

Devotional Post

Prashant H. Pandya



The process of translating an idea or innovation into a service that satisfies a specific need and creates value for customer will certainly be welcomed by the customers, and they would be willing to pay for it. Today innovation has become an important strategic focus for the Postal Department, so that it is able to adapt to the fast changes at the marketplace. Study of Postal Innovation leads to the conclusion that the postal industry has made a good start in embracing innovation. Nearly all key postal operators have been diversifying their businesses for years, especially into the logistics and financial services area.

With more than 155,000 post offices covering even the remotest corners of the country, Indian Postal network is the largest in the world. Today Department of Posts has embraced innovation by diversifying their services in order to respond to the rapid evolution of consumer needs and to remain competitive in changing markets. Prasad, prasada or prasadam is a collective noun for substances - often items of food but also water, flowers, grain, ash, powder etc. - that have been offered to a deity during worship and which are subsequently distributed to priests, devotees etc., considered to have the deity's blessing residing within it which is

either consumed or preserved by worshippers. In contemporary Hindu religious practice in India, the desire to get prasada and have darshana are the two major motivations of pilgrimage and temple visits. Those who are unable to fulfill their desire for one or more reasons worship the deity from home but do not get benefit of consuming or receiving deity's blessings in form of prasadam. Tapping this sentimental feeling of devotees, Department of Posts came out with an innovative idea of delivering 'Prasadam' of many temples to the doorsteps of devotees making it convenient and affordable without actually travelling to the temples or holy places and launched 'Prasadam Post' Service.

Creativity has more to do with how to make marketing and public relations an integral part of the innovation process.

Speed Post Prasadam of Kanaka Durga Temple for Durga devotees

For the first time in India the Department of Posts, in co-operation with Sri Durga Malleswara Swamivari Devasthanam, Vijayawada, arranged to deliver prasadam of the famous Hindu temple of Goddess Kanaka Durga to devotees through speed post during the Dussehra (Vijayadashmi) festival started in October 2001.

Under this scheme devotees who cannot visit the temple during the festival can get the Goddess' Prasadam and 'Kumkum' (coloured powder used for social and religious markings in India) delivered at their doorstep by paying Rs. 40 at the nearest post office during the prescribed period just before Dussehra for which a receipt is issued by the Post Office. After collecting the amount from the devotees, the same is remitted to Nodal office i.e., Vijayawada HO. and Vijayawada HO further pays the prescribed amount to the temple authorities. Temple authorities in turn hand over the Sacred Prasadam to the postal authority. The Prasadam is neatly packed in a box by Department of Posts and delivered by Speed Post to the devotees. Each box of Prasadam contains 'Kumkum', Copper plate and 'Laddu' (sweet) and pocket size photograph of the Goddess.

Arrangements were made for the devotees from Krishna, West Godavari, Guntur, Prakasam, Nellore and Khammam districts, besides Vijayawada City at local post offices.

In the year 2001 Department of Posts delivered about 80,000 Prasadam packages from Kanaka Durga temple of Vijayawada earning additional revenue worth Rs. 24 lakhs. In the year 2003 the cost of Prasadam was increased to Rs. 50 from Rs. 40. Devotees outside the state had to pay Rs. 50 through money order and the amount was to be sent to the Devasthanam office of temple.

In the year 2003 Department of Posts delivered more than 88,000 packets of Prasad while in 2004 more than 146,000 packets; in 2005 over 150,000 packets, in 2006 more than 130,000 packets and in 2007 more than 99,000 packets respectively were delivered.

Sri Raja Rajeshwara Swamy Divya Prasadam, Vemulawada

Sri Raja Rajeshwara Swamy Devasthanam at Vemulawada village of Karimnagar District in Andhra Pradesh is one of the ancient and famous Shivate temples. Vemulawada is situated at about 11 kms to the North East of Sirsilla and 36 kms from the Karimnagar. The presiding Deity – Lord Raja Rajeshwara Swamy in the form of "Neela Lohitha Siva Lingam" is known for his boundless benevolence in fulfilling the wishes of the devotees. This Shrine is popularly known as "Dakshina Kasi" (Southern Banaras) and also as "Harihara Kshetram" for there being two Vaisnava Temples within the main Temple complex. A Dargah within the precincts of the temple stands as ample evidence for religious tolerance, as a place where all devotees offer prayers, irrespective of caste and creed.

In the year 2002 Andhra Pradesh Postal Circle made an arrangement to deliver Sri Raja Rajeshwara Swamy Divya Prasadam by Postal Service to the devotees. Rs. 50 was to be deposited in the post offices by devotees and a packet of Divya Prasadam containing 25 gm. Sugar Candy, Kumkum, Vibhuti and small photograph of Sri Raja Rajeshwara Swamy were sent in a specially designed envelope to the devotees by Department of Posts.

