

ROLE OF FOOD (PRASADAM) SERVED AT RELIGIOUS PLACES TO ATTRACT TOURISTS/PILGRIMS: A CASE STUDY OF MUTHAPPAN TEMPLE IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

Background: Throughout the Indian history, religion has been an important part of the country culture. Religious diversity and religious tolerance are both established in the country by the law and custom. A vast majority of Indians associate themselves with religion. Rituals, worship and other religious activities are prominent in an individual's daily life. Religion is also principal organizer of social life. There are many temples in India which offer uncommon prasadam and the rituals are carried out traditionally by a particular tribe or community for whom that temple and Lord/God/Goddess are very sacred. One such Lord is The Sree Muthappan who is a deity commonly worshipped in the North Malabar region of Kerala and in the Coorg region of Karnataka as well. The Prasadam offered to Lord Muthappan is very uncommon as compared with other Hindu Temples which do not allow any alcoholic beverage inside the Temple premises and also taking meat and fish inside the temple is considered a 'taboo'. **Objective:** The objective of this study was to find out the role of prasadam as a tourist attraction and importance of prasadam over food. **Methodology:** The data was collected online using Google Forms. Convenience sampling was used and the sample size was 60. The data has been analyzed and graphs have been made using MS-Excel 2007 and SPSS version 25.0. One sample T-Test has been used to statistically check the validity of our research. **Results:** The study highlighted that Muthappan temple is known for its unique prasadam though the respondents are not that much aware about the prasadam served at Muthappan temple. Not many respondents are willing to accept toddy and fish as a religious prasadam. The study showcased that the Muthappan Temple is divergent in its art and culture, the prasadam served, the habits of the Lord and also the unique history it holds. The likes and dislikes of the deity are unique too. The findings of this study revealed that food is, overall of great significance to tourists; however, it plays a varying role in domestic tourists' experiences at different travel stages. Null hypothesis got rejected and alternative hypothesis got accepted. **Conclusion:** The researchers have reached the conclusion that respondents believe in the highness of such uncommon temples and their Lord but are not readily accepting the traditional Prasadam of that place. The result of the study also highlights that food served at religious place play a significant role in attracting pilgrims and tourists.

Key Words: Prasadam, Muthappan Temple, Baked Fish and Toddy, Temple Food, Religious Food and Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Muthappan is the principal deity in the ritualistic Theyyam dance performed in the famous Parassinikkadavu temple. The ritual performers of Muthappan Theyyam belong to the Vannan community of Kerala. The puja rituals and rites for Muthappan are performed by the Thiyya community. During performance of Muthappan Theyyam, the performer consumes the toddy liquor and passes it around to the spectators. In this act, Muthappan “breaks” the temple rules by allowing alcohol into temple grounds. Worship of Muthappan is unique in that it does not follow the Satvic Brahminical form of worship, as in other Hindu temples of Kerala. Worshipping system is according to Shakteyam where Panja-ma-karais offered including Madhyam(toddy) and Mamsam (fish flesh).Fish and toddy is used as an offering to Muthappan and people of all castes, religions and nationalities are permitted to enter the temple and take part in the worship. In Muthappan Temple drinking toddy is not considered as a taboo. The people entering the temple are greeted with tea and payaru (boiled green dal) with grated coconut. It is served everyday between 7:30 am to 8 pm (Express, 2009). Once the puja is over, fish and toddy is distributed to the devotees as Prasad.

The traditional story of parassinikkadavu Muthappan describes the background of the deity. The ruler (naduvazhi) Ancharamanaykkal Vazhunnavar of Eruveshi, Kannur was unhappy, as he had no child. His wife Padikutty Amma was a devotee of Lord Shiva. She made a sacrifice to Shiva for children. One day in her dream she saw the Lord. The very next day, while she was returning after a bath from a nearby river, she saw a pretty child lying on a rock nearby (which is worshipped even today). She took the child home and she and her husband brought him up as their own son. The boy used to visit the jungle near their house (mana) for hunting with his bow and arrows. He would then take food to the poor and mingle with the backward communities like thiyya. As these acts were against the way of life, his parents earnestly requested him to stop this practice, but the boy turned a deaf ear to their warnings. Ancharamanaykkal Vazhunnavar became very disappointed. Ayyankara Vazhunnavar decided to take the matters in his hand and admonished him. The boy revealed his divine form (Visvaroopam or Viswaroopa or Cosmic All-Pervading Form) to his parents. They then realized that the boy was not an ordinary child but God. They prostrated themselves in front of him surrendering them to him. The moment he got out of his house, everything that came under Muthappan's vision burned and turned into ashes due to his sadness in leaving the

house. His mother told him that he should not walk all the way destroying every creation in this world. Muthappan pierced his eyes so that nothing shall be disintegrated with his vision. Thiruvappana is depicted as blind because of this myth.

