

## Makara Sankranti

Makara Sankranti is a popular Indian festival celebrated in many parts of India. It is known as the harvest festival. Makara Sankranti or Sankranti is also known as Pongal in South India. It is the only Hindu festival that follows a solar calendar and is celebrated on the fourteenth of January every year. This festival has astronomical importance: it marks the beginning of Uttarayana, the sun's movement to the north for a period of six months. In the following six months the days are longer and warmer. Sankranti also marks the end of winter and the arrival of the spring season in India. This festival is celebrated at the end of the harvest season, giving farmers a break from their daily routine. Farmers perform a pooja to signal the end of the traditional harvest. It is celebrated differently in different regions of India.

In Andhra Pradesh, Sankranti is celebrated for three days. The first day of Sankranti is called Bhogi, which represents transformation. In many families, younger children are showered with rice and fruits called "Regi Pandlu". It is said that doing this protects the children from evil eye. Another ritual observed on this day is Bhogi Mantalu (Bonfire). Girls dance around the bonfire singing songs. Indian sweets, snacks like nuvvula laddoos, karjakayalu, chakilalu, pala kayalu are prepared in massive quantities and are shared with friends and relatives. The second day of Sankranti is called Makar Sankranti, also called "Pedda Panduga". On this day, everyone wears new clothes, prays to God, and prepares special offerings to god. The third day of Sankranti is called Kanuma. Govardhana Puja or Gopuja (worship of cows) is the major ritual on this day. Farmers honor their cattle by decorating them with vermillion and turmeric and performing Aarthi.

The main attractions of Sankranti are Rangoli, Regi Pandlu, Kite flying, and Bommala Koluvu. The home fronts are decorated with beautiful and rich muggus (Rangoli). Mother Earth is the most patient of all. We show respect to Mother Earth by decorating her with spectacular artwork and colors. These muggus are to be drawn before the sun rise welcoming the sun god. Kite flying is also an important part of this festival. There are kites of all sizes and colors soaring through the sky. Most rooftops are crowded with neighbors and relatives competing against each other. Bommala Koluvu is the display of dolls on a platform. The steps are always numbered odd and often follow a specific theme such as Ramayana. Women often take their children to visit each other's house to see the display of dolls and distribute leaves and fruits.

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