

Event Management: A Study on the Ardh Kumbh Mela 2019

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ABSTRACT: Kumbh Mela is the biggest religious event in India and millions of pilgrims come for the purpose of bathing in the sacred waters. It is believed that taking a dip into the holy river washes away the sins and religious-minded people perform bathing rituals for ablution. As the event draw closer millions of people from across the world, management of the event is imperative in order to avoid mishap. It is curious that an event of such grandeur is attended without any prior invitation and people from different walks of life are equally embraced. A study of Ardh Kumbh Mela 2019 is needed as it is one of a kind. The study highlights the facilities provided by the Prayagraj Mela Authority and shows how the mela was a Swacch Kumbh, Safe Kumbh, Sanskritik Kumbh and Digital Kumbh. From the literature review, six importance of Kumbh Mela has been found out. In addition, three criteria have been taken for the Kumbh 2019 in resemblance to the qualifying criteria set by UNESCO for inscription on the list of intangible cultural heritage. The study concludes that proper event planning evokes lasting impression in the psyche of people and creates a resurgence of peoples' interest and participation.

KEYWORDS: UNESCO, intangible cultural heritage, religious event, tourism industry.

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I. INTRODUCTION

India is a country with diverse religions, traditions, festivals, faiths and events. Proffering an insight in the jaw-dropping mores, ebullient fairs, orgiastic festivals, India is a conclave of events. Events are an essential motivator of tourism and event management is a fast growing professional field where tourist represents a potential market for planned events while the tourism industry has become a vital stakeholder in their success and attractiveness¹. A study of the typology of planned event reveals the differences in their purpose and reflects the uniqueness of every event. The typology revealed the eight categories of planned events, viz, Cultural Celebrations (festivals, carnivals, commemorations, and religious events); Political and State (summits, royal occasions, political events, VIP visits); Arts and Entertainment (concerts, award ceremonies); Business and Trade (meetings and conventions, consumer and trade shows); Educational and Scientific (conferences, seminars and clinics), Sport Competition (amateur/professional, participants, etc); Recreational (sport or games for fun); and Private events (weddings, parties, etc)². The present study encompasses the cultural celebration as a planned event taking the case of Ardh Kumbh Mela³ 2019.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. To study the event conducted by the Prayagraj Mela Authority⁴ for the management of Ardh Kumbh Mela 2019;
- ii. To assess the Ardh Kumbh Mela 2019 in contrast to the criteria as set by UNESCO⁵ for conferring intangible cultural heritage.

¹ Getz, Donald. "Event Tourism: Definition, evolution and research." *Tourism Management*, 2007: 403-428.

² Getz, Donald. *Event management and Event tourism*. Second. New York: Cognizant, 2005.

³ The term 'mela' connotes a fair or Hindu Festival derived from the Sanskrit word melá 'assembly'. English Oxford *Living Dictionaries*.

⁴ Prayagraj Mela Authority is a permanent body set up under the UP Prayagraj Mela Authority Allahabad Act, 2017 for organising the event of Kumbh. The Prayagraj Mela Authority ensures that the basic amenities are provided in Kumbh 2019 to the devotees visiting the Mela. Kumbh Mela official website. www.kumbh.gov.in/en/prayagraj.

⁵ UNESCO is the ellipsis for United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

KUMBH MELA: A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

In India, mass bathing practice is evident in the gangetic plains where a massive fair is organised popularly known as Kumbh Mela. It is a mass congregation of pilgrims either from the homeland or overseas with the object of dipping into the sacred river. The etymological meaning of Kumbh can be traced from Sanskrit where 'Kumbh' means pitcher⁶. The Kumbh Mela 2019 is the Ardh Kumbha Mela held at Triveni Sangam⁷. The Mela started from 15 January to 4 March 2019 with three Shahi snan (royal bath) and three snan.

