

CHANGING ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE LAVI FAIR IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

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Abstract: *The fairs and festivals provides an opportunity to break the monotony and experience the moments of marry making like singing and dancing playing and feasting but also an occasion to meet relatives, members of community, religious faith at one place, these also provide a good market for buying and selling of local and foreign produce on such occasions the peasants bring their produce like, ginger, walnuts, almonds, chilgozas and apricots etc. The local artisans, blacksmiths, craftsmen, potters and weavers find an opportunity to market their products. Fairs and festivals are an integral part of our cultural life. Whether it is a change of season or the harvest or a day of religious importance the fair and festivals are observed. The change of seasons play significant role in giving a shape to the fair and festivals. A fair is a special kind of gathering of people for buying and selling, for holding contests and for having a good time, fairs first come about as means of carrying on peaceful trade between different tribes. Thousand, years ago, tribesmen gathered at certain places to exchange goods. However fairs are institutions established to centralize supply and demand of merchandise at particular time at certain places. The main difference between fairs and ordinarily daily or weekly markets are that fairs take place at much greater intervals and lasts for longer periods that they are of importance to buyers and sellers over a far greater area. Although retail trade is by no means excluded from them they mainly serve for the wholesale trade. Thus through this study an attempt has been made to acknowledge the changes observed in such event.*

Key words: *Exchange, Markets, Seasons, Supply and Demand.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Fairs and Festivals play a very significant role in an individual's life for they are occasions for cementing the bonds between the individual and his community. Therefore, holding of fairs become sites of economic, cultural, social and ritual negotiation between the people and their environment leading to harmony and consolidation. Fairs and festivals break the routine, the drudgery, the struggle, suffering and subjugation in every individual life. They provide an opportunity to share joy, release emotions, forget pain, and renew social community bonds, therefore becoming an occasion for re-integrating and re-emphasizing the link between individual and society. Thus individuals as part of family clan and tribe ritually participate in a fair to look after the interest of their group and seek protections and blessings for its prosperity.

2. OBJECTIVES:

The present study is an attempt to document the changing ethnography of Lavi Fair in Himachal Pradesh. Keeping in view the major objectives which are:

- (i) To document the ethnography of the ancient trade fair.
- (ii) To identify the socio-cultural changes in the fair from the past to the present.
- (iii) To understand the system of traditional economic exchange and its significance for the people as well as its changing dimensions.
- (iv) To understand the significance of the Lavi Fair in the back drop of cultural, social, ecological and physical landscape of Himachal Pradesh and everyday life of its inhabitants.

3. METHODOLOGY:

To achieve these objectives we need to document the ethnography of the Lavi Fair therefore an attempt has been made to capture the spirit of the fair and its changing form. The most important dependence has been made to collect the primary data through the interview method both formal and informal method, where detailed case studies have been made of people involved in the fair, from a long period of time as well as in the contemporary period. This has been done to record the social and cultural significance of the fair in the life of people. The other information about the fair has also been applied through the secondary sources available both published and unpublished as well as oral resources and records of the Bushahr royal family.

4. LOCALE OF STUDY:

The present study was conducted in Rampur Bushahr, which is located in district Shimla and lies in the foothills of the western Himalayas. The socio-economic and demographic profile of the state and district is given as under in order to acquaint with the location of study. The district is located between the longitude 77° and 78°-19" east and latitude 30°-45" and 31°-44" north. It is bounded by Mandi and Kullu in the north, Kinnaur in the east. The elevation of the district ranges between from 300 to 600 meters above sea level. Shimla district has some famous peaks, such as Jakhu, Chansal in Rohru Teshil. The topography of the tehsil is rugged and tough. The prevalence of inter locking spurs, narrow, steep sided valleys with high peaks and dense forests of *kail* and *deodar* in the whole districts adds to its youthfulness of its topography. Due to topographical variation, the district has varying climate according to the elevation of the area. The area of study is very popular due to its historic background.

