

UNIT 8 FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

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Baisakhi Celebration

8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will know about the:

- major festivals and fairs of India,
- chief characteristic features of various festivals and fairs of India,
- potential of fairs and festivals for tourists, and
- role of tour operator, guide, etc. to attract tourists towards Indian fairs and festivals.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Fairs and festivals are an important part of social activity and are observed all over the world in a variety of ways. In India, traditional fairs and festivals are connected with religious beliefs, folk-lore, local customs, changing seasons, harvests, etc. Not only does India have many different festivities connected with its various religions, our numerous cultural traditions influence the manner of celebrating them.

Indian fairs and festivals are as varied in origin as they are in number. Many of them are observed in a particular manner in different parts of the country. Some celebrations are specific to certain areas; some are celebrated by different sects and communities in an especially noteworthy way in certain villages, cities, or even states. This gives fairs and festivals their own local flavour.

Sometimes it is difficult to separate fairs and festivals. In many cases they are interconnected. Many fairs (**melas** or **utsava**) are held in India usually at religious places or to celebrate religious occasions.

In recent years, many cultural fairs and festivals meant for carrying the music, dances, arts and crafts into the lives of people have also been introduced. This latter category is usually **tourism-oriented**. Examples of this are the **Jaisalmer Desert Festival** (Rajasthan) held in winter, and the **Khajuraho Dance Festival** (Madhya Pradesh) where renowned Classical Indian dancers perform against the backdrop of the famous Khajuraho temples complex. (For further details see Course TS-2, Block-05).

To recapitulate, you must have already read about fairs and festivals in our Course TS-2, Block-5. But our emphasis in TS-2 was entirely different than what we are planning to discuss in the present Unit. In our Course TS-2 our objective was to tell you how festivals and fairs could be used as an important component of tourism development. Therefore, we did not discuss the important traditional socio-religious festivals of India which form the very heart of Indian socio-cultural life. Instead our discussion was confined to non-traditional festivals which are started comparatively quite recently by tourism department. Our purpose in this Unit is to familiarise you with Indian culture, its social structure, etc. keeping in view the 'Tourism' component as well. A discussion on all the family rituals, performed within a family, is beyond the purview of this Unit for we have already covered this aspect in Unit 7 of the present Block.

8.2 FESTIVALS AND FAIRS OF INDIA: SOME IMPORTANT FEATURES

Festivals and fairs are significant parts of the Indian cultural life. In the present Section our purpose is to explore the 'spirit' behind Indian fairs and festivals.

Festivals are very 'heart' of Indian socio-cultural milieu. In fact, Indian cultural life revolves round the festivals and fairs. As for the socio-religious content of the festivals and fairs is concern, it is very difficult to differentiate them into water-tight compartments. However, for convenience we have attempted to put them into one or the other category. But these divisions are interchangeable and barring few festivals and fairs most of them fall into more than one head.

Festivals and fairs are extremely significant parts of Indian cultural life. They have a history which goes back to centuries in our past. They are aspects of our common culture and are celebrated by both the elite and the masses. Some of the important characteristics of our festivals and fairs are discussed below:

- 1) Most of the traditional Indian festivals are socio-religious in content. Almost all of them are accompanied by religious rituals of one kind or the other. Every traditional festival has two aspects. One is the **worship** which is performed according to the specific religious norms. For example in **Holi**, **Diwali** or **Ram Navami** the Hindus worship their gods and goddesses at the individual or family level. In **Id** the Muslims go to the mosques to offer **namaz** because the collective worship is an important aspect of their religion. Similarly, on **Christmas** the Christians go to their Churches for religious services.

But all the festivals have another aspect also and this represents our composite culture. Participation in most of our festivals are not restricted to a particular community. Members of all the communities participate in the festivities attached to a festival. **Holi**, **Diwali**, **Id**, **Muharram**, **Baisakhi** and **Christmas** involve all the people at one level or the other. Therefore, despite having strong religious content, our festivals represent our commonness, forge our unity and encourage a social bond.

- 2) Most of the festivals specific to the Hindus are seasonal in nature. They announce the change in season and mark the harvesting seasons.

All the seasonal festivals are celebrated during two harvesting seasons **kharif** (August-October) and **rabi** (March- April). Besides, spring season is another period of seasonal festivities.

