

## PRASADAM – THE DIVINE AUTHENTIC FOOD OF ANCIENT TEMPLES OF TAMIL NADU

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*All that you do, all that you devour, all that you provide and supply  
away, in addition to all austerities that you may perform, must be  
completed as an providing unto Me.*

**Bhagawadgita (Chapter 9, Text 27)**

Accordingly, offering what a person eats after offering to the Lord is an essential part of *bhakti-yoga* (yoga of devotion) and makes the meals blessed with spiritual potencies.

*Patram Pushpam Phalam Toyam Yo Me Bhaktya Prayacchati,  
Tadaham Bhaktyupahritamasanami Prayatmanah*

**Bhagawadgita (Chapter 9, Text 26)**

So, whoever offers a leaf, a flower, a fruit or even water with devotion, Lord Krishna says that he accepts the offering as it is offered with a loving heart. Thus, one can see that the Lord does not need anything, but if one offers fruits, grains and vegetarian foods, He will accept it.

As a religious nation, prasāda has a rich history of meanings within the Sanskrit tradition from Vedic literature onwards. In this textual culture, prasadam is a mental kingdom experienced by gods, sages and other powerful beings and is marked by spontaneous generosity for the bestowing of boons. The earliest literature of India i.e., Rig Veda, *Prasāda* is placed on high regard in India, the intellectual country. The later texts such as the Shiva Purana, references to prasada can be seen as a fabric substance. (<https://www.eastern-spirituality.com/glossary/spirituality-terms/p-definitions/prasad>).

According to the classical Hindu perception, food is the fundamental link between humans and Gods. Through feeding the Gods and eating their leftovers as prasadam, men and women make certain the stability of this symbiotic relationship. Maximum South Indian houses lay special emphasis on ritual preparation of special meals for Gods during numerous activities. However, temple *prasadam* is constantly unique and is shared with the devotees after the first offering is made to the deity (Nalini Rajan 2018). In historic Tamil temples after the pooja, the priests percentage the sanctified vegetarian providing referred to as *Mahaprasada*, that's made in line with a recipe that has remained unchanged for hundreds of years. For the preparation of *prasadam*, many food items were prohibited such as onion, garlic, potatoes, tomatoes, cabbages, okra and green chilies as they are imported to India initially by the Portuguese traders from other

parts of the world as they are regarded as an equivalent to the cooking of meat (Chitrita Banerji, 2010).

### **The Aims and Objectives**

The study aims to analyze classification of various *prasadam*s both (edible and non-edible) from ancient days till date in various ancient temples of Tamil Nadu. Further it examines the importance and variance of *Saiva* and *Vaishnava prasadam*s. Besides, this study also seeks to find out the variety of ethnic *prasadam*s offered in ancient temples of Tamil Nadu along with their culinary techniques. Further, the prime objective of this study is to find out the role played by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to maintain the authenticity and ensure the quality of *prasadam*s through effective promotions.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study analyses various distinct aspects of *prasadam*s in the ancient temples of Tamil Nadu, their preparation methods and unique food customs. Hence, the study of this nature would help to know more about the varieties of ethnic *prasadam*s offered and the purpose of offering such *prasadam*s, food safety and quality assurance measures in preparing those *prasadam*s by the FSSAI and its' contribution at various levels of the whole process.

### **The Methodology**

The research methodology adopted is purely descriptive and narrative in nature about *prasadam*s offered in various ancient temples of Tamil Nadu.

### **Classification of Prasadams**

There are mainly 6 varieties of Prasadams:- Edible/cooked, edible/raw uncooked, non edible/applied on body, non edible/worn on frame, sold *prasadam* and free *prasadam*.

#### **1. Edible/Cooked**

Sweets, exceptional sorts of cooked rice, *sundal* (boiled pulses combined with spices), cooked samba rice with jeera, *ven pongal* (cooked rice with pepper, butter and nuts), *sarkkarai pongal* (rice pudding), *payasam* (liquid rice pudding), *puliyodharai* (tamarind rice), *thayir sadham* (curd rice), *vadai* (fried lentil snack), *modakam* (rice+ candy Coconut), pittu (rice+jaggery), full rectangular meal are categorized as edible/cooked *prasadam*s.

#### **2. Edible/Raw Uncooked**

Milk, water, *panchamirtham* (bananas, honey, jaggery, nuts, cardamom spice and ghee mixture), and sugar candy, nuts, pepper, salt, sand from ant hill, Tulsi leaves, poha (pounded rice blended with coconut and sugar) are the usual offerings. In the *Sankarankovil* and the *Vaitheeswarankovil* of Tamil Nadu, people collect sand from ant hill in the temple and eat it in minute quantities as *Prasadam* and remedy. Tamil Hindus take coconut, bananas, betel leaves and flora into the temples and take them back to their houses after giving them as an offering to the God.