Distribution of Hyderabad Haleem by post in Hyderabad.

During Ramadan (Ramazan), the holy month of Muslims, the aroma of 'Haleem', a delicious non-vegetarian dish, pervades Hyderabad. As a part of its efforts to diversify and transform itself into a market-savvy organization, Department of Posts decided to take up and deliver 'haleem', a

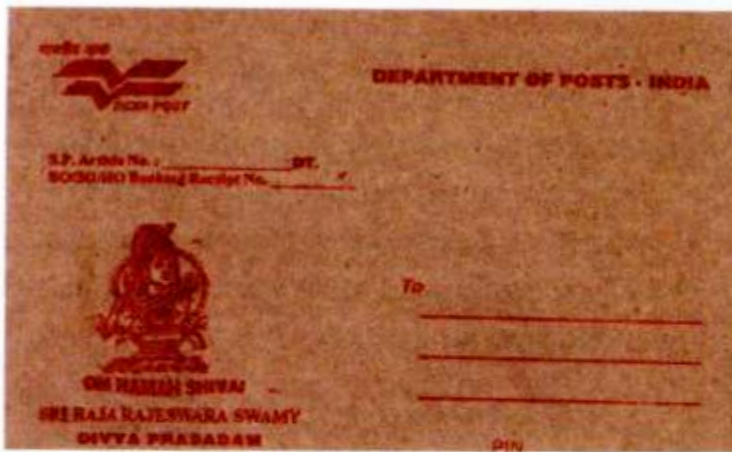


Fig. 1.
Envelope for delivering Divya Prasadam of
Sri Raja Rajeshwara Swamy Devasthanam,
Vemulawada

'Swami Prasadam' of the Ayyappa temple, Sabarimala

The Ayyappa temple of Sabarimala the Western Ghats in South Kerala is a true example of communal harmony. The main pilgrimage seasons for Sabarimala starts from November to mid-January when Mandala Vilakku and Makara Vilakku festivals are hold. During the pilgrimage season, thousands of devotees, from all over the country come to offer prayer to the Lord and pay homage to nearby Vavar mosque. Devotees offer naivedyam or prasadam to the God during the pooja. At the mosque 'Vibhuti' (sacred ash) is given away to the devotees, who apply it on their forehead.

A strong liking for sweets is a common factor of all Hindu Gods and Ayyappa is no exception. *Appam* (pancake made with fermented rice batter and coconut milk) and *Aravana payasam* (made of rice, ghee and jaggery) are the prasadam of the Lord. Devotees who visit Sabarimala can buy this prasadam from the counters at the temple. Devotees who could not visit this holy place were unable to take benefit of this prasadam.

The Kerala Postal Circle launched a new service called "Swami Prasadam" through a tie-up with the Travancore Devaswom Board on 29th November, 2002 to deliver Sabarimala prasadam to the doorstep of the Ayyappa devotees by Express Parcel Post Service. To avail the facility of this service, the devotee had to send Rs. 150/- by money order or Speed Post M.O. (Telegraphic M. O., Demand Draft or Postal

wheat and meat porridge, specially made for breaking the fast, during the holy month of Ramadan. The local postal department launched this service for the residents of Hyderabad in October 2002. The postal department tied up with Pista House located at Shalibanda Road, Hyderabad—which cooks the city's best-loved haleem to have it delivered all over the city through twenty of its post offices.

Under this scheme orders were to be placed in advance at the selected post offices and delivery of fresh haleem cooked under strict hygiene guidelines was packed in plastic containers, properly sealed and labled with specifications like weight, cost and validity printed on each pack. This was delivered at the customer's doorstep via speed post before 'roza' (daily fast) was broken at sunset.

The validity of haleem was not more than one day after the haleem is prepared, so speed and hygiene were of paramount importance. Prices for the haleem were fixed at Rs. 50 for 300 grams, Rs. 85 for 600 grams, Rs. 110 for 900 grams, Rs. 140 for 1,200 grams and Rs. 165 for 1,500 grams.

On the launch of the scheme about 3,000 orders were placed on the first day of the month itself, and the scheme was a big success.



