CHAPTER-III

The Concept and Classification of Festivals and Fairs

CONCEPT

Festivals and fairs are an important part of the cultural life of the people. They have educational, social as well as religious characteristics. They serve the need of social interaction not only for economic subsistance but also for emotional integration and better understanding of one another. The festivals and fairs reflect the cultural heritage of the people and also serve to revive it.¹ These are as old as the human race. The geographical features of the country, its history, people and their religious faiths contribute towards the evolution and development of various fairs and festivals. Alien influences in ancient times, the patronage of the ruling families and the rustic sentiments of the people mixed with tradition, customs and conventions all alike have helped the growth of fairs and festivals.

The festivals and fairs, as the terms are used in religion are essentially synonymous (festival, being the adjective form used also as a noun), properly describing an anniversary that is observed with rejoicing,

¹ Singh, M.G.S. Himachal Pradesh: History, Culture and Economy, Shimla, 1988, p. 55
'fair' is also an annual holiday gathering for merrymaking. More generally the term festival and fair are also applied to all annual ceremonies and not merely confined to those connected with rejoicing. Major religious festivals and fairs, with few exceptions, are annual. The religious year not only represents a span of time but is also a representation of sacred events of the past eternally recurring.

The concept behind the origin of the fairs and festivals is to evolve, promote and preserve the common culture of the community, country or society settled in a specific place. They not only provide moments of merrymaking like singing, dancing, playing and feasting but also a chance to meet relatives, members of the community, clan, tribe or people of different religious faiths at one place. These also provide a good market for buying and selling of local and foreign produce. On such occasions the peasants bring their produce like ginger, walnuts, almond, chilgoja etc. The rural artisans and craftsmen find an opportunity to market their products, viz. agricultural implements, earthen wares, woollen and cotton produces, ornaments and other household items. In order to market the products and procure foreign goods a necessity was felt to devise an occasion where the sellers and buyers could meet.

3. Ibid.
The evolution is also linked with the celebration of auspicious days connected with the avatars (incarnations) and village deities. Besides, the festivals and fairs provide the opportunity to celebrate the birth anniversaries of prophets, such as Buddha, Jesus Christ, Holy Mohamad, Guru Nanak Dev etc. Birth and death anniversaries of saints, sages and heroes are also celebrated by holding festivals or fairs at their birth places or Samadhis. The auspicious dates and time contributed to the origin of these fairs and festivals. The best examples of such auspicious fairs and festivals are Samavati Amayasya, Kumbh Mela of Haridwar, Allahabad, Nasik and Ujjain and Pushkar Mela in Rajasthan. The Navaratra days in March-April and September-October are considered very auspicious in India. The seasons and agricultural activities also played an important role in the evolution and celebration of these cultural gatherings. Basakhi is a seasonal as well as an agricultural festival. It is celebrated on 1st Baisakh (13th April) when the weather starts warming up. In the plains by this time, the peasants complete the harvesting of wheat and enjoy the fruits of their hard labour. In the hills the people celebrate the end of winter and thereafter get busy in harvesting the Rabi crop.
In most cases the motives for establishing a festival are mixed: there is the obvious fact of its being a pilgrim attraction and boost to the local economy. But festivals also perform a notable service in adversifying the arts and making it possible to enjoy drama or music in attractive surroundings away from the great cities and capitals. Festivals and fairs may also be founded to honour and perform the work of a great dramatist or composer.

_Festival_ derives for the most part from collective ritual. The tendency of primitive behaviour to rely upon magic involves the participation of the social group-clan, tribe or family-inactivities which are held to affect the interest of the whole group. Hence the greater proportion of primitive ritual is collective, and most activities involves collective rituals. Meals partaken of in common assume the character of religious ceremonies. The propitious day connected with the avatras, holymen gods and goddesses, ceremonies for the propitiation or placation of supernatural powers, for relief from sickness and epidemics, for the preparation of warriors and heroes before an expedition, are occasions for collective rituals for festivals in which the entire community joins. Agricultural operations are also associated with a series of festivals.

