the *Chithirai* streets. For the first 8 days Goddess Meenakshi in Simha Vahana, on the 9<sup>th</sup> day in Silver Chapparam and on the tenth day in Kanaga Thandi Vahana comes from Pudumandapam around the four Chitirai streets. On the 9<sup>th</sup> day, during the *Arthajama Puja* at the second prahara of Sundareswarar shrine, Goddess Meenakshi is placed on an *unjal* (swing) and the hymns from Thiruvasagam are sung. After each song *Deeparadhana* is performed. On the tenth day night, at the second *prahara* of Sundareswarar shrine, a ritual called ‘*Rattina Ponnumjal*’ (golden swing) is performed.

**Arudra Festival**

The *Arudra* festival is for Nataraja. This festival is observed in the month of *Margazhi*. The occasion is one especially favourable to propitiate the dancing aspect of Siva (Nataraja).<sup>243</sup> This is observed in Madurai temple also.<sup>244</sup> At Chidambaram Nataraja temple, this festival is said to be of a special importance. The festival concludes on *Tiruvatirai nakshatra*. Lord Nataraja dances for His consort Devi Uma, Pathanjali and Viyakrapatha on this day.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> *ARE* 104 and 109 of 1912

Ashtami Chappara Festival

Another one-day festival of importance held during this month is the Ashtami Pradakshina Vizha or Ashtami Chappara Vizha. This festival is held for the protection and welfare of the world. Once Lord Siva went to offer food for all the living beings, Goddess Parvati wanted to test him and closed an ant inside a vessel. But for Her surprise there was a piece of rice near that ant. To commemorate this event this festival is celebrated.

On the Ashtami titi, in the month of Margali the Utsava deity of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi start at about 6 am from the temple to East Masi Street. There, the deities are placed in two small cars called Ashtami Chapparam. The car of Lord Sundareswarar is pulled followed by the car of Goddess Meenakshi. The idols of Vinayaga, Muruga and Athikara Nandhi, the temple bull and camel accompany infront of the procession. The temple Vidvans play music with Nadhaswaram. The procession goes through Yanaikkal, East Veli Street, South Veli Street, Thirupparankundram road, West Veli Street, North Veli Street, Nayakkar New Street, Vakkil New Street, East Marat Street, Vilakkuthun and return to the East Masi Street. On the way rice are thrown on both sides of the road to denote the incident ‘Padiyalattal’ (offering food) of the Lord Siva. Then the deities are brought to the temple. From 6 am to 9 or 10 am the four doors of the temple are closed. When the deities reach the temple again the doors are opened and devotees are allowed to worship.
Float Festival

The Hindu festival which goes by the name *Thaipusam* is observed on the day over which the asterism *pusham* (cancri) presides, in the Tamil month of *Thai* (Jan-Feb). The day generally falls on the full moon day of the month. The planet *Brihaspati* or *Guru* (Jupiter) is said to be the presiding deity of asterism ‘*Pusham*’ and consequently worship offered to the asterism *Pusham* is considered to have special merit since *Brahaspati* symbolizes wisdom and the hindus consider him to be the preceptor of the Gods and one of the most important of the seven planets if not the most important planet. A bath in a sacred river on this day is considered to be very meritorious and people of all sorts flock to the nearest one for the purpose.

The natal star of Thirumalai Nayakkar is *pusam* of the month of *Thai* and the king to perpetuate its memory arranged the *Teppotsavam* (Float festival) to be celebrated with great pomp. The Teppakulam at the eastern edge of Madurai was initiated by Thirumalai Nayakkar in 1636 AD. As a setting for festivals in which sacred images were floated reservoir has steps flanked by animal and bird balustrades leading down to the water in the middle of each side. A sixteen-columned pavilion with a pyramidal tower stands on an island at the centre; it is capped with a kuta roof. Portrait sculptures adorn the four central columns; slabs cut into the shape of arched openings are placed in between smaller but similar

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246 *ARE* 459 of 1929-30
247 *ARE* 458 of 1929-30
pevilions mark the islands four corners. This Teppakulam covers an area in the south-north 1000 feet and east –west 950 feet with 9.5 lakhs square feet. This tank is commonly known as the Vandiyur Mariamman Theppakulam as there is a famous Mariamman temple on the other side of the tank. It is stated that a large size Vinayaka or Pillayar was unearthed while the tank was dug. This Pillayar was installed in the southern prakara of the Sundareswarar shrine of the Meenakshi temple and now called as Mukkuruni Pillaiyar. This festival is celebrated till this day with the same pomp and pleasure.

