

Significance of Fairs and Festivals in Kathmandu Valley

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Nepalese society is culturally rich due to diverse ethnicity and community. Most of the fairs and festivals in Nepal are celebrated in Kathmandu valley. Even though the cultural activities here are unique, the influence of western style and modernization has hindered the continuation of the unique and original culture. Newar community of Kathmandu valley still have many amazing cultural traditions. Jatra-Parva (Fairs and festival) is basically part of such cultural tradition. Newars naturally believe in religious duties. So it seems that the festivals here are often done in honor of the God-goddess or are motivated by religious traditions. But these fairs and festivals do not always reflect only the religious aspect. Rather, it also sheds lights on the theoretical, physical, psychological aspects as well. Therefore, every festival has its own significance. When fair and festival is depicted in detail, it is found that there is harmony, cooperation and good coordination

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between family and society. Whether it is a local level Jatra or central level Jatra, its significance is also reflected at the state level in addition to its social. How did the many types of festivals prevalent in the Newar community of Kathmandu Valley come to be and what is their significance and what is their usefulness in the current context? Various facts can be presented regarding this. Although the religious and spiritual aspect is the main reason for the origin of the festival, its usefulness or importance seems to be for improving or attaining religion and virtue, but in fact, the countless festivals celebrated here on the one hand are indirectly giving various practical, moral, diplomatic, social, etc. messages to the society. If there are, on the other hand, it also introduces various aspects such as promotion of the country's culture, development of tourism, level of entertainment, strong economic status. In fact, the festivals that have been popular since ancient times are not just traditions to celebrate. Behind this, many mysterious philosophies and intentions are also hidden. people may not know what their culture is unless they deeply understand those philosophy and intentions.

[**Keywords** : Pancham Veda, Ganthakarna Chavadasha, Sayata, Taleju, Maneshwari, Nakhtya, Sikabu, Bhairavanath, Machchindranath]

1. Introduction

Since ancient times, Vedic religion-culture has had a great influenced on the religious culture and social organization of Kathmandu Valley. The popular festivals are also inspired by this. Therefore, the festival is considered as a precious fund of culture and a mirror to observe the real nature of the society. The more the festivals are celebrated in the country, the more the country is considered to be civilized and rich in culture. For this reason, culture is also called the Pancham Veda (fifth Veda) (Rakesh, 2010 : 7). Original and Authentic culture is the backbone of any nation. Without it, the nation becomes lifeless and dull. In fact, traditional festivals are a powerful cultural process that portrays the true nature of society. Culture includes people's beliefs, art, moral ideals, values, customs, behaviour and the skills, knowledge, abilities, etc. that people have achieved till date (Taylor, 1975 : 63). Festivals represent all these aspects of culture. Therefore, festivals are an integral part of culture.

The festivals of Newar community of Kathmandu Valley can be considered as one of the best social and cultural festivals in the world. Because it has its own original tradition and cultural environment. In fact, the entire lifestyle of the residents of here is wrapped in the web of festivals (Majpuria and Gupta, 1981 : 3). Cultural coexistence and unity also fosters the national unity. The characteristic of Newari

festivals is to respect the elders and love the younger. Everyone celebrates them in a free atmosphere, wishing for intimacy in the family, social harmony in the society, peace and prosperity in the state and peace in the world (Bhattarai, 2009 : 5). The main intention behind most of these festivals seems to be appeasing the deity to wish that the relationship between man and the environment, that is, living being and the world, should always be balanced. In fact, since the beginning of creation, it seems that such festivals have come into vogue in order to worship an invisible power, which is omnipotent and which people imagine as God, who has been running the whole creation of this world in an orderly manner. Festivals seem to have originated with the purpose of raining on time, agricultural crops flourishing, happiness, peace and prosperity spreading everywhere, natural calamities and divine calamities not occurring.

2. Methodology

Both primary and secondary sources have been used to make the presented study authentic and reliable. Among the Primary sources are the on-site study of various fairs and festivals, direct observation as well as interviews with related people and published texts, books and writing articles under the Secondary sources. Analytical, descriptive and comparative methods have been used to study the resources obtained in this way.