Bihu	Mid-January	Mid-October	Mid-April
Onam	Sept.-Oct.		
Pongal	Mid-January		
Vasant Panchami	February		
Makar Sankranti	January		
Lohri	January		
Holi	March		
Vaisakhi	April		

Nonetheless the base of all seasonal festivals is 'Agriculture.' Festivals are observed because either the new crop is sown or crop is harvested. In Punjab, from **Lohri** onwards peasants start cutting their winter crop. **Pongal**, **Bihu** and **Onam** celebrations mark the harvesting of paddy crop. On the day of **Pongal** with the new crop 'Shankarai Pongal' (rice cooked in milk and jaggery) is prepared and distributed as 'Prasadam.' Sugarcane, which is another crop harvested at this time is also distributed as part of 'Prasadam.' Similarly, tender **turmeric** plants (another new crop harvested during this period) are tied around the neck of the pots (**kalash**) in which **Shankarai Pongal** is cooked. In Assam, during **Bihu** celebrations, 'rice' preparations **chirwa** (pressed rice) is eaten and distributed. Rice dishes are also the chief component in the **Onam** feasts.

Similarly, **Holi** and **Vaisakhi**, are primarily celebrated to mark the harvesting of new **rabi** crop. Here wheat forms the centre of all rituals. When the **Holi** fire is lit tradition is to roast wheat and barley plants in that fire.



Dashehra at Kullu, Himachal Pradesh



Boat race during Onam celebrations in Kerala

Since agriculture is the base of all these seasonal festivals, its closely related component cattle-worship is another important aspect of these celebrations. Whether it is Pongal in South or Bihu in North-East, cattle are worshipped. The first day of Bohag Bihu (mid-April) called **Goru Bihus** is in fact the day of cattle festival. On this day Assamese decorate their cattle with flowers, animated with turmeric and treated to jaggery (**gur**), brinjal and other vegetables. Similarly, third day of Pongal called **Mattu Pongal** is dedicated to cattle (**matu**) worship. Their horns are polished and flowers hung around their necks. For fun, some people tie money around the neck of the oxen and the brave try to snatch that out of their necks. Cattle-sport organised during Pongal festivals have become more a part of Indian Cultural life rather than that of religion. Cattle sport **Jellikattu** of Madurai, Thanjavur and Tiruchirapalli have acquired all India fame in which bundles of money, etc. are tied to the horns of bulls and young men try to snatch them. Bullock-cart race is organised on this day in Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu in which everyone takes part irrespective of age and religion. Its counterpart in North-India is **Govardhan Pooja** which falls on the third day following **Dipawali**.

Fire worship is another important feature of seasonal festivals. We get references of fire worship as early as the Harappan period (at Kalibangan). **Magh Bihu** (mid-January) celebrations are centred around **bhelaghars** (specially constructed structures of thatched grass and green bamboos): Men and women spend whole night in these structures. Bonfire is arranged. In the morning these **bhelaghars** are burnt as symbol of fire worship. First day of Pongal, called **Bogi Pongal** is celebrated by lighting bonfire. Boys beat drums called **Bogi Kottu**. This **Bogi** is dedicated to the god of rains, Indra. It heralds the coming of new season (Spring). Bonfire celebrations of **Lohri** and **Holi** needs no introduction. On the day of **Lohri** bonfire is lit to worship Sun God to get protection for worshippers and their crop from the severe cold of **Paush** month (December-January). Thus bonfire is the symbol of collective security and safety.

We have also talked about linkages of different regions as an important feature of Indian festivals as well as cultural tradition. There are some festivals celebrated at a particular time but with different names all over India. The most prominent of such festival is **Makara Sankranti** (January 14th). It is celebrated in Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh as the three day long Pongal festival, and in Karnataka and Northern India (January 13) as **Makar Sankranti**. **Lohri** (January 13) celebrated primarily in Punjab also coincides with **Makara Sankranti**. **Baisakhi** in Punjab and **Holi** in Northern India and **Bohag Bihu** in Assam marks the coming of new year. From **Lohri** onwards starts the economic year of **zamindars**. From **Nauroz** (21st March) starts the Parsi new year.

- 3) As we have pointed out earlier all these festivals have socio-cultural aspects also and involve all the people in an area or region irrespective of caste and community in the festivities. **Kite flying** is a special feature (specially in Ahmedabad and Jaipur) of **Makara Sankranti** celebrations in which everyone participates with full zeal.

