

SANTINIKETAN POUISH MELA: AN ECONO-CULTURAL AND ECOLOGICAL REVIEW

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Abstract:

Santiniketan Poush Mela is a legendary socio-cultural gathering in West Bengal where large number of people with different castes and creeds are integrated every year from different nooks of this country and abroad. About 1350 stalls of different kinds have taken part in the 2010. It is a good place where craftsman exchange their excellencies of skill, culturally equipped groups and individual claim their cultural expertise. Different vulnerable cultures find fresh breath of survival and local rickshaw pullers enjoy reliable economic revival. But, recently, the strong onslaught of highly profit centric, consumeristic motivation of the shark businessmen, the poor craftsmen is being endangered. The rudimentary motto of 'Gurudev' Rabindranath Tagore to have assured integrated econo-cultural development of the rural expertise has to some extent undergone into metamorphism. Within very scarce spatial and infrastructural environment, huge population pressures, pressure of commercial stalls have added another problematic dimension like air pollution, sound pollution and garbage pollution which are not ecologically supportable. In this present study, various outskirts of cultural, ecological and economic profiles have been outlined.

Keywords: *Life Style, Riksha Puller, Pollutants, Cottage Industry, Cultural Environment*

Introduction:

In memory of the indoctrinated day (21st December 1843) of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore in "Bramho Dharma" as well as establishment of 'Upasana Mandir' (7th Poush, 1298 in Bengali Calendar and 21st December in 1891) such a universal Santiniketan Poush Mela began to start. The rudimentary philosophy and spirit of this mela according to precursors Devendranath Tagore and his son 'Gurudev' Rabindranath Tagore were to create such a conducive scope where rural and urban people would be able to interact cordially by heart and soul in respect to their all sorts of lifestyle, creativity, generosity, cultural specialty, spirituality and so on. In the period of its initiation, this mela was ins and outs rural centric but with the fast changing passage of time, now Santiniketan Poush Mela is characterized by pompous dazzling and uproar of profit monger businessmen, national and multinational companies, their product marketing and exhibition. Desperate onslaught of business circle, have almost uprooted the poor rural craftsman and their natural but sophisticated hand made articles. The intolerable growth of gathering within very limited infrastructural facilities, environmental qualities on that period has become suffocated and endangered.

Objectives:

In this present study, an endeavour has taken to outline the scenario of the Santiniketan Poush Mela with special reference to socio-economic and ecological perspectives.

Location:

Santiniketan is just 1 km north of town Bolpur in Birbhum district which is 154 km north of Kolkata. Santiniketan is mainly universally famous because of Rabindranath Tagore and his amazing creation, Visva-Bharati University.

Database and Methodology:

Layout of mela, records of stall have been collected from Mela Committee of Santiniketan Poush Mela, Department of P.R.O. of Visva-Bharati; Pollution data from the Centre for Environmental Studies of Visva-Bharati, Akhil Bharat Bhuvvidya O Parivesh Samiti (N.G.O.) of Santiniketan, for 2001-2002 and from Department of Environment and West Bengal Pollution Control Board. Socio-economic information is derived through questionnaire survey.

Economic Review :

In first occurrences of Poush Mela (1894), only 30 to 40 temporary shopkeepers decorated the mela which was increased to 1200 during 2004 and 1350 during 2010. Organizing expenditure of this mela was 3339 INR during 1894 but now it is more than 175000 INR. During Poush Mela (23rd to 25th December) Santiniketan becomes the densest space because lakhs of people gather in this time. As per huge concentration of population and shopkeepers a large sum of economic transaction is generally conducted. The following table reveals the nature of transaction.

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Table-1: Per day average sales structure of different kinds of stalls, 2010

Stall Types	Per day average sale in INR/stall
Sweet	7525
Dokra	1500
Foothpath	1490
Restaurant	14500
Stationary	3450
Exhibition	26388
Handicrafts	9500
Shawl/patti	31400
Wooden furniture	16500
Amusement	15200

