**Origin & Significance of Thai Poosam Kavady**



"Thai Poosam" falls every year on the full moon day in the Tamil month "Thai" (January/February). On this day the full moon is in transit through the brightest star "Pusam "in the zodiac sign cancer and the planet Guru is said to be the presiding deity. The festival occurs in the month of Thai (the 10th month on the Tamil calendar) and on the day when the full moon passes through the star "Pusam". This event is called "Thai Poosam". This festival is one of the biggest festivals on the South Indian calendar in South Africa.

The Kavady prayer and penance is observed over 10 days by devotees. The devotee has to abstain from various things like alcohol, drugs etc. They have to observe celibacy and maintain a vegetarian diet for this entire period. The Kavady procession is seen as an outward demonstration of mass devotion to God as Lord Muruga. There are various reasons for carrying the Kavady but the two main categories are firstly to express thanks to Lord Muruga or to ask Muruga for help in overcoming a particular problem.   
According to mythology, Iduman, one of the disciples of Agasthiyai, was asked to bring to hills - representing the two forces inherent in all living beings (Siva and Shakti). Iduman, carried these two hills with a - Kavady a beam across his shoulder with one hill suspended on each end. Mid way through the journey he sat his burden down in order to rest.   
  
When he was ready to resume, he found that the hills were too heavy to pick up. As he prepared to forcibly pick them up he saw Lord Muruga in the way and he angrily asked him to move out of the way, Muruga refused.

Iduman was annoyed a battle broke out between Lord Muruga and Iduman whereby Iduman was destroyed. Muruga through his eternal mercy revived and pardoned him, a change came over Iduman and he became Lord Muruga’s greatest devotee. He carried the first Kavady out of absolute devotion to the Lord. Lord Muruga also made Iduman his gate keeper. That is why when a devotee goes to the famous Pazhanimalai temple one must first pray to Iduman and then proceed to the main temple.

**What is a Kavady?**

It is a Tamil word meaning flattened pole with loads at the ends. The Kavady carried in a religious procession also has a pole with a semi circular arch. The arch is decorated with flowers and palm leaves. The loads attached to the ends of the pole are brass vessels filled with milk or other offerings. Peacock feathers and a vel are also attached.  
  
A brass pot filled with milk can also be carried for Lord Muruga as an offering and it is called “Paal Kodum”.  
One question which is often asked by devotees is can I fast for Kavady without carrying a Kavady.  
  
The answer to this question is definitely “YES”. One does not have to only carry a Kavady to show devotion to Lord Muruga. By observing the 10 day fast and attending the 10 day prayer at the temple is also seen as devotion towards Lord Muruga. Devotees please remember it is your love and devotion towards the Lord that is important.

**Why is a flag raised and a 10 day fast observed?**

The flag which is raised on the first day. Firstly marks the beginning of the 10 day fast and the observance of the Kavady festival.   
The flag also serves as a reminder that one should start fasting and go to the temple.

**The meaning of the banner or flag**

The Sevel (Rooster) symbolises the approach or the dawn of knowledge. It is the Sevel that proclaims the coming of the sun in the east. The sun is the heavenly body that dispels darkness. The Sevel on the banner announces the approach of knowledge which will destroy all ignorance. The 10 day fast or sadhana is the clearance of ones mind, body and soul. By fasting and going to temple and praying for 10 days devotees become spiritually charged and uplifted to carry their Kavady.

**The Vel**

Lord Muruga’s Vel is strong, straight and pointed, representing our spinal cord running through the spinal column, to the top most part of our brain, which is the highest point of knowledge. The Vel is the spear of wisdom, penetrating the intellect, seeking ultimate reality. A deadly foe to the arrogant, to the lower natured it affords strength and protection to the awaken soul.

**The Mayil (Peacock)**

The Peacock represents his Vahana (vehicle) symbolising his conquest over ego, vanity and pride. By Lord Muruga sitting on the Peacock it symbolises the control he has over our pride and ego.   
Valli and Dheivany consorts of Lord Muruga  
Valli is Icchashakti the power of will and Dheivany Kryashakti power of action.

**Why yellow?**

The ancient tribes in India started the Kavady festival by worshipping the rising sun. They believed that the sun could provide heat and light but symbolically it could also burn up sins and redeem devotees.   
They recognized the sun as Lord Muruga.   
The sun was seen as a yellow colour which is associated with Kavady.   
That is why devotees wear yellow for Kavady.

**Types of Kavadies**

Various Kavadies one can carry  
Manjal (turmeric powder)/worries and debts  
Pushpa (Flowers)/ progress and success  
Paal (Milk)/ Good life and prosperity  
Thayier (Sour milk)/sickness  
Illanier (tender coconut)/conceiving   
Then (Honey)/truthfulness and honesty  
Ellemichaai (Lime)/enemies  
Vibhoothi (Holy ash)/blessings  
Panier (Rose water)/ wealth and progress  
Ney (Ghee) liberation   
Meaning of the following?  
Vetri-vel – The Vel of victory  
Haragarogara – Hail, Hail, Hail Oh Lord

**The six-syllabled mantra chanted for Lord Muruga**

**OM SARAVANABAVA NAMAHA/POTRI**  
  
SA – CONFERS THE PROSPERITY OF SHAKTI  
RA – GIVES THE WEALTH OF KNOWLEDGE  
VA – BESTOWS HAPPINESS OF ENJOYMENT  
NA – PROTECT FROM ALL FORCES OF EVIL  
BA – CONFERS MORALITY  
VA – CONFERS THE LIFE OF BLESSEDNESS