Cultural significance of **Bihu** dances organised during **Bohag Bihu** celebrations needs no elaboration. It is not only the very life of Assamese but has attained a place among the national heritage. During **Bihu** celebrations **Bihu** dance is the biggest attraction. On this day whole Assam comes to life. People sing and dance on the beat of drum, **pepa** (a kind of instrument made of buffaloes' horn), **tal**, **gagna** (**sarangi**), etc. In this dance both young men and women take part. On this day another dance **Husori** is also organised. The difference between the two is that the former one is danced on the tunes of love songs while the latter is played on religious themes. Latter is generally organised in groups by men.

Kathakali dance, which is among the classical dances of India, is the chief attraction of **Onam** festival. Boat races or "**Vallumkali**" also marks **Onam** festivities. Specially at **Aranmulai** and **Kottayam**. Here '**Odde**' boats are rowed by about 100 oarsmen each to the accompaniment of songs and drums. These races are no less important to an Indian, than to a Keralite irrespective of caste and creed.

During the **Lohri** festival the whole Punjab comes to life and dance to the tune of **Bhangra**.

During the festivities of **Navratri** Gujarat comes to life. Women dance **garba** around an

non-Hindus also participate with equal zeal. Earlier when **zamindars** used to organise these celebrations, drum beaters and **Shahnai** players were invariably Muslims. In Calcutta, in huge parks and fields and in every corner of streets **pandals** are constructed, and decoration with lights is done. Huge processions are organised on the fourth day (**Vijayadashmi**) to immerse the Durga statues in the river/ponds/sea amidst drum beating. Throughout the route people dance and sing. Cultural programmes and feasts, plays, etc. are organised. **Durga Puja** conveys the message of collective unity and love without which life becomes colourless.

Similar processions are organised on the tenth-day of Durga Puja, known as **Vijaya Dashmi** or **Dashehra** throughout India. Ramlila precedes the **Vijayadashmi** celebrations. Almost in every city community **Ramlilas** are enacted and on the tenth day huge processions are taken out. Statues of Ravana, Kumbhakaran and Meghnath are burnt with bursting of crackers symbolising the destruction of evil. These cultural gatherings have acquired special colour in specific regions. In Himachal Pradesh, at Kulu-Manali, **Dashehra** celebrations are chief tourists attraction. **Dashehra** of Gwalior, under the aegis of Gwalior Maharaja till date attracts not only the tourists but is the chief attraction for the people of Gwalior as well. Similarly, **Dashehra** of Mysore is known for its pageantry and splendor.

Whole **Braj** region (Mathura-Brindavan region of Uttar Pradesh) traditionally associated with **Krishna** is famous for its unique way of **Holi** celebrations. On the first day of **Holi** the women of Barsana throw coloured water and **gulal** powder on the men of Nandgaon and strike them with sticks in a mock-fight. The men can defend themselves only with the leather shields. The next day it is the turn of the women of Nandgaon to throw **gulal** and coloured water on the men of Barsana and attack them in the same fashion. This mock-fight (called **Jathmaar Holi**) is considered auspicious and is meant as harmless fun.

Deepawali brings the joy all over. Practically every village, town and city is illuminated with earthen lamps, candles and electric bulbs to welcome Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and wealth. On this day people visit each others house, exchange sweets, and fire-works are organised. These celebrations are enjoyed by everyone irrespective of community and strengthen the feeling of love, prosperity and brotherhood in the society.

Id, **Muharram** and **Milad-un Nabi** celebrations in India acquires a distinct colour and cultural tradition. **Id** celebrations in India no more confined to recitation of **Namaz** and wearing of new clothes only. In India, from the very start of the pious month of **Ramzan**, festivities are organised. People organise huge **iftar** parties. Sometimes such parties are organised by their Hindu compatriots and at other time Hindus join **iftar** parties of Muslims conveying the message of equal participation in their festivities. On the day of **Id** huge **meias** are organised at various places. The live description of **Id** celebrations in his story 'Idgah' by Munshi Premchand reflects the very spirit of **Id** celebrations. Interestingly, **Muharram** processions are also the distinct characteristics of Indian culture and **Majalis** are organised during the forty day mourning; **tazias** are taken out on the tenth day throughout India in processions.

Buddha Purnima, though exclusively celebrated by Buddhist, taking holi dip on the day of **Purnima** is very much part of Hindu religion. **Baisakh Purnima** is of special significance in the life of a Buddhist. Its on this day that Buddha, founder of Buddhism was born, attained enlightenment and **nirvana**. Buddhist way of celebrating **Buddha Purnima** is not very much different from other Indian festivals.

