

Makar Sankranti - 14th January 2018

Prem Namaste, Vanakkum, Hare Krsna, Jai Shree Krsna, Jai Shree Raam



Makar means Capricorn and Sankranti is transition. Sankranti means to go from one place to another place (to change direction). It also means one meets another. There is a Sankranti every month when the sun passes from one sign of the zodiac to the next. There are twelve signs of the zodiac, and thus there are twelve sankranti's as well. Each of these sankranti's has its own relative importance but two of these are more important - the Mesh (Aries) Sankranti and the most important, the Makar (Capricorn) Sankranti. Transition of the Sun from Sagittarius to Capricorn, during the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere is known as Makar Sankranti. From this day begins the six-month long Uttarayana, considered very auspicious for attaining higher worlds hereafter. While the traditional Indian Calendar is basically based on lunar positions, but Sankranti is a solar event, so while dates of all festivals keep changing, the English calendar date of Makar Sankranti is always same, **14th January**. Makar Sankranti is celebrated in the Hindu calendar month of Magha. There is another significance of this day, after this day the days start becoming longer and warmer, and thus the chill of winter is on decline.

To us Hindus, the sun stands for knowledge, spiritual light and wisdom. Makar Sankranti signifies that we should turn away from the darkness of delusion in which we live, and begin to joyously let the light within us shine brighter and brighter. We should gradually begin to grow in purity, wisdom, and knowledge, even as the sun does from this day.

The solar year commences when the sun is in Aries (the first sign of the zodiac). From the point of view of mathematical calculations, the solar year is more scientific than the lunar year. One lunar year has 354 days only and lunar days (or nights) increase or decrease according to the phases of the moon. Compare this to the solar year which has 365 $\frac{1}{4}$ days and remains the same. The sun is the most important and the most prominent of our stars and the undisputed lord of our planetary system. The sun

always comes first. First day of the week commences with Sunday (Ravivar).

Science attaches great importance to the Sun. The Sun is the inexhaustible storehouse and the source of light and energy. Without sunlight creatures and vegetation would cease to exist. People will lose their life sustaining vitality. Lack of nourishing substances would lead to the end of creation. This is why the Sun's existence, movements and positions in the cosmos are so important and that is why the Sun earns our respect, admiration and reverence.

In South India, Tamil Nadu, Sankranti is known by the name of 'Pongal'. In South Africa it's called Thai Pongal. Thai is the 10th month of the Tamil calender and Pongal (means "boiling over" or "spill over") is the first day of the month of Thai. The 2018 South African Hindu calenders has set aside the 14th January as the first day of Thai. So Thai Pongal is actually a harvest festival and showing ones gratitude to Suryadeva (the Sun-Deity) and thanking him for agricultural abundance. In South Indian Hindu festivals, Thai Pongal is timed by an astronomical event - the winter solstice. Pongal is traditionally dedicated to the Sun-Deity Suryadeva, and marks the beginning of the northward journey of the Sun from its southernmost-limit, a movement traditionally referred to as uttarayana. It coincides with the festival Makara Sankranti celebrated throughout India as the winter harvest, and is usually held from January 13–15 in the Gregorian calendar i.e. from the last day of the Tamil month Maargazhi to the third day of Thai. The saying "Thai Pirandhal Vazhi Pirakkum" meaning "the commencement of Thai paves the way for new opportunities" is often quoted regarding the Pongal festival. Pongal Tamils thank the solar deity for the good harvest and consecrate the first grain to him on this 'Surya Mangalyam'. Tamilians decorate their homes with banana and mango leaves and embellish the floor with decorative patterns drawn using rice flour. The day begins with Surya Pongal or sun worship. It is very popular particularly amongst farmers. Rice and pulses cooked together in ghee and milk is offered to the family deity after the ritual worship. Pongal means "boiling over" or "spill over". The boiling over of milk in the clay pot symbolizes material abundance for the household. Pongal is also the name of a sweetened dish of rice boiled with lentils which is ritually consumed on this day. Symbolically, Pongal signifies the warming i.e. boiling of the season as the Sun travels northward towards the equinox. In essence in the South this Sankranti is a 'Puja' (worship) for the Sun-Deity. In Andhra Pradesh, it is celebrated as a three-day harvest festival Pongal. It is a big

event for the people of Andhra Pradesh. The Telugus like to call it 'Pedda Panduga' meaning big festival. The whole event lasts for four days, the first day Bhogi, the second day Sankranti, the third day Kanuma and the fourth day, Mukkanuma.

