

Explainer



# Maha Kumbh: Amalgamation of Spirituality, Faith, Culture, Unity

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*Maha Kumbh, once in 144 years event, to host 400 million people in the largest congregation of people globally spreading shared values that Hindus believe and propagate*



## **Introduction**

Kumbh Mela derives its name from ancient Sanskrit language. In Sanskrit, mela means fair while Kumbh signifies a pitcher with nectar of immortality. Kumbh Mela is the largest and most significant recurring Hindu pilgrimage event in Bharat. During Kumbh, people from world over converge at holy rivers for a sacred bath to atone for their sins and attain liberation or moksha from all worldly attachments.

Kumbh Mela are held at Haridwar in northern hill state of Uttarakhand where the holiest of river Ganges flows from mighty Himalayan ranges; Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh which sees coming together of Ganges, Yamuna, and Saraswati; Nasik in Maharashtra through which river Godavari flows and Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh that hosts Shipra river. These locations alternate every twelve years for holding the Kumbh melas.



Maha Kumbh denotes largest Hindu spiritual gathering globally and perfectly reflects a healthy mix of community, tradition and commitment. In 2025, Maha Kumbh will take place in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh during January 14 - February 26. It's billed as a breathtaking event that will bring tens of millions people from all over world in their pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. One estimate put the gathering at 400 million people that equal almost the entire European Union's 27-member countries

Kumbh Mela transcends religious barriers, considering its historical and cultural significance, representing universal human desire for peace, purification, and unification.

## Historical Foundations

Kumbh Mela's roots are deeply ingrained in Hindu Puranas and ancient Vedic texts, especially the legend of Samudra Manthan (the ocean's churning). As per the texts that exist for millennia, demons (Asuras) and gods (Devas) worked to stir the cosmic ocean in pursuit of Amrit, the nectar of immortality.



There was a furious skirmish when the pot (kumbh) that held the nectar emerged. Lord

Vishnu, assuming the persona of Mohini, carried the pot across skies to prevent Amrit from ending up in wrong hands. Four drops of nectar fell on Earth during this celestial journey sanctifying Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nashik, the four holy places where the Kumbh Mela is held.

The most auspicious of all Kumbhs is Maha Kumbh Mela which takes place once in 144 years. It's a unique and rare occasion of spiritual and celestial significance. Scientifically, Sun, Moon and Jupiter's alignment during this time affects tidal forces and energy flows, intensifying the sanctified environment at Prayagraj's Triveni Sangam, where the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati come together.



Astrologically, this alignment is considered to increase spiritual potency because Moon rules emotional equilibrium and intuitive powers, Sun represents vitality and cosmic energy while Jupiter bestows heavenly wisdom. It is believed that this heavenly arrangement will produce an unmatched opportunity for spiritual purification and rejuvenation.

During Maha Kumbh, millions of pilgrims assemble in Prayagraj for a dip in the holy water of Triveni Sangam to atone for their sins and be freed from cycle of rebirth. The site's holiness is enhanced by its unusual geographical and astronomical alignment; ancient texts refer to this time frame as "gateway to moksha (salvation)."

It is believed that interaction of cosmic energies directs divine energy into the confluence, providing devotees with unique chance to transcend earthly bounds and establish a connection with the celestial realm. The Maha Kumbh is profound celebration of cosmic harmony and human dedication because of the fusion of science, astrology, and spirituality.



## Rituals and Their Profound Significance

### *Ritual Bathing (“Snan”)*

At heart of Kumbh Mela is the sacred act of bathing at Triveni Sangam. Devotees believe that immersing oneself in these holy waters during the festival purifies the soul, washes away sins and brings one closer to attaining moksha (Salvation). The ritual is most potent on designated Shahi Snan (Royal Bathing) days which are as follows for 2025 Kumbh Mela:



- **January 14, 2025 (Makar Sankranti): First Shahi Snan**
- **January 29, 2025 (Mauni Amavasya): Second Shahi Snan**
- **February 3, 2025 (Basant Panchami): Third Shahi Snan**
- **February 12, 2025 (Magh Purnima): Major bathing day**
- **February 26, 2025 (Maha Shivratri): Final Snan**

Shahi Snan processions led by the revered naga sadhus and other ascetic orders (“Akharas”) are grand spectacles that symbolise spiritual hierarchy of the event. Naga Sadhus known for their austerity and renunciation are the first to bathe paving the way for millions of devotees to follow.

