**A Report on the Brahmaputra Pushkar and Sanskrit Mahotsav**

**History of Pushkar Mahotsav**

Pushkaram is the Hindu river festival” Pushkara” meaning one who nourishes and carries 3.5 crores water bodies of religious and ecological importance. All the rivers are the creation of Lord Brahma, 12 major rivers in India have been assigned by the Rasis ( Zodiac Sign). When the planet Jupiter ( Brihaspati or Guru) transcends from one zodiac sign to another every year, that event is celebrated as “ Pushkara Festival” for 12 days as “ Brihaspati” takes 12 days to settle down in the river.

Brihaspati is recognized as the Guru ( teacher) by all the Devas, as he drives away darkness and hence he is bright and pure. Generally, Pushkara remains in the Kamandala of Lord Brahma, but planet Brihaspati wanted to live with Pushkara. Hence he requested Lord Brahma to allow him to take Pushkara with him. But, Pushkara was not agreeable. So, on request of Brihaspatu it was decided that Pushkara will enter the river during the transitional period of Brihaspatu from one river to another and after that he would return to the Kamandala of the Brahma when Brihaspati settles in the new river corresponding to the zodiac sign. The river during this period becomes pure and nourishes the devotees.

**Activities undertaken during the Mahotsav:**

The devotees engage in activities such as Snana (taking bath by taking a dip in the river), Dana ( Charity), Japa ( recitation of Mantras), Archana ( Prayers, offerings, Aartis) and Dhyana ( meditation)

Major rivers assigned Zodiac signs:

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| Aries – Ganga  | Leo – Godavari | Sagittarius – Brahmaputra  |
| Tauras – Narmada | Virgo – Krishna | Capricorn – Tungabhadra |
| Gemini – Saraswati | Libra – Kaveri | Aquarius – Indus |
| Cancer – Yamuna | Scorpio – Tamirabarani | Pisces - Pranhita |

As in Kumbha Mela where there is divine energy ( presence of Amreet) in the river, so worshipping the river during this period is very blissful, similarly in the case of Pushkaram, Brihaspati, Pushkar and the river nourishes the devotees.

With the blessings of his Holiness shri Shankaracharya of Shri Kanchi Kamakoti Preetam, Kanchipuram and by the efforts of the Hon’ble Chief Minister of Assam, Shri Sarbananda Sonowal, this year Pushkaram was celebrated in the banks of the river Brahmaputra from the 5th November, 2019 to 16th November, 2019 wherein elaborate arrangements were made for the pilgrims to take a holy dip on the banks of the mighty Brahmaputra and seek the blessings of God and their ancestors.

Daily Chatur Veda Prayan, Maha Rudhra Japa, Chandy Prayan and Kamayartha Homas were performed in the morning during this 12 days. Post morning rituals Holy water ( Kalasa Teertha) was offered into the river Brahmaputra and the daily Pushkar bathing was performed.

 Nadhi Aarti, Vishnu Sahasra Parayan, Lalitha Sahasra Namah Archana, Rudhra Krama Archana were performed in the evenings. Daily evening preachings were undertaken by Satra Adhikaris and the spiritual Gurus.

The Hon’ble Chief Minister of Assam monitored the event as an average of 20,000 persons per day was expected to visit the state to take the holy dip on the mighty Brahmaputra River. Keeping in view of the expected large inflow of tourists to the city during the 12 days, the Hon’ble Chief Minister of Assam undertook a minute to minute report on the celebration of the festival.

**Initiatives Undertaken by the State Government under Swach Bharat Mission**:

The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is the most significant cleanliness campaign led by the Hon’ble Prime Minister of India who led a cleanliness pledge for mass movement of cleanliness. Keeping in tune with the initiatives of the Hon’ble Prime Minister of India, the following initiatives were undertaken during the festival

