

Thai Pongal - Another Festival of Light

Thai Pongal is celebrated in the early hours of the morning when the sun begins to rise. On the first day of January according to the Tamil calendar, clear designs of white colour flour are drawn on the floor as a boundary, with small entrances around the area where the first pot of rice from the new harvest of the season will be boiled with pure white milk, added with jaggery and served with sugarcane.

This festival is actually a recognition of the service we receive from the sun and all those who helped in reaping the fruit of the farmers' efforts as harvest. As an expression of gratitude the first pot of rice from the new harvest is offered to the elements, which had served the farmers.

Religious festivals and rituals express a great reverence towards 'LIGHT'. Also many Beliefs, Faiths, traditions and customs have honoured and worshiped light as a symbol of Supremacy.

Every year Buddhists celebrate Vesak festival with lanterns, and deepaks (small oil lamps) and make the temples and the whole area light up with so much of splendor and beauty. In the Christian Church the lights of the many candles add to the serenity of the Church and their prayer. Similarly there has never been any observation of religion by the Hindus without the light of an oil lamp.

As there can't be a memorial for something, which has not existed or happened in the past, this similarity in all religions regarding the reverence towards 'light' makes sense when it is said that it means the enlightenment of the intellect at some point of time in life. Although physical lights are being used for many reasons to represent the enlightenment of the intellect, we all know that light plays an important part in the life of human beings.

When the sun, the natural stage-light of this world, finishes its duty, people automatically go for an artificial mode of lighting at the place they reside. Though there are eyes, they need light to remove the curtain of darkness and to see clearly for any information's accuracy.

Human mind generally and naturally have a tendency of fear and dislike towards darkness. The very visible reason is the confusion they experience while in darkness. Darkness gives an experience of discomfort and insecurity however, even if people are equipped with all kinds of instruments for comfort and safety. Darkness makes people feel lonely as they can't see and enjoy the company they are with. Though a good deed may be carried out in the dark, it creates unwanted suspicion in the mind.

When day breaks, there is always refreshment in our approach, attitude and vision. The mind and the body are ready to focus on the aim, face the challenges and to follow the discipline as the daylight brings in another chance to live. With a full stop to the past, the journey towards creating a better future begins at the present.

People concentrate on religious activities in the mornings soon after sunrise. In a way, the feelings of the mind had created a tradition and made mornings into an auspicious time. Although this is the apparent significance of Thai Pongal too, the ritual is also a memorial of an unforgettable and auspicious event that takes place in the unlimited drama of life.

When there is a misunderstanding about the self, others or a situation, confusion and fluctuation of that affects the human mind. Then when by chance or by our own effort we come to know the Truth, the light of right understanding begins to flash through enlightening the mind.

As a result unnecessary doubts disappear; purity in thoughts and the ability to discern accurately develops; the mind gets cleared; relationships get renewed and life is sweetened with peace and happiness.

In other words when the Sun of Knowledge rises, the darkness of ignorance disappears in the world and brings such a joy and peace through the purity of its knowledge. It is pure, true and accurate knowledge that make us create a better world for ourselves. True knowledge teaches us the philosophy of Karma, sinful karma and neutral karma. It teaches us such karma that one doesn't have to repent for it, but reap a very elevated fruit of it in future.

This enlightenment, which can settle so many problems in life and make us very efficient in our decision making and discernment is impossible to be brought into our very lives by ordinary human beings, but only by God, The Supreme Truth Himself. This is the true significance of the rituals we perform during the Pongal celebrations.

In the new pot of intellect which has developed a new approach towards life, the milk of pure thoughts is poured and added with the jaggery of good and elevated qualities of life. When it is boiled in the fire of intensified attention on the mind, happiness overflows and spreads to every nook and corner of life.

That sweet rice of inner happiness is shared with everyone and the relationships gives the experience of sweetness, which is represented as the sugarcane. The result of elevated actions and efforts are symbolized as the new harvest.

The rice is first offered to the sun for the service it provides, lovingly remembering the Sun of Knowledge whose light of knowledge transforms sorrows and bestows happiness and purity of mind.

When festivals are celebrated just as a ritual with devotional feelings, of course, we attain the joy and contentment. When the festival, truly takes place in our lives, it is celebrated with the right understanding. Then the joy and contentment experienced in life practically will last for not only this life but after this life, for many lives also.

This year when the milk fills the pot and overflows joyfully let us remember the golden red rays of light that comes from a white point of light - GOD SHIVA - The Father of All Souls - The Supreme Truth of the Universe - The Sun of Knowledge is filling us with Love, Peace and Happiness.

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