

A Study on the Cultural And Ritual Significance of Akkaravadisal as Prasadham in the Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple, Srirangam, Tiruchirapalli

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Abstract:

Akkaravadisal, is an origin of South Indian cuisine made with rice, milk, and jaggery, is traditionally offered to Lord Vishnu during December month as a part of Vaishnavism, particularly by devotees of the Goddess Andal, who prayed for a marriage with Sri Ranganatha Swamy. Akkaravadisal is a very traditional temple-blessed offering prepared for Lord Ranganatha. It's made with rice, jaggery, milk, camphor and ghee, and is known for its rich and creamy texture. The akkaravadisal has been mentioned in Four Thousand Divine Hymns in a couple of instances. The objective of this study is to know the cultural and ritual significance of akkaravadisal as blessed offering for devotees. prasad or prasadam is a religious offering in Hinduism, The akkaravadisal is to be consumed by attendees as a holy offering. The offerings may include cooked food, mostly with jaggery. This vegetarian dish is usually offered and later distributed to the devotees who are present in the temple. Sometimes this vegetarian offering will exclude prohibited items such as garlic, onion, mushroom. This review explores into the rich historical and cultural aspects of akkaradisal and the reason for offering akaradisal as the iconic prasadam of Sri Ranganathan Swamy Temple in Srirangam, Trichirapalli district.

Keywords: Akkaravadisal, Prasadam, Tradition, Srirangam, Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple

Introduction:

The word Akkaram is a literary term that denotes Sugar or Jaggery, while Vadisal describes the method of cooking through steaming or boiling. The creation of this dish symbolizes the prosperity of the temple and the local produce of the area. Akkaravadisal, also known as Akkara Adisil, embodies passion, tradition, and culinary excellence in South India. This delicacy, typically prepared as a temple offering (prasadam), represents the harmonious blend of spirituality and gastronomy. Its roots trace back to the rich cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu, where food transcends mere nourishment, serving as a medium for communion with the divine. Normally made with rice, moong dal, jaggery, milk, and ghee, the dish is both luxurious and simple. Its creamy texture and unparalleled sweetness are adored, enhanced by the fragrant notes of cardamom and the luxurious touch of ghee-fried cashews and raisins. The history of

Akkaravadisal is intertwined with temple customs and Tamil literature. One significant reference to Akkaravadisal in history appears in the hymns of Sri Andal, the only female Alwar saint and a devoted follower of Lord Vishnu. She vowed to prepare Akkaravadisal as an offering to the Lord Vishnu, symbolizing her devotion and her intention to present the finest offerings to the deity. This religious and historical context has elevated the dish beyond culinary significance, imbuing it with sanctity. Akkaravadisal is especially cherished at the Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple in Srirangam, one of the most prominent and sacred Vaishnava temples globally. This temple, dedicated to Lord Ranganatha (the reclining aspect of Lord Vishnu), is renowned not only for its architectural brilliance but also for its culinary offerings. Akkaravadisal is frequently prepared during important festivals such as Panguni Uthiram and Vaikuntha Ekadashi, as well as offered in daily rituals before the deity, cementing its crucial role in temple ceremonies. The dish also serves as a reflection of Tamil Nadu's agricultural and cultural bounty. The ingredients that make up Akkaravadisal, including jaggery, rice, and milk, highlight the state's fertility and its long-standing agricultural heritage. Its preparation demands meticulous attention, as achieving the right balance of sweetness, creaminess, and aroma is essential to maximize its flavor. Over the years, Akkaravadisal has transitioned from a temple offering to a beloved dish found in many Tamil households, particularly during Pongal celebrations. Its enduring popularity attests to the lasting bond between food, culture, and spirituality in Tamil Nadu, as well as the continued reverence for traditions that nourish the state's cultural legacy. The Akkaravadisal or Akkara Adisil is a traditional recipe from the Iyengar community, typically made and served as a temple offering (prasadam) in Tamil Nadu. This dish is characterized by a thick consistency and features a rich, creamy blend of moong dal, rice, jaggery, and milk. It holds a unique place in the culinary traditions of the Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple in Srirangam, one of India's largest Vaishnava temples. Akkaravadisal plays a vital role during the Panguni Uthiram festival, a day marking the worship of Lord Ranganathar and Goddess Ranganayaki together. Its history is intricately linked with temple culture and Tamil traditions. It appears in Sangam literature and is associated with the offerings made by devotees, including Sri Andal, who dedicated her offerings of Akkaravadisal to the deity.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