3. Significance and Usefulness of Festivals

Although there are definitions, characteristics, analysis, purposes and intentions related to festivals, based on them, in general terms, the festival is a glimpse of the traditional situation, a sign of the change of season, the introduction of nationally important people, the remembrance of the great soul and aware of the dignity of ancient culture and heritage, the struggle and sacrifice of the men of the age and their thoughts. Festival of Newar community on one hand is celebrated to get rid of ghosts, vampires, demons, witches, evil spirit, etc. While on other hand they are also celebrated to fulfill the objectives of eliminating diseases and achieving successful agricultural harvests. This shows that the local festival of Newars of Kathmandu Valley does not confined within the myth that only gods and goddesses are worshiped during festivals. In addition to this, these festivals also acknowledges the fact that every living being in this world has its own importance. for this reason, people do not only

worship gods and goddesses in the festivals, but also worship themselves, parents, ancestors, brothers, sisters, children, teachers, animals, reptiles etc. The most important thing is that these festivals helps to bring the different types of people living in the family, the community at one contact point and it also creates a sense of social harmony, mutual conciliation and cooperation. If these festival is studied in depth, there are many secrets of ethics, ideals, virtues, honesty found within it and if one follows them, he will be able to achieve his goals in the struggle life. From a psychological point of view, it seems that people have developed these festivals for the purpose or as an opportunity to express their feelings. Because the local common people living in the closed society and under the controlled state system of the ancient times could not express their feelings, pain, sorrow, suffering and complaints as they can in today's environment. On the other hand, such festivals were considered as a powerful opportunity for the state to indirectly learn about the sentiments of its people, their views on the governance system, their situation, etc., from which it would be easy for the ruling class to correct their weaknesses and move forward. In this way, the common people, on the occasion of the festival, express their sadness, trouble, grievance, pain and sufferings experienced in public through various symbols. Among such festivals Gathemangal (Ghantakarna monster), Gaijatra (cow festival) etc. festivals can be considered as major festivals. During these festivals, the passionate feelings in their hearts are expressed through many expressive dances, satirical exhibitions, farces, etc. And the fact that these Jatras (festivals) were popular in Kathmandu valley and surrounding Newar settlements since ancient times is clear from the mention of Ganthakarna Chavadasha and Sayata in Gopalraj vansavali, a genealogy (Bajracharya & Malla, 1985 : 61 & 63). Therefore, Gathemangal festival is originally a festival with Ghantakarna Rakshyas (monster) and Gaijatra is a festival celebrated in memory of dead people, but from a psychological point of view, it can be considered as a major festival to express the feelings of the local residents.

Even from a diplomatic point of view, the festivals here have their own importance. Because during the main festival celebrated here or during the local Jatra, sons-in-law, along with the daughters, who has been married nieces, nephews, grand-children are invited by organizing a Nakha Tya bhoje (a special feast). It is considered to be a symbol of good fortune to go to a feast. However, if a person is

mourning a death of family members and relatives, at that time going to feast is not on consideration as it carries unluck and misfortunes. If not, hosting and visiting, inviting relatives, friends and family members gathering in one place, exchanging happiness with each other, eating together a delicious feast with variety of dishes, having fun etc. in the festival period is common and is massively celebrated in Newar community. These actions will indirectly make the family and social relations warm and cordial. It is found that such festivals have a great diplomatic role in developing and expanding friendly relations with their families, relatives and friends.

Since prehistoric times, the festivals here have been directly or indirectly related to farming or grain production. By imagining an invisible force that conducts the regular system of this world, so that rain falls may on time, may the crops flourish, may there be no famine, no flood or drought, no lightning during the rain, and earthquakes do not occur, the festival has celebrated in praise of the importance of this power.

Later, when religious and spiritual feelings started to develop in people, they started considering the same invisible power as God. In memory of that deity, a festival was celebrated here every year. And in recent times, the gods also appeared in many forms. In the beginning, there were only a few limited gods like Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, but in the Middle Ages or the ancient Malla period, Tantric gods and goddesses of many forms appeared. Tantric gods and goddesses were also associated with Shaivism, Vaishnava and Buddhism. In Lichchavi period, there is very little mention of Shakti along with Purusha (male) deity. But in the middle ages, mixed Tantric religion became popular, so this mixed form became popular in Shaivism, Vaishnava, Buddhism. Brahma and Saraswati, Vishnu and Lakshmi, Shiva and Parvati etc. are prominent among the deities with power. It has gained the most popularity in recent times. Therefore, even in the Rajprashasti of the rulers, the tantric goddesses such as Maneshwari, Taleju etc. have been considered and worshiped as Sweshta devatas and Ista devatas. As the popularity of the Shakti deity started to increase in the state, many tantric worship laws, fairs, tantric idols also appeared (S. Joshi, personal communication, July 25, 2020).

