

Music, Trance and Dance in the Thaipusam *Kavady* Festival: Reflections of a Select Group of South Africans

Nirmala Gopal

Department of Criminology and Forensic Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
E-mail: gopal@ukzn.ac.za

KEYWORDS Thaipusam. Kavady. Trance. Dance. Music. Lord Muruga

ABSTRACT Hinduism in South Africa finds expression in a series of fasts, festivals and rituals. The Kavady festival is one of the most popular festivals observed annually by mostly Tamil-speaking Hindus in South Africa. This article examines how the Thaipusam Kavady festival is understood and explained by a select group of devotees in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. This includes the significance of the festival for them, and in particular their understanding of the music and trance dance, about which there is a dearth of literature. Trance, dance, and music are seen as indispensable in helping raise devotees to a higher spiritual place and in coping with the physical pain exerted on the body. Most interviewees found the experience of Kavadi very rewarding and intend to continue participating in future years.

INTRODUCTION

Festivals have been an important part of Indian life in South Africa from the time that the indentured first arrived in Natal. Indians, including Hindus, participated in large numbers in the Muharram festival while the festival at the Isipingo Temple, with its animal sacrifice, firewalking, and trance-like behaviour, drew large crowds annually over Easter to celebrate with the goddess Mariyamman. Among the many major Hindu festivals celebrated by the South Africa's Tamil-speaking Hindus, Kavady is arguably the most popular (Mikula et al. 1982; Kearney 1982; Harber et al. 1982). Kavady is celebrated annually in honour of the God Muruga who, it is believed, has the power to cure people of their illnesses and get rid of misfortune. Lord Muruga, son of the Lord Shiva, is a multi-armed God deemed to have the qualities to destroy negativity and obstacles and is symbolic of strength and endurance (Chetty 2007). Hindu festivals and seasons, it should be noted, are observed in South Africa according to the calendars used in India even though South Africa is in the southern hemisphere and India in the north, which means that the seasons occur at different times of the year. For instance, the *Thai Pongal* and *Maha Sivarati* festivals are observed to mark the beginning of the sun's entry into the northern hemisphere, which are regarded as auspicious occasions by Hindus, but are observed in South Africa at the beginning of winter (Kumar 2000).

While Kavady is celebrated on three occasions annually in South Africa, *viz.* the Thai-

pusam Kavady, Chitraparvam Kavady, and Pangani Uttaram, this article focuses on the Thaipusam Kavady, which draws the largest following. Two interviewees, UG and DC, pointed out that since the New Year in the South Indian calendar began on 14 April, devotees took part in order to take vows that would allow them to end the Tamil year in good stead and also start life in the English calendar New Year in a positive light. Kavady is a means of fasting, prayers and penance by those who in the course of the year have been afflicted with disease or sickness (Diesel and Maxwell 1993). The name Kavady derives from '*kavu*', meaning shoulder, and '*adi*', which refers to base or bottom. Kavady thus becomes a 'device' that is carried on the shoulder (Padayachee, 2004). Others derive Kavady from '*kavu*', to carry on the shoulder, and '*tadi*', which refers to a pole. The kavadi itself is a bamboo arch decorated with marigolds, ferns, palm shoots, peacock feathers and coconuts. On each end is a brass container (*sombhus*) filled with milk with which the devotee has to wash the statuette of the deity. The procession starts from a river bank and proceeds to a temple. Thousands who may not have taken a vow attend to be blessed by participants. Roger Copoosamy, chairperson of the Braelyn Temple in East London explained that the kavady symbolised "the carrying of one's burdens, sufferings, ill-health or misfortune away from the temple and bringing it to rest at the feet of Lord Murugan" (*Daily Despatch* 24 January 2008). Key aspects of the festival include a special dance involving male devotees whirling around with the kavady and bodily torture through such

acts as putting hooks in the body and hanging coconuts or pots of milk from the hooks, putting a skewer into the tongue, walking on sandals made of nails, and piercing hooks into the back with ropes attached to them and having someone pull the other end of the ropes.