Fig. 2. Outer box of Swami Prasadam. BNPL (Book Now Pay Later), & computer generated label of India Post with logo are inscribed on the box. Name and address of recipient, booking number of article with prefix "BNPL" are printed on this label

Fig. 3. A mailer sent along with the 'Swami Prasadam' describing the India Post Prasadam Scheme to devotees

The mailer is titled 'डाक द्वारा शबरिमला "स्वामी प्रसादम" मंडलम - मकरविलककु 2004-05'. It contains the following text in Hindi:

(केरल डाक परिषद और निरुक्तिकर देवस्वम बोर्ड का संयुक्त प्रयास)
 ❖ पंजीकृत पारसेल डाक द्वारा अपने घर के द्वार पर प्रसादम प्राप्त करने के लिए दृष्टिकोण भक्त इस सेवा का उपयोग कर सकते हैं।
 ❖ स 2004 (दो मी डबल मात्रा) की सीमा के सभी आदेश/स्वीकृत पोस्ट सभी आदेश कार्यालयक-अधिकारी, निरुक्तिकर देवस्वम बोर्ड, शबरिमला, पल्लमिडेट्टा जिला, केरल, पिन कोड - 689 713 के तहत पर भेजा है।
 ❖ किसी भी डाक घर में सभी आदेश बुक कर सकते हैं।
 ❖ सभी आदेश भेजनेवाला प्रत्येक भक्त प्रसादम प्राप्त होने पर भद्रदान अथवा धन के प्रतिफल प्राप्त करने के लिए आदेश करने के पत्र पर भेजना है।

| क्रम नं. | प्रसादम | मात्रा |
|----------|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| 01. | 'अरवणा प्रसादम' का मुहरबंद टिन | 2 टिन |
| 02. | अपम - वायुसक आवरण में पैक किया गया | 1 पैकेट |
| 03. | भगवान अथवा धन का धान और चंदन | 1 पैकेट |
| 04. | भगवान अथवा धन का अतिरिक्त ची | 10 मि. ची |
| 05. | मलिकपुरथमा का मरुतक (सफेद) और कुंकुम | 1 पैकेट |
| 06. | काजल स्वामी का काली मिर्च और धन्य | 1 पैकेट |
| 07. | स्वामी अथवा धन का लता चित्र | 1 |

- सभी आदेश बुकिंग का कार्य प्रारंभ हुआ है और इसकी अंतिम तारीख (2.01.2005) है।
 - दिनांक 2004 के पहले सत्रांत में पंजीकृत पारसेल डाक द्वारा प्रसादम भेजने का कार्य प्रारंभ होगा।
 - तार सभी आदेश, सॉल डाक और भारतीय डाक अंश स्विकृत नहीं किए जायेंगे।

Orders were not accepted) to "The Executive Officer", Travancore Devaswom Board, Sabarimala - 689713, Via Pathanamthitta, Kerala. "Swami Prasadam" was to be inscribed on the top of M. O. form and full address of the person to whom the prasadam is to be sent, was to be written at the space provided for senders' address. This facility was available only

during the festive season and money orders were accepted upto the month of April.

Following items of the prasadam were sent to the devotees by Express Parcel Post under BNPL Scheme in a specially prepared box having logo of India Post and photograph of Lord Ayyappa printed on it with "SWAMI PRASADAM" and "EXPRESS PARCEL POST" inscribed at the top. (Fig. 2 & 3) A sealed tin of 'Aravana payasam' 250 ml., 7 Appam packed in an airtight cover, Lord Ayyappa's 'Vibhuti', Malikapuratham-ma's manjal and 1 packet kumkum, Vavar Swamy's pepper and 1 packet 'Vibhuti' and a small laminated picture of Swami Ayyappa. During the second season (2004) the prasadam packet comprised of 'Abhisheka' ghee (10 ml) and sandal paste of Lord Ayyappa.

In 2007 amount for Prasadam was increased from Rs. 150 to Rs. 210 and the 'prasadam' packet consisted of a sealed tin of 'Aravana prasadam', a packet of 'Appam' in air tight cover, "Vibhuti", sandal paste, 10 ml of 'abhishekha' ghee, turmeric of the deity of Malikappuram, a packet of vermilion, pepper of 'Vavar Swamy' and a small laminated picture of Lord Ayyappa. The prasadam packets were dispatched through registered parcel post. Out of Rs. 210, Rs 10 was used for providing 'annadanam' (free meal) to the pilgrims at the shrine.

Srisailam temple prasadam and sale of yagna tickets

In 2002, Andhra Pradesh Postal Circle of Department of Posts entered into an agreement with the Shree Giri Vedic Research Foundation, New Delhi, which organized the yagna (ritual offering of ghee and herbal preparations into a sacred fire) at the Srisailam temple, Srisailam, Kurnool

district during 9th to 29th January, 2003. Accordingly, the Department of Posts booked the prasadam orders at Rs. 116 and home delivered to devotees by Speed Post through its network of post offices in Andhra Pradesh. Arrangements were also made to sell tickets of yagna performed at the Srisailam temple through post offices.

