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According to the Hindu calendar, November marks the holy month of Karthik, and the annual groundnut festival, Kadlekai Parishe (which translates to "Groundnut Fair"), begins on the last Monday of this month on Bull Temple Road in Basavanagudi. Initially a two-day event, the festival has now grown into nearly a week of bustling activity, during which Bull Temple Road is closed to vehicles and swarms with crowds. If you plan to visit, be prepared to navigate through a sea of people!

Navaratna Lakshman, a nonagenarian, fondly recalls when the fair was held at Bugle Rock. "Back then, there was no park; it was open on all sides," he says, describing how the area would fill with groundnut vendors, including those from Tamil Nadu, selling both kari kadalekai (fried groundnuts) and hasi kadlekai (raw groundnuts).

He reminisces about the streets lined with vendors selling puppets, musical instruments, and sweets. "Groundnuts were sold by a measure called a 'ser,' which was nearly a litre, and cost just 3 paise—a small amount considering there were 192 paise to a rupee at the time," Lakshman recalls. He and his friends would gather, buy groundnuts, spread out a bed sheet on the nearby rocks, and compete to see who could eat the most. "It was such a joy, and we looked forward to it every year," he reflects fondly.

### Looking back

The origins of Kadlekai Parishe trace back centuries, to a time when Basavanagudi was a small village with vast groundnut farms. According to local lore, a bull began ravaging the crops, and what followed has two versions. In one, the farmers chased the bull until it vanished atop a hill, where they later discovered a Nandi idol. In the second version, the bull was beaten to death, turning into a stone Nandi. Legend has it that this stone Nandi began to grow, and an iron peg had to be placed on its head to stop its expansion.

Today, this Nandi is enshrined in the famous Big Bull Temple, where it stands an impressive 15 feet tall and 20 feet long. To honor the bull, farmers began offering their first groundnut harvest to the Nandi as a mark of respect—a tradition that continues to this day.

### Blast from the past

Long-time residents of Basavanagudi fondly recall how the Kadlekai Parishe has evolved over the years, becoming far more crowded than it once was. Parimala S.A., an old-timer, reminisces, "Back in the 1950s, it was a more intimate, two-day event. The first day was the Chikka Parishe, a smaller version, followed by the Dodda Parishe, the main fair. The area in front of the Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple would transform into a lively fairground, complete with a mini zoo for children. I vividly remember one year they even had a tiger on display. As our house was nearby, we saw people flocking in, mostly villagers from the neighboring areas, coming to enjoy the parishe."

Vijayalakshmi, a long-time resident of Basavanagudi, fondly recalls how the fair, though crowded back then, was nothing like

# A FESTIVAL IN FLUX

*With Kadlekai Parishe around the corner, locals reminisce about the changing face of this groundnut fair in their beloved Basavanagudi*



the bustling scene it is today. "In the 1960s, there were no vehicles, and the fair had a certain charm," she says, reminiscing about a simpler time. The two-day event felt safe and welcoming, with plenty of games for children, including the ever-popular giant wheel. She vividly remembers the excitement of rushing home from school to attend the fair.

"Back then, the focus was primarily on groundnuts," she notes, contrasting it with the broader variety of goods sold today. Vendors would roast the groundnuts in sand, achieving a perfect roast without burning them. She also recalls how the groundnuts

used to come fresh from the farms surrounding Basavanagudi. "Now," she laments, "most of the farmers are from Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, and the local farms seem to have disappeared."

Her reflections capture a sense of nostalgia for a time when the fair was more rooted in local tradition.

### Dance vibes

A lesser-known but significant tradition

tied to the festival is the folk dance known as Nandi Kollu, which is now seeing a revival. This unique dance involves balancing a long pole, harnessed around the dancers' waist, with a small brass idol of Nandi tied at one end. In earlier times, the dancers would make their way from the Nandi temple in Chickpet to the Dodda Basavananna temple in Basavanagudi, performing along the route.

"Our house was along the way, and my grandfather started the tradition of inviting around 100 of these dancers for snacks and refreshments at our home in Gandhi Bazaar," shares Maya Chandra, Founder of Maya Films, who is passionate about preserving this nearly forgotten dance form. "We would perform a puja to honour the bull, then serve the dancers as they rested before continuing their journey to the temple," she adds.

However, post-COVID, the dance has significantly diminished. "One year, only the Nandi idol came, carried on a plate, but there were no dancers," Chandra recalls. Determined to keep the tradition alive, she researched the festival's variations in places like Kengeri and Malleshwaram. "We found a talented group of performers in Kengeri and had them perform for us in Basavanagudi last year. We hosted the event at the Indian Institute of World Culture so that more people could witness this rare dance."

Kadlekai Parishe is truly a one-of-a-kind festival, steeped in Bangalore's cultural heritage, with layers of history and tradition waiting to be uncovered—one story at a time.

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