

4. The Sacred Message Of A Holy Festival

The Sun appeared serenely peaceful.

The day started to get shorter.

And the chill wind blew fiercely.

The fields were ripe with the golden crop.

The farmers rejoiced in singing.

The buds of flowers blossomed

On the banks of rivers like garlands.

Farmers were bringing home the newly harvested grain.

And hailed the arrival of the sweet

Festival of Sankraanthi.

Embodiments of the Divine *Aatma!* Many persons in the world have expounded in different ways the nature of divinity. Even in Bharath, although from ancient times profound spiritual truths have been proclaimed and propagated, the minds of men have not turned towards the sublime. It is the minds of men that need to be changed, not their external appearances. Men are judged by their qualities, not their garments.

"Yath Dhrishyam Thannashyam" (That which is perceived is perishable). Everything associated with the phenomenal world is continually changing. That which is subject to change is impermanent. What is unchanging is the eternal. By attaching excessive value to the changing things of the world, man is making himself remote from the changeless and eternal Reality. Men should endeavour to realise the eternal and unchanging *Aatma* (Omni-Self).

Significance of Sun's entry into Capricorn

In a year, the Sun passes through the 12 houses of the Zodiac in 12 months. The Sun's entry into each house of the Zodiac is described as a *Sankramana*. *Kraanthi* means change. *Sankraanthi* means a sacred change. The Sun's entry into every house in the Zodiac is not considered as 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 relating to the *Makara Sankramana*.

The Sun's entry into Capricorn takes place in mid passage between the months of Margasheersha and Pushyami. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sri Krishna has declared: "Among the months I am the month of Margasheersha." The Margasheersha month is the crown among the 12 months. 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 Margasheersha, 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 enjoyment with his children and his cattle.

Every experience is reflection of the Inner Being

However, what is the connection between these physical comforts and the spiritual significance of this season? Man is a lover of the beautiful. He rejoices at the sight of good food. It may be asked whether this joy, which he experiences is related solely to physical things or has it an inner spiritual basis? It is not the body that experiences joy. It is the *Aatma* (the Indwelling Spirit). The joy that one derives from looking at others is not related to the body but the *Aatma*. What the eye sees, the ear hears, the mind thinks, or the heart feels, all of them are experiences of the *Aatma*. The senses are only instruments. Every experience is a reflection of the Inner Being. Only when this truth is recognised will it be possible to comprehend to some extent the nature of the Divine.

For all actions, the inspirer, the performer and the experiencer is the Sun-God. For man, caught up in a meaningless existence and going through an endless round of futile activities, the Sun-God stands out as the exemplar of tireless and selfless service. He enjoys no respite from work. He is above praise and censure. He carries on his duties with absolute equanimity. Everything he does is only for the well-being of the world and not for causing any harm. It is only man's senses which prove helpful or harmful to him. When man submits to his senses, they become his enemies. When man masters the senses they become his friends. Friends and enemies result from the strength or weakness of men.

Earlier, a student in his speech mentioned that to Vibhishana, who believed in God, Rama was a friend. To the unbelieving Ravana, Rama became an enemy. Hence, man's happiness or sorrow stems from his belief or disbelief.

Faith leads to God

The primary motto for man should be *Sraddha* (faith or trust). The ancients declared: "Believe and Live." Without Faith you cannot live happily. Only when you have the belief that one is your mother you develop love for her. Likewise, a woman loves a baby only when she feels he is her child. In the same manner, the recognition of the Divine arises from Faith.

Where there is Faith, there is Love.

Where there is Love, there is Peace.

Where there is Peace, there is Truth.

Where there is Truth, there is Bliss.

Where there is Bliss, there is God.

Thus it is Faith that reminds us of God.

All that is taught or learnt today appears to consist of pompous verbiage concerning the external world. Doubtless, there is a great deal of talk about Divinity and Spirituality. But one cannot notice in these preachers any sacred mark of Truth, Love or Peace associated with Godly men. Are men to be esteemed for the clothes they wear, the speeches they make, or the "punditry" they display? No. The only person worthy of esteem as a wise man is the one whose actions correspond to his thoughts and words. The Divine judges men by their thoughts and motives. God sees only the inner purity of man's motives and not his external appearance or the power and pelf he possesses. Valmiki, Nanda, Kuchela, Gajendra (the Lord of the Elephants), the child Dhruva, the illiterate Sabari, Vidura and Hanuman are all examples of beings who enjoyed God's

grace only through their devotion and not because of birth, wealth, scholarship, or any other accomplishment.

