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Mini-Project

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Report on Gwalior Mela

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Madhya Pradesh: The state of Fairs.

Fairs are a coming together of people of various backgrounds. It is a harmonic procession of happiness and joy. Since times immemorial, the human race strives to strike a balance between dreams, reality and ambition. Fairs and festivities have always been the most powerful collective expression of Indians.

India has not only preserved, but fostered one of the most enriching experiences of human life, because fairs are usually a spectrum of fiestas and fancies. This ancient heritage has been carried forward by the people who, despite all the miseries and hardships, have always made sure to uphold this beautifully coloured part of their lives.

Madhya Pradesh goes a step further in making its fairs more special by capturing India's true festive culture. This is not just because Madhya Pradesh, as the name suggests, is geographically the 'central province' of India.

It's because the people living here form a miniature India, representing all of its desires and diversities. Hence, it doesn't come as a surprise that Madhya Pradesh is a host to all sorts of fairs, from rural to urban, from folk to tribal, and everything in between.

Madhya Pradesh has a rich legacy of fairs, expanding from *Malwa to Mahoba, from Datia to Chhattisgarh, from Orchha to Bastar*. Not only do these capture the intermingling fragrance of diversities, but also provide a source of livelihood to many. The fairs act as a backbone of Madhya Pradesh's socio-economic culture.

Even though all the fairs are unique in their own way and deserve a special mention when discussing the history of the state, the Gwalior Trade Fair is a little more special. It's significance can be imagined by the fact that many call it to be **"The Koh-i-Noor of India's Mela Culture"**.

Background of Gwalior Trade Fair

First started in 1905, the Gwalior trade fair is already more than a century old. Encompassing generations, this fair is not just older than our independence, but is also the biggest fair of Madhya Pradesh.

More than [50 Lakh people visit the Mela](#) annually. Spread over 104 acres of land, it has 1200 permanent pavilions and more than 500 pucca platforms besides 3000 open space shops. Apart from promoting trade with a quantum of business transacted over ₹100 crore in just a month.

Spread over more than a hundred acres, it is one of the most colourful fairs in North India. To help with administering, the 'Mela Ground' is divided into several 'sectors' and 'blocks'. There is a nickname given to Mela Ground as well. Located on the Race Course road, it is rightly called the *Pragati Maidan of Madhya Pradesh*.

From the last week of December to the end of January (and sometimes, until the middle of February), the Mela Ground turns into a miniaturised city. For about six weeks, everything is present -- from cyber cafes to coffee shops, from motorcars to handicrafts.

What makes it a speciality is that only a few fairs can even come close to the variety and vastness of the 'Gwalior Mela'. Like all great things, Gwalior Trade Fair has also evolved with time, going from a simple rural fair in the advent of the 20th century, to now including a big "haat" of farming cattle including horses, camels, and oxen for trade.

But, it must not be considered to be a simple trade fair. It manifests many colours of our lives, from economic to cultural, from poetic to musical. It has something to offer to everyone, from rural to urban, from traditional to modern.

Matthew Arnold once said about Gwalior Mela, that *he saw life steadily and saw it whole*.

Values

Gwalior Mela started in 1905 because of then ruler, His Highness Madho Rao Scindia. His initiative came as a fresh air of breath for people at a time when there was uncertainty about the country and in international waters.

Gwalior Mela soon became an example of how problems can be tackled and something beautiful can come out of the collective will power of masses.

Despite how the changing times kept most of the rulers preoccupied and perplexed, Highness Madhav Rao anticipated how starting this tradition would go beyond all the current problems. Amidst confusion and chaos and the rise and fall of rulers, he did something that rarely allowed other rulers to even consider.

Growth over the century

"Mela Maveshiaan", the name of the Mela when it originally started, began due to natural calamities hitting Gwalior twice in the same decade, once in 1894 and then again in 1904. They had a grave impact on farmers as they left families starving.

Hence, Mela Maveshiaan was started to help farmers by providing them a chance to bargain with farmers of other states to get competitive prices for their produce. Soon, the word got out and the Mela got popular beyond the borders of Gwalior.

