



# THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

## ‘Thattukadas’ are here to stay

Wayside eateries are thriving here, thanks to loopholes in guidelines which go light on these food stalls

20th August 2019



By Swetha Kadiyala

Express News Service

KOCHI: Who doesn't love street food, especially when it is light on the pocket? The last few years have seen a mushrooming of thattukadas (street food stalls) across the city. Conservative figures put the number of functional thattukadas at a little more than 500 within the Kochi Corporation limits. Not surprising, considering that while hotels and restaurants have to acquire both a Dangerous and Offensive Trades Licence (DNO) from the local municipality and a separate permit from Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to set up an establishment, thattukada owners are only required to register their stall with the state Food Safety Department.



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“The registration for roadside eateries comes under the FSSAI. It costs `100 per year and vendors only have to affix a valid identity card along with providing details of where the stall will be set up,” said Rani, district food safety officer, Ernakulam. As per regulations, the basic registration with FSSAI is only applicable to stalls whose revenue per day is less than `3,000 but the Kerala Hotel and Restaurant Association (KHRA) claims that street food vendors are flouting norms.

“Some popular thattukadas in the city located close to bus stations and main hubs do business upwards of `25,000 every day. This is more than the sales in some restaurants. They don’t have to follow any hygiene standards imposed on permanent eateries, there is no routine inspection.

Moreover, wayside eateries do not come under the purview of GST and most of them blatantly misuse the electricity and water resources of the corporation,” said Hafiz Moosa, state secretary and district president of KHRA. On the other hand, roadside food vendors state that they have to operate under the constant threat of eviction as the Corporation refuses to issue licences.

“We are not given formal recognition, we have to operate in a grey zone and are scared to be shut down any day. Officials say we don’t follow hygiene but my stall has been running well for the last 10 years. Some of my customers come every other day, why would they turn up if the food is unclean,” noted Usha (name changed) who runs a popular wayside eatery in Panampilly Nagar with her husband.

Unlike in the case of hotels where inspections happen regularly, street food stalls have so far been exempt from scrutiny. “The Food Safety Department has every right to cancel or suspend registrations but street food stalls issue a statement claiming their income is below a certain figure. So the review procedure is not as stringent. When an officer visits a certain area to inspect a hotel or a food processing unit, he or she also drops by thattukadas in the vicinity to check cleanliness standards,” adds Rani.

Close to 2,000 stalls were directed to shut shop in 2017 by a task force set up by District Collector.

The Street Vendors Act of 2014 enacted by Parliament proposes rehabilitation of stalls to identified locations. “Kerala is yet to implement the act on a full scale but most hawkers would be unwilling to uproot from their current locations as it might lead to a sharp fall in their sales. What we found during the eviction drive was that some stalls were thriving and making anywhere around `50,000 to `1 lakh daily,” said Sreenivas, district health officer.

street stalls

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