

மதுரை சித்திரைத் திருவிழா
MADURAI CHITHIRAI THIRUVIZHA

Institutions of Hindu Religious Endowment Board:

- a) Arulmigu Sri Meenakshi Sundareaswarar Temple
- b) Arulmigu Sri Sundararaja Perumal Temple

Communities:

- (a) Brahmanas
- (b) Kallar

Practitioners:

Hereditary Service Providers who join the entourage

1. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE ELEMENT

1.1 Description

Madurai, in Tamil Nadu, India, is one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. Its natural, spiritual, and cultural identity finds vibrant expression in the **Chithirai Thiruvizha**, often called the "*Festival of Festivals*." Celebrated during the Tamil month of Chithirai (mid-April to mid-May), it marks a period of post-harvest joy, communal harmony, and spiritual renewal.

At the confluence of River Vaigai and tributaries is the ancient riverine settlement Madurai and capital city of Pandyan clan of yore. Being a tableland, the fertility and prosperity of Madurai is attributed to sovereign of the green goddess Meenakshi. The festival's central events include:

- The **Coronation of Goddess Meenakshi**
- The **Celestial Wedding** of Meenakshi and Lord Sundareswarar
- The **Blessing Journey of Azhagar**, who travels from the forested hills to the Vaigai River

A vast network of sacred sites connects the celebrations- from Azhagar Hills (21km) through the historic north eastern highway to Madurai city and south western highway to Sri-villiputhur town (80km). In the 17th century, King Thirumalai Nayakkar unified two distinct temple festivals- Saivite (Meenakshi) and Vaishnavite (Azhagar)- with 4 overlapping festive days, by synchronizing their schedules and venues. His interventions addressed several key concerns:

- a) **Agrarian Convenience:** The Meenakshi Ther-ottam (chariot festival), previously held in the Tamil month of Masi, saw limited participation. Less people came to run the chariot, the majority of whom were occupied in harvesting their yield. For the convenience of the

agricultural folks and to celebrate the festival at leisure after gathering the produce, key events of the festival were incorporated into the newly formulated festival.

b) Security and Administration: Following a burglary at the Azhagar Temple in 1669, members of the Vedar (hunter) community involved were punished by the Zamindar of Velliyakundram. In recognition of their role, Thirumalai Nayakkar granted patronage, and the aristocratic family assumed responsibility as custodians of the temple's wealth.

c) Sectarian Harmony: Sectarian divide between Saivites and Vaishnavites was high. Meanwhile, Azhagar Divine Descent to River Vaigai was held at Thenur, 15km west of Madurai. At the destination, entry of Azhagar was an enactment to bless the drying riverbed in summer and gain adequate rainfall during the monsoon showers. A new Neer-azhi Thenur Mandapam was built at the river bed in Vandiyur, north east of Madurai. The introduction of the popular fest succeeded. It was no ordinary feat to divert the festive route to an important highway and celebrate the same in an urban ambience. The city still resounds with the merriment of its residents and villagers of rural areas transcending sects, communities and even religion.

Over time, this integration has fostered deep communal harmony beyond ritual practices.

Festivities today include:

- Processions of Meenakshi paraphernalia in the streets of Old Madurai
- Azhagar's journey along the northern banks of the Vaigai
- Celebrations at nearly 100 traditional *Mandagapadi* (stone pavilions), where communities offer food (*Chithira-annam*), music, and devotional performances

The Chithirai Fair continues throughout the summer, drawing lakhs of devotees, supported by voluntary contributions from institutions and organizations.

Ultimately, the festival embodies unity, devotion, and shared human emotion, transcending social and cultural divisions.

1.2 Preliminaries:

- a. The Arulmigu Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple and Arulmigu Kallazhagar Temple prepare formal invitations for their respective festivals, conducted over 11 and 9 days. While their rituals differ, overlapping days create a harmonious blend of Saivite and Vaishnavite traditions.
- b. Meenakshi Chithirai Festival and Azhagar Chithirai Festival organisers exchange invitations at the Then-ur Neer-azhi Mandapam.
- c. Canopy columns are ceremonially installed at all *Mandagapadis*, mandapams, and temples along the processional routes where deities and offerings are received during the festival. This initiative ensures the provision of shaded ceremonial spaces. Notable sites include Theradi Karuppanasamy Temple, Thallakulam Prasanna

Venkatachalapathy Perumal Temple, the Bitter Gourd Mandagapadi, and the Thenur Neerazhi Mandapam. As the date of the deities' arrival approaches, the canopies are elaborately decorated to welcome and invoke divine grace.

