The Temples have always been an important part of the socio-religious life of the people in India down the centuries. They have been a strengthening factor in bringing people together and also uphold the dharma. The temples became the seat of great communion where the rural and the urban, the high and low, could meet in an atmosphere of friendliness for a common purpose. Being a public place, the village community assembled here and evidences also point to even kings interacting with the subjects in the precincts of the temple. The festivals in the temple again helped to bring together people from neighbouring villages also. Fairs which are organised simultaneously provided every craftsman like toy-maker, puppet show man exhibit his wares. The vendors from neighbouring villages brought and sold the commodities not easily available locally. These activities continue even today. The temple festivals, thus, attracts the largest fairs in villages and towns, where the local fairs or sandais could only sell the basic needs for the routine life. Thus, temples have been a social phenomenon, as the festivals and fairs are celebrated for the co-operative endeavour of the society.

Around the 6th century C.E or even earlier, South India witnessed a study expansion of wet rice cultivation. Presence of Brahmanas and their sprawling settlements with vast areas of cultivation under their command, the temple gained much prominence and the temple became the pivot around which several activities took shape. Temples sprang up in Southern India on a large scale during the period of agrarian expansion through Devadhanam and Brahmadeyas. A perceptible feature of agrarian expansion was the proliferation of Brahmadeya villages, opening up in the fertile river valleys for agriculture. Thus, the Brahmanas had gained the control of large number of temples with a vast extent of lands as their properties and all the entailing privileges. The Brahmanas struck deep roots in South

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India and gained the confidence of the local chiefs and received major grants of lands as Brahmadeyas and other privileges, like gold, silver and precious stones. As a result, the Brahanical settlements strengthened their grip on society.

The temples received their patronage from many quarters such as rulers, traders and landlords. The patronage included land and gold. The lands that are donated to the god were called Devadhanam and that are given to the Brahmans was called Brahmadeyam. God’s property came to be called as Devasvam and Brahma’s property as Brahmasvam\(^2\). By the efficient management of these huge resources, the Brahananas became the most powerful groups. As the temple trustees acted as banks, the temple were authorised to attach the property of the village in the event of default of the prompt payment of dues. It is said that those who were required to supply the stipulated amount of oil to the temple should pay, in the event of their failure to do it, a fine of 50 kazhanju of gold to the Perumal or to the king, 25 to the sabha of the temple and 10 to the local chief. It is also stated that anyone who stood in the way of performing a particular service, he and any supporter of him, would be considered that he had killed his father and married his mother\(^3\). Besides, he would lose his caste, his land and other properties would be seized and attached to the temple property.

The Varnasramadharma, which is the most important development in 6\(^{th}\) CE, brought out the differentiation in the social caste system, though accepted by upper classes, was resisted by others and led to the Bhakthi Movement. The emergence of Bhakti Movement challenged several rigid social and religious practices. A group of saint-poets, which were the two popular sects of Vaishnavism and Saivism respectively, known as the Nayanmars and Alwars, successfully ousted the antisocial perspectives of human life, and this strong political and social movement attacked strongly the barriers of caste and creeds. The saints, who were also poets, travelled from temple to temple, singing and

\(^2\) Kesavan Veluthat: The Temple in Medieval South India (2010, Oxford University Press, New Delhi) p 65
\(^3\)Ibid: p78.
dancing with their devotees and slowly they became mass movements that included people from all sections of society having patrons from royalty and nobility through kings, chieftains, ministers, military-generals, farmers, merchants, potters, weavers and so on. The songs composed by these saints are part of the compendium known as Thirumurai. The first three Thirumurais of Thevaram were composed by Sambanthar, the next three by Appar (Tirunavukkarasar) and the seventh by Sundharar. Thiruvachakam and Thirukovaiyar were composed by Manickavasagar who was the eighth among the saints. The Chidambaram Nataraja temple and the deity were immortalized in Tamil poetry by the works of the saint poet Thirugnanasambanthar. Thirunavukkarasar or popularly known as Appar composed eight songs in praise of Nataraja and Sundarar ten songs in praise of the Lord, and so also Sundarar commences his Thiruthondar Thogai (the sacred list of Lord Shiva's 63 Nayanmars) paying his respects to the priests of the Thillai temple. Thirugnanasambanthar also went and sang in Thiruppathirippuliyur Temple.

Manikkavasagar’s Thiruvagasam continued to be placed near the idol of Shiva there. Several verses of Thiruvagasam including the accho pathikam, after singing of which he is said to attained Mukti, at Thillai Nataraja's feet. The same are engraved on the walls of the Chidhambaram temple also. The work of Thiruchitrambalakkovaiyar continued to be sung in Thillai Chidhambaram temple. As per a popular sthalapurana, at Thirupunkoor near Chidambaram, a famous saivite temple, once, was devoid of rains for a long time. A local Chola Prince requested Sundarar to fix the problem. The saint put up a wail for justice saying that 12 acres of land be given to the temple if it rains by his service and upon completing the song to Lord Shiva rains lashed incessantly. After many such days Sundarar was summoned by the prince again to fix the problem of heavy rains. Sundarar once again insisted that 12

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7 Nataraja P.R: Thirugnanasambandhar Devaram, pp162 -166.
more acres be given to the temple should the rains cease after his song. The same happened and the temple became richer by 24 acres more.

It is interesting to note that many local rulers had supported the Bhakthi movement and granted\textsuperscript{8} donations. King Mahendhirapallavan, who was reconverted to saivism by Appar, a Pandiya king Nedumaran, a Chola king Kocchenganan, the Cheraman Perumal (the founder of Chera kingdom), Kulasekara Alwar (a ruler of Chera dynasty) and many others became the patrons of the movement and granted extensively.

The \textit{car festival} was and is one of the major festivals celebrated in many a Hindu temple all over India. Since, Tamilnadu is a land of temples, car festivals are a feature of most temples. Car festivals draw massive crowds from various parts of the region as well as people of different communities and clans. The people gather with a spirit of oneness on these occasions. All the communities mingle freely for celebrating the car festivals. Car festivals serve as a meeting place for the social milieu and for spread of communal harmony, and a sense of solidarity prevails. A large number of pipers, drummers, lute-players, flutists, musicians, and choir-singers with their musical accompaniments are usually invited and concerts are organised in the Natya and Sangita mandapas in the temple complex for the entertainment of the people.

In times of famine, hard-stricken villagers were fed and given grains from their granaries. Relief works were also carried out by some temples. At times of military attack, the temple with its elaborate, high and strong built boundary walls, served as a fortress to shelter the entire village. The lights in the towers of the temple served to locate the place to the nocturnal travellers who have lost their way in the same way as a light-house to the sea-farers during the nights\textsuperscript{9}. For the villages not situated near a river or a stream, the temple provided water from a huge water tank for their bathing and refreshments. The temple well, from which

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\textsuperscript{8} Kesavan Veluthat: The Temple in Medieval South India, p66.
water was carried for bathing the principal deity, was utilised by the inhabitants of the village except for a few sections who were not permitted to draw water directly from the well. The village carpenter, potter, barber, master priest and others were paid in terms of grains for their services. The temple utilised many craftsmen who gave their bests products, to make the fairs in the festivals advantageous to the producer and the consumers.

Another important social benefit was education. Schools (patasalas) and seminaries (matas) for the cultivation of Vedic studies and other branches of knowledge like grammar, philosophy, medicine and logic were patronised by temples. The existence of Vedic College at Bahur near Pondicherry and various subjects taught therein are mentioned in the inscriptions of the local Vishnu temple. In Thiruvetriyur near Madras, there was a Vyakarana school where Panini Sutras were taught from a special mandapam called Vyakarana-Vyakhyana mandapam. In Ranganathan temple, Srirangam, there was a library (Sarawathi Bhandharam). At Kanchipuram, in Varadharajan temple, there was a provision to teach Ubhaya Vedanta (Sanskrit and Tamil scriptures). At Thirumukkudal, there was a college where provision was made for one teacher and ten pupils for studying Rig and Yajur Vedas and twenty pupils to study Vyakharna. Tamil studies were also fostered by the temples and Devaram in Siva temples and Dhivyaprabhandham in Vishnu temples were cultivated\textsuperscript{10}.

The temple encouraged music, dance and literature and had also richly contributed to Bhakti literature. Nayanmars and Azhwars were inspired to compose hymns and poems, especially in Tamil. Cultural activities like Bhajans, music and dances have took and practice continues in the temple precincts. In the Nrithyamandapas and Koothanpmbalams, the danseuses of the temple regularly conducted the dances in the evenings. Even now, Natyanjali in Chidhambaram Natyasabha and Thiruvaiyaru musical Uthsavam in which

\textsuperscript{10} Raman. K. V., The Role of Temple in the Socio-Economic Life of the People - Temple India (1981, Vivekananda Kendra Patrika,, Madras), p102 and 106.
Thiyagarajar keerthanais are chanted in Thiruvarur temple, are conducted every year in grand manner. Devaram, Thiruvasagam, Thiruvembavai and other devotional songs are also chanted in the temples during and after the poojas. Dramas are also fostered in the temples. The Kuravanjinatakam, Silappathikaram, Ramakaviyam, Mahabharatham are the most popular dramas enacted during temple festivals since early days. A large number of musical instruments like karadigai, segandi, udukkai, yazh, matthalam, parai and sangu, which are now gone out of use were used during the festivals.

