

CONSUMER RIGHTS

In any vibrant democracy or market-driven economy, the protection and empowerment of consumers from the very bedrock of ethical commerce, economic justice, and social equity. As markets evolve with the rise of digital platforms, e-commerce, and global trade, the need for robust consumer protection frameworks becomes increasingly critical. Empowered consumers are not only better decision-makers but also act as catalysts for competitive, transparent, and accountable businesses.

Consumer protection refers to the legal and institutional mechanisms that safeguard buyers from unfair trade practices, exploitation, misinformation, and substandard goods or services. On the other hand, consumer empowerment is about equipping people with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make informed choices and stand up for their rights. Both elements are deeply interconnected and must function in tandem to ensure a healthy consumer ecosystem.

India has come a long way in its journey toward consumer protection. The Consumer Protection Act of 1986 was a landmark piece of legislation that laid the foundation for consumer rights in the country. However, with changing market dynamics, the law required a substantial upgrade. This led to the enactment of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, which introduced important features like e-commerce regulation, product liability, and the establishment of the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA).

Under the new law, consumers now have access to a faster, more transparent grievance redressal mechanism. The introduction of mediation cells and the digitization of complaint filing through platforms like E-Daakhil have made the entire process more consumer-friendly. The Act also makes misleading advertisements a punishable offense, holding endorsers and manufacturers equally accountable—a significant step forward in promoting fair practices. Despite progressive legal frameworks, the gap between legislation and ground-level implementation remains a challenge. A large segment of consumers, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, are still unaware of their rights. Many are intimidated by the legal processes or lack the resources and education to pursue claims, which results in continued exploitation.

Further, the rise of online shopping has introduced a new set of challenges—ranging from counterfeit products and fake reviews to data breaches and unclear return policies. While the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 attempts to regulate these, enforcement remains patchy, especially with multinational platforms operating across jurisdictions. There is also a need for more trained personnel, timely disposal of complaints, and stronger coordination among agencies to make consumer protection truly effective.

Consumer empowerment is not merely about laws—it is equally about awareness. A well-informed consumer is the first line of defense against exploitation. National campaigns like Jago Grahak Jago have played an important role in educating the masses about their rights and responsibilities. However, more needs to be done, especially at the grassroots level.

Schools and colleges can incorporate consumer education in their curricula. Community-based awareness drives, digital literacy programs, and multilingual educational content can help bridge the information gap. The role of civil society organizations, NGOs, and media is also pivotal in amplifying the consumer voice and highlighting unethical business practices.

Businesses, too, have a significant role to play. Ethical practices, transparent pricing, quality assurance, and responsive customer service are the hallmarks of consumer-centric companies. Those that build trust with consumers are more likely to thrive in the long term. Corporate social responsibility should not be limited to charity—it must extend to fair trade, responsible advertising, and sustainable production practices.

Government agencies, on their part, must not only legislate but also regulate effectively. The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA), State Commissions, and District Forums must be adequately staffed and funded. Stronger penalties and faster adjudication will serve as deterrents against exploitation.

Protecting consumer interests and empowering them with knowledge, tools, and platforms to raise their voice is not just a matter of justice—it is a strategic necessity.

Digital technologies offer great potential to democratize access to information and streamline grievance mechanisms. Mobile apps, AI-powered chatbots, and online arbitration platforms can revolutionize how consumer complaints are handled, but only if they are accessible and inclusive.

Shiva, Science and Sawan's Spiritual Detox



■ DR. POONAM PARIHAR

Shiva is Truth, Shiva is Infinite, Shiva is eternal, Shiva is God, Shiva is Omkar, Shiva is Brahman, Shiva is Shakti, Shiva is Bhakti." "Mahadev is the master of the masters, but he is called Bholenath." "Shiva is the ultimate source of consciousness." "Life isn't about finding yourself; it's about creating yourself. Shravan Maas holds immense spiritual importance, particularly in strengthening the bond between devotees and Lord Shiva. The month of Shravan is widely associated with Lord Shiva because it was this month when the churning (Manthan) of the celestial ocean occurred. During Shravan Maas, followers usually observe four types of fasts, including Sawan Somwar Vrat, Solah Somwar Vrat, Pradosh Vrat, and Mangala Gauri Vrat. Sawan Somwar Vrat: This fast occurs every Monday (Somvar) of the month, typically spanning four Mondays, occasionally five. Shravan month fasting also known as Sawan or Shrivana, involves a combination of dietary restrictions, spiritual practices, and temple visits. Devotees typically follow a vegetarian diet, avoiding onions, garlic, and non-vegetarian food. They also abstain from grains and pulses, and some may choose to fast completely from food and water on certain days. The month is dedicated to Lord Shiva, and devotees perform special prayers, chant mantras, and visit temples. Observing Shravan Maas offers devotees a unique opportunity for profound spiritual growth. This sacred period acts as a catalyst, elevating one's spiritual consciousness to new heights. During this auspicious month, many experience a heightened spiritual awareness.

