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Festival Tourism Plays a Major Role in Building Social Bond: A Study with Reference to Chithirai Festival, Madurai



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ABSTRACT

This study employed to investigate the major role of festival tourism in building social bond. In this dizzying and demanding world, real happiness is rarely experienced because of pessimism and seriousness even in little things growing big. Hence it is essential to bring out cheerfulness and childishness in us and thereby spread positivity as a whole. Celebrating festivals help to freed ourselves from all worries and stresses. For this descriptive study, the survey was conducted from 1st August to 30th September 2022. Under simple random sampling method, a well-structured online questionnaire is used to collect Primary data from 54 respondents and Secondary data is collected from websites, journals and magazines and processed using the method of content analysis. The findings of the research paper concludes that Chithirai festival tourism play a crucial part in bringing people from every locality together in a bond of love. Moreover, popularizing the festival will invite people from other states and countries to join in the festivities and thereby increase the popularity of the destination and paves way for sustainable economic growth of the destination.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the simple word that brings happiness, joy, pleasure, and relaxation to anyone in the world. Planning for a tour is just like that of preparing for a festival and if it is a festival tour, the only word that could describe is “celebration”. Not only that, in this dizzying and demanding world, true happiness is rarely experienced due to pessimism and seriousness even in small things that become big. So there has always been a need for something that brings positivity. This is how festival

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tourism came about, which makes us forget all our worries and celebrate the most beautiful things in life. Festivals reduce negativity in a positive and natural way. Several days of festival tourism help to reduce friction and bring friends, family, and society together in loving solidarity. In this way, festival tourism plays a key role in connecting people of all religious, economic, and social backgrounds.

1.1 Significance of the Study

Festivals are one of the most interesting and dynamic forms of tourism industry. The study of festivals is now an important and productive area of tourism research. Regarding the marketing campaigns promoting India, the country's fairs and festivals are among the key elements that contribute to the image of Amazing India. Recognizing the potential of this segment, Subhash Goyal, President of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), said: "events such as festivals not only attract tourists, but also contribute to the development or maintenance of a community or regional identity".

The Kumbh Mela festival of Allahabad, Pushkar Fair in Rajasthan, Rann Utsav of Kutch, The Ladakh Festival, Cashew & Coconut Festival of Goa, Snake Boat Race Festival of Kerala, Durga Pooja festival of West Bengal, National Dance and Music Festival at Sirpur of Chhattisgarh, Adventure Sports Festival of Uttarakhand, Ganesh Utsav of Maharashtra and Dusshera Festival of Mysore have gained popularity in the country where there is no significant identity is found on Chithirai Festival, Madurai.

In this context, this article highlights the events that take place during Chithirai festival, examines the role of festival tourism in creating friendship and unity for the people of Madurai, as well as a strong regional identity, thereby increasing the number of tourists visiting the city of Madurai.

Chithirai festival is of historical importance in Madurai, the city titled "the land of festivals". Not a month without celebration of a festival in the world famous Meenakshi temple makes it culturally and spiritually rich. Chithirai festival ignites the interest in learning the stories and history behind it and also contribute enormously to social cohesion.

1.2 The Chithirai Festival

Sri Meenakshi Sundareshwarar Temple, which is popularly known as Sri Meenakshi temple is situated on the banks of River Vaigai in Madurai. The Chithirai festival of Madurai is associated with wedding of Goddess Meenakshi with Lord Sundareshwara and Kallazhagar entering the river Vaigai. In olden days, the Saivas celebrated wedding festival of Goddess Meenakshi and the Vaishnavas the Kallazhagar festival. It was the King Thirumalai Nayaka who initiated social bond by merging both the festivals to remove the indifferences of the sects. It is one of the longest celebrations in the world. The first 15 days of the festival is celebrated for Goddess Meenakshi and the next 10 days for Lord Kallazhagar.

The history begins from birth of Thadathagai piratiyar from a holy fire and born to Queen Kanchanamalai and the King Malayadwaja Pandiya. Unusually, the child has three bosoms when she born. Since the king does not have a male heir, he crowned Goddess Meenakshi as the queen of the Pandiya kingdom. This is celebrated as Pattabhishiekam as a part of Chithirai festival.

The queen, Goddess Meenakshi aimed to expand the territory of Pandiya kingdom and conquered the places in seven directions. Finally she marched towards the eighth direction, Mt.Kailash, the abode of Lord Siva. On seeing Lord Siva, the third bosom vanished. Goddess Meenakshi

and Lord Siva resolved to marry. The valour of Goddess Meenakshi at the battlefield at eight directions is enacted in Digvijayam procession that stand as a part of the Chithirai festival.