Entertain good thoughts and good feelings

What is *Bhakti* (Devotion)? *Bhakti* is directing one's sacred love towards God. Man gets bound by his attachment, through egoism, to the transient things of the world.

Your primary task is to discharge your duty. This does not mean renouncing worldly life or your obligations to your family. Keep your mind serene and unruffled. All the changes affect the external. They do not affect the internal experience. Entertain always good thoughts and good feelings.

In this connection, an incident from Jesus's life may serve as a good example. Jesus saw in the market place a woman who was being stoned by people around her as one who had gone astray. Jesus approached them and said: "Oh People! you are all persecuting this woman for some physical misconduct. Think how many such sins you are committing mentally. Whoever has not committed such a sin even mentally, let him cast the first stone. All others have no right to throw stones at her!"

People go on judging who is a sinner and who is a pure person, but they should enquire within themselves how far they are sinners or meritorious. Everyone must try to keep his mind free from bad thoughts. The Sankraanthi Festival is intended to make people embark on this exercise in transformation.

Symbolism of Sankraanthi celebration

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. On Sankraanthi Day they used to employ cow-dung as a sacred means for cleansing purposes. They demonstrated also the inner significance of the Sankraanthi celebration. They placed three balls of cow-dung in front of their houses, 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 sacred. In olden days, people used to sprinkle water mixed with cow-dung in front of their houses. The cow-dung helped to destroy the bacteria in the atmosphere. The cow-dung was considered a symbol of health and happiness. The first cow-dung ball represented Krishna, who was worshipped as Gopala (the protector of cows). Krishna was adored as the bestower of joy and health. The second cowdung ball was placed as a symbol of the Govardhana Hill which Krishna lifted and thereby demonstrated His divinity. The third cow-dung ball symbolised the cow, which is the source of health and joy for the people as the giver of milk. Gopala, Govardhana and *Go* (the cow) were worshipped in this manner.

Among vegetables the pumpkin has a place of honour as the largest in size. The *Gopikas* looked upon the pumpkin as a symbol of large-heartedness. Hence, pumpkins were offered as fitting gifts on Sankraanthi Day. What is the gain from this offering? The pumpkin does not rot quickly. It can be preserved for a long period. Any number of edible preparations can be made from it. It can also be used in combination with many other vegetables. Because of its distinct qualities, the offer of a pumpkin also meant making an offering of one's virtues.

Develop harmony towards everyone

Sankraanthi is a holy day for many reasons. It was the day on which Aadhi Shankara took *Sanyasa* (renounced all worldly ties and donned the ochre robe). On this day it is the usual custom to offer to people a mixture of jaggery and Thil (sesame). Jaggery is sweet and is a symbol of love. Thil is also known as *sneha*, which means friendship. Therefore, the offer of the jaggery-thil mixture means offering to people love surcharged with friendliness. Develop harmony towards everyone. Much of what passes for friendship today consists in associating with persons when they are affluent and benefiting from their money. When they are in distress, the same persons will not even look at them. This is not friendship at all. True friendship must emanate from the heart and should remain unaffected by weal or woe. In fact, God alone can be an unfailing friend in all situations. He is with you, above you, below you, beside you and around you.

The profound message of Sankraanthi

Today people do not rely on such Divine friendship. They place their faith in the transient things of the world. The message of Sankraanthi is the promotion of love among one's kith and kin and friends by all of them coming together to celebrate this festival. It is on this day that the "Ganga" bull trainers take their decorated animals from house to house, play music in front of the homes and make the bulls demonstrate their skills before the family gatherings.

The bulls are also made to give demonstrations in the market place with a view to promoting fellow feeling 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. He will carry a small whip which is used for training the bull. The bull will be taught to respond to instructions designed to promote love and happiness in the home by relating the story of the wedding of Rama and Sita. Rama and Sita represent the Omni-Self and *Prakruthi* (Nature) respectively. 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 'Sankraanthi day conveyed a profound message to the people.

