IMPACT OF FAIRS AND FESTIVALS ON LOCAL ECONOMY: A CASE STUDY ON TARAKEYSWAR TOWN IN HUGLII DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL

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Abstract: Fairs and festivals are important parts of the Indian cultural life. The life of Indian people revolves round the fairs and festivals. In other words we can say that fairs and festivals are heart of the Indian socio-cultural life. In India traditional fairs and festivals are connected with religious beliefs, changing season's harvests etc. They are varied in origin. They attract a large number of people from different places. Hence fairs and festivals have tremendous tourism potential both domestic as well as foreign. Tarakeswar in Hooghly district of west Bengal is very famous and pious place in India for the pilgrims. This paper investigates the impact of fairs and festivals on the economy as well as environment of Tarakeswar town and its adjacent area.

Index Term: Fairs and Festival, traditional, tremendous, tourism, Pilgrims, potential, economy.

1. INTRODUCTION:
Fair is a place where a large number of peoples gathered at specified time for purpose of buying and selling of goods. Festival is a time of celebration with involvement of family, friends, relatives and community to celebrate the special religious or cultural events. Festivals and other events that attract visitors (Light,1996) compensate for the seasonality of ordinary tourism (Higham and Hinch,2002), promote a city’s image (Roche,1994), and contribute to the development and sustainability of the urban economy (Bramwell,1997). These studies primarily investigate the economic impact of fairs and festivals (Moscardo,2007). Tarakeswar town in Hugli district of West Bengal is famous for the temple of Baba Taraknath (Shiva). Many fairs and festivals are celebrated in this town throughout a whole year. Srabani mela, Chitra mela and Shivratri mela are the famous fairs of the holy place. Tourists who belong to different castes, languages and religions visit and enjoy the fairs and festivals of the small town. Large numbers of tourists visit the pilgrim center to fulfill their religious customs during the different festival seasons. The role of the fairs and festivals is very important for the refreshment of economic condition of the residents of local and surrounding area. They are very helpful to reduce economic disparity, employment generation and can enroot again the cultural values. Many modern social evils, which are caused by materialism, can be cured with the help of the fairs and festivals.

2. THE STUDY AREA:
The Tarakeswar township area has been selected for the study of economic impact of fairs and festivals. The town and its adjacent area are situated between
LOCATION MAP OF STUDY AREA

INDIA

WEST BENGAL

TARAKESWAR TOWN AND ITS ADJACENT AREA

TARAKESWAR CD BLOCK

Kilometres

Kilometres
the parallels of 22° 51'52"N and 22° 54'20"N latitudes and 87°59'00"E and 88° 02'42" E longitudes. The average elevation of the study area is about 18 meters (59 feet). The town obtained the status of a municipality on 6th August in 1975. At present the total area of the town is 3.88km². This municipal area is divided into 15 wards for administrative purpose. Temple of Baba Taraknath is situated in the ward no.6. This municipality is surrounded by four gram panchayets.

3. Objectives:
The main objectives of the study are
a. To study the impact of fairs and festivals on the economy of Tarakewar town and its adjacent area.

b. To identify the positive and negative impacts during and after the fairs and festivals on Tarakeswar town.

4. Data Base:
The present study is based on mainly primary data source which is collected by the intensive field survey during different fair and festival session in Tarakeswar town through the Questionnaire schedule and interview techniques.

5. Methodology:
Data and information of pilgrims, economic transaction during mela season, residential status of seasonal shopkeepers during different mela seasons etc have been analyzed by the use of statistical techniques. Then the attribute data were processed and calculated by using excel software and shown by tabular format. Maps have been developed by applying G.I.S techniques.

6. Historical Background and Heritage Places of Tarakeswar:
Taraknath Temple of Tarakeswar is one of the prominent pilgrimage centers in Bengal. As per local legends it is said that Raja Visnu Das was a resident of Hariharpur of Jounpur Pargana of Ayodha in the early Eighteenth century. The Raja immigrated to Bengal for the disturbance of muslims, and took up his abode in the village of Ramnagar at Balagarh, near Haripal, about two miles away from where Tarakeswar is now located. With him came 500 followers of his own caste and 100 Brahmans from Kanauj. Later, his brother discovered a site in the nearby jungle, where cattle discharged the contents of their udders (milk) at a particular spot each day. Upon investigation he discovered a Shivalingam. After this incident, a dream to Vishnu Das revealed that the idol was the symbol of the Tarkeshwar form of Lord Shiva. Very soon a temple was built there by villagers at this spot. The present form of the temple is said to have been built by Raja Bharamalla, in 1729 AD. Temple is built with a special Bengal temple architecture. The main attractions of Tarakeswar are Temple of Baba Taraknath, Dudh pukur, Rajbari, Buddha temple, Kali and Lakshmi Narayan temple.