Primitive collective rituals are often governed by the phases of the moon. Agricultural civilisations observed seasonal festivals the chief of which usually take place at the time of the summer and winter solisities. The dates of the observations are subject to considerable variations. In several instances the rites which were originally related to the monthly cycle have been transferred to the yearly cycle. The dates being, however, still determined by the older lunar calendar and not by the later solar reckoning. Sometimes the incidence of periodic festivals is determined by the rotation of crops, necessary in yearly stages of agriculture as in the instance of Chamba's Minjar fair.

To the Western World, festivals is a programme of cultural activities, mainly concerned with music, art, cinema, and theatre, which takes place with some measure of regularity in fixed place. Most festivals are held in towns where the facilities for celebrations and performances are available, but in some cases marquees and temporary buildings have to be used because the town is small. In the West the first festivals in the modern sense arose at the end of the

5. *Encyclopaedia of Social Science: N.Y.1953, Vol.5-6, 198-201.*

19th century and were descended from the English Charol and instrumental festivals of the previous century. Since the second world war there has been a boom in festivals, particularly in Britain. This is true even of very small towns and villages and is often an opportunity for music-making on a mixed amateur-professional basis. In medieval times in Europe the festivals were at first held on days to celebrate important occasions of the Christian Churches where many people gathered together in the cathedral of the city or other shrines of faith. Merchants and traders saw in such gatherings a good opportunity for doing business.

India (mostly Hindu): As described in ancient literature all Hindus festivals were religious, and this is not due solely to the fact that the literature itself is religious. Either inherently, as in-connection with sacrifice to a god, or artificially, as when a coronation was accompanied by rites which made the whole ceremony a religious festivals, all celebrations of a public nature consisted partly of

feasting and partly of performing religious exercises. Among the ancient festivals the Hindu Amavas, or the festival of new moon always held a high rank, and is important not only on account of its antiquity, but also on account of its prevalence, since even the Buddhist preserved a memory of it in the UPASATHA festival though reduced in that sober organisation to a Sabbath day observance. On Amavas or purnima day Hindus eat only one meal. It is a monthly mortuary service, at which prayers are offered for their parents.

Hinduism: Festivals of contemporary India are derived from the sectarian Hinduism of the period after the writing of the Puranic (c.4th century A.D.) lore. Ancient festivals were mostly seasonal and observed with sacrifices described in the Vedas. The four monthly festivals were celebrated at the end of winter and at the beginning of the monsoon and autumn. The Aswamedha was the most elaborate Vedic festival. Vedic festivals were similar to those of other early Indo-European people, but as the Aryan invaders were absorbed by the indigenous Dravadian people the festivals fell into disuse and were replaced by those of modern medieval Hinduism.

Modern festivals are mostly connected with the worship of Shiva, Vishnu (generally in the form of his avatars of incarnation) and Shakti. Many are associated with a place of pilgrigmage, sacred to a deity. Seasonal festivals such as Holi, are celebrated by all sects and are popular not sectarian in origin. Some festivals are common to Northern India, others to Southern India where Dravidian culture is predominant. Many are purely local and are observed with fairs. Sectarian festivals are numerous among the devotees of Vishnu since that god has several avatars.

In India when the harvest is in and the sun commences its auspicious journey to the northern emisphere people lay down their burdens and travel to participate in fairs and festivals held at the confluence of rivers, around lakes, and amidst dense forests. This travel of discovery and adventure has sacred sanction, as it is the basis for observation, learning and teaching, and coming together of vast numbers of people.

Millions walk, centuries-old paths, travel in gaily decorated cards drawn by bullocks or camel or journey by train. Irrespective of caste and creed they converge on the sacred soil where festivals are held. Along this route for centuries have travelled medicants and story-tellers, dancers and musicians,

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seers, philosophers and wise-men, social workers, magicians the great Mahants of religious sects who set up their Akharas or clearly demarcated arenas at the sacred site. Merchants and shopkeepers build tiny bamboo booths, decorated with brilliant coloured paper or cloth buntings or lithographs of the gods, to sell their merchandise which includes sun-dyed cloths, brass utensils, beads for men and cattle. The Halwai, the maker of sweet meats, sells round sugar balls covered with very fine silver leaf or sweetmeats shaped as animals, birds or flowers. The seller of glass bangles is a popular feature at all fairs. Therefore, these fairs and festivals became the meeting places for various communities, religious and cultures.