The greatest art treasures of India are from the temples. Individual sculptures intended for worship, figures for processional purposes during festivals, vehicles for these images, temple cars on elaborate scale with massive wheels and rich carvings, were all prepared by craftsmen who were very creative in their line of work. Painting on the temple walls discovered in various caves and temples in South India at Sittannavasal, Kanjipuram Kailasanatha temple, Badami caves and Kailasanatha temple at Ellora, Hampi, Leypakshi and other places are best examples in colour. Even the temple utensils and articles of worship, lamps, the incense burners are all beautifully designed. The role of sthapathis in making icons in temples and their cars were well recognised in medieval periods, particularly in the late Chola and down to early Vijayanagra periods. Additions and alterations were made to the then existing temples during the Vijayanagra and Nayak times. These activities included the production of temple cars and large number of icons, statues and paintings.

The car making has several stages and are attended by a large number of artisans. The sthapathis had, not only the knowledge of technique of car production, but also decorating the same with sculptures and carvings, at times reflecting the contemporary life. Human figures, old and young children, flora and fauna as well as mythical motifs were found and displayed in the temple cars. The temple cars were fully decorated with a narrative and

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11 Acharya, Prasanna Kumar: Manasara and Silpashasthra (1927, Oxford University Press, Madras), p35.
descriptive panels, depicting the stories and events told in the epics, sthalapurana and other puranas and contemporary literature. The figures depicted are in various poses such as standing, sitting and dancing. They were shown with variety of dresses and ornaments, besides head dress and hair style. A close examination and study of figures throw a volume of light on the contemporary dresses and decorations. Hence, it evidents that the car makers have had a thorough knowledge of human anatomy and happenings very much active to the life in the contemporary. The cars depict the social functions and social gatherings which are mostly religious in character. War scenes with a variety of weapons are well depicted.

The car festival drew the people from across the communities, castes and creeds, who mingled to witness the grand festival. They forget the cast feeling and join to gather to celebrate the festivals. There was a perfect unity in the gatherings which saw a social and communal harmony. The Hindu temple cars had their impact on the Christian and Mohammedan culture. In order to identify themselves with the native customs, they have imitated some aspects of Hindu culture in many places like Velankanni, Tuticorin, Idapadi and Dhindukal. The Christians conduct car festivals. There are cars in the dhargahs in places like Andankkulam, Manamadhuri and Naagur. The Muslim car festival is known as Chandhanakkudu (behar-i-a-zamjahi).

As said earlier, the car festival was an entertainment for the people to move out of their houses and enjoy mingling with different people. There were also sports and pastime activities provided, during the events. There were temporary shops provided to sell cooking vessels of earthen wares and iron wares, for the benefit of the villagers, coming from remote areas. It acted as a modern bazaar or supermarket of modern time selling objects and artefacts that are needed by the village folks. The festivals have given an opportunity for villagers, coming from, for off and inaccessible places, to buy their home needs. The temple cars and

12 Kalidos Raju: Temple Cars of Medieval Tamilaham, p 237.
festivals got a profound impact on the common belief of the people even today. It is said that the propitiation of village god relieved people from epidemic diseases like small pox (periyammai)\(^{13}\). Thus, the festival had a major role in the social, economic and ecclesiastical activities.

The temples engaged in a large number of employees in the temple services and its various functions. The temple priests known as Bhattacharyyas (Dheekshidhars in Chidhambaram, Vadakalai – Thenkalai Brahmins wearing Nama with a little difference in Srimushnam and Saiva-Brahmins in Thiruppathirippuliyur temples) who are well versed in Aagama rituals. The Chidambaram temple is managed and administered hereditarily by these Dheekshidhar, who were well versed in agamas, as the legends say, were brought here, from Mount Kailas, by Saint Patanjali\(^{14}\), specifically for the performance of the daily rituals and maintenance of the Chidambaram temple. The Chidambaram Mahatmiam recounts of their arrival in Tillai just as Lord Nataraja started his dance there.

In ancient times the Deekshidhars the community of hereditary priests, were known Muvayira-var, or the 3000 of Tillai. Their relation of Lord Nataraja is a very intimate and powerful one, which is expressed by the legend that once the 3000 were requested by Brahma to perform a Vedic sacrifice in heaven. At their return they counted to make sure all had returned safely. But however they counted, they found only 2999. All were very upset, until a voice from the Sabha called out and announced that He Himself, Lord Nataraja , was the 3000\(^{th}\) Deekshidhar\(^{15}\). There are two inscriptions at Chidhambaram that refer to them (Thillai Three Thousands or Thillai Brahmins). One is the early twentieth inscriptions recording, made by Naralokaveera, the provision of sluice to water the lands of three thousands (SII, IV, nos. 225 and SII, 1271 – 1273). The other one, (SII, VIII, no 43), is an inscription of 1279 that describes the naming of the piece of land as Thillai Thousands area (Thillai Muvayira

\(^{13}\) Kalidos, Raju; Temple cars of Medieval Tamilaham, p 236.

\(^{14}\) Srinivasamurti. S: Temple Architecture, Devalaya Vsathu, Part VI (Sulekha.com publishers), Wikipedia.

\(^{15}\) Meyyappan. S: Chidhambaram Temple (1998, Manivasagar Pathippagam, Chennai), p44
Vilagam) after the Brahmins who lived in the district (the Adhyayana Buttargals of Thillai - Chathurvedhimangalam)\(^{16}\). Today they number around 360. Although considered as one among the Shiva Brahmans or Ayyars, they form a completely separate group, called Vaidheeka Brahmins, who were the followers of Baudhayana Maharishi. Their way of life is very different from the rest of them. In general, only the married male member of the Deekshidhar family gets to perform the rituals at the temple and even serve as the chief priest for the day. Married Deekshidhars are also entitled a share of the temple’s revenue. A Deekshidhar has to have his hair pulled to the left side of his head and tied into a bun (Kondaiyazhagar).

The Chidambaram temple is unique in countless ways, but one outstanding feature is, without doubt, the way in which its priestly community is organized. The daily management is in the hands of team of nine dheekshidhars, one of which will be selected to be the Secretary of the temple for one year. The duties of the Secretary of the temple are to preside over all the activities in connection with the daily management, as well as to represent the temple towards the outside world. All ritual duties in the temple are performed through strict rotation system. Special honorary functions, like presiding over the great Chariot Festivals, or other special ritual functions, are accredited by drawing a name from the list of Community Members. Inscriptions\(^{17}\) relate that many kings, zamindars, rich people and many others had granted lands, jewels and other assets to the temples and these assets are supervised and governed by these dheekshidhars, even today.

There was another a special group of temple workers who were also put on the wage list. They were the dancers attached to the temples and almost all the leading temples of South India had this unique class of women called devaradiyals or devadasis (servants of the

\(^{16}\) Leslie C. Orr: *Temple Life at Chidhambaram in the Chola Period – An Epigraphical Study (Ch. 44), South Indian Horizon – Felicitation Volume for Fracious Gros*, (2004, Institut Francais de Pondichery, Ecole Francaise - de – Extreme – Orient, p232.

Lord), dedicated to the service of the temples. Their main duties were to sing and dance in front of the deity at specified times daily and accompany the deity in processions. From the epigraphs of the Chola times, we came to know that they had a respectable place in the society and even rich people dedicated their daughters to the service of the God. The devadasi, the only educated woman of ancient Indian society, was a precious gem (*Manickam*) in the royal crown. She was an expert in dance and music and in erotica. The agamas prescribed a four-fold path for temple services for devadasis. They were *Sariya, Kriya, Yoga* and *Gnana* 18. Every activity like the cleaning of the temple, singing and praising the lord, dancing, reciting hymns, lighting lamps, gathering flowers and making garlands out of them are sanctioned by agamas as ways to attend salvation.

The King Krishnadevaraya 19 fell in love with and married a devadasi, Chinnadevi. She had become his favourite and enjoyed a high status in the society. Krishnadevaraya when erected, his bronze statue in Thiruppathi had added Chinnadevi on his left side, along with his wife Thirumaladevi on his right, one can see even today. Likewise, The well known incident of a devadasi, Vaippi 20 of Chidhambaram taking away the golden image of Nataraja for safe keeping in her house, when the forces of Tippu Sultan plundered the temple, was one of the courage of devotion. Similarly when the temple of Srirangam was threatened by Malikkafor’s invading forces, the renowned devadasi, Hamsakala 21, attached to the temple, saved the temple and was honoured with a name, Sriranganatha Manickam.