KAVADY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Kavady Festivals are observed at many temples in South Africa but some have acquired special status, such as the Shri Vaithiantha Easvarar Alayam (Umgeni Road Temple) which is the largest Hindu temple in the southern hemisphere (Thaver 2006). The Sri Siva Soobramaniam Temple at Brake Village which has attained the status of a place of pilgrimage; and the Melrose Shree Siva Subramaniam Temple in Johannesburg which was built in 1919 and is one of the oldest temples in Gauteng. It is firmly rooted in the soil of the banks of the Jukskei River, which exudes an aura of reverence and serenity. Newspaper reports allude to the celebration of Kavady more than a century ago. The *African Chronicle* (13 February 1909), for example, reported on a Kavady festival at the Umgeni Temple. The comments of the trustee K. M. Pillay were interesting. He considered it a 'blessing' that the British flag was flying all over the world and thanked God that they were under British rule. He prayed that King Edward VII would live for a long time and prayed for the well-being of the Royal family, the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Privy Council which always "saw to the good of India". The Government of Natal had "always been very good to Indians" and allowed them to practice their festivals, he said. A reporter from the *Natal Mercury* (10 February 1935) reported on the Kavady festival at the Umbilo Temple:

The approaches to the Temple were gaily decorated with multi-coloured bunting and vegetation, and vivid splashes of colour were lent to the scene by the bright-hued, flowing garments of the Indian women, who formed a large percentage of the concourse inside and outside the Temple. In the vicinity of the Temple the strong fumes of burning camphor assailed the nostrils. This was incense burning round an image at the foot of which the Faithful cast their thank offerings. The chanting of the priests, the piping of Indian flutes, and the beating of the nagarars (drums fashioned like tom-toms)

mingled with the subdued hub-hub of conversation as the devotees, bearing on their shoulders "*kavadies*", marched in procession round the exterior of the Temple prior to concluding their penance within. Altogether between 30 and 40 Hindus went through this ritual yesterday afternoon. They were drawn from all over the Borough. Each community arrived in procession on their own, accompanied by one or more sacred images drawn on low wagons or carts.

Kavady continues to draw wide support in the contemporary period. Journalist Kuben Chetty, who carried *kavady* at the Marianhill Shree Siva Soobramoniam Alayam Temple in Marianhill in 2007, found that many devotees who had moved out of the district to different parts of the country returned to their communities annually to carry *kavady*. They felt that communal bonds would be lost without this annual festival (*Daily News* 7 February 2007). Journalist Niren Tolsi was one of 2,000 devotees who carried *kavady* at the Meadowlands High School grounds in Chatsworth. He described the "transcendental metamorphosis of some believers as part comedic grotesque, part mystic allure, and part downright unfathomable" (*Sunday Tribune*, 11 February 2010). A 2008 newspaper article reported that 'Braelyn came alive with colour yesterday as East London's Tamil community celebrated the end of the Thai Poosam Kavady. Burning camphor lingered in the air and various cleansing rituals, piercings, dances, and chants were performed' (*Daily Despatch*, 24 January 2008).

This article is concerned specifically with the meanings of trance and dance in the contemporary period where *Kavady* remains a feature of many temples, even those that have become "sanskritised". The primary aim of this study is not to understand individual constructions of *Kavady* but instead probe the discursive views through which participants give meaning to the significance, trance dance, and music of *Kavady*. This study is based on face-to-face interviews conducted with 10 respondents in KwaZulu-Natal who were selected through snowball sampling across the greater Durban area. There were five males aged between 30 and 87, and five females aged between 25 and 40 who had participated in the festival (see Appendix One for a demographic profile of interviewees). Interviews were conducted at a mutually arranged venue and each interview lasted on average an hour.

All interviews were conducted in English. Since participation in the study was dependent on availability and willingness, the study is limited in terms of the views of the respondents. This study is about the individual devotees in the first instance, but is an exploration of their discursive positioning in relation to Kavady. Questions were facilitated by a semi-structured interview schedule which focused on issues regarding their understanding of Thaipusam, and the significance of the trance dance and music played during the festival. Interviews took a conversational form with individuals sharing information with great enthusiasm. Utilising a working model of thematic analysis, data were analysed through a step-by-step procedure which began by searching through the transcripts of the interviews for repeated patterns of meaning (Braun and Clarke 2006). In the second part of the analysis, codes were produced to highlight emerging patterns. Each interview was coded, and these codes were matched across the 10 interviews. A thematic map was then produced where themes were further refined in relation to the data from all respondents. It is critical to note that while the limited research on Kavady in South Africa has focussed on the nature, extent and description of the festival, this study concentrates on the dominant themes generated from the interviews, which are centred on the significance of trance dance and music.

