

# THE MAGNIFICENCE OF KUMBH

PRAYAGRAJ 2019













**COMMISSIONED BY PRAYAGRAJ MELA AUTHORITY**  
**© PRAYAGRAJ MELA AUTHORITY**  
**JUNE 2018**

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
DR ASHISH KUMAR GOEL, IAS  
DIVISIONAL COMMISSIONER, PRAYAGRAJ AND CHAIRMAN, PRAYAGRAJ MELA AUTHORITY

**EDITORS**  
VIJAY KIRAN ANAND, IAS, MELA OFFICER  
DELEEP KUMAR TRIGUNAYAT, PCS, ADDITIONAL MELA OFFICER

**AUTHOR**  
SANJAY BHATNAGAR

**CO-AUTHOR**  
RUCHI SINGH

**IMAGE CREDIT**  
ASHUTOSH TRIPATHI  
RAJESH SINGH

**IMAGE COURTESY**  
PRAYAGRAJ MELA AUTHORITY

**EDITED, DESIGNED AND PRINTED BY**



PENINSULA SPENTA  
MATHURADAS MILL COMPOUND  
N. M. JOSHI MARG, LOWER PAREL (W)  
MUMBAI – 400 013.  
TEL: +91-22-24811010  
FAX: +91-22-24811021  
WEBSITE: [www.spentamultimedia.com](http://www.spentamultimedia.com)

**EXECUTIVE PUBLISHER**  
MANECK E. DAVAR

**EDITOR**  
MONIDEEPA CHOUDHURI

**DESIGN**  
MILIND S. PARKAR, NILESH JUVALEKAR

**DIGITAL IMAGING**  
NINAD JADHAV

**PROJECT COORDINATOR**  
IMRAN SYED

DISCLAIMER: DUE CARE AND DILIGENCE HAVE BEEN TAKEN WHILE EDITING AND PRINTING THE BOOK. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR THE PRINTER OF THE BOOK HOLDS ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR ANY MISTAKE THAT MAY HAVE CREPT IN INADVERTENTLY. PRAYAGRAJ MELA AUTHORITY AND SPENTA MULTIMEDIA WILL BE FREE FROM ANY LIABILITY FOR DAMAGES AND LOSSES OF ANY NATURE ARISING FROM OR RELATED TO THE CONTENT. ALL DISPUTES ARE SUBJECT TO THE JURISDICTION OF COMPETENT COURTS IN PRAYAGRAJ.

THE REPORTING AND WRITING WORK IN THIS BOOK HAS BEEN DONE BY THE AUTHOR AND CO-AUTHOR. THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN IT ARE THOSE OF THE WRITERS AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE OFFICIAL POLICY OR POSITION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF UTTAR PRADESH.





# THE MAGNIFICENCE OF KUMBH

PRAYAGRAJ 2019









*Kumbh Mela (the festival of the sacred pitcher) is the largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on earth, during which participants bathe or take a dip in a sacred river. Devotees believe that by bathing in the Ganges one is freed from sins liberating her/him from the cycle of birth and death. Millions of people reach the place without any invitation. The congregation includes ascetics, saints, sadhus, aspirants-kalpavasis and visitors. The festival is held at Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik every four years by rotation and is attended by millions of people irrespective of caste, creed or gender. Its primary bearers, however, belong to akhadas and ashrams, religious organizations, or are individuals living on alms. Kumbh Mela plays a central spiritual role in the country, exerting a mesmeric influence on ordinary Indians. The event encapsulates the science of astronomy, astrology, spirituality, ritualistic traditions, and social and cultural customs and practices, making it extremely rich in knowledge. As it is held in four different cities in India, it involves different social and cultural activities, making this a culturally diverse festival. Knowledge and skills related to the tradition are transmitted through ancient religious manuscripts, oral traditions, historical travelogues and texts produced by eminent historians. However, the teacher-student relationship of the sadhus in the ashrams and akhadas remains the most important method of imparting and safeguarding knowledge and skills relating to Kumbh Mela.*

Inscribed in 2017 (12.COM) on the Representative List  
of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity



**“The world has taken note of the  
cleanliness that has been kept at  
Kumbh this time.”**

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi while addressing the Indian  
community in Seoul during his February 21-22, 2019 visit to South  
Korea to receive the Seoul Peace Prize 2018.









## YOGI ADITYANATH

Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh

**P**rayagraj Kumbh is the most significant of all Kumbh Melas. It is a unique example of religion, spirituality and peaceful coexistence, and has fascinated people across nationalities, beliefs and religious leanings since time immemorial. I am thus extremely happy that Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 not only lived up to the traditions of a centuries-old heritage, but also fulfilled our vision of 'Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh'. I congratulate all whose sustained efforts made this event a grand success and bow before Prayagraj for hosting millions of devotees, saints, seers, tourists and academicians during Kumbh 2019.

