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# Makara Sankranti

Makara Sankranti is a festival of harvest all over the Indian Continent, especially the Indian Union.

ANDHRA PRADESH: Every month the Sun moves from one zodiac constellation to another and the day on which Sun changes the constellation is called Sankranti. Makara Sankranti (usually falls on January 14), the Sun's movement into Capricorn (Makara) constellation is considered very important, as it is the beginning of a six-month period of the auspicious time of Sun's northern course called Uttarayana Punya Kaalamu. Bhogi is the day preceding Sankranti and Kanumu is the day after Sankranti. One month preceding Makara Sankranti is known as Dhanurmasamu. During the entire Dharnurmasamu girls decorate the mungili or vaakili (the entrance to the house) with huge

muggulu (designs with sand of lime stone or rice flour, turmeric and kumkuma) with Gobbemmalu (globes made of cow dung and decorated with flowers, turmeric and kumkuma, and incense) in the center, and worship Gobbemma (Goddess) while singing and dancing around the muggu (design). On Bhogi day in the early morning a bon fire is lit up with waste, before the traditional special bath. In the evening Bommala Koluvu (arrangement of images of Gods, toys and dolls) and Bhogi pallu (Zyziphus fruits, floral petals and coins) showers for children, Perantamu (gift giving, that includes clothes, lentils, betel leaves, betel nuts, flowers, turmeric and kumkuma) for women are given. Pulagamu with fresh rice from the harvest and a kalagalupu koora (mixed vegetable curry) with chikkudu (beans), vankaya (egg-plant or brinjal) and other vegetables are prepared. Pongali (rice pudding with milk) is an important item during this festival. Special dishes like karapupusa, chakkilalu (brittle salted and peppered lentil-rice pretzels), palakayalu (hard fried rice globules), ariselu (sweet rice cakes) etc., are also prepared. On Kanumu day animals are decorated and races are held, sometimes the banned cockfights, bullfights and ramfights are included. Sun, Mahabali (a mythological king of anti-Gods or asuras or danavas) and [Godadevi \(Goddess Godadevi- see below\)](#) are worshipped during this harvest festival.

"Haridaasu (servant of Lord Hari/Vishnu)" is a special attraction of this festival, just like Santa for Christmas. These Haridaasus wake up very early in pre-dawn hours, bathe, wear special saffron clothes, and visit each home in the village. They wear Vaishnavite markings on the face, necklaces of rudraksha (probably seeds of Guazuma tomentosa plant) beads, flower garlands, tamboora (stringed musical instrument) on one shoulder, chirutalu (castanets) in one hand, anklets with bells,

etc., and visit homes while singing religious songs (Vaishnavite, especially praising Lord Rama). They collect alms (especially rice), provided by the villagers, in a pot called akshayapaatra carried on the head. Usually people belonging to saataana, daasara, raaju etc., castes/tribes practice this kind of lifestyle. Villagers compete to give alms to these Haridaasus.

**ASSAM:** Bhogali Bihu is the Assamese harvest festival, which is celebrated to mark the end of the winter paddy harvest, in January/February or the month of Maagh. On the night before the festival, people fast and pray, and thatched pavilions are put up around the countryside. As a sign of the festival having begun, the pavilions are set on fire at dawn. Bull fights and celebrations mark the day.

**BENGAL:** The largest gathering in Bengal is held every year during the Makara Sankranti festival at the confluence of the Ganga and the Sea. On this day, people come from all over Bengal for a ceremonial cleansing in the River Hooghly, near Calcutta. In Kurseong, situated at an altitude of 2458 mts. (4864ft), 51 kms from Siliguri and 30 kms from Darjeeling, this festival is celebrated at the peak of winter. People go to temples and riverbanks for worship and holy dip.

**HARYANA and PUNJAB:** In January, the people of Punjab and Harayana celebrate Lohri, marking the end of winter. The countryside is dotted by bonfires, around which people gather to meet friends and relatives and sing folk songs. Children go from house to house singing, and collecting money and sweets.

**RAJASTAN:** It is a big kite festival in most parts of the Indian

Continent. In Rajasthan, cities like Jaipur and Ahmedabad skies are filled with kites. In Jodhpur, the Desert Kite Festival is held during Makar Sankranti. The three day Festival starts with an Inauguration at the Polo Ground. The Festival includes two sections - the Fighter Kite Competition and Display Flying - with trophies in both categories. Every evening participants meet for dinner at an exotic location. On the final day the Festival shifts to the exquisite lawns of the Umaid Bhawan Palace, the royal residence of the Maharaja of Jodhpur. The finals of the Fighter Kite Competition and the final judging of the Display Kites is followed by the prize giving and closing ceremony and a farewell dinner with the Maharaja (the King). For the year 2000, kite fliers can register for a fee of US\$250.00 per person that includes hotel, meals, and local transportation for six days (the Festival 2000: 09 to 15 January) at Jodhpur and Jaipur.