What to offer Lord Shiva during Sawan?

During Sawan, devotees offer various items to Lord Shiva to seek his blessings. These include milk, water, honey, ghee, curd, and Bel Patra (Bael leaves), which are considered sacred and pleasing to the deity. Other offerings include fruits, sweets, and flowers, particularly white flowers like jasmine. Devotees worship Lord Shiva in Shravan with deep reverence, seeking his blessings for spiritual growth, well-being, and liberation from worldly attachments.

Unlock Divine Blessings: The Power of Shravan Somwar Vrat for Health, Wealth, and Prosperity" or "From Fasting to Fulfillment discover the Secrets of Shravan Mondays".

Elevate Your Consciousness: Experience the Transformative Power of Rudrabhishek" or "Unleash Divine Grace, a guide to Performing Rudrabhishek for Inner Peace."

Beyond the Ritual: Unveiling the Sacred Symbolism of Shiva's Offerings" or "Connect with the Divine, a deep dive into the Spiritual Significance of Shiva Puja Offerings".

Journey Through Mythology: Exploring the Legends of Shravan and Lord Shiva" or "From Myth to Manifestation, discover the Timeless Wisdom of Shravan's Sacred Stories".

Catchy Angle: "Walking with Faith which Unveiling the Devotion of Kanwariyas in Shravan" or "The Journey of a Thousand Miles: Witnessing the Spiritual Strength of Kanwariyas".

Maha Mrityunjaya Mantra Awakens Your

According to the Puranas, this is the most auspicious time to worship Shiva, and the energy is at its peak for devotion, fasting, and meditation.

The Word Shiva means "Without death", "timeless", formless and "everywhere."

"Shravan Maas & Unleashing the Divine grace: A guide to perform Shive Pooja in Sawan for inner peace."



"Shiva is beyond the limits of time and space holding the cosmic energy that governs everything"

"Worshipping God Shiva in Sawan teaches us how to surrender our ego to find true self"

Inner Healer: Focuses on emphasizing the power of chanting the Maha Mrityunjaya mantra during Shravan for health, protection, and spiritual growth explains the meaning and significance of this powerful mantra and harnesses the Power of the Maha Mrityunjaya Mantra in Shravan" or "Chant Your Way to Wellness which discovers the Profound Benefits of the Maha Mrityunjaya Mantra during Shravan".

The month of Sawan (Shravan) is considered very auspicious for worshipping Lord Shiva. Many devotees observe fasts and perform rituals dedicated to him during this time. Scientifically, the monsoon season slows digestion and lowers immunity, and fasting with light foods helps reset the digestive system and reduce toxin buildup, making Sawan rituals surprisingly body-friendly.

Rituals Practices & Religious Significance: Sawan is particularly dear to Lord Shiva, as it's believed he married Parvati Maaduring this month. It is also believed that Shiva drank the Halahal poison during the Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean) to save the world, and he is revered for this act during Sawan. Devotees offer Jalabhishek (pouring water or milk) on Shiving, especially on Mondays, which are dedicated to Shiva. The Shiving is seen as a symbol of cosmic energy and is believed to radiate powerful energy.

Devotees often visit temples for Abhishekam and chant Shiva mantras. Fasting, especially on Mondays, is a common practice. Some women fast for mental strength and emotional balance. Offerings like Panchamrit (a mixture of milk, curd, ghee, honey, and jaggery) are used for Abhishekam. Lighting diya, performing Rudrabhishek, and reading scriptures like the Shiv Purana are also part of the rituals.

Scientific & Nature Perspectives:

The monsoon season brings increased moisture and humidity which can impact digestion and immunity. Fasting during Sawan can help the body reset its digestive system and eliminate toxins. Avoiding onion and garlic during Sawan is also said to benefit the body by promoting detoxification. Some interpret the Shiva-Parvati union as a representation of the balance between masculine and feminine energies. The concept of the Shiving as a source of cosmic energy can be linked to the idea of neutron particles and their role in the nucleus of an atom.

The Science Behind Sawan's Monsoon Magic: Explore the meteorological and hydrological aspects of the monsoon season, linking it to Shiva's association with water and the natural world.

