

## MAKARA SANKRANTI - SIGNIFICANCE:

When you think of the number 12, what comes to mind? The 12 months of the year, perhaps? Let's set that aside for a moment. The calendar months we follow today differ from traditional ones. Another connection to the number 12 is the **12 zodiac signs**, right?

1. **Mesha (Aries)**
2. **Vrishabha (Taurus)**
3. **Mithuna (Gemini)**
4. **Karkataka (Cancer)**
5. **Simha (Leo)**
6. **Kanya (Virgo)**
7. **Tula (Libra)**
8. **Vrischika (Scorpio)**
9. **Dhanur (Sagittarius)**
10. **Makara (Capricorn)**
11. **Kumbha (Aquarius)**
12. **Meena (Pisces)**

To understand their significance, let's explore two concepts: **physical motion** and **relative motion**.

**Physical motion** is what truly happens. For example, the Earth revolves around the Sun.

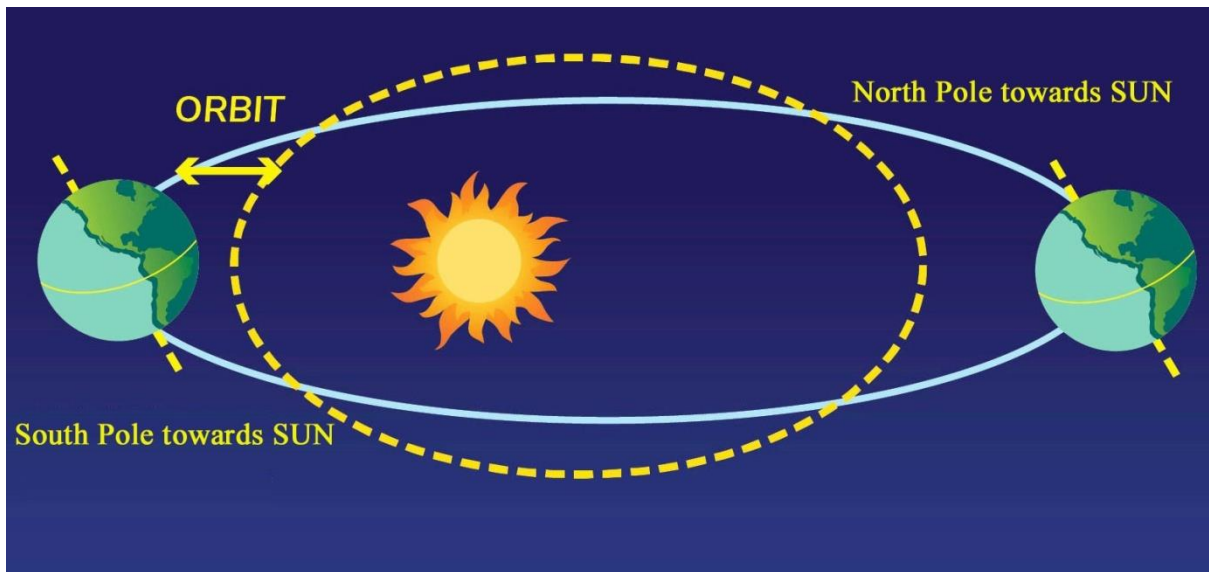
**Relative motion** is how things appear to move from our perspective. Due to Earth's rotation, it *seems* like the Sun moves around us, even though that's not the case.

NASA's telescopes confirm recently that Earth orbits the Sun. However, from "relative motion viewpoint" on Earth, it looks like the Sun travels through the 12 zodiac signs. Each zodiac sign is made up of distinct stars that move very slowly. But because Earth rotates much faster, these stars appear to shift positions.

This apparent movement creates the illusion that the Sun moves through each zodiac sign over the year. One important transition is when the Sun moves from **Sagittarius (Dhanur)** to **Capricorn (Makara)**. This shift is known as **Makara Sankramana**, meaning the Sun's entry into Capricorn. This event is celebrated as **Makara Sankranti**—one of the most significant festivals in India. But did you know there are actually **12 Sankrantis**—one for each transition between zodiac signs?

### Why Is Makara Sankranti So Important?

Makara Sankranti marks the **Sun's northward journey (Uttarayana)**, symbolizing longer days, increased sunlight, and the start of the harvest season. It represents a time of prosperity, growth, and new beginnings. This celestial event has deep spiritual and cultural importance, celebrated with joy, rituals, and gratitude for nature's bounty.



Looking at the image of Earth's motion, you can see that Earth is tilted at **23.5 degrees**. This tilt causes different parts of the planet to be closer to the Sun at different times. When the **northern hemisphere** tilts towards the Sun, we experience **Uttarayanam**, starting on January 14th. Six months later, on **July 14th**, the **southern hemisphere** tilts towards the Sun, marking the beginning of **Dakshinayanam**.

**Uttarayanam** is a time of positive energy, growth, and enjoyment.

**Dakshinayanam** is viewed as a period of hard work, preparation, and challenges, particularly for farmers during the rainy season.

The efforts made during **Dakshinayanam** bear fruit during **Uttarayanam**. This cycle of **Uttarayanam** and **Dakshinayanam** symbolizes the balance of preparation and reward, aligning perfectly with nature's rhythm. This is why **Makara Sankranti** holds such significance—it marks the Sun's transition and the beginning of change and renewal.

Before we enjoy the fruits of **Uttarayanam**, it's traditional to **remove old, useless things** from our homes as a symbolic act of letting go. This is celebrated on **Bhogi**, where we burn these old things in a bonfire to signify forgetting the past.

The very next day is **Makara Sankranti**, the day the Sun begins its northward journey. Following this, on the **next day**, people honor and care for the animals, especially the bulls that helped with the labor during **Dakshinayanam**. These animals are washed, decorated, and allowed to rest before the hard work begins again during the **Ashada Masa**, when the rains set in.

Content by : M.S. Rajanikanth