Apart from the customers who come to enjoy the mela by going on rides, shopping, or grabbing a snack on food stools, the Mela is also a center for traders. By attracting buyers and sellers from all around, it has now become an extremely important socio-economic platform for people living in and around Gwalior.

Over the years, the administration rights of the Mela went to a committee of businessmen and people who were nominated. Seeing the growth potential, the

committee acted on their toes and made detailed expansion plans by the early 20's itself.

These plans consisted of systematic markets, 'bazaar'. These bazaars were intended to be equipped with multiple facilities. After Maharaja Madho Rao, Maharaja Jiwaji Rao Scindia and later Mr. Madhav Rao Scindia greatly helped in developing Gwalior Mela to the scale and vastness of what it is today.

Many people with influence have been critical in helping the Mela expand in recent times, especially ones related to the Madhya Pradesh Chamber of Commerce. However, the survival and ultimately the success of Gwalior Mela is because of the people.

In spite of multiple setbacks over the century, through years good and bad, people come back to see the fair every year and feel proud of the legacy that they've preserved.

A significant part of the Gwalior Mela is the Cattle Fair. Even today, over 10,000 cattle animals are sold within fifty odd days that the fair lasts. From cows, buffaloes, and horses, to oxen and camels, all animals are sold and bought.

Another major section of the Mela is the 'Art and Craft' region where various woodcarvers, weavers, ceramic artists, sculptors, and several other craftsmen and women attract the visitors with their beautiful creations.

Not just the artists of Gwalior, but from regions beyond the boundaries of Madhya Pradesh come to display their talents. But the Fair is not just a means of getting exposure and quenching creative thirst, as the business is a means to approximately an income of ₹60 lakh.

Critical Success Factors

- Exemption of Sales Tax gave a major boost to Gwalior Trade Fair by making it a very attractive place to trade in. Not only does it help the sellers in increasing their margins, but it helps the middle class - people who have limited budgets for their dreams.
- Another sector which got hugely benefited from these exemptions is the automobile sector. Tax cuts brought down the prices of vehicles like tractors, motorcycles, scooters, three and four-wheelers.
- Welcome to wonderland, we've got it all - From 'Kushti' to 'Kavi Sammelan', from 'Lehengas' to 'Chanderi' sarees, from Agra's famous 'Pethe' to Gwalior's own speciality 'Gazak', From 'Mathura ke Pede' to 'Bihar ke Khaze', from Kashmiri shawls to Radhasthani 'Chundaris', from international circus to juggler's shows, from 'Kavvalis' to Padmini's dance, from pincers to lawn mowers, from electronic exhibitions to book stalls.
- *This is the ocean where all rivers meet with a warble of contentment. With its wide spectrum, it has greatly contributed to the economic life of the state and has weft a fabric of social life where collectivity, collaboration and cohesiveness show the path of prosperity.*
- Traditional wrestling competitions are also arranged in the fair, in which ladies also participate. This is a great attraction, both to rural and urban populations.
- Our rich heritage of handicrafts is also laid out in the emporia called 'Shilp Bazar', which consists of about 63 permanent pucca shops for the craftsmen participating from all over India.

Significance

Past

In the past, these exhibitions depicted India's freedom movement.

Present

They reflect the developmental aspects and strategies and of the latest technological developments in the area of communication.

Autonomous Authority

Gwalior Trade Fair Authority(GTFA) - an autonomous body to look after the administration of this internationally recognized Fair - was formed in 1996 by Chief Minister Mr. Digvijay Singh which is now responsible for the whole administration of the Trade Fair.

It has its own Police station along with telecommunication facilities.

Festival Tag

In 1997, soon after the formation of the GTFA, Mr. Ramesh Chandra Agrawal of Dainik Bhaskar Group, the then Chairman of the GTFA announced that the Mela will be celebrated as a "real festival".

Recognition

The Gwalior Mela was represented in the International Trade Fair held in New Delhi and became the recipient of a prestigious reward. Mr. Ashok Sharma, the then Vice Chairman, received this special reward on behalf of GTFA from Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, the then President of India.

