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### Thaipusam

Thaipusam is a Hindu festival celebrated mostly by the Tamil community on the full moon in the Tamil month of Thai (January/February). It is celebrated not only in countries where the Tamil community constitutes a majority, but also in countries where Tamil communities are smaller, such as Singapore and Malaysia. The festival is also referred to as Thaipooyam or. The word Thaipusam is derived from the month name Thai and Pusam, which refers to a star that is at its highest point during the festival. The festival commemorates the occasion when Parvati gave Murugan a vel "spear" so he could vanquish the evil demon Soorapadam.

### Origin



Skanda (or Murugan) was created during one of the battles between the Asuras (or to be more specific Surapadman) and the Devas. At one point, the latter were defeated several times by the former. The Devas were unable to resist the onslaught of the Asura forces. In despair, they approached Shiva and entreated to give them an able leader under whose heroic leadership they might obtain victory over the Asuras. They surrendered themselves completely and prayed to Shiva. Shiva granted their request by creating the mighty warrior, Skanda, out of his own power or Achintya Shakti. He at once assumed leadership of the celestial forces, inspired them and defeated the Asura forces and to recognize that day the people created the festival.

### Kavadi



Kavadi Attam is a dance performed by the devotees during the ceremonial worship of Murugan, the Tamil God of War. It is often performed during the festival of Thaipusam and emphasizes debt bondage. The Kavadi itself is a physical burden through which the devotees implore for help from the God Murugan. Generally, Hindus take a vow to offer a kavadi to idol for the purpose of tiding over or averting a great calamity. For instance, if the devotee's son is laid up with a fatal disease, he would pray to Shanmuga to grant the boy a lease of life in return for which the devotee would take a vow to dedicate a kavadi to Him.

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**Vel kavadi**

Kavadi-bearers have to perform elaborate ceremonies at the time of assuming the kavadi and at the time of offering it to Murugan. The kavadi-bearer observes celibacy and takes only pure, Satvik food, once a day, while continuously thinking of God. On the day of the festival, devotees will shave their heads and undertake a pilgrimage along a set route while engaging in various acts of devotion, notably carrying various types of kavadi (burdens). At its simplest this may entail carrying a pot of milk, but mortification of the flesh by piercing the skin, tongue or cheeks with vel skewers is also common.

The simplest kavadi is a semicircular decorated canopy supported by a wooden rod that is carried on the shoulders, to the temple. In addition, some have a small spear through their tongue, or a spear through the cheeks. The spear pierced through his tongue or cheeks reminds him constantly of Lord Murugan. It also prevents him from speaking and gives great power of endurance. Other types of kavadi involve hooks stuck into the back and either pulled by another walking behind or being hung from a decorated bullock cart or more recently a tractor, with the point of incisions of the hooks varying the level of pain.

