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Safe Processing Matters More Than Zesty Flavours

Context

- India's vibrant food culture is shadowed today by a growing **crisis of trust**.
- A series of **high-profile adulteration cases** has intensified public concern, revealing deep-rooted problems in hygiene standards, especially within the informal food sector.
- The contrast between the appeal of street food and the growing dependence on packaged foods underscores the complexity of India's food ecosystem.

The Crisis of Trust in Informal Food Systems

- Street food remains a powerful symbol of India's cultural identity, yet concerns about **safety and sanitation** are increasingly overshadowing its charm.
- The July 2024 raids on 58 pani puri stalls in Chennai, where officials found **contaminated water** and unsafe handling practices, highlight a pattern witnessed across many cities.
- These incidents reflect a **systemic regulatory gap**, especially in monitoring small vendors scattered across densely populated urban spaces.
- The scale of the problem is immense. The Observer Research Foundation estimates **100 million food-borne illnesses and 1,20,000 deaths annually**, much of it connected to contaminated food from informal sources.
- Common practices like the **reuse of cooking oil** not only degrade nutritional value but also produce **harmful trans fats** and toxic compounds.
- The use of **adulterated or low-quality ingredients**, driven by cost pressures, further heightens risk.
- Although the FSSAI is working to **train, certify, and regulate street vendors**, the informal sector's vastness makes enforcement challenging.
- Initiatives such as vendor training modules, covering hygiene, safe storage, and waste disposal, represent progress, but meaningful reform requires sustained effort over many years.

Packaged Food: Structure, Science, and Reliability

- In contrast, the packaged food industry operates within a **structured, science-driven system** that inspires greater consumer confidence.
- While often seen as a convenience-driven sector, packaged foods reflect a **well-defined regulatory framework** established by the FSSAI.

- These guidelines regulate the entire production chain from raw material sourcing to final packaging, ensuring **traceability, accountability, and consistent hygiene standards**.
- Technologies such as pasteurisation, vacuum sealing, and aseptic packaging significantly reduce microbial contamination and extend shelf life.
- These innovations make packaged foods particularly suitable for varied climatic conditions and for meeting the needs of India's expanding urban population.
- Another strength lies in **transparency**. Clear ingredient lists, allergen warnings, and expiry dates empower consumers, especially parents, elderly individuals, and health-conscious buyers, to make informed food choices.
- The industry is also responding to rising health awareness by offering **healthier product lines**, reducing harmful additives, and expanding **nutrient-fortified foods** to address widespread micronutrient deficiencies.
- These developments demonstrate a model in which **commercial interests align with public health goals**.

Reconciling Tradition with Safety

- Despite its risks, street food remains a **cultural and economic pillar** of India.
- Millions of livelihoods depend on it, and its flavours remain deeply rooted in the country's identity.
- The objective, therefore, cannot be to marginalise street food but to **raise its safety standards** to acceptable levels.
- National programmes such as the **Eat Right India movement** and the **Clean Street Food Hub (CSFH)** are steps toward bridging this gap.
- By promoting **hygiene training**, certifying qualified vendors, and encouraging **community-level improvements**, these initiatives aim to bring the informal sector closer to regulatory compliance.
- Collaborative efforts, such as FSSAI's training partnership with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, illustrate how targeted interventions can uplift safety practices without disrupting livelihoods.
- Yet the unorganised nature of the sector means progress will be gradual.
- Effective oversight requires **regulatory support, community participation, and sustained behavioural change** among both vendors and consumers.

Conclusion

- As India undergoes rapid **modernisation and urbanisation**, ensuring **safe and hygienic food for all** must become a national priority.
- While packaged foods benefit from scientific processing, structured oversight, and transparent labelling, street food's cultural significance calls for thoughtful reform rather than displacement.
- Ultimately, the future of India's food landscape must be shaped not by sentiment alone but by an **unwavering commitment to safety**, ensuring that tradition, innovation, and public health move forward together.

Safe Processing Matters More Than Zesty Flavours FAQs

Q1. Why has consumer trust in street food declined in recent years?

Ans. Consumer trust has declined because several food adulteration and hygiene violations have exposed major safety risks in the informal food sector.

Q2. What major issue did the July 2024 Chennai raids reveal?

Ans. The raids revealed that many pani puri vendors were using contaminated water and practicing unsafe food handling.

Q3. How do packaged foods provide greater safety assurance?

Ans. Packaged foods provide greater safety assurance because they are produced under strict FSSAI regulations and use scientific processing methods that reduce contamination.

Q4. What initiatives aim to improve street food hygiene?

Ans. Initiatives such as the Eat Right India movement and the Clean Street Food Hub aim to improve street food hygiene through training and certification.

Q5. What should guide India's future food safety approach?

Ans. India's future food safety approach should be guided by a strong commitment to ensuring safe, hygienic food while preserving cultural food traditions.

Source: **The Hindu**

The Future of Health Lies in Harmony

Context

- The contemporary world faces a convergence of crises, rising lifestyle diseases, ecological degradation, and social fragmentation, that challenge **conventional models of health** and development.
- In response, a global reorientation is underway, one that seeks to restore balance between individuals and the environment, progress and sustainability, and innovation and intuition.
- Central to this shift is the **growing recognition of traditional medicine** as a vital resource for holistic well-being.
- Far from being an antiquated practice, traditional medicine is increasingly supported by scientific research and global policy frameworks, positioning it as a **key contributor to future health**

The Philosophy of Holistic Health

- **Health as Harmony**
 - Traditional medicine systems across cultures share a foundational belief: true health emerges from harmony, within the body and between humans and nature.
 - Unlike purely biomedical models, which prioritise diagnosing and treating disease, traditional medicine emphasises prevention, balance, and lifestyle regulation.

