



A study of tribal fairs held in Panchmahals, Gujarat

INTRODUCTION

Panchmahals district became a part of Gujarat state when partition of Bombay state took place in 1960. Panchmahal district is situated in central Gujarat. In the present Paper, **study of tribal fairs held in Panchmahals, Gujarat is conducted**. During the period of 1991 to 2001, the partition of Panchmahal district's Eastern Talukas were separated and the new, Dahod district came into existence. Recently the new Panchmahals district was further divided to form the new Mahisagar district. I have included the details of Panchmahals of that time which was separated from Mumbai. I have tried humbly to introduce Panchmahals, known for its Geographic features.

Situation:

Panchmahals district situated at 20-30 to 23-30 Northern latitudes and 73-15 to 74-30 East longitude on the Eastern part of this state. On the Northern side of this district, Sabarkantha, Vansvada district of Rajasthan are situated whereas, on the Eastern side, there are Jhabva district of Madhya Pradesh and on the Western side, Vadodara and Kheda districts of Gujarat respectively. North-South length of the Panchmahals is approximately 129 kms whereas East-West length of district is approximately 116 kms.

History:

Panchmahals means the region of five mahals. Since the time of Sindhiya state, Godhra, Kalol, Halol, Dahod and Zalod are five mahals of Panchmahal district. At that time, the district was known as Pavagadh-Panchmahal district and, Subas of Sindhiya, who administered whole state, furthermore, their main Capital was Pavagadh. In Medieval history, Chanpaner city and Pavagadh mountain were in the centre of the Panchmahal district. During the seventh century, at the time of First king Vanraj of Anhilvad, Chanpaner was established. This ancient Chanpaner City was capital of Chalukya kingdom. During the time of Mughals, between 1573 to 1727, Godhra became main centre of Panchmahals.

Schedule Tribes:

According to 1991 approximate population of STs in Panchmahals numbered to 13,95,050. Total population of the STs is 47.19% in district.

MEANING OF MELAS:

According to Bhagavat Go-mandal, Melas are meant for last meeting at last moment. It is a mass of people gathered for celebrating some festivals. Besides this fair means: Bogoge, Show, Sports, Meetings, Visits etc.

Fair (Mela) means informal meetings based on customs and traditions at the pre-decided time and place with community. People meet with community, is known as *Melak* in Sanskrit. Amarkosh provides two meanings of *Melak*, first one is Sangamaou with *Melak*, the second means is Union. People come together in fairs and even in union, which ultimately leads to *Melak* word. Mela word might have developed from “Melaye, Melo, Merto”. Mountier William and Opte have given Melak Mela as Sanskrit counterparts of the fair but this special meaning of Mela, Melak is not used abundantly in Sanskrit literature except for Panchtantra. But Panchtantra describes it as “Pakshi Melayako Mahotsav”. In this example, it is mentioned clearly that, Pakshi Melayako means birds fair, which is Sankritised of Gujarati word.

According to Gujarati Sarth Joining Dictionary, in Sankrit, it is Melak, Melay in Prakrit and Mela in Hindi and Marathi. Melao word usage is found in *Tripurdah Dim* in this sense. From this it can be inferred that perhaps the Gujarati Melo has come from Adeshya Melak Meli and its sankritization in Amarkosh.

As per Vashudevsharan Agrawal’s opinion in ancient time the fairs were recognized as ‘Mad’ and ‘Yatra’ names. Mad was also called as a kind of festival, and these kinds of religious fairs were also called as Jata, Yatra and Jatra. Melak and Mela names were also recognized.

The English (fair) of Mela has come from Latin “Foire, fariae” , and it means as holiday that is festival day. The aim of fairs is to revelate life’s beautiful and loaded emotion, and to enjoy. Perhaps the word Mela became popular even if festival is much ancient. Each fair is associated with its greatness and anquity of particular place. Hence, fairs are involved since ancient times with human life.

TRIBAL FAIRS OF PANCHMAHALS:

Tribal culture is centuries old. Maneknath, Gor, Magar, Galdevaro etc. are included in tribal fairs. Their customs, traditions, fairs, weekly bazaars (Haat) etc. are held at a regular period of time in their own originality since ancient time. Amali Agiyaras fair is extreamly important religiously and culturely. On that day, all village people in the evening Aonla tree or its branch is installed and go around (pradaxina) it to apologize for their sins and ask god for forgiveness and pray for a better produce, cattle seasoning and health for the new year. After this Amali agiyaras fair is also organized at Dahod’s Bavka village. Here, ancient remains of Shiv temple are considered to belong to 746 B.C. to 486 B.C. Due to these sculptures and cultural engraving, this place is known as Khajuraho of Dahod, furthermore it is being preserved by Archeology Department. People of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh take part in worship to Shivji with Bhajans.

There is ancient Shiva Temple at Triveni confluent (Triveni sangam) to Dudhmati, Kharod and Kadi rivers at Radiyati village of Dahod district. Here Amali Agiyaras fair is held where people participate with their traditional cloths and musical instruments. In addition, in this fair devotees of Shiva with long hairs and with ash on their body try to impress Lord Shiva and take the Prasad of Bhang.