This research has been conducted to provide a better understanding of medieval temple food practices, particularly those related to the Srirangam temple, based on evidence from Tamil inscriptions and Sanskrit sources, to address several specific aspects related to temple food practices that are often misunderstood, including: controversies surrounding eating naivedya and food offerings, historical developments leading to the practice of eating temple prasad. Based on the main findings: this study examines historical and contemporary Vaishnava temple food offerings, drawing on epigraphic and Sanskrit sources, clarify common misunderstandings about South Indian temple food practices, such as the controversies around eating naivedya, the history of temple prasad, the nature of temple sambhar, and the preparation and location of temple food, focuses on the Srirangam temple dedicated to the reclining Vishnu, a major site of Vaishnava devotion. Srirangam, with its cultural and historical significance in the context of Vaishnavism, has several distinctive practices around its temple. One such practice is ritually consuming akaradisal, an ancient dish that forms a part of temple offerings and festive occasions. This review endeavors to bring out the religious and sociocultural undertones behind akaradisal and how it ties into the greater culinary and ritualistic traditions within Srirangam. Akaradisal has been referred to as a rice-and-lentil dish constituting the central item, as both an offering (naivedya) to the gods and a meal to the

devotees. The old history of Srirangam speaks about making and the significance of such offerings, particularly at major festivals and ceremonies. This review elaborates on how Chola-era inscriptions present a narrative form explaining temple food practice and presenting the connection among food, worship, and social life as being within the framework of the Srirangam temple environment. The persistence over centuries of these types of practices presents the more extensive thematic factors of religion and socio-religious congregating as elements of Vaishnava tradition. The offerings at Srirangam, including akaradisal, are not merely culinary acts but are imbued with extensive theological meaning. For practitioners, the act of preparing and consuming such offerings is viewed as a devotional exercise that reinforces the connection between the divine and the mundane. From a nutritional perspective, although the foremost importance of akaradisal might reside in its ritualistic nature, it also possesses the qualities of some health benefits. Overall, research suggests that vegetarian diets that are high in lentils and rice positively influence health through the supply of essential nutrients and may enhance participants' health. Although akaradisal per se has not been examined in particular health studies, this kind of general study on the health-benefiting aspects of vegetarians is consistent with ancient diet habits in a wide range of Indian cultures. Lastly, akaradisal is a perfect example of the culinary tradition within the Srirangam temple practices. The complexity of interaction between food, religion, and society implies the relevance of such traditions in modern Vaishnavite practice. Traditionally Akkaravadisal is served as the iconic prasadam in Sriranganatha Swamy Temple at Srirangam, Trichy, India. Sriranganatha Swamy Temple at Srirangam is a very famous religious temple of deep cultural and historical significance. It is the most iconic temple of Lord Ranganatha of the Hindu school of architecture and has been held in reverence for centuries by the Vaishnavite community. (1)