According 2011 the population of the district is 814,010 persons and literacy rate is 83.64% and sex ratio is 915 persons per 1000 females. The density of population is Shimla 159 persons per square kms as against 123 people in the state according to 2011 census. The high density of the state is because it is a capital city and high fertility rate; high sex ratio also affects the density of the district. Agriculture and horticulture is the mainstay of the majority of population in the district. The climate in the district varies from extreme hot in the lower elevation to extreme cold in the higher elevation. From the agricultural point of view the district can be divided into three regions, viz. (1) valley and basin areas (2) mid hills and (3) high hills.

Further the agro-climatic conditions prevailing in the district are most suitable for growing of temperate fruits. During the last thirty years, there has been silent but tremendous revolution in the sphere of horticulture in Shimla district. Shimla is the biggest apple growing district in Himachal Pradesh. From the industrial point of view, presently the district is confined to agriculture and horticulture. Horticulture is becoming very effective measures for the economic development and setting of industries, which divert substantial proportion of population from agriculture to industry.

Shimla is famous for its cultural and traditional richness. Many fairs and festivals are celebrated all around the year. Among the various fairs and festivals, the Lavi fair of Rampur Bushahr is quite famous and which is the focus of the present study.

5. GEOPHYSICAL SETTING OF RAMPUR BUSHAHR:

Rampur is located at 31.45°North and 77.63°East. It has an average elevation of 1021metres (4429 feet). It is a very beautiful place situated at the bank of the river Satluj. The city is nearby to popular places like Jhakhari, Jeori, Sarahan, Green valley Dhar Gaura and Shraikoti to name a few. Rampur Bushahr is a town and a municipal council in Shimla district of Himachal Pradesh. It is 130 km from Shimla and is well connected with National Highway 5 earlier it was NH 22 which passes through Theog, Narkanda, Kumarsain and Sainj. The principality of Bushahr (also known as Bashahr, Bushahar and Bushahr) was once among the largest of the twenty-eight Shimla Hill States under the administration of the British Raj keen to invest on regional and transcontinental trade and exploit Himalayan resources. It is bordered on the north with Spiti, on the east with Tibet, on the south with Garhwal and on the west with Kumarsain, Kotkhai, Rohru and Kullu. Caught in the machinations of the British imperial enterprise, it was subjected to political-cum-economic vicissitudes, acceding to the Indian Union in 1947.