Shiva's Trishul: A Symbol of Balance and the Universe: Discuss the scientific principles of balance, equilibrium, and the interconnectedness of opposing forces, relating it to the three prongs of Shiva's trident.

Sawan's Spiritual Detox: Mind, Body, and Nature, examines the scientific benefits of fasting, mindfulness, and spending time in nature, all of which are integral to Sawan celebrations.

The Science of Rudraksha: Discusses the scientific properties of Rudraksha beads and their connection to the nervous system and energy flow.

Shiva's Damaru: The Rhythm of the Universe is related to the sound of Shiva's Damaru to the fundamental frequencies and vibrations that govern the universe.

Sawan and the Jet Stream: Discusses the influence of the jet stream on the monsoon and how it affects rainfall patterns, linking it to the unpredictable nature of both weather and life.

The Sun's Role in Sawan: Explores the astro-

logical significance of the Sun's position during Sawan and its connection to spiritual energy and vitality.

Spiritual & Philosophical:

Om Namah Shivaya is Decoding the Mantra's Vibrational Power which delve into the meaning and vibrational energy of the Panchakshari mantra, exploring its potential to purify and transform.

Shiva's Silence Speaks Volumes: Discusses the power of introspection, meditation, and listening to one's inner voice, all of which are emphasized during Sawan.

The Significance of the Shiving: Explains the symbolism of the Shiving as a representation of Shiva's formless nature and the creative and destructive forces of the universe.

Sawan as a Time for Transformation: Highlights the opportunity for personal growth, self-reflection, and spiritual awakening during the month of Sawan.

The Story of Shiva and Sati: Discusses the mythological significance of their relationship and how it relates to the themes of love, devotion, and sacrifice.

The Importance of Charity and Compassion: Explores the connection between Shiva's compassion and the practice of giving to others, particularly during Sawan.

Key Facts about Shravan Month: Named after the Nakshatra (constellation) "Shrivana", which is prominent during this time. Highly auspicious for worshipping Lord Shiva.

Importance of the Shravan Month Spiritually Charged Period: It is believed that during Shravan, the cosmic energy is aligned with spiritual growth. Pujas performed during this month are said to yield quicker and stronger results.

Sacred Time to Worship Lord Shiva: According to the Puranas, this is the most auspicious time to worship Shiva, and the energy is at its peak for devotion, fasting, and meditation.

Pleasing the Deity: Fasting on Mondays, performing Rudrabhishek, and chanting Shiva mantras are believed to bring blessings, inner peace, and relief from karmic debts.

Health and Discipline: Fasting and eating light meals during this month align with the seasonal transition and support physical detox and mental clarity.

Benefits of Observing Shravan

- Mental peace and emotional strength.
- Spiritual upliftment and detachment from material cravings.
- Better health through regulated fasting and clean eating.
- Fulfillment of desires, especially those related to family life and prosperity.
- Connection with divine energy through simple yet powerful rituals.

Shravan is more than a month on the calendar—it is a season of devotion, introspection, and transformation. Every prayer offered, every fast kept, and every mantra chanted during this time brings us closer to the compassionate and powerful energy of Lord Shiva. Whether you're a devout follower or just beginning your spiritual path, Shravan offers a beautiful opportunity to align with cosmic energies, shed negativity, and invite blessings into your life. As the monsoon rains cleanse the Earth, let your heart be cleansed through your devotion. This Shravan, embrace simplicity, silence, and Shiva.

Paradise Beckons: The revival and richness of tourism in Jammu and Kashmir

■ MOHAMMAD HANIEF

With snow-draped peaks, serene lakes, sacred shrines, and heritage woven into everyday life, Jammu and Kashmir remains one of India's most captivating regions—a land where nature whispers stories and culture thrives with deep-rooted grace. As tourism reclaims its place amid rising peace and infrastructure, the region is experiencing a renewed interest from travellers both domestic and international. The "Crown of India," as it's often called, is once again open to exploration, wonder, and soul-searching adventure.

Kashmir Valley, known for its breath-taking scenery and poetic landscapes, has long been symbolic of romance, reflection, and resilience. Once the muse of poets and filmmakers, the Valley is experiencing a renaissance in foothill thanks to targeted tourism campaigns and improved travel accessibility.

In Gulmarg, the snow stays long enough to satisfy both amateur and professional skiers alike, with Asia's highest ski lift offering unparalleled alpine experiences. The summer months transform the area into a lush expanse dotted with wildflowers, making it ideal for hiking and golfing on one of the highest courses in the world. Pahalgam offers river rafting down the Lidder, scenic picnic spots, and trails that wind through pine forests and pastures where shepherds still tend flocks.