Prasadam of Sri Bhagawati temple, Kadampuzha

Kadampuzha Devi temple is a Hindu temple and pilgrimage center at Kadampuzha in Malappuram district of Kerala. The temple is dedicated to goddess Durga, a Devi. Kerala Postal Circle introduced service for distribution of Kadampuzha Sri Bhagawati Temple Prasadam on 22nd August 2003. Devotees had to send M. O. worth Rs. 100 to the Executive Officer, Kadampuzha Devaswam Board and prasadam was delivered by the Department of Posts anywhere in India.

Devi Bhagavathy Prasadam through Post

Chotttaikkara Bhagavathi temple is a very famous and ancient temple in Ernakulam district. It is situated 15 Kms. from Erankulam (Kochi).

In 2004, the Cochin Devaswom Board and the Department of Posts has tied up to send Devi Prasadam to the devotees through Post. To get the 'Devi Prasadam' by post, devotees has to send Money Order for Rs.150/- addressed to: "The Assistant Commissioner, Chottanikkara Devaswom, Chottanikkara. P.O., Ernakulam, PIN - 682312, Kerala". The top of money order form should contain the words "DEVI PRASADAM" and the full address of the person is to be written to whom the prasadam is to be sent in the space provided for sender's address.

The following items of Devi Prasadam are being sent, on receipt of the Money order, by Express Parcel Post (EPP): One sealed tin of 'Aravana Payasam', a packet of Guruthy Pushpanjali Prasadam, a packet of Archana and a small laminated picture of Bhagavathy.

Prasadam of Shri Siddhivinayaka Temple, Mumbai

Maharashtra & Goa postal circle tied up with the Shri Siddhivinayak temple trust, Mumbai for delivery of the holy prasadam of temple at the doorstep of devotees through postal service. Devotees have to visit any post office in Maharashtra and Goa and tender the required amount at the



Fig. 4. Packet with 'Chottanikkara Devi Prasadam' & India Post Logo inscribed

Fig.5. Devi Prasadam of Chotttaikkara Bhagavathi temple



counter. Within a few days, the holy prasadam will be delivered at the address provided by devotee. (Fig. 6). The prasadam contains a photograph, one 'Vibhuti' packet (Sacred ash), dry fruit packet consisting cashew nuts, *kismis* (Raisins), Crystal Sugar and *kharek* (dried dates), *raksha* thread (Holy thread) and dry Coconut.

Sri Ramulavari prasadam

The Sree Seetha Ramachandra Swamy shrine at Bhadrachalam is the most famous temple in the country dedicated to Lord Rama. The Visakhapatnam Postal Region entered into a tie-up with Sri Seetharamachandra Swamy Devasthanam, Bhadrachalam to offer 'Sri Ramulavari prasadam' through post offices in April 2004.

Under this scheme devotees of Sri Seetha Ramachandra Swamy can book Prasadams by paying Rs. 50 at any nearby post offices during the prescribed period just before Sri Rama Navami festival. After collecting the amount from the devotees, Post Offices issues a receipt for the amount paid. Collected amount is remitted to Nodal office i.e., Bhadrachalam H.O. which further pays the prescribed amount to the temple authorities. Temple authorities in turn hands over the prasadam containing "*Mutyala Talambalu*" (mixture of pearls and rice mixed with turmeric and saffron), a photograph of the deity and *laddu* (sweet) to the postal authority. This is neatly packed in a box by Department of Posts and delivered by Speed Post to devotees.

In year 2004 Department of Posts delivered more than 102,000 packets of Prasad. While in 2005 more than 119,000 packets, in 2006 more than 116,000 packets and in 2007 more than 97,000 packets were delivered respectively.

Prasadam of Lord Shiva through post

With the start of holy month of Shrawan in July 2012 the Department of Posts entered into an agreement with the Kashi Vishwanath temple of Varanasi and Mahakaleshwar temple of Ujjain to deliver the sacred '*prasad*' from these two temples to the devotees through Speed Post.

