

Cultural Continuity and Change: Analysing the Socio-Cultural and Historical Significance of Uttarakhand's Fairs in the Age of Globalisation

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Abstract: *The state of Uttarakhand is renowned for its distinctive cultures and varying beliefs. Various fairs and festivals are celebrated throughout the year in the Garhwal and Kumaon regions of the state, such as Uttarayani Mela, Devidhura Mela, Mann Mela, Vishu Mela, Jauljibi Mela, Gauchar Mela and Nanda Devi fair. These fairs hold religious, socio-cultural, and economic significance in people's lives. These fairs and the festivities associated with them are related to the land, soil, crop harvesting, and changes in the seasons. They are considered auspicious by the people and serve various purposes for the people who come from distant places to visit them. These fairs are important trading centers as people come to sell their products at these fairs. Also, many folk songs and dances are alive today because these fairs are essential centers for social gatherings. This paper's study area is the Garhwal and Kumaon regions of Uttarakhand. The paper discusses the historical background of some of these fairs and their socio-cultural and economic importance. It also discusses the impact of modernization and globalization on these fairs and the efforts that can be made toward their preservation.*

Keywords: Fairs, Festivals, Folk Traditions, Globalization, Modernization, Kumaon, Garhwal.

INTRODUCTION

In the history of humankind, the feeling of enjoyment and recreation has perhaps existed since the early days of his life. The life of primitive humans was one filled with struggles. He would have found an occasion to escape his mundane daily life, forget his troubles, and dance and sing joyfully. These occasions could be his victory over his opponent, his success in hunting, the arrival of a new season, economic exchanges, moonlit clear nights of autumn after dull rainy days, or enchanting spring after the harsh winter. When he transitioned from his nomadic life as a hunter-gatherer to a sedentary lifestyle where agriculture and animal husbandry became indispensable, he learned to express gratitude to some unknown supernatural powers or visible god-like rain, sunshine, and moonlight. When he saw his flourishing crops, he would bow to these powers and express his gratitude through singing and dancing. These very occasions of joy would gradually become the basis of festivals and fairs organized today. As civilization developed, these festivals and fairs also underwent several changes in their forms. When we look into the historical background of various religious, agricultural, and commercial fairs and festivals, we find that they have experienced several stages of historical development before reaching their present forms. It took hundreds of generations to acquire their present forms (Sharma, 2008).

A *mela*, or fair, is a gathering where individuals assemble at a culturally significant time and location. Fairs usually occur at the junction of trade routes, riverbanks, or confluences. The designated fairground often carries a deep historical significance and is commonly linked to a deity, goddess, or local hero. Most fairs are linked to a specific festival. Therefore, a ritual center in the form of a sacred confluence, river, lake, temple, or shrine where religious activities occur is usually associated with a fair. For Hindus, these activities generally encompass worshipping deities (*pūjā*), bathing (*snana*), viewing the deity (*darshana*), performing dramas (*lila*), consuming sacred foods (*prashad*), and singing devotional hymns (*kirtan and bhajan*). The fair's timing is determined by the positions of celestial objects like the sun, moon, planets, and stars, following one of the many solar and lunar calendars used in India. Melas are organized for various purposes but usually incorporate three objectives *dharma*, *artha*, and *kama* as defined by ancient Indian philosophers, as they simultaneously serve as religious, commercial, and recreational events (Kurin, 1985). Melas are the sites that bring together participants from various

religious, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. The fair brings together various social groups, including devotees, medical practitioners, artisans, musicians, traders, dancers, snack hawkers, and vendors of toys, clothes, and household merchandise. In fact, *mil*, the Sanskrit origin of the word *mela*, means the act of gathering and mixing. At a fair, mixing and meetings happen on a grand scale; it is a meeting place for people from different villages, towns, and regions. Through shared experiences in these fairs, individuals from different backgrounds become unified (Tribhuwan, 2003).

