

## ORIGINAL ARTICLES

# Transforming Traditions of Aadi Kritikai Festival: A Comparative Study on Rural and Urban Practices

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## ABSTRACT

Festivals are an integral part of Indian culture, with each region, tradition, and community having unique celebrations. Aadi Kritikai, a significant festival in southern India, is an example of this diversity. This festival has been celebrated across the states in South India, with distinct characteristics in urban and rural areas. This study comprehensively analyses the Aadi Kritikai festival, examining its characteristics, ritual practices, devotional expressions, and generational changes. The research focuses on the comparative analysis of historic-culture changes in celebrations between urban and rural areas, highlighting the impact of modernisation and urbanization on traditional practices. The findings of this study reveal the dynamic nature of Indian festivals and their adaptability in the face of change. The research contributes to our understanding of the evolving cultural landscape of southern India, providing valuable insights into the preservation of cultural heritage and traditional practices. Through a comparative study, this article aims to understand the significant changes that have occurred in the celebrations of Aadi Kritikai over time. The research provides a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between tradition and modernity, culture and identity, and community and individuality. The present study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the significance of festivals in Indian culture, highlighting the importance of preserving cultural heritage and traditional practices in rapid modernization and urbanization.

## KEYWORDS

• Ritual Practice • Aadi Kritikai • Kavadi • Festival • Urban • Rural • Culture

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## INTRODUCTION

Festivals are integral to India's rich cultural legacy, showcasing the country's diverse traditions, arts, and practices. Each festival has unique historical and mythological significance, traditions, and ceremonies, contributing to the nation's social, religious, cultural, and economic environments (Haidukevych, 2022). Indian festivals play a vital role in preserving cultural heritage, celebrating religious traditions, and nurturing social cohesiveness. They serve as dynamic platforms for community engagement, allowing diverse populations to come together, connect, and share their unique cultural narratives (Prabeen *et al.*, 2024).

Festivals provide a platform for traditional music, dance, and art forms to be passed down through generations, promoting family cohesion and strengthening social bonds, cultural identity, and a sense of belonging. They also offer an opportunity for families to come together, celebrate their heritage, and strengthen intergenerational relationships (Shokouh & Navabinejad, 2024). Moreover, festivals profoundly impact individuals' emotional and psychological well-being, providing a much-needed break from routine and offering joy, excitement, and relaxation. By promoting emotional rejuvenation and overall well-being, festivals contribute to individuals' and communities' happiness and quality of life.

The present paper centres on the *Aadi Kritikai* festival, a prominent cultural event in the southern part of India. The primary objective of this research is to investigate the spatial and temporal dynamics of *Aadi Kritikai* celebrations, with a specific focus on the variations in observance between urban and rural areas and the transformations that have occurred across generations.

## Review of Literature

Festivals are a vibrant reflection of culture, capturing its essence through celebrations that unite people. By preserving traditions and fostering community bonds, festivals adapt to societal changes, ensuring their enduring relevance. Cultures express uniqueness, resilience, and creativity through festivals, securing their legacy. Festivities transcend social divisions, offering platforms for joy and solidarity. While celebrations vary across socio-economic, cultural, and regional

contexts, festivals universally emphasize unity, tradition, and the human spirit.

The origin of festivals dates back to the mid-1st millennium AD, supported by medieval Hindu texts and historical accounts from famous figures like King Harsha and Sanskrit poet Rajasekhara. Epigraphic evidence from the same period, including Rashtrakuta empire inscriptions, corroborates their enduring cultural significance, highlighting their profound roots in Indian tradition and heritage (Kotin, 2021).

Indian folk art, a continuum from ancient to contemporary times, plays a pivotal role in festivals and celebrations. Traditional forms like *Rangoli* and pictorial scroll paintings preserve historical contexts, shaping India's cultural identity and influencing its artistic future (Agrawal, 2020).

Festivals play a profound role in shaping individual and collective identities. By participating in festivals, individuals connect with their cultural heritage, traditions, and community, which satisfies their fundamental human need for belonging (Jaeger & Mykletun, 2013).

Storytelling and oral narratives are pivotal in fostering authenticity and emotional resonance in local festivals. Cultural festivals in urban contexts serve as bridges, connecting people and places while acknowledging their complex social, economic, and political dynamics (Finkel & Platt, 2020). Conversely, rural festivals mitigate interpersonal divisions, promoting unity. Urban festivals also cultivate positive attitudes among elite audiences, encouraging dialogue and coexistence.

Narratives and stories are integral to Indian festivals, serving as educational and recreational tools that cater to diverse needs and address pedagogical challenges. Oral stories, encompassing folk tales, stories, and songs, are embedded in religious rituals and festivals, preserving cultural heritage and collective wisdom. Compelling storytelling authenticates local festivals, eliciting positive emotions and ensuring their success.