#### **3. Non edible/Applied on Body**

*Vibhuti* (holy ash made from cow dung), *kumkum* (turmeric is dried and powdered with a bit of slaked lime, which turns the rich yellow powder into a red color), sandal, burnt *Yaga*

(sacrificial fire) ash, Bilva (golden apple tree) leaves and sandalwood powder are the non-edible *prasadam*s.

In all the south Indian temples *vibhuti*, *kumkum*, *sindhur* (red powder), sandal paste, *homa bhasmam* (holy ash from the sacrificial fire pit), *bilva* leaves, *chandana* (yellow powder) are provided as Prasad. If it is a Vishnu temple, Tulasi (Holy basil) leaves are provided to devotees from the feet of the statue. All temples give flowers to girls which they wear it of their hair. In India it is first presented to Gods after which women get it from there. Generally, no Hindu girls wear it immediately from the basket.

#### 4. Non edible/Worn on Frame

Talisman, medals, holy thread (*kaappu* on wrists), black (*kasi*) thread, plants, garlands, silk, rosaries (Rudraksha or Tulasi seeds). In South Indian Temples, sarees draped over the statues are offered in auction to women. They buy them as they consider them as the top luck symbol or auspicious items. Photos and books are also given in some temple premises which include even ashrams, holy centres. Metal objects which include earrings, talismans and so on also come under this category.

#### 5. Sold Prasadam

These days Prasadam is being sold in large temples. However, simultaneously loose *Prasadam* is also likewise distributed. After seeing the demand for the Prasadam, many prominent South Indian temples additionally started selling out the unique *prasadam*s in special counters.

#### 6. Free Prasadam:

Flowers, *Vibhuti*, *Kumkum*, Sandal powder and the fruits, coconuts taken into the temple are returned back to the same person, but a small fee is collected for doing that service. (Swaminathan 2015). Apart from the above mentioned 6 types of Prasadams, the Hindu Prasadams can further generally be classified into *Vaishnava Prasadam* and *Saiva Prasadam*.

#### Vaishnava Prasadam

Between the 9th and the 14th century, Vishnu temples in southern India became famous as far as their *prasadam*s are concerned. The world renowned eastern wall of the Srirangam Ranganathaswamy Temple at Tiruchirappalli witnesses diverse offerings to the God there. The earliest prasadam included *appam* (made of rice and coconut) and *athirasam* (cakes made of flour rice and jaggery or molasses fried in ghee). Although later one can find the mention of *ven pongal* (rice cooked with inexperienced lentils, ghee and salt) and vadai (black lentils ground and fried in ghee). So well-known are these temple services, that every massive temple in Tamil Nadu is specifically acknowledged for its' *prasadam* – the dosai of Alagar kovil, sarkarai pongal of Parthasarathy Temple in Chennai, idli of Kanchipuram temples and dadhyodanam (curd rice) of Padmanabhaswamy temple.

#### Saiva Prasadam

Saiva temples consists services to their predominant deities – Shiva, Parvati, Ganesha, and Muruga. And in almost every Saiva temple, there is abhiseka or anointing – even bathing – of the deity with water, coconut water, camphor, milk, ghee or panchamritam, comprising milk,

curd, ghee, honey, sugar, fruits and nuts. Abhisheka is once in a while supplied as *prasadam* to devotees as is the case in the Kapaleswarar Temple in Mylapore. Many temples provide *pongal* (salted or sweetened cooked rice). The *prasadam* in Ganesha temples is a sweet dumpling known as *modakam* or *kozhakattai*, representing the germ of lifestyles, mainly in the course of the event of *Vinayaga Chathurthi*. Shiva's more youthful son, Muruga, demands that his devotees convey hot sugar syrup (used for making a *prasadam* referred to as *panchamritam*) on a pilgrimage to the temple site. The *panchamritam* at Palani Temple is a well-known offering (Nalini Rajan 2018).

## Re-known Ethical Prasdams in Ancient Temples of Tamil Nadu

### Palani Temple Panchamirtam

It is a sacred mixture of 5 elements (Milk, Curd, Honey, Sugar and Ghee) in same amounts. The word Panchamritam is a combination of two phrases – Pancha means five and Amrita means ambrosia (food of the immortal and the nectar of God (Dhrubo Jyothi n.d.)). Palani *Panchāmirtam* is the oldest shape of jam or fruit mix that can be preserved very well even for several months. As far as this *Prasadam* is concerned, there is a saying that 'the olden it's far, it tastes higher'. It is made up of the small sized *viruppāchchi* plantain that has very little water content material.

Incidentally, it is to be placed here on record that, Viruppāchchi is the name of a village (inside the Palani Hills) in which this precise type of plantain is grown in large numbers. Apart from the crushed plantains, *Panchāmirtham* consists of kandasari sugar from Kangeyam region, dates, kismis, sugar sweet (kalkandu), cardamom and ghee in proper proportions.

