

Food destroyed at Jagannath temple after foreigner's entry

In a country where millions go to bed hungry, Rs.1 million worth of food meant as holy offering at Orissa's Jagannath temple was destroyed Friday because a foreigner had entered it - an act seen as defiling the premises.

Priests at the temple in Puri, 56 km from here, also performed rituals to cleanse the shrine after Paul Rodgier, a 55-year-old American Christian, visited it Thursday afternoon.

The priests fined him Rs.209 when he pleaded that he was not aware of any restriction on the entry of foreigners to the temple. Rodgier had reportedly come to the government-run National Thermal Power Corp in Angul district on official work a few days ago.

The shrine administration then decided to destroy the food that was prepared for offering to the deities, temple official Laxmidhar Pujapanda told IANS. A mud pit was dug inside the premises and the holy offering was thrown in it.

The priests, who had stopped all the rituals of the temple since Thursday afternoon, also performed purification rituals Friday, he said. The kitchen areas of the temple were also washed thoroughly, he said.

Foreigners are not allowed to enter leading Hindu temples in Orissa, including the Jagannath temple at Puri and the Lingaraj temple here.

An American woman, Pamela K. Fleig, who had converted from Christianity to Hinduism after marrying an Uttar Pradesh resident, was denied entry into the 11th century Lingaraj temple in Bhubaneswar in 2005.

Thailand's Crown Princess Sirindhorn was also not given permission to visit the Jagannath temple the same year because she is a foreigner and a Buddhist.

Even former prime minister Indira Gandhi - a born Hindu - was not allowed to enter the temple when she was in power because she had married a Parsi.

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