

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC & CULTURAL IMPORTANCE OF THE FAIR OF NORTH BENGAL

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The meaning of fair is union among masses. For few days in the year all the people of different shades come together and create sacred land. Fair brings a lot of happiness in our rural life. In our folk culture fair plays a major role. The life as the six districts of North Bengal become cheerful depending on these fairs. All the fairs of North Bengal are unique in diversity. Three fairs bear rich traditional heritage. In different times different people assemble from various places for the attraction of fair foreign scholar like Caning hum, Ferguson, William Hunter became spellbound seeing these fairs. Historians like Dinesh ch. Sen, Akshay Kumar Maitra, Nihar Ranjan Roy surprised to see the rich splendor of these fair. There is a mention of these fair in different books of Barendrabhumi's Such as Gokul Chandra Prasasti (eulogy) and song of Satya Pir by Krishno Haridas.

Thakurmela of Patiram : Patiram is situated 8 K.M. from the district town Balurghat. Almost 125 year old Thakur Mela had been started by R.N Tagore's relative Raghunandan Thakur. The popularity of this fair spread once upon a time in Maymarsingh, Rajsahi, Bihar and even Dhaka. Raghunandan Thakur mainly started the fair for farmers. This fair is also known as 'Farmers fair'. This fair is the centre for the trading of Cows and buffalo. Once the charge of writing voucher of sold product (in the fair) had increased by the landlord, the Communist party started movement (in British period) against it and that movement known to us as '*Talgandi movement*'. The lower strata of the society are mainly involved with this fair. In rural economy, fair plays a significant part. The children and women get test in the fairs for their tremendous attraction for cosmetics, bangles and toys.

The Tazia Fair of Hemtabad :- Tazia fair is a unique example of folk festival at the Hemtabad Block of Uttar Dinajpur District. This fair has been celebrated for almost 200 years.

On the day of Muharam the Muslim youth they used to go for a procession in the memory of the battle of Karawala in Arab. The fair starts at afternoon and when the procession return the fair goes over. This fair lasts for only few hours. The main attraction of this fair is 'Marfia' or the sad song. Both Hindu and Muslim community take part in this fair. People come from distance to fulfill their wishes like getting child, happiness of the family, curing disease etc.

The people whose desire have been fulfilled offer the statue of horse and elephant to the Pir and they also show their respect by lighting lamp. In the fair a lot of brass material is sold and there is many cosmetic goods' shop which attracts the girls. The people who came there buy sweet, chop, samosa, while returning to their house and it give an extra flavor of the fair.

Huzur Saheb's Fair : This fair taken place around the mazar of Pir Saheb at Haldibari in the Sub-division of Tufanganj in Coochbehar district. The original name of Huzur Saheb is Khundakar Shah Sufi Moulana Mohmad Eokramul haq Rahaman. His ancestral house was at Murshidabad district. In the first half of 18th century he came to Haldibari for spreading Islam, he started living here permanently and at last died here also. It is said that through hard meditations he got the verdict of God and he was given instruction in his dream it spread Islam and organize fairs. From that time the fair began. For various purposes like getting child, bring peace to family, getting mercy from God, people come to this fair. This fair started on 5th of Falgun(in Bengali calender) and for the Muslim of North Bengal this is considered as pilgrimage.

Different type of utensils like cauldrons spoon, plough, etc are sold in this fair, besides all kinds of furniture, stationary goods, are also available here. That the smell of foods makes the people indecisive which food to eat and which one to avoid. They become absolutely spellbound. This fair also brings communal harmony between Hindu and Muslim community.

The Fair of Mask Dance: After cutting the autumnal crops the village people get some time at their disposal. In the context of Indian culture this time period is very significant. Because the craftsmanship of the village people can be at full fledge in this spare time when they are otherwise busy throughout the year in earning money. The religious and the dance of different social occasions of north & south Dinajpur district mainly follow the tradition of the season. Different races of tribal people including Rajbangsi, Poli, Desi, Coach, Kaiborto, Santal, Munda, Oraon became totally engrossed in this fair. This fair is not artificial at all. Their intention is not only to income like businessman of the town but

also the fair deals with village cultural taste, economy and beliefs. These things indicate that this fair besides carrying cultural heritage will survive for a long time off period.