Ganesha, the elephant headed God, considered pious by every Hindu is worshiped first on all the auspicious Hindu ceremonies. But **Ganesha Chaturthi** is celebrated with such zeal and fervour in Maharashtra that it has acquired a distinct place here. Though, primarily it is a religious festival but Bal Gangadhar Tilak used it as a vehicle to raise Nationalist feelings among Indians. He used it as a platform for social reformists and politicians. During this festival whole Maharashtra comes to life, from village to cities. In the cities in each house, street and **mohalla** Ganapati statues are laid. Cultural Programmes are organised. In the villages, Ganapati idols are placed either in a school or at **Mukhia's** (village headmen) house and some cultural programmes are organised. Ganapati statues are taken out in

- 4) Indian fairs, in most cases, are devoid of the religious content. They are (excepting the **Kumbh mela** which is mainly a religious congregation) the secular parts of Indian cultural life. Buying and selling of cattle, goats, handicrafts and various other things take place during the fairs. We can say that they represent the cultural - commercial life of traditional India. Although in some fairs, some religious rites take place, they are mostly subordinate to the commercial side of it.

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) Analyse the chief characteristic features of seasonal festivals of India in six lines.

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- 2) Find out the relationship among Pongal, Lohri and Makar Sankranti festivals.

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- 3) Discuss the cattle festivals of India and find out the similarity and dissimilarity in the manner they are celebrated all over India.

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- 4) Match the following:

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| i) Durga Puja | a) Assam |
| ii) Ganeshotsava | b) Kerala |
| iii) Onam | c) Punjab |
| iv) Bihu | d) Bihar |

8.3 MAJOR FESTIVALS OF INDIA

In this section we will discuss some major festivals of India. We have tried to give mythological origins of the festivals wherever possible. Most of the festivals are related to the region, season and religion of the people.

Bihu: People of Assam, irrespective of caste and creed celebrate three **Bihus**. All these three **Bihus** are connected with each other. **Bohag Bihu** is celebrated in mid-April; second in line is **Magh Bihu** observed in mid-January; and the third one **Kati Bihu** is commemorated in mid-October. But, the most celebrated one is **Bohag Bihu**. **Bohag Bihu** heralds the coming of the New Year in the Assamese calendar. **Magh Bihu** is basically related with agriculture. It is observed when the paddy crop is harvested. **Kati Bihu** is celebrated on the last day of the **Ahin** month of Assamese calendar. This is also known as **Kangali Bihu** for this is the time when almost all the granaries are empty. On this day people perform rituals in the midst of paddy fields to wish for good paddy crop.

Makar Sankranti: It is celebrated on January 14. This marks the beginning of 'Uttarayana' or the half year long northern sojourn of the Sun. It is celebrated in Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh as the three-day long **Pongal** festival, and in Karnataka and Northern India as **Makar Sankranti**. Kite flying is a special feature of the cities of Ahmedabad and Jaipur on this day.

Lohri: It is celebrated on the last day of the **Paush** month (12-13 January). It coincides with **Pongal** and **Makar Sankranti** marking the culmination of winter. It is believed that this is the coldest day of the year. Community bonfires are lit. Traditionally, any family having a wedding or any happy occasion to celebrate plays host to the rest of the village on this festival. Rice-flakes, popcorns and sweets made from jaggery (**gur**) and sesame seed (**til**) like "Gajak" and "Revadi" are tossed into the bonfire.

Onam: It is celebrated in the Hindu month of **Sravana** on the day of **Sravana Nakshatra** (September-October). **Onam** is Kerala's major festival. According to legend, king Mahabali practiced great penance and became all-powerful. Vishnu took the incarnation of a Brahmin dwarf, **Vamana** and asked the king to give him all the land he could cover in three steps as alms. The king agreed. At this **Vamana** grew to super-human proportions. Covering the earth and heaven in two steps, **Vamana** asked where he should place his third step. Mahabali offered his own head and was pushed into the nether world (or **Patalam**). In recognition of his piety, Mahabali was made King of **Patalam**. He is allowed to return to his former kingdom once a year in an invisible form. **Onam** is celebrated to assure King Mahabali that all remains well in his land, and that his people are happy and prosperous.

On the eve of **Tiruonam**, the second and the most important day of the 4-day **Onam** festival, everything is cleaned and decorated in preparation for king Mahabali's visit. Auspicious saffron colour cloths are presented to friends and relatives.

