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FABULOUS FESTIVALS OF NAYAKS AND ITS ECONOMIC DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

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ABSTRACT

Culture and traditions of Madurai are being flattered by the national interest in their culture. This enhances the residents pride and promotes the preservation and cultivation of the local culture. Thus this festival helps in promoting and preserving the traditions and culture of Madurai. Besides giving peace and breaking the monotony of the people, the festivals also help in boosting the local economy. The festivals of Nayaks also gain importance because of their economic impact and economic distribution of wealth. Being a highly spiritual country, festivals are at the heart of people's lives in India. Festivals are events ordinarily staged by a local community, which centers on and celebrates some unique aspect of that community. Tamil Nadu is a land of festivals and culture. Festivals of Tamil Nadu have traditionally been preservers of the art and culture of the State, especially the festivals of Nayaks period are celebrated with great grandeur to highlight the temple art of the region. Nayaks festivals besides establishing the architecture of the temple, also act as channel in the distribution of economic wealth throughout the region.

Keywords: Festivals, Nayaks, Economic Impact, Tamilnadu, Madurai, Promoting the culture.

INTRODUCTION

Being a highly spiritual country, festivals are at the heart of people's lives in India. Festivals are events ordinarily staged by a local community, which centers on and celebrates some unique aspect of that community. Tamil Nadu is a land of festivals and culture. Festivals of Tamil Nadu have traditionally been preservers of the art and culture of the State, especially the festivals of Nayaks period are celebrated with great grandeur to highlight the temple art of the region. Nayaks festivals, besides establishing the architecture of the temple, also act as channel in the distribution of economic wealth throughout the region.^[1]

The Madurai Nayaks were rulers from around 1529AD until 1736AD, of a region comprising most of modern – day Tamil Nadu with Madurai as their capital. The most notable of Nayak dynasty were the King. Tirumalai Nayak (1623-1659), and the queen, Rani Mangammal (1689-1704). The Nayak reign was an era noted for its achievement in arts, cultural and administrative reforms, revitalization of

temples previously ransacked by the Delhi Sultans, and inauguration of a unique architectural style. As Nayaks were pleasure loving people, they introduced many festivals in their region for their recreation.^[2]

FESTIVALS AND RECREATION

Madurai city is called 'the City of Festivals' because of Tirumalai Nayak only. During the region of Tirumalai Nayak only. Chitrai festival was introduced as a great grand festival in Madurai. Before Nayaks era, Meenakshi Thirukalyanam and Chariot procession, which are the components of chitral festival now, was celebrated in the Tamil month of Maasi (February – March). As the people were busy in harvest in this month, people did not come forward to pull the heavy Chariots which were donated by the king to the temple. But people gathered in large number in Thenoor when Alagar came here from Alakarkovil during the month of Chitrai. People feel free in this month as this month is the post harvest month and also spring season. So the king shifted the Thirukalyanam and chariot procession

from the month of Maasi to Chitrai and he named it as Chitrai Festival. The Alagar also comes to Vandiyur near Madurai instead of going to Thenoor. Alagar Vaigai Elenthuarulal is called as Chithrai Thirunaal. As many people gathered for this 15 days festival in the city, the festival becomes a Chitrai Peruvizha. Even today thousands and lakhs of people gathered on Chitra Pournami day and give their offerings to God. The main income of the city is derived from Chitrai Festival only.^[3]

Next to Chitrai Festival, Navarathiri Festival is the great festival of Nayaks period. In those days, Navarathiri Festival was celebrated as the symbol of valour by the Kings. Even this festival was celebrated by the Chola Kings. According to Puzhalendi Pulavar, during this festive season, the irresponsible poets' heads were cut off by Ottakuthar, the court poet of Cholas. This declared the existence of this festival during the Cholas itself. Now – a – days, this festival is celebrated to honour Goddesses for nine days. Following the Vijayanagar rulers, the

Madurai Nayaks, especially Tirumalai Nayak, celebrated Navarathiri Festival for nine days in the Tamil month of Puratchi (September – October). During this festive season, the small kings paid tax to the King and this festival was celebrated by the Kings only. As a gift to Sethupathi for his great help, the Nayak besides giving gold and money, he also gave the right to celebrations, which were conducted to prove the valour of the people. But now – a – days, it has become the Goddesses Festival.