An inscriptions 22, which belongs to the Vijayanagara Empire, dated 1567, from the Arunachalesvara temple, Thiruvannamali, supplies a very interesting information. The record states that the *devaradiyars* (the temple servants) residing in the western and eastern sectors, were in the enjoyment of certain villages and lands, from the days of the Cheras, Cholas and

19 Ibid, p100.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
Pandiyas, and Somaiyadhanda Nayaka and that in the reign of Achchutha Devaraya (1529-42), a local officer, Royapparasar, levied taxes on these villages and lands and collected some amounts of gold. The devaradiyars were seriously affected. They were unable to pay the taxes and as a result, there were no temple servants to look after sacred cars and also to carry the flag, umbrella etc. During the festival days, the matter was informed to the emperor Sadasivaraya who declared the villages and lands tax free (sarva-manyam). Thus the practice was restored and the regular services resumed. Sadasiva also made another order to that effect that in future no officer should collect taxes from those villages and lands owned by the temple servants who looked after the temple services. The importance of the record lies in the information that they were permanent servants in the temple to look after the temple car.

During the Bramhotsavam or annual festival, right up to the early decades of the twentieth century, the institution got much affected with the launch of the social purity movement, featured the dance of the devadasis. As a group, they were known as chinnamelam, in contrast to the Nadaswaram music group which was known as periyamelam. Quite often, they used to sing and dance Kaman Kuthu. They also dance during the time of arathi. They use to sing hymns from Devaram and Thiruvasagam. Even when the deity was put to bed in palliyarai, they used to sing and dance (Kolattam). When the deities are taken for the Unjal sevai (rocking cradle) and in each and every ritual in the temple, the devadasis used to participate in almost all the rituals. Now a days, there are no devadasis attached to the South Indian temples.

Besides the archakars and devadasis employed with temples, other personnels such as the temple manager known as Devakarmi, the Brahmacharins who took care of the pilgrims, the madappalli (kitchen) cook, the water carriers to the sanctum (paricharakas), flag bearers (kodikkarars), umbrella bearers, gardeners, garland makers, torch bearers (pantham

pidippavars), painters, chariot makers and repairers and many others were engaged in various occupations and were paid from the temple.

Whenever there was Thiruppani or repairs, renewals, constructions of new additions in a temple or when a ratha was remodelled or renewed and or when the walls and ceilings were repainted, a large sum of money was needed. The construction of the temple car was a costly affair, involving a large quantum of money and was constructed from the temple funds. The temple granaries were to be filled regularly and a regular supply of sweet smelling unguents, sandal powders, saffron, incense, camphor and many others which cost a lot for the temple. Villagers also, being proud of possessing temple cars, donated cash as well as articles of gold to the temples. Besides, donations from the public, grants were made by the rulers from time to time. Huge temple cars, adorning some temples in Tamilnadu, reflected the economy and prosperity of the time. For example, temple cars of Chidhambaram, Sri Mushnam, Thirupaduripuliyur and Thiruvarur, Kanchipuram, Sri Villipuththur, Virunjipuram and many other places became witness to the wealth of their temples. The cost of wood and the payment made to the car makers were rather expensive and the construction was also time consuming. Since Chola kings, had earned a lot of money and property through the wars, they had spent the same to the car making\textsuperscript{24}. The prosperity of the state and the ruling family was reflected in the temple car production and the temple festival. Only during times of peace, the rulers could spend time to the religious activities like construction of temples and festivals. The car makers known as rathakaras, themselves a class, having specialised and trained in the construction of a car, were found employed in the temples. The decorations on the car were done by sculptors who were employed by the temples. There were other skilled labourers and a large number of technicians, who were dependent on the temple for their income. They were moving from place to place throughout the year, depending upon the demand. There are nearly thousand cars (big and small) belonging to different periods, in different parts of

\textsuperscript{24} Ramalingam. K.K: Chidhambaram Natarajar Thirukkoil, p 240.
Tamilnadu at present. The making of a single car would cost roughly about 1 – 1.5 crore Rupees\textsuperscript{25}. This is enough to gauge the impact and influence of temple cars on economy.

There are more than 500 inscriptions seen on the walls of Chidhambarm. The inscriptions engraved on the walls of the temple in Chidhambaram have been recorded by the Madras Epigraphical department, during the year 1888 to 1892. Epigraphical records shows that the Chola king Paranthaka I or Veera Chola who reigned between 907 and 951 AD renovated the hall, making several additions of his own and endowing large grants for conducting the festivals of the temple. The inscriptions available in the wall says several gifts to the god of Chidhambaram by Kundhavai, the daughter of Rajaraja I. Records a grant of land to the temple for a flower garden and also a sanction of a grant to maintain the flower garden. The grants were made for the maintenance of the temple for lighting lamps, doing pujas and abishekams everyday. That Srimushnam temple also received several grants from the lords for the maintenance of the Nithyapujas and Nivedhanam and for the maintenance of the nandhavnam (flower gardens) is recorded in the walls of the temple. The grants from 38 villages were made to maintain the gopurams, prakaras, walls, ornaments, temple wells and tanks.

Inscriptions from Thippathiripuliyur says that to lit the lamps in the temple every day, some cattles, goats, cows, gold and money were granted to the villagers and to the priests in the temple. Lands were also donated. Paranthaka I donated 700 hundred acres of fertile lands to five bramins to take care of the temple. An inscription number\textsuperscript{26} describes that temple has 21 inscriptions seen in the walls of Thiruppathiripuliyur temple.

One third of the inscriptions at Chidhambaram\textsuperscript{27}, refer to the establishment of gardens and provisions for the support of gardeners and others responsible for producing flowers for garlands to be used for the temple. Several inscriptions specify the type of flower required,

\textsuperscript{25} Interview with Pattu Dheeshidhar, Chidhambaram, dated 11 – 04 – 2011.
\textsuperscript{26} SII: Vol. 7, No. 739.
\textsuperscript{27} ARE: p230-231.
mainly red lotuses. One inscription records the arrangements that were made for the supply of 2574 garlands daily\textsuperscript{28}. Some of the gardens were used to grow coconuts, jack fruits, mango, and plantain\textsuperscript{29}. An inscription specifies that 11,620 plantains are to be supplied daily\textsuperscript{30}. Two other inscriptions states that Lord enshrined in the Moolasthanam is to be offered eight services with cooked food as also for Dhakshinamurti\textsuperscript{31}. Several inscriptions refer to the arrangements made to provide bathing facilities, clothes gifts of ornaments and gift of lamps. A great majority of gifts made to the temple were made by people who were not kings. Donations were made by Chola Royal women, horse traders, Brahmins, temple women (devadasis), men associated with mutts and local land lords.

Emperor Adhithya Chola (870-907) and his son Parandhaka Chola (907-948) presented a gold plated roof of Natarajar temple and were named as Chitrambala mukadu (roof) kongil kanakam anintha Adhithan and Koil ponn veyntha Perumal. This is noted in the Leydon inscriptions of Holand museum\textsuperscript{32}. In another inscription, it is stated that Rajendhira Chola had granted 265 gold coins (equivalent to 4500 bags of paddy) and 40 gold coins towards the expenses of the temple\textsuperscript{33}. Nakkan Paravaiyar, wife of Rajendhira I, had granted 44 acres of land and 305 gold coins to the temple (Then-India Kalvettugal IV: no. 223). An inscription states that Kulothunga Chola I and his sister Mathuranthaki had donated lands and coins to establish a mutt and a floral garden (nantavanam). Kundhavi had donated a gold kalasa to the temple\textsuperscript{34}. The inscriptions in the Chidambaram temple says Naralokaveeran\textsuperscript{35} who served the Chola Emperors, Kulothunga (1070-1125) and Vikrama (1118-1135) had made provisions for a road to be built to the seashore for the procession, a hall on the beach

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{28} Ibid: 320 of 1913.
\item\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, 82 of 1913.
\item\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 150 of 1961.
\item\textsuperscript{31} Sethuraman. N:SII. XII, Nos. 152 and 201
\item\textsuperscript{32} Ramalingam. K.K: Chidhambaram Natarajar Thrukkoil, p240.
\item\textsuperscript{33} Ramalingam. K.K., p 240.
\item\textsuperscript{34} Ramalingam. K.K.: ARE, 119, 1888,
\item\textsuperscript{35} Daheja Vidya: Chola bronzes from South India, (Mapin Publishers, Ahmadabad), p 16.
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where dancing Siva could enjoy the sea breeze and a fresh water tank for the devotees who accompanied the Utsavamurthy (processional image).

The Meikirthy (*Prasasthi*) of Vikrama Chola (1118 – 1135 A.D), states that in his tenth year Vikrama Chola gilded the Chidhambaram Nataraja Temple and its Car. Vikrama Chola celebrated the big sacred festival called the great grand festival on the day of Star *Uthirattathi* (*Uthiarashada*) in the Tamil solar month (*Purattasi*). For this purpose, he granted the car, (mobile temple or *Thiruther* temple) and spread pearls over canopy, so the Lord Nataraja, the wonderful cosmic dancer, would be pleased to come in procession in the car for the benefit of the people. The temple festival is said to have been celebrated for ten days, and the tenth day would fall on the day of full moon, in *Purattasi*.