Pongal: It is celebrated on the 1st day of the Tamil month of **Tai** i.e. mid-January. Its a three-day festival. The first day is called **Bhogi-Pongal**. On this day people clean and white-wash their houses and in the evening community bonfire is conducted. **Surya-Pongal**, the second day, is marked by women preparing 'pongal' (rice cooked in milk and jaggery) and offering it to the sun (**Surya**). The third day, **Mattu-Pongal**, is dedicated to cattle (**matu**). 'Pongal' offered to deities is given to the cattle to eat. Their horns are polished, and flowers hung around their necks. Coloured balls of 'pongal' are left for birds.

Raksha Bandhan: It is celebrated on the **Purnima** day in the month of **Sravana** (July-August) all over India. Girls tie colourful 'rakhis' or thread of silk and amulets, around the wrists of their brothers, including cousins. In return, the brothers offer gifts and pledge to protect their sisters. On this day Brahmans and Purohits also tie **Rakhis** on the wrists of their **Yajman**.

Navratri Durga Pooja, Dashehra: These are celebrated in the month of **Ashvin** (September-October). These are important ten day festivals for the Hindus in most of India. First nine days are celebrated as **Navratri**. The **Navratri** festivities of Gujarat, with its music and dance (**garba**) are of exceptional appeal. **Saptami**, **Ashtami** and **Navmi** forms famous **Durga Pooja** celebrations of Bengal; while the tenth day, known as **Vijaya Dashmi** is observed as **Dashehra** in various parts of India. People in Bengal immerse Durga statue on this day, thus ends the **Durga Pooja** festivities. Though, **Dashehra** is celebrated in various parts of India in different ways, the concept behind these celebrations is the same i.e. victory of good

Holi: Holi is the festival of colour. On this day coloured powder and coloured water are sprinkled by people on each other. This spring festival, falls in the month of **Phagun** on the day of **Purnima** (February-March), was known in ancient times as 'Madan-Utsav.' One story about **Holi** concerns Prahlad, son of evil King HIRANYAKASIPU. HIRANYAKASIPU demanded that every one should worship him as a God. When HIRANYAKASIPU's own son, Prahlad, continued to worship Vishnu, HIRANYAKASIPU persecuted Prahlad. Ultimately, Prahlad's aunt Holika, who was immune to fire because of divine boon, entered a blazing fire with Prahlad with the intention of burning the prince. However, it was Holika who was burnt to ashes, while Prahlad came out unscathed due to Divine intervention. Thus, even today, on the evening preceding the colour festival, bonfires are lit to symbolise the burning of Holika - the destruction of evil.

The **Holi** of Braj (the Mathura-Brindavan region of Uttar Pradesh traditionally associated with Krishna's childhood, and with stories of Radha-Krishna), is marked by several days of festivals. At Anandpur Sahib, in Punjab, the day following **Holi** is marked by festivities, mock-battles, archery and fencing contests by a sect of the Sikh community.

Dipawali: India's 'Festival of Light' (**Dipawali**) falls 20 days after **Dashehra** on the **Amavasya** or 'New Moon' night of the Hindu month of **Kartik** (October-November). Coinciding with the approach of winter, and the sowing of the winter-crop in many parts of India, people celebrate the return of Rama to Ayodhya, after 14 years of exile, and after slaying Ravana. For many in South India, **Dipawali** commemorates the slaying of Naraka by Krishna. In Bengal and some other parts of Eastern India, Kali is worshipped on this occasion. **Dipawali** marks the beginning of new commercial year for many and businessmen finalize their old account books and open new accounts.

Practically every village, town and city is illuminated with earthen lamps, candles and even electric bulbs to welcome Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and wealth. Jains also celebrate **Deep-Dipawali** ten days after **Dipawali** as part of **Moksha** celebrations of their 24th **Tirthankar**, Mahavir.

Id-ul Fitr: **Id-ul Fitr** marks the end of the holy month of Ramzan, during which pious Muslims have fasted from dawn to sunset. It is celebrated on the 1st **Rabi-ul Awwal** of Arabic calendar. This festival is commonly referred to as 'sweet Id' by children, as vermicelli or 'seveyian' are offered to all. It is a day of celebrations, feasting and wearing new clothes. People offer prayers at **Idgahs**. Alms are given to the poor and children receive gifts (**idi**).

Id-ul Zuha (Id-ul Azha): Its also called **Bakr Id**. This commemorates the sacrifice of Ibrahim (Abraham of the Bible and of the Jewish tradition). Ibrahim was ordered by God to offer his son Ismail as a sacrifice. Ibrahim blindfolded himself and devotedly carried out God's instructions. However, when he removed the cloth from his eyes he found his son alive by his side, and instead a ram, lying on the sacrificial altar. God then commended Ibrahim's trust. A sacrifice of a goat or ram is made by each Muslim family symbolizing Ibrahim's offering and faith in God. **Id** prayers follow, along with feasting and rejoicing. It follows around 2 months 10 days after **Id-ul fitr**.