Further north, Sonamarg—literally "Meadow of Gold"—glitters with glacier-fed streams and valley views that stretch into eternity. Trekkers heading toward the Thajiwas Glacier or embarking on longer expeditions into Zojila Pass often find themselves lost in the hypnotic beauty of the place.

And then there's Srinagar, the beating heart of the Valley. Here, Dal Lake plays host to floating vegetable markets at dawn and reflective houseboat dinners at dusk. Nigeen Lake, the quieter sibling, offers a retreat for those craving

solitude. Narrow alleyways wind through old city bazaars, where saffron, spices, and handwoven shawls fill the air with scent and story.

While Kashmir enchants with scenic brilliance, Jammu—known as the "City of Temples"—holds deep spiritual significance. For many pilgrims, a journey to Vaishno Devi, nestled in the Trikuta Mountains, is a lifelong dream fulfilled. The 13-kilometer trek from Katra combines devotion, endurance, and the reward of spiritual serenity upon reaching the cave shrine.

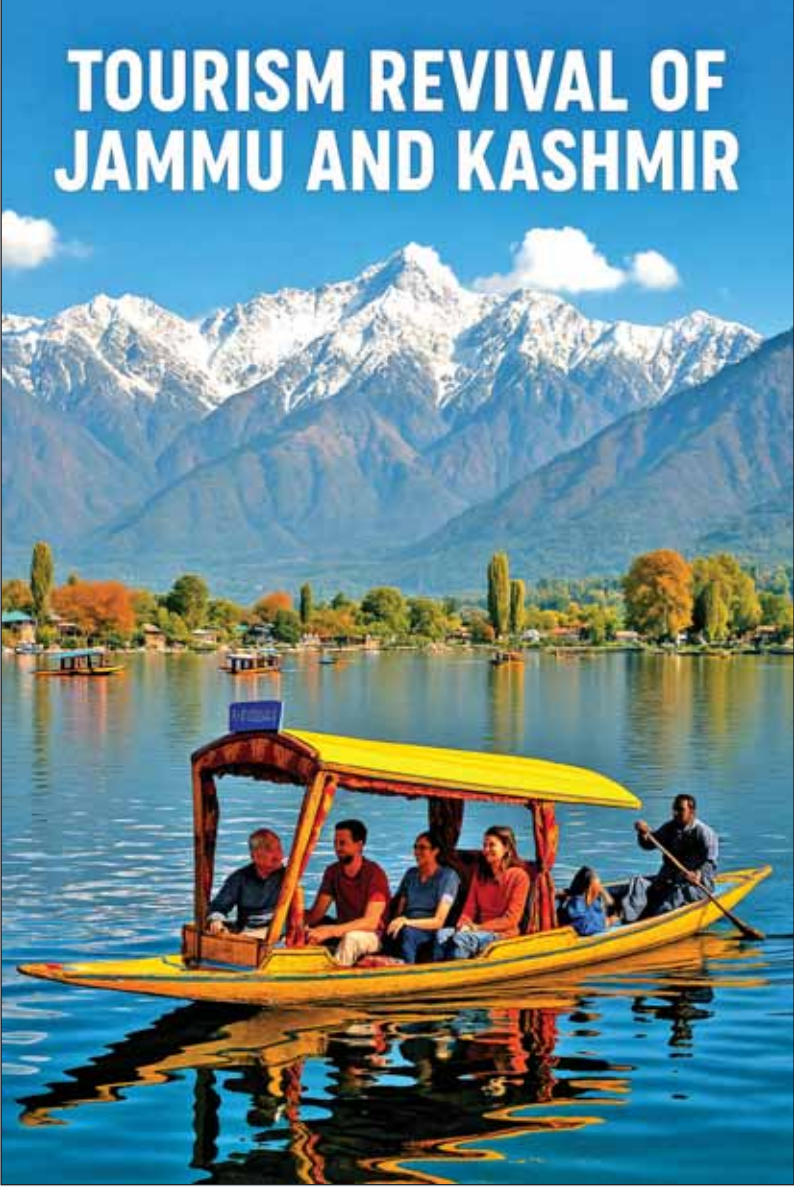
In the old quarters of Jammu, temples like Raghunath Mandir, Ranbireswar Temple, and Peer Kho Cave Temple showcase the architectural richness of Hindu traditions while offering havens of calm amid bustling city streets.