This review article emphasizes the importance of the temple as a prominent religious hub in Kerala, drawing tourists and pilgrims. The research underscores the importance of sustainable tourism interventions and community participation to counteract adverse effects and ensure equitable dividends. The history, architecture, and recent trends at the temple have increased its popularity, fostering cultural exchange and tourism facilities development in the region. The authors have used Mathematical and statistical bibliometric studies to examine the historical context of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, the major attractions of the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple, and to understand the contribution made by the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in facilitating tourism within Kerala. Through this research, the authors have analysed the exponential Growth of religious tourism publications that are in an exponential growth phase, underpinned by a yearly rise in citations, Global Research Leadership as the United States is at the forefront of research in this area, with nearly 20% of articles linked to its centers, primarily university centers, Multifaceted Motivation of Tourist is multifaceted, with religious, cultural, traditional, spiritual, and landscape patterns interacting in the choice to travel and evolution of pilgrimage. Sriranganatha Temple is not only a masterpiece of architectural beauty, but it has also been at the center of socio-political activity in southern India for many years [2]. There has been a battle over the temple as well, as different dynasties have fought for control of it, reflecting broader power dynamics and religious dynamics during medieval times, as the temple has been a center of patronage and strife as well. Historical records register that the temple was a pilgrimage and worship site that received pilgrims from across the area and contributed towards the development of religious tourism in Tamil Nadu. Located along the Kaveri River, on a beautiful island, it is particularly picturesque, and this also adds to the holiness of the temple among pilgrims due to its location. There are various modes of prasadam offered to the devotees in this temple, which is one of the most unusual cultural traditions that is adhered to within this temple.

The prasadam of Sriranganatha Swamy Temple holds a key position within the worship system, cherished not only because of its sanctity but also because of its position in daily rituals. Common dishes that may be offered range from various forms of vegetarian delicacies like the tamarind rice referred to as puliyodarai, curd rice, as well as the sweet rice identified as akkaravadisal, and it is usually offered with fruits, including bananas and coconuts. All these offerings conform to the locally based cuisine styles and farm crops, representing the communal meal believed to promote cohesiveness within devotees. Additionally, the concept of prasadam within this temple context goes beyond mere offerings; it represents blessings from the god that have been bestowed upon the devotee. (2)

According to the authors, the main objectives of this study is to obtain 8 traditional and 2 modern rice varieties from different regions of southern India, grow the rice varieties under standard agronomic practices, and harvest biological replicates, determine the total phenolic content using the Folin-Ciocalteu colorimetric method, Analyse the volatile organic compounds using gas chromatography-mass spectrometry [4]. Through this research, the authors have identified the pigmented traditional rice varieties had higher total phenolic content compared to non-pigmented traditional and modern rice varieties, the traditional rice varieties had a higher diversity of volatile organic compounds compared to modern rice varieties, the traditional pigmented rice varieties had higher concentrations of beneficial fatty acids like linoleic acid and oleic acid compared to modern varieties [6]. There is no doubt that South Indian sweets are famous for their variety and the richness of rice-based sweets, both of which are indicative of the rich culture and agriculture of the region. There is a wide variety of food available at the festival, ranging from traditional sweets to contemporary sweets, all of which reflect a harmonious blend of taste and texture. Kheer, a smooth pudding made from rice, milk, and sugar, is one of the most popular rice desserts in India. It is usually supplemented with spices such as cardamom, nuts, raisins, and other additions like these. Aside from its sweet flavor, kheer also has many nutritional benefits, and it has been a part of traditional celebrations and rituals throughout South India for a long time. It is typical for rice to be cooked in milk until smooth, during the process where it is very important to use the starches from the rice for the desired consistency to be achieved. The use of rice varieties such as Sona Masoori and Basmati for Kheer adds a distinctive touch of flavor and texture to the dessert, which is further enhanced by the use of rice varieties. Rice quality is a very important topic, since the type of rice varieties selected will affect the sensory properties of the final product, which is explained in detail in the next section. [7]

The authors have used 3D printing of a traditional South Indian snack, "sweet pidikollukattai", Characterization of the mixing properties of the rice flour and thermal characteristics of the paste (rice flour, jaggery, and water), Comparison of the traditional control product to 3D printed products that were post-processed by steaming for different durations (5, 10, and 15 minutes)

Evaluation of the samples through proximate analysis, color, weight, dimensional measurements, texture profile analysis, and sensory characteristics methods to 3D print a traditional South Indian snack called "sweet pidikollukattai", characterize the mixing and thermal properties of the rice flour and paste used for 3D printing, compare the 3D printed product to the traditional form of the product in terms of proximate analysis, color, weight, dimensions, texture, and sensory characteristics [8]. Through this study, the authors have found that no significant differences in color, composition, weight, and dimensions between 3D printed and traditional control samples. The 3D printed sample steamed for 10 minutes had a texture profile comparable to the traditional control.

