



# Fairs or Melas: Symbol of Economic Exchange And Socio - Religious Harmony (Ancient to Modern Period)

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## **Abstract:-**

There are many ways to celebrate the happiness. India has been a country of vibrant customs and traditions since the ancient times. Every special occasion becomes more special when some event has been organized, in which people of different cultures come together and embrace each others traditions. Fairs and festivals in country have always been a moment to be cherished. In this paper we will discuss about the some prominent fairs which have been organized in country since ages. The study primarily sheds light on the different fairs which have been organized at the different parts of the north central India. This study covers the time period of ancient to modern period. It has been divided into three sections, the first sections mainly discusses about the prominent fairs and track down their background. The second section is an attempt to find out the linkage between fairs and commercial exchange or trade and commerce, and how it act like a platform for traders and the endmost section is trying to bring the points forefront that these gatherings are mediums of social exchange and religious harmony as well. This is an attempt to discuss these fairs in view of economy and social religious amalgamation.

Keywords:- Fairs, Economy, Trade, Social, Religious Harmony.

## **Objectives:-**

The primary objectives of this study are as follows-

- Find out the various fairs which are organized in north central India.
- Discuss these fairs via perspective of economic exchange
- Track down the fairs through the lens of socio- religious harmony.

## **Research Methodology:-**

Information that are used for this study essentially are based on textual sources, books of concerned topic, newspaper articles, webpages as well as various research journals. So the study basically is based on the secondary sources.

## **Introduction:-**

This study is primarily discusses about the fairs which have been organized in north central India, specifically Rajasthan, Punjab including Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar pradesh regions since ancient times till modern period. The major goal of this paper is to trace the some prominent fairs which are organising in the concerned regions and contributing in economy and socio-religious harmony. These gatherings are symbols of India's vibrant culture and tradition. Mela or Indian Fair, is a large gathering of people who temporarily gather at one place on pre decided time and place according to particular culture. Mela is a sanskrit term meaning "gathering" or "to meet" or a "fair". It is organized for all sizes of gatherings which can be religious, commercial as well as cultural. These fairs usually organized at the intersections of trade routes, river banks or confluences. The ground where these types of fairs are organized have some rich history and associated with Gods, Goddesses or some mythological or local heroes. The date and time of these fairs are decided after tracking the changes in positions of sun, moons, planets as well as stars. The reasons for organizing of these fairs are mostly depended on three goals of action which are - Dharma, Artha and Kama which has been discussed by various Indian philosophers<sup>i</sup>. These fairs are religious, commercial as pleasurable events. In India most of the fairs are held on the occasion of different festivals which are celebrated by indians like Janmasathmi, Durga puja, Buddha Purnima, Mahavir Jayanti, Christmas etc. So These gatherings are not only the medium of entertainment but also a source of spreading love and harmony and acceptance of each other customs and beliefs.

In this study, famous gatherings which have been organized since a very long time have been discussed. One of the Major fair which is held in India is, Kumbha fair which is celebrated at four of the places- Prayag, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik at the confluence of three rivers (Ganges, Yamuna and Saraswati), Ganges, Shipra and Godawari respectively. The word Kumbh has been derived from the sanskrit term kumbh which means 'pot' or 'pitcher' and the mela is 'festival', so this fair is also known as 'the pitcher festival'<sup>ii</sup>. Kumbh fair occurs four times in twelve years and rotates among these four places. Each twelve year cycle include a Grand Mela, called Maha Kumbh<sup>iii</sup>.

There are lots of fascinating stories behind the celebration of these festivals as well as fairs. One of the most believed narration is that The story began when there was a war between the gods and demons for twelve consecutive days for the right over nectar. One day of god is equal to one year of humans. During the war for nector, drops of it fell at four places- River Ganga in prayag and Haridwar, Godawari in Nasik, Shipra in Ujjain. Godavari is also known as Gomati ganga, Shipra is known as North Ganga, so all rivers are related to Ganga. First written evidence of the Kumbha mela can be found in the accounts of chinese traveller and monk Hiuen Tsang who visited India during 7<sup>th</sup> century in the reign of king Harshavardhana<sup>iv</sup>. According to