For getting Prasad of Kashi Vishwanath temple of Varanasi, devotee has to send money order of Rs 60 in the name of Superintendent of Post Offices, Varanasi (East Division) and in return the postal department would send a packet containing *Vibhuti* (holy ashes), *Rudraksh* (holy beads), a laminated photo of Lord Shiva and Shiv Chalisa (prayer book) as prasadam to the devotees. (Fig. 7) Prasad of Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga temple of Ujjain is sent to devotees on receipt of money order for Rs. 151 in name of Prabandhak (Manager), Shri Mahakaleshwar temple management committee, Ujjain-456 006. The temple authorities, in return, would send the prasadam through Speed Post Centre, Ujjain via Speed Post. The prasadam would comprise 200 grams of dry fruits, 200 grams of *laddu*, *Vibhuti* and the photograph of Mahakaleshwar. Recently amount for receiving Prasad of Mahakaleshwar temple of Ujjain has been increased from Rs. 151 to Rs. 201. (Fig. 8 and 9)

Prasad of Shri Mahalakshmi Temple, Kolhapur

The Mahalaxmi temple of Kolhapur is an ancient temple and one of the Shakti Peethas also called Dakshin Kashi, dedicated to the Goddess of prosperity and peace. Shri Mahalaxmi is locally known as Goddess Ambabai.

In September 2014 Kolhapur Postal Division

and Mahalaxmi Bhakta Mandal entered in to an agreement for home delivery of Mahalaxmi Prasad through Post. Devotees can subscribe to the facility by paying an advance of Rs. 80 at any post office and the prasad can be home delivered to any part of the state through Speed Post. The prasad pack contains a laminated photo of the Goddess Mahalaxmi along with dry fruits, *haldi* (turmeric powder) and *kumkum* (red powder used by Hindu women to make a round mark on the forehead).



Asheervachanam Scheme

Tirumala Sri Venkateswara Temple is a famous Vedic temple in the hill town of Tirumala, near Tirupati in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. Andhra Pradesh Postal Circle launched the 'Ashirvachanam' scheme in December 2009 for devotees to send money orders from anywhere in the country to Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) jointly with TTD. (Fig. 10 on following page).



Fig. 6. Prasad Mailer of Shri Siddhivinayaka temple, Mumbai

Fig. 7. Water-proof envelope with logo of India Post for sending Prasad of Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Varanasi

Fig. 8. Advertisement published by Department of Posts for prasad facility for Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga temple of Ujjain

Fig. 9. Special envelope with logo of India Post for Prasad of Mahakaleshwar temple, Ujjain





Fig. 10. 'Ashirvachanam' Scheme

Under this scheme Devotees of Lord Balaji can remit donations to Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Hundi through Money Orders from any Post Office. Money orders from Rs 10 or more can be sent to Executive Officer, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD), TTD Administrative Building, K. T. Road, Tirupati – 517 501. Tirupati H.O. pays consolidated Money Order amount through Cheque to Executive Officer, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam on daily basis. In turn TTD provides the Acknowledgement Card containing message of Lord Balaji, a pocket size photograph of Lord Balaji and Goddess Padmavathi, 'Akshatalu' (sacred grains) with window envelope.

The Post Office undertakes the responsibility of collection of sacred material, insertion, closing, addressing, labeling, special handling, despatch and delivery of the sacred material to Devotees by post. (Fig. 11) The delivery of prasadam takes place in about a week after the money order is sent. Customized software has been developed by Department of Post to manage the 'Ashirvachanam' scheme.

In 2013-14 more than 28,000 money orders were sent to Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam while in 2014-15 over 32,000 money orders were sent. 'Aseervachanam' scheme has also been extended by Andhra Pradesh Postal Circle at (1) Sri Laxmi Narasimha Swamy Temple of Yadagirigutta, a popular Hindu Temple of Narasimha Swamy, an incarnation Lord Vishnu situated



Fig. 11. Envelope mailed by Postmaster, Tirupati HPO under 'Aseervachanam' scheme containing 'Akshatahlu' and a photograph of the deity with Aseervachanam letter

on a hillock in the Nalgonda district, (2) The Bhimeswara Swamy temple of Draksharamam (East Godavari Dist.), one of the five powerful temples of Lord Siva, known as Pancharama Kshetram. The Scheme was launched at Draksharamam P.O. on 23rd March 2015.

(3) Suryanarayana Swamy Temple, one of the ancient and all among two Sun God temples of our Country situated in Arasavalli Village at a distance of about 1 Km east of Srikakulam Town.

(4) Gnana Saraswati Temple, one of the two famous Goddess Saraswati temples in India located on the banks of Godavari River at Basar, Telangana.