CLASSIFICATION: In Himachal Pradesh these festivals play a great part in the life of the people. Indeed these form their chief holidays. On these occasions men, women and children assemble in great numbers near a place of worship. After the offerings have been made they enjoy the fun and frolic of the fair and festivals going around them.

With the exception of a few all the principal Hindu festivals of Northern India are celebrated in Himachal Pradesh with usual zeal and tradition. On

the festival day, the people generally keep themselves free from daily routine work. They take a bath, wear neat and clean clothes, cook special foods, worship at the temple and sing and dance in the open.

Some of the festivals of Himachal Pradesh are derived from the sectarian Hinduism of the period after the immigration of the high caste Hindus (7th Century to 15th Century A.D.) from the plains. Most of the immigrants were petty chiefs and they introduced here traditional festivals like Holi, Dashehra and Diwali. Many of the festivals are associated with the worship of Shiva and Shakti and the others are connected with the places of pilgrimage.

The seasons have also played a major part in shaping the festivals of Himachal Pradesh. Every season has its appropriate festival, the ceremonies in each being largely influenced by the season in which they are celebrated. Thus the arrival of winter is celebrated by the festival of bonfire and the summer by the festival of flowers. All the year around there is a regular cycle of festivals held in various parts of Himachal Pradesh. These may be classified as under:-

a) Religious and Mythological.
b) Social and Cultural
c) Seasonal

16. Ibid.
a) As explained above the religious and mythological festivals are connected with different cults, auspicious days and holymen. Those are mostly held on the basis of a lunar calendar and very rarely on the basis of solar dates. Amongst these are Shivratri, associated with the worship of Shiva, Navratras connected with the worship of Shakti in March (Chet) and October (Asoj). The people keep fasts and visit Durga Temples. Ramanaumi and Krishna Janamashtami are linked with birth days of Ram Chandra and Krishna respectively and Dushahra and Diwali also have a religious basis.

b) Social and cultural festivals are associated with the social, cultural and historical events in the life of any community or country. Out of a long list of such festivals the most popular are Rakhpuny or Rakshabandhan, celebrated throughout the State. Haryali, Sair, Bishu, Cherwal and Phulech, the festival of flowers are other famous festivals. The last mentioned festival is held in Kinnaur.

c) Seasons have played an important role in the shaping of the festivals celebrated in Himachal Pradesh. Every season has its own appropriate festival, the ceremonies in each being largely influenced by the seasonal conditions prevailing at that time. Thus the arrival of winter is heralded by the festival of the bonfire like Diwali or Buri Diwali celebrated in November or
December; and the summer by the festival of colours and flowers. The best examples of such festival are Magha Samkranti, Basant Panchami, Holi, Basakhi and Phuleeh.

Fairs arose in the past centuries just as much for religious as for commercial reasons and in Sanskrit the word Yatra or Jatra is used for both a pilgrimage and for fair. In Europe fairs were at first held in days that were important festivals of Christian Churches when many people gathered together in some cathedral city or other places of interest. Merchants and traders saw in such gatherings good opportunities of doing business and either petitioned local church dignitaries for permission to set up stalls in the cathedral square or on church land, or obtained a municipal or Royal charter granting a similar privilege. Gradually those fairs came to be associated not only with religion and business but also with entertainment. Fair days began with religious services, continued with business, and often ended at night in rather riotous gaiety. Many fairs of this kind now survive only for purposes of amusement.