Muharram: **Muharram** is a solemn occasion commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (grandson of the holy Prophet Mohammed), along with his followers at Kerbala. It is a ten-days observance of intense mourning by sections of the Muslim community. '**Tazias**' made of paper and bamboo (symbolizing the tomb at Kerbala), are carried in procession. A horse, representing Imam Hussain's horse, Dul Dul, accompanies the procession.

Christmas: The birth anniversary of Jesus Christ (25th December) is celebrated by Christians in India amidst Church services on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, singing of carols (religious songs), exchange of gifts and feasting. The day after Christmas is observed by giving alms to the needy. (Thus the name Boxing Day, because money and gifts were put into boxes meant for the poor). Churches, Cathedrals and homes are decorated, and scenes depicting the infant Christ are put up.

Good Friday: Christians observe Good Friday (March-April) with Church services and the singing of hymns in memory of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on this day. A long period of fasting and prayer, known as **Lent**, precedes Good Friday. This comes to an end on Easter Day.

Easter: The Sunday after Good Friday (March-April) is a day of celebrations for Christians. It is believed that Jesus Christ, who was crucified on Good Friday, resurrected on this day. He then continued to preach to his followers for 40 days before ascending to Heaven.

Christians hold Church-services and celebrate the occasion with feasts and visiting friends and relatives. Easter processions are also taken out.

Nauroz: This is a Parsi (or Zoroastrian) festival. Linked to the spring equinox (21 March), it is believed to date from the time when King Jamshed ruled Persia. Worship at the Parsi fire-temples is followed by visits to friends and relatives to exchange greetings.

Buddha Jayanti (Buddha Purnima): It is a celebration of the anniversary of the birth, enlightenment and 'Nirvana' (death) of Gautama Buddha - all of which occurred on the same day according to Buddhist tradition. **Buddha Purnima** (April-May) is marked by chanting of verses from dawn to late-night, and ceremonial offerings at Buddhist shrines. The celebrations are noteworthy at Sarnath near Varanasi (where Buddha preached his very first sermon), at Bodhgaya in Bihar (where he became the 'Enlightened One' - i.e. Buddha), and in Sikkim and Ladakh.

Ganeshotsava: Its observed in the honour of Ganesh, the elephant headed God, son of Siva and Parvati. It is celebrated in the month of Bhadrapada (August-September). Ganapati is worshipped on this day in other parts of India as well but it is celebrated with special zeal and fervour in Western India. Clay images of Ganesh are made and sold to worshippers. The images are sanctified and worshipped for ten days after which they are immersed in a tank or river.

Besides these socio-religious festivals some of the modern-day festivals have been introduced by the Tourism planners and the Tourist Department as attractions for the tourists. The major among them are the **Jaisalmer Desert Festival**, **Music and Dance Festivals** at many places in the country, **Mango Festivals** in Delhi, Haryana and U.P., **Garden Festivals** in Delhi and Sikkim, and **Elephant Festival** in Kerala. All these festivals are non-religious. They have been discussed in detail in our Course Ts-2, Block-5, Unit-18.

8.4 FAIRS OF INDIA

As we have pointed out earlier, the Indian fairs encompass the cultural, social, commercial and occasionally even religious aspects of Indian life. Large or small fairs have always been attached to many festivals in India. Thus during Dushera, **Ganeshotsava**, **Id**, **Makar Sankranti** and even **Muharram** fairs of substantial size are held during the celebrations. Some fairs are independent and exist in their own right. In terms of their scope the Indian fairs are huge and cover many aspects of our life. Thus we find some people engaged in trading their commodities, some involved in religious rites like taking dip in the holy water etc., some indulging in religious debates while at some other corner we can find singing of folk songs going on; loudspeakers can be heard blaring the latest filmi songs from another side while some can be seen indulging in leisurely chat; wrestling bouts are not uncommon and sometimes even the local level leaders can be seen giving lectures.