medieval hindu legends, its origin is available in one of the most famous medieval puranas, the Bhagvata Purana, the Samudra Manthan episode (churning of the ocean) along with Vishnu Purana, the Mahabharat and the Ramayana<sup>v</sup>. The river ghats during these fair, look so beautiful. During this Simhasth mela, Shipra ghats visited by pilgrims all through year but number of them get very high during kumbh, lakhs of people came here to have a bath in sacred river<sup>vi</sup>. Traditionally it is belived that, during 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, Hindu saint and Philosopher Adi guru Shankracharya started the tradition of hindu gatherings for philosophical debates and discussions, across the hindu monasteries in Indian subcontinent<sup>vii</sup>.

### **Rajasthan**

Rajasthan is a city of royalty and valour. This place has witnessed many great incidents as well as this land is a mother of various great heroes of our history. It is famous for its beauty and tourism. Many fairs have been organized here from centuries. One of the famous fair which is celebrated here since three decades is Ramdeo cattle fair in Nagaur<sup>viii</sup>. Bssically this fair is organized to trade and commerce of livestock buffaloes, camels etc. Other cattle fairs are like Baldeo cattle fair, Tejaji Cattle fair etc<sup>ix</sup>. One of the famous cattle fair of Rajasthan, known as Pushkar Fair. Locally it is known as Pushkar Camel Fair, which is an annual five day camel and livestock fair held in the town of Pushkar between the months of October and November. It is one of the world's largest camel fairs<sup>x</sup>. Buying and selling of livestock are the main attraction of this fair and also an important tourist place.

### **Haryana**

Haryana is the place of various ancient kingdom, and famous harappan sites are present here. It is known for its unique traditions, folk stories and songs etc. Many events are organized here which are enjoyed by people. Cattle fairs have been organized in the various districts of Haryana. According to Gazetteer of Gurgaon, some of cattle fairs which are celebrated mostly held on religious ocassions relation to situation of stars and planets. Among these fairs are Phagun badi Ekkam, Jeth badi Pancham, Sawan badi Ekkam, Bhado Sudi Dasmi which is held in Pataudi and Patil in gurgaon, fair in Hazipur is celebrated on Bhadon Sudi Duj, phagun sudi saptami<sup>xi</sup> etc.

### **Punjab**

This state has witnessed the migration and settlement of different tribes of people with different cultures and ideas. The famous Indus valley civilization flourished in this region, conquered by various powerful kingdoms and also acts as an entry gate of India. In punjab various fairs have been enjoyed by the people. These fairs mark the religious, social, recreational and seasonal occasions which are held at various places in Punjab, it also organized some fairs in which the most prominent are cattle fairs, through which breeders and buyers close to each other and hence serve a very useful purpose. Government charges fees on the cattles hence these fairs are profitable for ruling class also. One of the famous fair of Punjab is Jarag Fair. It is celebrated in Ludhiana in the Pail Village to worship Goddess Seetala and one of the most reputed fair in Punjab<sup>xii</sup>. It attracts tourists from across the country and the various types of exhibition are held here. This fair is also known as Baheria Fair<sup>xiii</sup>. To worship the goddess Sheetla, people gather around the pond and

shovel out the earth and make shrine through soil. After prayers people distribute sweets to each other. Before that, this sweet is offered to a donkey which is believed to be the vehicle of goddess Sheetla. Generally this fair is held in the month of March and April, which is Chaitra month in Indian calendar. Number of stalls are also set up in the fair, wide display of handicrafts and traditional items, many cultural programs also organized in which people of different culture come together.

### **Madhya Pradesh**

Heart of India, is a place of beauty and many historical As well as mythological stories like Uttar Pradesh, this place also celebrates the festival of Kumbh which is known as Simhastha Kumbh, It is celebrated when Jupiter ascends into sun sign Leo's quarter or the Simha constellation of the zodiac, which is why it is called Simhastha<sup>xiv</sup>. The story of celebrating this fair is the same which is famous for Kumbh of Prayagraj, as there was churning of the ocean, Gods and Demons competed for the divine nectar for immortality, due to this fight some drops of nectar fell on four places and Shipra river is one of those places, so this river became the enhancer of life and the Kumbh is held to celebrate this event<sup>xv</sup>.

