

FO 2: Legend of the Ambalappuzha Paal Paayasam

According to the legend, Lord Krishna once visited in the form of a sage – that is a very wise man – an Indian king and challenged him to a game of chess.

Being a chess enthusiast, the king happily accepted the invitation. The prize had to be decided before the game and the king asked the sage to choose his prize in case he won. The sage told the king that he had a very modest wish. Being a man of few material needs, all he wanted was a few grains of rice. The amount of rice itself would be determined using the chessboard in the following manner: one grain of rice would be placed in the first square, two grains in the second square, four in the third square, eight in the fourth square, and so on. Every square would have double the number of grains of its predecessor.

Upon hearing the demand, the king was unhappy, since the sage requested only a few grains of rice instead of other riches from the kingdom, which the king would have been happy to donate. He requested the sage to add other items to his prize, but the sage declined.

So the game of chess started and, needless to say, the king lost the game. It was time to pay the sage his prize. As he started adding grains of rice to the chess board, the king soon realized the true nature of the sage's demands. By the 20th square, the number had reached one million grains of rice, and by the 40th square it had become one trillion. The royal granary soon ran out of grains of rice. The king realized that even if he provided all the rice in his kingdom, he would never be able to fulfil the promised reward.

To fill a normal chessboard, one would need 18,446,744,073,709,551,615 grains. This amount of rice would weigh about 460 billion tonnes and cover the surface of India two metres deep.

Upon seeing the dilemma, the sage appeared to the king in his true form, that of Lord Krishna. He told the king that he did not have to pay the debt immediately but could pay him over time. The king would serve paal-payasam (a dish made of rice) in the temple freely to the pilgrims every day until the debt was paid off.