The Villages Aadhivarahanallur, Kondasamudram and Aranthangi were donated to Srimushnam temple by *Mallappanayakkar* to conduct temple poojas and repairs. In an inscription no. 267, it is stated about the festivals conducted throughout the year, about the vahanas of the deities and the poojas conducted daily. In inscription it is stated (in Telugu), that *Achchuthappa Naicken* (1505) has donated golden ornaments and golden vahanas to Bhuvaraha and his consorts.

Another inscription which is taken from *Arunachaleswara* Temple, *Thiruvannamalai*, belongs to *Krishnadevaraya*. It is dated Monday, the 5th January, 1517. The inscription refers to many grants made by the King to the temple. One of them was a sacred car for Lord *Vinayaka* (*Vinayakarukku pannuvitha Thiruther*).

A inscription which is taken from the *Parthasarathi* Temple in *Triplicane*, Madras, belongs to Vijayanagara King, *Veeravenkatapathi Deva Maharaya*. It is dated 1599. The

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36 Sethuraman. N, Temple Cars Referred to in The Inscriptions, p165.
37 Sethuraman. N, Temple Cars Referred to in The Inscriptions, p165.
38 S.I.I.: Vol 8, No165.
record refers to the grant made for the car in the month Chithirai, various types of offerings and materials for abhisheka from the day of the hoisting to the day of festival are given in detail.

The *Venkatachalapthi Perumal* Temple\(^{40}\) at *Thiruppathi* was the favourite of the Vijayanagara Kings. In the reign of Krishnadevaraya (1900 – 29) endowments were made to the temple by the king for conducting car festivals in the Tamil months, Purattasi and Panguni. It is during this times, this tradition is conducted even today. In the reign of his successor *Achchutha Devaraya* (1529 -42), endowments were made for conducting car festivals in the month of Aadi, Aavani, Aippasi, Karthikai, Thai, Maasi and Chithirai. Thus the car festivals were celebrated nine months in a year.

*Rathotsava* is a compound word of *ratha-kara* plus utsava meaning that the utsava is conducted by drawing the ratha by hands (*kara* meaning hand). The rathotsavas are car festivals gained an immense popularity attracting devotees by the thousands. Encouraged by this trend, the temples vied with each other in constructing the highly embellished Rathas. Car streets were designated as per pulling needs of the rathas. During the reign of Vijayanagara kings, the pinnacle of religious Rathas was achieved, thus creating a golden chapter in the history of the Rathas. The rathotsava or car festival was established as a socio-religious practice in south India from the 7th century onwards. Tamil epics like Silappathikaram and Manimekalai also contain the description of rathotsavas. Rathotsava is conducted in grand style in almost all temples in whole India. The rathothsava in Puri Jagannathar temple is a grand festival attracting people from all over India. The rathothsava conducted in Chidhambaram, Srimushnam and Thiruppathirippuliyur temples is very popular in TamilNadu. Infact Rathothotsavam is a part of the Brahmothsavam festival which is celebrated for ten days and the car festival is conducted on the ninth day. The car festival is

conducted as per *utsava prakarana* which is common to all *Aagamas*. Conducting the *Brahmarathotsava* is based on the *Samhitha* calculations.

A festival may be observed with acts of worship, offerings to deities, fasting, feasting, vigil, rituals, fairs, charity, celebrations, *Pooja, Homa and Aarathi* etc. They are celebrated in individual and community life of Hindus, without distinction of caste, gender or class. The festivals typically are celebrated during the important events from Hindu mythology. All festivals in Hinduism are predominantly religious in character and significance. Many festivals are seasonal. Some are celebrated at the time of harvests, the change of path of the moon and sun (eclipses) and birth day or birth star of God or a prince or a hero.

The full moon will combine either with the star *Poorattathi* (*Pubba*) or *Uthirattathi* (*Uthirashada*) or *Revathi*. In the tenth year of Vikrama Varsha (*Vikrama aandu*), star Uthirattathi in the month Purattasi (Sep – Oct.) fell on the 21 September 1127. This was the ninth day when the car was drawn. The next day was the full moon, the last day of the ten-day festival. The record clearly states that the car was drawn on the ninth day of the festival in the month Purattasi. The ninth day was the day of Uthirattathi, which was also the birth star of the king. The festival was called as great grand festival (*Perumpeyar Vizha*). A record which comes from *Srirangam* is dated 1409. It belongs to *Veerabooopathi* Udaiyar41, the local Viceroy of *Vijayanagara* Empire. It states that the birth star of the Viceroy was Punarpuasam (*Puravbahdrapatha*) in the Tamil month Thai (Jan – Feb). Therefore, every year, he arranged a festival in his name that was a nine-day festival. Ninth day will be the star Punarpuasam. On that day Lord *Ranganatha* and his consort were taken in procession in the car.

Temple festivals in South India are conducted in style and grandeur. Temples and festivals always go together; we cannot think of a temple without a festival and a festival

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41 Sethuraman. N., Temple Cars Referred To In The Inscriptins, S.I.I. 24.
without a temple. The temple festivals are classified into Saivam (one day festival), Ganam (three days), Bandhikam (five days), Bavunam (seven days), Daivikam (nine days), Kaumaram (thirteen days), Saivitram (fifteen days), Chandram (seventeen days) and Sauram (twenty days).

The poojas are conducted daily (nithya poojas), six times a day. Sometimes special poojas (naimithya poojas) are also conducted on some occasions. The special poojas were conducted with garlands, flowers, nectar, camphor, fruits, ghee, payasam, etc. The daily pooja starts early in the early hours of dawn, known as Kaalasandhi (first poojah), the pooja around 7am is called Ushathkaalam (second poojah), around 12 noon is Uchikkaalam, (third poojah), in the evening around 4pm is Prodoshakaalam (fourth poojah), around 6pm is Sayaratchai (fifth poojah) and around 10pm is Arthajama (sixth pooja).

The daily pooja is done in three steps; abhisheka, alankara and aradhana. The Abhisheka is the process of giving bath to the idol with various objects like gingili oil, sigaikkai, milk, honey, curd, sandal paste, panchamirtha, tender coconut water, rose water or panneer etc. For women idols, manjal (turmeric) and kunkuma are added extra. Viputhi is used for Lord Shiva, Ganesha and Murugan, but not for Vishnu. Swarnabhisheka is done with gold jewels. The Alankara is done by the archakar. The idol is beautifully decorated with silk sarees, flower garlands, various ornaments like kiritamakuta on the head, kundalas on the ears, nose rings, kheyuras over the shoulder, bracelets around the wrists, various haras like Rathna hara, around the neck, udharabandha in the abdomen and anklets in the ankles. Yajnopavithra is adorned in male idols. The forehead is adorned with kunkuma. The Aradhana is of camphor light waving and deeparathana with single headed dhupa or multiple headed (maha-dhupa) deepas. At the time of pooja, ghee rice (ven pongal), pachamirtham

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and various types of fruits are offered to the idol and also betel leaf with nut offered to the deities. The *monthly* pujas are celebrated on the first day of the Tamil month, full moon, new moon and on two *Pradodsam* days (13 or 14th day following the full moon and new moon days, when pujas are done to Shiva and Nandhi, between 4 and 6 pm) and these special pujas are called *Pancharathra*\(^{45}\) pujas or *Panchaparva* pujas.

The *annual* pujas are many. One day festivals like *Deepavali, Shankaranthi* (Pongal), *Ramanavami, Hanuman Jayanthi, Krishna jayanthi, Soora Samharam* (Skanthar Shasti), *Ugadhi, Mahasivarathri* and *Ganesha Chathurthi* are celebrated in many temples. *Navarathri* is a nine-day festival. *Bramothsavam* is celebrated for 10 – 14 days. *Kumbabhishekam* is celebrated once in twelve years.

Larger temples have multiple cars. Chidhambram Nataraja temple, Thirunelveli Nellaippar temple and many other Siva temples have five temple cars each. The order, in which the uthsavamurthies (Panchamurthies) travels\(^{46}\) is standard. In Siva temples, Vinayaga always leads, followed by Siva and his consort together in a car, then the Amman alone, with Chandikeswarar in the rear. Subramanya comes directly behind either Vinayaka or the Amman. The festival procession always follows a standard route specific to each event. It involves not only the circumambulation of the temple precincts, the temple corridors, periodic pauses for a short time at important axes and a longer times in certain mandapas, before going into car streets.

At the time of Rathothsavam, the ratha is taken from its shelter and cleaning the car is done. In Thiruppathiripuliyur, the fire engine is employed to air wash the dust and spider

\(^{45}\) Raju.V.: *Thiruppathirippuliyur Paadalesvar Koil Varalaru*, (2008, Centre For Indian Cultural Studies, Chennai) P98

webs. In ancient period The plinth and the reliefs were cleaned with a paste of butter, honey and curd, which gives the brown tinge and glossy look\(^{47}\),which also acted like a pesticide, but now a days, the rathas are polished with varnish. The *vimana* is built fresh with bamboo sticks and other wooden logs. The entire vimana is decorated with colourful cloths (thiraiseelai) painted with figures pertaining to that temple. For eg. in Chidhambaram temple vimana, the figure of Nataraja is painted in the front bunting. The ratha itself is decorated\(^{48}\) with bunches of various kinds of fruits, tender coconuts, bunches of peanuts, paddy and banana, toranas of mango leaves and a lot of garlands of varieties of flowers. Plantain trees with banana bunches are tied in all the eight corners. In some temple cars, as in Srimushnam, in the *rathamukha*, a *ratha sarathi*, usually *Brahma* is seated, holding the ropes, tied to four or six galloping *horses*. At all the eight corners, *Yalis* or *Bhutha ganas* are tied to the pillars. Two *Gandharvas* holding garlands in their hands are suspended from the roof.