### *Spiritual Discourses and Devotional Activities*

Kumbh mela serves as a platform for spiritual enlightenment through Satsang (spiritual gatherings), kathas (storytelling of faith-based texts), and bhajans (devotional singing). Renowned saints and scholars deliver discourses on vedic philosophy to modern challenges of spirituality, fostering a deeper understanding of Hindu traditions.



### *Yoga & Meditation*

The festival’s serene environment provides an ideal setting for yoga and meditation practices. Daily sessions led by accomplished yogis help participants achieve physical well-being and mental clarity, complementing their spiritual journey. Special camps are set up for teaching ancient techniques such as Pranayama, Hatha Yoga and Dhyana (meditation).

## **Cultural and Social Dimensions**

### ***Celebration of Unity in Diversity***

Kumbh Mela's appeal transcends faith, attracting people from all walks of life regardless of caste, creed or nationality. The very act of bathing and praying together fosters a sense of equality and universal brotherhood emphasising shared spiritual goals that unite humanity.

### ***Cultural Showcases***

Kumbh Mela is a living museum of Bharatiya culture that offers an immersive experience of Bharat's artistic heritage varying from performances of classical dance forms like Kathak and Bharatanatyam to folk music and theatrical renditions of Hindu epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Handicraft exhibitions and culinary stalls enrich the cultural landscape.

### ***Platform for Social Welfare***

In recent years, Kumbh Mela has become a hub for social initiatives including health camps, sanitation drives and educational programmes. These efforts not only benefit the pilgrims but also uplift the local communities making the festival a catalyst for constructive change.

### ***Community driven Projects***

Many organisations and individuals set their camps to help pilgrims. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is one such prominent cultural and social organisation in Bharat which has played a pivotal role in enhancing infrastructure and inclusivity at Kumbh Mela. Guided by its philosophy of "Seva" (service) and community building and bonding, RSS-inspired organisations have undertaken several initiatives to make the festival more accessible and impactful.

### ***Environment and Cleanliness***

RSS and fellow Hindu organizations have launched a comprehensive campaign to promote cleanliness and environmental protection during Maha Kumbh. With millions of devotees and kalpvasis (pilgrims camping for a month) expected, a host of Hindu organisations are focusing on creating garbage-free zone at Kumbh site.



Central to this initiative is "One Bag, One Plate" campaign aimed at reducing plastic waste and promoting sustainable practices. As part of this effort, RSS plans to distribute over 1.5 crore eco-friendly plates and cloth bags to devotees, saints, kalpvasis and religious groups attending the Kumbh. These items, collected from households and organisations across the country will replace single-use plastic and disposable items like 'dona-pattal' (leaf plates).

Volunteers will also educate visitors on proper waste disposal, encouraging them to use designated areas for garbage thereby maintaining cleanliness and protecting the environment.

The "One Bag, One Plate" initiative not only underscores importance of sustainability but serves as a unifying force, connecting families and communities across Bharat in a collective effort to support this monumental gathering.

Students for Development (SFD) or Vikasarth Vidyarthi, known for its commitment to environmental and student development causes will carry its tradition of running plastic-free Kumbh campaign at Prayagraj Kumbh. The organisation will conduct an extensive Janjagran Abhiyan (public awareness campaign) across Kumbh grounds urging devotees and pilgrims to refrain from using plastic.

