



Some Major Fairs of Tribal Population in Gujarat State

KEYWORDS

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Introduction

Gujarat ranks highest in the country in terms of number of fairs held every year. Annually around 3500 fairs are held here mostly by the tribal population with great festive fervour, splendour and pomp. These fairs, in addition to reflecting the rich cultural heritage of the place, also reflect the lifestyles and deep rooted traditions of the tribal population of the state. These fairs which have religious and mythological basis have various social, religious and cultural implications. Good number of foreign tourists visits these fairs as they are attracted by the culture, tradition and customs of the large tribal population which participates in these fairs.

Some of the major fairs of tribal population in Gujarat state are discussed below.

Baneshwar Fair

Baneshwar fair which begins on the festival of Shivratri and goes on for five days is dedicated to Baneshwar Mahadev also known as Lord Shiva. It is one of the major fairs amongst Bhils. During the festival, when the fair is held people of this Indian tribe set up camps on the banks of the Som and Mahi rivers, perform dances around the fire and sing traditional songs. The Raslila (a kind of folk dance involving males and females) at the Lakshmi Narayan temple is a must watch. Cultural shows, magic shows, animal shows and acrobatic feats are the centre of attraction at the fair.

Bhagoria Fair

In ancient and medieval history behind the boundary of Malwa there were two small cities- Bhagor and Jhabba. Bhagor was historically more ancient than Jhabba. It is said that the city was given the name of Bhagor in the memory of Bhrigu Rishi. Bhagoria fair is celebrated as the principal fair among the Bhils, the other popular ones being Gal and Gadh. The festival is dedicated as thanks giving to God for a sizable harvest and since most marriage alliances among Bhils are formed at this time, the festival has also come to be known as the festival of love, romance, and marriage. The time of the year is the spring season in India, beginning ten days before the Indian festival of colours called Holi and culminating on the day after Holi. The hallmark of Bhagoria is the host of village Bazaars (Haats) that are popular and begin to be held immediately after the Rabi harvest. These daily markets are an annual event in which the year's maximum sale and purchase is witnessed. The Bhagoria fair also features the cultural dances, performed along with the rhythm of drum-beats and brass thalis.

Dangs Darbar Fair

This is one of the most colourful tribal fairs in the state

of Gujarat. Every year, this fair is held at Ahwa, the most significant town of The Dangs District. The Dangs is one of the picturesque districts of Gujarat situated at the backdrop of Saputara Hills. These hills were originally the abode of the tribal people, the adivasis. Therefore this fair reflects the tribal culture perfectly, as every year, there are millions of tribal people who come to this place, heavily decked up, playing the Shehnai while rhythmically beating their drums. Cultural performances like dance, drama and folk songs are performed by them in this festival. The name Darbar came into existence, because, in the earlier days, the British Darbar consisting of Rajas and Naiks were conducted in close vicinity to the Ahwa town. Showcasing culture and tradition is the Rally of 5 Kings with Naiks, the Bhavai and the Dangi Dance – spectacular to watch as the people move in concentric circles to the beat of percussion and wind instruments. Darbar is one place that displays music, dance and art of The Dangs as well as other corners of the country. Dang Darbar Fair is held before the festival of Holi and focuses on the interesting lifestyle of the tribal people of the Dang area. The Dangs district is located in the southern part of Gujarat and is surrounded by Saputara hills.

Gol Gadhedo Fair

Gol Gadhedo fair is held on the seventh day after the festival of Holi and is celebrated prominently in the districts of Dahod, The Panch Mahals and Chhota Udaipur. Matured boys and girls wishing to marry gather at this fair, where through a specific ritual they select their life partners. In an open field a long bamboo is raised and on its top jaggery (gur) is tied. The matured girls sing and dance around the bamboo. They keep sticks in their hands and beat the boys to prevent him from reaching the pole for collecting the jaggery. The boy interested in winning a girl, of his choice tries to reach to the pole, climb it and get the jaggery by breaking the barrier created by girls. Who so ever succeeds in picking the jaggery from the pole has the right to select the girl of his choice out of all the girls gathered for marriage. Jaggery is called 'Gol' in local language (pronounced as 'Gaud') and the boy is beaten as if he is a donkey which is called 'Gadhedo' in local language, which gives the name to the fair – Gol Gadhedo.