FAIRS IN INDIAN HISTORY

In Indian history, since the time of the Harappan civilization, we find that people have devised various methods to entertain themselves. We have evidence of terracotta toys such as carts, whistles, balls, clay marbles, gamesmen, dice, and clay discs, which seem to be the remnants of a *pithu*-like game from various Harappan sites. The bronze dancing girl from Mohenjodaro suggests that dancing was an important recreational activity. However, we do not yet have any archaeological or literary evidence of any form of social gathering where people would gather and celebrate a festival or a fair being organized in the form we have today (Nag, 1999).

During the Vedic period, we have references of people engaging in chariot racing, dicing, music, and dancing in their leisure time. Family books of Rig Veda and later Vedic texts mention flute players, conch blowers, drummers, and musical instruments such as the cymbals, drums, flutes, and harp. Yajur veda refers to a *vansha-nartin* (pole dancer or acrobat). The vedic period also saw the emergence of a variety of *yajnas* for social gatherings. Such *yajnas*, attended by thousands of individuals, are described in Vedic literature. In the Rigveda, the term *samana* is used to refer to these social gatherings, which were likely a form of fair. This term is frequently regarded as one of the festivals, assemblies, conventions, and so forth. It is also mentioned that individuals from different regions used to attend this fair and exhibit their artwork. In order to promote their reputation, courtiers and pandits would attend this fair. Archery and chariot racing were among the numerous amusements that were conducted at Samana. Scholars have drawn comparisons between this festival and the Greek Olympic Games (Shastri, 1940). In modern times, the Kumbh Mela has evolved into one of the largest gatherings of people on the planet. Some historians indicate that the earliest written evidence of the Kumbh Mela is found in the accounts of the Chinese traveller and monk Hiuen Tsang, who visited India in the 7th century during the reign of King Harshavardhana. Others, however, trace its history to the period after the twelfth century or even to more recent periods. Despite all the debate around its origin, its modern form, and the scale that it has acquired in modern times, this fair exemplifies a very old Indian tradition of hosting fairs along the banks of sacred rivers.

Hindu festivals such as Holi, Basant Panchami, Dussehra, Diwali, Shivratri, and Sankranti, and various Muslim festivals like Id-ul-Zuha, Id-ul-Fitr, Shab-i-Barat, Muharram, and Milad un-Nabi, were celebrated during the medieval period. People would participate in large numbers on these occasions. Processions, *jhankis*, beating of drums, musical performances, and fireworks constituted an indispensable part of these public celebrations (Pearson, 1984). The banks of the Ganges, extending from Kailash to the Bay of Bengal, together with several pilgrimage sites throughout the

region, were visited by millions of Hindus year-round. These pilgrimages and festivals offered an enjoyable respite in the social lives of the populace. They promoted the virtues of religious devotion, charity, compassion, and religious tolerance and fostered social interaction among many groups of individuals. Thus, since ancient times, we can follow how modern festivals and fairs evolved into their current form.

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIO-CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF FAIRS IN UTTARAKHAND

The state of Uttarakhand is known for its diverse array of fairs and festivals, contributing to the region's vibrant cultural landscape. Throughout the year, various festivals and fairs are celebrated across different regions, each reflecting the area's unique traditions and seasonal rhythms. These celebrations persist, in one form or another, commencing with the Phuldei festival of the new year in the month of Chaitra and culminating with the Holi festival in the month of Phalgun (Sharma, 2008). In Uttarakhand, several terms are used for fairs and festivals, such as *thaul*, *ausar*, *mela*, and *kanthig*. The Sanskrit word *sthal* (place or temple) is the root of the word *thaul* and Sanskrit word *rautar* (new year) is the root of the word *ausar* (occasion). The Sanskrit word *kantuk* (curiosity for spectacle) seems to be the origin of terms like *kantik*, *kanthig*, *Thaul* refers to fairs in the districts of Tehri, Pauri, and Uttarkashi, as well as the Pinder valley of Chamoli district. *Mela* is a broad name used in all Garhwal regions, while *ausar* is the term used in the area around Joshimath (Chamoli). Festivals are the celebration and remembrance of important and holy occasions in each community's yearly calendar. A festival venue transforms into a fair when it attracts enough large-scale outside visitors (Purohit, 2008).