Typology of Kumbha Mela



The Kumbh Mela is broadly classified into five types⁸:

a. Maha Kumbh Mela

The Maha Kumbh Mela is held every 144 years in Prayagraj (Allahabad).

b. Purna Kumbh Mela

The Purna Kumbh Mela is held after every 12 years in Prayagraj (Allahabad).

c. Ardh (half) Kumbh Mela

The Ardh Kumbh Mela is held in every 6 years at Haridwar and Prayagraj (Allahabad).

d. Kumbh Mela

The Kumbh Mela is a very vital occasion that takes place every 3 years following four locations in India: Prayagraj (Allahabad), Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik.

e. Annual Mini Kumbh Mela

The Annual Mini Kumbh Mela, also known as the Magh Mela is held every year at Prayagraj (Allahabad), except the years of Purna Kumbh Mela and Ardh Kumbh Mela.

Importance of Kumbh Mela

From the survey of literature, six importance of Kumbh Mela may be made evident: mythological importance, astrological importance, spiritual importance, social importance, economic importance and national importance.

Mythological importance:

Kumbh Mela is intrinsically to the elixir of life or the nectar of immortality which makes it legendary⁹. The mythical belief is intrinsically linked to such ritualistic practices.

6 Collins English Dictionaries. www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/kumbh-mela.

7 The term 'sangam' connotes a confluence of rivers especially that of the Ganges and Jumna (Yamuna) at Allahabad. English Oxford *Living* Dictionaries.

8 Rodda, John C., and Lucio Ubertini. "The Basis of Civilization--water Science?" Symposium on the Basis of Civilization--Water Science?. Wallingford: International Association of Hydrological sciences, 2004. 165.

Astrological importance:

The Kumbh Mela occurs in the four distinct places based on the planetary positions based on the story of elixir of life¹⁰. As of Prayagraj, two possibilities are found: When Jupiter enters the Aries constellation and the Sun and the Moon are in Capricorn constellation, the Kumbh festival is held at Prayagraj on the new moon day; and, when the Sun is in Capricorn and Jupiter moves in to Taurus, the Kumbh festival is held at Prayagraj.

Spiritual importance:

The spiritual importance of Kumbh Mela can be linked to ritualistic bathing performed in the sacred waters. In the ancient texts mention has been made of the importance of bathing at sacred waters and how one can attain merits by bathing in the holy waters. In the great epic Mahabharata¹¹, the entire Tirtha Parva narrates the benefits derived by bathing in the holy waters. Thus devotees believe by bathing in the Ganges one is freed from sins and are liberated from the cycle of life and death. This grand event witnesses mass congregation of pilgrims for the purpose of ablution.

Social importance:

The Kumbh Mela is an event where no prior invitation is required, yet millions of pilgrims from across the world gather to celebrate the holy event. Since time immemorial, Kumbh has been uniting the people of India and the world at large. Although bathing rituals is the core focus, the social aspect of the festival also revolves around the Vedic mantras, holy revelations, mythical stories, traditional performances and devotional prayers. The core message of the Kumbh Mela is the unification of all beings without any strata, sharing of noble thoughts, harmony and universal brotherhood.

Economic importance:

The economic importance of Kumbh Mela can be understood from the revenue generation of the different sectors involved directly or indirectly and the employment opportunities associated with the Kumbh Mela across various sectors.