Celestial wedding of Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareshwara takes place at Sri Meenakshi temple. Amid chanting of vedic hymns, Lord Sundareshwara and Priyavidai are brought to the dais after a procession along Chithirai streets of Madurai followed by the bride Goddess Meenakshi. Holy rituals and exchange of garlands on behalf of Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareshwara take place followed by placing 'thirumangalyam' on Goddess Meenakshi. During the event, many women in the huge gathering replace their 'thali' (wedding chain) with a new sacred thread as per custom.

Chithirai car festival starts with flag hoisting at the temple. The devotees from different region participate in pulling the wooden temple cars of Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareshwara. The temple cars are taken around the four Maasi Streets after a grand pooja at the Karuppasamy temple. With the Thirthavari ritual, celebration of Meenakshi festival will come to an end.

The next 10 days are celebrated and is associated with the famous visit of Kallazhagar (a form of Lord Mahavishnu). As part of the festival, Azhagar begins his journey from Azhagar Temple dressed up as a Kallar in the midst of hymns sung by the Varnipalargal. The Varnipalargal disguise themselves as Kallazhagar and spray water from goat skin bag over the crowd try reducing the heat of season and help the devotees on the procession. The ritual of devotees welcoming Kallazhagar to the mainland is popularly known as 'Ethirsevai'. On the full moon day, Kallazhagar steps into the sacred river Vaigai. Millions of devotees arrive to visit this famous event to take part in the Azhagar chariot processions. On his return, Dasavatharam festival is celebrated throughout the night at Ramarayar Mahal. The next day, Azhagar dressing up as a Kallar reaches to Azhagar temple in palanquin decorated entirely with varieties of flowers (Rajendran, 2020).

Meanwhile the devotees who take part in the procession under the scorching sun are offered prasadam, food donations and refreshments by the philanthropists.

The purpose of the research paper is to focus on the crucial part of Chithirai festival in building social bond in Madurai.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- To study how festival tourism create opportunities to everyone to interact with other members of the society where social cohesion is deprived off in the recent years and individuals lack the sense of belongingness socially.
- To study how festival tourism plays a major role in building social bond and bring positivity, amity and unity despite all negativities and diversities.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This research paper focuses on Chithirai festival's contribution in building social bond. The sample of the study concentrates on the domestic tourists only. For this purpose, primary data are collected through interviews and online questionnaire from 54 respondents and secondary data through journals, magazines and websites. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are determined by percentage and frequency analysis. and Five-point Likert Scale is used to analyse their opinion on Chithirai festival tourism in building social bond.

3.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Sample Respondents

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	34	62.96
Female	20	37.04
Age		
Below 20 years	06	11.11
21- 29 years	24	44.44
30-39 years	10	18.52
Above 40 years	14	25.93
Locality		
Urban	43	79.62
Rural	11	20.37
Marital Status		
Married	28	51.85
Single	24	44.44
Divorced	01	01.85
Widow	01	01.85
Type of Family		
Joint	20	37.04
Nuclear	34	62.96
Education		
Professional studies	10	18.52
Post Graduation	16	29.62
Under Graduation	16	29.62
School Level	12	22.22
Employment Status		
Profession/business	10	18.52
Employee	17	31.48
Home Maker	11	20.37
Student	16	29.62
Monthly Income INR.		
Below ₹20000	26	48.14
₹20000 - ₹30000	16	29.62
₹30000 - ₹40000	04	07.40
Above ₹40000	08	14.81
Source information		
Friends & Relatives	14	25.93
As a native of Madurai	40	74.07

Demographic data of 54 respondents from the domestic tourist's population are analysed by frequency and percentage method, and the findings are given in Table 1.

Of the 54 respondents, 62.96% are male and 37.04% are female. 44.44% of the respondents found to be in the age group between 21-29. It is seen that the respondents with the highest frequency in the occupational group are 31.48% the employees, followed by 29.62% the students, 20.37% the home makers and 18.52% professional or business people. Among the participants 48.14% come under the category of monthly average income below INR 20000. The highest percentage of 29.62% of the respondents are the postgraduates as well as the under graduates. Among the total respondents 74.07% are familiar with Chithirai festival as they are the native people of Madurai and 25.93% learn from their friends and relatives about the festival. It is found that 62.96% of the respondents belong to nuclear family.