The 3D printed sample steamed for 10 minutes had the highest sensory acceptability among the 3D printed samples. The other such traditional dessert to be talked about is Pongal, which is made almost like Kheer

but possesses its distinctive flavour of the salty-sweet sort. Made mainly during the harvesting season festivals, this is generally a mixture of jaggery with cashews topped up with ghee [9]. The use of jaggery along with rice offers a complex flavor and another dimension of nutrition, as it is mineral-rich compared to processed sugars. This dish represents the farm culture of the place, particularly valuing local crops but also emphasizing the importance of traditional rice varieties, which result in healthier consequences, particularly for the diabetic population due to their slower rate of glycemic index. Foodtech advancements have also reflected in the preparation of these traditional sweets. Technologies such as 3D printing have been used to prepare advanced rice-flour-based sweets, such as sweet pidikolukattai, to demonstrate how food tradition can be reinterpreted through new food science practices. This technology demonstrates how advances in cooking techniques of the contemporary period can retain historical taste without sacrificing contemporary innovations in appearance. [10] As a result of eating prasadam, believers feel as if they are imbued with divine blessings and that it leads to a state of religious wellness. Ritualistic preparation is done with great attention, which reminds the devotee of the purity of the food that is consumed. There has been an increase in the preparation of prasadam in recent years for major festivals such as the annual Car Festival. This results in a large amount of food being distributed to attendees at the temple as a means of sustenance and a place of community, further emphasizing that the temple is a place for community and sustenance. In addition to being evidence of India's rich religious heritage, the Sriranganatha Swamy Temple fuses historic heritage with rituals of piety and collective devotion that are reminiscent of ancient India. In addition to the architecture of the temple, the history of the temple, and the prasadam available in the temple, this is one of the best examples of religious faith being fused with the culture and social life of the region. [11] The Tamil Nadu cuisine includes a range of traditional prasadams (sacred offerings), which are religiously significant and deeply rooted in the cultural and historical context of the state. Prasadams, usually presented in temples and at religious rituals, represent the bond between humans and the gods worshipped. The offerings are not merely spiritual deeds but also represent the agricultural richness of the land and the traditional cooking habits of its inhabitants [12]. Historically, prasadams have their roots in ancient Tamil culture, with offerings to gods as a way of showing appreciation and respect. The different prasadams, such as Puliyodarai (tamarind rice), Pongal (sweet rice dish), and Neivedyam (offering of sweets), are formulated based on locally sourced ingredients that reflect the agricultural practices of Tamil Nadu. The variety of prasadams indicates seasonal and regional agricultural practices, providing insight into the dietary customs of ancient Tamil society. In this study, the authors have conducted a randomized controlled trial over 24 weeks. 80 participants with type 2 diabetes aged 35-65 years were randomly assigned to either an LGI diet group (n=40) or a control group (n=40). Anthropometric and biochemical parameters were measured at baseline and 24 weeks to compare reductions in glycated hemoglobin (HbA1c) after 24 weeks of intervention with LGI diet, examine changes in blood lipids and blood pressure in the intervention group on LGI diet, compared to the regular diet, evaluate changes in inflammatory markers such as hs-CRP and apolipoprotein B (ApoB) between the LGI and control group, measure reduction in fasting insulin and Homeostatic Model Assessment of Insulin Resistance (HOMA-IR) in the study groups, after intervention with the diet. In this study, the authors emphasised about the long-term implementation of a low-glycemic index (LGI) diet based on traditional South Indian Kerala cuisine led to significant improvements in glycated hemoglobin (HbA1c), inflammatory markers (hs-CRP), insulin resistance (fasting insulin, HOMA-IR), triglycerides, and weight in the intervention group compared to the control group and the LGI diet group also had non-significant reductions in systolic blood pressure, total cholesterol, and HDL compared to the control group. As a