- **Rediscovering Ancient Knowledge**

- Although often framed as a modern innovation, the science of well-being is rooted in age-old practices.
- Contemporary research increasingly validates traditional insights about the interconnections between physical, mental, and environmental health, reaffirming their relevance in today's health landscape.

Global Relevance and Socioeconomic Value

- **Widespread Use of Traditional Medicine**

- The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that nearly 90% of its member states use traditional medicine in some form.
- For billions of people, especially in low- and middle-income countries, these systems remain the first line of healthcare due to their accessibility, affordability, and cultural acceptance.

- **Contributions Beyond Healthcare**

- Traditional medicine supports broader societal goals by contributing to:
 - **Biodiversity conservation**
 - **Nutrition and food security**
 - **Livelihood generation**
- This holistic impact demonstrates that traditional knowledge is not only a medical asset but also a pillar of sustainable development.

India as a Global Leader in Traditional Medicine

- **Expanding the AYUSH Sector**

- India's AYUSH sector, valued at approximately \$43.4 billion, reflects a major shift from reactive health models to preventive, personalised, and integrative care.
- The sector's growth is driven by consumer demand, policy support, and increasing scientific legitimisation.

- **Strengthening Standards and Research**

- India has taken significant steps to institutionalise and standardise traditional medicine:
- Establishing a dedicated AYUSH department in the **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)**
- Contributing to global standard-setting through **ISO/TC 249/SC 2**
- These initiatives aim to ensure safety, quality, and international acceptance of traditional medical systems.

WHO's Global Traditional Medicine Centre (GTMC)

- **Purpose and Vision**

- Located in Jamnagar, Gujarat and supported by the Government of India, the GTMC serves as a global hub for:
- Evidence-based research
- Data and analytics
- Innovation and sustainability
- Its mission is to optimise traditional medicine's contribution to global health while respecting local cultures, resources, and rights.

- **Evidence and Equity as Core Principles**

- The GTMC prioritises ethical, scientific, and inclusive approaches, ensuring that traditional medicine evolves responsibly and benefits all communities.

Global Collaboration and Policy Momentum

- **The First WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine (2023)**

- Hosted in Gandhinagar alongside the G-20 Health Ministerial Meeting, the 2023 summit marked a milestone in global dialogue.
- It united ministers, scientists, practitioners, and communities to strengthen political commitment and promote data-driven integration of traditional medicine.
- The summit concluded with the Gujarat Declaration, which emphasised:
 - Biodiversity protection
 - Fair benefit-sharing
 - Digital innovation
 - Equitable access to traditional health knowledge

- **The Second WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine (2025)**

- Building on the 2023 momentum, WHO and India will co-host the second Summit in New Delhi from December 17-19, 2025.
- With the theme **Restoring balance: The science and practice of health and well-being**, the event will:
 - Advance multi-stakeholder collaboration
 - Support the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Strategy (2025-2034)
 - Deepen scientific exploration and global innovation

Integrating Tradition, Technology, and Sustainability

- **Traditional Medicine in the Future of Healthcare**

- As the world shifts toward holistic health models, traditional medicine offers valuable frameworks for preventive care and sustainable living.
- Scientific validation and technological innovation are increasingly strengthening its credibility and application.

• India's Integrative Approach

- India demonstrates how ancient knowledge can coexist with modern science through:
- Integration of research and community participation
- Emphasis on sustainability
- Technological advancements in health systems
- This approach shows that traditional medicine is not opposed to modern healthcare but can enrich it.

Conclusion

- The global resurgence of interest in traditional medicine is **more than a cultural revival**, it is a strategic, evidence-backed response to modern health and environmental challenges.
- As nations seek holistic pathways to well-being, **traditional medical knowledge offers valuable insights** into balance, sustainability, and preventive care.
- **India's leadership**, combined with WHO's global initiatives, is shaping a future where traditional medicine stands validated by science, empowered by technology, and governed by ethics.

The Future of Health Lies in Harmony FAQs

Q1. Why is traditional medicine gaining renewed global importance?

Ans. Traditional medicine is gaining renewed importance because it offers holistic, preventive, and sustainable approaches to health that address modern challenges such as lifestyle diseases and environmental degradation.

Q2. What role does India play in the global traditional medicine sector?

Ans. India plays a leading role in the global traditional medicine sector by expanding its AYUSH industry, promoting evidence-based research, and contributing to international standard-setting.

Q3. What is the purpose of the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre (GTMC)?

Ans. The GTMC aims to strengthen evidence, innovation, and sustainability in traditional medicine while respecting local cultures and resources.

Q4. What was a key outcome of the first WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine in 2023?

Ans. A key outcome of the 2023 summit was the Gujarat Declaration, which called for biodiversity protection, fair benefit-sharing, digital innovation, and equitable access to traditional health knowledge.

Q5. What is the main theme of the Second WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine in 2025?

Ans. The main theme of the 2025 summit is Restoring balance: The science and practice of health and well-being.

Source: **The Hindu**

