



January 14th 2013

MAKAR SANKRANTI!

What is Hinduism?

Hinduism originated in India. There are nearly one billion Hindus worldwide, with the majority living in India and neighbouring Nepal. It's pluralistic, recognising that we are all different and has no single

founder, no single scripture and no single set of teachings, it is for this reason that Hinduism is often referred to as a way of life rather than a distinct religion. Most Hindus consider the Veda as sacred scripture, draw on a common set of values called the Dharma and believe in the cycle of Karma, a law of action and consequence that affects all existence; a rotation of birth, death and rebirth.

Hindu Gods and Goddesses

Within Hinduism several deities are worshipped, some of the most recognised are:

- **Brahma** – creator of all the universe and creatures within it
- **Lord Vishnu** – the preserver and protector of the universe
- **Lord Shiva** – to destroy the universe in order to recreate
- **Lakshmi** – consort of Vishnu, goddess of wealth and purity

What is Makar Sankrant?

Makar Sankrant is an auspicious occasion, also commonly recognised as the kite festival. Happening ten days before the festival of spring, Vasant Panchami, it is a colourful celebration across the world. It marks the transition from long winter months of hibernation to the advent of prosperity and the germination period. It coincides with Pausha, for many this signifies the beginning of the harvest season, alongside many weddings and house inaugurations.

When is Makar Sankrant?

It is the only solar event in the Hindus usually lunar calendar, falling in mid-January. Depending on the solar cycle, it's the day that the sun starts its journey back into the northern hemisphere, from being close to the tropic of Capricorn moving back to the tropic of Cancer.

How is Makar Sankrant celebrated?

Makar Sankranti celebrations vary depending on area. Within India the festival lasts anything between one and seven days and worship is directed at numerous symbols, from the Goddess Lakshmi in West Bengal to Lord Shiva in Darjeeling. Kites are traditionally flown as offerings to the Sun, bonfires are lit and delicacies shared. In the state of Punjab sesame seed oil lamps are lit which are believed to bring prosperity and rid sins whilst the famous 'Bhangra' dance is performed. In Rajasthan many exchange small gifts to Brahmins or the less fortunate.

Glossary of terms

Atman

This refers to the 'eternal self'; the real self beyond any form of ego or falsehood. Also referred to as spirit or soul, understanding oneself is considered the first principle in realising Moksha (liberation).

Brahman

Brahman refers to a transcendent power beyond the universe, not identical to God. Most Hindus believe that Brahman is spread through everything but they do not worship Brahman. Rather, they believe that Hindu deities are manifestations of Brahman.

Dharma

This refers to duty and morality. Dharma gives humans the opportunity to act righteously as revealed in the Vedas. Each person has their own unique form of Dharma, what is correct for one person may not be correct for another.

Karma

Karma refers to action and reaction, it relates to a cycle of rebirth meaning that any action can surpass this life into the next. Positive or virtuous action, in line with Dharma, will return good responses, and bad actions, inharmonious with Dharma, will cause the opposite.

Purushartha

A person's goals, each are different according to the position and stage of that person's life. The codified aims fit into three categories; Dharma, profit or worldly success and pleasure.

Samsara

The process of reincarnation. A continuous cycle in which the soul is reborn repeatedly into a new physical body, this can be human, animal or divine being. Karma will be the deciding factor in the next incarnation. Death

is the last samsara in which Moksha will come; the end of the cycle.

Veda

The Vedas define truth for Hindus and they are the most ancient religious scripture. Vedic texts are often called 'shruti' which literally means 'hearing' because for hundreds of years they were passed on orally. They contain four parts; the Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads.

Other dates to remember

March 8th – Holi

March 21st – Hindi New Year

October 13th – Navratri

November 11th – Diwali



Sacred Spaces

Shree Radha Krishna Mandir

Gandi Hall, Brunswick Rd, Withington, Manchester, M20 4QB.

Gita Bhavan Hindu Temple

231 Withington Rd, Whalley Range, Manchester, M16 8LU.

Hinduism at the University

Religion and belief at the University of Manchester:

www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/equality-and-diversity/equality-groups/religion-belief/

Religious observance guidance:

<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=8362>

Sacred spaces map:

<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=9044>