- d. Costumes and gears for divine role players are prepared at least two months in advance. Devotees undertaking key roles observe fasting and spiritual discipline.
- e. Once both the temples raise their banners, the locals do not leave their city or town. They attend as many events as possible. Family ceremonies such as ear-piercing and matrimonial arrangements are often scheduled during this period.
- f. On the Eve of the Festival:
 - Rituals are performed to sanctify the ground space within the temple premises through fire to remove negativity before the beginning of festival.
 - Sixty-four types of offerings are presented
 - The directions from where the god arrives and goes around are purified and cleansed.
 - Concluding rituals are performed after the festival

1.3 Day-by-Day Events: Meenakshi Chithirai Festival (11 Days)

➤ The principal festive deities are taken in grand procession along the fourth concentric street of Old Madurai, encompassing all directions of the Masi Streets:

- a) The divine couple, Sundareswarar and Piriya-vidai, seated with their second son, Kanthan, positioned between them. Sundareswarar, true to his name, is handsome with a captivating smile.
- b) Goddess Meenakshi Amman, the sovereign deity of Madurai, also proceeds in splendour through the ceremonial routes.

➤ Accompanying them are associated deities such as Ganesha, Murugan, and Adhikara Nandi. Caparisoned temple bull bearing a twin mono faced percussion instrument and temple elephant lead the procession.

➤ Young devotees dressed as different forms of gods also take part with excitement. Musicians play the double reed wind instrument of Tamilnadu and rumbling percussions like barrel shaped drum. 'Pancha-vathyam', an orchestra of 3 complex percussion and 2 blow instruments of brass horn and conch is performed popularly in temple festivals of South India. Folk performance also takes place on the move.

➤ Kolam or auspicious floor designs decorate the entrance of shops located in the streets to welcome the procession and honour with a lit lamp, coconut and fruits offering.

Highlights of key Days

DAY 1 *morning- Flag Hoisting

- The temple flag or banner bears the emblem of Nandhi, the mount of Sivan - Trident, Sun, Moon - 16 ritual items including different lamps used in honouring the god.
- Amidst chanting of hymns, the priest hoists the flag on the 56 feet tall mast in the presence of temple trustee and other officials on the occurrence of Karthigai asterisk in the month of Chithirai.
- The processional deities are brought in Silver Throne to the colorfully decorated Kullalar Mandapam nearby. ***Evening-** Deities mounted on Tree of Life and Lion go on a procession of Masi Streets.

DAY 2 *morning- Deities mounted on Golden Chariot are in Muthu-ram-ayyar Mandapam in the temple. ***Evening-** Deities mounted on Boothaganam and Annam go on a procession of Masi Streets.

DAY 3 *morning- Deities mounted on Golden Chariot are in Kalyana-sundara Mudaliar Mandapam in the temple. ***Evening-** Deities mounted on Kailasam Mountain and Kamadhenu go on a procession of Masi Streets.

DAY 4 *morning- Visit to Alaga Pillai & Dhana Pillai Vagayara Villa-puram Pavakkai Mandagapadi.

- Two residents of Villa-puram area, Alaga Pillai and Dhana Pillai were chieftains providing army to the king. They had provided endowments and in order to honour the people of Villapuram, as per their request, the deities-come in Golden Palanquin and stay in the community hall of Bitter Gourd Mandagapadi from morning to evening.
- It is believed that in olden days a lot of bitter gourds was cultivated in that area and given as an offering, which is followed till today.

DAY 5 *morning- Deities mounted on Golden Chariot go to Ram-ayana Chavadi in North Masi Street. ***Evening-** Recital of 'Vedar Pari Leelai'

- After the procession of deities on Golden Horse along the North and East Masi Streets, narration of a divine play from the sacred literature of Thiru-vilayadal Puranam is rendered at Meen-akshi Nayakkar Mandapam inside the temple.
- The chief recitalist narrates the 'Vedar Pari Leelai' i.e. The Hunter's Hunt to the gathering in the presence of the deities.
- The Golden Horse is offered dumplings made out of horse gram, after which it is distributed.

DAY 6 *morning- Deities mounted on Golden Chariot are in Sivagangi Raja Mandapam in the temple. ***Evening-** Recital of 'Saiva Samayam Stapitha Varalaru Leelai'

- In front of the Elephant Mahal narration of a divine play from Thiru-vilayadal Puranam in the temple.
- The chief recitalist narrates ‘Saiva Samayam Stapitha Leelai’ i.e. Re-establishing Saivism by child prodigy Thiru-gnana Sambandar. It takes place in the presence of 63 ‘Nayanmars’, the Saivite Saints with the images of the child saint, Pandyan king Ninra-seer Nedu-maran, Queen Mangayark-arasi and minister Kula-chirayar, in the forefront who all were recognised as Saivite saints in the historic transformation of Madurai.
- After the recital, the deities are taken in procession mounted on Golden and Silver Bull go on a procession of Masi Streets.

DAY 7 *morning- Deities go on a procession of Masi Streets in Silver Palanquin and return to Meen-akshi Nayakkar Mandapam in the temple. ***Evening-** Deities are mounted on Nandhik-easwarar and Yali go on a procession of Masi Streets.

