

BHOG – On the way to becoming more Blissful!

Food served at pilgrim centres is not only considered to be pure and sacred but it also connects us to the divine. This edible offering, mostly referred as BHOG, prasad or langar, to the deity is an integral part of the spiritual experiences that India offers uniquely. It is meant to nourish both our body as well as mind.



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Since, the places of worships not only offer BHOG to the Almighty, it also serves food to several on a day-to-day course. Hence, ensuring food safety in these places is a major component in aiding health of thousands of the devotees who are visiting these places.

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has conceptualized Blissful Hygienic Offering to God (BHOG) initiative under its flagship programme, Eat Right India, to encourage Places of Worship to adopt and maintain food safety and hygiene. This initiative aims to encourage places of worship to ensure the health and welfare of the pilgrims by educating food handlers and vendors in the premises about proper food safety and hygiene. Under this initiative, the food handlers involved in preparation of prasad and vendors selling prasad are educated about appropriate food handling practices which are essential to ensure the health and welfare of the pilgrims. Later these establishments are audited and basic training is imparted to the food handlers. Display of food safety messages and Food Safety Display Boards at prominent places at the place of worship to encourage adoption of safe and hygienic food habits by the devotees is an important element of this initiative. After successful completion of all the steps, identified place of worship is recognized/certified.

Following the principle of Eat Safe, Eat Healthy and Eat Sustainable, BHOG aims to ensure that safe and wholesome prasad is received by the devotees along with the blessings of deity. A structured process for defining benchmarks, gap analysis, filling infrastructure gaps, training & capacity building and certification after a third-party audit is adopted at an identified place of worship. This is a systematic way to ensure compliance to food safety standards and also ensures organizing food vendors operating within the premises of a place of worship towards improved food safety and hygiene practices.

BHOG has been gaining a lot of traction from several states, especially, Haridwar. Successful implementation of



this initiative has been done at 45 places of worship so far covering the State of Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Delhi, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Meghalaya; and many other locations are in the pipeline. In the coming years, we plan to scale up the initiatives to other states.

Famous Temples like Shri Mahakal Mandir, Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh and Shri Ram Mandir, Raipur, Chhattisgarh have implemented BHOG and shown remarkable improvement. They made significant changes in infrastructure and lay-out, based on the gaps identified during the pre-audit to ensure unidirectional flow of food. They have started using food-grade lubricants and cleaning agents that come in contact with food items and utensils. Procurement managers are ensuring only food-grade material with the FSSAI logo. Other good practices initiated include temperature-monitoring devices like thermometer or digital display to make sure food is adequately cooked and safe for consumption, discontinuing the use of equipment and packing material made from non-food grade plastics, newspaper, thermocol etc. Testing of water and maintaining test reports and proper documentation on procurement, maintenance, personal hygiene, medical certificates, pest control, visitors and trainings.

Under 'Eat Right India', FSSAI has launched a series of initiatives targeting both food businesses and consumers to create an environment of right food practices and habits. BHOG is no different, and essential to raising confidence of consumers in relishing eternal offering they receive at the places of worship. **NS**