



Glory of Bharath » INDICA

Makara Sankranthi



Sankranthi is an auspicious festival day for the Bharathiya. There are three sacred festival nights for Bharathiya. They are Sankranthi, Sivarathri, and Navarathri. Each of these has its special significance. Sankranthi enables man to turn his vision towards the sublime (Uttharayana Punya Kala). The day is considered auspicious for man to embark on his journey towards the goal of a purposeful, sacred and blissful life. The north is described as Himachala. Himachala symbolises a heart that is pure and cool as ice (hima) and steady as mountain (achala). The message of Sankranthi is that people should direct their vision towards Himachal in this symbolic sense. It does not mean looking at the north with the physical eyes. It calls for enquiring into the truth of the spirit with the inward eye of wisdom (Janana drishti). Sankranthi signifies this internal vision.

Bharathiya festivals are full inner significance, imparting bliss, and not ostentatious shows. Every festival has a unique significance of its own. Makar Sankranti marks the commencement of the Sun's journey to the Northern Hemisphere (Makara raasi), signifying the onset of

Uttarayana Punyakalam, and is a day of celebration all over the country. The day begins with people taking holy dips in the waters and worshipping the Sun. Traditionally, this period is considered an auspicious time and the veteran Bhishma of Mahabharata chose to die during this period. Bhishma fell to the arrows of Arjun. With his boon to choose the time of his death, he waited on a bed of arrows to depart from this world only during this period. It is believed that those who die in this period have no rebirth.

In a year, Sun passes through the twelve house of the zodiac in twelve months. The Sun's entry into each house of the zodiac is described as a Sankramana. 'Kranthi' means 'change'. Sankranthi means a secured change. The Sun's entry into each house of the zodiac is not considered equally holy. What, then is the reason for giving special importance and sacredness to 'Makara Sankramana' the entry of the sun into 'Makara' (Capricorn)? Besides the physical qualities associated with the sun's movement into each house of the zodiac, there is an inner spiritual significance related to the 'Makara Sankramana'. The sun's takes its entry into Capricorn between the months of Margasira and Pushyam. In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna has declared, "Among the months, I am the month of Margasira". The Margasira month is the crown among the twelve month. What is the reason? Among the planets of the solar system, the sun is the presiding deity. Without the sun, the life process in the world will cease. During the month of Margasirsha, the world experiences the abundance of the harvested food grains, which sustain and confer joy on the people. Every farmer's granary is filled with grain. The weather during the season is cool and pleasant. It is an appropriate time for enjoying peaceful rest. It is the time when man is free from the burdens of daily toil and can devote his time to enjoy with his children and his cattle.

The Uttarayana punyakala or the Makara Sankranthi is a holy occasion to pray to the Lord. As the Vedas instruct us to pray:

Asatho maa sath Gamaya (lead me from unreal to real); Tamaso maa jyothi Gamaya (lead me from darkness into the Light); Murthyor maa Amritham Gamaya (Lead me from death to Immortality). Use this day to address this prayer, sincerely to your Ishta devatha (chosen deity) or to your Aaraadhya-devatha (the form of the Lord you like most). Festivals connected with the moon and the sun are celebrated in our country, in order to drive into the minds of men the importance of mind control, (chandra or moon is the deity of the mind) and of clarifying the intelligence (Surya or the sun is the deity of intelligence). When the sun moves northward that is God-ward, the Intelligence too must pursue Godward. That is the significance of Uttarayana.

In the Dwapara Yuga the cowherds and cowherdesses used to experience boundless joy in the presence of Krishna, forgetting themselves in their devotion to the Lord. They demonstrated the inner significance of the Sankranthi celebrations. They placed three balls of cow dung in front of their house, fixing three pumpkin flowers on their top and went round singing and dancing in adoration of Krishna. What is the significance of these three balls of cow dung? People are inclined to despise cow dung. But in the eyes of the gopikas they were



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sacred. Among the three cow dung balls the first cow dung ball represented Krishna, who was worshipped as Gopala (the protector of the cows). Krishna was adored as the bestower of joy and health. The second cow dung ball was placed as a symbol of Govardhana hill which Krishna lifted and thereby demonstrated his divinity. The third cow dung ball symbolised the Cow, the giver of milk. Gopala, Govardhana and Govu (cow) were worshipped in this manner.

In olden days people used to sprinkle water mixed with cow dung in front of their houses. The cow dung helped to destroy bacteria in the atmosphere. Cow dung was considered a symbol of health and happiness. On this day it is a custom to offer a mixture of Jaggery and sesame (til). Jaggery is sweet and is a symbol of Love. Til is also known as 'sneha' which means friendship. Therefore the offering of the Jaggery-til mixture means offering to the people love surcharged with friendliness. The message is: Develop harmony towards every one.

Sankranthi promotes love among one's kith and kin and friends as all of them come together to celebrate this festival. It is on this day the 'Gangri' bull trainers take their decorated animals from house to house, play music in front of the houses and make the bulls demonstrate their skills before the family gathering. The bulls are also made to give demonstration in the market place with a view to promote fellow feelings and harmony. The girls in every home will take their younger brothers to such demonstrations. The trainer of these animals will be dressed in a special way and display large caste marks on his forehead. The bull will be taught to respond to instructions designated to promote love and happiness in the home, by relating the story of the deeds of Rama and Sita. Rama and Sita represents the Omni-self and Nature. Their union is to be celebrated by the offering of one's love to the divine couple. Thus, the performance of the sacred bull on Sankranthi day convey a profound message to the people.