DAY 8 *morning- Deities go on Golden Palanquin to Kattu-chetti Mandapam in West Masi Street. ***Evening-** Pattabishekam-Coronation of Meen-akshi Amman

- Meenakshi Amman is believed to have been born as the Pandyan Princess. Her coronation takes place in the grandly decorated Aaru-kal Mandapam inside the temple. Thereafter her title Meenatchi / Meenakshi derived from the fish symbol of the Pandyan Dynasty gained a divine stature to imperial authority. From the Tamil month of Chithirai to Avani the goddess reigns over Madurai city and rest of the months are ruled by Sundar-easwarar.
- Temple trustee receives the ‘Parivattam’ a kind of honour like placing a crown, which was originally accorded to Mannar Thiru-malai Nayakkar.
- Following the honours to the temple authorities, the diamond studded crown ‘Rayar Kridam’ is ceremoniously placed on Meenakshi Amman. It was donated by Appaji Rayar, a minister who served in the court of Vijaya-nagaram King Krishna-deva-rayar.
- Goddess is adorned with Neem Flower Garland, as it was customarily worn by the Pandyan rulers.
- Then the ornamental scepter, a symbol of righteousness is given to her amidst the chanting of sacred hymns. The trustee receives the scepter from the goddess and takes it around Sundar-easwarar accompanied by temple instrumentalists. Then hands back to the goddess marking the transfer of power.
- Meenakshi Amman goes on procession in Silver Palanquin along the Masi Streets.

DAY 9 *morning- Deities go on a procession of Masi Streets in Mara-varna Chariot and return to Siva-gangai Raja Mandapam in the temple. The Divine Thali, holy marriage pendant is taken on a palanquin with due respect to be worshipped by the family which had offered it to the goddess generations ago. ***Evening-** Dig-vijayam-Victorious Direction Expedition

- To seek the blessings of her mother Queen Kanchana Malai, for a successful expedition Meenakshi Amman visits her shrine at Ezhu-kadal Street. While Sundar-easwarar does not take the lead of the procession and go around the Masi Streets.

- Meenakshi Amman battles against the guardians of eight directions. Accomplishes mounting the Indra Vimanam on a victorious expedition around the Masi Streets. Then confronts Nandhi, who could not contain her victory. Sundar-easwarar appears and Meen-akshi Amman does not progress, recognising and accepting him as her spouse.

- **Winning of *Ashta Dikpalakas*, the 8 direction deities and finally confronting her suitor happens in the following areas-**

- 1) Keela Masi Street - Indran
- 2) Junction of Keela Masi Street and Therku Masi Street - Agni
- 3) Therku Masi Street - Yaman
- 4) Junction of Therku Masi Street and Mela Masi Street - Niruthi
- 5) Mela Masi Street - Varunan
- 6) Junction of Mela Masi Street and Vadakku Masi Street - Vayu
- 7) Vadakku Masi Street - Kuberan
- 8) Junction of Vadakku Masi Street and Keela Masi Street - Easanan
- 9) Then finally wins Nandhi and God Sundareaswarar confronts.

- Sons of Bhattars or priests below nine years of age enact the roles of the goddess and god. The children accompany the deities.

- At Lala Sri Renga Chattiram Thiru-kalyana Mandaga-padi exchange of garlands takes place between the deities. D

DAY- 10 *morning- Thirukalyanam- Celestial Wedding

- Thousands of devotees throng the Thiru-kalyana Mandapam located in the junction of West and North Adi Streets to witness the celestial wedding. The eighteenth-century wedding hall constructed by Vijayaranga Chokkanathan Nayakkar could not accommodate the increasing gathering of devotees.

- Presence of deities Subramanyam along with his consort Deivanai and Pavala-kanivai Perumal from Thiru-param-kundram decked in silk and grand jewellery are present on the wedding dais.

- Two Bhattars from the family of Kula-sekara Bhattar and Ugra Pandya Bhattar play the major role in the holy wedding and they perform the exchange of garlands on behalf of Meenakshi and Sundar-easwarar

- While witnessing the wedding as narrated in Thiru-vilayadal Puranam married women gathered there also replace or add the sacred turmeric-soaked thread to their Thali, as per custom. They renew their wedding vow. Some of them distribute the sacred turmeric thread and bangles, always worn by them after the ceremony.
- After the celestial wedding, an entirely sponsored grand wedding feast is provided for the devotees at Sethupathi Government Higher Secondary School in the recent years.
- Moi or Return gifts either in the form of silk dress, jewellery, money and so on as per their capacity are collected.
- All of these were earlier organised by the temple authorities. In continuation of the wedding rituals, the divine play of ‘Gundodharanukku Annamita Leelai’ from Thiru-vilayadal Puranam, the feast is offered to two images of Boothaganams carved in the old Kalyana Mandapam of the temple. ***Evening-** The newlyweds give a Darshan or vision to the sea of devotees. A wedding procession through Masi Streets mounted on Silver Elephant and Floral Palanquin, followed by Thiruparamkundram Subramaniam with Deivanai on Peacock and Pavala-kanivai Perumal on Garuda adorn the streets.