The float festival is a twelve day festival deciding the Thirthavari (ending day) on Thiruvatirai Nakshatram. On the day of Punarpoosam harvesting festival is celebrated and on the twelfth day (pusam star) the Float Festival is celebrated at Vandiyur Mariamman Theppakkulam.

On the first day morning, after hoisting the flag, the deities of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken in Simha Vahana around the second prahara of Sundareswarar shrine and placed in Kulalar Mandapam inside the temple. In the evening Lord Sundareswarar is taken in Karpaga Viruksha Vahana and Goddess Meenakshi in Simha Vahana around the four Chithirai streets.

On the second day morning, the deities are taken in separate *Thanga Chapparam* (golden *chapparam*) on procession to *Kunjan Chettiyar mandapam* in Therku vassal. The procession goes through *Amman Sannadhi, Chithirai Street, Jadamuni koil* street, *Manjanakkara* Street, *South Veli* Street and reaches the *Kunjan Chettiyar mandapam*. There *pujas* are performed to the deities. In the evening at about 6 pm the deities start from there, Goddess Meenakshiin *Anna* (swan) *Vahana* and Lord Sundareswarar in *Bhoota Vahana*, come through *Therku vassal, South veli* street, *Manjanakara* street, *Jadamuni* street, *Chithirai* street, *Amman Sannadhi* and reach the temple.

On the third day morning, the deities are taken in golden *chapparams* around the four *Chithirai* Streets and reach *Thirukkalyana mandapam* inside the temple. In the evening from there, Lord Sundareswarar in *kailasa parvatha vahana* and Goddess Meenakshi in *kamadhenu vahana* are taken around the *Chithirai* streets and return to the temple.\(^{251}\)

On the fourth day morning, the deities in Golden *chapparams* are taken through *Chithirai* Street, *Amman Sannadhi*, *East Avani Mula Street*, *Thasiltar Pallivasal Street*, *East MasiStreet*, *East Vadampoki Street* and reach *Nelpettai Attumandhai Pathinettam kottai paratesi mandapam*. There *pujas* are performed to the deities. In the evening the deities return in separate silver throne *vahana* to the temple through *East MasiStreet*, *East Marat Street*, *Ezhukadalstreet* and *Amman Sannadhi*.

\(^{251}\) *Temple Visit on 30.01.2009*
On the fifth day morning, the deities of Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken in golden *chapparams* to *Adhimulam pillai mandapam* in *Thirukkalyana mandapam* and then to *Subburaya Achariyar mandapam* and *pujas* are performed. In the evening Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshiin separate golden horse *vahana* go on procession around *Chithirai* streets and return the temple.

On the sixth day morning, Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken in golden *chapparams* to Thirukkalyana mandapam inside the temple and *pujas* are performed there. In the evening, Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi go in *Rishaba vahanas* to *Yanai mahal* in the south Aadi Street. They are accompanied by the idols Kulachiraiyar, Thirugnana Sambandar and Mangaiyarkarasi. Then the procession goes around the four *Masi* streets and returns the temple.

On the seventh day morning, the deities are taken in golden Chapparams around the *Chithirai* Streets and placed in *Thirukkalyana mandapam* and *pujas* are performed. In the evening Goddess Meenakshi in *Yali vahana* and Lord Sundareswarar in *Nandhikeswarar vahana* are taken around the four *Chithirai* Streets on procession and return to the temple.