The customs of holding fairs for the exchange of goods at established times and places is certainly very old. By the end of the 2nd millennium B.C. caravans of merchants used to attend the most important religious festivals in the holy places. In the closed economy of the old ages fairs had the main function of satisfying those needs that local resources could not meet. Most commercial exchanges in the important fairs of this period were controlled by Byzantine or Jewish or Arabs merchants who traded with the West and East in items like costly cloths, spices, perfumes and jewels.

In the west the medieval fairs were first held inside the churches or around them. In time the right of holding a fair was established in the charters granted to the industrial towns. With this came the need to ensure that law and order was maintained, that weights and measures were sound and the merchants could rely on a speedy settlement of disputes before returning to their own parts. In this way, there arose the "Law merchants. Thus it can be said that in olden times most of the trade was conducted through fairs. These fairs were a source of revenue to the organisers or government, who received rent for all the fair sites. Some times the organisers received rent for all the fair sites. Some times the organisers of the fairs had to pay a duty to the rulers or government.

Fair differ from the market because they take place at longer intervals and normally involve sellers and buyers from much wider area. Fairs are distinct from exhibitions (even if called world fairs) since they are primarily or entirely commercial, while exhibitions are more for display or advertising and are not necessarily held at religious intervals.

Fairs are organised to provide an opportunity for a meeting of buyers and sellers of agricultural products and implements, common to a region. In America many fairs exhibits agricultural products, and other articles for public inspection and study. The term is also applied to bazars where fancy articles are offered for sale and to the agricultural and industrial exhibitions, held under the direction of districts, States or nations at which there is competition for prizes. In Europe industrial fairs are held frequently. In India such fairs are periodically held in big cites like Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta.

There are some fairs which were not for trading but purely for amusement and were not held annually.

As time went on, the amusement side of the fairs gradually came to be more important than the trading and amusement often became rather rowdy. The trading remnant of the fair became separate from its more vital part-the jugglers, monageries, vendors and side shows
of all kinds. The puppets, the plays, and all such fun of the fair became more popular with the masses.

All the paraphernalia of a modern fair is carried in vans and on trailers from fair ground to fair ground. The day before the fair the showmen arrive to set up their roundabouts, stalls, and the booths for special shows of freaks, gypsy fortune tellers, side shows and for many various other items. The round about or merry-go-round a prominent feature of the modern fair appeared in the 18th century.

The fairs of mixed religious and commercial character go back a long way in the history of most countries. The Hindu fair of Kumbha at Allahabad (Paryag) ad Haridwar, is of a very long standing. By the 4th century fairs were being held regularly in India. The number of fairs increased after the 11th century. Now, with the improvements in the communications international fairs like India Festival, France Festival, Russian Festival are becoming popular.

India Fair called in India a mela or assemblage, is held periodically at many places. The system existed in full force throughout India. Innumerable fairs are held in India and the Hindus custom of assembling at shrines and taking the opportunity of

displaying merchandise, prevails throughout India. In Asia fairs flourish as the only means by which nations distant from each other, the population of which is often widely spread, can be readily supplied with articles of home and foreign produce.

In Himachal Pradesh the concept of a fair is quite different from what it is in other parts of the country. A cluster of shops or a chain of merry-go-rounds does not adorn the fair venue here. The community gods and their devotees form the congregation which according to tradition creates the atmosphere of the fair. The gods with their devotees dance and participate on such occasions whose sanctity is preserved almost zealously. Some are commercial or agricultural fairs, which gather in a style unique to the hills.

Every fair and festival of Himachal Pradesh has a legendary origin which is the governing factor in all such gatherings. Hill people are tradition bound and, therefore, tend to perpetuate their social life in its original style without much regard for sophistication.

Fairs, as a means of mass recreation are very popular in Himachal Pradesh. Men, women and children of all ages, classes and creed flock in hundreds and enjoy, singing and dancing. They play on instruments such as drums, tambourines and trumpets. To a lover
of culture, a Himachali fair is an aesthetic treat.

