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Local Fairs of Odisha, its impact on Family bond & Community Cohesiveness

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Abstract

The objective of the study is to identify some fairs and festivals observed in different parts of Odisha and to study their social, economic, political, and, psychological impact on people. Though many fairs and festivals are observed at local levels, this qualitative study only discusses those ceremonies which are famous and significantly influence family bonds and community cohesiveness. It has been found that most of the fairs and festivals observed in Odisha are connected with religion, mythology, history, and, local culture. Other findings include people from far off places visit the fairs irrespective of caste, religion, age, and gender; family members reside outside return home to take part in the ceremony; family and community celebration along with feast and new dress; relatives come to visit the fair; a make-shift market for buying and selling of the products brought from different parts of the country; food stalls and cultural programmes. The changed environment adds positive vibes to community life and significantly improves the quality of life. Since the socio-economic life is changed by the fairs and festivals, it indirectly influences the psychological well-being of people.

Keywords: *fair, festival, community cohesiveness, psychological well-being*

Background

After independence Indian family system has witnessed swift transformation because of rapid industrialization. Population explosion, weakening of cottage industries and, declining agricultural production forced people to employ themselves in industrial units located far away from home. Industrialisation, mobility of people from rural areas and, other supplementary factors helped to establish a different trend in Indian society known as modernisation and urbanisation. Whenever a new trend is

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created in society, it adversely affects the previously established social system and culture. Culture is the way of life of a group of people residing in a particular geographical region. It is manifested in their behaviour, values, customs, practices and, wisdom and is transmitted from one generation to the next through practices, replication, and storytelling and, other mediums of communication. Indian society is multi-cultural. The cultural practices differ from state to state and region to region.

As a result of modernization and urbanization the village community life as well as the joint family system which are the two strong pillars of Indian indigenous culture began to collapse. People got higher education, engaged themselves in industrial sectors, institutions and, other allied sectors; brought their families to the urbanized area to avail the better facility and decent living. All these contributed to the birth of the nuclear family system and the disintegration of the joint family system (Bhusan, & Sachdeva,1999). The close family bond and community cohesiveness, the two core values of Indian culture lost their significance. But the fairs and festivals celebrated at local levels regularly at a particular time of the year have been instrumental in bringing back people to their native place, uniting them with family and friends, and, thereby maintaining the community cohesiveness. Sinha (1988) viewed that the modern Indian family is in a transitional phase, where structural changes are not accompanied by psychological changes. People wish to live in a small, nuclear family but continuing to draw strength from the extended family, particularly during difficult periods.

Fairs and festivals are cultural practices in which people participate without their conscious will and rational thought. They are accepted as part of one's life and pass from one generation to the next naturally without any conscious effort. These fairs and festivals illustrate tradition, art forms, aesthetics, beliefs and, attitudes of people. Community Festivals provide an opportunity, during which people can celebrate and positively promote a community (Dikmen, 2011). Fairs and festivals attract people from other communities and create opportunities for enjoyment.

In this backdrop, the study aims to

- i) Identify some fairs and festivals observed at different areas of Odisha.
- ii) Study the impact of local fairs and festivals on Family bond and Community Cohesiveness

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The study is confined to Odisha.

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Secondly, agrarian festivals are not included in the study. The major fairs or yatras observed in three different regions of Odisha where a large number of people assembles and participate is considered.

The yatras with some religious or historical background are incorporated.

i) Important Fairs observed at different areas of Odisha

The word 'Fair' may have originated from the Latin word fair or holidays. Years ago fairs were considered as a commercial place for merchants to buy and sell their products or goods. Now a day in fairs, business activities and, religious activities were held in juxtaposition with each other. Yatra means journey. In this context, they are the journeys of a god or goddess from their place of worship to another spiritually significant place and the celebration associated with this journey. Odisha has been divided into 30 districts. These 30 districts have been placed under three different revenue divisions, such as north, south, and central regions. Different fairs or yatras are held in these regions at different times of the year. Most of the people in Odisha are Hindus. As per the 2011 census data, Hindus are the majority in Odisha constituting 93.63% of the total population. Most of the fairs and festivals observed by people of Odisha are related to the Hindu religion. It is said that people observe thirteen festivals in twelve months. The family get-together, exchange of different kinds of sweets, cakes, fruits (popularly known as Bhogas), and community dining are the salient features of these festivals. Fairs and festivals attract people from other communities and create opportunities for enjoyment. Community Festivals provide an opportunity, during which people can celebrate and positively promote a community (Dikmen, 2011). Different festivals are observed in different regions of the state and the native families eagerly wait for these festivals as it is the time for the homecoming of family members staying outside. Fairs and festivals are not only time for merriment but also family reunions. Relatives and friends also visit during the festivals and take part in the celebration and the entire community fervently participates in the festivity.