Because Sankraanthi was deemed the most important festival, it was the day on which the newlywed bridegroom visited the bride's home. It was the day on which many people called on others as a mark of goodwill. There were rejoicing in every home because of the get-together of all kinsfolk. (Swami recited a poem describing how the young girls in the family celebrated the occasion by cutting jokes and playing tricks).

The Sankraanthi festival was thus designed to promote harmony and love in the family, to make people realise the unity of the Creator and creation, to teach the people their obligation to instil 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 Sankraanthi festival.

Sankraanthi festival: then and now

Today such a holy festival has been converted into a day for the enjoyment of jaggery and thil, totally missing its inner significance. People are immersed in the darkness of self-indulgence.

Rice cooked with jaggery is a special preparation for Sankraanthi day. What is the reason for this? In the olden days, this sweet rice was prepared to celebrate the gathering of the harvest and after the cows had been fed with the sweet rice, it was scattered over the fields. On the third day, all the cattle used to be decorated and taken round the bazaar in procession. For this reason, the

festival was called in Tamil Nadu "*Maattuppongai*"--the Pongal festival of the cattle. The bull is much more than a mere quadruped. As the vehicle of Shiva, it has an honoured place in the Shiva temple as Nandi. Its eyes are always directed towards the Lord in the sanctum. The Nandi is worshipped before one enters the sanctum.

Develop faith in God and serve fellowmen

The Sankraanthi 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 sugar cane. Like the cane, which is hard and has many knots, life is full of difficulties. But these difficulties have to be overcome to enjoy the bliss of the Divine, just as the sugarcane has to be crushed and its juice converted into jaggery to enjoy the permanent sweetness of jaggery.

Enduring bliss can be got only by overcoming trials and tribulations. Gold cannot be made into an attractive jewel without its being subjected to the process of melting in a crucible and being beaten into the required shape. When I address devotees as *Bangaaru* (Golden one), I am considering you as precious beings. But only by going through the vicissitudes of life with forbearance can you become attractive jewels. You should not allow yourselves to be overwhelmed by difficulties.

Develop self-confidence and have firm faith in God. With unshakeable faith, dedicate yourselves to the service of your fellowmen and lead exemplary lives.

Today the Sun-God begins his northward journey, *Uttarayana*. The noble and heroic warrior Bhishma waited for fifty six days so that he could give up his life in *Uttarayana*.

Do your duty like the Sun

The Sun, in entering on his northward journey, hailed the Himalayas in the north as the beautiful abode of Lord Shiva. The heart should be regarded as the abode of the Lord and the vision should be turned to experience the Divine. The human heart itself symbolises the Himalayas as the abode of purity and peace.

The Sun's northward journey is a pointer to the path man should take to realise God. The Sun is the supreme example of selfless and tireless service. The world cannot survive without the Sun. Life on earth is possible only because of the Sun. The Sun teaches man the lesson of humble devotion to duty, without any conceit. The Sun is the supreme example for everyone that he should do his duty with devotion and dedication. Doing one's duty is the greatest *Yoga*, as pointed out by Krishna in the Gita. Let your actions and thoughts be good. You will then experience the Bliss Divine.

Sankraanthi 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 Bharathiyas alone. Its message has a meaning for everyone in the world. It has a message for people of all climes, creeds and countries. *Kraanthi* (change) and *Shanthi* (peace) both reside in the heart. You need not search for them in the outside world. Discover them within you. This is your duty. Serve your parents and society. Lead a Godly life, dedicating all your actions to God. Live in Love!

Poornachandra Auditorium Sankraanthi Day, 15 Jan 1992

What exactly is the cause of all grief? It is the attachment to the body that produces grief as well as its immediate precursors: affection and hate. These two are the results of the intellect considering some things and conditions as beneficial, and some other things and conditions as harmful. This is a delusion, this idea of beneficence and malevolence. Still you get attached to objects that are considered beneficial, and you start hating the others. But, from the highest point of view, there is neither. The distinction is just meaningless. There is no two at all. How can there be good and bad then? To see two where there is only one, that is delusion or ignorance. The ignorance that plunged Arjuna into grief was of this nature-- seeing many, when there is only ONE.

Sathya Sai Baba