Fairs and festivals in India are vibrant community events that showcase the country's rich cultural heritage, enhance social connectivity, and support local economies. These events provide a platform to display India's diverse cultural traditions, including

music, dance, art, and crafts while fostering social bonding and community spirit. By celebrating traditional festivals, communities can revitalize their cultural heritage and pass it down to future generations (Thomas, 2022).

### The theoretical approach in this Article

#### *Cultural Perspective:*

Ethnographic approaches involve immersive fieldwork, participant observation, and in-depth interviews to grasp the lived experiences of individuals. The application of these theories involves exploring the symbolic aspects of festival celebrations and understanding the intricate layers of cultural meanings attached to these events through participant observation and interviews, researchers can capture the nuances of social interactions, shedding light on how festivals contribute to social cohesion, shared values, and community bonding.

Malinowski's functionalism helps understand festivals' practical functions in society (Sabino *et al.*, 2013) and provides insights into festival rituals' transformative and community-building aspects.

The strength of this study lies in integrating cultural and ethnographic theories, creating a multidimensional framework that goes beyond a mere observational approach. By combining theoretical lenses, the study aims to bridge the gap between historical influences and social dynamics, providing an understanding of festival celebrations.

### METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research approach was used, incorporating data collection methods such as observations and semi-structured interviews, to explore Aadi Kritikai festival celebrations in Karnataka, specifically in Bangalore City and Kolar. The study examines devotees' experiences with *Kavadi*, family roles, and individual responsibilities in preserving the values of the festival. It provides a comparative analysis of changes in Aadi Kritikai celebrations between urban and rural areas, offering insights into the festival's dynamics and significance. It captures the lived experiences of groups, communities, and individuals (Ahuja, 2021). Secondary data sources including digital media, journals, and articles were used to enrich the understanding of the festival and its significance in transferring the knowledge to

the next generation.

### Sampling technique

The study used a multi-pronged sampling approach to select participants from two locations. In Bangalore urban, a combination of purposive and convenient sampling methods was utilized to target individuals who were participating and devotees of the festival. This approach enabled the research team to capture diverse perspectives and experiences.

In Kolar rural, the priest of the temple became a key informant as he has in-depth knowledge of regular temple visitors and festival celebrants proved invaluable in identifying suitable participants. This approach ensured that the study captured the perspectives of individuals deeply invested in the festival and its traditions.

### Justification for selection of sampling units

The primary criterion for selecting sample respondents was their participation in the festival celebrations, given that this festival is not widely observed like other festivals. The chosen temples, Sajjan Rao Circle (about 70 years old) and Banashankari (about 50 years old) were selected for their historical significance and cultural importance. These temples are situated in areas with a high concentration of migrants from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, where the festival is deeply ingrained and widely celebrated. Additionally, Kamasamudra Village in Kolar district, with a 40-year-old temple, was included due to its strategic location on the Andhra Pradesh border, which has resulted in significant festival influence in the region.

### Method of Data Collection and Study Period

Data was collected through participant observation, where the researchers observed the festival celebration at the temple and in some households. In addition, a telephonic interview was conducted. For all the interviews, ethical guidelines were followed by obtaining informed consent from all participants.

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to get detailed data regarding the celebration of the festival, any changes in its celebration, reasons for the change, and the importance and relevance of the festival to them and changes in festival procedures and practices over three generations.



This study was conducted during the last week of July 2024. The fieldwork comprised surveys at three Subramanya Swamy temples: Banashankari (July 29, 2024), Sajjan Rao Circle (July 30, 2024), and telephonic interviews with respondents from Kamasamudra Village (first week of August 2024). Each interview lasted approximately 15-30 minutes. Dr Kavitha P.N. (Research Associate) and Aruna S. (Research Assistant) conducted the fieldwork as part of an ICSSR-sponsored project.

### Demographic data of the sample respondents

The study area comprised three Subramanya Swamy temples: Banashankari (50 years old) and Sajjan Rao Circle (70 years old) in Bangalore, and Kamasamudra Village (40 years old) in Kolar district, chosen for their cultural significance and long-standing presence. The study comprised 52 respondents (36 men, 16 women) from three Subramanya Swamy temples. In Bangalore, 41 respondents (29 men, 12 women) were interviewed, while 11 respondents (7 men, 4 women) from Kamasamudra village in Kolar District were interviewed via telephone conversation. The study adopted a multi-generational approach, incorporating perspectives from first-generation (7 families), second-generation (8 families), and third-generation (9 families) families.

## OVERVIEW OF THE AADI KRITIKAI FESTIVAL

*Aadi Kritikai*, also known as *Aadi Krittika* or *Aadi Karthigai*, is a significant festival celebrated in Tamil Nadu and other parts of South India. It falls in the Tamil month of *Aadi* (July-August) and is dedicated to Lord Murugan, the Hindu god of war and victory. *Aadi Kritikai* is celebrated on the sixth day (*Shashti*) of the Tamil month of *Aadi*, coinciding with the *Kritikai* star's lunar phase. This day honors Lord Murugan, also known as Karthikeya, who was created to defeat the demon Tarakasura and restore dharma, or righteousness.