He then started a journey from Ancharamanaykkal. The natural beauty of Kunnathoor detained Him. He was also attracted by the toddy of palm trees. Chandan (an illiterate toddy tapper) knew that his toddy was being stolen from his palm trees, so he decided to guard them. While he was keeping guard at night, he caught an old man stealing toddy from his palms. He got very angry and tried to shoot the man using his bow and arrows but fell unconscious before he could let loose even one arrow. Chandan's wife came searching for him. She cried brokenheartedly when she found him unconscious at the base of the tree. She saw an old man at the top of the palm tree and called out to him as "Muthappan" ("muthappan" means grandfather in the local Malayalam language). She earnestly prayed to the God to save her husband. Before long, Chandan regained consciousness. She offered boiled grams, slices of coconut, burnt fish and toddy to the Muthappan. (Even today in Sree Muthappan temples the devotees are offered boiled grams and slices of coconut.) She sought a blessing from him. Muthappan chose Kunnathoor as his residence at the request of Chandan. This is the famous Kunnathoor Padi. After spending some years at Kunnathoor, Sree Muthappan decided to look for a more favorable residence so that he could achieve his objective of his Avataram. He shot an arrow upward from Kunnathoor. The shaft reached Parassini where the famous Parassini Temple stands today. The arrow, when it was found, was glowing in the Theertha (sacred water) near the temple. The arrow was placed on the altar. Since then, Lord Sree Muthappan has been believed to reside at Parassinikkadavu, when thiruvappan traveled through the jungle he reached puralimala near Peravoor and met another Muthappan, Thiruvappan called him cherukkan (meaning young boy in Malayalam) and accompanied him this second Muthappan is called as Vellattam. This theyyam carries round shaped throne made of hay. Now Thiruvappan is called as Muthappan and the second Muthappan is called Vellattam (Muthappan, 2012). God of the poor and toiling masses, he is helpful to anyone who worships and follows him. A rebel God in the Hindu pantheon, he drinks toddy (palm wine) and eats roasted fish. He has a hunter's attire and carries with him a bow and arrow. His companions are dogs who wander freely in his temple. The secular nature of this God is further evident in treating every one equally, irrespective of this caste, religion, country or creed. There are no restrictions, no dress regulations and anybody can go up to the sanctum-sanctorum and pray.

As a boy, Muthappan was very rebellious. He was a great hunter and would skin the animals that he killed and wear their skins as clothes. One day, he came across a coconut tree that was being tapped for toddy, the liquor fermented from coconut sap. He climbed the tree and emptied the jar that was holding the toddy. When the toddy tapper returned and saw Muthappan, he immediately challenged him. Muthappan turned the man to stone for daring to address such a powerful God in such a manner. During performances of Muthappan Theyyam, the performer consumes the toddy liquor and passes it around to the spectators. In this act, Muthappan “breaks” the temple rules by allowing alcohol into temple ground’s (Clark, 2018).

Sree Muthappan was always accompanied by a dog. Dogs are considered sacred here and one can see dogs in large numbers in and around the temple. There are two carved bronze dogs at the entrance of the temple that are believed to symbolize the bodyguards of the God (Xu, 2012). When the Prasad is ready, it is first served to a dog that is always ready inside the temple complex. Local legends enhance the importance of dogs to Sree Muthappan. A few years ago, temple authorities decided to reduce the number of dogs inside the temple; so they took some dogs and puppies away. From that very day, the performer of the Sree Muthappan Theyyam was unable to perform; it is said that the spirit of Sree Muthappan enters the performer's body for the duration of the ceremony (Linda, 1984). But he probably refused to enter the Theyyam performer's body because the dogs had been removed. Realizing their mistake, the dogs were brought back to the temple by the temple authorities. From that day onwards, Theyyam performances returned to normal.

Table 1: Difference between Food & Prasadam

S.No.	Food	Prasadam
1.	Consumed in order to fill up one’s stomach	Usually served in a pilgrim or religious place
2.	No special feeling while consuming it	Consumed with religious sentiments
3.	Consumed depending upon individual’s diet	Consumed as a form of God’s blessings in small quantities irrespective of diet of individual
4.	Depends on natural and local vegetation of the region	Depends on history of God or the Temple and also on likeliness and non-likeliness of God (Local available ingredients may also play an important role at times)
5.	Maybe self-prepared or by family or in some commercial area which directly or indirectly means profit	Generally prepared by self-help groups, volunteers, etc., with religious sentiments

6.	May or may not be served to others	Distributed among all
7.	Consumed for letting life going	Consumed to satisfy one's religious aspirations
8.	Maybe prepared with profit motive	Prepared with service motive

Prasada in Sanskrit means Grace or Favor and in Hinduism, food and water offered to a deity during worship (puja) (University of Plymouth, n.d.). It is believed that the deity partakes of and then returns the offering, thereby consecrating it (Muthappan, 2020). The offering is then distributed and eaten by the worshippers. The efficacy of the prasada comes from its having been touched by the deity. Food left by a guru (spiritual leader) is considered prasada by the guru's followers, as the guru is regarded as a living god (Quora, 2018). All food, if silently offered to God with the proper prayers before eating, becomes consecrated and is thus considered prasada (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.).

