



THE HINDU

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Where worship breaks new ground



A machine vends prasadam. The blood pressure of devotees is checked. There is no donation box. This temple in Padappai is undoubtedly unique, says K. SATHYA NARAYANAN

They head into a poky little room to collect custom-made coins. Next, they head to a vending machine. They push the coin into the slot, and out comes a box. Any guesses about what's in this box?

Considering this is a one-of-its-kind initiative in this part of the world — well, that's what I am told — there is a greater likelihood of you not knowing the answer. The box contains 'prasadam'. This 'prasadam' has been approved by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India.

FSSAI IN NEWS

This is what makes Jayadurga Peetam, a temple in Padappai, unique. There are other novelties at this temple, which is around two decades old.

Devotees who have diabetes are given specially-prepared sugar-free prasadam. “Devotees with diabetes are given special badges, whereby authorities identify them and give them the sugar-free prasadam,” says Dr. Sri Sridhar, an herbal oncologist and son of Sri Durgai Siddhar. Dr. Sridhar functions as head priest and caretaker of the temple.

And then, devotees who want to attempt Angapradakshanam, a special form of prayer where a devotee goes around the temple, rolling sideways on the ground, have to undergo a blood pressure check. It is mandatory. If the devotee has abnormal blood pressure, he or she will be prevented from performing the sadhana.

“Angapradhakshanam is a tedious exercise for anyone. For those with abnormal blood pressure, an element of health risk comes added to it. This is why we check the blood pressure of those who want to attempt the sadhana,” says Dr. Sridhar.

This temple does not have a hundi, a large container that is placed in different sections of a temple to collect monetary offerings from devotees. As a policy, this temple does not accept monetary offerings from devotees. “I wanted to show that money from devotees is not required to run a temple. That’s why this temple does not have a hundi,” explains Dr. Sridhar.

One more unusual practice at the temple is avoidance of camphor. Instead of camphor, ghee lamp for mangala aarathi and homam is used.

The temple also encourages *muligai samayal*, a form of traditional herbal cookery. One herbal dish is served with the *prasadam* separately. The temple also delivers *prasadam* at the homes and even offices of devotees who have donated materials such as clothes for the deity and items for the preparation of *prasadam*.

All devotees are supplied with a bottle of water. This temple is also known for housing many less-known deities.

Before I leave, I want an answer to one question. Why a vending machine for prasadam?

“In most temples, when the devotee is engrossed in prayer, someone will call out for prasadam. No one wishes to miss the delicious prasadam and the devotee invariably breaks his prayer and runs for the prasadam. Food should not come between God and us. I did not want the same thing to happen at this temple, so I had a vending machine for prasadam installed here,” explains Dr. Sridhar.