DAY 11 *morning- Thiru-ther-ottam- Chariot Festival

- Masi Streets are wide, broad enough to draw the two chariots. The bigger chariot carries Sundar-easwarar and Piriya-vidai followed by a smaller chariot with Meenakshi Amman. The Chariot Pavilions and supplementary streets to facilitate turn the lengthy rope around the junction are appropriately placed. Sound plan in operation of the chariot for more than 400 years is a wonder.
- After seeking permission from the chariot deity Ther-adi Karuppanna-samy, the rope of the chariot is pulled by the people.
- The ornate chariot are embellished extensively with the sculptures depicting legends.

1.4 Key Communities

Paid Temple Service Providers:

- **Sthanikars:** A group of six responsible for maintaining sectarian rituals
- Temple musicians
- **Othuvars:** Sacred hymn reciters
- **Andars:** Exponents of Vaishnavism

Alternatively service providers are engaged, if required.

Practitioners:

- **Role Players as Embodiments of the Divine:**
 - a. Azhagar enrobes as bandit and endears the Kallar Community, who are thereby honored with the privilege of regarding Kallazhagar as their kinsman.

- b. Ardent water-squirters, attired in bandit robes, spray naturally scented water using traditional leather sling pouches (*thoparai*) on Azhagar and fellow devotees. This act is believed to purify, nourish, and rejuvenate. Members of their families, including young children, actively participate by walking the entire six-day *Blessing Journey* of Azhagar, continuing the ritual practice across generations.
- c. Role players of deity Karuppu-samy dance inviting the deity to possess them and become soothsayers.
- d. Clowns act as truth-tellers, offering both insight and entertainment to the gathered crowds.
- e. Sons of priests below nine years of age enact the roles of the goddess and the god during the 'Direction Expedition' event - on the 9th day of Chithirai Thiruvizha.
- f. Two priests, belonging to the families of Kula-sekara Bhattar and Ugra Pandya Bhattar, perform exchange of garlands on behalf of Meenakshi and Sundar-easwarar during the *Celestial Wedding* event on the 10th day of Chithirai Thiruvizha.
- g. Torch Holders with a ritual dance become soothsayers.

- **Gender-related Practices**

Married couples participate in the “**Celestial Wedding**” on the 10th day of the Chithirai Thiruvizha, as described in the 13th-century text *Thiru-vilayadal Puranam*. During this sacred event, couples renew their marital vows by replacing or adding a turmeric-soaked thread to the *thali* (marriage pendant), symbolizing reaffirmation of their union.

Married women also engage in the ritual sharing of auspicious items, including:

- (a) sacred turmeric threads and bangles, traditionally worn after marriage;
- (b) vermilion (*kumkum*) for application on the forehead; and
- (c) *Madurai Malli* (*Jasminum sambac*), a geographically indicated jasmine, used to adorn the hair.

- **Special Responsibility:** Velliyakundram Zamindar, caretaker of Azhagar temple wealth, safeguards the Azhagar procession through forested stretches.

1.5 Preserving Legacy:

Madurai Meenakshi, Fish-eyed goddess finds mention in Tamil Literature- ‘*Devaram*’ (7th century). Commonly known as *Meenatchi* (“the fish-eyed one”), she is closely associated with the fish- the totemic emblem of the Pandya dynasty- symbolizing divine lineage and sovereign authority. During the *Coronation of Meenakshi* on the 8th day of Chithirai Thiruvizha, she is adorned with a seasonal neem flower garland, traditionally worn by Pandyan rulers.

1.6 Skill Transmission- Grace in Laborious Task:

The *Seer-Padham* (deity mount carriers) practise specialized movement techniques such as *Vaiyali*- a rhythmic trot and galloping horse movements- rooted in medieval South Indian tradition. The “Coming of Azhagar,” performed in this dynamic style and accompanied by thousands of devotees, is a striking and awe-inspiring spectacle. Similarly, the mount carriers of Meenakshi skilfully manoeuvre through dense crowds, ensuring the smooth progression of the procession toward the river.

1.7 Social and Cultural Relevance for Communities

Madurai's identity as the "City of Festivals" is reflected in its cycle of six major temple celebrations each year, including Chithirai Thiruvizha, all closely linked to its surrounding hills and the Vaigai River. The city's landscape- its ancient temples, ceremonial streets, and festive architecture- collectively embodies a living cultural heritage.

Communities residing along the Vaigai and its tributaries are deeply connected to the observance of Chithirai Thiruvizha. Following the harvest season, agricultural families participate in large numbers, often traveling by bullock carts and camping along the riverbanks. As an expression of gratitude, offerings are made to temple granaries at Azhagar Kovil and the Madurai Prasanna Venkatachalapathy Temple, including agricultural produce and, at times, calves gifted to the temples.

The brilliance of the summer sun is complemented by the radiance of *Chithirai Pournami*, the full moon of exceptional luminosity. On the twelfth day of the festival, a series of symbolic enactments take place:

- a. Entry of Azhagar to bless the drying riverbed in summer and gain adequate rainfall during monsoon showers.
- b. Gracious rise of Azhagar from river amidst splashes of water.

Devotees express reverence through applause and participation in rituals such as head shaving and ear-piercing ceremonies. Decorated bulls, adorned with percussion instruments tied to their humps, are ceremonially bathed in the river.