This magical transformation of food happens across many religions, and goes a long way toward explaining Prasad (sometimes called prasada), which is the offering made by Hindus of food, flowers, water, and such during a ceremony or to a priest or saint. A simple definition of Prasad would be "an offering from the individual self to God." However, in recognition of the fact that God is omnipresent and cannot exist without existing in us, part of this Prasad is generally returned to the giver (Prabhu, 2018). The blessed food, flower, or object, offered and returned through this ritual, becomes sacred. We offer Prasad selflessly to God (or to a saint or teacher who has brought us closer to God), and our individual self-expands when the blessing is returned (Hunte, 2007).

Recently, the needs and interests in local food related tourism research are growing as the local food plays an important role in overall tourist experience and destination branding (Doctor, 2017). However, research on the religious food as a culinary heritage has received relatively little attention and particularly an understanding of tourists religious food consumption in a tourist destination is much discussed.

The objectives of the study were:

- To find the role of Temple Food/Prasadam to attract tourists to Religious/Pilgrim places.
- To find out the importance of Prasadam as compared to food.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: A descriptive study design was adopted, it is one in which your primary goal is to assess a sample at one specific point in time without trying to make inferences or causal statements. The study is focused on Muthappan Temple, the unique history it holds and the rituals which are sacred to the Temple and Lord Muthappan.

Locale: The majority of the respondents were from Kannur and Kochi. The device used for conducting the survey was a self-designed questionnaire which was circulated online to the natives of Kerala as well as non-residents of Kerala which asked respondents questions related to Temple Food and Prasadam.

Sampling Design: The sample size was 60 in total, the online link was sent to 70 people out of which 60 people responded which show that good number of people were interested. Researchers used their own resources for conducting the study. The results of the study brought forward some important and astonishing facts.

Tools and Technique: Dichotomous and 5 point Likert scale was used to collect responses from the respondents.

5 point Likert scale is used to understand their attraction about food served at religious place; where

1= Least likeliness to visit

2= Less likeliness

3= Neutral

4= More likeliness

5= Most likeliness to visit

The questionnaire was self-designed and circulated online using Google forms; thus the responses were taken online from friends and some relatives as well from Keralites as well as non-Keralites. As work location was situated in Southern part of the country, there were

many Keralites in batch who helped us by further sharing the link of the questionnaire with their near and dear ones. Thus, the responses were recorded.

Data and Statistical Analysis: Inferential statistics are based on probability theory and hypothesis testing, and enable generalizations about populations from which samples are drawn (Limited, 2012). As such, inferential statistics have a distinct advantage over descriptive statistics because the former enables results to be extrapolated to the wider population. However, the caveat that the validity of generalizations made using inferential statistics is predicated on how representative the sample is of the population is acknowledged.

Data collected was analyzed using SPSS version 25.0 and graphs were generated using Microsoft excel version 2007. *One Sample T-Test* was performed and p values of >0.05 was considered significant.

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no association between food served at religious places and frequency of visits by pilgrims / tourists

$$H_0: p > 0.05$$

H_0 : Food served at religious places does not play any role in attracting pilgrims / tourist.

Alternate Hypothesis(H_A): There is association between food served at religious places and frequency of visits by pilgrims / tourists

$$H_A: p < 0.05$$

H_A : Food served at religious places play important role in attracting pilgrims / tourist

One sample T-Test has been used to test hypothesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