staple carbohydrate food in South India, rice is seen as a staple carbohydrate food, and more traditional varieties of rice, such as red rice, are consumed because of their lower glycemic index, as opposed to highly refined white rice, which is a staple food in other parts of the country. Considering the increasing awareness of diet-related diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, it is vitally important to know the nutritional composition of such traditional forms of rice [13]. The nutritional composition of rice has a wide range of health implications, especially in light of what we now know about diet-related diseases. The complex web of flavors that can be found in South Indian sweets prepared from rice is not only a culinary delight, but it is also a source of nutritional health and cultural diversity, as they are prepared from rice. The ability of these foods to be adapted to meet current tastes and nutritional requirements is what allows them to survive in modern diets, as long as they can meet those nutritional requirements, and remain relevant for as long as they can fulfill those needs. [14]

Ethnobotanical studies focus on the importance of the relationship between food culture and farming practice in Tamil Nadu. For instance, Muthu et al. focus on the importance of flora in the prasadhams local rituals, with a focus on the importance of medicinal species and their symbolism. The incorporation of native plant species in prasadhams testifies to their significance in worship and indicates their ethnomedical applications drawn from the Tamil community's cultural heritage, indicative of a timeless reverence for nature. [15]

This study has also illustrated how traditional health practices in rural Tamil Nadu augment the preparation. The prasadhams are generally believed to be repositories of healing properties; thus, respective rituals are attached to specific herbs and spices believed to possess medicinal properties, exhibiting typical ethnomedical beliefs. The dining practices of the prasadhams expose ethnocultural and historical stories, since simultaneously it is food and spiritual sustenance, as Kareem and Yoganandham have asserted. The ritualistic nature of prasadhams is attested to by ethnocultural stories that encircle them, depicting the offerings as a means of constructing people together and forming cultural identity. Preparation and offering of prasadhams in temples build communal sharing among devotees and make social bonds in the community stronger [16]

Therefore, prasadhams are a living cultural symbol that is more than a food offering, infusing rich historical and social meaning into the traditional practices of Tamil Nadu.

In conclusion, prasadhams in Tamil Nadu are far more than ritual food items; they encapsulate the region's agricultural heritage, culinary traditions, and social dynamics. The interconnection between the sacred and the edible in prasadhams reveals much about Tamil culture, placing them at the heart of spiritual and community life in this diverse region. The extensive documentation of traditional practices and ingredients emphasizes the significance of these offerings in maintaining a living heritage that resonates with generations. [17]

Conclusion:

There is great significance in ritual and cultural belief of devotees who visit Srirangam's Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple for a blessed offering Akkaravadisal is the essential sign of belief in this temple culture, food culture, and religious devoutness. Its roots, linked to the spiritual tradition of offering food to deities, highlight the deep intertwining of spirituality and culture in Tamil Nadu. The connection with Sri Andal and mythological temples such as the Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple in Srirangam further enhances its cultural and historical importance. In addition to its religious value, Akkaravadisal represents the agricultural abundance of Tamil Nadu and the technique involved in its preparation. As a cherished

prasadham and festive delicacy, Akkaravadisal continues to be a favorite among both devotees and food enthusiasts, embodying timeless principles of respect, abundance, and cultural pride. Its enduring popularity emphasizes the importance of food in upholding and celebrating Tamil Nadu's heritage, elevating Akkaravadisal from just a dish to a symbol of devotion and cultural legacy.

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