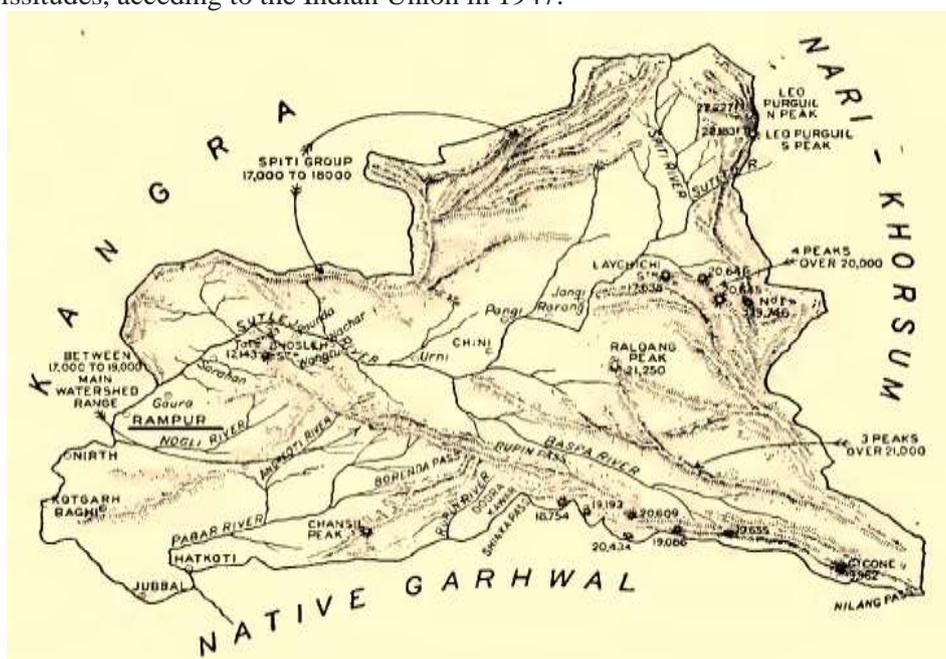


Figure 1 Sketch Map of the Indian Princely state of Bashahr (Shimla Hills), 1911

On 8 March 1948, along with twenty other princely hill States of Punjab and Shimla, Bushahr signed an agreement which resulted in its inclusion in the Indian State of Himachal Pradesh. Rampur, a small township situated at 1,005 meters on the left bank of the Sutlej, served as Bushahr's winter capital. Being well connected with major trading routes that joined Indian markets with Central Asia and Tibet, it buzzed with mercantile activity, especially in November during the Lavi fair, the largest trading event in the north Himalayas attracting traders from Kashmir, Ladakh, Yarkand, and the Indian mainland.

6. DATA COLLECTION:

Depending upon the nature of study the Lavi fair is an event spread over a couple of days which include multifarious activities, where people come to participate in the fair such an event provides an opportunity of intermingling with each other. There exists a lot of excitement in the fair because of hectic activities of the same time. Quite a few of them require detailed attention for observing the ritualistic dimensions and their significance in social and cultural context.

Primary Sources

For the data collection the participant observation method was used depending upon the qualitative nature of study. To get the necessary information the researcher was the frequent part of the fair since previous years and attended the different phases of the fair that is the preparatory phase, during the fair and aftermath of the fair. Many of the activities and rituals performed during the fair are part and parcel of the fair. Therefore making complete involvement in the fair developing intimacy and rapport with the respondents was an integral part of the fieldwork. It was through the snowballing technique that a great deal of information collected and interaction with a variety of respondents took place. It was impossible to interview with the structured schedule because many of the respondents were illiterate and felt uncomfortable with a framed questionnaire. Secondly an open-ended schedule gave the research flexibility to make in depth inquiries. The other additional interviews were conducted with the members of erstwhile royal family of Rampur Bushahr who are historically linked to the fair. The information obtained was collected in a diary.

The researcher also interviewed and discussed with shopkeepers, permanent and non-permanent visitors with the organizers of the Mela Committee, with the members of Municipal committees, govt. functionaries of Rampur Bushahr and also with the local people. Two types of generation were involved in the interview the older and the younger one. The younger ones have recently participated in the fair, and the older one's are those who are a witness to the Lavi fair since the past. So interacting with these two generations the researcher has able to obtain the changes in the fair and also the habits and taste of these two generations.

Secondary Sources

For the purpose of our study both published and unpublished material was used. To comprehend, the historical, cultural and legends associated with the event relevant information was collected from the proceedings of govt. reports, gazetteers, census, encyclopaedias, newspapers, journal, magazines, weekly, biweekly, monthly, news paper cuttings, survey hand books, and souvenirs of the previous fair and unpublished materials were used.

The other sources of information are the historic places at Rampur Bushahr, monuments, brochures books published in Hindi and some written in local dialect which provide necessary information. As well as the records maintained by the Rampur Bushahr royal family.

7. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE FAIR:

Historically the Lavi fair was based on trade relations between Tibet and Rampur Bushahr. It has gained much importance over a long period of time with the succession of kings in both these states. The Lavi Fair is held on 25th Kartika according to the origin or legend of this fair, many sources, legends and documents of Bushahr royal family were the source of information. It started almost 300 years ago in 1681A.D. during the regime of Raja Kehri Singh of the Bushahr and the Tibetan general Galden Tsowang when a trade treaty was signed between the Bushahr state and the Tibetan general Galden Tsowang. Prior to this treaty there was an attack from Kashmir and Ladakh on Tibet. Now Tibet requested the Raja of Bushahr for his help. While he was on pilgrimage expedition to Lake Mansarovar. He agreed and this help resulted in the victory for Tibet and so the treaty was signed between these two states. Under this treaty horses from Tibet and swords from Bushahr, and envoys were exchanged in token of friendship between Raja Kehri Singh of Bushahr and the Govt. of the VI Dalai Lama. Before this treaty trade was done clandestinely.