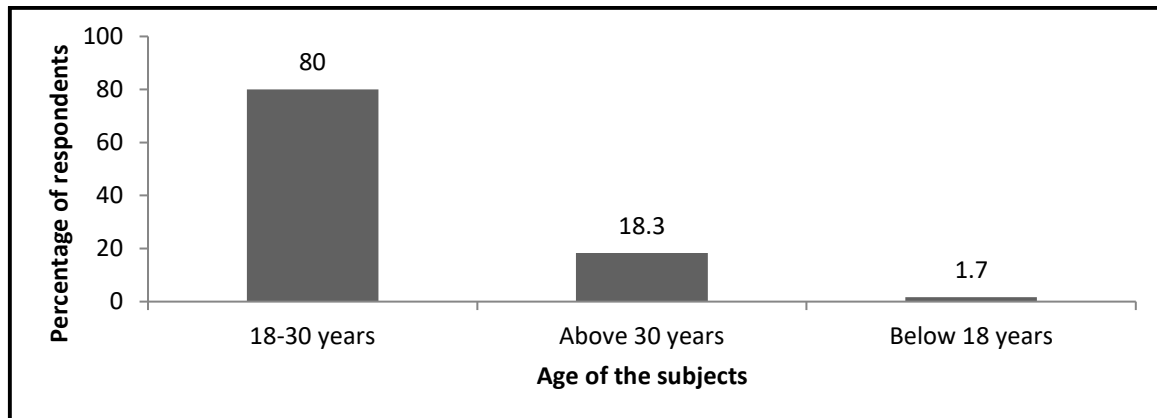


Figure 1: Age of Respondents

It can be noted that out of entire 60 respondents 1 respondent (which forms 1.7% of the total respondents) was below the age of 18 years, 47 respondents (which forms 78.3% of the total respondents) were between the age of 19-30 years; which shows that majority of the respondents were youngsters, and 12 respondents (which forms 20.0% of the total respondents) were above the age of 30; therefore a good sample size participated in study which covered teenagers to youngsters or old age people as well.

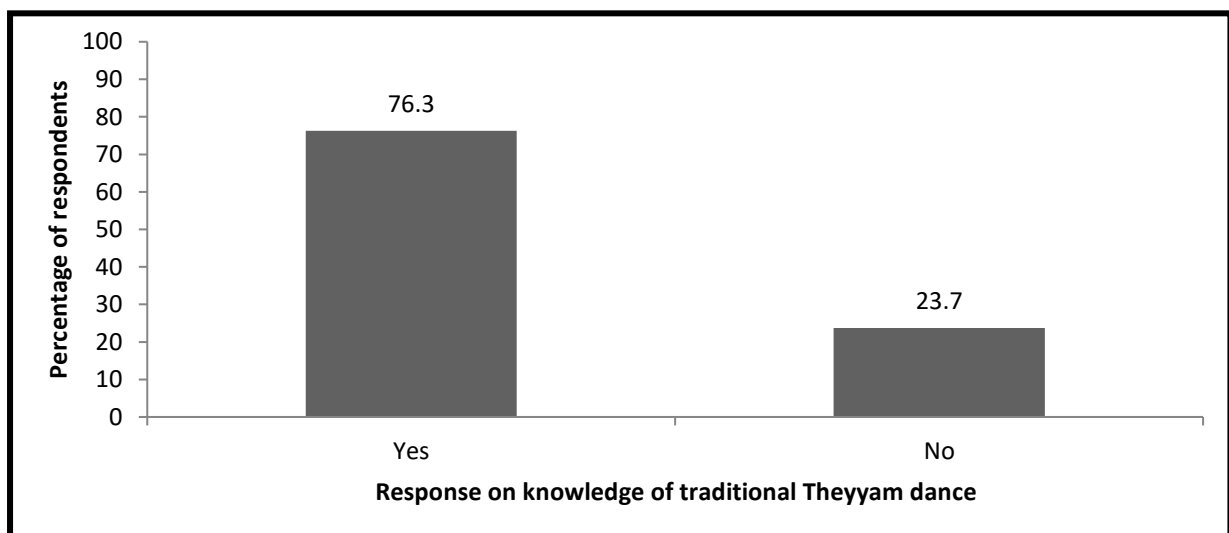


Figure 2: Response on ritualistic dance of Kerala

The traditional Theyyam dance of Kerala was originated in the Temple of Lord Muthappan. It was from here that this dance went outside and became famous. From the above bar graph it can be noted that out of 60 respondents 59 have responded for this question. The responses

tell that 45 respondents have heard about the Theyyam dance of Kerala which means that 75% of the total respondents were aware about this dance form. Whereas on the other hand one can see that 14 respondents said that they were unaware about this dance form of Kerala.