The massive wheels are checked thoroughly and any minor repair, if needed, is done. The thick ropes are smeared with turmeric in oil paste and the iron chains that are used for pulling is also taken care of. The *muttukattai* or *sarakkukiattai*, made of Tamarind timber, that are used to control the speed of the car during procession are kept ready.

Within the temple, on the *rathothsava day*, the deity or Uthsavamurthi is given the holy bath (*Thirumanjanam*) and is decorated, making selective use of precious *jewels*. In the appointed *auspicious* hour, the bejewelled idol is brought out of the precinct of the temple, through the first and second *praharas* onto the *Sannadhi* Street, in a small

\(^{47}\) Interview with Arul, Sthapathi, Mahabalipuram, dated 31 – 12 - 2010.

procession called *pallaki utsava*\(^{49}\), to the *Theradi* or *Thermuttam* or *Shobana Manadapam*. (from where the deities are transferred to the decorated car). Subsequently, the deities are shifted into the ratha (*Ratharohana*) and is placed in the centre of the *uthsavabera* or *Simhasana*. The *pallaki uthsava* of Virinjipuram temple, in which the Lord Margabanthu and Goddess Maragathavalli Thayer in one palanquin, Maragathavalli amman in another palanquin is shown in the picture. Subramaniya with his concerts and Ganapathi are taken in separate palanquin. A large *gourd* is placed under the right front wheel as a sacrifice gift to the gods; a prayer is offered to the chariot and after the gourd is split with an auspicious crack, the crowd begins to pull the iron chain and the gigantic ropes. As the chariots are exceedingly heavy, they require a great number of people to pull them, through the four *maada streets* and then through the important *theradi-veedi* (*Car streets*) around the town. There will be an intense emotional *fervour* among the thousands of devotees who throng the entire temple premises and assemble in large number all along the passage way. The ratha is pulled along the streets in a clock-wise direction. Special care has to be taken at the corners, where the ratha turns up, using wooden wedge (*sarukku kattai* or *muttukkattai*) placed beneath the wheels. Pushing and pulling actions are *synchronized* with music of the *Nadhaswaram*

\(^{49}\) A Pallakki Uthsava Photo Taken at Virinjipuram Koil Rathothsavam. 25 – 06 – 2012.
The nadhaswaram players, along with the priests will be seated in *Narasana*\(^{50}\). The drummers on the road will be beating an even rhythm. On the way, at each and every house, the people give their offerings to the deities; they are as *thrilled* as the gods are giving a visit to their doorsteps to bless them personally.

A break is taken in the middle of the day, from twelve to four, and the procession starts again. By six, the chariot is reached the theradi. After the devotees finished their worships, the idols are returned to the temple sanctuary. At some places, the festival is accompanied with various kinds of *entertainments* conducted at the corners of the streets like music *kacheri* (orchestra) and musical or historical or social *dramas*. *Kolattam, kummiyattam, poikkal kuthirai, silambattam* etc are also carried out in the streets in front of the procession of the deities, like the festivals at Chidambaram, Srimushnam, Thirupadripuliyur.

Before conducting the festival, the temple authority has to get *permission* from the Commissioner of Police, PWD officials, EB people, Fire service men, Ambulance and related medical people, Telephones and the municipality. Representatives from all these people form a committee and discuss about how to conduct the festival with out any untoward incidents. Finally, they also meet the Collector of the district and get the permission from him also. PWD officials has to look after the free water facilities and the sanitation. Ambulances and Fire service must be kept ready. Police picket polls will be installed. The car streets will be checked thoroughly.

In case of new rathas, a fully decorated ratha, without the deity, a *rehearsal* (trial) procession of the car is done. It is called *Vellotam*. The chief *sthapathi* alone is seated on the narasana and the car is pulled along the main *maada* streets to check out the condition of the car. Later, the sthapathi, thus honoured, will be well paid and are given many gifts. If any

\(^{50}\) Michell George, Chariot Panels Of Tamilnadu, Article III, Marg, VOL.XI.III, No. 2(Marg Publications, Bombay), p 35.
mishap happens to the car, it will end up with the sthapathi alone. That is why sthapathi alone is seated in the car during the Vellotam.

In smaller temples which is not rich enough to have a car of its own, a Kattai Ther\textsuperscript{51} (cart wheel) or Go-ratha is used to pull the deities. The kattai ther with four wheels is well decorated with a huge circular prabha which is illuminated with electric bulbs. The deity is seated in the middle of the prabha on a vahana pertaining to the deity or the temple. \textbf{(Fig. 5: Kattai ther)}

Car Festivals in Chidhambaram:

Chidambaram is the sacred place (the bhooloka Kailasam) for the Saivites, and this Shaiva temple is one of the most ancient temple in India. In Chidambaram Nataraja temple, the poojas are conducted daily (nithya poojas), six times a day. Sometimes special poojas (naimithya poojas) are also conducted on some occasions. The special poojas were conducted with garlands, flowers, nectar, camphor, fruits, ghee, payasam, etc. They are performed by Deekshidars alone who were the hereditary priests of the temple\textsuperscript{52}.

Although, in the Siva temples, the poojas (abishekams) for Lingas are done daily, only six abishekams per year are done for Lord Nataraja at all Siva temples, including Chidhambaram. They are: the first pooja in the early hours of dawn (kalasandhi) is the Marghazhi Thiruvaadhirai (in December – January), the second pooja in the ushat kaalam (morning) is the Chittirai Thiruvonam (in April- May), the third pooja in the noon (uchi kaalam) on the fourteenth day after the new moon (sukla paksha chaturdasi) of the month of Masi (in February - March), the fourth pooja in the afternoon is the Aani Uthiram or Aani

\textsuperscript{51} A Ponniyamman koil festival photo taken at a Village, Pennathur, on 14 – 04 – 2013.
\textsuperscript{52} Abbe Dubois: Hindu Manners and Customs, pp 53 – 56.
Thirumanjanam (in June-July), the fifth pooja in the evening (sayaratchai) is the Aavani Chaturdasi (in August-September) and the sixth pooja in the midnight (Arthajama) is the Purattasi Chaturdasi (in October - November). Of these the Marghazhi Thiruvaadhirai (in December-January) and the Aani Thirumanjanam (in June-July) are the most important.

Of these six abishekams or poojas, Marghazhi Thiruvaadhirai and Aani Uthiram are conducted in 1000 pillared mandapa while Maasi chaturdasi, Chittirai Thiruvonam, Aavani chaturdasi and Puratasi chaturdasi are conducted in Kanakasabha. Of these, the Aani Thirumanjanam and the Marghazhi Thiruvaadhirai are the most important festivals, accompanied with the temple cars, and are called Brahmothava. These two are conducted as the key festivals with the main deity (Moolavar Anandhathandava Natarajar himself) is being brought outside the sanctum sanctorum in a procession that included a Rathotsavam, preceded and followed by a long ceremony.

It is believed that Lord Nataraja gives his special dharshan to the public in these festivals to demonstrates his five-fold functions; (waking up and seating of the Lord on the peeta represents) Creation, (doing the abhishekam or Thirumanjanm represents) Protection, (adorning the Lord with Karuppu Chanthu represents) Destruction or Samharam (dressing him with white cloth represents) Concealment and (and bringing him in a procession represents) Salvation.

In Chidhambaram, the daily poojah start with the Thiruppalli-ezhuchi (waking up) of the Lord Nataraja and Goddess Sivakamasundhari. At six am, the door of the Pallivaasal (bed room) is opened and a deeparathanai is done to the deities. The deities are then brought to the moolasthanam (sanctum sanatorium) where the abhishakam and aarathanai are done to the Spatika linga which is already present there and to Nataraja and Sivakami. This pooja is

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55 Ibid: p216.
called \textit{kaalasandhi} and is completed by 8 am. Around 10 am, the \textit{Ushathkala} pooja starts. Abhishekam with milk, honey and sandal paste is done to the \textit{Spatika} linga and \textit{Rathnasabapathi} (another small statue of Nataraja seen in the sanctum) but not to the utsavamurthies. Camphor aradhana is shown to them. When the camphor light is shown before the Spatika, he looks 	extit{dark}, and when the camphor light is shown on the back, the Spatika linga is \textit{brightly} illuminated and the event is made unforgettable. This poojah is completed by 11 am. \textit{Uchikala poojah} starts by noon, around 12 pm. This time, only \textit{deeparathanai (no abhisheakam)} is done to all and the door of the sanctum is closed.

