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Cultural Heritage of Gujarat - Folk Fairs

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Introduction:-

The land of Gujarat is cultivated by hand. 'Sahyadri' and 'Saputara' mountain ranges in the east, Kutch desert in the west. Abu in the north and Damanganga in the south boasting the natural beauty of Gujarat's glorious folk forest, one can see the vibrant heritage of art, culture and saints. Folklore means any characteristic in behavior and thought that is traditionally handed down from generation to generation. Folklore covers the whole of the people. Folklore is a human group that is not confined within a single geographical boundary. Indigenous and Foreigner have come and gone in Gujarat. It includes the making of wooden plants, the removal or cleaning of wood, the work of fishermen etc. Kharwa, Kol, Mimyana, Barda, Mer, Bacho, Babar, Kharak, Van Ra, Vaghela, Targada, Haraya, Salat, etc. have settled in Gujarat. All these peoples and the people who inhabited the regions and their sects, rites, customs, beliefs, music, dance, painting, living and food, beliefs and artistry together have shaped the folk culture of Gujarat. People and regional communities have a significant contribution in shaping the folk culture of Gujarat. Thus, folk culture is not the creation of a single human being or a human group, but just as the great river rises from many rivers, distinctive forms of Gujarati folk culture have been created from the synergistic fusion of many peoples. Festivals and fairs that add joy to the life of the people are of a different kind. Humans have been celebrating fairs and festivals since time immemorial. There are many traditions observed during festivals like Diwali, Holi, Gokul-Asthmi, Akhatrij, Uttarayan and Vasant Utsav. Village-to-village fairs are organized in some festivals. Folk fairs are organized everywhere in festivals like Shravani Poonam, Bhadravi Amas, Third-fourth-fifth of Bhadarwa, the splendor of Gujarat's art and culture is revealed. These folk festivals and fairs are celebrated together by all without discrimination of caste, poor or rich, by removing the pain in the human heart, joy spreads throughout the atmosphere. Gujarat is famous for its traditional fairs and festivals.

Folk fairs as cultural heritage of Gujarat:-

The folk fairs of Gujarat hold a special significance for the entire folk community. In Gujarat, fairs are held in many places during Aso month starting from Kartak month. Gujarat is famous for its traditional fairs and festivals. Out of 1600 large and small fairs held in Gujarat every year, more than 500 fairs are held in Shravan month. The highest number of fairs around 159 are held in Surat district and the least in Dang district. As many as 280

Indigenous fairs have been held in Gujarat, with the highest number of 89 held in Panchmahal district. Folk fairs (Lok Mela) means a gathering where masses gather, fairs mean a meeting, a gathering of masses or a crowd gathered to meet each other. Meetings, gatherings, a heavy bazaar of various items filled on a fixed date and at a fixed place.

Origin of Folk fairs:-

Exact information is not available as to where the first fairs were held, but fairs are mentioned in ancient times in the two epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. Generally, fairs are held at river banks, hilly areas, forest areas or religious places where people gather to celebrate an event and buy essentials from one place or to meet each other and enjoy the fair. Each fair has a different format and activities. It can be assumed that fairs started as the original aim of our ancestors was to preserve our culture.

Importance of Folk fairs:-

The folk fairs held in Gujarat are largely organized in accordance with religious festival occasions or beliefs. People participate in the fairs held on the occasion of the festivals of the gods and goddesses with the religious spirit of the community. People enthusiastically participate in the fair in memory of monks and saints as well as local deities. Most fairs are held once a year. Although some fairs especially in tribal areas known as 'haat' fairs are held every week. Local fairs last for a day or so, but some fairs like 'Tarnetar', 'Bhavnath' and 'Madhavarayana' fairs last for five or seven or more days. These fairs have been celebrated all over Gujarat for years. Years ago entertainment equipment like today was not available. There were no means of transportation. People did not have the means to store the necessities of life for a long time, so folk fairs used to be a means of supplying the people with their necessities and also a place for entertainment. These fairs have many elements that attract the masses. Hatis overflowing with sweets, jewels, toys, and many other crowd-pleasing items, young women and men decked out in colorful costumes and glittering ornaments, 'Ras-Garba' and 'Duha' programs all these elements make folk fairs more attractive. In addition to this, charming young men and women, from young innocent children to experienced men and women also flock to it. For them fairs become a religious pilgrimage. This is a prominent feature of folk fairs of Gujarat. Thus, let us study some popular fairs of Gujarat from a religious socio-cultural perspective.

Tarnetar fair :-

In the village Tarnetar in Surendranagar district, the famous fair of India is held for three days on Bhadarvasud 3-4-5 in the premises of the temple of Trinetrishwar Mahadev. In this three- day Bhatigal Mela, foreigners from all over India and foreigners who have come to India see this fair. The mythological importance of this area is also great. It is believed that Draupadi was born at this place. This is the place where Draupadi swayamvara and Arjuna shot the arrow in the eye of the fish. As part of this mythological tradition, a marriage bazaar is held in the fair. In this fair, brides and virgins are offered to the buy accessories etc. The exciting part of this fair is 'Rasada', 'Dhol', and the sound of 'Jodia Pava' and its round circle dancing charmingly spinning 'Kathi', 'Koli', 'Rabari', 'Bharwad'. And hundreds of women from other communities in the fair 'Raas-garba' creates attraction and many competitions are held, thus preserving the culture of mythology and social tradition, this fair becomes a unique and precious opportunity for the people.