According to Hindu legend, Lord Murugan's victory is celebrated during *Aadi Kritikai*, allowing devotees to seek his blessings for safety and prosperity. This festival is a celebration of Lord Subramanya's powers, with devotees offering special pujas and yagnas and participating in chariot processions to align themselves with goodness

and prosperity. Thousands of devotees gather at the *Arupadai Veedu*, the six habitats of Lord Murugan in Tamil Nadu. These habitats, located at Thiruthani, Swamimalai, Palani, Pazhamudircholai, Thirupparankunram, and Thiruchendur, are said to be the sites where Murugan camped during his battle against the demon Soorapadman, as described in the Skanda Purana.

The *Aadi Kritikai* celebrations reach their crescendo with the magnificent procession of Lord Muruga's idol around the temple grounds. The idol is seated on a beautifully decorated chariot or palanquin, accompanied by devotees who recite prayers and sing hymns in reverence. Many followers observe a fast and offer extra prayers at Murugan shrines, seeking the lord's blessings.

### Rituals and Offerings

As part of the festivities, devotees participate in various rituals, including carrying a symbolic load called "*Kavadi*" or walking on fire as a sign of devotion and atonement. Offerings of fruits, sweets, and other vegetarian treats are made to the lord, which is later distributed as *prasadam* or sanctified food.

*Aadi Kritikai* is a celebration that transcends religious boundaries, fostering community bonding and cultural heritage. Traditional dances like *Kolattam* and *Kavadi attam* are performed, which is not only a display of artistic expression but also a form of penance. Devotees push their physical limits by carrying heavy *Kavadi*'s or performing intense movements, demonstrating their unwavering devotion.

The festival also underscores the importance of environmental harmony in Tamil culture. With the onset of the monsoon season, the farming community offers prayers for a bountiful harvest. Flowers, fruits, and grains are used in ceremonies and offerings, symbolizing the interconnectedness of human life and the natural world.

According to mythological accounts, the synergistic energy of Goddess Parvati and Lord Shiva's third eye culminated in the manifestation of Lord Subramanya. The fiery spark generated by this cosmic union was so intense that even Agni Deva, the deity of fire, was unable to withstand its potency. To mitigate the heat, Agni Deva deposited the fiery spark into a tranquil pool of water, which

the Skanda Purana later designated as *Saravana Poigai*. As the blazing energy splashed into the water, it fragmented into six radiant sparks, each of which transformed into a resplendent infant boy.

*Aadi Kritikai* commemorates the epic battle between Lord Murugan and the demon Surapadman. According to legend, Surapadman, empowered by boons from Lord Shiva, wreaked havoc on the gods, sages, and humans, spreading terror and chaos. To restore peace and defeat Surapadman, the gods sought Lord Shiva's intervention. Shiva created Murugan, appointing him commander-in-chief of the celestial army. Armed with the divine *Vel*, a spear gifted by his mother Goddess Parvati, Murugan led the army against Surapadman. The intense battle raged for several days, with Muruga's divine strength and courage ultimately overpowering Surapadman's formidable powers. On the final day, Murugan split Surapadman into two halves using his *Vel*. One half transformed into a peacock, becoming Muruga's mount, while the other half became a rooster, adorning his flag.

The triumph of Murugan over Surapadman symbolizes the eternal victory of good over evil and knowledge over ignorance. *Aadi Krithigai* celebrates this momentous occasion, reaffirming Lord Muruga's role as the divine protector and warrior who safeguards the universe from darkness and chaos.

#### Customary practices before Aadi Kritikai

*Aadi Kritikai* is a significant festival that begins with a series of rituals. To prepare for this occasion, devotees typically follow these steps:

**Gange Puja:** The festival commences with a puja ceremony performed at a nearby lake or bore well, seeking the blessings of the divine.



Gange Puja

**Purification Rituals:** Devotees sprinkle cowdung water throughout the house to purify the surroundings. The puja area, room, and puja items are also thoroughly cleaned.

**Personal Purification:** Individuals take a bath to cleanse themselves, followed by sweeping and mopping the house to create a sacred and clean environment.

**Dietary Restrictions:** Abstaining from non-vegetarian food is a crucial aspect of the festival, promoting a sense of self-discipline and spiritual growth.

**Decorations:** A beautiful *Kolam* or *rangoli* is drawn at the house entrance, adding a touch of vibrancy and festivity to the celebrations.