Around 5 pm, after opening the sanctum door, the evening (\textit{Sayaratchai}) pooja starts. Abhishekam is done to the Spatika linga. Around six, \textit{shodashobachara aaradhna}\textsuperscript{56} (a series of deeparathanai with mahadeepam, nagadeepam, vrishaba deepam, aradhana with poornakumamba, mirror etc.) is done. Around 6 pm, the \textit{second Sayankala poojah}, abhishekam and aaradhana is done to the Spatika linga. During the same time, in the \textit{kanakasabha}, \textit{aaradhana} is done to the \textit{golden vilva} garland within the closed doors. It is done by a dhikshidar who enters into the Chidhambharara Rahasya\textsuperscript{57} room.

In purely physical terms, the appellation \textit{Chidhambara Rahasya} applies to a panel comprising vertical rows of strings of golden vilva leaves, studded with precious stones, suspended close to the norther wall of the Chitsabha, just above the mukhalinga, and to right of the dancing Lord. It is normally covered by a black silk (which is changed twice a year with a new one) curtain or maya-yavanika (curtain of Illusion). It is revealed to the devotees in the Kanakasabha three times of a day, after the every \textit{kaalapuja}, by the presiding priest. It is also revealed by request to individual devotee. The lifting of the curtain symbolises the redressal of ignorance. While the iconic form of Nataraja correspond to the swarupa (formed)

\textsuperscript{56} Ramalingam K.K.: Chidambaram Nataraja Thirukkoil, p219.
state, the Spatika linga to the Rupa-arupa (formed yet formless) state, the Rahasya epitomises the arupa (formless) state, thus reinforcing the Conscious as space. This pooja is completed by 8 pm. Again around 10 pm, the deities are returned to their paliyarai, where again a deeparathanai is done. In the Sivakamasundhari shrine, poojas are done twice in the morning and twice in the evening. In subramaniyar (Murugan) and Vinayagar sannathi, poojahs are done once in the morning and once in the evening.

Aadi pathinettam perukku (in which Natarajar is taken to the Kollidam river for a dip), Aavani puttuthiruvizha, Aippasi Puramthiruvizha, Maasi maham (Kadalattu Vizha) and Mahasivarathri (in Maasi) are some of the most important festivals conducted in Chidambaram. In Karthikai, kandhashashti Vizha (a five day festival for Lord Murugan) and in Aavani month, Vinayagar Chathurthi Vizha are also done in grand manner. Thiruvizhas are also conducted in grand manner to the Tamil sages Appar (in Chithirai), Thirugnanasambandhar (in Vaikasi), Manickavasagar (in Aani) and Sundhramurthi Nayanar (in Aadi).

Aani Thirumanjanam or Aani Uthiram is an auspicious day in the Tamil month Aani (May – June) and is dedicated to Lord Nataraja. Thirumanjanam means Holy Bath. The festival is observed on the day of Uthiram Nakshathiram. Since the Bramothsavam is a ten day festival, the preparation to carry out the Mahabhishakam or Thirumanjanam starts ten days earlier. Aani

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58 Ramalingam K.K.: Chidambaram Nataraja Thirukkoil, p222.
Tirumanjanam opens with the Dhvajarohana (Kodiyetram or the hoisting of the holy flag) on the flag-staff in front of the Nataraja shrine in the second prakara. In the flag, the figures of Nandhi, Trident or Trisula and Poorna Kumba are drawn. In the previous day of the Dhvajarohana, Ganesha pooja and Vasthu Shanthi pooja are conducted. On the flag hoisting day, in the forenoon at an auspicious hour, all the Panchamurthies (Somaskanthar, Goddess Sivakamasundhari, Ganesha, Muruga and Chandikeswara) are brought near to the Dvajasthamba. Homas and other special poojas are conducted to the dhvajasthamba, Nandhi and the Balipeeta in front of the Panchamurthies. Then, Rakshabandhanam (Kappu kattuthal) is carried out to all the Panchamurthies and Nandhi and to the dhvajasthamba. Some other poojas are also conducted to satisfy all the Devathas, Astathikpalakas (demigods guarding all the eight sides) and subordinate gods like Brahma, Vishnu etc inviting them (Perithadanam) to attend the festival and seeking their grace for the successful completion of the festival. Thereafter, the flag is taken for a procession within the prakara and is tied to the Dvajasthamba. From the evening of the first day of the festival to the morning of the eighth day, the Utsavamurtis (processional deities or the Panchamurtis) are taken out in procession (twice daily) over the four car streets of Chidambaram in gold or silver plated canopies supported by four pillars, in the morning, and on various vahanas (vehicles) of their own with gold or silver casements in the nights. The procession starts with Lord Vinayaka first in the line, followed by Subramanya, Somaskanthar (Shiva, Parvathi with Murugan), Sivakamasundhari and Chandikeshvara in the end. The departure of the processional deities starts from the Alankara mandapa in the second prakara and pass through the yagasala where

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poojas and homas are performed on all the festival days. After ascending over the twenty one steps of the Thittivasal, the procession emerges out the gate and enters the East Sannathi Street which is colourfully decorated with rangoli kolams. The procession is accompanied with rapturous Nadhaswaram music.61

On the night of the second day, Somaskandhar is taken out for the procession in a silver Chandhraprabha, (the orb of moon) and the others in their own vahanas. On the third night, Somaskanthar takes the procession in the Golden Sooryaprabha62 (the orb of the sun) with others in their own Vahanas. On the night of the fourth day, Somaskanthar takes procession in the Silver Bhootha vahana, to indicate that he has the control over the pancha boothas. On the fifth-day night, Somaskandhar and Sivakamasundhari take the procession in separate Vrishabavahanas. On the sixth night, he takes the procession in the elephant vahana (Gajavahana) which indicates that Lord Siva, after the Gajasamhara, had made him as his vahana. On the seventh night, Somaskanthar takes the procession in the Golden plated Kailasa Vahana, there by indicating that he had given anugraha to the Ravana (Lankeshvara) who had tried to uplift the Kailasa. Sivakami and Skandha (Muruga) follows him in separate Vrishaba vahana. At the end of the procession on each day, the panchamurthies are brought to the Dvajasthamba and a special pooja is performed. The eight day is the day of Maham Nakshathram, the day when Manickavasagar63 attained moksha. Saint Manickavasagar is

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the Author of Thiruvasagam, a well known Tamil epic. It is believed that on a Aani Uthiram
day, Lord Shiva appeared before Manickavasagar under a Kurundai tree and offered upadesha
(advice) and during the Mahabhisheakam, as everyone watched, the sage merged into the
Lord. – In the morning procession on that day, Manickavasagar joins the procession along
with Panchamurthies, The eight day is the day of Maham Nakshathram, the day when
Manickavasagar\textsuperscript{64} attained moksha. In the morning procession on that day, Manickavasagar
joins the procession along with Panchamurthies, and after reaching the temple, the event of
attaining the moksha is performed. On the same evening Siva as Bikshadana takes the
procession in a
golden plated
ratha (car) and
in the night,
Somaskanthar
alone takes the
procession in an
ashwa vahana
amongst the
thunderous crying
(Fig. 9: Rathotsavam in Chidhambaram – Natarajar, Amman, Chandikesvarar)
of the devotees shouting Bikshadarukku pitchai Idungal (Give alms to Bikshadana)\textsuperscript{65}.

The ninth day is the actual festival day (Rathotsavam) in which the panchamurthies
take the procession in the Rathas. In the early hours of the morning, the idols of Nataraja and
Sivakamasundari are prepared for the car festival and are decorated with the precious jewel
collection of the temple. After the kalai-pooja is performed, followed by the ritual of yatra
dana (prayerful offering at the commencement of the journey) which signals the departure of

\textsuperscript{64} K.K.Ramalingam, Chidhambaram Natarajar Thirukkoil, (2000, Thiruvarasu Puthaka Nilayam, Chennai), p228.
Nataraja and Sivakamasundari. Later, the Panchamurthi are brought out from the Kanakasabha. The idols are moved with forward and backward swinging movement, alternately in quick succession (Sachidanandha dance), as they pass through the first and second prakaras and enter on to the East sannadhi street to the Ther-adi from where the idols are shifted to the rathas (ratharohana). Lord Nataraja and Goddess Sivakami are mounted on a Unjal (not on the Simhasana) which hung from the roof of the first kodungai. The swing board (unjal) is somewhat loosely tied to the nearby pillars so that a little swinging movement is allowed during the procession. Coconuts are broken and lighted camphor deeparadhanai are showned by the priests on the narasana to the idols and by the carpenters to the wheels before the ratha is moved for the procession. First Vinayagar ratha starts, followed by Murugar, Lord Natarajar, Goddess Sivakamasundhari and in the end Chadikeshwarar moves. As the cars move on along the four car streets, thousands of devotees vie with one another to pick up the thick ropes and iron chains to pull the cars. The emotionally charged crowds move on with but one single thought of Nataraja and His consort. A close glimpse of Nataraja and Sivakamasundari gives thousands of devotees a much-priced chance to feel the thrill of a close view of their Lord and His consort. It is a heart-warming experience. By about 11 am, the five cars move up to the junction of the west and north car streets, where they are parked till about 4 pm for public darshan.