Although the Vaigai's flow is now regulated and its riverbed reduced, the festival continues to honour its enduring significance.

Once both the temples raise their festive banners, local residents traditionally remain in the city, participating in as many events as possible.

1.8 Secular Practice:

A strong example of secular harmony is seen during the **Chariot Procession** on the morning of the overlapping **11th day** of Chithirai Thiruvizha. Flag bearers from both temples jointly participate, carrying their respective symbols. This shared ritual reflects a spirit of mutual respect and harmony between the Saivite and Vaishnavite traditions.

2 CONTRIBUTIONS TO VISIBILITY, AWARENESS, DIALOGUE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Visibility and Awareness

- Chithirai Thiruvizha is widely represented in visual and performing arts.

- It is celebrated in classical Tamil literature, particularly within the *Varnippu* genre, and has inspired popular cultural adaptations, including the well-known film rendition “*Azhagar Is Coming*.”

Food Security

- Distributors of water, refreshments and food need to register with Tamilnadu Food Safety Department.

Health Care

- Processional Routes are cleared before a procession takes place. Shopkeepers and residents clean the front of their premises, often adorning them with decorative designs.
- To prevent dehydration, kiosks providing water, buttermilk, and tamarind juice are traditionally set up along the routes.
- Hand Fans are commonly distributed to cool off the heat.
- Use of motorized devices in *thoppai* (water-squirting instruments) is prohibited.

Quality Education

- Storytelling traditions with an emphasis on human values.
- Participants learn through observation and active involvement in the festivities, fostering experiential knowledge.
- Recitalists narrate episodes from *Thiruvilaiyadal Puranam*, enriching cultural understanding.
- Vaishnavite exponents share mythological narratives.

Gender Equality

Meenakshi reigns over Madurai city and alternates her regal duties with consort Sundar-easwarar- an expression of gender balance that is rare in many traditions.

Being fish-eyed, Meenakshi is believed to be ever-vigilant, protecting the city without rest, much like a fish that never closes its eyes.

In general practice, devotees visit her shrine before that of Sundareswarar. This consideration extends into the households of Madurai, where women are traditionally greeted first.

Peace and Social Cohesion

- Meenakshi and Azhagar temples, representing Saivite and Vaishnavite traditions respectively, observe different key events during Chithirai Thiruvizha. However, they jointly celebrate the festival of the city and mutually invite each other at Vandiyur Thenur Mandapam. This formal gesture nurtures mutual respect - which had existed in the ancient and medieval period, but was disturbed later.
- No clash or disruption has been reported. The festival’s socio-religious-cultural aspect encourage participation and foster a sense of collective belonging. The festival is marked by an inclusive and accommodative ethos.
- Traffic Restrictions and regulations are implemented and followed.
- Crowd management is carried out with help of Police Personnel and Home Guards.

3. SAFEGUARDING MEASURES

a. River Vaigai Restoration

Madurai prospered with copious rush of Vaigai River course meandering into the city gracefully as a damsel - “*Poyya-kula-kod*”- never fails to provide water to Pandyan land, as mentioned in Tamil Epic *Silapadhikaram*. The glorious lifeline of Madurai nowadays has inflow of water manned by regulators. Despite loss of ghats, sand, width of riverbed, Chithirai Thiruvizha honours River Vaigai. To preserve both the ecological and cultural integrity of the river and its associated rituals, the following measures are essential:

- The “*Entry of Azhagar*” is the most attended event of the festival. Place of occurrence needs facelift and should not appear staged.
- Another event- “*Redemption of the Mandooka Ascetic*”, held at Thenoor Mandapam, necessitates improved access- replacing temporary mud pathways with well-designed ghats that lead to the natural sandy riverbed.
- The procession of Azhagar in the *Mohini* incarnation from Rama Raya Mandapam to the riverside calls for thoughtful beautification of the riverfront.
- Celebratory Stone mandapams lining the northern bank of the river- originally constructed for Azhagar’s visit- require careful conservation and restoration to preserve their architectural integrity and heritage value.

Long-Term Plan: Restoration of the Vaigai Riverbed Stretch:

The 2 km stretch of the Vaigai riverbed from Azhwarpuram to Vandiyur, along which Azhagar travels, needs restoration. Clearing excess vegetation and replenishing sand can help revive the riverbed and prevent further damage. With these efforts, monsoon flows can gradually restore the river’s natural balance.

b. Facilitation of *Thoparai* Craftsmanship

- The *Thoppurai* is single-use leather pouch by used water squirters to spray holy water on Azhagar. It is an integral part of Chithirai Thiru-vizha rituals. This unique handmade leather bag is stitched once the leather is chosen and payment done. Traditionally handcrafted by around 300 leather artisans from Kariyapatti (36 km away), this practice is sustained as a form of devotional service.
- Leather processing requires a substantial water supply, which is currently inadequate for producing nearly 10,000 bags. Artisans have to travel a distance of around 96 km to Dindugal for cleaning the hide, significantly increasing production cost. Provision of convenient local infrastructure is therefore essential.
- Since they are traditionally familiar with leather, they make a water spout system only through the right leg hole of the goat hide. Then convert the left leg hole into a shoulder-sling system. This expertise can be documented and shared to enhance production capacity and meet growing demand.