The Fair of Swami Nath : This hundred year old fair is celebrated with lot of energy and enthusiasm at the Raiganj block in Uttar Dinajpur District. It is believed that a farmer named Ranu Debsharma got the deity of Swaminath while cultivating his land, later he informed this to the local landlord. The landlord then builds a temple of Swaminath. Then there they began worshipping the deity and organized fair. Swaminath was the deity is Bishnu. The women who came there believe that if they have on opportunity to look as the deity than they will not suffer the hardships of widow life in the next birth. It if a fair of two days but it continues for seven days. The people of Santal, Desi, Poli, Rajbanshi take part in this fair.

Teohar Fair: it is a very famous folk festival of Darjeeling district. In the auspicious day is bhatra dwitiya, this fair starts at Mahakal temple. The hill people like Limbu, Lepcha, Rai, and Sherpa participate in this fair. The zilipi and laddu of this fair is very well known.

Rasmela of Coochbehar : One of the most important fair of Coachbehar district is Rasmela. On the four wall of silver Madanmohan Deb is decorated and he is placed in the front veranda of Garvagriha(inner apartment). The pilgrims became amazed seeing the dazzling light of the temple. This ancient's fair is still very famous throughout Uttar Banga. The businessman makes them ready with all kind of essentials goods for the upcoming people. Different kind of utensils, furniture's, clothes is at abundance in this fair. This fair becomes truly a mixture of not only village life and town life but also tradition and modernism.

Ramkeli Fair: In the month of June, 1514 Chaityanadeb come from Nilachal to panihat by boat and them via Kumarhatta, Fulia, and Boira, he finally reachd to Gour. Chaityanaded stayed at Ramkeli for four days. Hossain Shah became very eager to meet him during his visit at Ramkeli. According to Scholars he came to Ramkeli on Jaistha Sankaranti (15th June). To remember this day, his disciples started a great fair. Beneath the Tamal tree of Ramkeli where Chaityanodeb sat, his followers set up a temple just beside it,in which on a small stone piece the

mark of Chaityannodeb's leg had been fixed. Though the centre of this fair is a temple of Madan Mohan. Ramkeli fair is renowned throughout West Bengal as a meeting place of all the follower of Baishnab cult. The main attraction of the fair is to embrace into Baishnav religion.

Such few others notable fairs are Jalpeswar of Jalpaiguri districts. It continues for 15 days starting from the day of shib chathurti. Many people from far and wide come to visit the fair. The Boira kali mela (fair) of Kaliyaganj in Utta Dinajpur is also well known to the people across it. The followers show tremendous respect to Goddess Kali. A lot of offering of goat are given due to the fair. A Muslim Inspector of Kaliyaganj police station started worship of this temple. People from Muslim community also offer 'Vog' to fulfill their wish.

In the rural life of North Bengal, fairs play a significant role. All the girls boys and children wait throughout the year for these fairs to come. They find happiness there. These fairs show the culture of village and help in developing rural economy. These fair places become trading place and also create opportunity for villager to buy their necessary requirements. Though we do not get exact amount of transaction but still a large amount of transaction happens there.

In different corners of north Bengal one can see a numerous numbers of these kinds of fairs starting from chaitro sankranti and ending in Ambubachi (in Bengali calendar). Though the pattern of Fair is more and less similar but there are some difference in culture and worshipping the God and Goddess. In the era of globalization consumerism science and technology the impacts of rural culture is decreasing but in the fair culture gets boost and the importance of fairs is lie on it.

Reference:

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2. Roy Dhananjoy, Banga Deser Uttarprantio Sahanskritik Itihaser Dhara, Amar Bharati, Kol-09.