TAMILNADU: Pongal in Tamilnadu is celebrated to mark the withdrawal of the southeast monsoons as well as the reaping of the harvest. Pongal is strictly a rural festival. It is celebrated on the first day of the Tamil month 'Thai'. 'Thai' is the month that is supposed to be very auspicious for every kind of activity. The Sun is worshipped for his rays are responsible for the life on earth. It is the biggest harvest festival, spread over four days. 'Bogi' is celebrated on January 13, 'Pongal' on Jan 14, 'Maattuppongali' on Jan 15, and 'Thiruvalluvar Day' on Jan 16. In fact, the name of the festival is derived from the Pongal, rice pudding made from freshly harvested rice, milk and jaggery. The first day, Bhogi Pongal, is a day for the family. Surya Pongal, the second day, is dedicated to the worship of Surya, the Sun God. The third day of Pongal, Mattu Pongal, is for worship of the

cattle. Cattle are bathed, their horns polished and painted in bright colours, and garlands of flowers placed around their necks. Pongal is associated with cleaning and burning of rubbish, symbolizing the destruction of evil. Decorative designs are traced on floors and on the day of the Pongal, newly harvested rice is cooked in homes to acclaim the bounty of the gods. In Chennai (Madras), a rath yatra procession is taken out from the Kandaswamy Temple. In Madurai, Tanjore and Tiruchirrapalli, where Pongal is known as Jellikattu, bundles of money are tied to the horns of bulls, and villagers try and wrest the bundles from them. Community meals are made from the freshly gathered harvest and enjoyed by the entire village. Thiruvalluvar has done a great contribution to Tamil literature with 'Thirukkural'. There are 1330 verses in this work and they talk about all aspects of life. Thiruvalluvar day is celebrated on Jan 16.

Sreenivasarao Vepachedu, January 13, 2000

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## Godadevi or Andal



A devout Brahmin, named Vishnucitta lived in Villiputtur, a town near Madurai in the present State of [Tamil Nadu](#) in the Indian Union.

His daily duties included procuring flowers for the worship of the Lord Vishnu at the local temple. One morning, as he went about his business, he discovered a baby girl lying under a tulasi plant in his flower garden. Having no family of his own, Vishnucitta felt it was God's grace that gave him this child and named her Godai, or "gift of Mother Earth." Filled with joy, he took her home and raised her as his own.

Sri Godadevi, who is also called Sri Andal, is the last of the 12 Alvars of Vaishnavism. Sri Andal is the incarnation of Sri Bhoodevi (Mother Earth), the divine consort of Srimannaaraayana (the Supreme Lord), who took birth on this earth to liberate suffering human beings from worldly bondage. She sang thirty sweet songs containing the cardinal principles of Sri Vaishnava Dharma (Vaishnava Religion) during the month of *dhanurmasam* (December/January). Singing these songs, with understanding of their inner meaning, will bring peace, prosperity and unity with the divine. These thirty songs are called Pasuras of Tiruppavai

(<http://namperumal.tripod.com/Tiruppavai.html>). For the recital of Tirupavai visit:

<http://www.teluguone.com/bhakti/venkateswara/purusha/tiruppavai.jsp>.

For Telugu script of Tiruppavai, visit:

<http://www.htci.org/thiruppavai/telugu.pdf> and in Roman script:

<http://www.htci.org/thiruppavai/English.pdf>. For more on Godadevi visit: <http://www.ramanuja.org/sv/alvars/andal/>.

Sri Krishnadevaraya (16th Century A.D.), a great Sanskrit scholar and a mighty emperor of Vijayanagar empire, wrote Andal's life history in his Amukthamalyada in Telugu, in *prabandha* style. *Prabandhamu* is a variety of Telugu poetry which is mainly a narrative or a continued discourse. Often sensuality (*sringaramu*) dominates in *prabandhas*. In Amuktamalyada, Emperor Krishnaraya beautifully describes the pangs of separation suffered by Godadevi (the incarnation of Mother Earth, the wife of Lord Vishnu) for her lover Lord Vishnu. He

describes Godadevi's physical beauty in thirty verses. Even the descriptions of spring and monsoon seasons add to the strength of sensuality. The sensual pleasure of union extends beyond the physical level and becomes a path to the spirituality and ultimate union with the lord Vishnu leading to Moksha, a state of being unity with God. Here Godadevi represents the humanity and her longing for Lord Vishnu (the Ultimate Supreme God) is the humanity's search for Moksha and divinity. (Visit also: <http://www.vepachedu.org/krishnarayalu.htm>).

The famous '[Suprabhatham](#)' which reverberates daily in the hill temple of Lord Venkateswara at 3 a.m. will temporarily go off the air from December 17 following the onset of 'Dhanurmasam'. Instead, the priests will recite verses from Andal's 'Tiruppavai' during the period which will last till the Bhogi festival. Same is the case with all the Vishnu temples located elsewhere in the country, in line with an age-old convention.

[The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams \(TTD\)](#) has arranged a daily discourse on 'Tiruppavai' along with other places at its Annamacharya Kalamandiram from December 16.



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**Om! Asatoma Sadgamaya, Tamasoma Jyotirgamaya, Mrityorma  
Amritamgamaya, Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantih!**  
**(Aum! Lead the world from wrong path to the right path, from ignorance  
to knowledge, from mortality to immortality and peace!)**

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