RAIN HAVOC

he Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir has once again found itself reeling under the fury of torrential rains. In recent days, heavy downpours have triggered flash floods, landslides, and waterlogging in several parts of Jammu, exposing the fragility of the region's infrastructure and the vulnerability of its people. Streets turned into rivers, rural areas were cut off due to washed-away roads, and low-lying colonies were inundated within hours. While the monsoon is a recurring reality, its increasingly destructive impact points to a larger challenge: the urgent need for resilience in urban planning, disaster preparedness, and environmental management.

The heavy rainfall has paralyzed normal life in Jammu. Traffic has come to a standstill on major highways, with the crucial Jammu-Srinagar and Jammu-Pathankot routes witnessing long blockades due to landslides. Several residential areas, particularly those near water channels and nallahs, suffered severe flooding as drainage systems overflowed. Villages in low-lying areas saw agricultural fields submerged, leading to crop damage and loss of livestock. Emergency services have been stretched thin, as administration and volunteers struggled to provide relief. Sadly, incidents of house collapses and casualties highlight the devastating human toll of the rain havoc.

The intensity of these rains cannot be viewed in isolation. Climate experts warn that extreme weather events-whether cloudbursts in the hills or prolonged downpours in plains-are becoming more frequent due to climate change. Jammu's unique geography, with its blend of hills, rivers, and dense urbanization, makes it particularly vulnerable. Global warming has disrupted monsoon patterns, and rising temperatures are intensifying rainfall episodes, leading to more floods and landslides. The region's experience is a clear reminder that climate change is not a distant phenomenon but a pressing reality impacting everyday lives.

While nature plays its part, human factors compound the crisis. Rapid and unplanned urbanization in Jammu has taken a heavy toll on natural drainage systems. Encroachments on water channels, deforestation in surrounding hills, and poorly designed stormwater drains have created conditions ripe for flooding. Roads and colonies built without environmental assessments become the first victims of torrential rains. The absence of robust drainage infrastructure means that even moderate showers can paralyze city life, let alone prolonged downpours. Unless urban planning integrates climate resilience, such havoc will continue to repeat vear after vear.

The administration often resorts to emergency measures-rescue operations, traffic advisories, and relief camps-when rain wreaks havoc. While these responses are critical, they cannot substitute for long-term preparedness. The need of the hour is a comprehensive disaster management strategy. This includes strengthening early warning systems, ensuring strict regulation against illegal constructions on floodplains, and upgrading drainage and sewage networks. Public awareness campaigns can also play a role in sensitizing people about flood risks and safe practices during heavy

Railway link connecting Char Dham

'Peace within is the eternal bliss, crops up when one connects God, by any mode'

Introduction

Religious values are the most venerated in India due to the presence of heritage marvels and cultural ethics. That is the only reason why this country serves as the revered destinations for pilgrimage and spirituality. Twelve Jyotirlingas, major places of worship of lord Shiva, Shakti Peeths of goddess Shakti, Char Dhams (literally 'four adobes of God') and various sacred rivers are the spiritual places across the country where odyssey to any one or all these holy places wash away one's sin, purifies the soul and brings devotees closer to salvation.

There are four major and four minor sacred pilgrimage shrines in India, spread across the north, south, east, and west of India, symbolizing a spiritual journey that covers the entire country and considered as the abode of God. The Char Dham (literally 'four abodes') refers to four sacred pilgrimage sites in India that hold immense spiritual significance in Hinduism. These shrines are in different parts of the country are believed to be essential for attaining moksha, liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Among major shrines or 'Bada char Dham' consist-Badrinath (Uttarakhand),Dwarka in west (Gujrat), Puri in east (Odisha)and Rameswaram in south (Tamil Nadu), encompass large circuit of India in four contrasting directions. Whereas Badrinath, Kedarnath Gangotri, and Yamnotri are considered as minor or 'Chota char dham' covers the smaller circuit, in one of the Indian states, Uttarakhand. Badrinath is a prominent site in both the Chota Char Dham and the Bada Char

Char Dham (Uttarakhand)

