**Makar Sankranti**

Makar Sankranti falls on January 14 or January 15 in certain years. Makar Sankranti is the very first major festival to be celebrated in India and is one of the universally celebrated Hindu festivals. Unlike other Hindu festivals — which follow the lunar calendar — Makar Sankranti follows the solar calendar and thus falls on the same day each year. This festival signals the end of winter and the beginning of the harvest, and is even observed outside India — in Nepal, Bangladesh, Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar — to name a few countries.

## History of Makar Sankranti:

This festival has been celebrated by Hindus since ancient times. Details of this festival are also mentioned in Hindu religious texts and documents.

According to one popular legend, this festival originated because people were celebrating a demon’s downfall. As the story goes, a particularly murderous demon named Sankarasur would torture and kill humans for no particular reason. Hearing this, a goddess named Sankranti came down to Earth and vanquished him. Ever since then, Hindus have held this festival in her name.

People also worship the Sun god, Surya, on this day since the sun has a lot to do with the changing season. From this day on, the sun starts moving northwards.

The festivities themselves have multiple traditions and legends attached to them. One main tradition centers around kite-flying under the sun. People believe this practice cleanses bodies of infections and germs after a long winter.

Traditional sweet dishes are consumed on this day, a tradition that also has a legend attached to it. Apparently, the Sun god Surya never quite got along with his son, Shani. On this day, however, they decide to let bygones be bygones, and Surya visits Shani’s home, carrying sweets as a mark of forgiveness. And so, Hindus eat and distribute sweets with loved ones.

Another tradition this festival is famous for — the spiritual element. People believe that holy waters — and a cleansing dip in them — are essential to Makar Sankranti celebrations. They visit holy rivers like the Ganga and Yamuna in India, on mass pilgrimages.

Across many parts of India, this season means the early stages of the agricultural cycle, when crops have been sown and the hard work in the fields is almost complete. Therefore, this time signifies a period of socializing and families enjoying each other’s company.