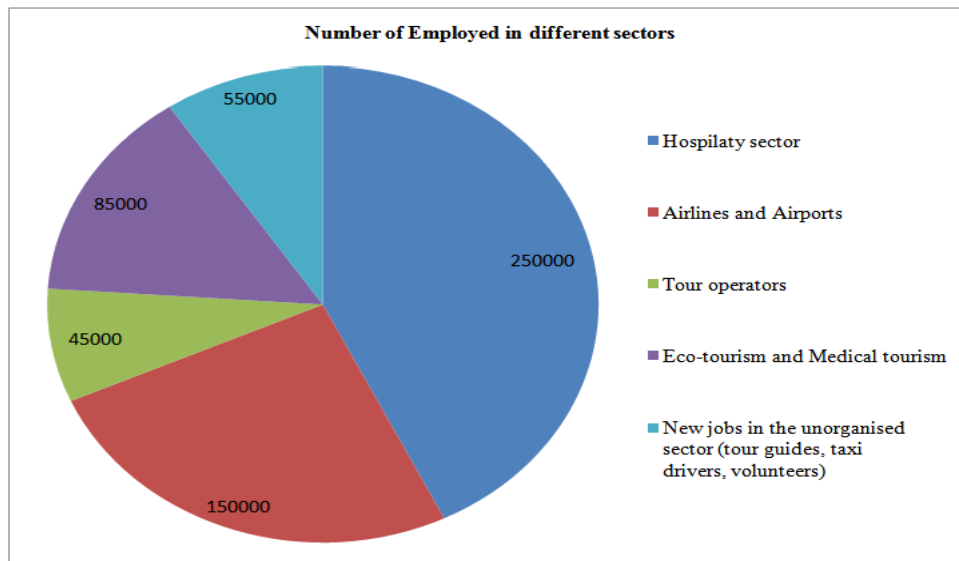
A tentative assessment of the tourism-implication of the Ardh Kumbh Mela of 2019 was made by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII)¹². According to CII, this grand Mela of 2019 is expected to generate revenue of Rs. 1.2 lakh crore for the State. Further CII estimated that there was approximately six lakh workers associated with the Mela across various ancillary sectors. The breakdown of employment in various sectors is depicted in the following chart:

⁹ The story begins with the Sage Durvasa becoming infuriated with the gods and cursed them to death. To offset this curse, the gods needed to churn the Sea of Milk popularly known as Samudra Manthan to obtain the nectar of immortality (amrita). The gods unable to perform the task alone took the help of demons (asura) and decided to divide the nectar equally. Lord Vishnu dove into the ocean talking the form of a tortoise to provide the proper balance to the Mount Mandara. As soon as the nectar appeared, argument broke out between the gods and demons and one of the demons stole the nectar. To bring back the pot (kumbh), Vishnu again took the form of enchanting Mohini and pursued the demons for the pot. The gods' flight lasted twelve (divine) days, during which they set the pot down at one place on each day. Eight of these places were in the heavens, and four were on earth – Prayag, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nasik. Kumbh Mela is held every third year in rotation at Haridwar, Allahabad (Prayagraj), Nasik and Ujjain. Lochtefeld, James G. "The Construction of the Kumbh Mela." *South Asian Popular Culture*, 2004: 103-126.

¹⁰ The story of Samudra Manthan, one of the best-known episodes in the Hindu mythology, narrated in the Bhagvad Purana states that the sacred alignments of celestial bodies directly relate to the Kumbh festival. It took 12 divine days to carry the Amrit to the heavens. As one divine day of Gods is equivalent to one year of the humans, the journey to the heavens symbolizes 12 years in human terms. That is why every twelfth year when Jupiter enters the Aries constellation on the day of the new moon in the month of Magh, the Kumbh festival is organized. Mythological studies suggest that the Kumbh festival and the Ganga are related to each other. The Ganga flows in Prayagraj but Godavari of Nasik is also called the Ganga or the Gomti Ganga. Similarly, the Shipra (in Ujjain) is recognized as the north branch, the Ganga of Kashi. From that place onwards, Shipra becomes the east branch where it assimilates with the Ganga. Astrological Significance. Kumbh Mela Official Website. www.kumbh.gov.in/en/astrological-significance.

¹¹ The Mahabharata, Book 3: Vana Parva: Tirtha-yatra Parva. The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa Translated into English Prose from the Original Sanskrit Text by Kisari Mohan Ganguli [1883-1896]

¹² Kumbh to generate Rs 1.2 crore revenue: CII. *Economic Times*. 21 January 2019. https://m.economictimes.com/news/economy/indicators/kumbh-to-generate-rs-1-2-lakh-crore-revenue-cii/amp_articleshow/67609608.cms



Source: Compiled from Economic Times

The chart projects the employment levels which will lead to increase in income for the businesses as well as local people. Besides the Mela, not only saw a massive congregation of people coming from all parts of India, but it also could draw huge number of pilgrims as well as visitors from other countries of the globe. The countries included UK, Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, Mauritius, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka among others.