Kavady Offerings

Thaipusam falls every year on the full moon day in the tenth month in the Tamil calendar, "Thai" (January- February), when the 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. This festival is one of the biggest on the South Indian calendar in South Africa (Kumar 2000). The name *Thaipusam* derives from the name of the month *Thai* and *Pusam*, the star that is at its highest point during the festival. This festival of faith and forgiveness is celebrated in India as well in places where Tamils constitute a minority, such as Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Fiji, New Zealand, and South Africa. Thaipusam is celebrated by all Hindu castes, from high caste *Brahmins* to low caste *Dalits*, while participants of all age groups and social status participate in this pilgrimage, which lasts for three days (Rajathurai 2007).

Kavady is associated with the taking of vows (*vrata*) which plays an important part in all traditional Hindu worship (Kuper 1960). Kavady is usually carried when misfortune, for example, protracted illness or disability, strikes an individual. One of the key themes to emerge from the interviews was the significance of Thaipusam for participants. There was a very clear understanding that Kavady was celebrated in honour of Lord Muruga and that the carrying of a 'burden', the kavady structure, in his honour, was meant to seek penitence. According to (BK), Kavady was "dedicated to Lord Muruga who is a deity that most individuals say if I overcome this problem I will carry a kavady for you. From a boy of eight years I have been praying to Lord Muruga". KA claimed that it was "a national festival in the Hindu calendar worshipping the deity 'Lord Muruga'. People carry kavady for their repentance, for forgiveness and more so if they have had any physical or health ailments". SS and KN also stated that the significance of Kavady was "to express thanks to Lord Muruga and to show and seek the Lord's blessings and help in overcoming a problem. When a devotee carries the burden in the form of a kavady the devotee is blessed by Lord Muruga. This auspicious prayer brings peace and good luck to the devotee."

As to the spiritual and material benefits gained from participating in the festival, according to BK, "a person only carries a kavady when something good comes out of it. It's a thanksgiving. For example: if a person is having a problem or out of work and if things come right then he goes and carries the kavady." According to PP, the kavady "symbolises the burden of the carrier like the two hills carried by Idumban. This burden is lessened when carried of whatever reason the vow has been taken. This is an auspicious time of fast for me as I am totally devoted to Lord Muruga." KN asserted that kavady was "a celebration to commemorate the occasion when Parvati gave Lord Muruga the 'vel' (spear) to destroy the evil demon Soorapadam. At the same time the occasion is used to ask Lord Muruga to guide, assist and avert one's calamity and therefore the dedication to Lord Muruga mainly celebrated by the Tamil community throughout the world." KN added that devotees can carry Kavady for others who may not be able to carry the Kavady themselves because they are ill.

Asceticism is an important part of the festival. Devotees undergo strict discipline, sacrifice and self-mortification to show the Lord that they are remorseful and repentful, and humbly seek pardon for their wrongs (Thaver 2005). The purpose of this preparation is to fortify the senses and suppress passions in order to achieve total control of mind over matter. Devotees pray, chant mantras, and sing devotional songs to prepare their body as a worthy vessel to embody the spirit of the deity. Various purifying rituals are undertaken in the days leading up to the festival. KA, for example, claims that devotees observed “a ten day fast where we abstain from eating meat and abstain from all other pleasures in life like the intake of alcohol, eating meat, sexual pleasures and on the 10th day are in absolute devotion to the Lord Muruga”. There is no prescribed period of fasting. According to interviewees it could vary from one or two days to several weeks. During this period, some devotees adhere to a strict vegetarian diet while others may eat just one meal per day. Most interviewees had a separate set of utensils which were only used during Kavady. Another crucial aspect was, as one interviewee put it, “to control the tongue – no cursing and swearing”. Sexual relations are also proscribed. On the day of the festival, interviewees felt, it is this state of purity and devotion that empowers them so that they feel no pain when their skin is pierced. DC, for example, said that if “you do not keep a pure fast, then, when you are being pierced you will bleed”.