Religious tourism in the region is not limited to one faith. Shrines like the Hazratbal Mosque and Charar-e-Sharif in Kashmir carry immense reverence for Muslim travellers, while Ladakh's monasteries, though administratively separate today, continue to complement the region's spiritual mosaic. Whether one seeks silence in prayer halls or insight through guided heritage tours, Jammu and Kashmir offers a journey inward as much as outward.

To walk through the local bazaars of Srinagar or Leh is to step into a living museum of art and tradition. Generations of artisans continue to weave Pashmina shawls, embroider Kani silks, and carve walnut wood furniture, preserving skills that have passed down over centuries.

Papier-mâché, a specialty of Kashmiri craftsmanship, adorns jewellery boxes, lamps, and decorative plates with intricate floral patterns inspired by Mughal gardens and Persian art. These aren't mere souvenirs—they're cultural heirlooms.

Food, too, plays a central role in cultural immersion. A traditional Wazwan—the multi-course Kashmiri feast—is an experience in itself. From rich Rogan



Josh and creamy Gushtaba to fragrant Yakhni and spiced Kahwa, each dish tells a story of hospitality, regional ingredients, and culinary artistry.

In Ladakh and high-altitude villages, momos, thukpa (noodle soup), and butter tea bring warmth and sustenance to travelers and locals alike.

Festivals such as Navratri in Jammu, Eid in Kashmir, and Hemis Festival in Ladakh fill the calendar with colour, music, and tradition. Travellers who

coincide their visits with these events are treated not only to spectacle but to the deep communal bonds that define life in the region.

Tourism plays a pivotal role in the economic landscape of Jammu and Kashmir. According to recent figures from the tourism department, the region welcomed over 2 million visitors in the past year, with expectations for this number to double by 2026.

Air connectivity has vastly improved, with frequent flights operating to Srinagar, Jammu, and even Leh during peak seasons. Road networks, once restricted by weather and terrain, are being expanded and modernized. The Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail project aims to facilitate safe and scenic travel across the region, offering panoramic views along the way.

Increased footfall has led to the growth of homestays, boutique hotels, and eco-resorts, providing employment opportunities for thousands. From taxi operators and tour guides to handicraft merchants and culinary experts, tourism has helped inject vitality into local livelihoods.

Moreover, the launch of community-based tourism programs in villages like Gurez, Yusmarg, and Drass ensures that rural voices are heard and involved in shaping visitor experiences.

Despite these gains, challenges remain. Environmental concerns such as pollution in Dal Lake, erosion of fragile mountain trails, and waste disposal in tourist hotspots have prompted calls for sustainable travel practices. Strict guidelines now govern trekking expeditions and water sports, while awareness campaigns stress the importance of eco-friendly choices among tourists.

However, recent years have seen stability, and locals—from houseboat owners in Srinagar to shrine caretakers in Jammu—continue to extend warmth and reassurance to visitors.

"Tourism is our pride and livelihood," says Bashir Ahmad, a third-generation

shikara boatman. "All we ask is for guests to come with open hearts and return with full ones."

Efforts to diversify tourism in J&K are now underway. Beyond the standard itineraries, travellers are encouraged to explore offbeat destinations like Bangus Valley, Mughal Road, and Surinsar-Mansar Lake.

Adventure tourism is booming with opportunities for snow biking, paragliding in Patnitop, rafting in Lidder, and mountain biking across the Zaskar range. New policy frameworks are also supporting film tourism, with recent Bollywood and regional films reigniting interest in Kashmir as a backdrop for storytelling.

Digital platforms have emerged as key players in promoting lesser-known destinations. Influencers, travel vloggers, and heritage bloggers are collaborating with local businesses to create authentic content that demystifies the region and highlights its offerings.

Meanwhile, heritage villages—curated for immersive experiences—offer curated activities such as handloom workshops, folk music performances, and organic farming demonstrations, showcasing a side of Jammu and Kashmir rarely seen in brochures.

As the first rays of morning touch the snowlines of Sonamarg or ripple through Dal Lake's reflections, the timeless allure of Jammu and Kashmir becomes apparent. It's more than a destination—it's a story in progress. A land of contrast and harmony, resilience and celebration.

Whether you're scaling a glacier, offering prayers in a mountaintop temple, or simply sipping Kahwa as the sun sets behind chinar trees, you are part of that story.

And so, the region continues to beckon: to those seeking spiritual solace, to those drawn by natural grandeur, to those who dare to see the world not just in colours, but in cultures. Jammu and Kashmir isn't merely open for tourism—it's open for transformation.