Southern regions of Odisha

Thakurani Yatra is one of the famous fairs celebrated in the southern region of Odisha. It is celebrated every year in the summer season in Berhampur town of Ganjam district. Silk city Berhampur, the gateway of South Odisha considers Goddess Budhi Thakurani as its 'Istadevi' or Goddess of the City (Panda, 2019). The people of Berhampur are emotionally involved with Thakurani Yatra which is being observed for more than two hundred years (Patnaik, 2017). The native families invite their married daughters and

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relatives to visit the yatra. Some relatives return after visiting yatra while some other relatives spend the summer vacation with family and friends. If a married daughter visits her parental home during the yatra, she stays till the end of the yatra. People celebrate the visit of Budhi Thakurani, the reigning deity of Berhampur to outside of the temple with rituals and creative manifestations. People decorate themselves with different costumes and paint themselves with varied colours.

Popularly this is known as 'besha' and people in different 'beshas' portray mythical, historical, social as well as comic characters. People also perform Bagha nacha (tiger dance) which is believed to be a favorite performance of deity. The Bagha nacha (Tiger dance) is performed to pacify the goddess.

After offering prayers to the deity, the body of the dancers is painted with black and yellow stripes resembling the tiger. The dancers, wearing tiger masks and tails dance in the streets in the burning heat of the Sun with typical movements to the rhythmic beating of drums. The dance is usually performed by the devotees in fulfillment of a vow. People gather to watch the dance and offer cash and kind in appreciation. Being impressed by the Bagha Nacha, renowned film director *cum* producer Budhdeb Dasgupta produced a National Award film Bag Bahadur.

This Thakurani Yatra allows people to the expression of their creative talent. Family get-togethers and distant relatives visit during the yatra tighten the family bond. At intervals, a visit to the native place, meet the near and dear, and participation in community activities lessen the hassles and stress of day-to-day life.

Another famous fair, the Taratarini Mela is celebrated in the Hindu month of Chaitra (March - April). The festival is observed on each Tuesday of the Chaitra month and the grand celebration is held on the third Tuesday. In many places, on this festive occasion, many people perform the *mundan* ceremony (first hair shaving) of their children and offer the hair to mollify the god.

In the past, animal sacrifice was held before the goddess and that has now stopped. First vegetable or crop, fruits, and sweets are offered as offerings. Other fairs include Chaiti ghoda yatra, which is a month-long celebration known as Chaiti ghodi nacha or dummy mare dance. It is an important *yatra* in southern Odisha and is mostly observed by the *keuta* community (Mohanty, 2017).

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Fairs celebrated in Western regions of Odisha

Western Odisha comprises districts of Bargarh, Balangir, Kalahandi, Sambalpur, Sonepur, Sundergarh, and Athmallick region of Angul district. The cultural practices of western Odisha in the forms of fairs and festivals, folklores, and dance differ from the rest part of the state.

Sitalasasthi Yatra - This yatra is observed to celebrate the divine marriage of Shiva and Parvati in a humanised form. The host parents of Parvati are selected or nominated some time before the yatra. As Lord Shiva is *swambhu* (self incarnated), the priest of the chosen temple acts as his parent. All the local customs and rituals of a marriage like *prastaba* (proposal), *nirbandha* (engagement), *bara nimantran* (Invitation to the bridegroom), and *panigrahan* (marriage) are all performed religiously by priests. The rich tradition of Sitala Sasthi Yatra of Sambalpur town is one of the major fairs which still hold ground in the cross-section of the society in Sambalpur. It is a unique event wherein the two divine characters namely Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati become two human characters and their marriage ceremony is celebrated as per the local custom. The most significant feature of this fair is during the holy marriage ceremony of Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati, the human beings become the parents of these deities. A couple performs the role of Parvati's father and mother. They also perform the ritual of *Kanyadan*, which is considered to be very auspicious and sacred for the Hindu parents, and as a whole, all the public has been treated as *Barati* of the Marriage ceremony. Professional as well as amateur artists perform music, songs, caricatures, and drama throughout the night. The festival allows the performers to demonstrate their pent-up talent. Another religious fair observed in western Odisha is *Chhatar yatra*. It is a traditional fair observed by the people of Kalahandi district during Durga Puja. Goddess Manikeswari, the presiding deity of Kalahandi is taken out of the temple in a divine journey.