Figure 1
Reason for participation in Chithirai Festival Tourism

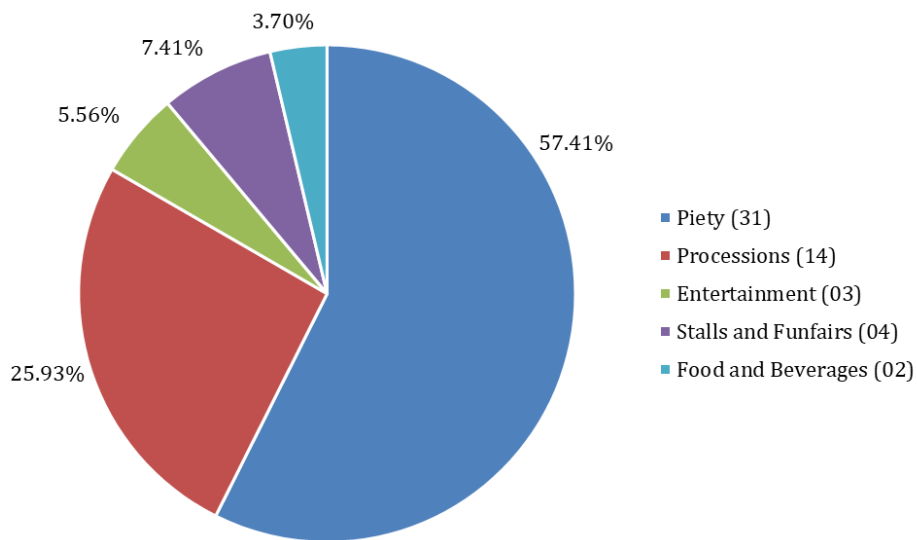


Figure 1 shows the main reason for majority (57.41%) of the respondents to take part in the Chithirai festival is piety followed by interest in being a part in the processions (25.93%), visiting stalls and funfairs (7.41%), entertainment (5.56%) and for experiencing varieties of food and beverages (3.70%).

Figure 2
Choice of Food Destination at Chithirai Festival

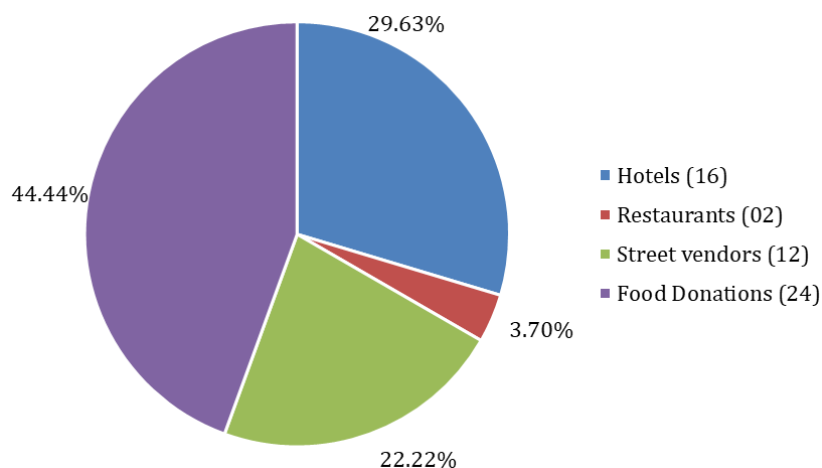


Figure 2 shows that majority of the participants' choice of food destination are food donations offered by the philanthropists (44.44%) followed by hotels (29.63%), Street vendors (22.22%) and restaurants (3.70%).