National and global importance:

Kumbh Mela is inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity under United Nations educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)¹³. It is the largest harmonious gathering of people on the globe where millions of people disembark without any invitation. Thus India is honoured to have its intangible heritage recognised worldwide.

Facilities Provided For The Kumbh Mela 2019

The facilities provided by the Prayagraj Mela Authority are listed below¹⁴:

- i. **800 special trains by the Indian Railways:** The Indian railways have proposed running 800 special trains from various stations of Allahabad district in addition to the regular trains run by the North Central Railway.
- ii. **Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI):** The Railways proposed to use technology, including artificial intelligence (AI), in an enormous way to tackle the enormous hustle of passengers to the holy city during the Kumbh Mela. IBM Intelligent Video Analytics is used for crowd control at the stations and its adjoining areas. In addition, a new mobile app called Kumbh Rail Seva is launched to broadcast information to train users and others relating to Kumbha Mela. This makes the Kumbha Mela 2019 as a Digital Kumbh.
- iii. **Disaster Management:** A Disaster Management Control Cell (DMCC) has been set up for providing services across the Mela premises. In addition, a vector control unit has been formed to counter infectious diseases. In order to fight epidemic, fire hazard, flood, stampede, etc, dedicated team has been formed and procedures designed accordingly.
- iv. **Setting up of Lost-and-Found digital centre:** As the Mela city is spread across 3200 hectares, it is likely that people may get lost. To mitigate this issue, 15 digital lost-and-found centres have been set up. All centres are interconnected with a central server. Information of lost and found pilgrims are

¹³ Kumbha Mela. UNESCO Intangible Heritage Lists. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/kumbh-mela-01258>.

¹⁴ Kumbha Mela Official Website. www.kumbh.gov.in

broadcasted with photos on LED screens at each centre. This makes the Kumbha Mela 2019 as a Safe Kumbh.

- v. **Public accommodation:** More than 20000 public accommodations have been constructed by the Mela authority for the pilgrims with facilities of overnight stay along with safety measures.
- vi. **Ganga Pandal:** A state-of-the-art cultural hall has been set up for the pilgrims with a seating capacity of 10000 people. Various cultural events are showcased at the Ganga Pandal with artists coming from across the country.
- vii. **Convention Halls:** Six convention halls have been set up in the Mela area with more than 500 cultural programmes and 5000 artists. This makes the Kumbha Mela 2019 as a Sanskritik Kumbh.
- viii. **Media Center:** Ultra modern international media center has been set up for the media persons and journalists coming to the Kumbha from across the globe.
- ix. **Vending Zones:** There have been more than 900 stalls of food items, utensils, grocery, clothing, etc in designated vending zones to cater to the needs of pilgrims.
- x. **Amusement Zones:** Three amusement zones have been set up with 3D projection theatres, variety of attractive games and other engaging activities.
- xi. **Paint My City:** This mission was launched with more than 20 lakh square feet of the city have been painted by various artists. This showcased the entire city as a beautiful bride.
- xii. **Waste management and cleanliness:** More than 1, 15,000 toilets were installed and more than 1500 swachhagrahis engaged in the monitoring of the operations and usage of dustbins and toilet. In order to create awareness for the protection of the biodiversity of the river Ganga, various roadshows, workshops, etc were organised and banners, hoardings, etc were distributed to disseminate information regarding the importance of cleanliness. This makes the Kumbha Mela 2019 as a Swachh Kumbh.

The Three Pillars Of Kumbha Mela 2019

In 2017, the UNESCO conferred the title of intangible cultural heritage to the Kumbha Mela by stating that the Kumbha qualifies the criteria set by the UNESCO¹⁵. Among the various criteria, the study aims to explain three fundamental criteria: Recognition, identity and continuity, Distinctiveness and Transmission.