Uttarakhand is one of the northern states in India which is also known as 'Dev Bhoomi' or land of Gods. It has two main regions: Garhwal and Kumaon. Garhwal region is associated with picturesquely colorful and

majestic mountains and is the heart and soul of the Hindu religion while Kumaon is traditionally associated with beautiful valleys, characterized by a gentler landscape, including the lower Himalayan region and plains. The state is nestled in the lap of magnificent Himalayas and considered as the center of Hindu pilgrimage having four sacred shrines and place of five Prayags (confluence of holy rivers). Badrinath, Kedarnath, Yamunotri and Gangotri (four abodes of God). Badrinathji one of the major Dham and dedicated to Lord Vishnu jiwhich is situated in Chamoli district and Kedarnath ji is one of the twelve ivotirling dedicated to Lord Shiva, located in Rudra Prayag district of Garhwal region.Gangotri and Yamunotri are considered as the seat of goddess Ganga and Yamuna respectively and source of both the sacred rivers in Uttarkashi district of Garhwal region. The state is adorned by confluence of sacred rivers. Holy river Alaknanda meets five distinct rivers such as Dhauliganga at Vishnu Prayag, Nandakini at Nanda Prayag, Pinder at Karna Prayag, Mandakini at Rudra Prayag and Bhagirathi at Dev Prayag. These rivers merge to form the holy River Ganga which is worshipped as the life-giving goddess. Besides, Gurdwara Hemkund Sahib, sacred place for Sikhs and devoted to 10th Guru Govind Singh is also

The pilgrimage starts in late April near Akshay Tritiya and closes around Deepawali festival as per Hindu almanac. Each site is steeped in mythology and is associated with various deities and stories from Hindu scriptures. The state is also famous for skiing, wildlife sanctuaries, river rafting, paragliding, bungy jumping, trekking and meditation etc. Every year millions of devotees and tourists from India and all around the world visit the Uttarakhand state. That is why this place is not only a tourist destination but the ultimate place for spirituality and self-

Railway Connectivity

Land transportation plays a vital role in which people and goods move from one place to another, including road and railway. Among all the major and minor Char Dham, road transport is available. Railway connectivity for Puridates back in 1897, Rameshwaram in 1906 and Dwarka in 1922. But the railway connectivity to the remaining Badrinath and the rest of the shrines in Uttarakhand remained un-commenced even after independence due to geological constraints. Haridwar is considered as the gate way of God's abode, succeeded by Yog Nagri Rishikesh having the last railway station at the foothills and way outset to Char Dham pilgrimage by road transport. In 2014, Ministry of Railways, Govt. of India gave nod to the railway project, Rishikesh-Karan Prayag new broad gauge Railway Link (RKRL) and entrusted the construction of same to Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL).

RKRL aims to connect all four sacred pilgrimage sites in Uttarakhand and to facilitate all weather access to Kedarnath and Badrinath shrines besides connecting new trade Centre, develop and serve the netizens of the region. The work on this project started in mid-2020 and progressing at a fast pace to its completion.

Project Overview

Spanning 125 kilometers, broad gauge railway line passes through Ganges and Alaknanda River valleys, high mountains and rugged terrain. Since inception, the project has witnessed several challenges. Subsidiary of Main boundary thrust (MBT) is also intercepted in proximal sections of the project. The project is divided into nine sections of varying lengths, and each section is contrasting with respect to geology and geomorphology. There is a total of 12 railway stations,16 tunnels and numerous major and minor bridges from Rishikesh to Karan Prayag, which is in progress. 83% of the total railway track is subsurface and passing

through tunnels using New Austrian Tunneling Method. India's first longest railway twin tunnels (14.5 km each) in Himalayas are being executed in this project using Tunnel Boring Machines named 'Shakti' and 'Shiv' Both the TBMs have achieved successful breakthroughs in April and June-2025 respectively. However, the various sections of the projects are making headway. The RKRL project has its scheduled completion by 2026. This project will connect Badrinath ji and Kedarnath ji shrines, while for Gangotri and Yamunotri shrines, railway link would start soon.

