



**Report About  
Tamil Nadu  
Temple Elephants  
That Need Immediate  
Rehabilitation  
Dec - 2021**

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**Subbulakshmi, Shanmughanathaswamy Temple, Kundrakudi, Sivagangai**  
**(Approximate age 55 years)**

- Subbulakshmi is also one of the oldest temple elephants in Tamil Nadu, who like most privately owned elephants is wrongly aged i.e. her age on record does not match her physical health.
- The elephant is living in this temple since 1970, over five decades. It is without doubt one of the oldest temple elephants in TN, of either 55 or more years of age, and suffers from many health problems.
- On December 7<sup>th</sup> during the evening hours, she was stationed on the right of the gallery into the temple, which was clearly her fixed daily place to stand, and giving blessing to devotees and collecting cash in return and passing that onto the mahouts.
- Subbulakshmi is highly obese, possibly inordinately, and might be because of some serious health issue that needs immediate investigation, diagnosis, and treatment.



***Old and Obese***

- Her excessive obesity has caused numerous posture issues namely all her nails were cracked and her hind legs appeared to be struggling to hold her weight. This showed early signs of lumpiness – it is quite likely that with her weight issues and the fact that she spends all her time on a stone floor, she suffers from acute foot rot.

- She has two long and deep healed wound marks on her hind legs, this could be injuries due to some sharp objects.



- Her overall health and body vitals look alarming and in addition, her entire skin is extremely dry and she has no hairs on her tail. These facts confirm about her deteriorating health and old age.



### ***Deformed nails and hairless tail***

- She gets minimum to no daily exercise, barely a short walk around the temple and spends all her time either blessing/begging or tied on the granite/concrete floor of her night shed which has an uneven floor (that must make standing on it additionally hard for her).



*Shed with an unsuitable stone floor and two side inclinations, making it hard to stand straight*



***Drinking water trough is used for storing things. Deprived of drinking water at free will***

- She was exhibiting stereotypic movements of head bobbing, which indicates the serious psychological problems she has.
- Both the mahout and kavadi (assistant) on her sides had sticks in their hands and ankush lying on the floor, a constant reminder for her to stay fearful, disciplined, and under their command.



*Deformed nails.  
Despite her poor health condition, she is forced to stand on the stone floor and  
bless devotees for earning money for the mahout*

**Detail observations of the poor health, upkeep, living and working conditions of Abhayambigai, Mayuranathaswami Temple, Mayiladuthurai (Age 55 years)**

- **Abhayambigai** is one of the *oldest* and *saddest* temple elephant in Tamil Nadu.
- On December 7<sup>th</sup> at around 10am, despite peak morning temple visiting hours, Abhayambigai was locked up in a tiny garage size shed, on the front side of the temple compound.



*Small shed with stone floor and concrete roof*

- The shed was unbearably tiny, claustrophobic, made of hard flooring, with no window, ventilation (other than the main gate) and absolutely no water anywhere in sight. All of this stands breach of every Project Elephant and Tamil Nadu government guidelines.
- It appeared unclear why her face and body were tied to the concrete post facing the wall and it was so difficult for her to turn and see outside.





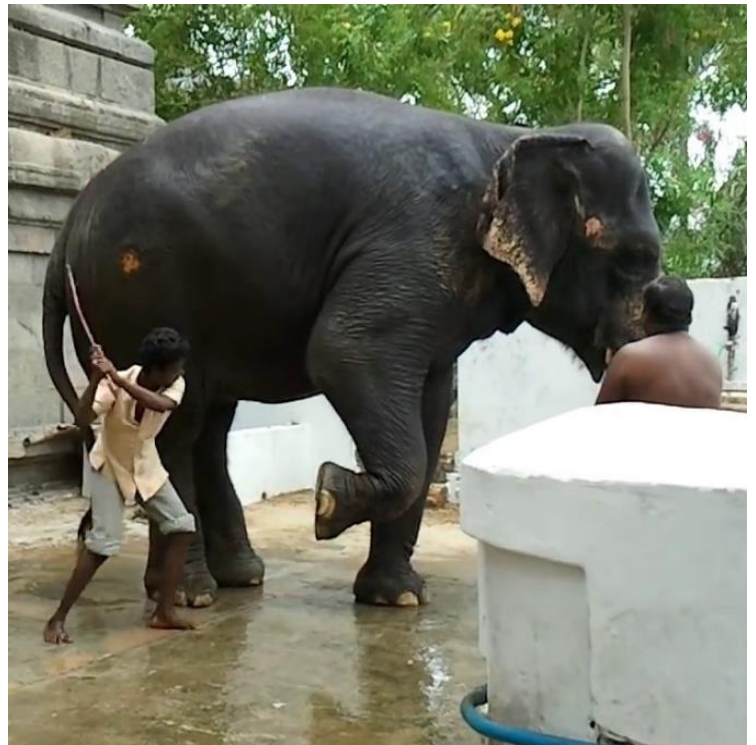
*Most time is spent facing and leaning on the walls, confirming a deeply depressed state of mind.*

