

COMBAT FOOD ADULTERATION

Food is not merely sustenance; it is the foundation of human health, productivity, and national well-being. Yet, food adulteration continues to pose a serious threat to public health and consumer trust across India. From milk diluted with harmful chemicals to spices laced with artificial colours and oils mixed with cheaper substitutes, the menace has evolved in scale and sophistication. Combating food adulteration is no longer just a regulatory challenge-it is a moral, economic, and public health imperative.

At its core, food adulteration is driven by greed. Unscrupulous traders and manufacturers seek to maximize profits by compromising quality and safety. The consequences, however, are severe. Adulterated food can lead to acute poisoning, long-term health complications such as liver and kidney damage, and even life-threatening diseases. Vulnerable groups-children, pregnant women, and the elderly-bear the brunt of these risks. In a country striving to improve nutrition and healthcare outcomes, the persistence of adulteration undermines hard-won progress.

India has a robust legal framework to address this issue. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) regulates and monitors food safety standards, conducts inspections, and runs awareness campaigns. State food safety departments and local authorities are also empowered to carry out raids and impose penalties. However, enforcement gaps, limited manpower, delayed testing processes, and prolonged legal battles often dilute the deterrent effect of the law. Stronger coordination between agencies and swift prosecution are essential to send a clear message that public health cannot be compromised.

Technology can play a transformative role in this fight. Rapid testing kits, mobile food testing laboratories, and blockchain-based supply chain tracking can enhance transparency and accountability. Digital platforms can enable consumers to report suspected adulteration instantly. Encouraging start-ups and research institutions to innovate affordable testing solutions could further strengthen monitoring mechanisms.

Equally important is consumer awareness. An informed citizen is the first line of defence. Simple household tests to detect common adulterants in milk, turmeric, or pulses can empower families. Schools, community groups, and civil society organisations must be engaged to spread awareness about reading food labels, checking FSSAI licensing details, and reporting violations. Media campaigns should shift from seasonal warnings-often around festivals-to sustained public education drives. The role of ethical business practices cannot be overlooked. Food producers and retailers must recognise that long-term credibility outweighs short-term gains. Transparent sourcing, quality audits, and voluntary disclosures can build consumer trust. Industry associations should adopt zero-tolerance policies and support whistle-blower protections within their networks.

Mahashivratri is a religiously significant festival

■ RAMESH SARRAF DHAMORA

Mahashivratri is the festival of Lord Shiva. Mahashivratri is celebrated with great pomp and show in all parts of India. Along with India, Mahashivratri is also celebrated in many other countries around the world, including Nepal and Mauritius. Every year, the Mahashivratri fast is observed on the Chaturdashi Tithi of the Krishna Paksha (dark fortnight) in the month of Phalgun. According to Hindu mythology, on this day, at midnight, at the beginning of creation, Lord Shiva appeared from Brahma in the form of Rudra. This is why this day is called Mahashivratri.

In the yogic tradition, this day and night are given so much importance because they present tremendous possibilities for the spiritual seeker. After going through many stages, modern science has reached a point where it proves that everything we know as life exists. What you know as matter and existence, what you know as the universe and galaxies, is just one energy, manifesting itself in millions of forms. Mahashivratri is the most significant festival in Hinduism. All Shiva temples are crowded on this day. Devotees perform ritualistic worship to seek the blessings of Lord Shiva. According to the calendar, Shivaratri is celebrated on the Chaturdashi Tithi (fourteenth day) of the Krishna Paksha (dark fortnight) of the month of Phalgun.

Mahashivratri is of paramount importance spiritually. On this night, the position of the Earth's northern hemisphere is such that energy in the human body naturally moves upward. On this day, nature inspires humans to reach their spiritual peak. Those living a family life celebrate Mahashivratri as Shiva's wedding anniversary. Those with worldly ambitions see this day as Shiva's victory over his enemies.

It is believed that Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati were married on this day. People observe a fast and worship Lord Shiva on this day. The Mahashivratri fast is considered the easiest to observe. Therefore, everyone, from children to the elderly, observes this day. Those observing the Mahashivratri fast are



prohibited from eating grains. Therefore, they eat fruits on this day. In Rajasthan, as carrots and plums are in season during the fast, villagers consume carrots and plums. People worship Lord Shiva in temples and offer him aak (aak) and dhatura (astringent). Lord Shiva is especially fond of bhang (cannabis), which is why many Shiva devotees grind and consume it on this day.