Kumbhmela is unique in the respect that it does not exhibit the features associated with a traditional Indian fair. It is basically a religious congregation which is held once every 12 years (**Maha Kumbha**) at one of the four holy places (Allahabad, Ujjain, Nasik, Haridwar) in turn. An "ardha" or **half Kumbha** occurs every 6 years. According to mythology, when the "devas" or gods and the "asuras" or demons together churned the waters of the primeval ocean many priceless things floated up from the ocean. Among these was a pot (**kumbha**) of "amrit" - the nectar of immortality. During the struggle for the possession of the "amrit" between the demons and the gods, some drops of the precious nectar got spilt. These fell at twelve places including nether world called "**patala**." Four of these twelve places, namely Haridwar, Ujjain, Allahabad and Nasik, are in India, and a great fair is held at each of these places in a 12 years cycle. Ujjain is also visited by many pilgrims during eclipses when a holi bath is considered meritorious.

The famous **Pushkar Mela** is held on the day of **Karthik Purnima** (in October - November). Devotees gather around Pushkar lake and take a ceremonious bath in it. Pushkar, one of the holy pilgrimage places of India, is said to possess the only temple where Brahma is still worshipped. According to legend, when Brahma was reflecting on a suitable place to perform "Yagna" (sacrifice), a lotus fell from his hand. That spot became renowned as Pushkar. An annual fair marks the occasion. This Pushkar fair, characterized among other things by its **cattle market**, has now become very well known to the tourists - both domestic as well as foreign. Traditionally a religious occasion, that was accompanied by the exchange of camels

and cattle between agriculturalists and animal breeders from far and near, it has now gained a "tourist attraction" status!

Among the non-religious fairs **Saliana**, (Palampur) is noted for its wrestling matches, while at **Sonepur mela** (in Bihar) selling of elephants adds extra colour to the occasion. **Garh Murktesar fair's** (60 km. from Delhi) antiquity one can well trace to Mughal period. This fair is held every year at Garh Murktesar where besides ritual bathing in the Ganges brisk economic activities also take place.

India has developed a unique tradition of **Urs** (birth or death anniversary celebrations at a **dargah**) celebrations. **Urs** are held annually at the **dargah** of famous **sufi** saints. Unique character of these celebrations is that people visit in large number to take the blessings of the revered saints irrespective of caste and creed (both the Hindus and the Muslims attend the celebrations with equal zeal). We have already discussed **Ajmer Sharif** as famous pilgrimage centre in our Unit 17, Block 5 of our Course TS-2. **Ajmer Sharif** is the **dargah** of **Shaikh Muinuddin Chishti**, the founder of **Chishti sufi** order in India. **Delhi Sultans** and **Mughal Emperors** all used to make pilgrimage to this shrine. Annual **Urs** celebrations continues here for **seven** days. The chief attraction here are the sessions of **qawwali** (a genere of music and poetry sung in a specific way). Food is distributed to the destitute. The manner of food cooked here also has its own attraction. Inside the **dargah** there are two massive iron cooking pots (**degs**). The capacity of the larger **deg** is such that it can cook 70 mounds of rice at one go while in the smaller pot 28 mounds of rice can be cooked at a time. Here people come with a desire to get their wishes fulfilled in lieu they present **chadar** at the mausoleum.

Similar **Urs** are commemorated at other places too. In April, annual **Urs** is held at Gwalior to honour the Great Mughal singer **Tansen** by singing traditional and newly composed Music. **Urs** celebrations of famous saint **Shah Hamadam** (he visited Kashmir in 14th century) are held every year at Srinagar in August- September.

Urs celebrations are observed at many places in Delhi - at **Qadam Sharif**, at the tombs of **Shaikh Bakhtiyar Kaki**, **Shaikh Nizamuddin Aulia**, **Shaikh Nasiruddin Chirag-i Delhi**, **Hazrat Amir Khusrau** and many other **sufi** saints. On this occasion tying of thread on the screens and seeking the fulfillment of one's desires was most sought after. These ceremonies also provide occasion for people of different faith and from all sections of the society to gather, mingle and interact with one another. Organisation of **Mehfil-i-Qawwali** or **sama** was the most important feature in all these **Urs**. These activities during the Mughal period and even now incorporate within them the **mela** concept, People bring their beddings and tents along and shopkeepers erect stalls alongwith the gamekeepers.

At the **dargah** of **sufi** saint **Qutbudin Bakhtiar Kaki** another unique festival **sair-i gulfaroshan** or **phoolwalon ki sair** is held every year. This unique festival of flowers, known as the procession of flowers and flower-sellers, dates back to the Mughal period. **Hindus**, **Muslims** and others participate whole-heartedly in it. Huge fans (**pankhas**) made of palm leaves and decorated with flowers and tinsel, along with floral offerings are carried in procession through the streets of **Mehrauli**. Fire dancers join the "**Sair**." The procession starts from the **Hauz-i Shamsi**, a sacred tank dating from the time of **Iltutmish** (13th century), and continues to the **dargah** of **Khwaja Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki**, popularly known as **Khawaja Qutub Sahib** (the second of the **Sufi** saints of the **Chishti** tradition), and then to the **Jog-Maya** temple. **Hindus** and **Muslims** jointly offer prayers at these two religious places. An associated function takes place at **Jahaz Mahal**, north-east of the **Hauz-i Shamsi**.