Andhra Pradesh Postal Circle has a plan to introduce Prasadam Service for the sale of Prasadam and Kumkum of five Sakthi Peethas of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana viz. (i) Draksharamam (The Bhimeswara Swamy temple), (ii) Pithapuram, Near Kakinada (Kukkuteshwara Swamy Temple), (iii) Alampur, Near Mahabub Nagar (Sri Jogulamba Devi Shaktipeeth Temple, also known as Yogulamba/Yogamba devi), (iv) Srisailam, Kurnool District (Sri Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple) and (v) Goddess Kanaka Durga Temple of Vijayawada.

Details of Money Orders paid to Executive Officer, TTD for the period December 2009 to August 2014 under Asheervachanam Scheme at Tirupati H.O. 517501

| Year | No. of MO Paid | Amount Paid to TTD in Rupees |
|--------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| 2009 | 3615 | 4,44,631 |
| 2010 | 252551 | 2,79,12,901 |
| 2011 | 236076 | 2,88,26,404 |
| 2012 | 229667 | 2,97,03,503 |
| 2013 | 269100 | 3,24,50,809 |
| 2014 | 195648 | 2,28,52,769 |
| Total | 1186657 | 14,21,91,017 |



Fig. 12. Sabarimala (Sabarimalai) P. O., Old Permanent Pictorial Cancellation



Fig. 13. Sabarimala P.O., New Permanent Pictorial Cancellation

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam Special Entry Darshan tickets

Andhra Pradesh Postal Circle and Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) has entered into an agreement for the issuance of Rs.300 special entry darshan tickets for Tirumala temple up to a month in advance. This facilitates a devotee to book the ticket even from a remote area. This scheme was officially launched on 5th January 2015. Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams ticket booking counter was inaugurated at the General Post Office at Abids, Hyderabad.

Pilot project of offering TTD's darshan tickets through nine post offices across five districts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana was launched in December 2014. Now this service has been commenced in 95 Head Post Offices and 2 Sub Post Offices in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Post office delivers mail to God

A post office located near the famed temple of Sabarimala, a Hindu pilgrimage center located in the Western Ghat mountain ranges of Pathanamthitta District is a unique post office and one of its main tasks is to deliver letters to God. This post office may perhaps be the only one in the country which doesn't work round the year. It comes alive during the Mandalam festival covering 41 days from November 15 to December 26, the Makaravilakku from January 1-14 (Makara Sankranti) and 10 days during Vishu in April. During this period it functions six days a week from 8 am to 8 pm. The post office mostly gets invitation cards for weddings, social functions and shop openings etc. addressed to Lord Ayyappa to seek divine blessings. Letter boxes kept in the temple complex get unusual postcards, envelopes, packages, etc. It has often been reported that the postal staff, while clearing letter boxes, find lost driving licenses, PAN cards, ATM cards, Voter cards etc. The post office staff mails them to concerned individuals.

Another feature of the post office is the special pictorial cancellation which depicts eighteen divine steps leading to the sanctum sanctorum of the temple. This is available only when post office remains open (Fig. 12 and 13). Eighteen steps that lead to the Ayyappa temple have been figuratively called Ponnu Pathinettampadi. These steps are divine in all aspects. According to a popular belief, the first 5 steps symbolize

the five human senses (*Panchendriyas*-signify the 'mortal' nature of one's body) vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch. The following 8 steps symbolize the eight *ashtaragas* - *kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *madha*, *maltsarya*, *asooya* and *dhumb* (desire, anger, avarice, lust, pride, unhealthy competition, jealousy and boastfulness). The next three symbolize for three *gunas*; nature born qualities i.e. *satva*, (perspicuity, discernment), *rajas* (activity, enjoyment) and *thamas* (inactivity, stupor). Last two steps symbolize *vidya* (knowledge) and *avidya* (ignorance). Those who cross all these steps are believed to achieve "Punyardarshan".

The river originates in Sahyadri Mountains (Brahma Parvatam) in the Western Ghats, about 18 km from Nasik and Triambakam in Maharashtra and forms a huge lake near Gangapur. It then embraces several tributaries on its way Eastwards and then southwards and finally joins Bay of Bengal in coastal Andhra Pradesh. The river flows through the states of Maharashtra, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Pushkaram or *Pushkaralu* (in Telugu), *Pushkara* or *Pushkar* (in Sanskrit) is an Indian festival dedicated to worshipping of rivers. *Pushkara* or *Pushkar* is derived from the element of *Push* (*Pushti*) meaning nourishment and *Kara* means one who does it. *Pushkara* is the energy that nourishes. With reference to the sacred rivers, *Pushkara* means the one who energizes the rivers and provides spiritual purification.

