

## THOUGHTS ON THE POSSIBLE ORIGIN OF THE “MAKARA VILAKKU”

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*For those who undertake the month-long annual pilgrimage to the Aiyappa Temple in the Sabari Hills in the Keralan part of the Western Ghats spotting a luminosity on a hillside across a neighbouring valley marks not only the culmination of a religious undertaking but also the auspicious entry of the Sun into sidereal Capricorn at the moment still thought of as the Winter Solstice, leaving sidereal Sagittarius. The “believers” regard the luminosity to be of supernatural or divine origin but the “rationalists” claim to have proof that it is a manmade bonfire, lit at the designated time by the temple authorities conniving with the relevant branch of the Kerala government to keep a gullible section of the public wallowing in superstition. I hold both the “believers” and the “rationalists” to be wrong. Lighting the bonfire was part of an ancient signaling system by which conveniently situated observers conveyed to those in the interior the information that the day has arrived on which the Sun can be seen to set at the southernmost point marked by some prominent feature – it will now begin to move northward. Means could be available even now to test if this proposition has a basis. Empathetic understanding of ancient practices is the need of the hour.*

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