The another famous and bizarre fair which is held in Madhya Pradesh is Ghost fair, which is held in the village of Malajpur. However the main purpose of this fair is not enjoyment or any type of economical exchange but this fair is discussed here because of its uniqueness and also it is the one of its kind in the whole world. It is said that ghost fair has been held here for more than 300 years. Many people do not believe in paranormal activities but instead of that they go to this fair to witness the moment of these abnormal activities in the fair. The next fair is Nagaji fair which is mainly celebrated in the tribal areas of this Madhya Pradesh. This fair is celebrated to remember the great saint, Saint Nagaji. He is being paid respect through this fair who lived about 400 years ago during Mughal Emperor Akbar's reign<sup>xvi</sup>. During early days, monkey trade used to take place during in this fair, but now domestic animals trading takes place. Many other performances are also held here<sup>xvii</sup>. Basically it is organized in months of November and December.

### **Fairs as economic exchange**

In fairs the most common views are the large gatherings of people from every nook and corner of the country; however in these groups people of different background and cultures are involved like some of them are pilgrims, some of them are householders, traders of different communities, sellers of various merchandise etc. These fairs are perfect place for buying and selling the variety of things. Buyers of different parts of the country come to these fairs and sell some famous things of their region. Food of different regions are sold here, these fairs promote the circulation and integration of goods in rural areas, as well as handicraft items in tribal and village goods in urban areas. Many livestock markets are also held in these fairs where camels, cows, buffaloes, horses are traded. Different types of toys are sold for the children which attract the babies. A huge number of inexpensive, ephemeral toys is often available for children, and animal accouterments like bells and harnesses are commonly purchased by animal traders who decorate their bullocks or camels etc in hopes of making them more attractive to potential buyers<sup>xviii</sup>. Various ornaments and goods, clothings for men and women are sold. Participation of traders in fairs offers numerous benefits for their trade, it is a

medium to reach majority of the people. Many cattle fairs are organised in the concerned regions. These fairs have been contributed in the growth of economy since a very long time. These types of cattle fairs are like a platform for traders. In the gazetteer of Nagaur, government has mentioned the income from these cattle fairs. The fair which are held are the platform where artisans from all over the country come together and sell the products of that place where they do their trade, products belonging to their culture and traditions, so it kind of chance for visitors to experience other cultures under the same roof.

### **Fairs as socio-religious harmony**

In modern days, when people have not enough time to enjoy with another people who belong to other places and know some additional things fairs are like a medium through people come together and meet with people who are from other places. These fairs are the gatherings where people often go their with family to enjoy, so these gatherings become the means to know different cultural background of other peoples. Various types of games and other activities engage the children and adults. These fairs sometime become the medium of exchange of knowledge, some times become educational events and act as a stage where performers of various places come and show their performances, dance at folklores, sing the songs of particular areas via this audience come in touch of different culture, so it is place to exchange their culture with people. Fairs also celebrate the socio and religious harmony.

These fairs are medium to forget our cultural and religious differences. The soul purpose of these gatherings are to bring happiness in the life of people and motivates us to embrace our culture and religion as well as provide a platform to come together and celebrate their shared heritage. Fairs are place for exchange of our knowledge and also helpful to increase the income. These are cultural celebrations that have always been acquire a special place in the society. In earlier times fairs are related to plentiful harvests or celebrating the important occasions of regions and communities. These celebrations are the medium to develop social harmony. They create opportunities for visitors to connect with an area, spend their time together, involve in celebration and experience the diversity of cultures of various places. Today these fairs, due to their economic profit, become an essential part of tourism department. So in one word, we can say that fairs or Melas bring prosperity to the economy, improve the lives of communities and bring them in forefront where they can show their different talents and skills. All these fairs try to interweave soul of different religion and drench them in colour of festivities. Apart from being a fun centred event, these events also act as source of livelihood for vendors who depend on it, many small vendors depend on these types of events for their business. This study is an attempt to track down some famous fairs and discuss them through the perspectives of economic exchange as well as social and religious harmony as these fairs are organized by various religious communities but enjoyed by people of various communities so it also helps in maintaining the social love and harmony.

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