



CU Hindu Cultural Society Information Sheet



Celebrating The Festival Of Pongal

The pooja conducted today is based on the Sri Vaishnava tradition of southern India. This tradition has followers spread throughout the south, concentrated in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka with significant migrant populations in other parts of India as well.

This tradition places heavy emphasis on devotion to the visual form of God - not just as a 'tool' for reminding us of His existence, but as a real manifestation of Him, out of his grace and compassion towards all living beings. The Tamil devotional Vaishnava saints from the 5th-9th centuries known as the 'aazhvaars' (meaning 'those immersed in God') went from temple to temple singing praises of the deities residing there, longing for union with beloved Lord.

The *aazhvaars* themselves came from all communities and backgrounds, from so-called 'untouchables' to kings and everything in between, providing a true cross section of mediaeval Tamil society. Their unity in their message of love of God, his consort Lakshmi and all of his creation showed that caste and gender barriers are insignificant before God. One such saint was Aandaal, the adopted daughter of the simple-living brahmin Vishnuchitta. She vowed at a very young age that she would marry none other than Lord Ranganatha (the form of Vishnu residing at the Shri Ranganam temple near Trichy in Tamil Nadu).

One of her poems, the 'Tiruppaavai', is traditionally recited by Sri Vaishnava families every day during the winter month of 'maargazhi' (mid December to mid January). Her beautiful descriptions of nature and landscape perfectly complement the varied emotional hues she paints in her longing for God and her praises of the Divine Couple. Traditionally, the Pongal festival coincides with the last day of recitation of the Tiruppaavai. Portions from this beautiful poem will be included in today's pooja, alongside traditional recitations from the sanskrit Vedas - which have been preserved orally for thousands of years, down to the details of every last note - and which form the bedrock of almost all Hindu traditions.

In today's pooja, we will ceremonially wake Lord Krishna, offer Him water to drink and wash with, perform His bath, offer him clothes, decorations and flowers, recite His 108 names (known as the 'ashtothara shata naamaavali' or sometimes simply 'ashtothara'), offer him food and fruits, recitations from scripture and music, and finally a return to His resting place.



Shri Aandaal

Please feel free to offer any fruits or flowers you may have for the pooja. These will be used in the 'archana' section (recitation of 108 names) and distributed afterwards as prasaadam (sanctified food).

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