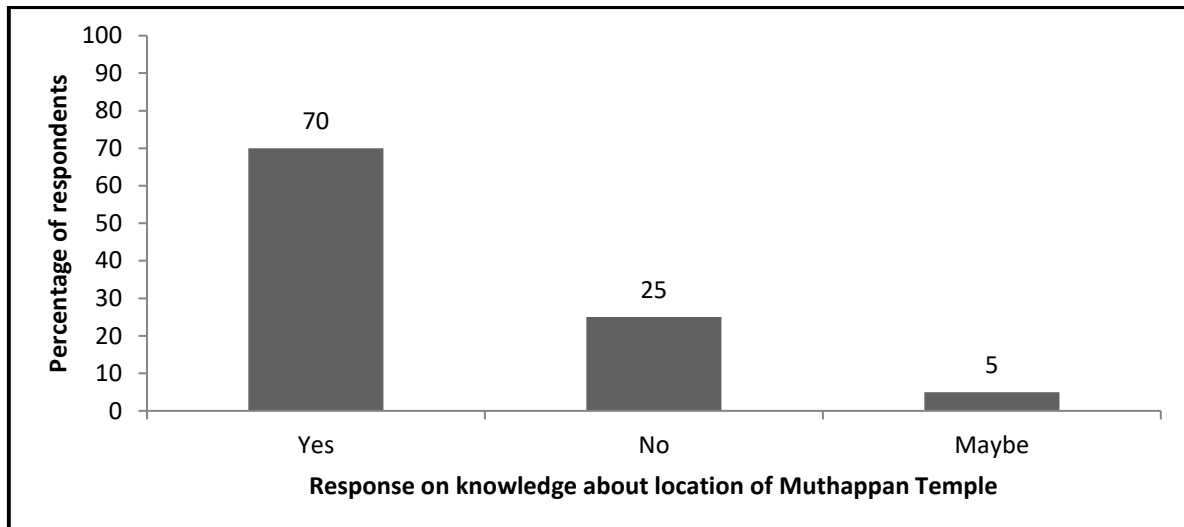


Figure 3: Response on whether respondents know where Muthappan Temple is located?

It can be observed from the above graphs that out of a total of 60 respondents 42(70.0%) which forms a majority were aware about the location of Muthappan Temple, whereas 15(25.0%) were unaware about the location of Muthappan temple and 3(5.0%) were unsure whether they know or not.

Table 2: Response on visit to Temple for Prasadam

Scale	Frequency (n)	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	17	28.3	28.3	28.3
2	4	6.7	6.7	35.0
3	8	13.3	13.3	48.3
4	5	8.3	8.3	56.7
5	26	43.3	43.3	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

This question played a very crucial role in determining the number of temple time's people visit. It can be noted from the above table that 17(28.3%) respondents stated that they have not at all visited a temple for Prasadam, 4(6.7%) said that they haven't visited a temple for Prasadam, 8(13.3%) were neutral, 5(8.3%) said that they might have visited a temple for Prasadam, and 26(43.3%) respondents said that they have visited temple for Prasadam, at times.

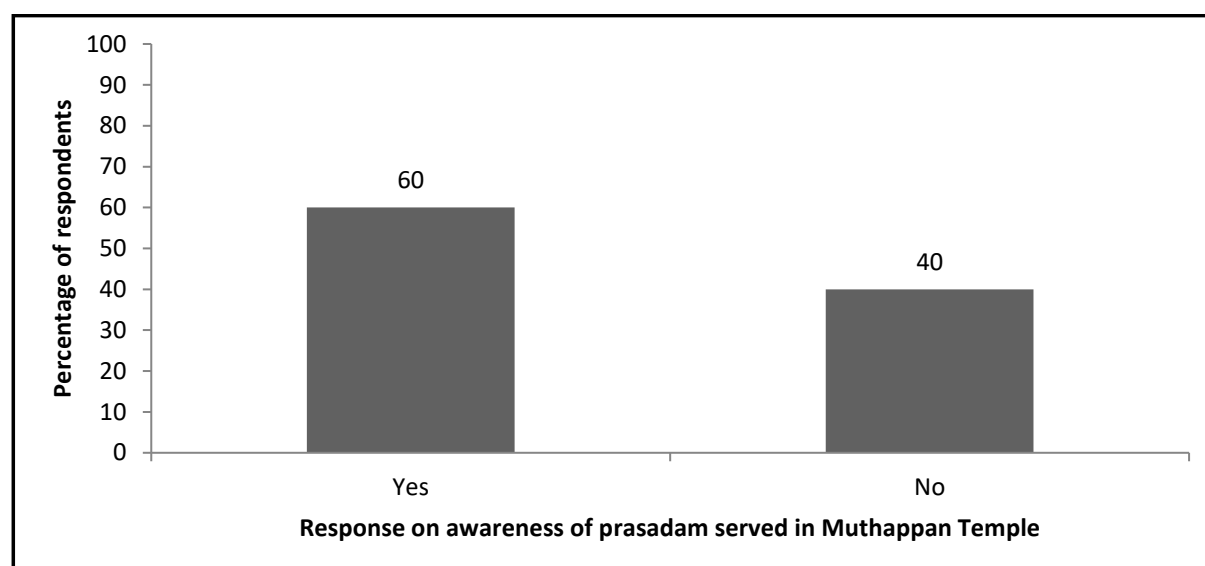


Figure 4: Response on Prasadam served in Muthappan Temple

Out of 60 respondents, 36 of them were aware of the Prasadam distributed in Muthappan temple; whereas 24 of them were not aware of the Prasadam served at Muthappan Temple. Muthappan temple is located only in some parts of India, so it is not uncommon that people aren't much aware.