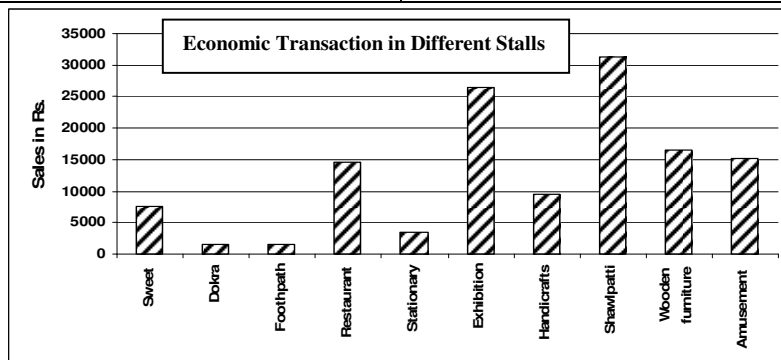


Fig. 1

Effect of Poush Mela on the Local Rickshaw Pullers:

Now, strong competitions have increased among them and extended facilities of town service buses have squeezed their relative level of earning. So, the two fruitful periods 'Poush Mela' and 'Basanta Utsav' are to some extent afford them to have achieved reliable income. As large number of tourists during Poush Mela period are concentrated, the rickshaw pullers do work unrest with toil and moil for day and night. In this period, every rickshaw pullers earn more than Rs. 175. About 20 days including 15th December to 5th January such a promising condition generally goes on.

Table-2 : Per Day Average Income of Rickshaw Pullers Before Mela (10 Days) During Mela (3 Days) and After Poush Mela (11 Days) of 2010

Date	Income in Rs.	Date	Income in Rs.	Date	Income in Rs.	Date	Income in Rs.
13 Dec.	95	19 Dec.	110	25 Dec.	215	31 Dec.	160
14 Dec.	98	20 Dec.	108	26 Dec.	205	1 Jan.	220
15 Dec.	97	21 Dec.	128	27 Dec.	195	2 Jan.	205
16 Dec.	98	22 Dec.	180	28 Dec.	180	3 Jan.	140
17 Dec.	102	23 Dec.	210	29 Dec.	182	4 Jan.	134
18 Dec.	110	24 Dec.	230	30 Dec.	190	5 Jan.	132

Source : Direct interaction with rickshaw pullers.

Inter State and Intra State Immigration of Stall Keepers:

Santiniketan Poush Mela is so famous that large number of stalls mainly different co-operative societies gather here. Large number of stalls from Jammu and Kashmir (mainly with shawl and woolen dresses), Bihar (iron works), Haryana (Handloom), some stalls from Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh join spontaneously in this occasion. Intra state or inter district immigration pattern indicates that stalls with varying number from different districts take part in this Mela. As per the contribution, Barddhaman, 24 Parganas, Kolkata, Murshidabad demand special mentionable space.

Table-3 : Inter State Immigration of Stalls (2010)

Name of the State	Number of stalls	Name of the State	Number of stalls	Name of the State	Number of stalls	Name of the State	Number of stalls
J&K	22	Bihar	14	Karnataka	1	Assam	2
Haryana	2	Orissa	3	Kerala	2	Manipur	1
Uttar Pradesh	2	Andhra Pradesh	1	Jharkhand	16	Madhya Pradesh	1

Source: "Public Relation Office, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan.

Table-4: Inter District Immigration of Stalls

Name of the district	Number of stalls	Name of the district	Number of stalls	Name of the district	Number of stalls	Name of the district	Number of stalls
N. 24 Pargana	32	Purulia	14	Murshidabad	18	Kolkata	240
S. 24 Pargana	18	Burdwan	84	Darjeeling	08	N. Dinajpur	07
E. Medinapur	12	Nadia	12	Maldah	4	S. Dinajpur	05
Bankura	16	Howrah	42				

Source : "Public Relation Office, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan.