- The vendors start preparation six months prior to the festival. After the festivity, they revert to daily wage labour. Providing sustained livelihood opportunities in tannery and leather crafts would support continuity of this tradition.
- After use, pouches are discarded in river. The water is not in full flow. Exploring recycling methods for processed hide items can mitigate environmental impact.

c. Revitalisation of the Chithirai Fair:

Two-month long fair, once a major attraction for all during summer holidays, requires revival and better spatial planning, particularly at the historic sports ground- *Thamukkam*.

Key initiatives include:

- Displaying regional handicrafts
- Providing camping facilities for the growing number of festival participants
- Enforcing a ban on plastic usage in food and water distribution

d. Restoration of Processional Routes and Cultural Spaces:

Old Madurai constitutes four concentric quadrant streets, which served as the traditional processional routes for the deities. Over time, the processional pathways have changed, and there is a need to reinforce their ritual significance. Additionally, there is a small amphitheatre that can be utilized for conducting Chithirai cultural programmes.

Restoration Measures undertaken by TN Government (Article links)

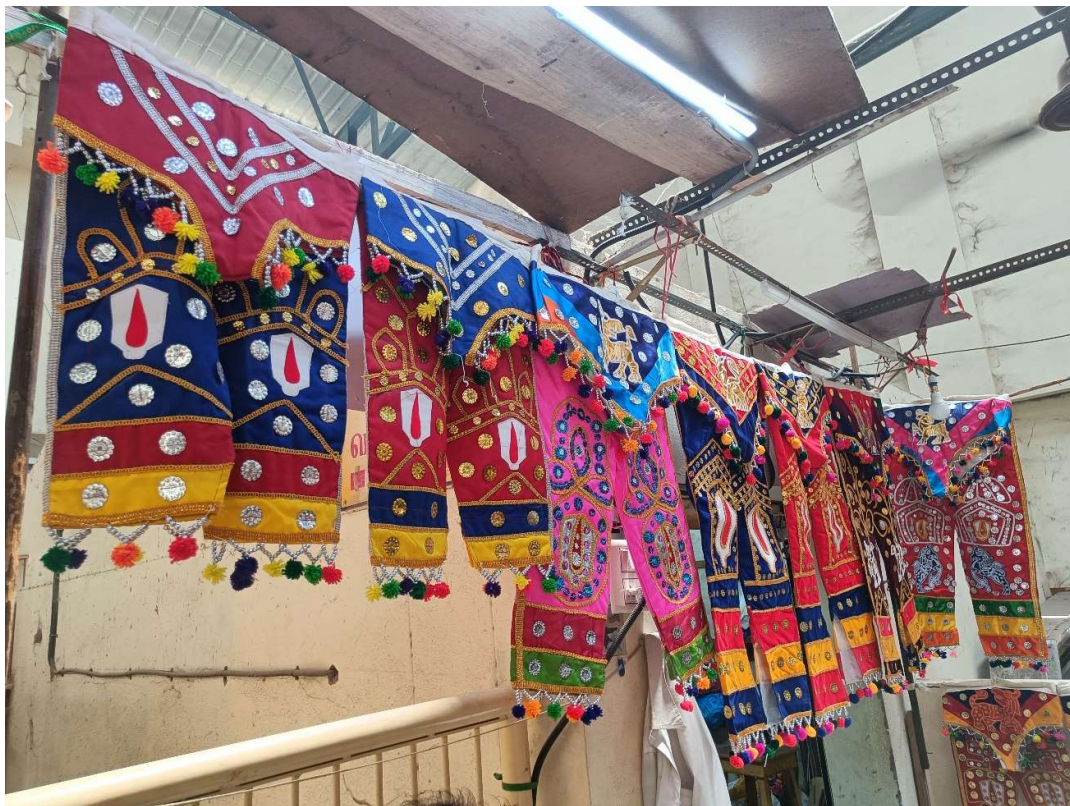
1. [TN government approves Rs 76-crore Vaigai riverfront beautification project](#)
2. [Corporation begins laying 'smart roads' on Masi Streets - The Hindu](#)