It is said in the Puranas that once Shiva and Parvati were sitting on Mount Kailash. Parvati asked, "Is there a fast that would enable a person to attain your abode?" He then recounted the story of a man living in a country called Pratyana who sold animals to support himself. He had borrowed money from a merchant. Because he failed to repay the loan on time, the merchant imprisoned him in the Shiva temple.

Coincidentally, that day was Falgun Badi Chaturdashi. There were stories and prayers going on all night, which he also listened to. The next day, he was released on the condition that he would repay his debt quickly. He decided to sit on the river bank that night.

Some animal would surely come there to drink water. So he made a place to sit on a nearby Bil tree. There was a Shivalinga under that Bil tree. While he was making his hiding place on the tree, he kept plucking Bil leaves and throwing them, which would fall on the Shivalinga. He had been hungry for two days. In this way, he had unknowingly observed the Shivaratri fast. Furthermore, Bilva leaves were also offered to the Shivalinga on their own.

After an hour of night had passed, a pregnant deer came to drink water. The hunter placed his arrow on his bow, but upon hearing her pitiful voice, he let her go on the condition that she would return in the morning. In the second hour, another deer arrived. He released her as well. In the third hour, another deer arrived, and he released her as well, all of them saying, "I will return to you in the morning." In the fourth hour, a deer arrived. She told him her entire story, saying, "Those three deer were my wives. They were all yearning to meet me." He then released her as well and dropped more bael leaves. This left

his heart completely pure, clean, and soft. In the morning, he climbed down from the bael leaf. As he descended, more bael leaves were placed on the Shivalinga. Pleased with Shiva, Lord Shiva softened his heart so much that he regretted his past sins and became disgusted with killing animals. In the morning, all the deers and deer arrived. Seeing him follow his true words, his heart became as white as milk and he burst into tears.

The festival of Mahashivratri demonstrates the importance of divine power in our lives. It shows us Lord Shiva's immense sacrifice, such as drinking poison for the welfare of humanity and the universe. This day reminds us that if we perform good deeds and have faith in God, He will surely protect us. People believe that Lord Shiva is close to us on Mahashivratri, and those who worship and stay awake all night receive his special blessings. Many people donate to charity on this day, feeding the poor and praying to Lord Shiva for a happy life.

The story of Shivaratri is recounted in our Vedas and Puranas: when the ocean was churned, fourteen gems were found in the ocean. Among those gems was Halahal, whose heat began to torment all the gods and demons. Then Lord Shiva drank it. He dedicated himself to the welfare of the people. That is why he is called Mahadev. When he held Halahal close to his throat, its heat turned his throat blue. Since then, Lord Shiva is also known as Neelkanth. Shiva means welfare. When the number of sinners in the world increases, Shiva destroys them and protects the people. That is why he is called Shiva.

For yogis and ascetics, this is the day when Shiva merged with Mount Kailash. In the yogic tradition, Shiva is not worshipped as God. Rather, he is considered the first guru, the Adi Guru, the originator of the science of yoga. After meditating for centuries, one day Shiva became completely still. All the turmoil within him stopped and he became completely still. That day was Mahashivratri. Therefore, ascetics view Mahashivratri as the night of stillness.

(The author is a freelance journalist)

ACCIDENTS ON THE INCREASE

■ ISHER SINGH JASROTIA

A few years back, the accidents were on the increase due to bad state of roads and when the roads were repaired recently, it was believed that there will be decrease in the accidents especially on the national highways and other roads connecting the main road. But it is very bad state of affairs that despite the new roads were repaired recently, there has been increase rather decrease in the road accidents.

The increase in road accidents have been partially due to the following reasons.

- i) Certain rules required to be followed for plying of the vehicles i.e two wheelers or four-wheelers are not followed.
- ii) Those plying the two wheelers do not restrict their speed;
- (iii) Non-bearing of helmets which is mandatory and compulsory, as has been in the big cities i.e. Chandigarh & Delhi and most of the defaulters found without helmet are not fined
- (iv) Benefits of bearing of helmets should be given

wide publicity through media.

v) Many accidents usually occur on the curb or crossing, hence the vehicles plying by the persons do not take note of it.

vi) Accidents also occur when one vehicle is overtaken by the other vehicle coming behind, especially on the national highway.

vii) Those plying the matadors and buses are not strictly penalized which are found over-loaded.

viii) Those incharge of traffic usually leave the defaulting vehicles simply by making challan and imposing fine on them but these defaulters repeat the mistakes and break the traffic rules, hence some stringent rules should be made.

ix) Government /transport authority lack heed whereas certain rules should be made for plying the vehicles especially on the national highway and those areas, which are highly populated areas.

