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IMPACT OF TRADE FAIRS DURING TEMPLE FESTIVALS AND PROCESSIONS

Smt. P.VVSDNL Karunasri

Lecturer in History, Government Degree College, Amalapuram

Trade fairs at temples during festive occasions act as vital socio-economic engines, boosting local economies and preserving heritage. They provide livelihoods for artisans, facilitate cultural exchange, and draw significant cultural tourism. In ancient and medieval civilizations, the temple and the market shared a reciprocal relationship. Temples required immense resources to conduct grand rituals, feed large gatherings, and finance local artisans. In return, they provided a spiritual and highly regulated sanctuary for trade. The different kind of temples acted as the epicenters of people's living. Devotees traveling long distances required food, shelter, and religious items, paving the way for merchants and traveling vendors to set up small stalls. They utilized the vertical space to exhibit goods and use visible, clear signage to stand out in a dense, noisy marketplace. Friendly interactions and offering small samples (for food items) are highly effective in converting foot traffic into paying customers. Prosperous merchant and artisan guilds regularly utilized temple festivals to showcase, barter, and sell their wares. These events created a dynamic local economy, where surplus farm goods, textiles, and crafts were traded.

The Origin of Indian Trade Fairs

Historically, ancient Indian temples were much more than places of worship. Between the 10th and 12th centuries especially during the Chola dynasty temples functioned as the financial and administrative engines of the region. They accumulated wealth through donations and acted as venture capitalists, lending money to merchant and artisan guilds. These guilds used the funds to finance risky, large-scale overseas voyages and land routes. Temples utilized their income to construct irrigation systems, fund hospitals, and support community education. The maintenance

of a temple relied heavily on the economic success of the surrounding markets. Kings and merchant guilds established temples attached to dedicated marketplaces (such as separate streets for spices, horses, and jewelry). The market provided taxes that enabled the temple to fund grand festivals, priests, and artisans. In exchange, the temple provided a secure regulatory environment, protected the market, and offered spiritual blessings to business relationships. Grand temple festivals attracted vast crowds, creating a natural rendezvous for traders, nomads, and buyers to barter or sell goods. Over centuries, these gatherings expanded into massive regional and international trade fairs. These fairs preserved India's cultural heritage while driving rural economic growth to greater scales.

Setting up temporary business stalls during temple festivals is a time-tested concept blending commerce, community, and culture. It requires securing permits from the temple administration, planning logistics like temporary power and crowd control, and offering products such as traditional food, religious items, or crafts tailored to the massive foot traffic. The summaries of selective temples originated from Indian roots, on which account festival and processions are organised have been discussed hereunder considering the convenient sample model where trade fairs are organized almost on similar scales.

The world famous 'Rath Yatra' in Jagannath Puri, is one of the most eagerly awaited festivals of India. It has been continuously been celebrated unstoppable since 1736 . It was said to be actually started during 8th century and stopped 32 times in between 1558-1731. The festival is celebrated annually in the month of June-July, the festival, deities of Lord Jagannath along with his elder brother, Balabhadra and sister, Subhadra are carried in huge and colourful chariots made in the form of temples. These chariots are pulled through strings and a magnanimous crowd of devotees from all over India and across the world gather in streets to just have an opportunity of touching these strings. The Yatra comes to an end when all three deities reach the 'Shri Gundicha Temple', dedicated to the aunt of Lord Jagannath . Deities reside in the temple for 9 days and are served sweets and chappan bhog. On the 9th day, deities are carried back to the Jagannath Temple with same pomp and show. This event is called as the 'Bahuda Jatra'. City of Puri, during these two days, converts into myriad of colours. Millions of pilgrims and spectators gather during the festival to seek blessings of the lord.



Thrissur is the cultural centre of Kerala and the 'Thrissur Pooram' festival celebrated in this sacred city of Lord Shiva is a true spectacle of grandeur and opulence. The festival was the brainchild of Sakthan Thampuram, maharaja of Cochin who ruled from 1790 to 1805. Held in the months of April- May, at the 'Vadakkumanthan Temple', the festival is a week long gala affair. During the festival, priests of different temples pay their obeisance to Lord Shiva. Devotees and spectators from different corners of the country throng to this place to just catch a glimpse of the festival's magnificence and vibrancy. A friendly tug-of-war competition held between two groups of temples divided in Eastern and Western zones with their majestically ornamented elephants, fireworks and exchange of huge colourful umbrellas, known as the 'Kudamattam' ceremony, is truly a visual treat to eyes.

Celebrated in the months of March- April and October-November at the 'Sree Pdmanabha Swamy Temple' in Thiruvananthapuram, the Arattu festival is one of the most significant and vibrant temple fairs in Kerala. Maharaja Arizham Thirunal Marthandavarma started this festival in 18th century. Arattu, actually is the closing ceremony of the 10 day long festivities in the temple but, since the ceremony takes place at such a grand level, it is no less than a full-fledged fair. During the ceremony, temple idols are taken to the 'Shankumugham Beach' for a holy bath. Huge procession of beautifully decorated elephants accompanied with drummers, musicians and dancers display a magnificent splendour of the grand festivities. Nightlong Kathakali dance performances, Velakali and Mayilattom (peacock dance) are other major highlights of this 10-day long gala event.