### Preparatory Method

Plantains 100 numbers

1. Kandasani sugar 10 kgs
2. Dates 1 kg
3. Sugar candy 500 grams
4. Kismis (raisins) 500 grams
5. Ghee 250 grams
6. Cardamom 25 grams

The plantain is beaten fully. Sugar is then mixed with it. Seedless dates, sugar candy and kismis are added in 0.33 degree. The last gadgets to add are cardamom and ghee.



Panchāmirtam, collected after abhishekam, isn't always a simplest scrumptious and nourishing meals; but additionally has stunning houses which keep it in situations appropriate for consumption over an extended length, without refrigeration. People can also visit the Panchāmirtam making kitchen in the Devasthānam's choultry. The Devasthānam has now made arrangements to fabricate Panchamirtam through the usage of electric utensils. ([palani.org/panchamirtham.htm](http://palani.org/panchamirtham.htm)).

### Sri Parthasarathy Temple Pongal

Black gram pongal prepared with gingelly oil, a peppery fritter known here as *Thirumal vada*, a jaggery-encrusted legacy snack called *manoharam murukku*, *kummayam* and *okkarai*, festive sweets made of dal are popular prasadam (Shoba 2015). *Sarkarai Pongal*, infused with the perfume of ghee and the imperative aroma of timber fire, is the famous delicacy here. The aroma fills the Mada streets, attracting passersby. After darshan, they dash to the prasadam stall to shop for the sweet dish. Even though akkaravadisal (prepared with rice, jaggery and milk), puliyodharai (spice mix with tamarind and cooked rice), adirasam (a sweet combination of rice flour and jaggery), sojji appam (a sweet dish like a poori made out of maida, stuffed with sweet rava/ semolina/sooji stuffing) and thenkuzhal (a crispy and tasty snack made using rice flour and urad dal flour) are supplied as prasadam, Sarkarai Pongal is the maximum-sought-after prasadam (Narasimhan 2015).

### Azhagar Temple Dosa

Alagar Temple is located 20km. distance from the Madurai city. Devotees believe that the worship of Alagar swamy brings prosperity in the commercial enterprises and also the family. Devotees donate cereals and rice here as a providing to the God to fulfill their wishes. With the accepted imparting of cereals and rice, dosas are prepared here. These dosas are supplied as a prasadam to the devotees (Lakshmi Deepa and Ramakrishnan 2013).



*R Chellappa, a cook at the Azhagar temple near Madurai, displays an antique griddle used to make a thick spiced dosa that is the signature dish here*

The *nel* (husked rice) that devotees carry as harvest supplying to the temple is auctioned off and an antique, wheeled grain bin referred to as *pathayam* holds the temple's modest stock of rice. Next to it, in a corridor, there is a mechanised equipment for pounding the grain. This work is carried out as a toilsome hobby by several guys. There are no women chefs within the misogynistic international of Hindu temples. This signature dish of the temple i.e., a *dosa* is made of broken rice and black gram with the pores and skin intact, ground along side salt, cumin, black pepper, ginger, hing and curry leaves".

A big griddle, fabricated from a treasured alloy is used for making the Azhagar temple dosa. After superheating a kilogram of ghee on the griddle, twice as much unfermented batter is

poured in and cooked until it turns to a golden brown colour. This dosa would not wreck for five days. The secret isn't always just the ghee, but also the adding of holy spring water of the *Noopura Ganga* that originates in the Azhagar Hills above the temple to the batter.

### **Varadarajar Temple (Kanchipuram) Idly**

Kanchipuram is not only synonymous to Sarees, Temples but also to Idly. Idly is given as *Prasadam* at Sri Varadaraja Perumal Temple in Kanchipuram. Sri Varadarajaperumal Temple *madapalli* cooks prepare *idlis* each day encased in dried mandharai leaves. These *idlis* are a healthy, wholesome and easily digestible meal. These idlies are exclusive from other different varieties of *idli*. The dried *mandharai* (sal) leaves in which the idlis are cooked add to the taste. If refrigerated, these *idlis* will last long for more than a week,” stated “Pathukadai” S. rainbow balaji, who has been in the temple as a chef for more than 35 years. Ingredients used in the preparation of this temple *prasadam* to make 100 idlis are raw rice 2kg, urad dhal 1kg, methi 25gms., pepper 100gms., jeera 100gms., dry ginger 100gms., a pinch of asafoetida, a few curry leaves, ghee 800gms and salt as per the taste. This idly is made of soaked rice, urad dhal and methi for an hour and grinding it afterwards to a rough consistency. After adding salt the batter should be kept aside for an overnight. In the morning, pepper, jeera, dry ginger, asafoetida (all without tempering), sautéed curry leaves and ghee are to be added and mixed well before cooking. Pieces of mandharai leaves are to be placed on the idli tray before pouring the batter. It takes about an hour to steam and cook this batter.

