

A crowd favourite gets formal recognition

TNN | Sep 16, 2019

CHENNAI: It's more than 19 years that S Sundari has been selling fish delicacies on the Marina. She has got many regular customers, but a recognition from the Tamil Nadu Safety and Drug Administration Department and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is special. A week ago, she received a certificate from the FSSAI for one of the most hygienic and safe street food vendors. It's part of the FSSAI's "The Eat Right Movement" that Sundari has been selected.

"I am happy that my service has been recognised by the government. My customers always enjoyed my food, but this recognition from the government is special," said Sundari, who is fondly called Sundari Akka by her customers.

There is a story behind Sundari's association with fish. She gets up at 4am every day and rushes to the Kasimedu harbour to buy fish. By 11am, she will be ready with various fish delicacies at Sundari Akka Kadai, a stall run by her near the Marina swimming pool. Although many sell fish delicacies on Marina, what makes Sundari different is her specially made prawn curry, mutton masala and fried seer fish. It's a recognition to her hard work and dedication. But Sundari gives the credit to her regular customers. "I am what my customers are. I might have won their hearts with my fish delicacies, but they are the ones who made me popular by spreading the news," said the 53-year-old.

It was while having lunch at a hotel in Chennai two decades ago that Sundari thought of opening an eatery. "The food the hotel served was bad. I thought why we couldn't open a stall and provide good and tasty food to people. I first started a tiffin stall and eventually I began serving lunch with fish and mutton curry. The response was good," she said. At her stall, Sundari takes care of everything. Serving tasty food to people, according to Sundari, is a great act. And it reflects in the fish and mutton dishes that she serves. "I make the fish and mutton items using a special masala that I prepare at the end of every month. I will fry the fish only after getting the order," said Sundari.

Besides fish delicacies, Sundari's mutton curry is also very popular. She doesn't sell poultry chicken which according to her is not good for health. Sundari's elder son studied hotel management, but he doesn't want to take care of the stall. "With the government's recognition, my responsibility has increased. I will continue to serve healthy and tasty food to people," she said.