Arrange the puja items on the *Rangoli*, creating a sacred space for worship. Offer fruits such as bananas, pomegranates, or other seasonal fruits, along with betel leaves and nuts, as a symbol of devotion to Lord Murugan. Afterwards, pour oil or ghee into the lamps and light the cotton wicks, creating a warm and welcoming ambience. Finally, adorn the entrance of the home with flowers, placing them on top of the door to add a touch of beauty and fragrance to the celebrations.

Following the thorough cleaning of the house, the idols are ritually cleansed with the *Panchaamruta abhisheka*. This sacred puja process involves smoothing the idols with a series of holy substances: ghee, milk, honey, sugar, turmeric-sandalwood paste, and finally, pure water or coconut water.



Puja to Kavadi

Upon completion of the *abhisheka*, the idols are adorned with sandal paste and *kumkuma* dots. Fresh flowers are offered to the idols of Murugan and other deities, marking the culmination of the puja ceremony.



The next step in the *Aadi Kritikai* celebrations is the *Kavadi* puja, which forms the core of this festival. Similar to the Murugan puja, the *Kavadi* puja involves oiling the *Kavadi* with sacred substances, including *pannir*, and adorning it with various flowers. Offerings of *Naivedya* are also made to Lord Murugan.

After completing the puja rituals, the devotee who has taken the vow carries the *Kavadi* to the temple, singing devotional songs along the way. Upon reaching the temple, the devotee must perform a minimum of three circumambulations around the temple. Once completing the circumambulations, the devotee enters the temple and lays down the *Kavadi*. They then receive the *tirtha* and only after that can they break their fast and partake of food and water. Upon returning home, the devotee performs puja to Lord Murugan,

marking the conclusion of the *Kavadi* ritual and the festival.

### Sacred Kavadi Types

*Aadi Kritikai* features diverse forms of *Kavadi*, each with its unique characteristics. During fieldwork, devotees who had taken the vow to carry *Kavadi* revealed that they practiced different types of *Kavadees*, despite being unfamiliar with its meaning and significance. Nonetheless, they faithfully carried *Kavadi* every year.

Devotees identified several types of *Kavadees*, including *Mayil Kavadi*: adorned with peacock feathers, *Puv Kavadi*: decorated with various flowers, *Pal Kavadi*: carrying milk in a basket, *Vail Kavadi*: carrying a trident pierced in the mouth.



When queried about their motivations for undertaking the *Kavadi* vow, devotees revealed a wide range of reasons, including: seeking relief from health issues, overcoming fertility concerns, alleviating financial difficulties, improving business prospects, enhancing marriage prospects, etc., These responses underscore the diverse and deeply personal reasons devotees embark on the *Kavadi* ritual, supplicating Lord Muruga's blessings and intervention in their lives.

### GAINING INSIGHT INTO AADI KRITIKAI THROUGH OBSERVATION

On the first day of *Aadi Kritikai*, an interview was conducted at the Banashankari Temple in Bangalore. Before 10 a.m., friends and family gathered at the temple to support those who had taken the vow (*vrata*). The worshippers, clad in yellow and red attire, were the focal point of the festival. These vibrant colours,

symbolic of auspiciousness and reverence, are an integral part of the festival's cultural identity.

According to devotees, putting on yellow and red garments is essential when worshipping the Lord Murugan. This tradition serves as a visual representation of their devotion and respect for the deity. As the worshippers made their way through the temple, they chanted "*Haro Hara*," a sacred mantra dedicated to the Lord Murugan.

In *Aadi Kritikai*, the practice of carrying *Kavadi* varies significantly among devotees. While some commit to carrying *Kavadi* for a specified period, such as one, three, or five years, others make a lifelong pledge, known as *Janma Kavadi*. This unwavering dedication is often a response to the fulfilment of their wishes, and they choose to continue the practice as a gesture of gratitude.

Devotees who undertake the *Janma Kavadi* commitment not only dedicate their lives to carrying *Kavadi* but also strive to pass on this revered tradition to future generations. This ensures the continued observance of *Aadi Kritikai* and the perpetuation of devotion to the Lord Murugan.

The *Kavadi*, a pivotal element in the *Aadi Kritikai* celebrations, exhibits a notable diversity in its contents. A comparative analysis of the *Kavadi* baskets reveals that one typically contains an assortment of puja materials, including flowers, fruits, *Arishina-kumkuma*, coconut, camphor, *Agarbatti*, and other ritualistic items.

The other basket is filled with *Naivedyam*, comprising rice, traditional sweets, and other food offerings. However, a closer examination reveals that the *Naivedyam* offerings also exhibit regional and familial variations. Despite these differences, a common thread is observed across the state, with devotees consistently offering floured rice and jaggery to Lord Murugan. This widespread practice surpasses linguistic and regional boundaries, underscoring the shared cultural heritage of the *Aadi Kritikai* celebrations.