Chitra Vichitra Fair

Chitra Vichitra fair is one of the largest, purely tribal fair of Gujarat associated with the Garasis and Bhil tribes. It is held every year in Gujbhakhari village of Poshina block in Sabarkantha District of Gujarat and is held a fortnight after Holi (the festival of colours) on the new moon day. The fair sees a congregation of around 60000 to 70000 tribal people showcasing their culture through their costumes, ornaments, dances and music. The mythological story behind this fair goes back to Mahabharata times, when Chitravirya

and Vichitravirya, sons of King Shantanu, on the advice of a saint, came to wash off their sins by taking a dip in the triveni sangam (meeting place of three rivers; in this case, Sabarmati, Akul and Vyakul) after which they immolated themselves here. In memory of that the tribal people mourn through the night ahead of the fair, which is held in their memory.

Tarnetar Fair

Gujarat's rich culture, tradition and handicraft are showcased in its full glory in Tarnetar Fair. This fair which is held in Tarnetar village of Surendranagar district begins on the 4th day of 1st quarter of Bhadarvo month (as per Hindu calendar) and continues for three days. Since this fair is held near a temple of Lord Shiva known as Trinetreshwar Mahadev Temple, it is also known as Trinetreshwar Mahadev Fair. There are few interesting stories behind the origin of this popular 'lokmela-people's fair', one of which traces back to Mahabharata Era which says that the Swayamvar of Princess Draupadi was conducted here. According to the folklore, the Pandava Hero, Arjun, won Draupadi's hand by showing his skill at archery, making this fair still an ideal place for Tribal youth to choose their life partners. According to another story, in ancient times, the Indian sages, used to come this Lord Shiva temple on the 5th day of 1st quarter of Bhadarvo month to take a bath in the holy water of the river Ganga, which used to emerge because of their yogic powers. This historic temple has a reservoir built around it and thousands of devotees take a holy dip in this reservoir as it is believed to be pure and sacred just like the mighty Ganges. Devotees believe that a holy dip in this reservoir will absolve them of all their sins.

Shamlaji Fair

Shamlaji Fair is held at Shamlaji temple, a temple of Lord Vishnu located in Bhiloda taluka of Arvalli (erstwhile Sabarkantha) district. This fair begins on the auspicious day of Karthik Purnima, which generally falls in the month of November and goes on for two weeks. The Garasis and Bhils are the tribal communities that attend this fair in huge numbers. On an average, around 20 million people attend this fair every year. Folk dances and songs are performed throughout the day on all the days during the fair at the Shamlaji temple. Lord Vishnu is known by various names by the tribal. While some refer the Lord as protector of masses, Gadadhar, some call him as Sakshi Gopal. The Bhils address the lord as dark divinity, Kalio Bavji. People, who visit the temple during this fair, also consider it mandatory to take a holy dip in the Meshwo River.

Kavant Fair

Kavant, a village of Kavant taluka of Chhota Udaipur (erstwhile Vadodara) district is the gathering arena for a tribal community named Rathwa who gather to recreate the joy of existence and life since time immemorial during this fair. The Kavant fair which usually begins on the third day after Holi is a prominent tribal fair in the north-eastern part of Gujarat. During these days, it is a delighting sight to see bedecked groups of tribal people trekking towards the venue. Through a variety of modes of transport they arrive, showing off their affluent eye shades, lighters and radios. Women of each village wear a dupatta and skirt of the same dye while the men wear similar turbans and skirts in order to differentiate themselves from other sub-groups. Both men and women are bedecked with community specific silver jewellery which is intricately sinewy and a pleasure to behold.

Vautha Fair

This fair is held at Vautha village in Dholka taluka of Ahmedabad district. Vautha is the meeting place of the two rivers; Sabarmati and Vatrak. The place where the fair is held is also known as Saptasangam, meaning the meeting point of seven rivers. This fair is held on Karthik Purnima, (full moon day of Karthik month – as per Hindu calendar) as devotees believe that Lord Karthikeya, son of Lord Shiva visits this place during this time. The fair is characterised by the biggest congruence of animals, specifically donkeys, at one single place. On this single day, around 4000 donkeys are traded in this fair by the traders belonging to the gypsy community. Large number of farmers, labourers, traders, etc. visit this fair.

Conclusion

These are some of the major fairs held and celebrated by various tribal communities of Gujarat. It can be seen that such fairs are held all through the year in various districts of Gujarat which means that these celebrations are not concentrated to one district, one tribal community or one part of the year. This clearly indicates that the tribal people live life with celebrations throughout the year and at all the places where they live.