Dhanu yatra is another famous yatra of western Odisha. Originally it is celebrated in the Bargarh district but due to the popularity of the yatra, now it is celebrated in many places of western Odisha. *Dhanu yatra* is worldwide famous as the largest open-air theatre. The entire Bargarh town and the adjacent villages are converted into Mathura and Gopapura and the mythological *Krushnaleela* is performed for eleven days. The most remarkable feature of the yatra is the local people, as well as the visitors, are also taken as characters. The lead characters like *Kansa*, *Ugrasena*, *Devaki*, *Basudeva*, *Krushna*, and *Balarama* are selected from amongst the local artist. They all participate without any preparations and invitations. The

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other important aspect of the *yatra* is its style of dialogue and delivery. There are no written scripts or specific dialogues for any scene. The theme provides an overall content. In keeping track of the episode, the artists deliver the dialogue without much rehearsal or preparation. This freedom allowed to the performers gives rise to a series of ingenious compositions and fascinating styles. The performances are so energetic and lively and the local people, tourists are so enthusiastic that the district administration plays a significant role. It appears that the rules of Kansha prevail in the town in those days. The general public enjoys his order as if he is the administrator of the district. The *yatra* is held from the afternoons till the evenings. The *yatra* ends after eleven days with the imaginary killing of Kansa. His large size effigy is burnt to mark the end of his tyrannical rule.

Fairs celebrated in Central regions of Odisha

Ratha yatra - The biggest fair of the State is Ratha yatra or car festival of Lord Jagannatha at Puri. Lord Jagannath is called Patitapabana: the redeemer of the down-trodden, for he comes out of His temple once a year for the salvation of the down-trodden. Here the people from all caste, categories, and religions mingle together to get a view of the Lord. Ratha yatra attracts a large number of devotees and tourists from all over the country and also from abroad. Throughout the year, lord Jagannatha is worshipped inside the Shree Mandir (the temple). Once a year during the rainy season, in the lunar month of Asadha, Ratha yatra is observed in which Lord Jagannatha with his brother Balabhadra, sister Subhadra, and Sudershan come out of the temple to give view to millions of his devotees. Millions of devotees from different parts of the country assemble to witness Ratha yatra. The different names of the festival like Ghosh yatra, sri Gundicha yatra, Patitapaban yatra, Adapa yatra, Dasavatar yatra are the manifestation of its assorted significances. The lodges and hotels get filled with devotees from outside. Railways run special trains to carry devotees and tourists for the occasion. The frequency of bus services from other districts also increases. The administration makes sophisticated arrangements for the control of the crowd and to provide amenities to the tourists. On the day of *yatra*, the Chaturdha murtis (idols of four deities) are brought from the temple to the wonderfully decorated wooden chariots. Devotees pull the three chariots to the Gundicha (aunt of the deities) temple where they spend seven days. During these days, the Shree Mandir (the temple) remains closed and all worships and rituals are performed in Gundicha temple. All these rituals continue for nine days till the Bahuda yatra (return journey) of the deities.

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Bali Jatra - In the Hindu month of Kartik (October - November), Bali Jatra is celebrated in the city of Cuttack in Odisha. The name Bali Jatra means 'A Voyage to Bali'. It is also said that as the yatra was held on the sand bed of the river, it was called Bali yatra. Its origin can be traced to the 15th century CE or to an earlier period when the maritime trade was flourishing. This popular fair begins from the day of the full moon and continues for the next seven days at Gadagadia Ghat of the River Mahanadi. Lord Kartikeswar is the presiding deity of this festival. Through this yatra, the people remember that day when sailors of Odisha sail to distant lands of Java, Bali, Borneo, Sri Lanka, and Sumatra for business and commerce. On this day, a grand fair is organised for seven days. The yatra provided opportunities to the local and inter-state artisans and craftsmen to display and sell their products.

Other important fairs of Central region are Ashokastami, Joranda Mela, Dola yatra, Chadak yatra, Chaiti Parba etc. The Dolapurnima or Dola yatra is a popular festival of the Vaishnavites in Orissa. It falls in the spring season, begins on the tenth day of the bright fortnight of the Phalguna, and ends on the full moon day. At this fair, people worship Radha-Krishna. The devotees came in a procession with small wooden images of Radha and Krishna carried in the *Vimanas* (palenques of the God) to the site of the fair. The deities in their ways visit several villages and receive offerings from the devotees. Bhubaneswar is famous as a Shaiva kshetra and Lord Lingaraj is its presiding deity. The car festival of Lord Lingalaja is celebrated at Bhubaneswar on the day of Ashokastami.