Significance of the railway link

Indian railways have gained flawless experience from its preceding Udhampur-Srinagar Baramulla Railway Link project in Jammu and Kashmir as far as tunneling in Himalayas is concerned. Railway board, Govt. of India have implemented state of art technology, deployed highly experienced Engineers and skilled manpower, reputed construction companies and tech savvy experts for safe and speedy completion of the project. Once completed, every section of society would be able to have a convenient journey and pilgrimage to these sacred destinations as per one's monetary level. Generally, it takes around seven hours from Rishikesh to Karan Prayag by road journey covering ~170 km. But in monsoon season and inclement weather conditions, there is frequent road blockage due to land slides and traffic jams. It also becomes arduous to transport commodities for the population residing in upper skirts by road transport. After completion of this railway project, it would only take two hours to reach Karan Prayag from Rishikesh. This project would not only ease pilgrimage to Kedarnath and Badrinath shrines but would also provide allweather commute, healthcare, education, employment, increase in tourism and mar-

kets for remote hilly regions. (The author is Resident Geologist)

Rotten Mutton & Adulterated Cheese-Poison Our Plates

present in Uttarakhand.

re not all those who indulge and encourage others to sell rotten meat and synthetics cheese playing with the health of the people and so with the lives of people? Our society and in fact some traders are stooping too low and dealing in adulterated, rotten meat and adulterated cheese.It points to the fact that some of our shopkeepers have no morals and are indulging in corrupt practices and they have least regard for the health of the people and they are playing with the health and as such with the lives of the consuming public. One thing comes to the mind that those dealing in mutton and cheese are very insensitive and they play with the health and lives of the public. There is no fear of law and law enforcing agencies and thus they deal in rotten, expired meat and adulterated cheese which creates health hazards for the people.Our government also seems to be in deep slumber and every obnoxious and criminal practice of selling rotten meat and adulterated and synthetics cheese is going on openly without having a least regard to the health of the people. In a sensational news, the authorities in Jammu and Kashmir have launched an assault on the illegal sale of rotten, expired and unhygienic foods in the run up to the festive season. Here in Jammu also hundreds of Kg's of cheese snatched which was made from synthetic material and resembled cheese and it is difficult for the consumers to differentiate between the real cheese and the synthetic one. Such cheese was recently unearthed in Katra which was meant for hotels to be consumed by Vishnu Davi pilgrims. The joint teams of the Food Safety Department-FSD and Legal Metrology Department have in the recent past intensified inspections uncovering spurious food items

such as rotten and expired mutton and synthetic cheese and have destroyed it and arrested all those dealing in such corrupt practices unmindful of its ill effects on the health of the consumers. In a major search, the authorities in Baramulla district of north Kashmir have seized over two quintals of spoiled mutton, declared unfit for human consumption. Meanwhile in Jammu city also ,2700 kg of expired fish and chicken was confiscated in a latenight raid and immediately destroyed at Kot Bhalwal dumping site. This is just the tip of the ice berg said the controller of the LMD Jammu. He said that his department has unearthed 27 quintals of rotten meat products which were found stored in highly unsanitary conditions. This operation was carried just days after 3500kg of adulterated meat was destroyed in Kashmir valley leading to public outery and a full investigation into food supply chain. Unsavoury and disturbing reports stated to pour in from various districts of the valley, where chicken, kababs, cheese and even sweets were found unfit for sale. The FSD has said that people have the right to know what is on their plate. People should cooperate with the relevant authorities and inform any spoiled food item so that action under the law can be initiated. The festive season is coming and as such the authorities have tightened their belts and warnings have been served on the restaurants to serve only hygienic, foods and adhere to the rules and laws or in the alternative be ready to face tough legal action. Over 12,000 kg of rotten meat seized and destroyed in J&K since crackdown began said FDA Commissioner. Seized meat included kebabs tainted with synthetic colours .CM Omar Abdullah and Health Minister Sakina Itoo demand stricter enforcement and public health safeguards. Consuming such meat can cause food

