FSSAI conducts workshop on food safety in places of worship under BHOG
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From Chintapurni Shakti Peeth to Meenakshi Temple and from Somnath Temple to ISKCON, representatives of all major places of worship (PoWs) gathered in New Delhi for the second workshop on food safety and hygiene implementation in PoWs under project Blissful Hygienic Offering to God (BHOG), conducted by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

Project BHOG was among the Safe and Nutritious Food (SNF) bouquet of initiatives launched by the country’s apex food regulator a year ago. The BHOG was launched with an aim to ensure that the prasad or food received by devotees is safe for consumption. Since, about 30 crore people visit PoWs across the country daily and receive the prasad as a blessing of God, it is necessary to ensure that it is safe for devotees.

Project BHOG was launched nationwide with the support of the Association of Food Scientists and Technologists India [AFST(I)], which have been involved in the food safety system implementation at Siddhivinayak Temple, Mumbai and Sai Prasadalaya, Shirdi. A short film on Project BHOG was released on the occasion.

The first workshop of Project BHOG was held in 2016. It witnessed the presence of around 14 major temples to create awareness and build capacities for improvement of food handling in places of worship. All temples showed overwhelming interest in adopting Project BHOG in their respective PoWs, notably in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

With the enthusiasm of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department, Tamil Nadu, the project was implemented in Tamil Nadu with the participation of 20 major temples. About 300 food handlers were trained.

In the first phase, a day-long practical training of food handlers was organised. This was followed by hand-holding by local food safety trainers to develop and implement the food safety management system in the second phase.

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Maharashtra also conducted a training programme for over 3,500 food handlers from 236 PoWs. A similar training session was also conducted at New Delhi’s Hanuman Mandir, where the food handlers were guided on
safe food practices.

FSSAI organised the second workshop in New Delhi recently to review the progress of the states and cover all other temples under this project. The regulator is also reaching out to endowment departments and samitis to reach the maximum number of PoWs.

On this occasion, a guidance manual was released to facilitate the PoWs in self-implementation of food safety in their premises. Representatives from Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat shared their experiences of improvement in the quality of prasad after implementation of Project BHOG at the PoWs. Also, the major auditing agencies came forward to support the temples in conducting the food safety audit.

Merging its other initiatives, namely Food Fortification & Food Smart Consumer, FSSAI also emphasised that the temples use fortified staples such as ghee, oil, rice, flour and milk while preparing prasad or langar to make it more wholesome along with various means of consumer education about SNF in PoWs.

Pasupathy, food safety expert, guided the PoWs in implementation of food safety during a two-hour interactive session. The next workshop is likely to take place in Gujarat in February 2018, and covering Somnath Temple and others.

Somanth Temple, Meenakshi Temple, ISKCON and other prominent temples will also showcase their temple food or prasad at the food festival slated to take place at Jawahar Lal Stadium, New Delhi, between January 12 and 14, 2018.