

REVIVING INDIAN CULTURE

India's rich cultural heritage, shaped by millennia of philosophy, art, language, and spiritual wisdom, is both timeless and deeply rooted in the soul of the nation. However, in the race for rapid modernization, urbanization, and global integration, the essence of Indian culture has often been sidelined or diluted. Now more than ever, there is a pressing need to revive and celebrate our indigenous traditions, values, and practices-not just for nostalgia, but to strengthen our identity in a rapidly changing world.

Reviving Indian culture does not mean rejecting modernity. It means creating a harmonious balance between tradition and progress. The values embedded in ancient Indian scriptures, such as respect for elders, the pursuit of knowledge, ecological harmony, and the idea of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family), remain deeply relevant in today's fractured global environment. These values can offer moral direction and societal cohesion in times of confusion and chaos.

Language is one of the key carriers of culture. As regional languages face decline in daily use, the revival of Sanskrit, and promotion of languages like Tamil, Bengali, Marathi, Dogri and others must be prioritized-not just ceremonially, but through education, literature, and digital platforms. Similarly, classical music, folk traditions, indigenous crafts, Ayurveda, yoga, and traditional festivals should be actively integrated into the educational system and public life.

The younger generation must be engaged not only through books but through experiential learning-visits to heritage sites, workshops in folk arts, storytelling festivals, and traditional theatre. Technology can be a powerful tool in this effort. Social media, films, and online learning platforms can help make Indian culture accessible and appealing to today's youth in ways that are engaging and modern.

Cultural revival must also go beyond tokenism. It should inspire pride without prejudice, encouraging unity in diversity rather than cultural exclusivity. India's cultural wealth is not monolithic-it is a vibrant mosaic of languages, cuisines, rituals, and philosophies.

The government, educational institutions, civil society, and individuals all have a role to play in this collective effort. Reviving Indian culture is not about returning to the past-it is about carrying forward the best of it into the future, with awareness, pride, and purpose.

Combat air pollution through eco-friendly Diwali

■ DR. BANARSI LAL

Diwali or Deepawali also known as the festival of hope and lights is the major festival in India.It is a cherished occasion celebrated across India and beyond with great enthusiasm and fervor. On this day people worship the goddess Lakshmi and commemorate the victory of good over evil.On this ,Lord Rama ,Mata Sita and Lakshman returned to Ayodhya after completing 14 years exile and defeating Ravana. When lord Rama defeated demon Ravana and came back home after 14 years of exile, people of Ayodhya decorated their homes and the markets with earthen lights to celebrate the return of their King and thus this festival came into existence. This festival also signifies the victory of good over evil. In present era people celebrate Diwali by illuminating earthen lamps and firing crackers across the nation and abroad causing lot of pollution in the environment. Over the years ,the celebration has impacted the environment due to pollution that takes place through burning of crackers. People visit their nears and dears and exchange sweets and gifts to express their happiness with each other. Firing crackers give us joy for sometimes but it causes noise and air pollution which have hazardous effects on our health and environment. The health hazards of firecrackers used to celebrate the festival are not known to many people. Many people believe that greater the fireworks, the better the celebrations. Very few people know how harmful these crackers are for the environment. Firecrackers can lead to burns and eye injuries during the celebration of Diwali. The ingredients in the firecrackers such as dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter are air pollutants. The burning of crackers releases the different types of pol-

lutants into the atmosphere including particulate matter, nitrogen oxides and sulphur oxides. These pollutants cause respiratory problems ,increase health issues and also cause acid rain.The noise pollution cased by the fireworks can disturb wildlife and disturbs the tranquility of neighbourhoods. Crackers are injurious to all especially senior citizens and children health. In India noise pollution is a regular phenomenon especially in the urban areas. The sources of noise pollution is usually multiplied during festivals like Diwali ,in which firecrackers are responsible for noise pollution which further led to temporary or permanent deafness. There is need to celebrate Diwali with eco-friendly alternatives.LED lights and lanterns are safe and more sustainable options. Encouragement should be given on community celebration instead of individual celebration. The cost of celebration can be reduced and the paper pollution caused by firing crackers can also be minimized. By encouraging the eco-friendly Diwali, the noise and air pollution can be reduced. The Diwali should be celebrated in a limited area and for limited time say 9pm to 10 pm. This can reduce the air and noise pollution. In the rural areas the festival generally comes after harvesting of the Kharif crops and farmers thank to God for their good crops.