When we look at various festivals and fairs held in different parts of Uttarakhand, we see that there are various driving forces for the hill people to hold these fairs and festivals at different times of the year. In the myths of every village, we find that every hillock, rivulet, stone, tree, and cultivation is attributed to Shiva, Shakti, Sita, Gaura (Nanda), Naga or any other folk deity. It is widely believed that every river and stream originates from the grace of gods and goddesses residing on the mountaintops. So a feeling of gratitude exists in people's hearts toward the natural forces; it is out of this sense of gratefulness and respect they annually offer *thaul* (festival and related ritual) to the patron god of a village or a group of villages, called Bhumyal. Similarly, the deities associated with rain, hailstorm, forest, wind, justice, cattle, and those from the Pan-Indian pantheon are honoured with a *Thaul* to rejuvenate their strength and, thus, guarantee the safety and welfare of the community.

According to Carl Jung, the desire to practice religion is a reflection of the human soul (Jung, 2014). The male and female aspects, or anima and animus, eros and logos, are what make up the human mind, according to him. In contrast to the anima's influence on creativity, faith in a system of *Prakriti* and *Purusha*, and expressive expression through dance and song, the animus is responsible for logic. The inhabitants of Garhwal are very religious people who attribute supernatural powers to inanimate objects like trees and rocks, according to this anima content. There are periodic invitations to bring the divine energies down to Earth when they are venerated as gods, and their lives are reenacted in dances, dramas, and rituals before they are bid farewell. The unique cycle of rebirth and death is observed

by certain deities, such as Nain in Pinder Valley, (Purohit, 2008).

Villages are geographically distanced from one other in the mountainous regions of Uttarakhand. Historically, when contemporary transport methods were scarce, and road infrastructure was inadequate, such occasions allowed individuals to reunite with their loved ones. They held particular importance in the life of married women (referred to as *dhijans* in local dialects) who worked hard in their in-laws' households and had minimal time away from their everyday responsibilities associated with agriculture, animal husbandry, and other domestic tasks. These holiday occasions afforded them opportunities to reunite with family members from *hermait* (natal home).

Historically, due to the rugged and inaccessible terrain of Uttarakhand, fairs, or *melas*, often took the form of gatherings that were both religious and commercial in nature. These events may last from a single day to several days or even weeks. Many fairs are timed to coincide with sacred occasions, such as Purnimas or Sankrantis. The more significant fairs typically occur during the winter months, a relatively slow season for agricultural activities in the region. (Nand & Kumar, 1989). Some festivals are celebrated in this region as the seasons change, demonstrating the harmony between the human heart and the natural world. Human hearts beat in unison with the natural rhythm. Baisakhi (Bissu in Jaunsar), Shivratri, Vasant Panchami, Maun (a fishing activity held in June), Raam Aid (a hunting festival held in January), Gindi Ka Mela, Jhakari, Selpati, Thaul, and so forth are all manifestations of this impulse to celebrating the seasonal changes. Thus, fairs and festivals in the Himalayan region of Uttarakhand are typically organized around a dominant theme, which may be religious, sports, or commercial, among many others (Purohit, 2008).

SOME IMPORTANT FAIRS OF UTTARAKHAND

The Uttarayani Fair is associated with the astronomical phenomenon of *Uttarayana*. The term *Uttarayana* is derived from two Sanskrit words: *uttara*, meaning "north," and *ayana*, meaning "movement" or "path" (Goyal, 2019). It signifies the time when the Sun begins its apparent movement away from the southern latitudes, from the Tropic of Capricorn to towards the northern hemisphere (Sharma, 2024). The fair celebrates the Makar Sankranti festival of northern India, also locally known as 'Ghughitia Tyar' (Pandey, 1935).