One of the very unique temple festivals of Kerala, the 'Attuvella Mahotsavam' is an eye candy. Celebrated in the months of March- April, the festival is a 2 days long event and is held at the 'Elankavu Bhagavathy Temple' in the Kottayam district of Kerala. It was started in the year 1755. The festival is celebrated as a welcome ceremony of 'Kodungallur Bhagavathy' who comes to meet her sister, 'Elankavu Bhagavathy' every year. During the festival, beautifully decorated and illuminated canoe in the form of temple replica carrying the deity of Goddess 'Kodungallur Bhagavathy' are marched through the waters of Moovattupuzha river to the temple of 'Elankavu Bhagavathy Temple'. Several small lit up canoes floating on the water accompanied with temple percussion music during the celebrations. Is truly a sight to be hold. A spectacle of this temple is a must when you are in Kerala during the same time frame.

Celebrated in the month of April at the 'Meenakshi Amman' Temple, the 'Chithirai Thiruvizha' festival is the biggest temple fair in Madurai that continues for about two weeks. As per 17th century's stone inscription it was started in 1646 by the King Thirumalai Nayakar. This festival celebrates the marriage of Goddess Meenakshi (a manifestation of Goddess Parvathi) to Lord Sundareshwara (a manifestation of Lord Shiva). Deities of Meenakshi and Sundareshwara bedecked in their wedding attires are paraded in massive chariots along the temple streets and finally taken to the exquisitely decorated hall of Meenakshi Temple where the wedding rituals are performed. Devotees gather in streets during the procession and offer flowers and coconuts to the deities. Whole city of Madurai comes to life during the celebrations. A true spectacle, this festival is indeed one of the major cultural events in India.

Held at the 'Cheluvu Narayana Swamy Temple' in Melukote the prominent pilgrim centre for Vaishnavites near Mysore in Karnataka, the 'Vairamudi Brahmotsava Festival' is a huge crowd puller attracting more than 14 lac pilgrims from all over the India and parts of the world. It was once attended by Ramanujacharya in 11th century. The celebrations take place in the months of March-April when the lord Cheluvanarayanawamy, a manifestation of Lord Vishnu, is adorned with a diamond studded crown belonging to the Mysore's royal family and is taken out in an elaborate procession with his consorts on a golden Garuda Vaahana. Huge number of devotees gathers in the town a night before to be part of the rituals and grand processions

One of the oldest festivals of Karnataka the 'Karaga Festival' is held every year for 9 days during the month of February in Bangalore. It was first started some 800 years ago and continuously being celebrated since 300 years. The festival is celebrated at a tribute of Goddess of Draupadi who is believed to be an incarnation of Goddess Shakti. The last day of the festival is a grand celebration of rituals and colourful processions. The chosen man of the Tigala community is dressed in a feminine attire to represent Draupadi and carries the Karaga or the Pyramidal floral structure on his head without touching it. The procession starts from 'Dharmayya Swamy Temple' and bare chested men of the community follow the procession



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to guard the Karaga. Major highlight of the festival is the scene of these bare-chested men hitting their chests with swords and dancing bare-foot over the live charcoals. The procession also halts at 'Darga-e-sherieff' for some time, displaying the secular aspect of the festival.

'Kotappakonda Temple' perched atop the Kotappa Hill near Narasaraopeta in Andhra Pradesh plays the host to the famous 'Kotappakonda Temple Fair' that is held every year on the eve of Maha Shivarathri in February. It was started in medieval period of with patronization of Chalukyas and continued by Kakatiyas. Thousands of devotees throng the temple with decorated and illuminated Prabhas(huge lamps) in their hands as an offering to the Lord Shiva, the presiding deity of the temple. Devotees also get their heads tonsured during the celebrations as a belief that their wishes are fulfilled by the lord on sacrificing the hairs. The sight of people relishing on delicious sweets, small girls queued up to purchase colorful bangles at bangle stalls, ladies bargaining with the owners of the stalls selling bamboo made items and villagers loudly calling out the crowds to sell their goats and cattle; is something that gives a feel of a true Indian fair.

Fair annually organized in the month of September at the 'Ma Nanda Devi Temple' in Almora district of Uttarakhand, the festival sees a huge crowd of pilgrims and spectators from both, neighbouring and far-off areas. It was said to be started some 1000 years back. Dedicated to Goddess Nanda and Sunanda, major highlight of the festival is the procession of Nanda Devi carried in a well decorated 'Dola', on the winding streets of Almora. Goddess Nanda is believed to be the guardian deity of hill town of Almora and other Kumaon regions, the festival is celebrated with great pomp and zeal as an obeisance to the Goddess. A fair is also organized during the festival at the temple premises where in local artisans and craftsmen sell their handicraft items. Folk songs and dances are also a major part of the grand celebrations.