poisoning, diarrhoea, dysentery, typhoid. Authorities in Jammu and Kashmir have seized and destroyed over 12.000kilograms of rotten adulterated and unhygienically stored meat since a UT -wide crackdown began. The operation has targeted products laced with harmful synthetic colours, as well as meant kept without proper cold storage facilities.Commissioner FDA J&K ,Smita Sethi, clarified that not all meat available in the markets is unsafe, but several serious issues have been flagged, especially in storage and quality. She further said "You will not find rotten meat everywhere. There are two or three concerns one is meat laced with synthetic colours or, especially used in items like kebabs, which are harmful. Such products are being destroyed. The commissioner highlighted that poor storage conditions, such as lack of cold storage facilities and improper packaging, have led to contamination in several cases. The seizers in recent weeks have been widespread. In Kupwara town ,20 quintal destroyed. While in Handwara 20 kg's were seized and discarded. In ,Srinagar city alone ,a major haul of 1200 kilograms was recovered from Zukura Industrial Estate on July 31stAcross the valley more than 3500kgs have been confiscated, including 2,500 kebabs tainted with synthetic colouring and 150 kg's of contaminated meatballs in raids across Srinagar.In Ganderbal's Nagbal area ,250 kg's of visibly spoiled meat was destroyed on the spot. In Jammu city nearly 800-1,000 kg's of expired packed meat and chicken were seized and destroyed at a cold storage bfacility.In,35 kilograms were destroyed during inspections recently.CM Omar Abdullah directs officials for tough action against accused selling rotten food items to public.CM chairs a high level meeting and asks concerned to ensure no meat

should be sold ,without proper clearance. Asking officials to act tough against the accused selling adulterated and rotten food to the public, chief minister Omar said that culprits will be given exemplary punishment. The CM while chairing a high -level meeting here amidst the ongoing crackdown against the selling of rotten meat and chicken in the markets passed slew of directions to the concerned authorities, seeking an end to such criminal practices, saying that the public health cannot be compromised at any cost. Pertinently, large quantity of adulterated and rotten meat was seized from different parts of Kashmir during the past two weeks. The people have questioned the authorities for failing to curb such illegal practices and putting the health of common masses at risk.CM further said,"The grave problem appears to have remained unchecked and unnoticed for too long. Theunscrupulous elements have played with the health and lives of people. This has to stop and those deliberately involved in playing with public health must face the law chief minister said. If government is serious about the health and life of the citizens, it should combat the problem of adulteration and pass a strong law to curb criminal practices which play with the lives of the people. Stringent punishment should be given to all those involved in selling adulterated food items so that other will not dare to do such illegal practices. Most recently DFCO Jammu has conducted Gangyal where they have seized 2,100 kgs of adulterated cheese and 78 expired tins of expired mustard oil. The, matter of adulteration is serious and it needs to be curbed. Thus, in short, the problem of rotten meat, chicken fish and adulterated other food items is very grave and should be curbed so that people do not have poison on their plates?

Religious and socio-cultural significance of Ganesh Chaturthi

■ PURAN CHAND SHARMA

ord Shree Ganesha is widely revered and highly honoured Deity who is worshipped ahead of all our gods in the spiritual realm of this universe on account of his unparalleled wisdom and foresight. Ganesh Chaturthi is celebrated all over the national horizon with matchless religious fervour and devotion.

Religious Significance Of Ganesh Chatyrthi

Birth Of Lord Ganesha: Devotees celebrate Ganesh Chaturthi as Birth day of lord Ganesha son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, who is revered as the VGHNAHAR-TA(Remover of obstacles), Siddhivinayaka, (The bestower of success) and Buddhidata, (the giver of wisdom and knowledge). According to Hindu mythology Ganesh Chaturthi commemorates the birth of Lord Ganesha. One of the most popular legends states that Goddess Parvati created Ganesha from sandalwood paste to guard her privacy while she bathed. When Lord Shiva returned and was denied entry by the boy, a fierce battle ensued and Shiva severed Ganesha's head. Subsequently, Shiva replaced the Ganesha's head with that of an elephant head to console grief stricken Parvati, thus reviving him and bestowing upon him the boon of being worshipped first among all gods. This tale explains why every auspicious ritual in Hinduism begins with the invocation of Lord

Ganesha and the fruit of knowledge: A famous story illustrates Ganesha's wisdom. Once, Sage Narada offered a divine fruit of knowledge to Shiva and Parvati, who decided that their sons, Ganesha and Kartikeya, should compete for it. The challenge was to circle the world three times. Kartikeva set off on his peacock, but Ganesha, with plump body and mouse as a vehicle, chose another way. He simply circled his parents, declaring that for him, they represented the universe.