The Uttarayani Fair held in Bageshwar, located at the confluence of the Gomati and Saryu rivers, holds great significance from religious, cultural, commercial, historical, and political perspectives. The name "Bageshwar" is derived from the ancient temple dedicated to Lord Bagnath (Shiva), which was established by Raja Lakshmi Chand around 1450 AD. Here the temples of Bagnath, Bhairavanath, and Datternath draw thousands of devotees annually during the Uttarayani Fair (Nag, 1999). Atkinson refers to how this fair used to be a great mart for the exchange of Tibetan products between the Bhotias and merchants from Almora and its surrounding regions (Sharma, 2008). Historically, the fair has served as a vital trade hub, particularly for the Bhotia breed of dogs, associated with the fair since the days of Tibetan trade, indicating a longstanding economic relationship that transcends mere transactional exchanges. Recent observations from traders reveal both a continuity of this trade, with prices

for dogs ranging significantly based on lineage and demand, and a notable decline in the fair's overall vibrancy. This shift reflects broader economic trends and societal changes, providing a rich context for studying the evolution of traditional fairs in contemporary society (ETV, 2023).

The Uttarayani Fair also highlights the cultural and historical significance of the *Bair Bhagnaul* art form, which is experiencing a gradual decline in the Kumaon region. This folk tradition, characterized by its unique question-and-answer format in Kumaoni, reflects the rich cultural tapestry of the region. Historically, Chowk Bazaar was a bustling hub for such performances, drawing large crowds and fostering community engagement. Recent presentations at the fair illustrate the resilience of this tradition, as local artists continue to perform despite its waning popularity among the younger generation, reflecting a broader trend of cultural disconnection in contemporary society. Kishan Malda's insights underscore the urgency of preserving this art form, suggesting that governmental support is essential for its survival. The *Bair Bhagnaul* tradition not only represents a valuable aspect of Kumaoni cultural heritage but also serves as a reminder of the need to safeguard local arts in the face of modern challenges (ETV, 2023).

Historically, the Uttarayani Fair in Bageshwar is also a reminder of the Kuli Begar system, a practice of forced labour imposed on the local populations by the colonial government due to inadequate transportation options in the mountainous regions of Uttarakhand. The Kuli Begar movement emerged in response to this oppressive practice (Pathak, 1991). The people of Uttarakhand had been raising their voices against forced labour for many years. When the British government did not pay any attention to their demands, people expressed their anger against the government on 14 January 1921, the day of Uttarayani Fair held in Bageshwar, and threw all the documents related to forced labour into the Saryu River (Pandey, 1937). Mahatma Gandhi's appeal for non-violent resistance bolstered the movement's momentum, exemplifying how grassroots mobilization can impact larger political movements (ETV, 2023). This movement, which marked its 101st anniversary in 2022, is crucial for understanding the socio-political landscape of early 20th-century India. The fair has historically served as a vital platform for political engagement in the region, with the tradition of political parties setting up distinct pavilions playing a significant role in this dynamic, which continues to be so even now. These pavilions become venues for political discourse, where party leaders present their policies and strategies to the public, influencing both voter perception and party direction (Prasad, 2023).

Traditionally, this renowned fair lasted seven days. For visitors to the Uttarayani Fair, Bhotia Bazaar continues to be a major attraction. Despite changes in the nature of the fair, both locals and outsiders still regard the products from Bhotia Bazaar as reliable. The market has successfully maintained its reputation over the years. However, now the fair no longer holds the same commercial and economic significance that it once did.

The Devidhura Mela is organized within the premises of the Varahi Devi Temple in Devidhura, Champavat district, on Raksha Bandhan on Purnima of the Shravan. Devidhura is located at the junction of Almora, Pithoragarh, and Nainital districts. Mela is renowned for its captivating dance performances, folk songs, and the traditional religious ceremony known as *Bagwal Bagwal*

(literally “fight with stones”) also known as the Stone War, involves opposing groups engaged in a battle, hurling stones at each other while utilizing roof-like shields made of wood (*farra*) for self-protection. In Bagwal, people from four clans (*khamis*)-Chamyal, Gahadwal, Lamgadiya, and Walig along with fighters from seven other groups (*thoks*) participate (Sharma, 2008). The Bagwal is initiated by the priest's conch shell blowing, and the combat ceases promptly upon the intervention of the priest, who facilitates reconciliation between the two sides. Those who sustain injuries while playing Bagwal feel joyful, believing that the goddess has blessed them. People also find that their wishes are fulfilled at this temple (Pandit, 2022). It is said that in the past, human sacrifice (*narbali*) was purportedly offered to appease the Mother Goddess. According to the legend, when the time came for a village elder's son to be sacrificed, she prayed to the goddess, who revealed that instead of a human sacrifice, there should be bloodshed equivalent to one person.