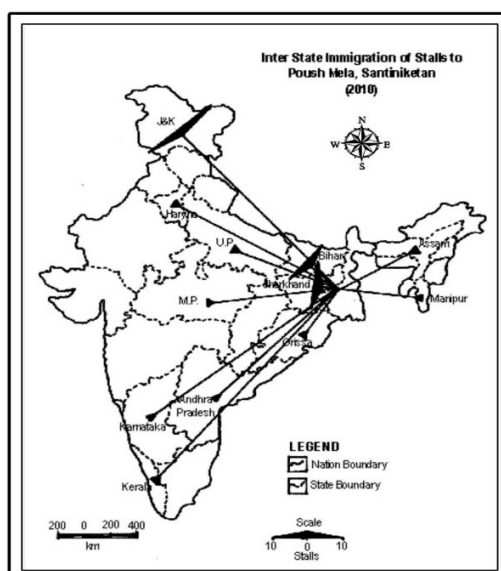


Fig. 2

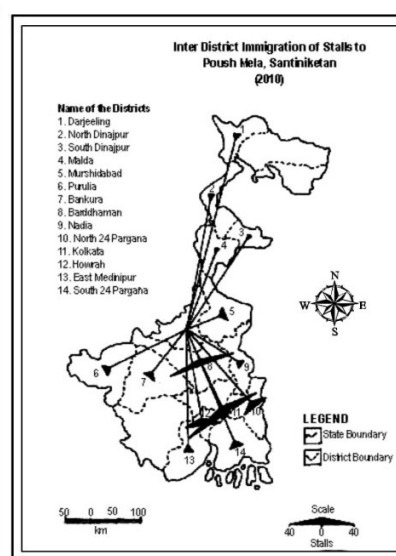


Fig. 3

Pollution of Poush Mela – A Problematic Issue:

Lakhs of people as concentrated in a very short space (half sq.km) for consecutive few days causes huge dust concentration at the lower atmosphere. Profuse fueling of coal, wood, diesel and kerosene also supply momentum for air pollution fair. Use of plastic bags, food waste, frugal food articles etc. also create heap of garbage. Due to lack of proper disposal of latrine, urinal, different places without much discrimination they used to use. Such a foul smell adds a new dimension of air pollution and soil quality deterioration. The extent of pollution becomes maximum on 24th December because aggregation of people is maximum on that day attracted mainly by 'Atashbaji'. In a word a temporary pollution dome is generally created during Mela period. In the following tables the nature of pollution are shown.

Table-5: National Ambient Air Quality Standard

Pollutants	Time Weighted average	Industrial Areas	Residential Rural and other areas	Sensitive Area
Sulphur-dioxide (SO ₂)	Annual Average	80 µg/m ³	60 µg/m ³	15 µg/m ³
	24 Hours Average	120 µg/m ³	80 µg/m ³	30 µg/m ³
Oxide of Nitrogen (NO ₂)	Annual Average	80 µg/m ³	60 µg/m ³	15 µg/m ³
	24 Hours Average	120 µg/m ³	80 µg/m ³	30 µg/m ³
Suspended Particulate Matter (RPM)	Annual Average	360 µg/m ³	140 µg/m ³	70 µg/m ³
	24 Hours Average	500 µg/m ³	200 µg/m ³	100 µg/m ³
Respirable particulate Matter (RPM) (size <10 micron)	Annual Average	120 µg/m ³	60 µg/m ³	50 µg/m ³
	24 Hours Average	150 µg/m ³	100 µg/m ³	75 µg/m ³
Carbon-monoxide (CO)	8 Hours	5 mg/m ³	2 mg/m ³	1 mg/m ³
	1 Hours	10 mg/m ³	4 mg/m ³	2 mg/m ³

Source: Centre Pollution Control Board.

*Ozone (O₃) USEPA standard for 1 hour average is 120 ppb (Parts Per Billion)

Table-6: Average Air Quality of the Mela Premises

Parameters	Unit	98 Percentile	50 Percentile	Parameters	Unit	98 Percentile	50 Percentile
SO ₂	µg/m ³	25.3	9.3	NO _x	µg/m ³	66	12
CO	µg/m ³	2.7	1.1	RPM (size <10micron)	µg/m ³	34	16
NO	µg/m ³	4	2	O ₃	ppb	838	199
NO ₂	µg/m ³	64	11				

Source: Centre of Environment Science, Visva-Bharati.

NO_x = Oxides of Nitrogen; NO = Nitric Oxide

Table-7: Range of Different Pollutants During Mela Periods

Parameters	Unit	Range	Dates			
			23.12.'03	24.12.'03	25.12.'03	26.12.'03
SO ₂	µg/m ³	Average	5.44	7.40	15.81	4.66
CO	mg/m ³	Average	0.08	1.40	1.94	1.08
O ₃	PPb	Average	16	18	16	20
NO	µg/m ³	Average	2.03	1.96	2.30	1.94
NO ₂	µg/m ³	Average	18.82	14.09	23.76	9.01
NO _x	µg/m ³	Average	20.86	16.05	26.06	10.98
RPM	µg/m ³	Average	212	270	390	221

Source: Centre of Environment Science, Visva-Bharati.