The Sankranthi festival was thus designed to promote harmony and love in the family, to make people realise the unity of the Creator and the Creation, to teach the people their obligations, to instill heroism in them by making the Sun God their example, and, above all, to make them realise their inherent Divinity. This is the sacred purpose of the Sankranthi festival. Today such a holy festival has been converted into a day for the enjoyment of Jaggery and Til, totally missing its inner significance. People are immersed in the darkness of self



indulgence. Rich cooked with Jaggery is a special preparation for the Sankranthi day. What is the reason for this? In the olden days, this sweetened rice was prepared to celebrate the gathering of the harvest and after the cows had been fed with the sweetened rice, it was scattered over the fields. On the third day, all the cattle used to be decorated and taken around the markets in procession. For this season, the festival is called in Tamilnadu as 'Matupongal' - the Pongal festival of the cattle. The bull is much more than a mere quadruped. As a vehicle of Siva, it has an honoured place in siva temple as Nandi. Its eyes are always directed towards the Lord in the sanctum. Nandi is worshipped before one enters the sanctum.

The Sankranthi festival should be regarded as the day on which man turns his vision towards God. Man's life may be compared to a stalk of sugarcane. Like the cane, which is hard and has many knots, life is full of difficulties. But these difficulties have to be over come to enjoy the bliss of the Divine, just as the sugarcane has to be crushed and its juice converted to Jaggery to enjoy the permanent sweetness of Jaggery. Enduring bliss can be got only by over-coming the trials and tribulations. Thus Sankranthi is intended to bring about various changes in man's attitude, so that he may sanctify his life. It is a festival not intended for Bharatiyas alone. Its message has a meaning for every one in the world. It has a message for people of all castes, creeds and countries.

"Samyak Kranthi I ti Sankranthi" Sankranthi confers peace and heralds a welcome change. It brings out the inner joy in people. It effects a change in the life-style. It generates sacred thoughts. People look forward to many worldly benefits also from this sacred occasion. It is also celebrated as a day, when a sacred bull is taken from house to house, while the owner recites the Ramayana story. The festival is also a joyous occasion for the youth folk.



The **Indo Gangetic plain** begins this day with taking dips in the Ganga and offering water to the Sun god. The dip is said to purify the self and bestow punya. Special puja is offered as a thanksgiving for good harvest. According to folklore, girls who take the holy dip get handsome husbands and boys get beautiful brides. Til and rice are two important ingredients of this festival. In the rice-eating belt of **Bihar** and eastern **Uttar Pradesh**, people have a special rice-centric meal on this

day. Also known as Gangasagar Mela, on this day, people come from all over India for a ceremonial cleansing in the river Hooghly, near Calcutta.

Lohri in Punjab and Haryana have always been celebrated with much exuberance and fanfare. They believe in celebrating this harvest festival together and rejoicing it to the fullest. For the masses this festival is a popular occasion for social intercourse and enjoyment. They make a bonfire and roast 'fresh chholia' (green gram) in pods with its leaves and stems intact, and eat it. They also sing and dance sitting around the fire. Lohri is thus a community festival and is always celebrated by getting together with neighbors and the relatives. The focus of Lohri is on the bonfire. The traditional dinner with makki ki roti and sarson ka saag is quintessential. The prasad comprises of five main items: til (gingelly) , gajak (a hardened bar of peanuts in jaggery or sugar syrup), gur (jaggery), moongphali (peanuts) , and phuliya (popcorn). There is puja, involving parikrama around the fire and distribution of prasad. This symbolises a prayer to Agni, the spark of life, for abundant crops and prosperity.

In Maharashtra, when two persons greet each other on this festive day, they exchange a few grains of multi-coloured sugar and fried til mixed with molasses and say "til gud ghya, god god bola" (henceforth, let there be only friendship and good thoughts between us). In Gujarat, the pandits consider Sankranti as an auspicious day to grant scholarships and certificates of merit to students who have successfully completed their studies in philosophy. In a Hindu household, new utensils are purchased and used for the first time. Brightly coloured kites dot the skies on this day.



In Karnataka, men, women and children attired in colourful tunics visit friends and relatives and exchange pieces of sugarcane, a mixture of fried til, molasses, pieces of dry coconut, peanuts and fried gram. The significance of this exchange is that sweetness should prevail in all the dealings. As part of the festival, cows and bulls are given a wash and the horns are painted with bright colours and decorated with garland, and are taken in a procession in the village to the accompaniment of pipes and drums. In the night a bonfire is lit and the animals are made to jump over the fire. It is a big event for the people of Tamil Nadu and 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.

One month preceding Sankranti is called Dhanurmasam and is also an auspicious period. People wake up early, take bath and go around the streets singing devotional songs. Houses are whitewashed and farmers clean their warehouses. Colorful rangoli (muggulu) are drawn in the front yards of every house during this month. These artistic floral designs are drawn on the floor with rice flour or fine powder from limestone. These patterns are decorated with marigold placed on cowdung balls. Colorfully dressed young girls go round them singing songs.

Sankramana is the time when the inward journey towards a pure and unsullied heart is made. Just as the sun embarks on his northward journey, Sankranti is the day on which the intellect should be turned towards the Atma for Self-realisation. In the movement of the sun from house to house in the zodiac, the entry into Capricorn is most important. Capricorn is a sign of peace and contentment. According to the Gregorian calendar, Sankranti begins on January 13 or 14. This confers a kind of mental and physical peace. In this period, farmers and others labouring on the soil enjoy a period of rest. The farmers are at ease enjoying the fruits of their labours. Their granaries are filled with grains of all kinds. During this month, farmers enjoy peace of mind and body.

Man cannot secure enduring bliss through physical pleasures. He has to discover that the source of this bliss is within himself. Sankranti enables man to make this discovery. Sankranti gives the call for total surrender. Sankranti is also a kind of family festival. The whole world is one family. The festival relates to the entire world. It is not confined to one's kith and kin.