* Barricades at the places of Holy dip, Cloak Rooms, Changing rooms for male and Female, Bio toilets, and adequate drinking water was provided to the pilgrims.
* Uninterrupted power supply and all electricity requirements were provided in the venue.
* Special cleanliness drive like cleaning of the streets, collecting garbage from the site etc was undertaken to prevent the pilgrims from enduring any hardships.
* Medical facilities were set up in the venue to provide immediate medical facilities to the pilgrims.
* Ample street lights were provided in the venue.
* Kamakhya Devalaya, Umananda Authorities, Basistha Temple Authorities had arranged easy access to their temples for the pilgrims to pay their obeisance.
* Hop on hop off services were introduced for easy access of the pilgrims to visit the myriad tourist destinations in Guwahati. Electric buses were introduced to ensure that less carbon footprints were emitted in the city in comparison to the increased footfall to the state during this period.
* Employment avenues were generated for the youths of the State tourist guides.
* The handloom and handicrafts of the state were promulgated to cater to the needs of the pilgrims.
* Cultural functions were performed to showcase the rich culture and tradition of Assam.
* Ethnic cuisine stalls were arranged to offer delectable cuisine of the state.
* CCTV cameras were installed in the venue to avoid any untoward incidents.
* No plastic zone was declared in the venue to avoid littering of the river.

**Statistical Analysis**: The estimated footfall for the festival was 2 – 3 lakhs. The pilgrims were enthused to visit Kamakhya temple, Umananda temple, Basistha Temple etc. The statistics of tourist arrivals along with revenue earned from the vehicles that were rendered for the services of the tourists to ply to various tourist destinations within the vicinity of the state are illustrated as follows:

**Total tourists**: 2,24,000 nos

**States**: Telangana – 1,18,633 nos

 Andhra Pradesh – 62012 nos

 Tamil Nadu – 16276 nos

 Karnataka – 30769 nos

 Kerela – 12310 nos

The revenue earned by plying the buses for the pilgrims during the period 5th to 12th November is illustrated above. The highest revenue earned was on 13th November, 2019.

The festival provided an opportunity to appreciate and assimilate the state’s diverse religious, architectural, culinary and handicraft heritage, the spectacular Brahmaputra ghat, delectable organic food and the vibrant handicrafts created by the local artisans. With a thoroughly invigorating and engaging programme, the festival offered the tourists an experience of Pushkaram like never-before.

**Opportunities for promotion of the tourist destination to the Southern States:**

After interaction with a few tourists who could speak broken English, taxi drivers, it was observed that the tourist took a dip in the river and proceeded to destinations like Shillong, Cherrapunjee, and Kaziranga. The pilgrims desired to go to destinations like Chandubi, Pobitora, North Guwahati , Sivasagar. However, as they had pre booked their tickets, there was paucity of time to visit these destinations. Their visit to the state has immensely increased the multiplier effect on the state’s economy especially to the Stakeholders of Tourism like hoteliers, tour operators, tourist guides etc.

**Onward Journey from Guwahati**: Kaziranga: 21,000 nos approx, Shillong : 57,000

During the festival most of the hotels in the city were booked. However from the statistical analysis above it is observed that 90% of the tourists were of the middle income group and 10% of the tourists were high end tourists. Some of the tourists returned to their native place after taking a holy dip in the river.

From the above statistical analysis, it was observed that 30% tourists visited Kaziranga and 70% tourists visited Shillong. The tourists were unaware of the other destinations like Manas, Majuli, Pobitora etc.

The tourists who visited the Pushkar festival mostly hailed from the following states: Telangana – 49%, Andhra Pradesh -26%, Karnataka- 13%, and Tamil Nadu – 7% and Kerela 5%

**Output of the festival:**

* A significant contribution to the economy of Assam.
* Cultural exchange and mutual understandings amongst the people of Assam and the pilgrims of the respective states.
* More than 2.00 lakhs pilgrims/ tourists got the first hand experience to know about Assam. This experience of the pilgrims will help in the growth of tourist footfall in Assam as word to mouth information is one of the effective publicity tools to promote the state.
* The return of investment from the festival is minimal in comparison to reach those target audience through the conventional method of publicity tools.
* The festival will create a tremendous potential to boost the Mighty Brahmaputra River to popularise amongst the pilgrims like the holy river Ganga.
* The footfall in Kamakhya , Umanada, Basistha temples increased immensely. The prospects of promoting Guwahati as a pilgrim destination has increased manifold.

**N.B: The photographs of the the Brahmaputra Pushkar Festival 2019 is annexed herewith.**

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