In particular, the Shakta Tantric deities are believed to be for national defense, public interest, national prosperity, good health, as well as for the advancement of farming and agriculture. It is known

that there is a belief that wherever Navadurga steps, the crops will double (Shrestha, 1993 : 81). Similarly, there is a tradition of considering Vishwanath Bhairava as the god of the age. Three main festivals of the three cities of Kathmandu Valley, Visket Jatra in Bhaktapur respectively. Machendranath's Jatra of Lalitpur and Kathmandu's Indra Jatra are very famous. All the three Jatras are celebrated for several days in their respective regions. Among them, Visket Jatra is associated with Shaivism sect, Machhendranath Nath sect and Indra Jatra is associated with Vedic Arya sect. In the same way, the method of celebrating Jatra or the law and regulations are also found to be different from time to time. For example, Bisket Jatra and Machhendranath Jatra are celebrated every year before the onset of rains while Indra Jatra is celebrated towards the end of the rain. But what is a strange coincidence is that the basic purpose of all the three Jatras is similar, i.e. rain should be given on time, farmers should be happy, famine should not occur, happiness, peace and prosperity should spread everywhere (Kayastha, 2013 : 101).

In this way, what can be learned from a thorough study of the popular festivals here is that since prehistorical period, i.e. before the development of religious feelings in people, festivals were considered as nature worship. Festivals were celebrated to wish that natural things such as sun, water, clouds, rain, precipitation, and the environment would not be unbalanced.

Even from a scientific point of view, the festivals here are not useless. Many philosophies and intentions are hidden behind this, which philosophy seems to be inspired by the purpose of "Bahujan Hitaya and Bahujan Sukhay" (may the welfare of many be the happiness of many). Even in today's changed context, the importance and utility of these festivals are the same as before, so it is known that the ancient ancestors who initiated the festival are no less than the materialist scholars when they are celebrated today. Because it is known that behind every festival celebrated here, there is an underlying purpose or significance.

The ancient scholars here sought various measures for the well-being of all creatures, plants, the environment and the happiness, peace and prosperity of mankind and implemented those measures practically by adapting to the country, time, situation and ideology of the people without revealing the facts completely. It is seen that they created festivals by turning things into concrete things,

protecting the original culture of this place, besides providing many kinds of useful education to the society, these festivals indirectly awakened the motivation to succeed by facing many problems and difficulties that come step by step in the struggling life. It is known that there are many scientific and factual reasons behind this.

Another thing, in the background of financial prosperity and opulence, many festivals and fairs have come into vogue here. The festivals here with amazing art, culture, religion, tradition and customs are attracting the attention of the whole world. The culture created by enthusiastic religious and spiritual spirit is considered to be the highest culture in Asia (Anderson, 1971 : 35). Millions of foreign tourists are coming to visit Nepal every year because of the unique art, culture and heritage here. Today, the tourism industry has become the largest foreign exchange earning industry in Nepal. It is giving great support to the national economy and festivals and fairs has their major contribution in flourishing tourism.

4. Conclusion

Festivals are the main basis for measuring the level of society and culture. The more such festivals are celebrated in the society, the more civilized and cultured the society is considered to be. From this point of view, the Newar society of the valley can also be considered as a society rich in culture. Because there are more festival days celebrated here than the days of the year, i.e. there are 366 festivals in a year of 365 days, this is confirmed by the popular saying. Some of these festivals fall on more than one day and some festivals celebrate last for two days. It seems that the festival here is structured on the basis of these three objectives: religion, entertainment and social harmony. If we pay attention to the background of the overall festivals prevalent in Kathmandu valley, these facts are close to the reality. In fact, the festivals here seem to have originated because there is entertainment along with religion and it also shows social unity. In addition to this, factors such as economic growth and political stability also play an important role in the structure of these cultural festivals. However, any civilization and culture gets an opportunity to flourish in the background of advanced economic conditions. On the one hand, the arable land with abundant production, on the other hand, trade with Tibet and India, the development of domestic industry, etc., the economic status of both

the state and the people here was strong. Due to this type of prosperous economic environment and deep faith and belief in religion, it seems that the enjoying various types of festivals, fairs, dances and feasts has developed among the residents.

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