Table 3: Response on likeliness of accepting toddy and fish as religious Prasadam

Scale	Frequency (n)	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	20	33.3	33.3	33.3
2	3	5.0	5.0	38.3
3	11	18.3	18.3	56.7
4	7	11.7	11.7	68.3
5	19	31.7	31.7	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

The above table brings to notice that out of a total of 60 respondents 20 (33.3%) were not all likely to accept Toddy and baked fish as prasadam, 3(5.0%) were not willing to accept toddy and fish as a religious prasadam, 11(18.3%) were neutral on the question whether they will accept Toddy and fish as a religious prasadam or not, 7 (11.7%) were likely to accept fish and toddy as a religious prasadam and 19(31.7%) are very likely to accept toddy and fish as a religious Prasadam. The point to be noted here is that the religion of the respondent was not been taken into consideration, which might be an important factor for this question in particular.

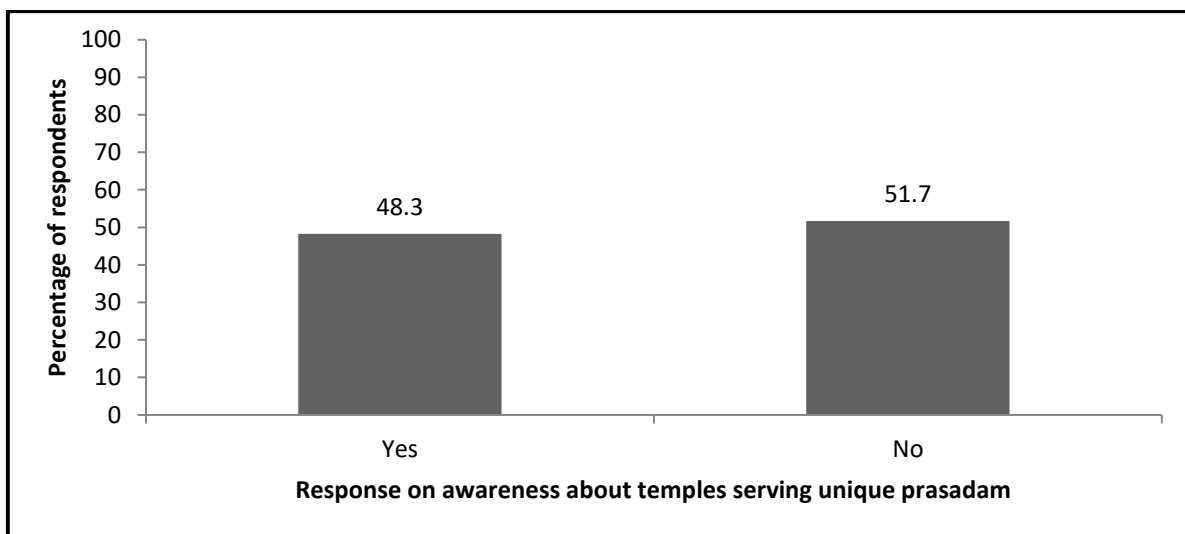


Figure 5: Response on visit to any other temple where unique Prasadam is served

From the above data it was revealed that 31 respondents didn't visit a holy place where unique Prasadam was served. But 29 respondents have visited temples that serve unique Prasadam. This means that other than Muthappan temple, there are temples which serve unique Prasadam and people go and readily accept the blessings and prasadam of that God.