On the eighth day morning Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken on golden palanquins to Smt. *Azhagammal Chettichi* endowment *mandapam* and reach the *Thirukkalyana mandapam*. There ‘*Valai Veesiyaruliya*
‘Leela’ is performed. Then they are taken on procession around four Chithirai streets and return to Thirukkalyana mandapam. Machahandi vivaham is performed there. In the evening Goddess Meenakshi in golden palanquine and Lord Sundareswarar in golden horse vahana go around the four Chithirai streets and return the temple.

On the ninth day morning Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken on separate Eduppu Ther (a small vahana with handle which is carried on the shoulders of the devotees) around the Chithirai streets and placed on the Chennai Dr. Vijaya Kumar mandahapadi in Thirukkalyana mandapam. In the evening both Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshiin a Saptavarnachapparam go around the Chithirai Streets and return the temple.

On the tenth day morning the deities are taken in golden palanquins to Muktheeswararar temple in the western side of the vandiyaur Mariamman Theppakulam. The procession goes through Amman Sannadhi, East Masi Street and Kamarajar salai and reaches the Muktheeswarar temple. In the evening, after performing pujas thithavari and ‘Theppam mututhalluthal’ are held. From there in Rishaba vahanas, the deities reach the temple through Kamarajar salai, East Masi Street and Amman Sannadhi.

On the eleventh day morning kathiraruttal festival is celebrated. Thai is a month of joy amongst the villagers as paddy is harvested. The God and Goddess are taken in golden palanquins to Ayyanapuram Sri Rangathamalmandapam.
Then the procession goes to Chinthamani village and placed in kathiraruppu mandapam and paddy is harvested as a ritual. In the afternoon at about 2pm after performing pujas, from the village the deities return to the temple.

On the twelfth day is the float festival. The Madurai float festival is a spectacular scene to behold. The deities are taken in golden palanquins escorted by elaborately decorated elephants and horses, along with musicians and devotees who sing songs all the way from the main temple to the Mariamman Theppakulam in the early morning. The procession is taken into Muktesswarar temple near the tank and then goes to the Theppakulam. There the deities are placed on a raft. It is decorated with colourful flower, silken buntings and papers. Raft is drawn around the maiyya mandapa two times and goes to maiyya (central) mandapa where it remains until evening. The king Thirumalai Nayak who built the tank is honoured by tying ‘Parivattam’ (a silk head gear) for his statue which is in the mandapa. Devotees throng in thousands to offer their prayer and the cold winter morning seems to have no effect on their faith.252

The most spectacular sight to the Madurai Float Festival is during the evening when the tank water is filled with thousands of floating oil lamps and banks flow with florescent tubes of light. The reflections cast along the lake from the oil lamps looks like the mirror image of the radiant stars in the night sky above. The deities are drawn round the lake again in the night and the celebrations continue into the night and are topped off with an impressive fireworks display to

252 Visit to Vandiyur Mariamman Theppakulam, 08.02.2009.
conclude the festivities. At about 10 pm Sri Meenakshi in Silver throne vahana and Lord Sundareswarar in Golden Horse vahanas are carried back to the temple. The programmes of the twelve days are given below.\textsuperscript{253}