Offerings by devotees on Thaipusam day include the breaking of coconuts, both during the chariot procession and on temple grounds, to signify humility and the crushing of one's ego to attain divine wisdom (*jnana*). There are two types of *palkudaml* (milk pot) bearers, some with body piercings, usually on the forehead, tongue, and cheek, and others without a piercing. There are also two types of Kavady *bearing*, one with and the other without body piercing. Kavady's with body piercing are predominantly taken by men, though in some cases women bear Kavady with their cheeks and tongues pierced with skewers. Children and women carry simple kavady's on one side of their shoulders. Men may pierce their bare torsos with hooks and a skewer fixed to their individual kavady's which are positioned to sit on both their shoulders. Another kind of offering involves mortification

practices only, that is, body piercing without bearing *palkudam* or *kavady*. This offering creates a sense of uneasiness among spectators due to its bizarre appearance and dangerous feats, such as devotees hanging limes or oranges on the hooks pierced on their torsos, pulling a mini Muruga chariot with ropes tied to hooks pierced at the back of their torso, or whipping themselves repeatedly upon possession (trance) (Simons et al. 1988). On the day of worship for Lord Muruga, devotees, regardless of class, caste, or gender, publicly offer prayers and thanksgiving by fulfilling vows for favours they may have been granted. Anand Etty, for example, told reporter Niren Tolsi that he had taken a vow to pull a chariot for six years so that Muruga would ease the asthma suffered by his mother and girlfriend, which had got “better” (*Mail and Guardian* 5 February 2010).

Trance

Tradition, religion and nationalism have considerable impact on dance and movement practices and ethnic identity among Hindu communities in former British colonies. Practices such as the classical style of Bharatanatyam and trance dance with body piercing are increasingly popular at festivals (David 2008). The culmination of the act of penance during Thaipusam involves the Kavady-carrier in a ritual dance before the image of the deity, Subramanya, who is asked to descend upon a devotee who enters into a trance (Ganesh 2010). A study of trance in Singapore found that most of the trances were reportedly precipitated by fear, anger and/or frustration. Seventy percent of the study participants reported prodromal symptoms. Common manifestations include unusual vocalisations and movements, shaking, apparent immunity from pain, and an unfocused or fixed gaze (Beng-Yeong 2000). During trance dancing, there are a variety of bodily motions and gestures among Kavadydancers. There is no uniformity, except for the execution of swirling movements with kavady's, since each person performs according to his or her own self-expression (Kapchan 2007).

The quality and variety of movements are highly dependent on possession, rhythm, the type, and the weight of the Kavady. While some devotees execute abstract movements, others embody the characters possessed by the deity

and perform 'role-play'. These 'dramatic' and 'pure' dance performances are regarded legible within the context of the sacred time and sacred space created by the festival (Rajathurai 2007). Onlookers and participants view trance as a display of the power of the deity. Possession is unpredictable and can happen during *pūja* (worship), while singing *bhajans* (devotional songs) or on receiving *darshan* from the deity. This allows the devotee to become united, albeit briefly, with his or her favoured deity, the common goal of Hindu worships (Lewis 1989). The ecstatic trance dancing of devotees at Taipusam signifies a belief that the powers of the deity Murugan become embodied in the purified body of the devotee during the dance. These powers are believed to bring auspicious results for the vow made by the dancing devotee (Kuppusami 1983).

Caste and Music

This study is particularly concerned with music and trance during the Kavady festival. Music during Kavady differs from that played at other Hindu festivals. There is more emphasis on drumming, the music is more energetic and invigorating, and the drumming rhythms are based on the beat of the heart, as the devotee is prepared to undertake demanding ritual requirements. The type of music varies according to caste. The ancient Sanskrit text, *Rig Veda*, divides Hindu society into four caste groups, *Brahmins* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaishyas* (cultivators) and *Shudras* (peasants) (Leach 1971). Hindus are said to have been created by a supreme being, *Purusha* (God), from whose brain emerged *Brahmins*, from his forearms emerged *Kshatriyas*, from his abdomen emerged the *Vaishyas*, and from his feet emerged the *Shudras*. A fifth group comprises of *Dalits*, *achuta*, or untouchables who are considered too polluted to rank as worthy beings (Berreman 1979). *Brahmin* music has its origins in the *Gandharva Veda*—the *Veda* of celestial musicians and singers. According to Hindu belief, the gods themselves played instruments. Shiva played *dhamaru* (drums), Krishna played *venu* (flute), and Saraswati, the goddess of learning, played the *veena* (lute). Brahmins avoid wind instruments as they are considered unclean after they have been touched.