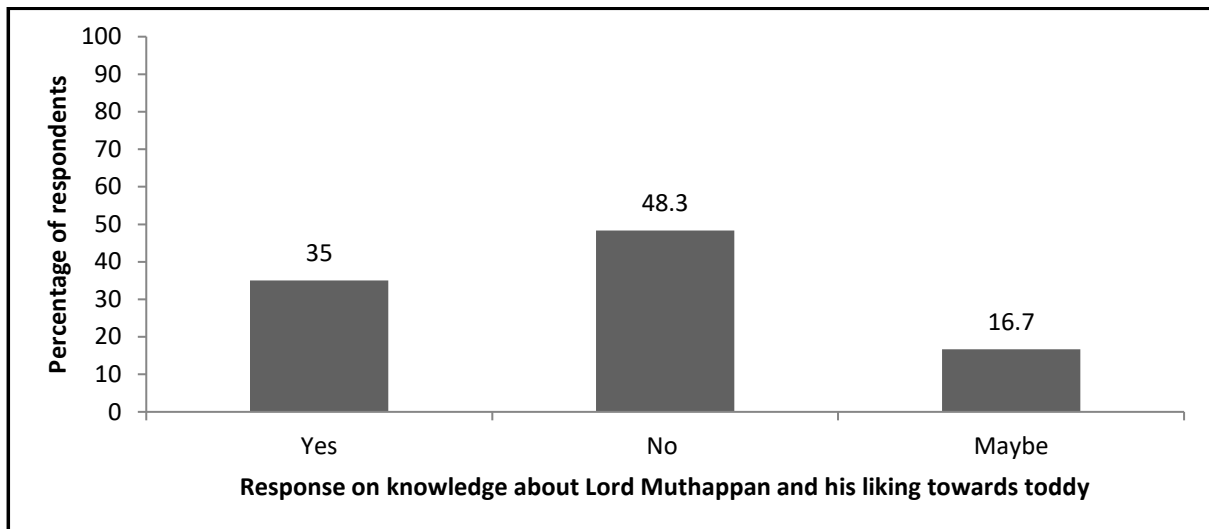


Figure 6: Response on knowledge about Muthappan & his liking towards toddy

Most of the respondents were not aware of the history behind Muthappan and his liking towards Toddy. It is due the limited presence of Muthappan Temple. But 35 % of respondents knew about history of Muthappan and his liking towards Toddy; which maybe from the respondents of Kerala as they may be familiar with Muthappan Temple or their Prasadam.

Table 4: Response on role of Prasadam in attracting tourists to that shrine

Scale	Frequency (n)	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	11	18.3	18.3	18.3
2	6	10.0	10.0	28.3
3	17	28.3	28.3	56.7
4	6	10.0	10.0	66.7
5	20	33.3	33.3	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

As per the respondent's opinion it can be noticed from the above table that out of 60 respondents 11(18.3%) believed that the type of Prasadam served in a pilgrim place plays a

very minimal role for attracting tourists, 6(10%) respondents believed that the type of Prasadam served in a pilgrim place plays a very small role for attracting tourists, 17(28.3%) said that the type of Prasadam served in a pilgrim place plays no role for attracting tourists i.e. they believed that Prasadam had nothing to do with the number of pilgrims attracted towards the Temple, Again 6(10%) believed that the type of Prasadam served in a pilgrim place plays a very significant role for attracting tourists and 20(33.3%) believed that the type of Prasadam served in a pilgrim place plays a very crucial role for attracting tourists.

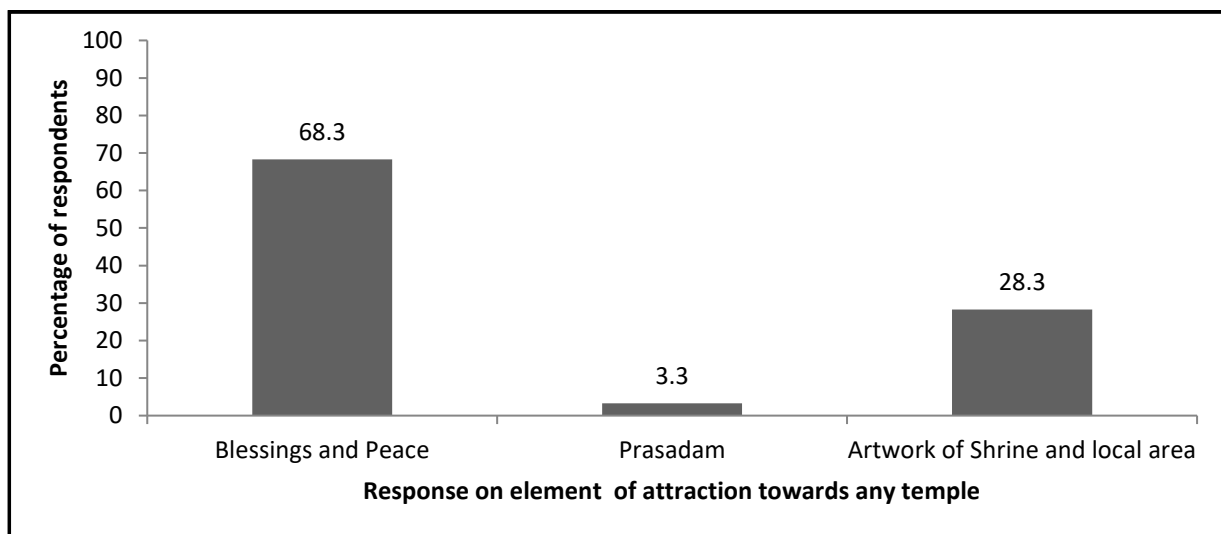


Figure 7: What attracts you towards a temple

From the above the graph it is clear that people were much devoted and visited the temple for obtaining the blessings from their beloved deity. Most of them gained their inner peace by visiting temple. It is to be noted that even though prasadam is considered to valuable, it is not the only factor for the people to visit temples. Prasadam here might not seem as a very important factor, as respondents did not visit the temple for prasadam but it is an important factor when it comes to acceptance of a prasadam.