Nearly every hamlet has a fair during summer and care is exercised to prevent neighbouring hamlets from having their fair on the same date. There is almost a continuous succession of fairs. To the accompaniment of music, the village deity is carried out of the temple to the village ground where there is a congregation of other gods and people. The principal deity dances in the centre. The people form a ring round the deity, singing, dancing and shouting lustily. Women wearing coloured head dresses "Dathu" and "Pattu", (blankets) form bright groups of spectators seated on the terraces around.

Fairs, as a media of mass-recreation, are very popular in Himachal Pradesh. All the year round there is a regular cycle of fairs held in various parts of the Pradesh. These may be classified as under:

a) Religious fairs
b) Fairs connected with festivals
c) Agricultural
d) Commercial and Trade fairs
e) Seasonal fair
f) National and State level fairs

a) Religious fairs are held to celebrate the auspicious days connected with the Divine Power of gods and goddesses. The best examples of such fairs are
Shivratri fair of Mandi, Dussehra fair of Kullu, Naini Devi fair of Bilaspur, Navratra fairs of Chintpurni and Jawalamukhi and Renuka fair of Sirmour.

b) Some festivals have assumed the form of fairs. The extraordinary instance of such fairs are Kumbh Melas of Allahabad and Haridwar and also Pushkar Mela of Rajasthan. For the hill people, Bhunda, Shant and Bhoj are their Kumbh Melas as like Kumbha these fairs are also held after twelve years. No baths are taken in the holy rivers and lakes but village deities are worshipped and fairs are held to please deities.

c) Agricultural Fairs: Like other parts of India, Himachal Pradesh is rich in agricultural rites and cults. Crops are offered to gods and goddesses. Cattle is held in high reverence all over the country and are worshipped by many people. Cattle worship takes the form of cattle caressing ceremony, painting the body and horns, bull baiting, racing and bull fighting. The peasant take much interest in Pujas (Worship) and Melas (fairs) which regulate not only agriculture itself but also the way of life of the people. The peasants are enthusiastic about pujas and melas and women are more absorbed in them. Fairs and festivals are social recreation and economic activities. These make rural life colourful and pleasant and give its cultural landscape a traditional touch. It is valuable to probe into these festivals.
in order to ascertain the dispersals and exchange of some crops, agricultural implements, cattle and other rural products.

The best example of the agricultural fairs of Himachal Pradesh is the Minjar fair of Chamba celebrated in the month of August. On the last day of a week long fair the devotees gather on the banks of the Ravi river to make offerings to Varuns, the god of rain, by floating Minjars (tentacles of maize) and coconuts on the river.

d) Commercial and trade fairs arose in past centuries just as much for religious as for commercial reasons. In olden times most of trade was conducted through such fairs. Merchants and traders, local and alien, displayed their merchandise and conducted business. The people and peasants bought the things of their need which were not ordinarily available in the bazars. The best example of such fairs in Himachal Pradesh is Rampur-Bushahar's Lavi fair held from November 11 to 13th November every year. This fair is attended by traders from all over Western Himalayas and Tibet who bring woollen products, ponies, Chilgoza, Zira and other manufactured goods. Traders from the plains also bring products of the plains.

Trade fairs are a source of income to the organisers or the government, who receive rent for all the sites in the fairs.
e) **Seasonal Fairs:** The seasons have played an important part in shaping the fairs. Every season has its own appropriate fair, the ceremonies in each being largely influenced by the climatic needs or other factors of the particular season. Thus the arrival of summer is heralded by Bishu fair held throughout the length and breadth of the State on Basakhi day which falls on 13th April every year.

f) **National and State Level Fairs:** In free India a new series of national and regional fairs have come into existence. These are held on national days like Independence Day on 15th August and Republic Day on 26th January. These fairs are held throughout the country. On 15th August, the Prime Minister hoists the national flag from the ramparts of Red Fort and on 26th January, the President takes the salute on Jan Path.

The State level fairs of Himachal Pradesh are 15th April and 25th January. On 15th April Himachal Pradesh came into being. On 25th January the Statehood was granted to Himachal Pradesh. Fairs are held at State headquarter and at all district and tehsil headquarters of Himachal Pradesh.