It was stipulated in the treaty that their friendly relations would continue till the time "Satlej goes dry, crows turn white, horses get horns, and stones which are stated on the border of boths states and on which the treaty was written, would produce hair and wool". Since then it is presumed that trade relations increased and finally Lavi Fair was held. In local dialect 'Loi' means shearing of sheep and hence the wool and woollen products were the main commodities in the fair. They started calling it 'LOI' that means to take or to receive things. There is much buying and selling during the fair. The fair is an old one. Particularly when there were no transport facilities, the importance of

this was purely trade and economic fair was considered to be a great. On account of Chinese border situation and Chinese occupation in Tibet, which resulted in a great setback to the trade, things were stated to have gone from bad to worse. The tax free trade continued between the Kinnauras and Tibetans till the international border was sealed in 1962. Continuous rises in the prices was considered to be another factor, which has hindered the fluency of trade.

Many traders flock to Rampur Bushahr from the Tribal belt and of Indo-Chinese border. Different trade routes were used by these Traders to reach Rampur Bushahr. These routes are –

- (a) Via Leh and across the Baralacha pass.
- (b) Via Shpki to Gartok in Chinese Tibet and
- (c) Via Suniam to Shaikar with their Commodities.

The commercial merchandise is registered at the checkpost at a bridge where the Hindustan Tibet road crosses the river Satlej at Wangtoo in district Kinnaur. After a long journey these traders reach at Rampur Bushahr and install their shops and tents with their commodities and live stock in Rampur Bushahr. The traders from plains and local also install their settlements in Rampur Bushahr and hence the buying, selling and exchange of commodities with the onset of the fair. Different types of shops permanent, non-permanent and hawkers are seen in the fair. The major commodities in the fair are Pashmina, Chilgoza, apricots, Walnuts, almonds, spices, borax, dhoop, woollen products both raw and semi-finished wool, woollen socks, Kinnauri patties, dhorus (blanket made of wool), numdas, gudmas, readymade garments, housiery and other household products are available in this fair. Beside this the horses, mules, sheep and goats were also sold in this fair.

Buyers from all over the country flock to Rampur Bushahr Lavi to purchase wool and other such commodities which are readily available in the fair. The goods are brought by the people of Kinnaur and Lahul-spiti, Ladakh, from Punjab plains and lower hills bring general merchandise to the fair to have a brisk trade.

The Lavi fair provides an opportunity to decipher the structural relationship between the state, community and the individuals. The participation of the state in the form of Raja as the head of state or local administration. Since 1984 the declaration of the fair as the state level fair number of government departments are involved, provide a space for examining the role of the state in the local events. It reveals that the role of various other organizations both government and non government are involved in this function like Municipal Committees, district administration etc. in steering of public opinion, resources and developmental initiatives. Now the fair is becoming commercialized earlier the outlook of the fair was traditional based on *Batta-Satta* i.e. the system of reciprocity and exchange unlike the present system where all the items are bought and sold in terms of cash transactions.

During the fair different consumer items are available like TV, fridges, refrigerators, washing machines, electrical tools, horticultural equipments, spray pumps, diesel engines, solar systems, computers and automobiles etc. The various companies like auto-expo, financial and insurance companies are involved in this fair and is providing lucrative incentives to the people in order to promote their business. Besides, these consumer durables like dresses, cosmetics, readymade garments, footwear and utensils etc. are found in the fair. But now a day because of industrialization and urbanization the taste of consumer items of the people has been changed. They are now preferring the consumer durables and manufactured goods instead of traditional woollen products and other such products. These products now symbolize the cultural and ethnic items and cater to the taste of foreigner tourists and other visitors who buy these products as a souvenir from the fair.

8. STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE FAIR:

The major changes in the fair that has been observed during the fair celebrated in the month of November every year and over a period of time. The change has been observed in formal and informal sectors of economy as well as social and cultural life of the people which is influenced by the advancement of new technological development and Industrialization.