The Joranda Mela, one of the top fairs is held at Joranda, Dhenkanal district, Odisha. It is held annually in the winter season on the full moon day of Magha (January or February). A huge number of Mahima Sanyasis (ascetics), devotees, monks, and pilgrims take part in Joranda Mela to worship in the Sunya Mandir (temple). No image worship is done inside the temple. A Havan is held in 'Yagna Kund' (holy pyre) as a part of the celebrations and is the main attraction for the tourists. Thousands of liters of ghee are offered to fire. It is exclusively a mass prayer of ascetics for the welfare of the world, which aims at spreading the message of love and humanity in the name of Mahima Gosain, the founder of Mahima Dharma.

Makar Sankranti is a popular fair that falls in January. It is the day on which the Sun enters the Capricorn and starts the northern course. Although Makar Sankranti is celebrated in all parts of Odisha the people of Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, Keonjhar celebrate this festival with much joy and merriment (Behera, 2017).

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ii) Impact of local fairs and festivals on Family bond and Community Cohesiveness

Indian family system is guided by a collectivistic principle which is manifested by joint family tradition where families of two-three generations along with their offspring live together under one roof. Although the fairs and festivals are deeply associated with religion, history, and culture, the main purpose seems to be social, economic, psychological, and recreational. So the festivals are regarded as the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of friendship and cooperation. Festivals also take away human beings from routine monotonous life to amusement. The festivals also provide relaxation to the people, who are exhausted after hard labour. Thus, they develop social harmony, fellow feeling and mutual co-operation, enjoyment and, recreation (Dora, 2012). According to Ekka (2012), the performance of the festival is a binding force to tie the community into a socio-cultural fabric.

In all the above-described fairs, at least a weeklong exhibition of different commodities is held. Temporary markets are established in which varieties of household articles and daily need items, spices, forest products, medicinal plant and products, utensils, and, toys that were not generally available during the year are sold and purchased. There were also open-air entertainment programmes like displays of martial arts, folk dances, and folk songs, and variety entertainment. The specialty of all yatras is the food stalls. The dates of exhibition and cultural activities also extend by the administration as per popular demand. Bastra pradarsani (garment exhibition), cultural programmes in the form of Bhajansandhya(devotional singing by both reputed and local singers), Kabi sammelan (poem recitation), literary discussions, theatres are organized to make the fair attractive and add splendor to the *yatra*. People attend the function in numbers, worship the god or goddess and enjoy the *yatra*.

The broad benefits of fairs and festivals on the community are manifold. Specifically when outside family members return home during the festival and people beyond the community and the region visit the fair and festival the socio-economic and cultural life is impacted. The changed environment adds positive vibes to community life and significantly improves the quality of life. Since fairs and festivals are socio-cultural events, the organization and management require the combined effort of many people. Teamwork and active participation make an event successful. Community people gather, meet, plan and execute and monitor till the end of the event. This creates a sense of identity and positively influences community

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cohesiveness. While organizing and celebrating the festival, people of the community irrespective of caste, colour, age, and gender come together leaving their worries and distress.

Conclusion

In the wave of modernization, not only families but many social institutions have changed. But some unique features remained intact to date. The joint family system might have been disintegrated but the nuclear families staying at distant places from the native place unite at the time of festivals to fulfill the desire for togetherness. Observing the rituals together, worship and dine together are some of the unique features of fairs and festival which ties the family knot. Festivals contribute significantly to the development of identity and unity by bringing the family members together under one roof. A sense of belongingness for the culture and tradition built up in the mind of the present generation. Baumeister & Leary (1995) viewed that human beings easily form social bonds, waver to break the established bonds, apply much of their cognitive resources to developing social relationships, react emotionally to changes in their belongingness status, and display aversive and pathological consequences when they are deprived of belongingness. A longing for identity and belongingness to one's community and culture facilitate the organisation of fairs and festivals and upheld rituals associated with it. In the words of Baumeister & Leary (1995) "many aspects of human culture are directly and functionally linked to enabling people to satisfy the psychological need to belong. Local festivals create opportunities for the migrated people of the family and community to return to native places, reconnect them with the tradition and satisfy the psychological need for belongingness. Community gathering in the forms of merry-making, playing games, the performance of rituals and dining together rejuvenates the psychological needs of affiliation, attachment, and belongingness.

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