Arts and Crafts of Madurai's Chithirai Thiruvizha (Film Link):

https://youtu.be/Oqy_U-oISiE



Devotees dressed as Hanuman accompany Lord Alagar
Photo Credit: INTACH



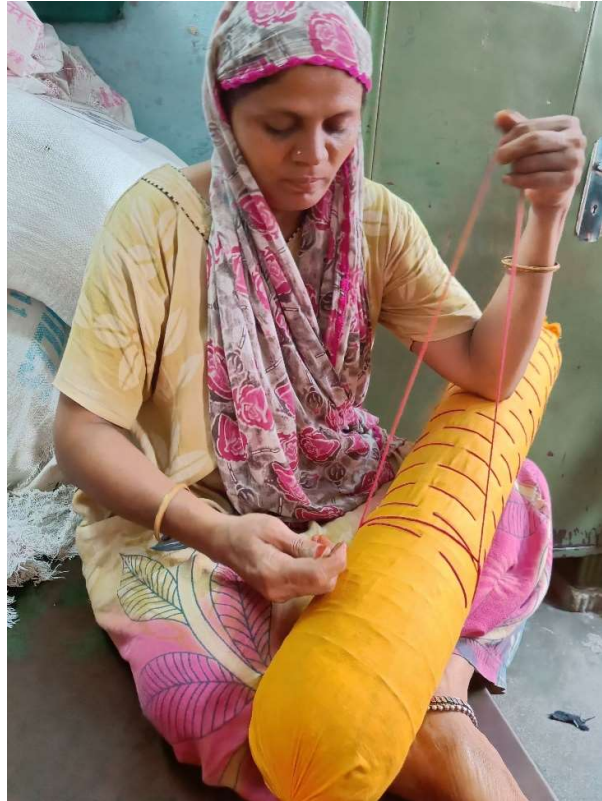
Colourful Salladams
Photo Credit: INTACH



Devotees in Karuppusamy Attire Blessing the People
Photo Credit: INTACH



A young devotee dressed in Karuppuswamy costume
Photo Credit: INTACH



Artisan adding final touches to the Thiri (wick)

Photo Credit: INTACH



Inside of Kunnathur Chattaram

Photo Credit: INTACH



Kunnathur Chattaram
Photo Credit: INTACH



Lord Alagar in Kandangi sari in a gold palanquin
Photo Credit: INTACH



Majestically decorated festival chariot
Photo Credit: INTACH



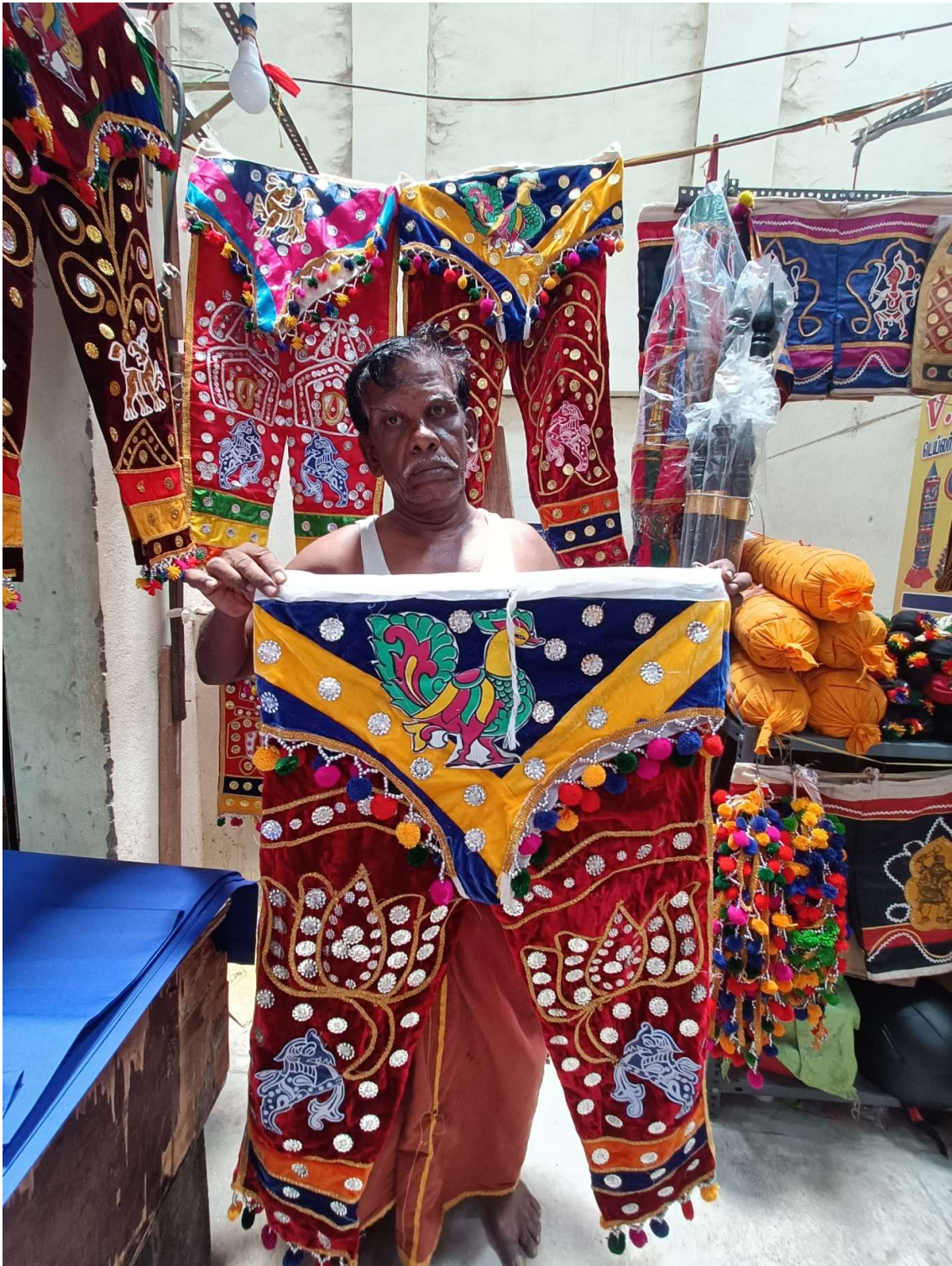
Saamy Aadi salladam set
Photo Credit: INTACH