Offering Prasada

### AADI KRITIKAI: VARIATIONS ACROSS GENERATIONS

The *Kavadi* festival, celebrated in Karnataka, exhibits a synchrony of observance among migrants from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, as well as native *Kannadigas*. Notably, the festival is observed on the same day and under the same *Nakshatra* (*Kritika* star), underscoring a shared cultural heritage.

However, a comparative analysis of *Kavadi* celebrations across different states and languages reveals variations in the intensity and duration of the festival. The Tamil community, for instance, exhibits a higher level of dedication in their celebrations, which can span one, three, seven, or nine days or even an entire month. Fasting is a common practice among Tamil devotees, with a minimum duration of three days observed by those who undertake this ritual.

Interestingly, the duration and nature of fasting vary significantly across individuals and regions. At the Banashankari temple, devotees were observed fast for either three or nine days. In contrast, a nearby temple witnessed a more subdued celebration, with only a few devotees opting for fasting. The majority of devotees at this temple, instead, chose to take vows early in the morning, visit the temple, and complete the *Kavadi* ritual on the same day. This urban scenario highlights the diversity and adaptability of *Kavadi* celebrations in contemporary times.



Flag-hoisting

### A GLIMPSE INTO RURAL KAVADI CELEBRATIONS

In contrast to urban areas, rural regions like Kamasamudra village (Bangarapete taluk, Kolar district) observe *Kavadi* with greater stringency. The rural celebrations exhibit distinct differences in their methods and practices.

The festivities commence with devotees carrying *Kavadi* assembling at the Subramanya temple. Adorned in red or yellow attire, they hoist the flag of Murugan in front of the temple. Following the flag-hoisting ceremony, the *Kavadees* congregate at the temple entrance, where a collective puja is performed.



### Fasting and Dietary Restrictions

Some devotees undertake a month-long fast, while those who opt for *Kavadi* observe a minimum nine-day fasting period. During this time, they adhere to a strict regimen, refraining from consuming food outside their homes. Only homemade food, prepared by individuals who maintain ritual purity (*madi*) is permissible. Devotees are allowed to eat twice a day, with at least one meal skipped to keep the fasting ritual. Additionally, liquor and non-vegetarian food are strictly prohibited.

### Pre-Kavadi Rituals

A day before carrying the *Kavadi*, devotees perform *Gange puja* at a nearby lake or borewell. This ritual involves the use of various sacred items, including *Arishin-Kumkuma*, milk, honey, flower garlands, coconut, and coconut water. Upon completing the puja, devotees return to their homes. The following day, devotees adorn their *Kavadi's* with an array of flowers. Once decorated, the *Kavadi's* are carried in a procession to the temple, accompanied by traditional dances and devotional songs.

A comparative analysis of *Kavadi* celebrations in Bangalore over the past two decades reveals a significant transformation in the festival's dynamics. Traditionally, devotees carrying *Kavadi* would proceed to the temple on foot, accompanied by music and dance, which were integral components of the festival.



**The traditional way of reaching the temple**

However, in recent years, this vibrant tradition has begun to wane. The increasingly fast-paced lifestyle of urban devotees has led to a decline in the traditional practices associated with *Kavadi*. Many devotees now choose more convenient modes of transportation, such as two-wheelers, rather than walking to

the temple. While some devotees still engage in traditional practices like drumming and *Kavadi attam*, these instances are becoming increasingly rare.



**Modifications to the reach to the temple**

This shift in celebratory practices underscores the impact of urbanization on traditional festivals, highlighting the tension between preserving cultural heritage and adapting to the demands of modern urban life.

In villages like Kamasamudra, devotees continue to observe traditional practices with great fervor. A notable aspect of their celebrations is the communal gathering in a public area, where they collectively perform puja for all the *Kavadees*. This is followed by a vibrant procession to the temple, accompanied by music and devotional singing in praise of Lord Murugan.

**Table 1:** The Enduring Spirit of Kavadi: A Devotee's Perspective

**Interviewer:** Can you describe how Kavadi celebrations are observed in Kamasamudra village?



**Devotee:** Yes, of course. We gather in a public area, perform puja for all the *Kavadees*, and then proceed to the temple, singing and dancing



to Lord Muruga's songs.

Interviewer: Why is this tradition so important to you?

**Devotee:** This is how we worship the festival. It's the proper way to reach the temple. If we don't sing and dance, it would be like committing a crime. We must follow our tradition, no matter how modern our lives become.

**Interviewer:** That's fascinating. You place great importance on preserving the traditional practices of Kavadi.

**Devotee:** Yes, we do. We believe that following these traditions can keep the essence of Kavadi practices alive.

**Takeaway points:**

- The devotee emphasizes the importance of preserving traditional practices, despite modernization.
- The community gathers for a collective puja and procession, fostering unity and shared experience.
- The devotee's commitment to tradition reflects their deep-rooted beliefs and values.
- The celebration holds emotional significance, with the devotee emphasizing the importance of preserving cultural heritage.