Figure 3

Favourite Experience at the Festival Tourism

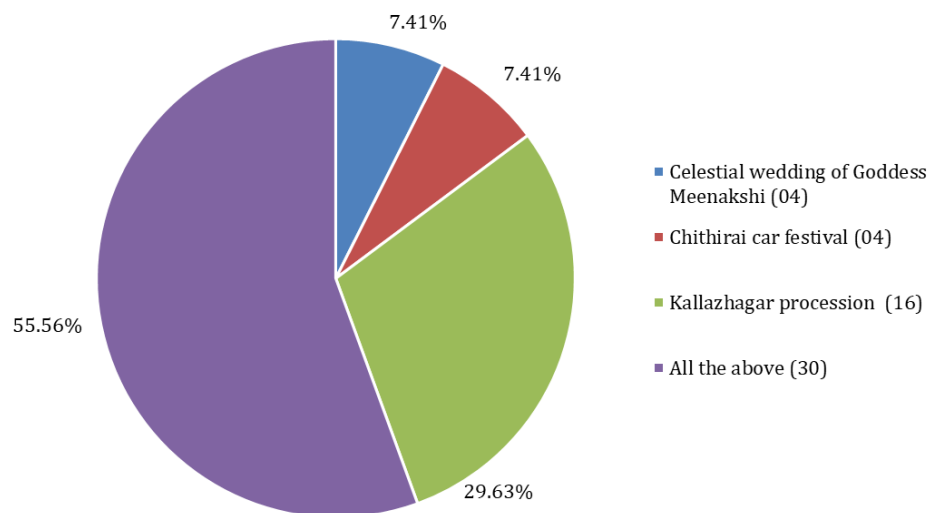


Figure 3 reveals that majority (55.56%) of the respondents take active participation in each and every event of the whole festival, followed by respondents shown interest in Kallazhagar procession (29.63%), and then contribution of equal of percentage of respondents towards both celestial wedding of Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareshwarar and the Chithirai car festival.

Table 2

Attitude of Tourist Customers on Chithirai Festival Tourism in Madurai

Parameters	Scores Given under Likert Scale Quinlet					Total score	Final score (in %)	Mean score
	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)			
Madurai has a unique image for its rich tradition and culture	25	20	5	2	2	226	83.7	4.18
Score value	125	80	15	04	02			
Reputation of Chithirai festival is the main factor for tourists visit between April and May	41	06	04	02	01	246	91.1	4.55
Score value	205	24	12	04	01			
Madurai citizens settled in various places assemble solely to take part in Chithirai festival	29	16	05	03	01	231	85.5	4.27
Score value	145	64	15	06	01			
Chithirai festival meets the expectations of all the tourists invariably	25	18	08	01	02	225	83.3	4.16
Score value	125	72	24	02	02			
The festival that lasts for a month plays a major role in building a strong social bond	21	16	08	05	04	207	76.6	3.83
Score value	105	64	24	10	04			

Under the Likert 5-point scale, final score in percentage represents the extent of support to the statements. This is obtained by taking maximum possible score 270 as the base and multiplying

with one hundred. Final score more than 75% and the Mean score ranging between 3.83 and 4.55 indicates the strong agreements to the above statements by the respondents (*refer* Table 2).

4.0 FINDINGS

In this study,

- Figure 1 reveals that material engagement of accepting a particular status (piety) for some time and then resuming provides a sense of gratification which is very essential to refresh oneself and to love the society.
- Figure 2 shows that people to a large extent taking food from food donations during Chithirai festival tourism improve harmony, friendliness, cooperation, goodwill, and strong communities.
- Figure 3 shows that majority of people take active part in the rites and rituals performed with full devotion during the festival that in turn help to create a positive atmosphere in the society.
- Table 2 indicates that people help one another during the festival tourism for instance when one suffers under the scorching sun during the processions, the others secure him by spraying water and this is what amity is and this is how social bond is built in.
- No religious disparities are seen during this Chithirai festival.

5.0 SUGGESTIONS

Festivals revitalize the destinations. Popularizing the festival will invite people from other states and countries to join in the festivities and thereby increase the popularity of the destination and paves way for sustainable economic growth. The findings of the research paper concludes that Chithirai festival tourism play a big role in bringing people from different locations in a bond of love for their native place, people, and celebration where advancement in technology to some extent has isolated individuals there, they create their own world and not willing to step out and get into the society with a bond.

Further, the economy of the festivals is opaque, however, they provide a solid foundation for our nation's socio-economic development as temporary freelancers are given various jobs due to the economic cycles that come with the significantly increasing demand for various products such as idols, jewellery, artifacts and sweets. These festivals temporarily support the development of national production and accelerate the development of small-scale industry (Shroff, 2022). On the other hand, promoting festival tourism (and its variants such as cultural tourism, pilgrimage tourism, etc.) can weaken the specificities of different cultures, their specific uses and customs, etc. because of their close contact with humans. foreign cultures. The unbridled expansion of tourism of all kinds would damage the environment and keep it clean (Jose *et al.*, 2017)

Therefore, the government should plan in advance to regulate overcrowding during the festival tourism to avoid life losses. In simple words, problems arising from the intensity of tourism like traffic jam and environmental pollution could be avoided by the concerned authorities of Madurai.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study contribute to encourage positive impacts of festivals on the society. Finally, the study limits only to Chithirai festival of Madurai. Further studies on different festivals and

their impact on strengthening communal harmony and unity can be investigated that may place the destination with an international identity. When festival tourism as a part of tourism sector is highlighted, definitely India will become a \$1 trillion tourism economy with 100 million international visitors by 2047 as said by the Union Tourism Minister G. Kishan Reddy while addressing the second G-20 Tourism Working Group Meeting in west Bengal.

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