The historical significance of Bagwal is underscored by D. D. Sharma's observations regarding the unique military tradition of stone warfare among the warrior class of mountainous regions. This practice was celebrated following the monsoon season, akin to the war exercises conducted by medieval Rajput rulers before their autumn military campaigns. In the medieval context of Kumaon, governance was predominantly orchestrated by the Thakuri rulers and mandaliks, which facilitated the organization of Bagwal as a form of military training among various Kshatriya clans at the culmination of the rainy season. Over time, this tradition evolved into a festive celebration, reflecting both its martial origins and its socio-cultural significance (Sharma, 2008).

According to a folk proverb, "*das dasein bees bagwal, kalikumu phuli bhandav*," Bagwal was traditionally celebrated in twenty locations throughout Kali Kumaon. Historical accounts indicate that prior to its observance in Devidhura, Bagwal was celebrated in Chamaldev. In earlier times, Bagwal festivities were held at various sites, including Chamaldev in the Patti Gumdes, Ramgad in Patti Ramgad, the Narayani temple in Shilauti-Chakhata, and Bhimtal during the Hariyale festival (Atkinson, 2002). However, many of these celebrations have either ceased altogether or have diminished to mere formalities, losing much of their original cultural vibrancy. However, Bagwal at Devidhura fair still continues to draw large crowds from distant areas. According to estimates, more than one lakh people from Nepal, Kumaon and other places participate in the Bagwal fair. It showcases a mix of tradition and modernity. When public sacrifice and violence were banned in the entire state, the format of this fair also changed. The administration directed that the game of Bagwal would be played with fruits and flowers instead of stones. However, the excitement of the fair does not stop people from using stones. The event celebrates the region's historical heritage and plays a significant role in shaping the identity of the people, making it an essential aspect of this cultural landscape (Rawat, 2015).

Thal, a town situated on the banks of the Ramaganga river in the Pithoragarh district, holds a fair on the occasion of Baisakhi, known as the Thal Fair (Sharma, 2008). Thal is a pilgrimage site, owing to the Ganga Snan (bathing in the Ganges) performed here and the presence of the Baleshwar Shiva temple. Thal once featured dharamshalas (rest houses) for pilgrims, as travellers heading to Kailash

Mansarovar stopped here for bathing before setting off for their further destinations (Kafal Tree, n.d.).

In the past, local traders, referred to as *Shauk*, used to trade in woollen goods imported from Tibet. One of the notable aspects of this fair was the hookahs (a device used to heat and vaporize tobacco for inhalation) manufactured in Thal. The area became well-known for its hookah-making trade. These products were so sought after that people from Tibet, Nepal, and the Terai would purchase these hookahs at the fair to sell in their own regions. However, this industry has now entirely disappeared. Over time, due to the cessation of India-Tibet trade and other contributing factors, the commercial nature of the fair diminished (Kafal Tree, n.d.). The presence of outside traders has almost come to an end, and fewer local vendors attend. However, artisans continue to showcase their products like ringal baskets, ropes, agricultural tools, copper utensils, and woollen garments. While the fair may not have the same lively atmosphere as before, its religious importance persists. It continues to reflect the local culture today. Cultural programs featuring folk singers and dancers enhance the festive atmosphere of the event. Thal Fair, originally lasting fifteen to twenty days, has now been reduced to three to four days. This reduction can be attributed to improved transportation and the increased availability of goods in even the most remote areas (Sharma, 2008).

In the era of British rule, Thal was a site for military recruitment. Numerous local young men were enlisted during both World Wars at these recruitment events, which were held near the Dak Bungalow situated about 2 kilometres from Thal. Additionally, prior to 1947, the area served as a venue for administrative courts that addressed public grievances and disputes. During the Indian freedom struggle for independence, the British arrested numerous local freedom fighters at the fair. It was a key location where Kumaoni activists would gather to formulate their strategies. In 1940, a powerful protest against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre took place here, involving the local populace. Many individuals who lived through that period continue to share stories and accounts of this critical demonstration (Kafal Tree, 2022).