### **Salt free delicacies at the Uppliappan Temple near Kumbakonam**

This 8th Century medieval Chola temple is surrounded with legends associated to its' presiding deity – Uppliappan (an incarnation of Lord Vishnu who's believed to have eaten food with none salt – subsequently the name). The *neiveithayam* (food offering) here is the curd rice and vada. They are very popular but are all prepared without salt and are yet very tasty.

### **Tamarind rice of the Brihadeeshwara Temple, Thanjavur**

Sunset at this glorious one thousand-year antique Chola temple is one of the most astounding attractions of Tamil Nadu. Head straight to the temple is the canteen where the devotees purchase a portion of the tamarind rice. Despite the large crowds, it's nonetheless possible to discover a quiet corner in which one could take pleasure in the consummation of the tamarind rice and different other cuisines from the temple kitchen.

### **The Curd Rice of the Jagannatha Perumal Temple, Thirumizhsai**

This temple is one of the *divya desams* consecrated via the Alvars. Curd rice is usually known as *Thair Satham* or *Dodyonam* and of course, this is an indispensable part of the *Neivethiyam* (meals offering) to deities in many temples in Tamil Nadu. A mixture of curd, rice and spices (used for tempering) are used to make sure that the rice doesn't flip bitter even after a few hours. This temple which is just off the Chennai-Bengaluru motorway, always serves scrumptious curd rice to the devotees (Ashwin Rajagopalan 2017).

### **Role played by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India**

The sacred services made to the deities, inclusive of *laddus*, *murukku*, *vadai*, and *adhirasam*, will get third party validation of their protection and quality within the shape of certification with the aid of the Food safety and standards Authority of India (FSSAI). The 47

principal temples in Tamil Nadu plan to sell prasadam in food grade packing containers with a purpose to have ‘quality earlier than’ dates. Already, the Sri Dandayudhapani Temple in Palani has gone in for licensing of its Panchamirtham. This famous prasadam now comes packed in packing containers with alongside labelling that enumerates the ingredients, weight, rate, FSSAI license variety, and other information stipulated by way of the meals safety department (FSD).

### **Regular Inspections**

The HR and CE branch has directed temples that promote prasadam over the counter to head in for licensing from the FSD, so that you can test samples to provide a ‘quality earlier than’ date. There would also be ordinary inspections from the FSD to ensure first-class and quantity in the prasadam being offered. Among the major temples in the State, the Palani temple was the first to head in for FSSAI certification. Prasadam in temples are usually made by means of contractors who get the soft for a 12 months, from July to June. “Contractors have been asked to ensure great quality. They instructed to plan to involve specialists in the making of sweets and savouries to herald Food Already, Food Safety Department has carried out training programmes for the contractors. The FSD additionally guarantees the best of food at essential temple festivals (Ramakrishnan and Deepa 2018).

### **Prasadam Exhibition**

FSSAI often organises exhibitions to showcase the protection and pleasant standards of the famous ancient Temple prasadam. Recently it was held on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2018 in New Delhi. This gave an opportunity to the residents of New Delhi to enjoy the mouthwatering *prasadam*s from famous temples of Tamil Nadu during the food exhibition.

The prasadam encompasses panchamirtham from Palani Murugan temple, ghee wafting laddu, murukku, appam, puttu from Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple, thenkuzhal and adhirasam from Srirangam Ranganathaswamy temple, Trich and the well-known milagu vadai from Tiruvannamalai Annamalaiyar temple. While the prasadam from Srirangam and Madurai can be airlifted, panchamirtham was carried in train for the reason that latter’s shelf life is longer. Hundred portions of each item was sent for the January 12 New Delhi expo (Anon. 2018).

### **Conclusion**

Food is a gift from God and so it needs to be treated with extraordinary appreciation. Conventional Hindus provide food to God mentally earlier than ingesting. According to Bhagawadgita, the devotees of the Lord are launched from all forms of sin due to the fact they eat meals, which is obtainable first for sacrifice. Others, who prepare food for non-public sense entertainment, verily consume only sin. Food is usually supplied to the presiding deity before they are made available to the lesser mortals through the temple canteens or souvenir stores. Some of these dishes are steeped only in records. However, at the same time lots of these unique dishes are also a part of popular sub-culture (just like the panchamurtham in Palani murugan temple). The recipe for success is that the preparatory method hasn’t changed over the protracted time period and only high satisfactory elements are given prominence such as big scale cooking on wood fire. However, the achievement element can be probably primarily be accorded to the devotion and dedication of the chefs of these Madapallis i.e., the temple kitchens.

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