

# A climb of faith

Thaipusam, a festival that falls on the full moon's day of the Hindu month of Thai, is dedicated to Lord Subramaniam or Muruga, who is said to reside on hillocks. It will be celebrated this Friday.

## MAKING THE PAAL KAVADI

**Stand made out of thick plywood to help balance the kavadi**

**The vel, Lord Muruga's weapon, is made out of plywood to symbolised his presence**

**A round wooden pole is used to balance the kavadi on the shoulder and to attach the milk pot**

**Devotees take ritual bath at the temple**

**1** Coloured stickers are cut according to the size of the kavadi

**2-3** The paper is pasted on the wooden structure

**3**

**4-8** Ornaments are used to beautify the kavadi including peacock feathers symbolising Lord Muruga's peacock vehicle

**4**

**5**

**6**

**7**

**8**

**DECORATION**

A statue of Lord Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, is placed on top of the vel

Plastic flowers decorate the pole to make it colourful

A sticker depicting Lord Muruga is pasted on the side of the kavadi along with the peacock feathers

The milkpot carries the offering for Lord Muruga

Prayers are chanted and devotee goes into trance

Hooks are pierced through flesh as a form of penance and the kavadi is placed on the shoulder

The journey to hilltop Muruga Temple begins. There is much singing and chanting along the journey

A priest chants in the ear of the devotee to bring him back to consciousness. At the hilltop, the hooks and kavadi are removed

Homage is paid and the main deity, Lord Muruga, is bathed in the milk offering

*Source: Seroja from Sri Ambal Store and P. Nathan*

## TYPE OF KAVADI

Below is a simplistic description of each type of kavadi. Each has its own significance and depending on the person carrying and their vow, they can decide which one they would like to follow.



### Mayil/Paal

This is the most popular form of kavadi and most often seen during Thaipusam. The kavadi is beautifully decorated with peacock feathers, flowers and other colourful ornaments. At the heart of this kavadi is usually a statue of a deity which the devotee chooses to carry. A small pot of milk is also tied to the kavadi as part of the offering.



### Thol

Thol Kavadi is the type of kavadi usually carried on the shoulder. It has a semicircular base, and is usually adorned with peacock feathers, glittering ornaments, decorations and flowers. A small pot with milk is attached to the Thol Kavadi. An inverted "T" wood holds the decorated top. Attached to the base are hooks that are pierced into the devotee's body.



### Alavu

The Alavu Kavadi involves piercing of the tongue or cheek. The main concept of this type of kavadi is to prevent the person immersed in the ritual to not speak and to derive endurance, energy and to focus on Lord Muruga.



### Koodam Mul

Koodam Mul kavadi involves offering the deity small pots of milk or fruits (like apples, oranges, lime) which are tied to the hooks. The hooks are then pierced into the body.



### Vettu Mul

Vettu Mul is one of the major forms of kavadi where the devotee will have hooks pierced to his body which are then attached to ropes. The ropes are pulled either by another person (as a form of penance) or is tied to a chariot to be pulled.



### Paal Kudam

The Paal Kudam is a pot filled with fresh cow's milk and is carried on the shoulders or heads of the individual.



### Thee Meethi

Fire walking may also be practised, commonly during temple festivals, but are not common during Thaipusam.