**Float Festival**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Morning</th>
<th></th>
<th>Evening</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God</td>
<td>Goddess</td>
<td>Route</td>
<td>Goddess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1\textsuperscript{st} day</td>
<td>Simmasanam</td>
<td>Simmasanam</td>
<td>Kulalar Mandapam</td>
<td>Simmasanam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Amman Sannadhi, Chithirai Street, Jadamunikovil Street, Manjanaakara Street, South Veli Street and Kunjan Chettiyar Mandapam in Therkuvasal.</td>
<td>Karpaga Virutcham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd} day</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Thirukalyana Mandapam</td>
<td>Annam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Amman Sannadhi, Chithirai street, East Avani Moola street, Thasitar Pallivasal street, East Mari street, East vadampoki street, Nelpettai, Attumandhai, Pathinettam kottai paratesi mandapam</td>
<td>Bootham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3\textsuperscript{rd} day</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Adhimulam pillai mandapam, Subburaya Achariyar mandapam</td>
<td>Silver Simmasanam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4\textsuperscript{th} day</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Silver Simhasanam</td>
<td>Silver Simhasanam</td>
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<tr>
<td>5\textsuperscript{th} day</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Golden Horse</td>
<td>Golden Horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6\textsuperscript{th} day</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Thirukalyana Mandapam</td>
<td>Rishabam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7\textsuperscript{th} day</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Golden Chariot</td>
<td>Chithirai Streets, Thirukalyana mandapam</td>
<td>Yali</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{253} Theppam Festival Invitation (27.01.2009-08.02.2009) published by the temple.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Golden palanquin</th>
<th>Golden palanquin</th>
<th>Smt. Alagammal Chettichi Arakkattalai mandapam, Thirukkalyana mandapam, Four Chithirai streets</th>
<th>Golden palanquin</th>
<th>Golden Horse</th>
<th>Chithirai streets</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>Golden palanquin</td>
<td>Golden palanquin</td>
<td>Chennai Dr. Vijayakumar mandahapadi in thirukkalyana mandapam</td>
<td>Saptavara chapparm</td>
<td>Saptavara chapparm</td>
<td>Chithirai streets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Eduppu Ther</td>
<td>Eduppu Ther</td>
<td>Amman Sannadhi, East masi street, Kamarajar silai and Muktheeswarar temple</td>
<td>Rishabam</td>
<td>Rishabam</td>
<td>Muktheeswarar Temple, Kamarajar silai, East masi street, Amman sannadhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Golden palanquin</td>
<td>Golden palanquin</td>
<td>Ayyanapuram Sri Rangathammal mandapam, Chinthamani village</td>
<td>Golden palanquin</td>
<td>Golden palanquin</td>
<td>Chinthamani to the Temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>Golden palanquin</td>
<td>Golden palanquin</td>
<td>Muktheeswarar temple, Mariamman theppakulam (vandyur)</td>
<td>Silver Simmasanam</td>
<td>Golden Horse</td>
<td>Vandyur to the temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>Silver Simmasanam</td>
<td>Silver Simmasanam</td>
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**Masi Mandala Utsavam**

It is also called *Masi Maham* festival. This festival starts on *Maham* star (asterism) in the month of *Thai* celebrated for 48 days (1 mandalam). Eight flags are hoisted on the first day. 6 days are allotted for Lord Vinayaga, 6 days for Lord Muruga, and 3 days for Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar and 6 days for Chandrasekharar. *Panchamoorthy utsava* is held for 10 days; *Mauna utsavam* is celebrated for 8 days; again 3 days for Chandrasekharar, 3 days for Chokkanatha Swami and 3 days for Chandikeswarar are allotted. In those allotted days the concerned deities are taken on procession around the second prahara. The ten days Panchamoorthys utsava (5deities) are as follows.
First day morning, Goddess Meenakshi in *Simha vahana* and Lord Sundareswarar in *Karpaga viruksha vahana* are taken on procession around the four *Chithirai* streets.

Second day morning, Goddess Meenakshi in *Anna vahana* and Lord Sundareswarar in *Bhoota vahana* are taken on procession around four *Chithirai* streets.

Third day morning, Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken to *Kanya parameswari mandapa* in South *Avani Mula* Street. Evening, Lord Sundareswarar on *kailasa parvatha vahana* and Goddess Meenakshi in *Kamadenu vahana* starts from the *kanya parameswari mandapa* come around the four *Chithirai* streets and reach the temple.

Fourth day morning, from *Thirukkalyana mandapam* inside the temple Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi in *Simha vahana* are taken on procession around the *Chithirai* streets and return the temple.

Fifth day morning, Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are carried to *Thamu chinnammal mandapam* inside the temple. Evening, they are taken on procession in Horse *vahana* around the *Chithirai* streets.

