

## JANUARY 2017 NEWSLETTER

### NEW YEAR'S DAY January 1 2017

With Devi Sharadamba adorned as shown below, the year 2017 was welcomed with grandeur at SVBF. *Mangala Arati* was performed on Dec 31<sup>st</sup> (2016) to welcome the new year. Approximately 1000 devotees came to temple on the day of new year and more than 250 devotees sponsored *archana* on this day.



### MAKARA SANKARAMANAM, UTTARAYANA PUNYAKALAM

#### January 13, 2017

Jan 13, 2017 – Bhogi; Jan 14, 2017 – Pongal; Jan 15, 2017 - Mattu Pongal

An auspicious Hindu festival, *Makara Sankranti* is celebrated throughout India in myriad cultural forms, marked with gaiety, devotion, and prayer. Signifying the onset of the sun's northern journey, it also marks the start of auspicious *Uttarayana*. The sun moves from *Makara Rasi* (Capricorn) to *Karkataka Rasi* (Cancer) on this day, i.e the sun takes its path northward from the Tropic of Capricorn towards the Tropic of Cancer on January 13th. As per the Vedas, *Uttarayana* is a holy period when our departed elders arrive on earth to bless their kith and kin, and return to *Punya Loka* at the beginning of *Dakshinayana*. This is an auspicious period to undertake meritorious deeds like *Annadanam*, *Vastradanam* as well as *samskaras* such as *Upanayana* etc. It is also the start of the Hindu wedding season. Lakhs of people take a dip in places like Ganga Sagar (West Bengal) and throughout the Indo-Gangetic plain. In Prayag (Allahabad), the famous *Magha*

*Mela* commences on this day by the banks of the Triveni Sangam. In Punjab, this festival is celebrated as *Lohri*, a bonfire festival marked with singing folk songs and feasting. In Maharashtra, a mixture of sesame seeds with jaggery is exchanged with the intention of speaking pleasing words and maintaining lasting friendship. In Gujarat, colorful kites adorn the sky; and in Karnataka, people exchange pieces of sugarcane as well as a mixture of roasted sesame, jaggery pieces, dry coconut pieces, peanuts, and fried gram. The significance being that sweetness should prevail in all exchanges. A similar exchange is made in Andhra Pradesh; however, the harvest festivity is extended over four days, namely *Bhogi*, *Sankranti*, *Kanuma*, and *Mukkanuma*. In Tamil Nadu, this time is very special as they celebrate the *Pongal* festival. The first day is celebrated as *Bhogi* in honor of Lord Indra, the celestial king and ruler of the clouds that enable us to enjoy a rich harvest with plenty of rain. On *Pongal* day, devotees perform the puja at home. They boil rice and milk in a pot to the point of overflow, and then symbolically offer this preparation to Surya Devata (Sun) along with other oblations. All people wear traditional attire and nice clothes. The following day is known as *Mattu Pongal*, a special day for the cows. They are decorated with beads and tinkling bells, as well as worshipped and fed *Pongal*. In SVBF, *Mattu Pongal* is celebrated every year in a grand manner by performing *Go Puja* to the cows in the

*Goshala*. Devotees are encouraged to sponsor *Go Pujas* that happen frequently. Finally, *Kanu* is celebrated. The ladies wash a banana leaf, and place it on the ground. The leftover sweet *pongal* and other rice items are served on the leaf with betel leaves and nuts for cows. The women perform this ritual before their bath, and ask for blessings for their families as well as longevity for their brothers. *Arati* is performed for the brothers, and the water is sprinkled on the *rangoli* adorning the house entrance.

## FEB 2017 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Feb 01 2017  
*Vasanta Panchami*
- Feb 03 2017  
*Ratha Saptami*
- Feb 24 2017  
*Maha Sivaratri*

### Farewell to Shri Shivashankar Bhat

Shri U. G. Shivashankar, manager at SVBF Stroudsburg submitted his resignation at the end of December 2016 to join his family in Bangalore. He was very efficient and extremely capable in overseeing the day to day events at the site. He was an asset to the Management and will be missed.