Godavari *Pushkaralu* is a festival of River Godavari happens once in 12 years. This lasts for a period as long as the Jupiter remains in Leo Zodiac sign. The first 12 days of Godavari *Pushkaram* is called *Aadhi Pushkaram* and the last 12 days is called *Anthya Pushkaram*. Last year it started from 14th July 2015 and ended on 25th July 2015 and was a '*Maha Pushkaram*' which comes once in every 144 years.

Godavari Mahapushkaram is once in a life time special opportunity for devotees to have a holy dip in Godavari River. It is believed that a dip in the holy Godavari enhances one's spiritual, mental and physical abilities and helps to cleanse the inner selves, wash out all evil tendencies and open up a path for righteous living.

This year Godavari *Pushkaram* pilgrims from all over the country had a holy dip in Godavari River but for various reasons,



Fig. 14. Advertisement by Andhra Pradesh Postal Circle for 'GOD-JAL' Scheme

'GOD JAL' Sacred water of Godavari River (Godavari Pushkara Jalam) through Department of Posts: New Facet of Devotional Post.

India is a country of innumerable sacred rivers and rivulets. Such rivers have become *teerthas* (Holy Place) and these *teerthas* have the reputation of washing away sins of the sinners. Godavari, the longest river in peninsular India, is considered very sacred by Indians especially by people of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra. The *Skanda Purana* (a medieval religious literature in Sanskrit) contains an elaborate account of the holiness of the Godavari.

many could not fulfill their desire. Andhra Pradesh Postal Circle took an initiative to supply the sacred water of Godavari to the devotees who could not physically visit and have a dip in the sacred waters of the Godavari River. Bottles of purified sacred water of Godavari River christened 'GOD-JAL' (Godavari Pushkara Jalam) duly purified and bottled as per ISI standards were delivered at the door steps of devotees at the cost as Rs. 20/- per bottle.

These bottles were made available at 95 head post offices, 2,360 sub post offices and 13,611 branch post offices of Andhra Pradesh & Telangana from 15th to 25th July 2015.

Department of Posts had tied-up with an ISI-certified water purification and bottling company to make the river water drinkable through reverse osmosis process and to supply the 'GOD-JAL' in 500 ml bottles. Shri B. V. Sudhakar, Chief Postmaster General, AP and Telangana circle, gave this information at a press meet: "The water drawn from the Godavari River would undergo an 18-stage purification process that complies with the Bureau of Indian Standards before getting bottled. The government of AP has permitted DoP to draw water from the river for this purpose."

Arrangements were made to place online orders for 'GOD-JAL', the sacred water at website of Andhra Pradesh Postal Circle by devotees till 14th July 2015. Residents of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana were able to book the orders through local post offices. Specially printed Money Receipts were issued for orders booked at Post Offices. (Fig. 16)

Domestic order except Andhra Pradesh and Telangana were delivered through EMS Speed Post while orders from foreign

Fig. 15. Sign at the Ghat from where water drawn for 'GOD-JAL', put up by Department of Posts stating: 'This Ghat is exclusively allotted to Government of India, Department of Posts for GOD-JAL project during the period of Godavari Pushkarams'



Fig. 16. Money Receipt issued by Post Office for order of 'GOD-JAL'



Fig. 17. My Stamp released on 'Godavari Pushkaram 2015' on 14.07.2015

countries were delivered through WorldNet Express. The last date for placing orders was 14th July 2015. For domestic orders Rs. 157 was charged towards delivery charges per bottle. Orders booked within the state of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana were delivered free of cost. Purchases from abroad were to be made using American Express or Diner Cards only. Rajahmundry H.O. was identified as the nodal point for dispatches of all orders received for 'GOD-JAL'. (Fig. 18 & 19) Department of Posts also launched 'My Stamp' on the regional theme of 'Godavari Mahapushkaram 2015' on 14th July 2015. Two Meghdoot Postcards and twelve special covers were also released on "Godavari Mahapushkaram" during the festive season. (Fig. 20 & 21)

Mahamaham (Kumbh Mela) 2016 Prasadam by Post

The Mahamaham is an annual event that occurs in the Tamil month of Masi (February– March) in the star of Magam in Kumbakanom in Tamilnadu. Once in twelve years, when the planet Guru (Jupiter) enters Simha (Leo) sign a larger festival called

Mahamaham (Kumbh Mela festival) is celebrated at Mahamaham tank located at Kumbakonam. This once in a 12-year gala event was celebrated from 13th to 22nd February 2016 at Kumbakonam. Hindus consider taking a holy dip at the Mahamaham tank on the day of Mahamaham as sacred. Vast crowds gather at Kumbakonam to have a dip in the tank, along with saints and philosophers. All the rivers of India are believed to meet at the tank on this day and a purificatory bath at this tank on this day is considered equal to the combined dips in all the holy rivers of India.