7. Fairs and Festivals
Hinduism is the oldest religion in the World. The secret of Hinduism’s successful survival can be traced to the imaginative and colourful celebration of its festivals by the people. Society as a whole gains a lot by celebrating these fairs and festivals around the year (Bhatiya and Solapaur, 1999). Tarakeswar town is one of the famous holy religious places in India. Its numerous devotees and pilgrims visit Tarakeswar temple coming from different parts of the country throughout the year. Most of the pilgrims come particularly on Mondays. More over during the occasion of Gajan and Shivaratri, thousands of devotees throng the temple site. Gajan mela is conducted for five consecutive days and concludes
on the last day of Chaitra month during mid-April. Shivaratri mela is another important festival of Tarakeswar. It is celebrated in late February or early March. Tarakeswar is famous all over India particularly for these three fairs and festivals.

8. INFLOW OF PILGRIMS IN TARAKESWAR

Religious tourism is motivated by faith or religious reasons (Sharple and Sundaram, 2005). Domestic and foreign tourists over the years have been shown in Tarakeswar town. The domestic pilgrims reach in Tarakeswar from the different districts of west Bengal. Besides the pilgrims come from different states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh. Tarakeswar attracts tourists round the year for its spiritual importance. However tourist’s arrival picks up mostly in the time of Srabani mela from mid-July to mid-August. In the month of Srabani mela about 2-3 lakh tourists comes per Monday. Throughout the whole month of Srabani mela about 15,00,000-20,000 pilgrims come from different districts of West Bengal and states of India. Besides in the month of makar sankranti, Ram navami, Paila Baisakh, Kartik poornima huge local and regional tourists come for worshipping Lord Shiva.

9. ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF FAIRS AND FESTIVALS IN TARAKESWAR TOWN:

Fairs and festivals play very vital role for the development and refreshment of economic condition of the residents of a region. Fair and festivals have direct and indirect impacts on communities. Fairs and festivals can attract tourist and visitors at regional, national and international level. It is one of the fastest growing forms of tourism. It can create employment opportunities, foreign exchange earnings and increase the standard of living of host community. In fairs and festivals tourism, tourist spends their money on a wide variety of goods and services. They purchase food, transport accommodation, communication and entertainment etc. This money is boosting the local economy. Fairs and festivals can also help to generate jobs and increase revenue to local people and shopping facilities. It also stimulates secondary economic growth. Tarakeswar town and its adjacent area is one of the vivid examples where fairs and festivals are organized in a specific month of every year. Many local residents like the pujaris, pandas are directly dependent on the visiting of pilgrim tourists for their day to day earning. The pilgrim tourists are generally found interested in purchasing photo, image, idols of Baba Taraknath and other articles. Due to the gathering of many pilgrims every year a number of temporary hotels and restaurants are opened in the township area. Many local people change their working sector and engaged in different types of work during mela season. Many permanent residents surrounding the temple area arrange home stay for the tourists. In the peak seasons like Sraboni mela, Chaitra mela it becomes the main source of income for the local people.

9.1 SRABANI MELA:

The season of Srabani Mela in the month of Sraban plays an important role in the economy of the municipal area. During this mela (Fair) about 922 stalls of worship materials, stationery shop, food stalls, C.D. and cassettes are placed temporarily in all different wards around the temple.

RESIDENTIAL STATUS OF MOMENTARY SHOPKEEPERS

The seasonal shopkeepers are mainly residents of the Tarakeswar town and its adjacent villages. Out of 922
Residential status of seasonal shopkeepers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residential status</th>
<th>stalls</th>
<th>Residential status</th>
<th>stalls</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Municipal area</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>Bhimpur</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baidyapur</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Gouribati</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bajitpur</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Bhata</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hauli</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Chandur</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhanjipur</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Other place</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: based on field survey stalls, the owners of 696 stalls were the residents of different wards of the municipal area. The owner of 150 stalls were the residents of the adjacent area and owner of 76 stalls came from different place of Hugli, Howrah, Burdwan, Nadia districts

### Collection from Different Vehicles during Srabani Mela

In the month of Srabani mela session large number of tourists come in Tarakeswar town using different vehicles like bus, Lorry, private car, taxi, van etc. Due to parking of cars in new bus stand or Rajbari field or other vacant place in Tarakeswar, tax is collected by municipal authority as parking charge. This money is used to cover different expenditure during Srabani mela season like electricity charge, decoration charge and temporary labour charge. The excess money is spent by the municipality throughout the year for various developmental purposes. According to survey report during the month of Srabani mela in Tarakeswar municipality collected about Rs. 2,46,360 from the vehicles as transportation tax.