A motorecyclist or the scootierist or plying the car, do not adhere to the rules and regulations of the transport department. The driver does not care for the



vehicle coming from the opposite side rather he is in hurry to reach his destination and causes accident. Some vehicles including the buses when overtake the other vehicles, occasionally the accidents do occur resulting thereof loss of precious lives and many times, the speedy vehicles overtaking the other vehicles, usually causes accident. In addition to the above, there are some

schools, which are located adjoine the national Highway, especially in Kathua District, their buses, remain stranded for more than 15/20 minutes at the time of close of their school, thereby disrupt the buses of other schools. Due to the said buses stranded on the national highway, the buses of other school get late

Despite directions issued by the Ministry of Road and Communication for making reforms on the road, from time to time, the orders have not been adhered to resultant there-to accidents have always been on the increase. Similarly there has been mishap on the dilapidated roads when the vehicles slipped, thereby killing so many people traveling thereto. This is largely due to dilapidated conditions of the road in the hilly areas

which had been main causes of the road accident

When we take the survey during the year 2013-14, again there has not been much attention towards the construction of roads. The reason being the investor companies have not shown any interest in this respect due to many prudent reasons.

Question in the present day scenario, is not as to who is responsible for the mess, chaos, lawlessness and causes of the accident but as to what measure can be adopted and the rules framed therein so that the accidents could be averted and mitigated.

Recent abrogation of Article 370 and 35-A, it was expected that things will prevail upon and the people plying the vehicle will adhere to the rules and regulations of the traffic but rather decrease in the accidents there has been increase in the accident.

This can be gauged from the fact that if we take the situation in District Kathua, wherein the vehicles of four wheelers will be found standing along both sides of the road Kalibari to Kathua city or Kathua

city to Hatli more, in traffic congestion areas and similarly some of the four wheeler vehicles are also found on national highway also and it is assumed that traffic authority is sleeping somewhere or do not care for those breaking the rules of the concerned authority.

The traffic police, meant to control the accidents, can to a great extent, decrease the accident by imposing strict traffic rules and regulations if they are sincere in performance of their duty but it is sorry state of affairs that those deployed on the roads and traffic congestion areas, many a times, refuse to take action on the obvious reasons best known to them creating doubts among the public

Lawlessness is the order of the day, hence whosoever are at the helms of affairs, should be given the responsibilities and accountability in this respect. All the organizations, NGOs and civil societies, all forming part of the modern society and modern India are hereby requested to give deep thought and Government of the state ( now U.T) as

well as the Central Government should also take adequate steps/measures to mitigate the above said problems so a to ensure decrease in the accidents. It is further submitted that some buses of different schools which are located on the national highway, their buses stand standard remain there for more than 15/20 minutes thereby make hindrance to the others schools buses as the parents of the children asked the drivers as to why the children are late.

Now after the revocation of Article 370 and 35-A and strict rules of traffic wherein it has been emphasized to put fine whosoever violate the traffic rules, the accident should be decreased, in addition to this public should be made aware that bearing of the helmet or sheet belt is itself a safety of those ply the vehicles. It is hoped that a good thing would prevail in future and everybody would strictly follow the rules and regulations of the traffic.

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Mahashivratri-Great night of Shiva

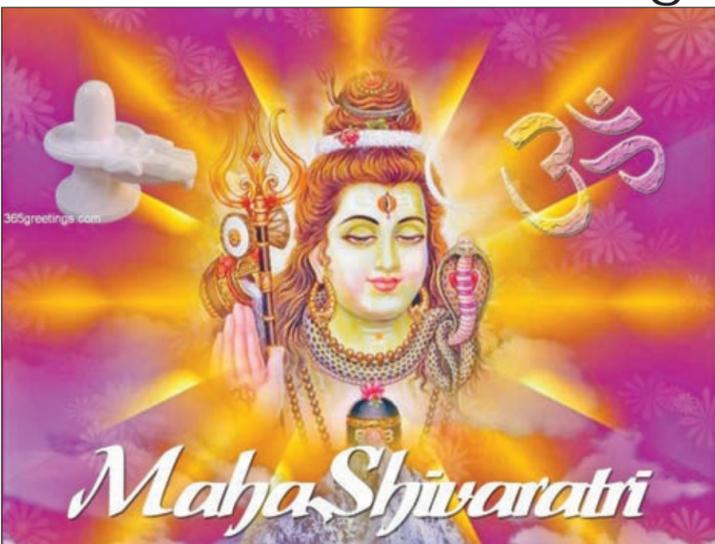
■ RAVI ROHMETRA

Maha Shivratri, which literally translates to "great night of Shiva" is a Hindu festival largely celebrated in India as well as in Nepal. The festival is celebrated on the new moon day in the month of Maagha according to the Hindu calendar. The day is celebrated to venerate Lord Shiva, an important deity in Hindu culture.