Kshatriyas are the only caste to use singing (*sahityam*) for the melodic line. They use the

tavil and *urumi melam* for drumming, with singing replacing the melodic role of wind instruments. *Salangai* is used as the drone by *Kshatriyas* as the *jalra* is used by Brahmins. *Vaishyas* place emphasis on rhythm without the melody of the Brahmins and *Kshatriyas*. The main instruments used by the *Vaishyas* are the *tavil* and the *urumi melman*, with *kombu* and *salangai* accompanying. Music of the *Shudra* is much like that of the *Vaishya* in that it is based on *talams* without *ragams*. Again, unlike the Brahmin and *Kshatriya* castes, which use *nadaswarams* and the voice for melody as well as drums and other percussion instruments, the *Shudra* use percussion instruments only. These include the *tavil* and *tappu*, with *salangai* as the drone and *sanggu* occasionally accompanying the music. *Dalit* music is much like that of the *Vaishya* and *Shudra* castes. It is based on rhythmic repetition without melodic instruments. The main instrument is the *tappu* drum, and occasionally the *sanggu* accompanies the music (Rajathurai 2007).

Trance Induction

Key elements for trance induction during Kavady ritual are belief in the Hindu faith, preparatory fasting, the smell of burning incense, together with the many sights (bright colours, rituals, and so on) and sounds going on around them, in particular the chanting of "*Vel! Vel! Vetri Vel!*" ("Lance! Lance! Victorious lance!"), and most importantly, the presence of music, especially rhythmic drumming (Simons et al. 1988).

Rouget writes of the importance of music for trance induction: "as a general rule, possession fit or trance is accompanied by music, and music is almost always regarded as being more or less responsible for its onset". The most important aspects of music for trance induction are the hypnotic facets of rhythm, repetition of melody, and increased tempo and shortening of the beat pattern (Rouget 1985). Interviewees were unanimous that the music was devotional in nature and in tribute to Lord Muruga, was calming and inspirational. BK said that "the songs and words are in praise of the Lord Muruga. It is soothing." KA also maintained that that music was "religious and the lyrics are in praise of the Lord Muruga in the various names that is attributed to him which has a dis-

inctive rhythm". For SM, "the type of music is devotional, calming, soothing and it allows one to think deeply and meditate, it is instrumental and loud which is in vernacular in keeping with the occasion", while SS mentioned that "the South Indian, Tamil devotional music that is played has a fast and chanting like tunes". All respondents felt that the choice and rhythm of the music was deliberately aimed to induce the trance dance and deep concentration of devotees. According to BK "when the music is being played they (devotees) go into deep concentration which leads to them getting into trance and they begin to dance". KN said: "it's the rhythmic beats and sounds of the drums which create them to go into the trance dance". SS reported that "the beat of the music and the nature of the fast pace of the beats induces a trance like state of mind in me". For PP, "the beat of the music takes me to a transcendental level of consciousness which is also a level of peace and bliss".

Overstimulation of the senses and the right 'mind-set' as to what will happen during the trance induction are also crucial. Devotees' senses are 'assaulted' by a number of things simultaneously. This includes the overpowering smell of incense, the chanting of the crowd ('*Vel!Vel!*'), the statues of the gods, offerings, the 'holy' colours worn— red, orange and yellow — and drumming and music. These factors combine to alter devotees' consciousness and bring them into a state of trance, which diminishes their response to external stimuli (Sivnanda 1986).

The *tavil* (*tavulor davul*) is a double-headed, barrel-shaped membranophone which is hollowed out of a solid block of heavy jack wood or black wood. The *tappu*, is an instrument made of a circular wooden frame approximately thirty-five centimeters in diameter. The *salangai* is a series of many bells attached to a leather strap, and is either worn on the ankles or held in the hands, and is shaken or struck to produce sound. The *sanggu*, is a conch shell used as a horn. Conch shells come in different sizes which produce different pitches — a higher pitch for a smaller shell and a lower pitch for a larger one.

According to one devotee, Gounden: "all I know is that when I close my eyes (preceding the trance), I say my personal mantra, praying that I am at Lord Muruga's feet or on his lap.

When I come to, all I know is that my body is suffering extreme fatigue and that I can't account for two or three hours of my life. I have no memory of the time — which is scary" (Thaver 2006). Kavady bearers are induced into trance by a priest, while bands of musicians play. Musicians must be male and they must have passed through puberty. Women are not permitted to play music at the festival due to the possibility of them playing while they are menstruating, which is regarded as offensive to the gods, and could compromise devotees. Musicians, like kavady bearers, prepare for Thaipunam by fasting, and abstaining from sexual intercourse, smoking, and drinking alcohol (Kuper 1960).