Just as Meenakshi is looked upon as a fisherman’s daughter, so is Sivakamasundari in Chidambaram. To the fisherman and fisherwomen of Chidambaram, Nataraja is the son-in-law of their community to whom, as well to their daughter Sivakami, all honours are done on the happy occasion of the Rathotsava, when they are right at their door, to bless them. Late in the evening, after accepting the fishermen’s offerings and reverence, the procession restarts and reaches the temple to assemble in the 1000 pillared mandapa. After accepting the ‘Kattalai’ offerings from Ubbayadhars, the camphor aradhana and neivedhyam are done with
accompanied Nadhaswaram. After Nataraja and Sivakamasundari are moved out the cars, Some other special poojas like Ekha-kala Laksharchana, Manthrakshathai, vilva poojah etc, are carried out\textsuperscript{66}.

On the tenth day, \textit{Aani Thirumanjanam} is celebrated. Thirumanjanam means sacred holy bath. About 3 am, the holy abhisheka starts. Lord Nataraja and Sivakamasundari are \textit{divested} of their large collection of silks, garlands and flowers, and preparations are made for their holy and ceremonial \textit{bathing} (Mahabhishekam). \textit{Viputhi} for Nataraja, \textit{Manjal} (turmeric) and \textit{Kunkuma} for Sivakami, milk, curd, honey, tender coconut, \textit{panchamirtham}, Rose water (\textit{panneer}) etc., for both are extensively used for the Thirumanjana Abhishekam. The mahabhishekam is completed before the \textit{sunrise} of the next day. Late on the night, the \textit{Dvaja-avarohanam} (unfurling of the flag) takes place, followed by sprinkling (\textit{prokshana}) of holy water, prepared from the yagasala for this purpose, upon the Panchamurthies and upon the devotees crowded there.

On the night of the eleventh day, the festival comes to an end, after completing the procession of the Panchamurthies in \textit{Muthu-palanquin} (Pearl Pallakku) which goes around the temple along the four streets. This is called leave-taking (\textit{Vidaiyathi}) festival.

Of the two Brahmotsavams of the Nataraja temple, \textit{Arudra Darshan}\textsuperscript{67} is particularly important for the \textit{Kanakasabha}. It is said that Appar and Sundharar\textsuperscript{68} participated in the festival of Thiruvadhirai. Ten days ahead of the day of the \textit{Tiruvadhirai} star in the Tamil month of Margali, the festival \textit{flag} is hoisted (\textit{Dvajarohanam}). The pattern of the ten days Arudra Darsanam festival is the \textit{same} as that of Ani Thirumanjanam festival with a difference that in the Arudra festival, Saint \textit{Manikkavasagar} is accorded a \textit{special} status in the rituals of


\textsuperscript{68} Daheja Vidhya: Chola Bronzes (1979, Motilal Banarsi Doss Publications Private Limited, Delhi), pp12 – 16.
worship during the festival period. In the Sayaraksha Deeparadhana (around 6 pm) of Nataraja, a decorated icon of Saint Manickavasagar is brought in procession and stationed before the Lord. Likewise, Manikavasagar is taken out in procession in the mornings on all the ten days of the Arudra festival. When the Arudra Darsanam is over, Deeparadhana is offered to Manikavasagar also. The protocol includes a vidayatti (leave taking) festival for Manikavasagar also.

According to historical and traditional evidence, it is clear that these two Brahmotsavams of Nataraja temple (Ani Tirumanjanam and Arudra Darsanam) are ancient. Some scholars have involved Kopperunjinga’s name as the starting point. However, these two festivals have been celebrated even before Kopperunjinga’s period.\textsuperscript{69} No. 223 Vol. IV of Epigraphica Indica makes pointed references to Margali-Thiruvadirai-Thirunal and Thiru Anithiurnal.\textsuperscript{70} It proves that these two important festivals of the Nataraja temple have been observed even from earlier time, at least as early as during the period of Rajendra Chola I. Even today these festivals are celebrated on a mass scale. Thousands of devotees take part in these festivals.

Sivakamasundari has a ten-day festival in the Tamil month Aippasi (October-November). On the ninth day of the festival, a Rathotsava (car festival) is celebrated; on the ninth day is Ruthusnanotsava (festival of puberty-bath), which falls of Aippasi Pusam. On that day, new garments are presented to Goddess Sivakami. It is a correction of Tiruppudavai- 

\textit{idu-vizha}, perhaps a reference to the gift of new cloths to a girl who has attained puberty, given after a purification bath.

On the tenth day of the festival, certain rituals connected with the Goddess’s marriage with Natarajar are performed; on the eleventh day of the festival, which is observed as the


marriage (*Tirukkalyana Uhtsavam*) day, the Amman is deemed to perform a *penance* (praying for the hand of the Lord), and after being taken in a procession, moves to the main temple, where the *holy wed-lock* with Natarajar is performed.

In *Srimushnam* Temple, a number of important festivals are celebrated in the *Bhuvarahaswami* temple in which the *pancharathra* mode of worship is followed. The most important festivals are the two Brahmothsavams in this temple, being conducted every year. The first one is conducted during the month of April-May, *Chithirai Uthsavam*. The second Brahmothsavam is conducted during the *Maasi* month (on full moon during February-March). *Chithirai Peruvizha (Brahmothsavam)* starts ten days prior to the full moon day.

![HamsaVahana, Shesha Vahana, Garuda Vahana, Hanuman Vahana and Gaja Vahana](image)

The *uthsavam* is carried out for ten days ending on the *full moon* day. The Uthsavamurthies (*Yajnavarahamurthi, Sridevi* and *Bhudevi*), are brought out for procession twice daily, in the palanquin (*pallakku*) in the mornings and in various *vahanas* in the nights, and the procession go around all the four *maada* streets around the temple.

On the *first day* morning, after the flag hoisting (*dvajarohonam*) pooja, the uthsavamurthies are brought out in *Pushpak palanquin (Pushpa Pallakku)* for the procession. On the same night, the uthsavamurthies are taken in *Simbu Vahana*. The uthsavamurthi are brought out in *Hamsa vahana* on the *second-day* night, on Gold-plated *Garuda vahana* on the *third-day* night, on *Shesha vahana* on the *fourth-day* night, on *Hanuman vahana* on the *fifth-
day night and on *Gaja vahana* on the sixth-day night.

On the seventh-day, the Uthsavamurthies are taken out in a ratha. Three or four days prior to the rathothsava day, the car is prepared for the therottam. Minor repairs are corrected. Wheels are checked and oiled. Reliefs are cleared off the dust and are varnished. New vimana is built and decorated with thirai seelai and thumbis. A flag and an umbrella tied above the kalasa. In front, on the rathamukha, four galloping horses are fixed. Lord Brahma is seated on the rathamukha as if he is holding the ropes of the horses. Bunches of peanuts, paddy, banana etc., garlands if varieties of flowers, and mango leaves thoranas are tied. The main deity, fully decorated and ornamented Bhuvarahaswami with his consorts Sridevi and Bhudevi, after the abhishekam and araradhana in the temple, is brought out of the temple to the theradi and mounted on the Uthsavabhera (Padmasana). A dhupa-aradhana is done to the deities. After a pooja to the wheels and cracking a gourd and a coconut, the ratha moves. The procession, with help of hundreds of people pulling the ratha, moves in all the car streets and in the end, reaches the temple in the night.

On the eight-day night, the procession is carried in Ashva vahana. On the ninth day morning, the Uriyadi or Mattaiyadi Uthsavam is held between Varahar and Ambujavalli Thayar. On the same night, the float festival (theppotsavam) in the Ashwatha Pushkarani is conducted. The Lord with his two consorts have a boat ride in the temple tank, that is illuminated for the purpose, accompanied by a retinue. The float festival reaches a crescendo when the boat speeds up. After the float festival, some special poojas are conducted in the temple. On the tenth day morning, after the procession in a pushpak palanquin in the four maada veethis is over, the dvaja-avarohana pooja is done followed by the unfurling of the flag. The entire festival is conducted in Srimushnam itself, unlike Maasi Maham.
During the *Maasi Mahothsavam*, the Lord and His consort visit the neighbouring hamlets and towns to give darshan to the devotees. The festival starts in the month of *Maasi* (February-March), beginning on *Bharani Nakshatram* and continued till *Pusam Nakshatram* for seven days in Srimushnam. On the eighth day the Lord is taken to *Perumattur* village and on the *ninth day* to *Thaikal* village near *Killai* by the seashore. The Thaikal village was once the capital of a *Muslim* ruler who is believed to have given many benefactions to this temple and also constructed a *mandapa* at Killai\(^\text{71}\). The *Nawab* of Thaikkal village, once, was inflicted by an incurable disease, was almost sinking when a devotee of Sri *Bhuvarahan* happened to visit the Nawab. Sensing the seriousness of his condition, the man, a Madhwa Brahmin, offered him tulasi and holy water, as *prasadam* from the Srimushnam temple. The Nawab accepted it reverently and he was cured of his malady miraculously. As a token of gratitude, he offered several acres of cultivable land and orchards to the temple trust. This property is under the survey of Madhwa Brahmins till date. The Muslim brethren in Killai, even today, welcome the presiding deity with grandeur. It is indeed unique that the Lord stops in front of the *mosque* and accepts garlands and candy from the chief *kazi*. After lighting the camphor, in the *dhargah* where the ruler is buried, the deity’s garland is laid on the grave, and the kazi recites some verses from the Holy *Koran*\(^\text{72}\). From the tenth day onwards the deity visits the surrounding villages like Vazhkai, Lalpuram, Chidambaram, Melamungilari, Bhuvanagiri, Alampadi, Tettampattu, Ramapuram and Kavaraipazhai where poojas are offered and then the deities returns to Srimushnam.