Tailor Ameer Jaan and his family with the thiri (a hand-stitched cloth fire torch) made by them
Photo Credit: INTACH



Tailor Prabhu preparing motifs for salladam
Photo Credit: INTACH



Tailor Sampath with the salladam stitched by him
Photo Credit: INTACH



Tailor Ameer Jaan in Saamy Aadi Salladam Karuppusamy attire stitched by him
Photo Credit: INTACH



Tying of Uruma (headgear)
Photo Credit: INTACH



Uruma Tying
Photo Credit: INTACH



Young devotee in colourful salladam
Photo Credit: INTACH



Young devotees dressed in Karuppusamy attire
Photo Credit: INTACH



Lord Kallazhagar leaving Thenur Mandapam along the Vaigai in Madurai on a Garuda Vahanam | Photo Credit: The Hindu Archives

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The holy flag being hoisted to mark the beginning of annual Chithirai festival at Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple in Madurai | Photo Credit: The Hindu Archives



Flag being hoisted at Meenakshi Temple ay to mark the commencement of Chithirai Festival
Photo Credit: The Hindu Archives



Flowing piety: Devotees carrying fire pots (agni chatti) at the Chithirai festival of Gowmariamman Temple at Veerapandi near Theni | Photo Credit: The Hindu Archives



Lord Kallazhagar entering the Vaigai River, as part of the Chithirai festival. | Photo Credit- The Hindu Archives



Devotees splash turmeric-mixed water on Lord Sundararaja Perumal in the guise of Kallazhagar on horse mount at Tallakulam in Paramakudi in Ramanathapuram district during the annual Chithirai Festival on Tuesday. | Photo Credit: The Hindu Archives



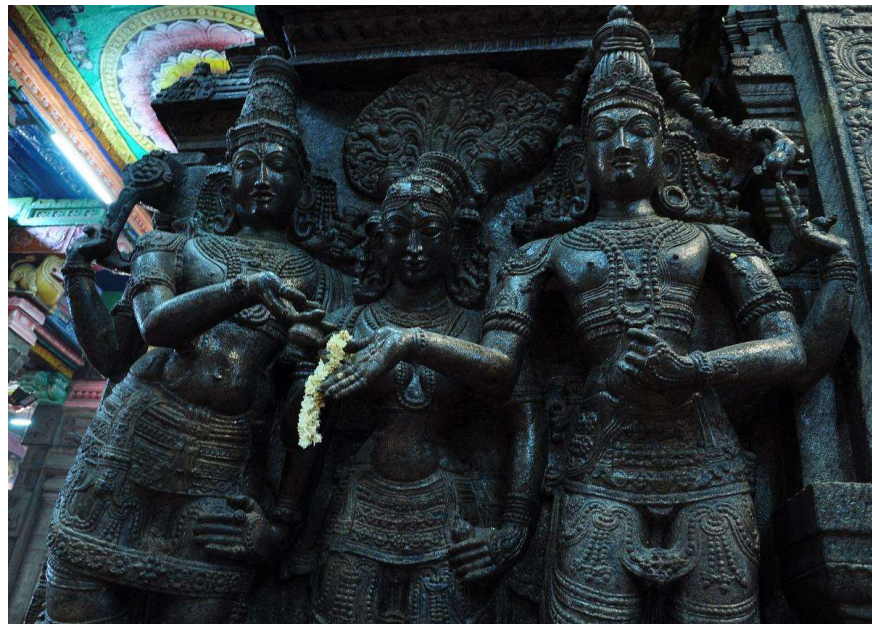
Photo of 'Azhagar Aatril Irangudhal' ceremony in Madurai; Karagattam performance
Photo Credit: The Hindu Archives



The journey begins: Lord Kallazhagar leaving Alagarkoil for Madurai. The procession stopped at 410 'mandagapadis' before reaching Madurai| Photo Credit: The Hindu Archives



Lord Kallazhagar proceeding on Alagarkoil Road in Madurai during the 'Edhir Sevai' on Tuesday
Photo Credit: The Hindu Archives



A sculpture depicting Meenakshi-Sundareswarar tirukalayanam, at the Maha Mandapam of Sri Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple, in Madurai. | Photo Credit: The Hindu Archives



Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple, with the temple tower in the background | Photo Credit: The Hindu Archives