There are many mythological legends associated with this day. According to a popular legend, when a hunter could not find anything to kill for his food in a forest, he waited on the branch of a Wood apple tree. In order to attract deer, he started throwing the leaves of the tree on the ground, unaware that there was a Shiva Lingam beneath the tree. Pleased with the Woodapple leaves and the patience of the hunter, it is believed that Lord Shiva appeared in front of the hunter and blessed him with wisdom. From that day onwards,

the hunter stopped eating meat. Another legend has it that after the Earth was faced with an imminent destruction, Goddess Parvati pledged with Lord Shiva to save the world. Pleased with her prayers, Lord Shiva agreed to save the world on the pretext that the people of the Earth would have to worship him with dedication and passion. From that day onwards, the night came to be known as Maha Shivratri and people began worshipping Shiva with a great enthusiasm.

Some folklore also consider this to be Shiva's day as this was believed to be the answer given by Lord Shiva when asked about his favorite day by Goddess Parvati. Maha Shivratri is a Hindu festival which is celebrated by people following Hinduism in India. People often fast on the night of Shivratri and sing hymns and praises in the name of Lord Shiva. Hindu temples across the country are decorated with lights and col-



orful decorations and people can be seen offering night long prayers to Shiva Lingam. Woodapple leaves, cold water and milk are offered to the Shiva Lingam on this day as they are believed to be Lord Shiva's favorite.

It is believed that the people who fast on this night and offer prayers to Lord Shiva bring good luck into their life. The most popular Maha Shivratri celebrations take place in Ujjain, believed to be the place of residence of

Maha Shivratri Festival  
Maha Shivratri Festival

or the 'The Night of Shiva' is celebrated with devotion and religious fervor in honor of Lord Shiva, one of the deities of Hindu Trinity. Shivratri falls on the moonless 14th night of the new moon in the Hindu month of Phalgun, which corresponds to the month of February - March in English Calendar. Celebrating the festival of Shivaratri devotees observe day and night fast and perform ritual worship of Shiva Lingam to appease Lord Shiva.

Legends of Maha Shivratri

There are various interesting legends related to the festival of Maha Shivratri. According to one of the most popular legends, Shivaratri marks the wedding day of Lord Shiva and Parvati. Some believe that it was on the auspicious night of Shivaratri that Lord Shiva performed the 'Tandava', the dance of the primal creation, preservation and destruction. Another popular Shivratri legend stated in

Linga Purana states that it was on Shivratri that Lord Shiva manifested himself in the form of a Linga. Hence the day is considered to be extremely auspicious by Shiva devotees and they celebrate it as Mahashivaratri - the grand night of Shiva.

Traditions and Customs of Shivratri

Various traditions and customs related to Maha Shivratri Festival are dutifully followed by the worshippers of Lord Shiva. Devotees observe strict fast in honor of Shiva, though many go on a diet of fruits and milk some do not consume even a drop of water. Devotees strongly believe that sincere worship of Lord Shiva on the auspicious day of Shivratri, absolves a person of sins and liberates him from the cycle of birth and death. Shivratri is considered especially auspicious for women. While married women pray for the well being of their husbands unmarried women pray for a husband like Lord Shiva,

who is regarded as the ideal husband.

To mark the Shivratri festival, devotees wake up early and take a ritual bath, preferably in river Ganga. After wearing fresh new clothes devotees visit the nearest Shiva temple to give ritual bath to the Shiva Lingum with milk, honey, water etc.

On Shivaratri, worship of Lord Shiva continues all through the day and night. Every three hours priests perform ritual puja of Shivalingam by bathing it with milk, yoghurt, honey, ghee, sugar and water amidst the chanting of 'Om Namah Shivaya' and ringing of temple bells. Nightlong vigil or jaagran is also observed in Shiva temples where large number of devotees spend the night singing hymns and devotional songs in praise of Lord Shiva. It is only on the following morning that devotee break their fast by partaking prasad offered to the deity.

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