The *Navarathri* festival involves the goddess Ambujavalli being decorated with silk sarees and flower garlands. She is carried in a flower palanquin on the last Friday of the Tamil months of *Aadi* and *Thai*. The festivals of Brahmothsavams are observed with overwhelming magnificence in the Bhuvarasvami temple. The festivals observed in the temple not only


include offerings of worship to the gods but also worship is offered to the benefactors of the temple.

Just as in every temple, in Thiruppathirippuliyur also, poojas are being done daily, monthly and annually. On the first day of the Tamil month, full moon, New moon and two on Pradodsam days special pujas called Pancharathra poojas are conducted. Annually six special (Peruvizhakkal) are conducted as in Chidhambarm. The first pooja, Marghazhi Thiruvaadhirai in the early hours of dawn (kalasandhi) the second pooja, Chittirai Thiruvonam in the ushat kaalam (morning), the third pooja, Maasi Chaturdasi (in sukla paksham) in the noon (uchikkaalam), the fourth pooja, Aani Uthiram or Aani Thirumanjanam in the afternoon, the fifth pooja, Aavani Chaturdasi, in the evening (sayaratchai) and the sixth pooja, Purattasi Chaturdasi in the midnight (Arthajama).

The most important festival in Thiruppathiripuliyur is the Vaikasi Peruvizha which takes place for fourteen days. For the first three days, a preparatory festival for Vannara Mariyammal with special abhishekam (Thirumanjanam) and deeparathanai is performed. On the night of the third day which happens to be a new moon day, the event of Kappu Kattuthal takes place, requesting the Amman and the astathikpalakas to help them to complete the festival without any obstacles. On the next day, a festival for (vignathai theerkkum) Vinayagar is performed. The actual Vizha starts from the fifth day which goes on for another fourteen days. On the first day, the Dvajarohanam is performed in Paadalesvarar Sannathi with a flag in which the figure of Nandhi is drawn. After the Kodiyetram, the Panchamurthi idols are taken out for) procession in wooden Indravimana, both in the
morning and night. On the second day, the deities are taken for procession in the *Lotus vahana* with *Suryaprabhai* in the morning and in *Simhavahana* in the night. On the third day, the deities are taken in the *golden palanquins* in the morning and *Bhuthavahanas* in the night. On the fifth day, the deities are brought out in *Kamadhenu* and *Karpaka virutchavahana* in the morning and in *Nagavahana* in the night. On the fifth day, *Adhikara Nandhi temple dharshan* is performed, followed by the procession in the *Vrishaba Vahana* (Fig. 12: *Dvajarohanam*).

In the evening a special vahana called *Theruvadaichan*, carrying the Panchamurthis takes up the procession. The Theruvadaichan is built on a large wooden log (*Chapparam*) with eight wheels and with a *vimana* built with bamboo sticks. On the sixth day, the deities are taken in for procession in *Gajavahana* in the morning. On the same night, the Panchamurthis takes the procession in *Silver Car*. On the seventh day morning, the deities are taken the procession in *Silver Car*. On the seventh seventh day morning, the deities are brought out in wooden *Kailasa vahana*. On the same night, after the Paadalesvarar marriage function, the Panchamurthis are brought in *Silver Vrishaba vahana*. On the eighth day morning, the Panchamurthis goes out in
Ashvavahana, and in the night, Lord Natarja as Bikshadana goes out in Parvathamalai vahana. On the same night, the deities are brought out in the golden Kailasavahana. On the ninth day morning, the (Panchamurthis are pulled in the Ratha in the procession. Three or four days prior to the rathothsava day, the car is prepared for the therottam. Minor repairs are corrected. Wheels are checked and oiled. Reliefs are cleared off the dust and are varnished. New vimana is built and decorated with thirai seelai and thumbis. A flag and an umbrella tied above the kalasa. In front, on the ratha mutha, four galloping horses are fixed. Brahma is seated on the rathamukha, holding the ropes of the horses. Two Dwarapalakas are tied in front of the deities. Eight yalis are tied in the corners. Fairies hung from the floor of the first kodungai. Bunches of peanuts, paddy, banana etc., and garlands of varieties of flowers, and mango leaves thorax are tied.

On the tenth day morning, after a pooja in the temple, the Theerthavari and Thiruvudal Vizha are celebrated. On the same night, the Panchamurthis are taken in pearl-pallakku. After reaching the temple, on the same night, Dvaja-avarohanam (unfurling of the flag) is done. On the eleventh day morning, Thirumulaipal Vizha to Thirugnanasambandhar is celebrated. On the same night, the deities are brought out in procession. On the twelfth night, the Theppothsavam is performed in Sivakara Theertham in a wooden theppam(float) with a vimana elaborately illuminated with electric lights. On the thirteenth day, a special Vizha for Chandikesvarar is celebrated. Vasantha Vizha or Chithirai thiruvizha is performed
days, ending on full moon day. On each day, special poojahs and abhishekams are performed to both Uthsavamurthi and Moolavar. The Uthsavamurthi is taken for a procession in the same vaha on all days in the nights.

The Jains, in accordance with the king's orders, tied Appar to a stone and thrown into the sea. However, Appar (Thirunavukarasar) fixed his mind on Lord Siva and sang hymns in praise of the Lord Nataraja. As soon as he finished the song the stone began to float. Appar was seen seated on the stone and was happily borne on the waves, which safely took him to the Thiruppathirupuliyur at a place called Karaiyeriya Nagar. In his remembrance, Appar thiruvizha is performed for ten days. Special poojahs and Thirumanjanam (abhishekam) are done to the Moolavar, Uthsavar (Chandhrasekar) and in addition to Appar are carried out. The procession is taken out on second and tenth day only. On the second day, Appar and Chandhrasekar are taken to the Karaiyerianagar in the silver vimana and silver Vrishabha vahana respectively. Appar\textsuperscript{73} is taken into the sea and dropped from where he swims and reaches the shore after a small struggle. Both the deities stay there throughout the day in Karaiyeriya Nagar and return to

\textsuperscript{73}Raju. V.:Thiruppathirupuliyur Paadaleswarar Koil Varalaru (2008, Center For Indian Cultural Studies), p33-34.
Thiruppatheripuliyur late in the night. On all the ten days, segments of *Appar Puranam* taken from the *Periyapuranam* are recited before the deeparathanai in the nights.

In all the three temples of Chidhambaram, Srimushnam and Thiruppatheripuliyur a number of smaller and larger festivals are being conducted almost every day and every week. Some festivals are conducted by the temple itself and many are carried out by sponsors. Shiva and his related poojahs are performed in Chidhambaram and Thiruppatheripuliyur while Vishnu and his related poojahs are done in Srimushnam. In Chidhambaram car, there is no sarathi to drive the ratha, where as in Srimushnam and hiruppathiripuliyur, Lord Brahma, seated in the rathamukaha, rides the horses tied to the car. Apart from these, in Thiruppathiripuliyur car, two dwarapalakas, are seen guarding at the entrance. Fairies are seen hanging from the roof of the car and Yalis are seen in each corner of the car. Previously, the Chidhambaram car alone was kept in a shed, where as the other two cars were left open in the street corners. But, now, these cars are also taken care of and sheltered in the sheds. Srimusham car is renovated in 2002 and Thiruppathiripuliyur car is built and used for the rathothsava from 2005 onwards.

It is clear that festivals are not a recent phenomenon, though the details are less clear. The number, length and routes of festivals may have changed in the course of the centuries, with the availability of resources of temples to hold the major festivals. In Thiruppathi Venkateswara Temple, there was a huge expansion in the number of festivals after the 14th century. By 1504, there were 153 festival days, and by the early 17th century, 429 festivals were celebrated on 365 days a year. New festivals like *Adbyanothsavam* (recitation of *Prabantham*), *Theppothsavam* and *Vasnthothsavam* were celebrated from the 15th century. But in Chidhambarm and Srirangam temples, Paul Younger\(^4\) notes that although minor changes are felt, there is a deep conservation in conducting the festivals, as mentioned in the

inscriptions and hymns. C.J.Fuller remarks that the festival in Meenakshi Sundareswara temple is being conducted in the same manner, as celebrated in the *Nayaka* period\textsuperscript{75}