**Source:** Field Source

Put it shortly, the revered tradition of carrying *Kavadi* during *Aadi Kritikai* has evolved substantially over time. Modern adaptations have enhanced accessibility and convenience, yet simultaneously sparked concerns about the potential dilution of sacred customs and time-honoured values.

### Changes Driven by Time Constraints

An examination of the temporal patterns of *Kavadi* observance in Bangalore reveals that the majority of devotees visit the temple during two distinct time slots: before 10 am and after 5 pm. This bimodal distribution is particularly notable among young professionals.



When queried about their motivations for carrying *Kavadi*, youngsters from both time

segments (10 am and 5 pm) cited the importance of completing the ritual, despite facing significant time constraints. Their responses, such as "we don't have much time; we need to go to the office" and "because of time scarcity, we cannot explain to you even," emphasize the challenges of reconciling traditional practices with the demands of modern urban life.

Notwithstanding these constraints, devotees demonstrated a strong commitment to carrying *Kavadi*, even if it meant abbreviating or adapting their observance. This phenomenon is evident among diverse demographic groups, including women, young children, and the elderly, who completed the *Kavadi* practice during these time slots. The repetitiveness of *Kavadi* observance among these groups highlights the complex interplay between tradition, modernity, and urbanization.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AADI KRITIKAI IN RURAL AND URBAN CONTEXTS

A comparative analysis of *Aadi Kritikai* celebrations in both areas reveals distinct differences in the way this festival is observed. In rural settings like Kamasamudra village, the flexible schedules and relaxed pace of life enable devotees to celebrate *Kavadi* without constraints, eliminating concerns about scheduling conflicts. In contrast, urban dwellers often struggle to accommodate the celebration into their busy lives.

In Kamasamudra village, devotees from various cities and villages converge to participate in the festivities. Family members and friends reunite, fostering a sense of community harmony and strengthening family values.

A striking contrast emerges between rural and urban celebratory practices. Rural devotees approach the festival with a sense of calm and devotion, whereas urban dwellers often complete the rituals mechanically, driven by a sense of obligation, for example, Urban devotees often simplify rituals and fasting, prioritizing quick fulfilment of festival obligations. This dichotomy highlights the erosion of traditional practices in urban environments, where the pressures of modern life often supersede cultural heritage.

*Aadi Kritikai* holds profound significance in both areas, albeit with distinct expressions and practices. Despite these urban-rural differences,

rural devotees continue to retain the essence of traditional practices and rituals associated with *Aadi Kritikai*. Their commitment to preserving cultural heritage serves as a testament to the enduring significance of this festival in rural contexts.

## IMPACTS OF NUCLEAR FAMILY ON THE FESTIVAL

The advent of nuclear families has significantly altered the socio-cultural landscape of modern India. One of the notable consequences of this shift is the impact on traditional festivals and celebrations. The *Aadi Kritikai* festival is no exception.

**Table 2:** Lost Traditions: From Joint Families to Nuclear Gatherings

**Interviewer:** Can you reflect on how the celebration of Kavadi has changed over the years?

**Devotee:** Yes. Fifteen years ago, when we celebrated Kavadi, we would invite a large number of family and friends, and they would all attend without fail. We would have at least 60 to 70 people joining us, and they would stay with us for a minimum of three days.

**Interviewer:** That sounds like a wonderful experience. Can you elaborate on what made it so special?

**Devotee:** Yes, of course. We would all work together, cooking and celebrating as a joint family. It was a lot of work, but we shared the responsibilities equally, and it was a truly enjoyable experience.

**Interviewer:** How has the celebration changed over time?

**Devotee:** Well, now families have become nuclear, and the current generation doesn't want to take on the responsibilities of hosting a large gathering. They prefer a more easy-going life. As a result, families no longer invite extended family and friends to join in the celebration. Now, only immediate family members, usually 2, 4, or at most 10 people, participate in the festival.

**Interviewer:** How has this change affected the celebration of Kavadi?

**Devotee:** To be honest, the festival has become somewhat bland. The Kavadi celebration has become more of a routine practice, rather than a joyful festival. It's clear that when families lived jointly, the Kavadi festival was a more enjoyable and significant experience. However, with the shift towards nuclear families, the festival has lost some of its significance.

### Takeaway points:

- Before Kavadi celebrations involved large gatherings of extended family and friends, whereas now, only immediate family members participate.
- The current generation's preference for a more easy-going life has contributed to the decline of traditional practices and community participation.
- The number of people participating in the festival has significantly decreased, from 60-70 people to just 2-10 people.

**Source:** Field Source.

In contrast to urban areas, the community in Kamasamudra continues to thrive, with

families gathering in a communal space for collective cooking and inviting a large number of people to participate. The prevalence of joint families in this rural setting has helped preserve the traditional practices and significance of festivals.