The interviewees' conceptual understanding of the trance dance was that it was a profound expression of devotion to God. SS emphasised that "the majority of the people who get trance are genuine" and are not faking it, while SM maintained that the "trance dance shows the feelings of the God that the devotee is bringing out in him at the time of the singing". PP felt that the devotee getting the trance was "in complete bliss and therefore dances". PP also felt that it was "invigorating, captivating, and peaceful." SC described the devotee being in "an altered state of mind so they are unaware of what is being done to them". UG claimed that, "Different music induces different deities". Respondents see nothing 'abnormal' about the state of trance.

Respondents spoke of their and others' direct reward through the blessings of the trance. For instance BK claimed: "I saw a lady take ashes and rub on her leg, and I saw her leg come back to normal. It all depends on one's faith and trust in God." Others such as KM and DC spoke of the closeness to God through the trance state and the levels of spirituality, while SM said that it was "the closest to God as they are gifted with a higher level of spirituality whereby people seek guidance when troubled. All trances are different— some are on a higher level than others whereby they can see things in the past and future even if they do not know you." SS said that, while he personally did not practice this ritual, "I do believe that the power of the trance may put one in an alternate state of mind and being". PP mentioned that from his "personal experience this is a higher state of mind one reaches when realising 'God' or a positive force. This is reached through meditation and a strong

connection with the Supreme Being.” Other respondents also made a connection between the trance state and the piercing with needles. SC, for example, stated that “this is an altered state of mind to allow them not to feel pain”. KA claimed that because devotees were “being pierced many times on their bodies and on the face that gives me a reason that in that point in time they are in pain, yet there are no traces of blood. This is why I strongly believe that they are on a higher level and in connection with the Lord Muruga.” According to UG, “when I was a youngster in (Magazine) barracks where I grew up the trance was induced through the reading of a religious text. Kavadi was observed as it was in India. People were God fearing and respected the trance.” He observed that for most people, a skewer through the cheeks, for example, felt like an ant bite while the hooks on the back were like being pinched. It would have been different had they not been in trance.

Kumar Iyer, a local priest in Durban, told reporter Niren Tolsi that trances were not a necessity for the Kavady rituals: “Of the 100 people pulling chariots, maybe about half experienced a trance. Because you get into a trance does not necessarily mean that you are closer to God.” Nathan Gounden, aged 38 in 2010, who has been carrying kavady from the age of five, told Tolsi that when he “closed my eyes (preceding the trance) I say my personal mantra, praying that I am at Lord Muruga’s feet or in his lap. When I come to, all I know is that my body is suffering extreme fatigue and that I can’t account for two or three hours of my life. I have no memory of the time – which is very scary. I really can’t explain it. I do believe in different planes or spheres and I suppose I am on an astral plane, on a path to God during the trance.” Gounden first experienced a trance as a 15-year-old. Coming from a religious family, he said that he had “always wanted to experience it as a youngster”. Gounden added that, “It’s interesting that there is no blood drawn during the piercings, but you know that even going for a simple glucose test, a simple prick on your finger will draw blood”. Tolsi found that some devotees experienced their first trance when they were at their lowest spiritually, while others experienced trance when they were most focused on God. He concluded that, “perhaps religious trance exists in that space between self-belief and self-delusion that is required of religious – and any other – faith.”

On the other hand, Anand Etty told Tolsi that he had not experienced a trance in the six years that he had been pulling the chariot: “I don’t feel any pain, because the journey is about the closeness between you and Lord Muruga. Part of the journey is about overcoming pain and obstacles for God.”