Another great festival of Thirumalai Nayak is Thaipooza Theppa Thiruvizha. Thirumalai Nayak dug the Vandiyur Teppakulam and originated the big floating festival. As his birthday falls on Pusa Star day in the month of Thai (January – February), Thaipoozam is celebrated in Madurai to honour Tirumalai Nayak. On this day the deities Goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundaeswarar will be taken out to attend the Theppam Festival at Mariamman Teppakulam in Vandiyur. On that day, the God and Goddess are taken around the central mandapa of the Teppakulam

in a decorated boat (theppam) and the Theppakulam is decorated grandly with lights and flowers. Thousands of people gathered to see the floating festival. As this month (Thai) is the season of sugarcane, sugarcane and sugarcane based business get progressive and many farmers benefitted through this festival.

Deepavali is the remarkable festival of the Nayaks. It is celebrated in the month of Aipasi (October – November). According to legends, there is no relationship between Narahasuran and Deepavali. Deepavali is not the festival of Tails and there is no mention about this is legends. Deepavali festival is pushed on to Tamil Nadu by Madurai and Senji Nayaks and therefore people celebrated from 16th century only. Until sometime earlier, the people of Chennai and Chengalpattu districts did not wear new clothes on Deepavali. During Nayak period, Deepavali as New Day and they write Puthu Kanakku on that day. As North Indians like Gujaratis lit Deepas on that day, it had become Deepavali.

Rani Mangammal instituted the famous Unjal (swing) festival in the

temple of Meenakshi to be performed in the Tamil month of Aani(June – July). Her contemporary portrait may be seen in the Unjal Mandapam. On all celebrations, the royal scepter (sengol) used to be placed before the Meenakshi deity and then placed on the throne for the whole day. A painting in the Meenakshi Amman Temple shows the temple priest handing over the royal scepter to the Queen. It may also be mentioned that Hindu kings ruled their kingdoms as the servants of God. The land was ruled in the name of the presiding God of the country.

According to Abi Dubois (missionary 1792 – 1823), the Roman Catholic Priest and the author of ‘Hindu Manners and Customs’ wrote that the three great festivals of Nayaks period were Navarathiri, Deepavali and Pongal. From that it is evident that Pongal festival is also celebrated during the Nayaks period as a religious festival. Now – a – days only, it is celebrated as a harvest festival.

Besides these festivals, during the time of Tirumalai Nayak, the

Tiruvillaiyadal festivals were instituted; as also the Avani Mula, Chitra and Vaikasi Vasanta festivals held in the Pudu Mandapam of Madurai. So from Tirumalai Nayak's period, festivals are celebrated all the twelve months of the year.

IMPACT OF FESTIVALS

Festivals have major effects on the local economy directly and indirectly that the spending by visitors on local goods and services by event-tourist has a direct economic impact on local businesses and also passes the benefit more widely across the economy and the community. The festivals of Nayaks also gain importance because of their economic impact and economic distribution of wealth. The major economic impact is on food and beverages – Madurai is city with number of restaurants and hotels with variety of foods. During the Chitrai festival time and Theppa Tiruvizha, hotels and restaurants are open over night. The income generated during this festival time gets double or tripled. Visitors from city and around the city visit the city to

see the decorations, lighting at the mandapas especially in the night. It requires the food and beverage services. There are hundreds of stalls serving food, tea, coffee and drinking water. It provides 3 times more income than other days of the year.^[4]

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

All these festivals allow the local communities to connect with their talent, art, craft, food, dance and other forms of cultural landscape and promote significant livelihoods through entrepreneurial activities. They fetch an economic boom through the culture of exchanging gifts, sweets and fruits which are completely associated with the economic agents such as producer, entrepreneur and consumer. In every festive season, demand for specific goods and services driven by cultural events and supply follow the demand by and large. Thousands of shopkeepers who live in a temporary shop on the streets find new opportunities during festive period.

Many market players believe that launching a new product or service

during festival time attracts its target customers as compared to non-festival season. Therefore, producers and entrepreneurs wait for the auspicious occasion to launch their product or service for its demand and to establish the pan-India brand. Hence, new products like automobile, home utensils, furniture and electronics etc, enter into the market during that time.^[5]

Festivals encourage the trend of sustainable spending specifically from the higher end of the social strata than the lower ends, and the lower ends tend to benefit from the consumption of the higher end by gaining additional income through entrepreneurial and tertiary activities.

SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Celebration of the festivals is the way of life of Indians. Whole society integrates during the festivals to celebrate it privately and publicly in various temples, residential complexes, and at the streets by singing devotional songs and organizing peaceful processions of the Gods and Goddesses

and exchanging sweets and gifts, etc, to the relatives, friends and neighbours. Therefore, it explores the situation to understand our co-existence of customs and culture with the economic agents.

Twelfth Five-Year Plan of India more specifically emphasized on inclusive economic growth by accommodating the marginalized sections into the mainstream economic system. In this practice, planning architects and policy makers still need to go a long way to achieve their principal goal due to splitting up of the people on the basis of gender, religion, social status and economic class by vigilant or reckless follow of western economic theories. This kind of incomprehensive economic approach never integrates the Indian society as a whole. We need to have more comprehensive understanding towards people customs, traditions, festivals and culture. On the other way our festivals succeeded in integrating the people, in community values and in ties social bondage to attain the peace, prosperity and social integrity of all the

social strata in addition to bringing them into the mainstream economic system.^[6]

Road passenger transport services – During the festival time roads are closed and two wheelers and for wheelers are restricted in the main city area because of crowd. The road passenger transport services become very important in those days. The public transport company provides public transport facilities to Madurai. Visitors from surrounding Madurai preferred this public transport to enter in the city during the festival time. The public transport company run extra buses with relatively more number of buses scheduled to play during peak days. Extra buses run round – the – clock, after 11.00pm till early morning hours with 25 per cent extra fares. It gives 2-3 times more income than other days of the year. The demanding transportation facilities show that number of visitors are also increasing year by year.

Recreational Services – Decorations, music, lighting is the great experience for the visitors. 90% people enjoy the music, decoration with lights.

So the traders of the public address system and electrical fittings get an enormous business. Children with the age group of 5-15 are interested in the festival because of variety of sweets, food and lights. Female have their interest in rituals and enjoying the festival with sweets and recipes.^[7]

An effective planning is done by the traders of Madurai for seasonal bargains resulting in good profits during the festival. Variety of traders right from a pedlar of peanuts to a stall keeper selling pearls do have business with the visiting population. Villagers do find their way to spend their money to buy the desired goods of their choice. Clothes, jewellery, fancy goods, ballons, etc, are all marketed by the competing traders who put up temporary sheds or stalls and invite the pulic to buy from them. The response is great. The people are socially inclined a bargain and buy their needs from these traders. It is also customary for the visitors to buy something during the festival apart from buying the eatables, sweetmeats etc. The

whole sellers are benefitted because of this seasonal trade.^[8]

The villagers come to Madurai in the bullock carts from distant places. The village blacksmith gets his lionshare of business to mend the wheels of bullock cards eventually to make it fit for travel. So as the carpenters do have good business in the repairing of such bullock driven carts. The small shops in the villages sell bags and trunks for carrying sufficient goods for their camp in the city. The timber, bamboos, thatches are sold in a large quantity and they are in a great demand in the summer and for the festival. The hawkers who sell bangles, kumkums and the like easily get the profit during the festival like Meenakshi Thiukalyanam. Economically the Chitrai festival stabilizes the rural and urban economy through effective trade channels.^[9]

The annual Chitrai Festival of Madurai is also the occasion of the biggest annual fair at which some hundred thousand cattle change hands. IT is held in April – May at Tallakulam and lasts for a fortnight. About 1,00,000

cattle is said to have assembled here from various parts in 2011. This cattle fair is largely visited by the village crowd.

The Department of Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu organizes a big fair at the Tamukum grounds during this festival. Some years ago, it was run by the private parties and later by the Municipality. This fair consists of shopping complex, stalls of the different departments of he state and central governments and other agencies, colour fully displaying their work, recreations and cultural entertainments. These stall have great educational value especially to the children and do the illiterate masses.

Culture and traditions of Madurai are being flattered by the national interest in their culture. This enhances the residents pride and promotes the preservation and cultivation of the local culture. Thus this festival helps in promoting and preserving the traditions and culture of Madurai. Besides giving peace and breaks the monotony of the people, the festivals also help in boosting

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