**Joint Family**

Although some families changeover to nuclear units, the impact of this shift is less pronounced compared to urban areas. The community's involvement, importance, and mass participation in festivals remain vibrant, with people embracing the workload and responsibilities associated with these celebrations without hesitation.

A notable aspect of rural festivals is the communal spirit and enthusiasm that pervades these events. Unlike their urban counterparts, rural communities approach festivals with a sense of reverence and joy, unencumbered by the pressures of modern life. This phenomenon is a testament to the enduring significance of traditional practices and community bonding in rural areas. Elderly devotees, who have spent a lifetime observing the sacred festival of *Aadi Kritikai*, shared their insights on its significance. With a deep understanding of the tradition and its cultural context, they revealed the importance of *Aadi Kritikai* in their lives;

**Table 3:** The Decline of Community Celebrations: Reflections on Kavadi

**Interviewer:** Can you share your thoughts on the significance of the Aadi Kavadi festival?

**Elderly Person:** Ah, yes! Aadi Kavadi is one of the most important festivals. It's an occasion for relatives, neighbours, friends, and sometimes the entire village to come together.

**Interviewer:** That sounds wonderful. Can you describe how the festival was celebrated in the past?

**Elderly Person:** We would gather at one common home or place,

perform puja, prepare food for everyone, and enjoy traditional dances like Kavadi attam, music, and even Harikatha recitals throughout the night. It was a truly joyous celebration.

**Interviewer:** It's clear that the festival held great significance for the community. How has the celebration changed over time?

**Elderly Person:** Unfortunately, those memorable moments are being missed by our younger generation. The main reason is that families have become nuclear, and there's no space for joint families. Many parents are not interested in retaining and fostering our cultural heritage.

**Interviewer:** That's a poignant observation. How do you think this shift has impacted the way the festival is celebrated?

**Elderly Person:** Well, nowadays, carrying Kavadi has become more of a mundane task. Young people continue the practice without truly understanding or enjoying it. They're more interested in completing the ritual because their parents or grandparents insist on it. It's become a custom or ritual that they must complete, rather than a meaningful celebration.

#### Takeaway points:

Aadi Kavadi is an occasion for relatives, neighbours, friends, and sometimes the entire village to come together.

The festival has become a ritual that young people complete out of obligation, rather than a meaningful celebration.

**Source:** Field Source.

Put in shortly, Aadi Kritikai is a sacred festival that embodies our tradition, culture, and devotion. It's a time for spiritual reflection, family bonding, and seeking blessings from Lord Murugan. This festival is an integral part of our lives, and we cherish its significance deeply.

### Cultural Shifts in Fasting

#### Fasting Practices in Urban and Rural Areas: A Comparative Analysis;

The fasting practices of devotees in urban and rural areas exhibit significant differences. This study examines the variations in fasting practices between devotees in Bangalore (urban) and Kamasamudra village (rural).

In Bangalore, devotees fast for a maximum of three days. When questioned about fasting, one group of devotees emphasized that devotion (*Shraddha*) is more important than the duration of fasting. They acknowledged that their ancestors' healthier lifestyle and greater dedication enabled them to fast for extended periods. However, they noted that contemporary lifestyle changes have made fasting less feasible.

In contrast, another group of devotees over fifty emphasized the importance of fasting as an integral component of ritual practices. They advocated for a minimum of one day of fasting, citing its physical and emotional benefits.

In Kamasamudra village, devotees who take

the vows of Aadi Kritikai are expected to fast for at least three days, with some fasting for nine days. Five years ago, devotees reportedly fasted for at least a month. When questioned about Kavadi devotees emphasized that fasting is an essential aspect of the vow, indicating their devotion (*shraddha*) to Lord Murugan. They prioritized fasting despite potential health issues, underscoring its significance in their spiritual practices.

This comparative analysis highlights the divergent fasting practices between urban and rural devotees. While urban devotees tend to emphasize devotion over fasting duration, rural devotees prioritize fasting as an integral component of their spiritual practices. These findings underscore the importance of considering regional and cultural variations in religious practices.

### Nuances of the rural and urban comparison

In rural and urban environments, its observance takes on different intricacies. While urban areas strike a balance between traditional rituals and modernized, individualistic approaches, rural areas place more emphasis on customs and community bonding. The festival's profound cultural and spiritual origins are evident in both settings, though.

### Nature and extent of Adi Kritikai festivities

Usually, celebrations are more community-oriented. During communal rituals and celebrations, the entire Kamasamudra village frequently gathers. The temples are associated with unique festival-related customs and strong local significance. Rituals and processions featuring traditional music, such as *Nadaswaram* or *Kavadiattam*, are more common, indicating a close-knit community.

On the other hand, celebrations in cities are more planned, with timetables for cultural events and rituals that can accommodate sizable crowds. In urban environments, commercial components like lavish décor, sponsorships, and media attention are more obvious.