Vaikunta Chaturdashi is one of the most auspicious days for Hindus. This day is celebrated in a grand way during the months of October-November at the 'Kamaleshwar Mahadev Temple' in Srinagar, Uttarakhand. It was started during 12th century by king Hammiradevi. Thousands of devotees visit the temple on this auspicious day to pay homage to Lord Shiva. People stay awake all night and pray to Lord Shiva with lighted 'diyas' in their hands. It is believed that standing and praying all night with a diya in hand on the day of Vaikunta Chaturdashi, can fulfil the wish of a child for childless couples. View of the 'Alaknanda River' illuminated with lighted lamps on the night of Vaikunta Chaturdashi is a sight to behold. A 5-day fair organized in the temple is also an event to during the celebrations.

One of the most famous fairs of Rajasthan, 'Kaila Devi Fair' is held at the 'Kaila Devi Temple' in Karauli district of Rajasthan during months of March-April. The fair marks the obeisance to Devi Kaila who is the presiding deity of the temple. It was started by Maharaja Gopal Singh in between 1723-1730. Large number of people including devotees, tourists and foreigners visit the fair to be part of the prayers and socio-cultural events that are organized in the temple premises. Many devotees visit the temple covering a distance of 15-20 km. by dragging themselves lying flat on the route. High amount of religious belief and physical endurance can be seen in these ardent devotees. The festival gives an insight in a true Rajasthani culture.

Culture Buddha Purnima marks the birthday of Lord Buddha and is celebrated with great fervor and enthusiasm at the 'Mahabodhi Temple' in Bodhgaya. The sacred city of Bodhgaya holds a great religious significance for Buddhists all over the world as it is the place where Lord Buddha attained enlightenment. It was a sacred site since 563 BCE and attained the status of World Heritage Site of UNESCO since 2002. Thousands of Buddhist monks, tourists and devotees throng the temple to be a part of special prayers and celebrations that are held on this day. Chanting of Buddhist hymns and prayers can be heard throughout the day in the Mahabodhi Temple complex, which is beautifully decorated with prayer flags and colourful bunting. As part of the celebrations, a grand procession is also carried out from the 80 ft. 'Grand Buddha Statue' up to the 'Bodhi Tree' and devotees offer fruits, flowers and incense to the statue of Buddha. Being part of these grand celebrations is one of the most divine experiences in lifetime.

Guru Nanak Jayanthi celebrates the day when the first Guru of Sikh religion, Guru Nanak Dev ji was born. Though the day is celebrated throughout the country, the celebrations are most impressive at the 'Golden Temple' in Amritsar, Punjab. Elaborately decorated and illuminated 'Golden Temple' is in its full awe during the celebrations. It was started in between 1469-1539 CE. The festivities start 3-weeks before the Guru Nanak Jayanthi and holy processions are



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taken through the streets of Amritsar early in the mornings. 'Guru Granth Sahib', the holy book of Sikhs is garlanded with flowers and a continuous reciting of the book, known as 'Akhand Path' begins three days before the actual event. Umpteen number of people visit the temple to be part of this holy ritual. On the actual day, the holy book is carried in a beautifully decorated palanquin and is led by the 'Panj Pyare', the five armed guards of the book with 'Nishan Sahib', the Sikh flag, in their hands. Marital arts performances by the Gatka artists during the festival is an eye feasting event.

Conclusion

Trade fairs during the time of festivals and processions at temple places have always been centres of knowledge - processed, refined information placed in the right context. In today's knowledge-based society, information has become a crucial resource. The production, selection, filtering and channelling of this information has thus become one of the most important activities in an economy.

The organisation of trade fairs benefits the exhibitors and visitors involved, but also the economy in the temple areas of the trade fair places and in the country as a whole. Hotels, restaurants and transport companies in particular benefit from this secondary effect. The same also applies to service companies that provide valuable services for trade fair organisers and exhibitors, such as stand construction, trade fair logistics, interpreter and hostess services.

Fairs create vibrant local economies by generating demand for traditional crafts, handlooms, agricultural products, and regional food stalls. Vendors and merchants rely on these gatherings to sell goods that are often unavailable in regular village markets, directly stimulating financial growth for certain communities. While these fairs are overwhelmingly positive, the large-scale gatherings can sometimes lead to commercialization, environmental challenges, and strain on local resources. Understanding and managing these factors ensures that temple fairs continue to balance spiritual traditions with sustainable, localized development.

These events serve as dynamic platforms for passing down traditional arts, folk music, dance, and martial arts to newer generations. They allow communities to celebrate shared heritage, fostering social cohesion and a collective regional identity interpreting the heritage and provides a good form of exchange of culture and diversity, which is the essence for development of nation like India since historical times.

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