

## [Murugan and Ganesha Love Paris](#)

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### CULTURE

## Murugan and Ganesha Love Paris

Two Gods enjoy a yearly chariot festival that's as good as it gets anywhere

Gilles Flament, France

It is Ganesha's birthday, but this is Paris, so the elephant-faced Deity of Dharma is delighted to invite His Brother, Lord Murugan, to the event. Each September for the past six years the Sri Vinayakar Alayam temple, Paris' first Hindu temple, has celebrated Ganesha Chaturthi by parading the bronze Deities through neighborhood streets. For a moment, this normally rough part of town becomes joyous and peaceful. It is the work of V. Sanderasekaram, a Sri Lanka native who founded the temple ( [www.temple-hindou.fr.fm](http://www.temple-hindou.fr.fm)) in 1985 in the South Indian tradition. At first, the parade was just for Lord Ganesha, but in 2000 Lord Murugan joined the festivities. His chariot is pulled by the women, Ganesha's is pulled by the men.

The procession begins at 11:00 am, when the two chariots are drawn out to the street. Seven priests preside, including some flown in from India and Sri Lanka. Saffron water is poured on the pavement to purify the five-kilometer route, which goes past the Gare du Nord railroad station in the north industrial

area. Behind the chariots, devotees sing bhajanas, carry offering pots on their heads and perform the kavadi dance with heavy wooden arches. Nagaswaram horn players and tavil drummers provide the rhythmic music. The chariots stop at Hindu shops along the way, where proprietors have set up tables heaped with coconuts to offer. Cocos soon litter the street as devotees break them by the thousands in front of the chariots. Late in the afternoon, the chariots are returned to the temple, and a giant feast is served to all.

The flamboyant event is well received in Paris. Fifteen thousand witnessed the 2001 festival, including Hindus from all over Europe and many non-Hindus as well. There are 150,000 Hindus in France. Some are Sri Lanka refugees; others are from Mauritius and Reunion. Le Figaro, a leading French paper, published a full page on the event. It was broadcast live on Tamil radio and reported on French TV.