Sixth day morning, Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi in *Rishabha vahana*, go on procession around the *Chithirai* streets.
Seventh day morning, Lord Sundareswarar in *Nandhi vahana* and Goddess Meenakshi in *Yali vahana* are carried to *Manikka mandapam* in South *Avani Mula Street*. Evening, from there they return to the temple after going on procession around the *Chithirai* streets.

Eighth day morning, Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi in golden palanquins, are carried around the four *Chithirai* streets and return the temple.

Ninth day morning, Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are carried in *Saptavarna chapparam* around the *Chithirai* streets and reach the temple.

Tenth day morning, on the day of *Masi maham nakshatram*, Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken to *Guruswami Sastri mandapam* in *Yanaikkal*. There *Thithavari* is performed by Lala chtram families. Evening, from *Yannaikkal* the deities are taken in *Rishaba vahana* on procession around the four *Chithirai* streets and reach the temple. On the tenth day flags are lowered down and account is read, which denotes the end of the festival. Before the reign of Thirumalai Nayak the celestial marriage of the Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Siva and the car festival were celebrated during this *Masi Maham* festival. The monarch transferred it to the *Chithirai* month.
After this from 32nd day onwards *Mauna Utsava* (8 days) and for Chandrasekarar, Chokkanatha Swami and Chandikeswara (for each 3 days), festivals are celebrated.

**Shivarathri Festival**

It is celebrated in the Tamil month of *Masi* (Feb-Mar.).\(^{254}\) The word Siva means ‘He gives blessings easily’. It also denotes the red which is the colour of Lord Siva.\(^{255}\) The abode of Lord Siva is mount Kailash. He is in the form of Linga in temples. He also appears in the form of Nataraja, Chandrasekara, Somaskanda, Dhakshinamurthy, Bhitchadanar and Bhairavar. In the Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple the idol of Lord Siva is in the form of Linga.

*Krishna Chaturthi* day in the month of *Masi* is called *Maha Shivarathri*. The night is divided into four quarters from 6 pm to 6 am; each quarter going by the name of a ‘*Jama*’ called also ‘*Yama*’\(^{256}\) and pious people keep awake during every one of it worshipping Eswara.\(^{257}\) People who observe this *Shivarathri viratha* take only a single meal during the day previous to the *viratha* day and sleep in a clean place during the night. In the morning of the *viratha* day they take bath in the water of a sacred river like the Cauvery, if one is available, and then go to witness the divine worship in a Siva temple; and at night offer worship to Siva.

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\(^{254}\) *ARE* 466 of 1929-30


\(^{256}\) Jama and Yama mean a watch, as measure of time (Sanskrit Yama – motion) Approximate value /Jama or /Yamam – This is generally applied to night hours.

during every one of the four Yamams. It is ordained in the scriptures, that those who want to observe the viratha very scrupulously, should worship Siva with lotus flowers, offer to Him ‘Pongal’ (Rice and green dhal mixed with jaggery and cooked together, added ghee, cashew nuts, dry grapes and elachi) and then recite the Rig – veda till the first Yamam is over.

In the second Yamam, they should worship him with clusters of Tulasi leaves, offer Payasam (a kind of sweet preparation like keer), and then be reciting the Yajur – Veda till its close.

In the third Yamam, the worship should be with the leaves of the Bael trees (Aegle marmelor) called also Bilvam in Tamil, the offering should be food mixed with sesame powder, and the recital of Sama – Veda.

In the fourth Yamam the flowers used for worship should be blue – lotus called Neelothpalam or Sengalinir, the offering should be food pure and simple and the recital the fourth or the Atharvana – Veda. During the night of Maha ShivarathriRudrabhisek should be performed on all the four jams (3 hours duration) with the thousand and eight names of Siva dully uttered each time offering Bilva leaves which are regarded as his favourite even more than the fragrance of the flowers which abounds at that time. An orthodox saivite devotedly performs the festival. People offer milk, honey, vibhoodhi and

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258 This is said to be a great purifier of the atmosphere and the destroyer of mosquitoes.