Prayagraj Kumbh, which takes place on the banks of Triveni Sangam, the holy confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati rivers, is undoubtedly the world's largest religious congregation, with people of various castes, creeds, customs and traditions assembling to achieve spiritual union with the divine. Prayagraj is venerated in the *Rig Veda* and finds special mention in the *Puranas* and other Hindu scriptures as the most important amongst the *tirthas*. Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj is believed to be the source of light and knowledge, the place where Prajapati Brahma performed *Ashvamedha Yajna* to create the universe.

It was our endeavour to showcase Kumbh Mela in a way that truly reflects the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and I am immensely happy that everyone who visited Kumbh Mela 2019 had a word of appreciation for its hospitality and grandeur. Heads of Mission of various countries who visited the Mela area prior to its formal inauguration were full of praise for its scope and vision. People from across the globe have also expressed admiration for the untiring and spectacular efforts of the administration in ensuring the success of Kumbh 2019.

It is a matter of great pride that Prayagraj Kumbh was a '*swachh* and *surakshit*' Kumbh as it set new benchmarks of cleanliness and safety. We could prove to the world that high standards can be ensured if there is concerted effort. A record 1.22 lakh toilets in the Mela area were kept clean round-the-clock by a battery of sanitary workers. A security force comprising personnel from various agencies also ensured an incident-free Mela – besides displaying exemplary behaviour vis-a-vis lakhs of devotees who visited Prayagraj Kumbh. I am also very proud that our endeavours to keep River Ganga clean and pollution-free paid rich dividends and millions of devotees and pilgrims who took a holy dip in the sacred waters found it clean throughout the Mela period.

I extend my gratitude to Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi whose personal interest and guidance helped us immensely in achieving the grand vision of *divya* and *bhavya* Kumbh. I also thank the various departments and agencies of the central government for helping the Uttar Pradesh Government whenever the need arose.

Yogi Adityanath













The Kumbh 2019 logo reflects the soul of Kumbh – spirituality, rituals, traditions and cultural customs. Ensconced in a pale yellow globe, it portrays tangible symbols like the confluence of the rivers – the Ganga, the Yamuna and the mystical Saraswati – saints and pilgrims.

The *kumbh* with the Om symbol signifies the mythological *kumbh* (jar of nectar) that Lord Vishnu whisked out of the grasp of *asuras* or demons during *Samudra Manthan* or the churning of the ocean.

The verse ‘Sarva Siddhipradha Kumbha’ encapsulates the significance of the event and the *tapobhumi*, Prayagraj.

A unifying icon for various activities around the event, it mirrors the vision of ‘Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh’ and depicts the spirit of Kumbh Mela, the world’s biggest human congregation.