We should follow the eco-friendly practices on Diwali. We can decorate our homes with colourful duppattas instead of plastic streamer. We can use the organic colours for Rangoli and real flowers and avoid the artificial flowers. Eco-Friendly crackers are available in the market. These eco-friendly crackers are made up of recycled paper and the sound produced by these crackers is as per the defined limits of the Pollution Board. Different paper

fluffers and color lights are produced when these crackers are brusted. We can decorate our homes with the earthen lamps instead of electrical lamps. Earthen lamps need oil for illumination and they produce meager amount of pollution in comparison to artificial lights. The earthen lamps can also help to reduce the electricity bills and the house beautification can also be enhanced. On this festival we express our happiness by exchanging gifts and sweets with the others. Celebrate this Diwali by gifting organic commodities to your friends and relatives. There are a number of organic products available in the market; you can gift organic fruits and vegetables, organic flowers, clothes made up of organic cotton, organic soaps and creams, organic tea, organic spices etc. We can also gift plants on this Diwali. There are a number of ornamental plants available in the market we can gift them to our relatives and friends. We can gift all these commodities in hand made clothes/wrappers. People do shopping on Diwali. It's an age old tradition to buy something new on Diwali. But on this Diwali purchase only the needful things. Buy only those things which are useful for you because more consumption of things will lead to consumption of raw material used in manufacturing of those things. Thus, the pressure on natural resources will be increased which ultimate lead to their extinction. The resources such as water, labour, energy, money etc. can be saved by using the needful commodities.

On this Diwali natural resources can be utilized by avoiding the artificial things. Use banana leaves to serve the guests at your home. By doing this you can add a traditional touch to this festive season. Earthen pots can be used instead of glass and plastic to add ethnic feeling. By doing this you can keep eco-

friendly environment at your home and surroundings. Before Diwali people clean their houses to make them attractive and beautiful. People take out unwanted things like toys, house hold items and cloths and donate them to the poor people. We can also buy some cloths, books, colors, sweets etc for them. Through this way we can make our Diwali brighter and y memorable. At Diwali all members of the family assemble together. The children and the old people should also be involved in celebration of Diwali and we can bring little joy in their lives by celebrating Diwali with them. We can go to an old age home or an orphanage and celebrate Diwali with them. Buy some clothes, sweets, lamps, candles etc. and share these things with them. They will be very happy. Many natural and organic fairs are held during Diwali time. One can explore shops selling natural and eco-friendly commodities on this festival. Many Self Help Groups (SHGs) are making earth friendly handicrafts and organic items to eat. One can gift organic and natural food items to his or her relatives. We can use the reusable glass jars for packing the edible items instead of plastic containers. Eco-friendly Diwali will help us to keep our environment clean and green. So celebrate eco-friendly and innovative Diwali. Happy Diwali to all the readers. Have a lovely, earth friendly and loving Diwali.An eco-friendly Diwali is not only a responsible choice but also a way to celebrates the festival's true spirit of joy,prosperity and harmony with nature.There is need to create awareness on the hazards of firecrackers on the health of human-beings.It has been observed that many people have favourable attitude towards eco-friendly Diwali.

(The writer is Chief Scientist & Head of KVK Reasi SKUAST-J)

Tobacco on rise in Jammu & Kashmir: A growing public health challenge

■ MOHAMMAD HANIEF

Tobacco use has quietly become one of the most serious public health challenges facing Jammu and Kashmir. Despite awareness campaigns, government regulations, and warnings printed on every packet, tobacco consumption continues to rise across the region. From bustling city streets to quiet villages, smoking and other forms of tobacco use have become deeply embedded in daily life - cutting across class, gender, and age.

Recent national health surveys place Jammu and Kashmir among the states and union territories with the highest rates of tobacco consumption in India. The latest data from the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS-2) and the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) show that 23.7 percent of adults in the region use some form of tobacco. Of these, 20.8 percent are active smokers, while 4.3 percent consume smokeless forms such as gutkha or snuff. These figures point to a worrying trend that shows little sign of slowing down.

The gender gap in tobacco use is substantial but telling. Nearly 35 percent of men in Jammu and Kashmir are smokers, compared with just 5 percent of women. While female smoking remains relatively uncommon, changing lifestyles and urban influences could

shift this pattern in the future.

Equally striking are the district-level disparities. In some areas, tobacco use has reached alarming levels. Kupwara, at more than 56 percent, tops the list, followed by Shopian (52 percent), Bandipora (49 percent), and Anantnag (48 percent). In contrast, Jammu district reports significantly lower rates, suggesting that while intensity varies, tobacco use has spread across nearly every corner of the Union Territory.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this crisis is the growing prevalence of smoking among adolescents and young adults. A recent survey conducted in Srinagar revealed that nearly one in four school-going students - about 23 percent - are active smokers. The findings expose how early experimentation with tobacco often evolves into addiction, locking young people into a habit that may last a lifetime.