Vautha Fair:-

This fair is held from 'Kartiki Agiyaras' to 'Purnima' in Vautha village of Dholka Taluka of Ahmedabad district. Vautha's fair is also mentioned in mythology in Sabarmati

area of Vautha. It is also popularly known as ‘Sapta Sangam’ as it is the confluence of seven rivers namely ‘Vatrak’, ‘Hatmati’, ‘Khari’, ‘Meshvo’, ‘Mazum’, and ‘Shedhi’. Shiv Parvati fled here, and Kartikeya is also believed to have visited this place. The specialty of the fair is that only animals are traded here with around 4000 donkeys and camels. People of ‘Vanzara’ tribe come more in this fair. Decorated donkeys and camels also attract attention in the fair. Thus, maintaining such mythological, religious and social culture, more than five lakh people flock to the fair and benefit from the ‘darshan’ of Lord Siddhanath Mahadev and fairs.

Bhavnath Mahadev - Shivratri’s fair -:

The ancient temple of Bhavnath Mahadev is situated on the banks of river Suvarnaksha at the foothills of Girnar in Junagadh. In the temple of Bhavnath Mahadev, a fair is held on the day of Shivratri. On the midnight of Mahashivratri, Lord Bhavnath is worshiped. A fair is held here for four days ‘Nagabawas’ from the surrounding area gather to witness the great worship of Shivratri and participate in the fair. The group of Bavas singing the Jayanad of the playing Mahadev has a unique presence in Bhavnath Mahadev. About three lakh people from Gujarat and Saurashtra come to enjoy the fair. The spiritual form of Girnar in Junagadh shines brightly during the days of the Bhavnath fair.

Shamlaji fair -:

Every year a fair is held in the month of ‘Kartik Purnima’ of the Shamlaji temple on the banks of the river Meshwo near the border of Gujarat and Rajasthan. In this fair, many people come in colorful costumes, especially the people of ‘Garasiya’ tribe. In this fair, the indigenous present in large numbers. These people have an abode in Shamlaji temple. This fair is a colorful festival among the hills of Aravali.

Madhavray’s fair -:

This folk fair is held every year in Madhavpur village of Porbandar. From ‘Chaitra Sud Navam’ to ‘Teras’, Madhavray the wedding ceremony of Lord Shri Krishna and Rukmani takes place. To enjoy this festival, devotees from all over the world gather. In this fair devotees ‘Ganesh Sthapan’, ‘Mandap-Vidhi’, ‘Varghodo’, ‘Swaymvar-vadhi’ etc. The events are celebrated here with full pomp for five days and the folk community of Gujarat revels in this fair wearing colorful clothes.

Naklang fair-:

In Koliyak of Bhavnagar district, at ‘Bhadra Amas’ Naklang fair is held at the temple of Naklang Mahadev on the sea shore. Naklang fair is organized in ‘Bhadra’ month ‘Amavasya’. In the Mahabharata, when the war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas ended, the Pandavas went to their mother Kuntaji. Knowing the whole truth, Kunti Mata said that you should now attain samadhi in the Himalayas. As per mother's advice Pandavas reached Himalayas. But Parvatraj Himalaya also considered them as sinners who destroyed the clan brothers. The Himalayas refused to save them. Seeking Himalaya's permission, the Pandavas set out with a black flag to clean themselves of their sins. While traveling, the Pandavas reached the village of Hatak near Bhavnagar and there half of their flag turned white. The Pandavas realized that they had come to the right place. And on reaching Koliyak of Bhavnagar, he established a temple of the immaculate Mahadev by walking three kilometers in the sea which swelled due to the currents and since then a fair is held there in the month of Bhadra and people from Gujarat Bhar go to participate in the fair.

Kachchh Fair :-

The culture, art and customs of Kachchh are unique. 12 fairs are held every year in Kachchh, the largest in India. Shitla Satam, Haji Peer Fair, Dada Mekaran Fair, Jakhno Mela, Karolpir Fairs include Rawadi Rathayatra on Janmasthmi in Mandvi, Shitlamata Fair on Chaitra Vad Teras in Mandvi, Shravan vad poonam fair in Anjar, Kuber Peer fair, Jesal-Toral fair, Ravechimata fair. There is a glimpse of the folklore. The unique culture of Kutch seems to have been created in a unique way for the tourists to enjoy the new experience of their lives.

Rupal's Palli Fair :-

This fair is held every year during Navratri in Rupal village, 15 km from Gujarat's capital Gandhinagar. The devout devotees of Vardayi Mata carry the palanquin of the mother and move around the village during the day. They have relatively pure ghee to please the goddess. The long procession carrying the palli palanquin of Devi is the specialty of this fair. A large community of people from the surrounding villages of Rupal throng here to visit Mataji's Palli and participate in the fair.

Chitra-Vichitra fair :-

A Chitra-Vichitra fair is held in Gunabhakhari village, which is just one and a half kilometer from Delwada village in KhedBrahma taluka of Sabarkantha district of Gujarat. A fair is organized every year in memory of Chitraveer and Vichitraveer of Mahabharata. Tribal men and women come to this fair and believe it to free their relatives from disease and pain. This fair is a must visit to get to know and enjoy the tribal culture up close.

Conclusion:-

Thus, many fairs are held in Gujarat as mentioned above, besides Ambaji Mata's fair is held in Data taluka of Banaskantha district in Kartak Chaitra Bhadravo and a large fair is organized in the Asho month of Ambaji Mata. Manek Kothari Poonam fair on Aso Sud poonam at Dakor is filled with bhajan-kirtan of Lord Krishna and a fair similar to the form of faith. Gol-Gadheda's Fair is organized after the festival of Holi in the tribal area of Dahod district. Chul's fair at many places in tribal areas, Chul's fair is organized on the second day after Holi. By lighting a big rectangular flame outside the village, the tribal men and women pass through the fire and the fire does not burn them, so the tribal people have a belief that the god of fire protects their family, children and cattle. Various fairs are organized in Gujarat and in that fair the diversity of culture and traditions of people, dress, food etc. is enjoyed.

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