Table 5: One Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
In your opinion does the type of Prasadam served in a religious place play an important role in attracting tourists to that Shrine?	60	3.30	1.488	.192

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 0					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
In your opinion does the type of Prasadam served in a religious place play an important role in attracting tourists to that Shrine?	17.181	59	.000	3.300	2.92	3.68

As it can be observed from the above table that N is the number of respondents which is 60; and the value of p is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 i.e. the level of significance is at 5% which mean the test is significant. The test value has been taken zero (0) as it is the mean of null hypothesis. A p-value is a probability associated with your critical value. The critical value depends on the probability you are allowing for a Type I error. It measures the chance at least as strong as yours if the claim (H_0) were true. As the value of p is significant, it can be concluded that here null hypothesis was getting rejected and alternative hypothesis was accepted which means that type of Prasadam served in a religious place plays an important role in attracting Tourists to that Temple/Shrine. So, statistically it is proved that, the type of Prasadam served at religious places play an important role in attracting pilgrims / tourists to that Temple/Shrine.

Accepted Hypothesis states:

H_A: Food served at religious places play important role in attracting pilgrims / tourist

H_A: <0.05

Religious groups take the role of food beyond fulfilling physical and emotional needs by including it into daily religious practices and rituals (Heather Farr).

Ghee soaked halwa and puri served at Gurudwara or lunger; Sabudana Vadi, Karanji and Modaks served at Siddhivinayak Temple, Dadar (Mumbai); the food served at pandals, we have been to Durga and Kali pujas in Nagpur, just for the simple and comforting moong dal khichuribhog (rice, pulses and vegetables cooked to a creamy consistency) served along with bainganbhaja (fried brinjal) and payash (kheer) or Parthasarathy Temple in Triplicane (Chennai) serves the *puliyodarai* are the various kind of food served in the form of *Prasadams*. If one visit Rajasthan, couldn't stop talking about the qawwalis and kheer (tabarruk) distributed during Urs at Ajmer Sharif. Prepared in two huge cauldrons (deg), in the precincts of the dargah, it is garnished with dry fruits. Also tradition of laddu itself is nearly 300 years old at holy town Tirupati are Prasadam (Swaminathan, 2015).

The prasadam cannot be defined under the definition of food. But as far as hygienic practices concern for preparing both, respondents expect to have very high hygienic standards. Also in case of mood, respondents feel that mood to eat Prasadam and food play important role while eating both (Lomte, 2017). The discussion above with other researchers finding also support the statistical result of the finding in this study. Hence, it is strongly recommended to have practice of serving Prasadam at religious places representing deity belief, local culture and traditions which can attract more pilgrims and will result in boosting domestic tourism.

CONCLUSION

The study results helped the researchers reach the conclusion that Prasadam without doubt is considered a blessing from God. The study also highlighted that Muthappan temple is always known for its unique Prasadam though the respondents were not that much aware about the Prasadam served at Muthappan temple. More than half of the respondents are unwilling to accept Toddy and fish as a religious Prasadam. The study also showcased that the Muthappan Temple is divergent in its art and culture, Prasadam served, the habits of the Lord and also the unique history it holds. The likes and dislikes of the deity are unique too. The findings of this study revealed that: firstly, food is, overall, of great significance to tourists; however, it

plays a varying role in domestic tourists' experiences at different travel stages. Secondly, demographic factors such as gender and religion may have influences on the food experience of tourists, while educational level has been revealed to be of little influence. The findings highlighted the contribution of local food at a destination level in the context of Prasadam, and signified the great potential for destinations to utilize food tourism to attract and retain tourists. Lastly, based on these findings, both theoretical and practical implications were derived. In particular, practical recommendations should be provided to the stakeholders on how to effectively utilize food/religious tourism to achieve successful pilgrim destination promotion in Kerala.

A thorough study can be conducted at prominent places in India where unique temples are there or at places where uncommon Prasadam is served. The study can be conducted with a large sample size and the question paper can be improved upon. The gender/religion of the respondent can be taken into consideration. There is a lot of scope in determining the exact role Prasadam or temple food plays in an individual's life. If the study is funded by some organization, exact and more relevant results can be retrieved from such study which will be helpful for the stakeholders as well the state tourism in determining the things to be added on or improved upon in order to make the stay smooth and hassle-free for tourists and pilgrims.

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