Major observation

- i. The basic air pollutant affecting the ambient atmosphere of the fair is due to the respirable suspended particulate matter (size <10 micron) and oxides of nitrogen (NO_x).
- ii. The respirable suspended particulate matter (RSPM), RPM had been observed during the evening hours when the movement of visitors were maximum and continued late night.
- iii. The respirable suspended particulate matter and NO_x had been observed due to use of the solid fuels in the mela premises.

Most irritating pollution is sound centric which becomes maximum during evening. The sound quality in different parts of the Mela ground has been described in table 8 to 11.

Table-8 : Noise Quality					Table-9 : Noise Quality				
Location : Western part of the mela ground					Location: Northern part of the mela ground.				
Date/Time : Evening, 24.12.01					Date/Time : Evening, 24.12.01				
Instrumental Swing	Slow noise (dBA)	Leq. (dBA)	Fast noise (dBA)	Leq. (dBA)	Instrumental Swing	Slow noise (dBA)	Leq. (dBA)	Fast noise (dBA)	Leq. (dBA)
North	64.4-90.8	83	81.2-92.8	84.93	North	77.7-84.2	81.31	74.1-87.4	84.03
South	91.3-97.9	94.94	84.5-101.8	96.75	South	80.3-88.5	85.49	81.2-89.0	85.67
East	79.2-91.5	86.75	90.6-98.6	94.9	East	70.8-89.7	83.57	74.4-92.7	85.3
West	84.9-96.8	93.18	87.0-98.0	93.51	West	80.0-89.9	84.84	70.8-90.4	86.3
Table-10 : Noise Quality					Table-11 : Noise Quality				
Location : Central part of the mela ground					Location: Eastern part of the mela ground.				
Date/Time : Evening, 24.12.01					Date/Time : Evening, 24.12.01				
Instrumental Swing	Slow noise (dBA)	Leq. (dBA)	Fast noise (dBA)	Leq. (dBA)	Instrumental Swing	Slow noise (dBA)	Leq. (dBA)	Fast noise (dBA)	Leq. (dBA)
North	81.5-88.1	85.49	78.9-90.7	87.09	North	81.4-100.3	97.4	90.2-104.8	100.23
South	81.0-87.1	84.62	74.8-89.7	83.82	South	82.6-100.8	98.29	96.9-107.8	103.3
East	78.2-93.9	88.76	83.1-96.6	89.76	East	78.3-101.0	96.51	95.9-104.5	100
West	79.7-89.2	84.67	76.8-89.9	85.84	West	90.0-101.0	96.83	96.9-102.2	100.03

Monitoring Conducted by CSME, CK-11, Sector-2, Kolkata-700091

Qualitative Shifts and Infrastructural Jeering:

Only five or six water supply points and crude urinal spots are not just sufficient to vehicle on the huge population pressure. Long queue for water collection, acute scarcity for accommodation and meal arrangement for the participants who join in the mela committee sponsored cultural function are. Actually dazzling, pompous commercialized mode is not able to hide on such basic and crucial problems. Moreover, quality of cultural programmes is degradating. The spearheading theme of this Poush Mela as per 'Gurudev' i.e. to integrate different rural entities with urban entities, cultural co-ordination, cultural transmission, exchange of skills and experience of different cottage industry oriented co-operative societies, create scope for the emergence of cultural qualities of the individual or group, is now billion miles away from the initial goals.

Conclusion:

However to sustain the universal fragrance of this Poush Mela, inner essence of cultural theme should be carefully nestled. Infrastructural up gradation at least due arrangement of water points, urinal spots, satisfactory fooding and accommodation facilities should be provided to the participants. Dispersal of such concentration of stalls is necessary as necessary as to restrict the sound level. Desperate fueling should also be mandatorily prevented. Timely sprinkling of water in the Mela ground to some extent alleviates the over concentration of suspended particulate matter in the air to some extent. Santiniketan undoubtedly a cultural hotspot of our country and 'Poush Mela' is considered as a good signature of this cultural environment. So it is earnestly necessary to preserve the cultural status and ecological stability with motherly touch and care.

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