Hasteswar Mahadev is situated at Hathidhara village of Limkheda taluka and Amali Agiyaras fair. In this fair, newly married couples together, with grains, water and coconut walk around the temple and pray for their happy marriage life. The main attraction of this fair is these newly married couple. Temple of Nadeswar Nal-Damayati is situated at Nadu village of Dhanpur taluka. It is believed that Nal and Damayanti rested at this place during their exile. The special importance of this fair is the deathless love story of Nal-Damayati. Those who are unhappy in their marriage life, take oath of Nal-Damayati on this

auspicious day and return the next year dancing with Dhol, Nagada, Thali etc. if their wish is fulfilled, and celebrate the fair. Hence, in Dahod district all fairs are beautifully organized on Doda Ropani and Amali Agiyaras. In this fairs, sword dance of tribals remain as centre of attraction. The people here are fond of celebration and celebrate all festival with tradition. The second day of Holi, Chul fair is main festival here. On this day, people walk on fire to fulfill their wishes.

During the days of Holi varieties of fairs are organized in Dahod and Panchmahal districts. Gol-Gadheda and Chadiya's fair are organized during Holi time. Fair of Gol- Gadheda, organized at Jeshavada village, is very famous. In this fair, man and woman known as Ranglo-Rangli, come here to enjoy in with flute and handkerchief in their hands. In this fair, people also come with traditional dresses, musical instruments etc. where women and men come singing Fagun songs and marriage songs. Additionally, they also perform sword dance with bits of ancient Dhol. People from nearest and far away villages participate in the event in huge numbers. Local tree known as Shemalo with big trunk and bag of jaggery on the top, is planted. Some young men try to climb on the stem to get jaggery. But, girls around the stem beat the men with full effort and force, and finally some of men may be able to climb to get jaggery even though he is being beaten by girls just like donkey, hence fair is known as *God -Gadheda no medo* in local language. Man who is able to get jaggery, becomes famous among girls, and make lifetime companion to the girl whom he likes!! Thus, this fair remind us about ancient *Svayamvars*.

After the second day of Dhuleti, at Dhanpur village of Dahod taluka, Chadiya's fair is organized. Here, on the day of fair local people tie cash money in white cloth, coconut and jaggery on the big wooden pillar. Those men who have not child, climb on that pillar. Around the tree, women are seen singing songs and dancing.

Tribal people believe in different gods and goddess. To save from fear and to obtain different benefits, they worship different gods and goddess and sacrifice different animals. It is tradition to sacrifice animal to impress goddess at the time of Navratri. Bhils of Panchmahals and Dahods believe in different gods-goddess such as Kalka mata, Okha, Zanpadi, Sudai, Ghodajo, Birbaj, Indraj, Kachumber, Vagajo, Kohajo, Hadarjo, Manato, Mozida etc. Home of such gods is not any big church or temple, even they don't have much adornment or decoration. Generally, they have their place at the outskirts of the village, or at some big banyan tree or any tree such as Shimalo (Flame of forest), Mahudo (Honey tree), Piplo (Bodhi tree), Ambali (Tamarind tree) etc. Most of fairs organized here also resemble with one another.

In different seven talukas of Dahod districts, different markets known as haat are also held where, Monday in Zalod, Tuesday in Limbadi on Wednesday in Dahod, on Thursday in Garbada, Friday in Jeshavada and Dhanpur on Saturday in Fatepura on Sunday in Limkheda are held. These markets provide specific identity to this place. Weekly fairs are organized at taluka levels where, cereals, pulses, oilseeds, fruits, vegetables, home used things, preparation of bamboos, baskets etc. are bought and sold by people. Specific identity of tribes, arrow-bow and catapult are in the centre of attraction. In this local markets, even some merchants also buy materials from people selling under the trees.

In Shahera market yard, animals like bullock, calves, hens, goats, buffaloes etc. are sold. These markets provide chance to select proper animals, or to buy and sell animals. Farmers buy bullocks before rainy season from these markets. Buying methods of these animals are also different. Seller, owner and buyer meet with each other and fix prices for animals to sell. At the time of fixing price, they shake hands, fix the price sitting, holding the fingers of hands covered with handkerchief. After fixing price of animal,

broker takes brokerage (commission) from seller and buyer. In this area, mostly cow, bullocks, buffalo, sheep's, goats and poultries are traded.

In such haat fair-Haat markets, government publishes tenders to provide place to marchants. Marketing yards also levy different taxes from farmers and marchants, and provides receipt to them. In the markets of these area, people buy weekly or monthly shopping for their livelihood. Tribal people come in huge numbers to buy different things starting from the clay utensils, metal utensils, broom, to all livelihood things from these markets, and hence becomes centre of attraction. Thus, agricultural equipments, vegetables and all livelihood things are available here with reasonable and cheaper prices. So, there is special importance given to these markets by them, and they buy things. Hat markets are known as integral organ of their lives. Atmosphere of these haat markets are just like any fair.

Tribal people keep or save required quantity of cereals for their family, and rest of the material is sold in these fairs. In return, they buy different livelihood things. Huts of tribes are scattered and in out skirts of forests hence, there is no chance for business. As a result of this, these kind of hat fairs are organized. Tribal people also use barter system for trading in these fairs. At the Limadi village of Dahod district, there is also big Haat organized. In this Haat mostly, clothes, livelihood things, different preparation of Bamboo, poultry and hens are sold here.

Conclusion:

Present article includes study of various community fairs organized in Panchmahals district with special reference to tribal community. These tribal fairs are our cultural heritage and we must preserve it. For that information regarding those fairs is an essential requirement. The present article is a humble attempt in this direction.

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