259 P.V.Jagadisa Ayyar, Op.cit, p.44.

260 ARE 462 of 1929 -30.
bilvaleaves. The time between 11.30 pm and 1 am is considered as very auspicious time, as God Siva appeared as the Divine Light at that time, after God Vishnu, and God Brahma failed to apprehend his full form.

This *Maha Shivarathri* festival is celebrated with much enthusiasm in the Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple. On this night *pujas* are performed four times to Lord Sundareswarar. *Thriyodhasi Titi* is the form of Amman, and *Chaturthi Titi* is the form of Lord Siva. The union of *Thriyodhasi* and *Chaturthi Titi* emphasize the Siva *Yoga*, who controls all the five elements of this world. This festival is celebrated according to the *agama* rules in the Meenakshi Amman temple.

**Panguni Uthiram Festival**

*Panguni Uthiram* falls on the full moon day in the month of *Panguni* (Mar - Apr). The *Panguni* festival is also known as *Kodai Vasantha Utsavam*. It is a ten day festival from *Karthigai* star to *Panguni Uttiram* star celebrated in the *Velliambala mandapam* in the South *Chithirai* Street. Each day morning Lord Sundareswarar and Goddess Meenakshi are taken on procession to the *Velliambala mandapam* and placed on an *Unjal* (swing). In the evening the procession goes around the four *Chithirai* Streets and return to the temple. For the first to eighth day they are taken in wooden throne *vahana* and on the ninth day *Rishaba vahana*. On the tenth day morning, Lord Sundareswarar in Horse *vahana*

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and Goddess Meenakshi in Simha (Lion) vahana, go to Velliambala mandapam. Then the deities are taken on procession to Thiruvappudaiyar temple in Sellur. There a divine sport of the Lord Shiva namely ‘Ponnanaiyalukku Katchi Arulal’ (a devotee of the God) is enacted and then they return to the temple.

**Thirupparankundram Festival**

A Brahmotsavam is celebrated for fourteen days in the month of Panguni (Mar-Apr) at Subramaniya Swami Temple, Thiruppankundram. The sacred wedding of Lord Muruga with Devayanai is celebrated on the twelfth day. Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareswarar come from Madurai on a procession to witness their son’s marriage. After an Abhisheka and Aradhana, Lord Muruga comes to the meeting mandapa and welcomes His parents. At Thiruvatchi mandapa the wedding of Lord Muruga is celebrated when the priests assume the role of the bride and bride groom. Married woman are given sacred thread dipped in turmeric for tying around their neck. A send off ceremony is held for Meenakshi Amman and Lord Chokkanathar in the evening at sixteen pillared mandapa. Then the deities return to the Madurai temple from Thirupparankundram

Madurai is one of the religious centers of Tamil Nadu and is considered the cultural capital of the state. Here, they celebrate several festivals throughout the year. During the 12 months of the Tamil calendar year, every month there is a

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festival in the temple. In the thirteenth century, Madurai is referred to as the festival city by Perumparrapuliur Nambi. About the sixteenth century the number of festivals increased. It is Thirumalai Nayak (1623-59), who re-organized the festivals and made it to celebrate festivals all the twelve months. All the festivals were organized for the welfare and prosperity of the people and the practice continues till today. Each day the deities parade in different vehicles. These festivals bring together great crowds of people in shared enthusiasm and they bring fun and cheer and good feeling to people. Pujas are performed six times daily with agamic rules. During the festival days the Panchaloga idols called Utsava Moorthies are taken on procession around the streets named after the Tamil months.

In the Madurai temple, like other temples, there is no practice of ‘Tonsuring’ because coming to the temple and worshipping the God itself, clear away the sins of devotees and they get blessings of the Lord Siva & Goddess Meenakshi. All the festivals are celebrated according to the agama rules till this day. Each day is a festival day in the temple. Thus there is no doubt that Madurai is called as the ‘City of Festivals’.