Maun Mela, this festival is celebrated in both the Kumaon and Garhwal regions. In the Western Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, the Maun festival is celebrated in Aglaad and Bhadrigad of Jaunpur in the Tehri district. In the Dehradun district, it is observed in the Jaunsar-Bawar region at locations such as Daragad, Kirangad, Dungariyagad, and along the Amlaav River. In the Uttarkashi district, the festival takes place at the confluence of the Kamal River and Malugad (Purola), at the Kedarganaga River in Bhadraru (Mori), Barnigad (Naugaon). In Kumaon, it is observed in the Palipachhaun region of Almora. (Rawat, 2024). Festival usually takes place in the month of Ashadha or Shrawan. Maun is observed before the arrival of the rainy season, as the water turns muddy after the rains, rendering fish consumption less appealing during that time (Pundir, 2014).

The term *Maun* is derived from the Sanskrit word *min*, which translates to “fish,” as it is a festival centered around fishing activities (Rawat, 2024). Maun powder is made from the stem bark, foliage, and seeds of the *timru* plant (*Zanthoxylum armatum*). This powder is preserved in *khaltas*, bags made from goat hide (Kumari et al., 2019). On the festival day, villagers gather at the riverbanks, engaging in processions with traditional music, including instruments like the

dhhol, *daman*, and *ransingha*. Rituals commence with village elders (*syana*) worshipping the river, followed by the application and discharging of *timru* powder into the water which immobilizes fish, facilitating their capture. The evening is marked by sharing the fish catch among families, with the largest fish offered to the village deity. In earlier times, attendees would present fish to the king.

Historically referred to as 'Rajmaun' due to its association with the Tehri kings, the Maun Fair dates back to 1866. It was initiated by the monarch of Tehri but faced interruptions, including its suspension in 1944 under Maharaja Narendra Shah due to local disputes. The fair was reinstated in 1949 following public appeals (Rawat, 2024). In the past, permission from the Tehri king was necessary to celebrate the fair. After the abolition of princely rule, the responsibility falls upon the panchayats (Sharma, 2008). In Jaunpur and neighbouring regions, people begin preparations for the festival at least a month in advance. This event follows a systematic rotational schedule where different villages in a *khat* (group of villages) contribute to the arrangements. For instance, in June 2023, Lalur Patti and other villages, such as Devan, Ghansi, and Tikri, collaborated to prepare 29 bags of timru powder. Thus, we find that this fair and the festivities associated with it exemplify a rich blend of history, culture, and community cooperation.

In recent times, some studies have been carried out on the ecological impact of timru powder, used for fishing during the fair. According to one study, the fishing activities during the festival led to a significant decline in fish populations, including species listed on the IUCN Red List. The event also affects broader aquatic ecosystems, causing high mortality rates among insects and amphibians, such as tadpoles (Kumari et al., 2019). Despite its cultural significance, environmentalists have raised concerns, emphasizing the need for sustainable practices that balance ecological preservation with cultural traditions (Jain, 2024).

Gauchar Fair, held in Gauchar, Chamoli district (Alaknanda river valley), is primarily a commercial fair, that takes place over a week starting on 14th November every year (Nand & Kumar, 1989). The area now known as Gauchar was once a prosperous agricultural region (Sharma, 2008). It was first held in November 1943, during the tenure of the then Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Barnedi. In the past, Tibetan traders from various places such as Dapa, Dipu, Gyaing, and Tholing used to come here to sell a variety of goods, including wool, *subaga* (*borax*), musk, *shilajit*, rock salt, and herbs. However, following the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1962, this interaction between traders came to a halt (Nand & Kumar, 1989). At present, the fair still attracts a large number of local people, traders and merchants. Cottage industry products such as carpets, shawls, *pankhi* and other woollen products are available for purchase. Women attending the fair don vibrant attire and adorn themselves with jewellery (Bisht, 1994). The fair is also a major cultural venue, as folk artists are invited to perform at the fair, and there are pavilions that showcase the rich cultural heritage of the state. The fair has seen certain changes in recent times as the state government tries to promote the fair through the incorporation of adventure sports like rafting in the fair. Such efforts help generate employment opportunities for the local people, curbing migration from the hills and keeping alive the overall significance of the fair as these fairs help in preserving the folk culture and traditions alive (Baghel, 2023).