- She was rubbing her forehead and trunk, resting and leaning against the wall, but every now and then she would move and try and turn her body to face the light.
- She was constantly banging her leg chain on the floor with her trunk. During the time of my long observation, she would go into moments of quiet depression resting her head against the wall, interspersed by agitated waves of anger to free herself from the chain. These are clear indications of the serious psychological problems the animal has.



*No drinking water trough. Holding chain with trunk and banging on the floor constantly*

- Abhayambigai already has a documented history of abuse with her existing mahout, which was confirmed through a viral video in 2015 of her being mercilessly beaten by the mahout and Cavady. The constant beating of the elephant by the mahout indicates that the relationship between the mahout and the elephant is marked by violence.



**Mahout & Cavady mercilessly beating, for bathing on her own, a few years back (image from a viral video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxJ3DRGMeWI&t=20s>**

- The violence creates more stress, and adds to the distrust between the already fractured relationship between the mahout and the elephant creating a cycle of violence in which the only victim is the captive elephant.

- The distress and anguish of Abhayambigai’s solitary confinement is unimaginable, which is very hard to describe unless witnessed in person, I have tried at best to document her pain through the few photos in this report.



***Head bobbing and swaying, a sign of psychological distress.***

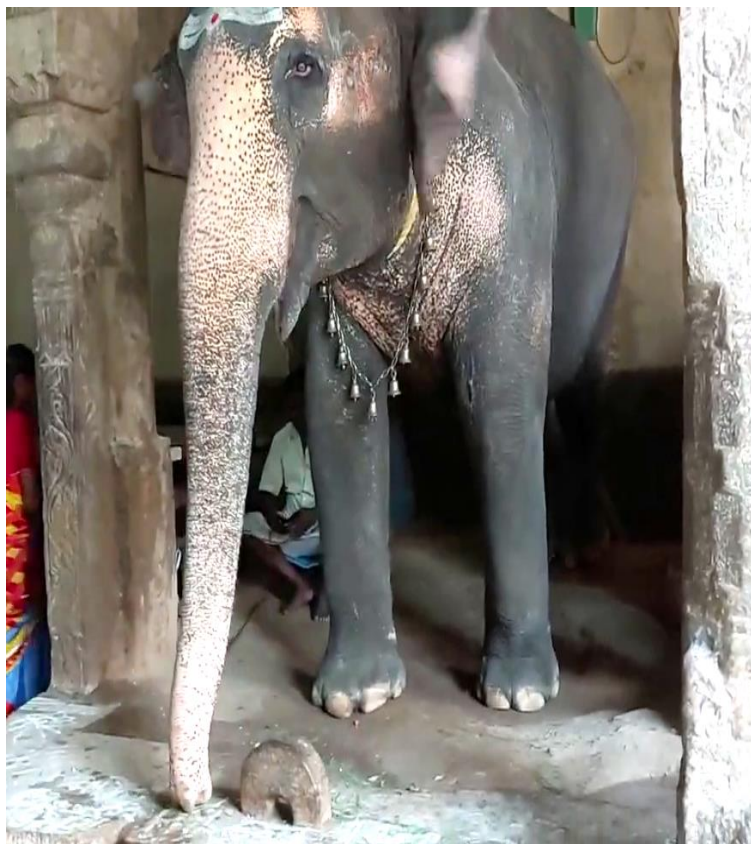
- Abhayambigai was the co-subject of the 2019 High Court directed inspection carried out by Biologist Mr. Ajay Desai which ultimately recommended the rescue and transfer of Elephant Gomathy to MR Palayam.
- It was accepted and noted by Dr Desai in his 2019 report, that like Elephant Gomathy, the solitary confinement of Abhayambigai is also an “***unethical incarceration of a highly social and intelligible animal***”.
- It is important we recognize Abhayambigai’s life of constant chaining, mind control, and solitary confinement as a criminal deviation from her deep and natural desire to live as a free animal in the wild.
- Dr Desai’s report had strong recommendations for improving the welfare of Abhayambigai, by allowing greater freedom of movement if the coconut grove can be fenced (electric fence) and the elephant is allowed free movement inside. On the temple side of the coconut grove there will be a need to have an additional barrier (steel