Makar Sankranti is one of the most auspicious day for the Hindus, and is celebrated in almost all parts of India, with great devotion, fervor & gaiety. Millions of people take a dip in holy places like Ganga Sagar and Prayag and pray to Suryadeva (the Sun Deity).

Makar Sankranti is the day when the glorious Sun-God of Hindus begins its ascendancy and entry into the Northern Hemisphere. Sun for us Hindus stands for Pratyaksha-Brahman - the manifest God, who symbolizes, the one, non-dual, self-effulgent, glorious divinity blessing one & all tirelessly. The Sun is the one who transcends time and also the one who rotates the proverbial Wheel of Time. The famous Gayatri Mantra, which is chanted everyday by faithful Hindus, is directed to Sun God to bless them with intelligence and wisdom. The Sun not only represents God but also stands for an embodiment of knowledge and wisdom.

Religious Significance:-

1. The Puranas say that on this day Suryadeva visits the house of his son Shani-deva, who is the swami (Lord) of Makar Rasi. This father and son do not ordinarily get along nicely, but in spite of any difference between each other Suryadeva makes it a point to meet Shani-deva on this day. The father himself comes to his son's house, for a month. This day symbolized the importance of special relationship of father and son. It is the son who has the responsibility to carry forward his father's dream and the continuity of the family.

2. It was on this day when Lord Vishnu ended the ever increasing terrorism of the Asuras by killing them. So this occasion also represents the end of negativities and beginning of an era of righteous living.

3. The great savior of his ancestors, Maharaja Bhagiratha, did great Tapasya to bring the River Ganga down on this planet earth for the redemption of 60,000 sons of Maharaja Sagara, who were burnt to ashes at the Kapila Muni Ashram, near the present day Ganga Sagara. It was on this day that Bhagiratha finally did tarpana with the Ganga jal (water) for his unfortunate ancestors and thereby liberated them from the curse. After visiting the Patala region (hellish regions) for the redemption of the curse of Maharaja Bhagiratha's ancestors Mother Ganga finally merged in the Sagar. Even today a very big Ganga Sagar Mela is organized every year on this day at the confluence of River Ganga and the Bay of Bengal and

millions take dip in the holy waters and perform tarpana (water of libations) for their ancestors.

4. Another well-known reference of this day came when the great grandsire of Mahabharata fame, Pitamaha Bhishma, declared his intent to leave his mortal coil on this day. He had the boon of Ichha-Mrityu (one who can chose his time of death) from his father, so he kept lying on the bed of arrows till this day and then left his mortal coil on Makar Sankranti day. One who dies during the period of Uttarayana, becomes free from transmigration. So this day is a very good day to start one's journey or endeavors to the higher realms beyond.

How to celebrate this auspicious day:

1. One should rise early in the morning, before sunrise, have bath and be ready with water & flowers for the sunrise. Worship the rising Sun, by offering water, flowers with both the hands & then pray with folded hands by chanting the Gayatri Mantra and pray for knowledge, wisdom and enlightenment to rise in the similar way to greater & greater heights. Pray for blessings to live a dynamic, inspired & righteous life.

2. Perform tarpana for your ancestors. Offer water to the ancestors while praying for their blessings. Resolve to redeem the pledges and pride of your Pitr's (ancestors).

3. Prepare laddus or other sweets of Til & Gur (a form of sugar) and offer them to your friends & relatives.

4. Consume Khichiri for lunch. This stands for inculcating simplicity in your life & habits.

5. Give some Daan on this day to someone who truly deserves it.

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