Pleased with his wisdom, they gave him the fruit. This anecdote reflects why Ganesha is worshipped as the embodiment of intellect and

Therefore, devotees invoke Ganesha, blessings at the commencement of any venture as it brings prosperity, peace and success

Spiritualism Symbolism in Ganesha: Elephant Head symbolizes wisdom, foresight and strength. Large Ears teaches patience in listening to others. small eyes symbolize focus and concentration. Trunk is indicative of flexibility and adaptability in life. Mouse as Vahna signifies control over desires and ego.

Ritualistic Importance

devotion.

The festival involves Prana Pratishtha (the ritual of invoking life into the idol, daily pooja

chanting of vedic hymns and Ganesh aarti. Immersion or Visarjan of idol after 1.5, 3,5,7, or 11 days represents the cycle of creation and dissolution reminding devotees that our life on earth is not permanent in any case.

Socio-cultural significance of Ganesh

1. Lokmanya Tilak and the freedom move**ment:** One of the most remarkable dimension of Ganesh Chaturthi is its role in India's freedom struggle. In the year 1893, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak transformed the private household celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi into a public, Community festival. His aim was to unite people against British colonial rule by bringing them together under the banner of religion and culture. Through public gather-

ings, processions and discussions, the festival became a tool of political awakening and national unity across castes, classes and regions under the shared devotion to lord Ganesha

2. Social Harmony And Unity:- Even today, Ganesh Chaturthi is a festival that strengthens the bonds of unity and harmony. In pandals and community gatherings, people of all classes, castes and sometimes even religions come together to worship lord Ganesh. This shared devotion breaks down barriers and promotes a sense of collective belonging.

Cultural Enrichment

Ganesh Chaturthi is also a celebration of art and culture. Exquisitely crafted idols, devotional songs, dance performances, plays and traditional music make the festival vibrant and engaging. It provides a platform for local artists, craftsmen and performers to showcase their skills. In both rural and urban areas, the festival serves as a stage for cultural revival

and creativity. 4. Service and Community Welfare: In the present times, many Ganesh Mandals and organizations use the festival as an opportunity to conduct social and welfare activities. Blood donation camps, health check up camps, educational competitions, charity drives and awareness campaigns are often held during Ganesh Chatuthi. This reflects the transformation of a religious festival into

a platform for social responsibility Economic And Environmental Awareness

Economically, the festival supports thousands of livelihoods from idol makers and artisans to decorators, sweet vendors and performers. The preparation for weeks in advance strengthens local economies. In recent years there has been a growing emphasis on ecofriendly celebrations. Idols made of clay, natural colours and initiatives to prevent water pollution during immersion rituals are gaining popularity and plaster of Paris idols and chemical paints are being discarded. This aspect of the festival connects spirituality with ecological responsibility, reminding usthat true worship is incomplete without care for nature. Undoubtedly, a significant message is going across the society to maintain perfect balance between devotion and responsibility.

Broader Philosophical Message

Ganesh Chaturthi is not merely a celebration of a deity but a reminder of values essential for life such as:-

Wisdom before action as symbolized by invoking Ganesha first. Unity In Diversity: This is meticulously demonstrated by overwhelming participation of all diverse communities in the society for celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi by virtue of their own impeccable devotion and urge for unity.

Impermanance Of Life: This is amply highlighted by Visarjan which symbolizes detachment while celebrating life with comprehensive devotion.

The festival, therefore, beautifully integrates Religion, culture, community, and environment, reflecting the Indian ethos of seeing spirituality in every aspect of life.

Conclusion

Ganesh Chaturthi is thus more than a ritual in India. However, it is a living tradition that binds spirituality with social progress. Religiously it honours Lord Ganesha as the remover of all obstacles and the giver of wisdom. Socio-culturally it stand as a symbol of unity, artistic expression, community service and even nationalist awakening during colonial rule. From Mata Parvati's creation of her beloved son to Tilak's transformation of the festival into a movement, the anecdotes, stories around Ganesh Chaturthi enrich its significance. In today's world of fragmentation, Ganesh Chaturthi continues to inspire harmony, creativity and devotion. Jai Bharat.

(The author is President, Ved Mandir,

Ambphala)