Jauljibi Fair is held in Pithoragarh district, near the confluence of the Gori and Kali rivers during Margashirsha Sankranti. The fair was first started by the zamindar of Askot in 1914, with the zamindar family preserving the tradition annually until 1948 when the Askot principality was incorporated into India. The government of Uttar Pradesh revived the fair in the 1960s. Jauljibi being in proximity to the Tibetan border, Tibetan merchants occasionally frequent this fair (Mittal, 1989). Bhotia traders from Johar, Danpur, Chaundas, and Nepali traders brought items like shilajit, musk, herbs, and honey, pashmina blankets, carpets, shawls, etc, to the fair, and traders from Delhi, Kanpur, Amritsar, Bombay, and Calcutta came to procure these products brought by these merchants. There was also significant trade in mountain (Bhotia/*Jumli*) horses in this fair. With the Chinese occupation of Tibet since 1962 and the consequent cessation of Bhotia trade with Tibet and the increase in modern means of transportation, this fair has lost its earlier commercial importance that it once held for the people living in this region (Sharma, 2008).

IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION AND MODERNIZATION ON FAIRS OF UTTARAKHAND

The significance of these fairs in the lives of people is diminishing with the ever-increasing pace of modernization and globalization in Uttarakhand. As efficient means of transportation reach the remotest of the villages now, facilitating the establishment of shops there and modern forms of entertainment become accessible with ease, people, especially the younger generation, are losing interest in folk songs and folk dances which used to be an essential part of fairs and festivals in the past. The trend is visible in the gradual decline of the presence of folk artists and a relative decline in religious beliefs associated with the festivals.

The convergence of various Aryan and non-Aryan cultures of the past resulted in the emergence of local fairs and related festivities in Uttarakhand, and they have undergone a tremendous amount of transformation before reaching their current form. Many of them have completely vanished without leaving any trace. In the folktales of Uttarakhand, we find accounts of numerous such festivals. For instance, in the tale of Tilu Rauteli in Garhwal, it is mentioned that a renowned historical fair took place at a location called Khatli ka kanta two centuries ago. By referring to Hamilton's "Description of Hindustan," Dr. S.P. Dabral asserts that in medieval Garhwal, a fair of Devdasis used to be held at Ranihat, Srinagar (Sharma, 2008).

Similarly, there exist numerous local festivals in the Kumaon region that were once celebrated with grandeur and extravagance for extended durations until the previous century. However, these festivals have either vanished completely or have been diminished to a mere one or two-day event merely to fulfil formalities. D. D. Sharma highlights the Dhanlek fair of Askot and the Ganesh Chaturthi fair of Dhwaipatishwar as some examples of such festivals. Additionally, the commercial fairs of Chaiti in Kashipur and Jauljivi in Ascot, which were once commemorated for several days, have now become nothing more than a mere name, lacking the grandiosity and spectacle of earlier times.

CONCLUSION

The fairs and festivals of Uttarakhand provide us a window to look back into the past; they act as a bridge between the present and the past. While globalization has

the potential to bring economic benefits, there is also a risk of dilution of cultural and traditional elements, which makes these fairs and festivals unique. There is a need to balance the progress that is supposed to occur with the arrival of modernization and preserving the cultural heritage. Community involvement; documentation of history, rituals, and unique aspects of each fair; promotion of traditional crafts; cultural awareness programs; active government support; inter-generational transfer of knowledge; integration of sustainable practices into the organization of fairs are some of the steps which will help us in striking a balance between preserving the originality of local fairs in Uttarakhand and allowing them to evolve sustainably. The role that these fairs and festivals play in conserving the folk customs and traditions of Uttarakhand, in providing the collective identity to the people of this region, in promoting social cohesiveness through shared rituals, folk performances, and the role they play in economic upliftment of the people involved, their study becomes important in an increasingly globalized world.

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