### Ritual Practices

Traditional offerings such as *paanakam*, *pongal*, puffed rice, and coconuts may be used in rituals. Offerings frequently use local produce. As part of a Kavadi procession, which is usually a straightforward but profoundly spiritual act, devotees may walk barefoot to temples.



Bonfires, which involve burning camphor to symbolize purification, may be practised in Kamasamudra village as part of less formalized processes.

Whereas *yagnas* or *homas* are more elaborate, with ornate decorative *Kavadees*, musical performances, and occasionally theatrical enactments, rituals in Bengaluru and urban areas frequently involve specialized priests and elaborate decorations.

### Community Involvement

The festival's preparations involve assistance from every household, strengthening the bonds between Kamasamudra's communities. The celebrations incorporate folk traditions such as storytelling, traditional games, and local Murugan legends. Often, villagers organize communal feasts and prepare food together.

Devotees from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds frequently participate in urban celebrations. Although the sense of community is still present, the intimacy that characterizes rural celebrations may be diminished by the volume of participation. Events like music concerts, religious discourses, and competitions for children may be organized alongside traditional rituals.

### Role of Nature and Environment

Celebrations and the agricultural cycle are closely related, with traditions asking for rain and a plentiful harvest. Since Lord Murugan is connected to hill shrines and *Poigai*, the natural setting, such as beginning *Kavadi* puja with a river or pond, often becomes a part of the worship. Urban celebrations are more focused on temples and frequently take place away from the natural environment.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To accommodate the fast-paced lifestyle of city dwellers, the celebration of *Aadi Kritikai* has undergone significant modifications in both rural and urban areas, particularly in urban areas. Even though temple visits and private rituals are still important, the demands of modern life and work schedules have led to celebrations that are less elaborate and time-constrained.

A stark dichotomy exists in the celebration of *Aadi Kritikai* between rural and urban areas, in this juncture, a critical question arises: What

contributes to this disparity in urban areas? The answer lies in the pervasive influence of modernity on urban lifestyles. As modernity permeates urban areas, it inevitably impacts the way festivals and rituals are observed. Despite these changes, urban dwellers need to continue performing *Aadi Kritikai* rituals, upholding the rich cultural heritage of Indian traditions. This commitment to preserving traditional practices is a testament to the enduring beauty of India and its festivals.

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### Appendix

1. **Aadi Kritikai:** 'Symbolize the victory of good over evil when Murugan slew the demon Surapadman'.
2. **Arishina:** 'Turmeric powder'.
3. **Arupadai Veedu:** 'Six Abodes of Murugan, is the name of six temples in Tamil Nadu, India that are dedicated to the Hindu god Murugan'.
4. **Harikatha:** 'A musical discourse of a story, episode usu. taken from mythology'.
5. **Haro Hara/Haro Gara:** 'It means Oh god Shiva Almighty, please remove our sufferings and grant us salvation. This is a mantra that is used to invoke Lord Shiva, Muruga's father'.
6. **Janma Kavadi:** 'Indeed refers to a lifelong commitment or a vow to carry the kavadi until one's death'.
7. **Kavadi:** 'The kavadi is a wooden arch on a wooden base decorated with peacock feathers and flowers and in which is placed a picture of Lord Murugan'.
8. **Kavadi attam:** 'Is a ceremonial sacrifice performed as an offering by devotees of the Hindu deity Murugan. Generally performed collectively during the Hindu festival Thaipusam, the bodily movements of Kavadi attam serve to activate the Kavadi as an extension of the body in the ritual worship'.

9. **Kolattam:** 'It is a folk dance from South India that involves women/group dancing in a circle while striking two wooden sticks together to create rhythms'.
10. **Kumkuma:** 'A bright-red or Dark pink or slightly orange powder applied by women (other than widows) on their foreheads, as an auspicious sign and also used in worshipping a deity; vermilion powder'.
11. **Naivedyam:** 'An offering of food, fruit, etc. to a deity'.
12. **Panchaamruta abhisheka:** 'the five things - milk, sugar, ghee (clarified butter), curds and honey - used to bathe an idol with'.
13. **Pannir/Rose:** 'Water-Perfume offering to lord Murugan during the Aadi Kritikai festival'.
14. **Prasadam:** 'Specific food offered to a deity during worship (puja)'.
15. **Rangoli:** 'A traditional Indian art from using coloured sand or powder to decorate a floor, courtyard other flat surfaces'.
16. **Saravana Poigai:** 'It is a small pool which is believed to have supernatural powers. It is believed that taking a dip in the pool can cure one of several diseases as well as wash away one's sins. The pool which is located at the Thiruvaavinankudi temple attracts a number of devotees. According to legends, Saravana Poigai is the pool where Lord Murugan emerged, and it lies in the Himalayas'.
17. **Tirtha:** 'Holy water, esp. the water used in the service of a god'.

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