railings) to stop people from approaching the fence/elephant too closely or interfering with the fence.

- The temple has made no steps to implement the recommendations of the Desai Report, to improve her quality of life.
- A larger open shed was observed inside the temple compound next to the coconut grove, it was only being used to house cows and was full of overgrown weed and was completely unattended. It was clear that Abhayambigai has not been relocated to the open shed, and the same was confirmed by the mahout citing constant rain.
- Abhayambigai has experienced over five decades of silent suffering in captivity. She worked for close to two decades as a captive elephant before she was acquired by this temple in 1988. She has lived (and suffered) in the tiny garage shed in this temple for over 34 years already.
- **The temple has failed to implement the core recommendation of the Ajay Desai report to allow her “greater freedom of movement”. Abhayambigai remains confined in the small concrete shed, with no positive change in her quality of life. This indignity must stop. She must be immediately rehabilitated at MR Palayam centre.**
- **Abhayambigai must be treated as a priority candidate - because of her old age, many decades of service and failing health - for shifting to MR Palayam for long term veterinary treatment and permanent rehabilitation.**

**Varalakshmi/Lakshmi, Thayumanaswamy Temple, Mallaikottai, Trichy**  
**(Approximate age: 40 years)**

- I visited Varalakshmi on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> December. Varalakshmi at first glance is a middle-aged, female temple captive elephant. In all the official records I have had a chance to peruse, she has been aged across a wide gap from 18-30 years. Like with all captive elephants who have changed many hands in private ownership, her age is not known clearly but is potentially much older than the stated records. Her age could be anywhere between 35 - 40 years.
- She is the sole temple elephant at Mallaikottai whose daily routine involves coming to the temple where she is made to stand on a hard soil platform within a narrow corner *niche* frame all day. She has zero scope for any movement within this space.



**Forced to stand on narrow space and hard floor at the temple for begging**

- She is required to bless temple devotees as they pass by in return for money, a collection she hands the mahout – essentially begging.
- Her daily walk from the temple shelter, a mere 500 meters distance from the temple and back is her only exercise. She does this walk, through extremely narrow and very busy (also loud) narrow lanes of the neighborhood in Trichy.
- She has extreme obesity and a very serious and prominent bend with fuse in the front-left leg. While walking she is careful to not put any weight on the deformed/injured front-left leg at all. Her gait confirms this left foot deformity, which is also a potential source of acute and constant pain.



***Front left leg ankle is bend and fused.  
Not using front left leg to bear body weight.***

- Her night shelter was in a dense residential neighborhood. Due to the front leg deformity she has an additional daily struggle to walk down the slope on the rocky road to where she is kept during the night.



***The shed is located on a busy residential & narrow street***

- The night shelter is abysmal and violates every stipulated norm. It is not even trying to be an elephant shelter, it resembles a car garage, or a small size grain stockyard, where she is tied/tethered both on her front and back legs, with no scope or possibility for her to lie down and rest.



***No water in the drinking water trough. Front 2 legs and back 1 leg chained.***

- Varalakshmi has lived in this current temple for more than 20 years, completely socially isolated, cramped in a dark small shed at night and made to stand as a show animal on a platform in the temple all day, blessing and begging. All this with a severe deformity in her leg.
- Found some rotten carrots kept on the floor near the shed for feeding.





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