CONCLUSION

Festivals have been an integral part of Hindu life in South Africa, with Kavady continuing to draw large crowds. The popularity of Kavady, mainly among people of South Indian descent, has contributed to the perpetuation of Hinduism in South Africa. As we have shown, devotees have multiple reasons for participating in Kavady, ranging from being thankful for something good that has happened in their lives or wanting assistance with a problem such as illness or unemployment. Devotees begin by participating in a ritual, which begins with the asceticism of purification, followed by trance and dance, which are deemed essential to take them to a higher spiritual place and allow them to inflict pain on their bodies which may not otherwise be possible. Kavady puts devotees under enormous stress and compels them to draw on the power of God to relieve their difficulties. When devotees impose the penance on themselves they have no one to turn to except God which results in them getting closer to God. Interviewees also explained that Kavady took their minds off the stresses of everyday life. For these reasons, we can expect Kavady and other such festivals to remain an important part of ‘modern’ Hindu life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I acknowledge with gratitude the considerable research support provided by Bonita Marimuthu and Soomaya Khan, my postgraduate research assistants.

REFERENCES

- Beng-Yeong NG 2000. Singapore: A cross-cultural perspective phenomenology of Trance States seen at a Psychiatric Hospital. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 37: 560.
- Berreman G 1979. *Caste and Other Inequities*. New Delhi: Folklore Inst.
- Braun V, Clarke V 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2): 77-101.

- Chetty K 2007. Bound in Faith. Daily News, (online) 7 February. From <<http://www.samedia.uovs.ac.za/cgi-bin/getpdf?year=2007&refno=247&topic=05>>. (Retrieved 19 July 2012).
- David A 2008. Local diasporas/ Global trajectories: New aspects of religious 'performance' in British Tamil Hindu practice. *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 13(3): 89-99.
- Diesel A, Maxwell P 1993. *Hinduism in Natal*. Durban: Natal University Press.
- Ganesh K 2010. *Beyond Historical Origins: Negotiating Tamilness in South Africa*. Mumbai: Mumbai University Press.
- Kapchan D 2007. *Traveling Spirit Masters: Moroccan Gnawa Trance and Music in the Global Marketplace*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Kumar PP 2000. *Hinduism in South Africa: Traditions and Belief*. Durban: Majestic Printers.
- Kuper H 1960. *Indian People in Natal*. Pietermaritzburg: Natal University Press.
- Kuppusami C 1983. *Religions, Customs and Practices of South African Indians*. Durban: Sunray.
- Leach ER 1971. Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan. C.U.P, pp. 5-15. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lewis IM 1989. *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism*. 2nd Edition. London and New York: Penguin.
- Mikula P, Kearney B, Harber R 1982. *Traditional Hindu Temples in South Africa*. Durban: Hindu Temple Publications.
- Padayachee S 2004. *Kavady: A South African Perspective*. Durban: Samakushasa Publishers.
- Rajathurai Y 2007. *Hindu Caste Music in the Malaysian Thaipoosam Festival*. MA Thesis. New Zealand: University of Canterbury
- Rouget G 1985. *Music and Trance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Simons RC, Ervin FR, Prince RH 1988. The Psychobiology of Trance. *Transcultural Psychiatric Research Review*, 25: 306-331.
- Sivananda S 1986. *Hindu Fasts and Festivals*. Durban: Divine Life Society.
- Thaver S 2005. Kavady devotees set for celebrations. Sunday Tribune, (Online) 23 January. From <<http://www.samedia.uovs.ac.za/cgi-bin/getpdf?year=2005&refno=116&topic=16>> (Retrieved 19 July 2012).
- Thaver S 2006. Hindus Prepare for Kavady Procession. Sunday Tribune, (online) 5 February. From <<http://www.samedia.uovs.ac.za/cgi-bin/getpdf?year=2006&refno=154&topic=16>>. (Retrieved 19 July 2012).

APPENDIX

Appendix One: Demographic Profile of Interviewees

Name of interviewee	Age	Gender	Linguistic group	Area	Profession
Balakisten Krishna (BK)	78	Male	South Indian	Chatsworth	Priest
Krishna Arumugum (KA)	44	Male	Tamil	Durban	Priest
Soobrie Chetty (SC)	69	Male	Tamil	Overport	Retired
Pushpa Padayachee (PP)	40	Female	South Indian	Durban	Academic
Sadhna Singh(SS)	28	Female	Hindi	Southgate, Phoenix	Student
SarasMurugan (SM)	52	Female	Tamil	Glenmore	Administrator
KandamayNaicker (KN)	53	Male	Tamil	Phoenix	Artisan
Dan Chetty (DC)	65	Male	Tamil	Phoenix	Artisan
Uncle Gorge (UG)	65	Male	South Indian- Hindi	Phoenix	Retired
KathegisaniMoodliar (KM)	87	Male	South Indian	Overport	Retired