Trade fairs are our modern-day addition to the tradition of Indian fairs. They are held intermittently throughout the year in different parts of the country. **Pragati Maidan** in Delhi is a prominent place for such trade fairs throughout the year. **Book Fairs** are also held in various cities to interest the readers and to develop a reading culture.

8.5 TOURISM AND FESTIVALS AND FAIRS

The question arises about the relevance of festivals and fairs for tourism. Important point is how we, as tourist guide, tour operator, etc., should present Indian festivals and fairs to attract tourists. Here comes your role to attract tourists to these famous events of cultural tradition of India. Needless to say that both, festivals and fairs have tremendous tourism potentials both domestic as well as foreign. Your role is to present unique aspects of Indian Cultural tradition to the tourists in a proper perspective. The famous processions at the time of **Durga**

Pooja (Calcutta), **Ganeshotsav** (Bombay), **Dashehra** (Mysore, Kullu, etc.) are too famous as centre of tourists attractions. Similar, is the case with **Bihu** (Assam), and **Garba** (Gujarat) dance traditions. There are many aspects related to Indian festivals and fairs which have a potential to attract the tourists. **Balus** and **Ramas** organising dances in the evening in groups at the time of **Ganeshotsava** is equally interesting a feature of **Ganeshotsava** celebrations as do the **Ganeshotsava** processions. Similarly, at the time of **Bihu** celebrations local Assamese sport of playing with eggs can attract tourists.

On **Pongal** day when people in every street and **mohullah** tie money on the neck of bulls and the manner in which brave men try to snatch them could be an equally attractive sight for a tourist. Manner of constructing thatched houses on the occasion of **Magh Bihu** and lighting bonfires whole night and dancing on the tune of **Bihu** dances and in the morning putting these houses at fire are fascinating. Similarly, interesting sight would be to see the **lathmar holi** of Barsana and Nandgaon in Mathura.

As a person associated with tourist trade it would be of use to you to learn more about the fairs and festivals of your region.

Check Your Progress-2

1) How is **Id-ul Fitr** celebrated in India? Write in 50 words

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2) Write five lines on the **Onam** festival

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3) Write a note on **Kumbha melas** in 60 words.

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4) What are **Urs** and why are they celebrated?

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8.6 LET US SUM UP

In the present Unit we have discussed the characteristic features of various festivals and fairs of India. It is very difficult to classify various festivals and fairs of India into water-tight compartments of religious, social or economic. They are inter-religious and possess cross-cultural, intra-regional character. But whether it is celebrated by one community or another, in one region or another, all seem to have inspired by the Indian cultural tradition in one way or the other. Chief feature of Indian fairs and festivals which is also the chief feature of Indian Culture is unity in diversity. Primarily Indian festivals and fairs have rural base. Peasant and agriculture are the focal points of Indian festivals and fairs. Fire worship which is an important feature of Indian cultural tradition is also an important feature of Indian festivals. They also convey the message of victory of good over evil. Thus, most common message conveyed by socio-cultural festival is that good deeds always prevail.

8.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-1

- 1) See Sec. 8.2

All such festivals are celebrated after the harvesting seasons are over. They are based on agricultural cycles and are the hallmarks of our rural life.

- 2) See Sec. 8.2

Discuss that linkages is the chief feature of Indian festivals. Mention how during the same period various festivals are celebrated in various parts of India.

- 3) See Sec. 8.2

Mention that 'cattle' plays an important role in the rural life of an Indian, all over India since time immemorial they were worshipped. Also mention that cattle worship in the of festivals is prevalent throughout India, though it differs in name and manner of celebration.

- 4) i) Bengal
ii) Maharashtra
iii) Kerala
iv) Assam
v) Punjab

Check Your Progress-2

- 1) See Sec. 8.3.

- 2) See Sec. 8.3.

- 3) See Sec. 8.3.

- 4) See Sec.8.3 Define Urs. Discuss its importance in the life of an Indian. Also mention that they are not just the religious gatherings but its a social affair where people of all caste and creed assemble.