Recognition, identity and continuity: Recognition, identity and continuity has been a qualifying criterion for inscription on the Lists established by the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).¹⁶ The Mela is recognised by the religious practitioners, individuals, communities, affiliated groups as part of their own heritage. The Mela involves different socio-cultural activities making it a culturally diversified festival. Similar practices have been witnessed in the recently concluded Ardh Kumbha Mela 2019. It showcased the cultural programs for continuity of our heritage. Further the Ardh Kumbha got recognition in the Guinness World Record for the largest crowd management, largest sanitation drive and largest painting exercise of public sites¹⁷.

Distinctiveness: Distinctiveness is another qualifying criterion for inscription on the Lists established by the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).¹⁸ The Kumbha Mela is

¹⁵ Kumbha Mela. UNESCO Intangible Heritage Lists. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/kumbh-mela-01258>.

¹⁶ The experts noted that article 2.1 of the Convention provides three criteria with which the ICH submitted for inscription must comply: the intangible cultural heritage must

(1) be recognized by communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals as part of their cultural heritage,
(2) provide them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. Report of the Expert Meeting on Criteria for Inscription on the Lists established by the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. 2005.

¹⁷ Kumbh Mela 2019 enters Guinness Book of World Records: Government. Zee Media Bureau. March 3, 2019 www.zeenews.india.com.

¹⁸ With reference to the mention of “human creativity” in article 2.1 of the Convention, one expert proposed to introduce a selection criterion based on the “excellence” or “uniqueness” of the ICH element submitted for inscription, which could also serve as a threshold to avoid too many inscriptions. The proposal was rejected as it would be too close to the concept of “outstanding value”. Nevertheless, some participants suggested that a criterion could be included on the “distinctiveness” of the ICH proposed for inscription, but could not reach clarity on what that term would refer to. Report of the Expert Meeting on Criteria for Inscription on the Lists established by the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. 2005.

distinct for it encourages syncretism among individuals without any discrimination ranging from sadhus (saints) and Naga Sadhus who follow the path of spiritual discipline, hermits secluded from the mainstream and the common people. In fact, in the Ardh Kumbha 2019, there is debut of the third gender reflecting a paradigm shift in the conformist outlook. Apart from that, the uniqueness of the Ardh Kumbh lies in the amenities provided by the Mela Authority for the pilgrims. The traditional procession of Akharas called 'Peshwai' during the Shahi snan included the transgender Akharas too. The exclusivity even lies in the fact that such congregation of populace for a common purpose of ritualistic bathing is indeed unnoticeable anywhere else.

Transmission: Transmission is yet another qualifying criterion for inscription on the Lists established by the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).¹⁹ Knowledge and skills related to Kumbh Mela are transmitted through the Guru-Shishya parampara (teacher-student relationship). The process of transmission is continuous and knowledge is proliferated by way of saints teaching their disciples about traditional practices. In the Ardh Kumbha Mela, various convention halls exhibited the ritualistic traditions making it the hub of cultural events.

II. CONCLUSION

The Kumbha Mela 2019 has indeed set a yardstick for the future events. Similar practices have to be sustained or at best upgraded for the upcoming Kumbha Mela in 2021 at Haridwar. More the privilege more is the resurgence of peoples' interest and participation. Besides, the implication of such congregations from the perspectives of growth and potential of the tourism industry is colossal.

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¹⁹ The experts considered that continued transmission, aimed at ensuring the viability of ICH, is a main objective of the Convention. They discussed and chose not to recommend a criterion to ensure the integrity of the transmission process. They agreed that the transmission of ICH is a continuous process, both among and within generations, as well as beyond national borders. When considering the transmission process, they recommended avoiding the term "tradition", which could be understood as "rooted in traditional practices" and lead to the stigmatisation of native groups. Various terms were proposed as alternatives, such as the term "transmission" itself, "collective memory", "shared experience", "community identity" or "historical continuity". Report of the Expert Meeting on Criteria for Inscription on the Lists established by the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. 2005.