Summary of Interviews of Various Shop owners/Other working people

- **Mickey Mouse Air Balloon Shop Owners**

They pay a rent of about 18,000 Rs to 40,000 Rs depending on the space they have acquired, their total earnings amount to Rs 60,000 to RS 80,000.

- **Gun Balloon Shooting Game Owners**

They have to pay 20-30K for a shop, the charges are extra for corner shops as these shops can have two faces towards the main road. Their total earnings amount to 50-60k.

- **Giant Wheel Owners**

The 'highest' ROI amongst all the categories of stalls/rides interviewed was of 'Giant Wheel' owners. A few refused to disclose their daily or average sales, but the ones who agreed to give an estimate said that the overall earnings are close to 8-10 Lakhs. Typically managed by a staff of 10, the individuals easily earn over 75k in profits every mela season.

- **Coca Cola / Pizza Hut Stores**

Mainly promotional and advertising purposes

- **Small Food Stalls**

Their rent is very small compared to shop and ride owners, typically in the range of 5-10k.

- **Cleaning Staff**

It is a networking and recommendation based system, a person contacts a member of the union or community and one person tells the other and members in their family and so on. They are paid around 2k for the entire duration.

SWOT analysis

Strengths

- Famous
- Organized over a huge area to exposure to many people
- Source of livelihood for vendors and handicrafts (wo)man.
- Source of enjoyment for children and grownups.

Weakness

- Certain aspects are unplanned (like waste disposal management)
- Too much dust arises from rides as the ground is covered with sand.
- Parking can be a major issue (along with traffic management).

Opportunities

- Can improve internal transportation by collaborating with e-vehicles.
- Can do better crowd management by giving some incentives on weekdays (as crowds come more on weekends).
- Ensuring basic standards of food quality are being maintained.
- Distancing rides and food stalls as rides lead to dust.

Threats

- Too many lethal accidents on or near rides can make people afraid.
- Too many cases of food poisoning.
Frequent concerts/ programs/rallies are being organized in the same locality.
- Better quality street food is available just outside the mela.

Porter's Five Forces Analysis:

A. Threat of new entrants:

1. Due to Governmental aid and its sheer size, Gwalior trade fair enjoys a monopoly over other trade fairs in the region.
2. However, its proximity to the prosperous and heavily invested Delhi-NCR region may result in the emergence of a competitor.

B. Threat of Substitutes

1. Shopping Malls offer more competitive prices and better customer service and a few malls have opened up in the city in recent years.
2. People in rural areas are getting acquainted with online shopping.

C. Bargaining power of customers

1. People often buy late during the trade fair when sellers sell at a lowered price as they are forced to clear the inventory.
2. There are a lot of shops selling similar stuff, so it's essentially a buyer's Market.

D. Bargaining power of suppliers

1. Suppliers often focus on clearing off their stock of underselling items or the ones in low demand.
2. Some customers may sense this and may create a low-cost low-value perception of the goods sold here.

E. Competitive rivalry

1. There are other trade fairs in nearby regions like Shilp Trade Fair and Taj Mahotsav.
2. However, most of these trade fairs are much smaller or focus on niche-products unlike Gwalior trade fair. (Shilp Mela chiefly focuses on Craft-items.)

Challenges

- People buying shop 'spots' early at low prices and later selling them at very high prices.
- Current challenges like the pandemic corona-virus will badly affect the Gwalior Mela, as people will be scared and conscious as well.
- Competing melas in nearby states.
- People buying stuff towards the end of the Mela to get cheap prices as the prices are reduced to more than half as sellers try to recover as much revenue as possible selling in losses even to clear their inventory.

Future Propositions

- E-selling of shops for more equality, leaving out the mediator.
 - As noted above, certain big merchants buy many spots for shops in bulk as soon as the allotment starts and later sell them at very high prices to the actual vendors who set up shop.
 - If this entire process is digitalised, it will curb this ill practise by making the process transparent.
 - A source who doesn't want themselves to be revealed said that the actual price of shops was as low as 3k-5k.
- Still a form of recreation
 - Even though digital entertainment is becoming more and more popular, Mela is still one of the major sources of recreation with family and friends.
- A form of income for the people of rural areas by selling handmade items.

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