The significant change has been observed in terms of trade and commerce. The major function of this is the commerce and trade, which is going on since the past. Now a day the trade and commerce has got changed in terms of commodities, weights and measures, value of economy. In the past the trade and commerce were imports and exports from Chinese territory, Ladakh, Yarkand and also from Jammu and Kashmir were famous for commodities like borax, salt, musk etc. which were exchanged with brocades, broad cloth, sugar candy, groceries, cotton piece goods and rice brought from Punjab and neighboring states. But now the opening of the Hindustan Tibet road and linkage with plains the finished manufactured goods were stocked at Rampur Bushahr by the traders from plains. Because of availability of manufactured finished durable articles in the market the consumers now prefer these goods instead of the traditional ones and are seeking the durability of the product with the increasing competition in the market.

An indirect consequence has made the significant changes in the family pattern i.e. from the extended joint family to nuclear family and from polyandry to monogamy such change is through the exposure of people through this event in which various agencies like NGO's and other organizations are functioning by launching various programmes

like family planning, health awareness, literacy mission and other such associated programmes to bring awareness among the people.

The increase has been observed in the rural urban migration. The rural people are nestling in the town because of the hub of multifarious activities in terms of education and commerce. The fair provides an opportunity to the peasants to get aware about the technological advancement in the field of agriculture and horticulture and the significant boost in the economy has been observed by promoting horticulture and cash crops in the region.

However one may notice major changes in the celebration of the Lavi Fair. There is certainly a shift from the Raja as State, to the democratically elected govt. as a 'state' or even the municipal council. During the rein of Rajas the relationship between the state and the subject were grounded on prime ordeal ties; now the relation between modern state and citizens are based on 'rights and duties' or more appropriately on contracts. The involvement of the 'state' as official organizer of the fair, thus, is quite different from than that of Raja, even though there is still a continuity in the form of celebration like formal rites in the Lavi Mela ground and the Lavi rate list is declared open and also its concluding part on the last day of the fair.

Now a day the fair is celebrated on a grand scale, both in terms of duration, trade economy and other activities related to it. The 'Mela Market' becomes like the local bazaar where all types of commodities and other agencies are seen at a moment in the bazaar. Products and artefacts put on sale not only reflect the technological development but also reflect on production relations. The shift has been observed from the handmade raw and semi finished to manufactured goods becomes apparent to people visiting the fair, where they see products being sold in the market.

The celebration of such event at large scale disseminates knowledge and inculcates people through various activities like exhibition, cultural programmes and through entertainment. Through these exhibitions, cultural programmes and through entertainment programmes new inventions, achievements and products of different areas are introduced to the local people. The state by inviting different cultural troupes play a significant role in introducing the locals to different cultures. Such types of events provide an opportunity to transmit it to the succeeding generation and also provide an occasion for social gathering and develop social relationship.

The celebration of such an event becomes important in terms of developmental perspective of the region. At the onset of the Lavi Fair various state agencies get activated and start functioning to complete the incomplete projects, roads, buildings and other associated with the infrastructure of the town and also undertake the newer ones, which are significantly related to the artisans and other participants in the fair which give promotion to tourism of the state. The organization of such an event in the local provides an opportunity to boost the economy of the region with the promotion of tourism, hotels, guest houses, restaurants, camping sites, transport facilities and all such other activities which are associated with the development.

9. CONCLUSION:

The fairs provide an atmosphere of eclatic and gaiety displaying people's traditional urge for a get together in a style unique to the hills. Hill people are very much fond of with their ancient traditions and, therefore, they have tended to perpetuate their social life in its original style without the least regard for the so called sophistication. Fair, as a medium of mass recreation, are very popular in Himachal Pradesh. Men, women and children of all ages, classes and creeds flock in hundreds and enjoy the fascinating features of a fair. The fairs and festivals of Himachal Pradesh are an essential and a fundamental part of life and style of its people, and express their profound feelings that are associated with them. Thus finally it is concluded that this fair plays an important part of the cultural life of the people of Himachal Pradesh. It has educational, social, economic as well as cultural opportunity to intermingle with each other. And also serve the need of social co operation not only for economic subsistence, but also for cultural survival. Thus the Lavi Fair being a trade fair is an important medium to promote and develop the economy of the region. Further the fair is seen as an important confluence as well as between the community and society.

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