Despite the ban under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), students continue to report easy access to cigarettes and other tobacco products, often sold by local vendors near schools. The sale of single cigarettes allows minors to purchase discreetly, while the increasing popularity of hookah lounges - offering flavored tobacco marketed as a social pastime - has normalized smoking among the youth.

The long-term implications are profound. Early exposure to tobacco drastically increases the likelihood of chronic addiction and related health problems. In a region already burdened by unemployment and psychosocial stress, tobacco often becomes a coping mechanism - an illusion of relief that leads to greater physical and mental harm.

Tobacco's deep cultural roots in Kashmir further complicate the problem. For generations, the hookah has been a familiar presence in rural households, symbolizing hospitality and communal bonding. While modern cigarettes have replaced traditional hookahs, the underlying acceptance of smoking has endured. This social tolerance makes it difficult to stigmatize tobacco use or enforce restrictions, especially within close-knit communities where smoking is seen as a harmless social habit.

The health consequences are devastating. Tobacco is a leading cause of preventable deaths and a major contributor to cancers, heart disease, and respiratory illnesses. Hospitals across Jammu and Kashmir are witnessing a steady increase in cases linked to tobacco use, particularly among middle-aged men. The economic cost is equally staggering. It is estimated that residents spend hundreds of crores of rupees each year on tobacco products - a sum that does not include

the medical bills, lost income, and long-term care that follow.

Although officials claim a slight decline in tobacco consumption - around two to three percent over recent years - the reality is far more complex. While urban centers show some improvement due to enforcement and awareness, rural and semi-urban areas remain deeply affected. Moreover, a drop among older smokers is often offset by rising use among younger people, threatening to undo any progress made.

The government has launched several initiatives under the National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP). Cessation centers have been established, awareness campaigns intensified, and fines introduced for smoking in public places. Educational institutions regularly host anti-tobacco events, and advertisements warn about the health risks. Yet, enforcement remains inconsistent. Smoking in public spaces is still widespread, and sales near schools continue largely unchecked.

One major obstacle is easy availability. Cigarettes and bidis can be found in almost every neighborhood shop, often sold without regard for age or distance from schools. Their affordability also keeps demand high, particularly among lower-income groups. Many users underestimate the dangers of "occasional smoking," while cultural acceptance dis-

courages people from quitting.

The problem extends beyond smokers themselves. Second hand smoke exposes countless non-smokers - including children and women - to harmful toxins at home and in public. Surveys indicate that more than half of adolescents in Jammu and Kashmir are exposed to secondhand smoke in public places, increasing their vulnerability to respiratory diseases and heart conditions.

Addressing this growing crisis requires sustained, multi-dimensional action. Stricter enforcement of existing laws must become a priority. Public smoking should be penalized more consistently, and sales of tobacco near educational institutions must be completely banned. Increasing taxes on tobacco products can make them less affordable, especially for young consumers.

Equally vital are education and awareness efforts that go beyond slogans. Schools, colleges, and community organizations must play a central role in teaching young people about the dangers of tobacco. Campaigns should highlight not only health risks but also the social and economic costs of addiction.

There is also an urgent need for accessible cessation support. Many smokers express a willingness to quit but lack guidance or counselling. Expanding cessation centers, integrating tobacco control into primary healthcare, and using

digital tools for follow-up support can greatly improve outcomes. Community and religious leaders, too, can help by promoting a culture that discourages smoking and emphasizes self-discipline and health.

Accurate data and regular monitoring are essential for informed policymaking. Without updated statistics and local-level studies, interventions risk being sporadic and ineffective. Coordination between government departments, educational institutions, and health professionals can ensure that tobacco control efforts remain focused and evidence-based.

Tobacco addiction is not merely a personal habit; it is a social and economic epidemic. The rising rates of tobacco use in Jammu and Kashmir threaten to undermine years of progress in public health and place an enormous strain on the region's healthcare infrastructure. Every cigarette smoked and every hookah lit carries a cost - one paid not only in money, but in years of life and the health of future generations.

The fight against tobacco will not be won overnight, but it can be won through persistent effort and collective resolve. Jammu and Kashmir stands at a critical crossroads: either allow this silent epidemic to tighten its grip, or act decisively to protect the health and well-being of its people. The choice, and the responsibility, belong to all.