In February 2016, during the Mahamaham 2016, Department of Posts entered into a tie-up arrangement with the Department of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment to make available Mahamaham theertham (sacred water) and prasadam to devotees through post offices all over India. Devotees had to register their names and address for getting the packets through post offices by remitting Rs. 150 in any post office having e-payment facility all over India up to 29th February 2016. Biller ID created for making e-payment was 6367 (HR&CE). For the first time e-payment facility was made available for the prasadam service by Department of Posts. (Fig. 22, 23)



Fig. 18. Bottles of 500 ml. 'GOD JAL' Sacred water of Godavari River



Fig. 19. Label of 'GOD-JAL' bottled water



Fig. 20. Meghdoot Postcard on Godavari Maha Pushkaram 2015 in Telugu



Fig. 21. Meghdoot Postcard on Godavari Maha Pushkaram 2015 in Hindi



Fig. 22. MPCM Receipt for e-payment for Mahamaham 2016 Prasadam

Mahamaham - 2016 packets, containing the Mahamaham theertham (holy water of Mahamaham Theertham tank), 'Vibhuti' (sacred ash), kumkum of 12 Siva temples and 5 Vaishnavaites temples located in and around Kumbakonam associated with the festival (viz. Sri Aadhi Kumbeswarar, Sri Banapureswarar, Sri Sarangapani, Sri Kasi Viswanathar, Sri Aadhi Kambatta Viswanathar, Sri Chakrapani, Sri Nageswarar, Sri Ekambareswarar, Sri Ramasamy, Sri Someswarar, Sri Kodeeswarar, Sri Rajagopalaswamy, Sri Gowthameswarar, Sri Kalahastheeswarar, Sri Adhi Varagaperumal, Sri Abimukeswarar and Sri Amirthakalasanathan Temple), sugar candies and a book on the history of Kumbakonam temples were made available to devotees under the arrangement. All items were neatly packed in a plastic box and despatched to devotees by registered post parcel from 23rd February 2016 on. (Fig. 24, 25)

Efforts were made to introduce Prasadam Service for Lord Jagannath temple, Puri in association with Jagannath temple administration in 2003 and Prasadam of Badrinath temple in the form of Blessings from Dev Bhumi" in association with the

Fig. 23. Advertisement by Department of Posts for Mahamaham 2016 Prasadam in Tamil language.

Uttaranchal Tourism Development Board in 2005, but more information about the introduction of prasadam service at these two places is not known. The author does not have information about any prasadam post services which are still in existence nor new services which may have been added by Department of Posts.

Readers are requested to provide any information available with them. Devotional post is a new subject and this article is perhaps the first time features of these services are brought out. The subject needs to be explored in depth. To collect examples of these services needs effort and patience. This subject has opened a new avenue for collectors of Modern Indian Postal History and examples of devotional post will help them build unique collections.

Fig. 24 & 25.
Registered Post Parcel of
Mahamaham 2016 Prasadam



About the Author:

Born on April 28, 1961, Prashant Pandya is a keen philatelist since school days. He received B.Sc. degree in Microbiology from South Gujarat University. He has worked in pharmaceutical divisions of Alembic Chemical Works and Sarabhai Chemicals at Vadodara. Presently he is a proprietor of Virtual Biz Solution. His hobbies are Philately, Web Designing, Philatelic Journalism and Ghazals.

In philately his areas of interest are Indian Postal Stationery of Pre- and Post-Independence period, Modern Indian Postal History, Postal History of Baroda State and Rajpipla State. In thematic Philately, he collects on Milk. Mr. Pandya is a President of Baroda Philatelic Society and an editor of 'Vadophil', quarterly newsletter of Society. Mr. Pandya is a Secretary of Philatelic Congress of India and promoter of Indian

Philatelists' Forum. He is an author to 'A Guide to Modern Indian Postal Stationery, Vol. 1, Envelopes' published in 2004. Mr. Pandya is an Indian Representative of Exponet – A Virtual International Philatelic Exhibition. Mr. Pandya is a volunteer editor at Allexpert.com and dmoz.org for philately related queries and websites. He has developed a website for the promotion of Indian Philately which is updated daily. Android App "indianphilatelydigest" is developed by him for Indian Philately and is available at Google Play Store. He has won several awards at District, State, National and International level philatelic exhibitions. He has acted as Jury members at District, State & National level philatelic exhibitions. He believes that Philately is "Edutainment" (Education + Entertainment)

Email: edesk@prashantpandya.com

Website: www.indianphilately.net