Hundreds of students will participate in this campaign, motivating visitors to reduce plastic usage thus promoting sustainability during Kumbh. Additionally, Nadi Kumbh will be organised focused on conservation and cleaning of sacred rivers. This campaign will encourage everyone to take an environmental pledge which includes commitments like avoiding plastic, planting trees and conserving water—actions that reinforce core message of environmental conservation and protection.

## *Health Initiatives*

During Kumbh Mela, RSS-inspired Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad will set up health camps offering free medical check-ups and emergency services. ABVP's Pharma Vision initiative will involve over 500 medical students from across the country who will serve as part of a seven-day internship programme. These interns will operate medical camps throughout Kumbh offering free general health checkups to pilgrims.

Doctors will oversee these health assessments, providing free consultations, medications, and vital health precautions.

In addition to this, pharmacy graduates and postgraduates, along with diploma students will engage in an extensive public awareness campaign. This initiative will focus on promoting health and hygiene practices with emphasis on women's health. Female professionals and students will be stationed to offer health services specifically designed for women ensuring comprehensive care for all visitors to the Kumbh.

Their focus on hygiene and waste management also aligns with broader goals of environment sustainability.

## **Safety and Monitoring**

To ensure Kumbh's safety, RSS has mobilised 1,000 trained volunteers who will work in shifts alongside police and other authorities. These volunteers will be stationed at key locations including the Sangam Nose, lost-and-found centres and crowd-heavy zones while others will assist at railway and bus stations to manage traffic and guide visitors. The volunteers are also being trained in disaster management, fire prevention and crowd control to ensure the safety of attendees.

## **SAKSHAM**

Saksham, an organisation inspired by RSS, is set to make a transformative impact at Maha Kumbh 2025 through its ambitious Netra Kumbh initiative. Netra Kumbh aims to address critical need for vision care among pilgrims by offering free eye examinations to over five lakh individuals and performing life-changing surgeries for more than fifty thousand people.

With support of skilled ophthalmologists, trained volunteers and state-of-the-art facilities, Saksham will establish eye care camps throughout mela townships. These camps will provide comprehensive screenings, distribute prescription glasses and facilitate surgical procedures such as cataract operations in partnership with leading hospitals.

Netra Kumbh exemplifies Saksham's mission to empower individuals by restoring vision, enhancing quality of life and fostering inclusion. For many underserved pilgrims, this initiative offers a vital opportunity to access specialised care they might not otherwise afford. Rooted in the spirit of selfless service (seva) that defines Kumbh Mela, Netra Kumbh integrates healthcare into cultural and spiritual fabric of the event.



By addressing both physical and social well-being, Saksham's efforts highlight transformative potential of service-driven healthcare, making Kumbh not just a spiritual gathering but a platform for meaningful societal change.

These initiatives by RSS and its inspired bouquet of organisations reflect holistic approach to Kumbh Mela, seamlessly integrating health, environmental awareness and social responsibility. Together, they ensure the Mela remains a beacon of spiritual, cultural and ecological significance. Organisations such as Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Seva Bharati, Janjati Kalyan Ashram, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, Rashtra Sevika Samiti, etc. will lead targeted public awareness campaigns in their respective domains embodying RSS's ethos of selfless service and commitment to societal well-being.

## Message to the World

Kumbh Mela is more than a faith-based festival; it is a living testament to humanity's enduring quest for meaning and connection. As the world grapples with challenges like environmental degradation, social fragmentation and spiritual disconnection, Kumbh Mela offers timeless lessons:

- 1. Unity in Diversity:** The festival demonstrates how shared values can bring people together, transcending divisions of language, culture, and status.
- 2. Respect for Nature:** The ritual of bathing in rivers underscores the sacred relationship between humanity and natural world, urging us to protect our environment.
- 3. Spiritual Renewal:** In a fast-paced world, Kumbh Mela offers a space for introspection, reflection, encouraging individuals to reconnect with inner selves and the divine.

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