#### Daily Income of Stall Keepers during Srabani Mela

During the Srabani mela season daily average income of owners of 142 stalls earn less than Rs.200, owners of 552 stalls earn Rs.200-400 and owners of 228 stalls earn more than Rs.400 in every day. But especially on the Mondays of srabani month the graph of daily income rises sharply because excessive number of tourists comes on the Mondays during this season. Owners of 449 stalls earn less than Rs.2000, owners of 390 stalls earn Rs.2000-4000 and owners of 83 stalls earn more than Rs.4000 on each Monday of the Sraban (Mid July to Mid August) month. The primary survey report on this aspect has been given in the table below.
Chaitra mela is another important festival to strengthen the economic condition of the town and its adjacent villages. Gajon mela is conducted during the last five consecutive days and completed on the last days of Chaitra month (in Mid-April). Different kinds of temporary stalls are opened in the surrounding areas of the temple of Lord Shiva. Some pilgrims stay here for the last five days and they observe their religious rituals. After worshiping in the days of Nil Sasthi, and Charak they make departure from this place. Hence different wards of the municipality surrounding the temple become over-crowded with the pilgrims during the last five days of Chaitra month.

**Importance of Chaitra Mela**

Chaitra mela is certainly a time to reinvigorate the economic condition of the residents of municipal and its adjacent areas. During the last five days of Chaitra month businessman, pujaris, pandas, casual labour of hotels and restaurants, owners of lodges and hotels, owner and labours of permanent and temporary shops and stalls, farmers etc. are benefited directly or indirectly by the fair and festival.

**Residential Status of Stall Owners**

Out of 816 stall owners 457 were the residents of municipal area, 137 were the residents of the adjacent area and the 222 stalls were the residents of other place. The stalls were opened in Ward nos. 3, 4, 5 and 6. The Stall keepers who mainly belong to the lower income group, were the residents of Baidyapur, Bhanjipur, Bhata, Bhimpur, Chandur and Gouribati. So this mela season certainly give them opportunity to refresh their economic condition.

Residential status of the stall keepers in Chaitra mela

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residential Status</th>
<th>No. of stalls</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Municipal area</td>
<td>457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baidyapur</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhanjipur</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhata</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhimpur</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandur</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gouribati</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other place</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>816</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: based on field survey
9.3 Shivaratri Mela:
Shivaratri mela is another important festival of Tarakeswar. It is celebrated in late February or early March. Many pilgrims, both men and women come on the day and night of shivaratri in Tarakeswar to pour water on the Shiva Linga of Baba Taraknath (God). About 70-80 temporary stalls were opened on the day of Shivaratri surrounding the temple, mainly in the Ward nos. 4, 5, 6 and 13. About 1,00,000 to 1,50,000 pilgrims come on that day from the adjacent villages and nearer districts like Howrah, Kolkata, Burdwan etc. A fair is organized in the ground of Rajbari on this occasion and it continues for 10-12 days. The permanent and seasonal shops and stalls make formidable business during this festival period.

Positive Impacts of Fairs and Festivals:
The results of the foregoing study have clearly demonstrated that fairs and festival tourism is playing a major role in socio-economic development of Tarakeswar and its adjacent areas. Opening of job and business opportunities, although most of them are temporary in nature, is of prime importance. Local people get absorbed in different jobs associated with the tourism industry. These open up the new possibilities for ventures and attract new investment in the township area. Expenditure incurred by the tourists provides the necessary income for preserving and managing places of attraction. Such spending also becomes a source of revenues for municipal council in the form of parking, tourist entry tax etc. Spending by tourists is distributed in different sectors and creates jobs and open source for revenue generation. It contributes to local wealth, economic development and regeneration.

Negative Impacts of Fairs and Festivals:
Some negative impacts can also be identified in the study area for the organization of fairs and festivals tourism. The main problem is increase of solid waste generation during fairs and festivals. As a result expenditure to clean the solid waste has increased significantly. Besides the price of daily commodities goes up during the seasons of fairs and festivals. So the local people face serious financial problems. Huge number of disorganized tourists converges into this small town during the fairs and festivals. As a result traffic jam on the roads becomes a regular phenomenon during the seasons of fairs and festivals. The condition becomes particularly hazardous during the periods of Srabani mela, and Chaitra mela seasons. Daily commuters of Tarakeswar town and its adjacent areas reach to their workplace, railway station, bus station and educational institutes through many problems during mela seasons.

Conclusion:
The present paper has revealed that the fairs and festival tourism in Tarakeswar has been playing a vital role for the development of economic condition in the study area. Directly or indirectly many people engaged in different types of informal working sectors associated with serving the pilgrims during mela seasons. Earning opportunities have increased in both formal and informal sectors. The proportion of workers engaged in seasonal business is more than those engaged in permanent business sector. Fairs and festivals certainly reduce economic disparity among
the residents in this region of Hugli district. However, many problems, like solid waste disposal, pollution, traffic jam, water scarcity inadequate supply of electricity, blockage of sanitary system which occur particularly during the fairs and festival periods. A master plan is essentially required for alleviation of these problems in this municipal town. More temporary toilets and dustbins will be constructed throughout the different wards of the study area. Pilgrims of Tarakeswar should be more responsible, self disciplined and careful regarding the use of the holy place.

**REFERENCES:**