Lights, Luxury and Lost value: The commercial takeover of Diwali

■ PUPU JI KOUL

The festival of lights, sweets, and joy-Diwali-India's most cherished and exuberant celebration, is once again around the corner. It is a time that symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil. Streets are adorned with decorations, homes are illuminated, and markets brim with the festive spirit. However, amid this grandeur, there lies a growing need for introspection. With the ever-increasing menace of pollution and the mounting threat of global warming, it is imperative to pause for a moment and ask ourselves-is our manner of celebrating Diwali truly worth the cost to our environment? Over time, the very essence of Diwali seems to have drifted away from its spiritual and cultural roots. What was once a festival of earthen lamps, homemade sweets, and togetherness has now, unfortunately, become synonymous with noise, smoke, and extravagant indulgence. The deafening sound of firecrackers and the haze of pollution that envelops our cities in the aftermath of celebrations have turned what was meant to be a festival of purity and light into an environmental hazard. This transformation demands a change in our mindset, urging us to embrace a green and eco-friendly Diwali, not just as a choice but as a moral responsibility.

Green Diwali, in its simplest sense, means celebrating the festival with minimal harm to the environment. Firecrackers, though considered symbolic of celebration, release an enormous amount of toxic gases that pollute the air and aggravate health conditions such as asthma, bronchitis, and other respiratory ailments. During Diwali, pollution levels often surge to alarming heights, making it difficult for even healthy individuals to breathe easily. Therefore, adopting



an eco-conscious approach is not merely an act of environmental preservation-it is an act of compassion towards our fellow citizens and the planet we inhabit. Diwali holds profound religious and cultural significance across various Indian faiths. For Hindus, it marks the return of Lord Rama, Mata Sita, and Laxman to Ayodhya after fourteen years of exile and the victory over the demon king Ravana. Jains commemorate it as the day when Lord Mahavira attained nirvana, Sikhs celebrate it as Bandi Chhor Divas, and Buddhists of the Newar community observe it as a festival of spiritual awakening. Despite these diverse interpretations, the core essence remains unchanged-the triumph of good over evil, light over darkness, and knowledge over ignorance. Over centuries, Diwali has transcended religious boundaries and

evolved into a universal celebration of hope, joy, and renewal.

However, in our zeal to celebrate, we must not overlook the repercussions of our actions. Excessive lighting, bursting of crackers, and rampant use of plastic decorations cause irreversible damage to nature. The true spirit of Diwali lies not in extravagance but in purity, simplicity, and compassion. Thus, celebrating an eco-friendly Diwali is both a tribute to tradition and a commitment to the future. There are numerous ways to make our Diwali greener without diminishing its charm. To begin with, we can return to the traditional practice of lighting earthen diyas instead of electric bulbs. Diyas not only add a warm, aesthetic glow but also support local potters whose livelihood depends on their sale. Unlike electric lights, they are cost-effective and sustainable, consuming

no electricity while preserving the authentic essence of the festival. The flickering flame of a diya is symbolic of wisdom, divinity, and peace-values that no artificial light can replicate.

Gift-giving is another integral part of Diwali festivities, yet it often contributes significantly to waste. Instead of opting for plastic or electronic items that eventually add to landfills, we can choose handmade or natural gifts crafted from jute, cotton, bamboo, or wood. These not only promote sustainable craftsmanship but also make for meaningful and personalized presents. Even the wrapping can be made eco-friendly by using newspapers or brown paper instead of glossy, non-biodegradable plastic sheets. Children can enjoy wrapping gifts with colorful comic pages from old magazines, making the process fun and creative. Decorations, too, can be both elegant

and environmentally responsible. Instead of using chemical-laden colors for Rangoli, we can create beautiful patterns with natural materials such as flower petals, turmeric, kumkum, coffee powder, or leaves. These are safe, biodegradable, and lend a fragrant charm to homes. Once the celebrations are over, these materials can easily be composted, enriching the soil rather than polluting it. Similarly, during the traditional pre-Diwali cleaning, rather than discarding old belongings, we can donate clothes, utensils, and toys to those less fortunate. Such gestures not only reduce waste but also bring joy to others, spreading the true spirit of sharing and compassion that Diwali embodies.

Children, undoubtedly, look forward to fireworks, and denying them completely can be difficult. However, a balanced alternative lies in choosing eco-friendly or green crackers, which are designed to produce less smoke and noise. These crackers are made with recycled paper and emit 30-40% fewer pollutants. While the Supreme Court has restricted the sale and bursting of traditional crackers due to their harmful impact, green crackers are a responsible option for those who still wish to uphold the tradition in a safer manner. Furthermore, it is wise to conserve electricity during the festival. Instead of keeping rows of electric lights switched on for hours, we can limit their use and allow diyas to take center stage. Not only will this reduce our energy consumption, but it will also help us reconnect with the original, spiritual essence of Diwali-one that celebrates simplicity, illumination, and togetherness. Likewise, indulging in homemade sweets rather than store-bought ones is both healthier and more meaningful, carrying the warmth and love of personal effort.

Over the years, the true essence of

