

Weaving histories of women

The contributions by several women have shaped history as we know it.



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The event will be held at the museum in East Coast Road

By [Express News Service](#)

CHENNAI: The contributions by several women have shaped history as we know it. For many of us, these names may be unknown or just faint echoes from a history textbook. Finding the letters exchanged between Elizabeth and Mary Gwillim, two sisters who lived in 1800s Madras, revealed the position of women then and their pastimes. While engaging with the rich legacy produced by the expat sisters, along with researchers around the globe in The Gwillim Project, DakshinaChitra found the centrepiece for the seventh edition of their annual event, Utsavam, on March 5 and 6.

The festival organisers, Deborah Thiagarajan and Gita Hudson, identified several influential women from Madras who have left their mark across fields over the last two centuries. The two-day programme will also inspire dialogue on gender and women empowerment. The focus is on the past and the present, and will not be

restricted to famous personalities alone.

Gita, the programme officer at DakshinaChitra, shares, “At the 7th edition of our upcoming multi-genre Utsavam, we want to showcase multiple perspectives on women in arts in south India that cut across class, caste, and even the gender binary to highlight our theme — Crafting a Women-Centric Future.” Trans actor Neha and activist Arulmozhi will inaugurate the festival. Utsavam brings together practitioners and academics while weaving the event-lineup around art, craft, history, and the performing arts. To promote women entrepreneurship, a sandhai will sell wares made by women-run businesses, and members of self-help groups. Five women from Madurai will also share how availing microfinance helped them gain financial independence.

A range of talks and discussions are scheduled including one by music historian V Sriram chronicling the story of Saraswati Bai, the first female Harikatha artiste in south India. Writer and historian Nivedita Louis, who has widely documented the stories of 43 women achievers of Madras, will speak about some of these muthal pengal (first women). She will focus on famous women personalities like Fathima Beevi, the first female judge to be a part of India’s Supreme Court, and the first Muslim woman to be appointed to any of the higher judiciaries, as well as several lesser-known women.

The lineup also features a Twitter Spaces conversation with 14-year-old city artist Laksha Mathikshara who dabbles in non-fungible, digital tokens. Another session provides space for women artists and entrepreneurs to network and share business ideas.

From a debate on contemporary patriarchy and storytelling to experiential performances and exhibitions, Utsavam seems like a perfect celebration of women in history.

Contact details

For details of the events, call 7358777797, and visit dakshinachitra.net for the full schedule.