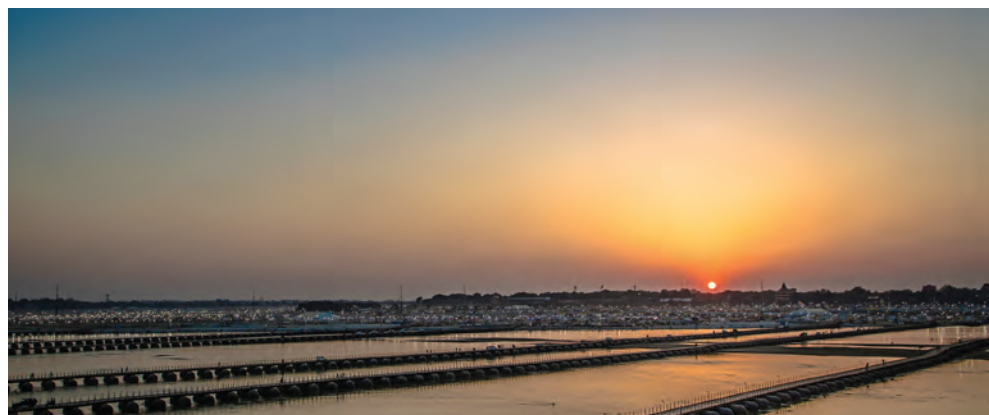
—12—

KUMBH 2019  
RECORDS



—20—

MICROCOSM OF  
THE WORLD



—46—

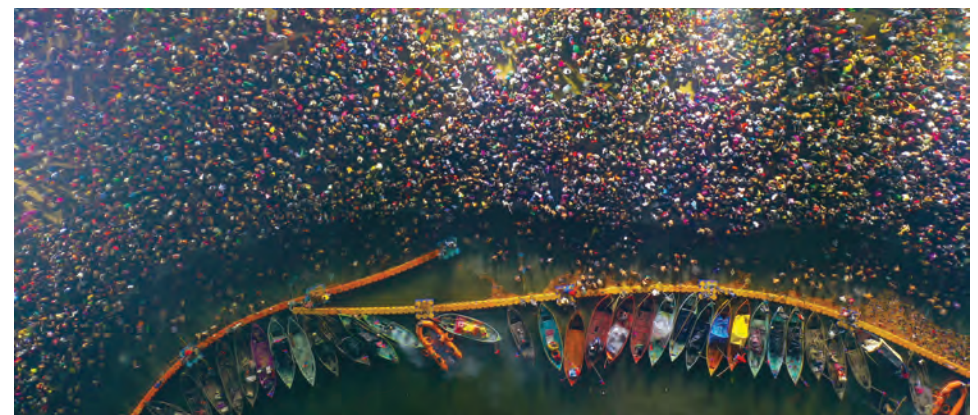
DIVYA KUMBH,  
BHAVYA KUMBH

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019

- 10 -

—58—

FAIR OF THE  
PITCHER



—64—

A FESTIVAL OF FAITH



– 74 –

AN ADMINISTRATIVE  
MARVEL



– 174 –

A MOSAIC OF LIFE

– 128 –

SMART PRAYAGRAJ



– 142 –

THE PEOPLE



– 222 –

APOTHEOSIS



# KUMBH 2019 RECORDS





The Guinness World Record for 'most contribution to a handprint painting in 8 hours' was a community engagement activity in which people from all walks of life and from around the world participated. As part of the Paint My City campaign, a 60-foot canvas was hand-impressed by 7,664 people, breaking the previous record held by South Korea with 4,675 handprints. Seoul's record, according to Mela Officer Vijay Kiran Anand, "was broken in the first few hours itself".







THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019





The 60-feet and 7,664 people hand-impressed canvas that created the Guinness record for 'most contribution to a handprint painting in 8 hours'.







The Guinness World Record for the ‘largest parade of buses’ was for a spectacular parade of a 500-bus fleet that was plied during Kumbh Mela – which according to Uttar Pradesh Principal Secretary Awanish Kumar Awasthi intended “to demonstrate the efficient traffic plan during the ongoing Kumbh Mela”. The saffron-coloured buses of the Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (UPSRTC) covered a distance of over 3.2 km on NH-19 between Sahson and Nawabganj toll plazas. It broke the earlier record that was held by Abu Dhabi with 390 buses.











The Guinness World Record for the world's biggest sanitation and waste disposal mechanism with 'most people sweeping the floor at multiple locations at one point of time' was demonstrated by 10,000 sanitation workers engaged in a cleanliness drive during the Kumbh Mela. Organised by the Prayagraj Mela Authority, it was a fitting culmination to the Swachh Kumbh initiative and, according to the Mela Authority Chairman Dr. Ashish Kumar Goel, "two years of hard work, planning and effective execution of an ambitious and unprecedented project."







# MICROCOSM OF THE WORLD





Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 lived up to the distinction of Kumbh Mela as the largest congregation of humanity and in the spirit of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* – The World is One Family – played host to 240 million pilgrims, tourists and researchers from India and abroad from January 15-March 4, 2019.

The grandeur, resplendence and mass participation that marked Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 was immeasurable and true to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's description of Kumbh as "a symbol of peace and harmony among all human beings". It was a gigantic gathering of people of varying socio-economic and cultural backgrounds celebrating spirituality and faith.

Pilgrims and *kalpvasis* thronged to Kumbh 2019 from culturally, socially and economically diverse places across the country and the world. Braving the cold and living simple and austere lives, they manifested a perfect example of human bonding, peaceful co-existence and harmony.

The serenity of *kalpvasi* camps contrasted with the excitement and flamboyance at the *akharas* where energetic sadhus preached religious tenets and spiritual practices.

Kumbh Mela 2019 was a microcosm of the world, with people of various nationalities mingling with the indigenous crowd and engaging in religious teachings, mythology, spirituality and guru-*shishya* traditions. About ten million foreigners who visited Kumbh 2019 found the Mela to be an inimitable example of co-existence, sociability and instinctual human bonding.

Margaret Philip from Europe, albeit not well-versed with the religious undertones of the event, could feel spirituality in the manner individuals of various backgrounds bonded with each other. Tim Yallop, an American researcher whose focus of study is the social impact of religion, found the Kumbh Mela ideal for studying the behaviour of a multicultural cross-section of people and an example of peaceful co-existence of diverse cultures and nationalities.

RIGHT: An all-pervasive spirit of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* – The World is One Family – as millions of people from across the globe gather at Prayagraj Kumbh.















# Envoys at Kumbh

The run-up to the 49-day festival was spectacular, with envoys of 72 countries visiting the Triveni Sangam on December 15, 2018 to witness the “marvel” of preparations for the ‘largest gathering and collective act of faith anywhere in the world’.

After a warm welcome by Kumbh Team officials, the heads of mission were escorted to the Mela area through roads lined with hundreds of school students waving flags in a traditional gesture of welcome. At the event venue on the banks of the Sangam, the Mission Heads visited Making of Kumbh 2019 – a unique exhibition on Kumbh Mela projects. This was followed by a cultural event and a documentary presentation on the making of Kumbh 2019.

The team of officials in charge of Kumbh Mela took the opportunity to apprise the Mission Heads of the amenities that would be provided to visitors and pilgrims during the mega event and the initiatives that had been taken to make Kumbh 2019 ODF (open defecation free), including the installation of over 1,22,500 mobile toilets.

The diplomats were felicitated with shawls and then taken for a boat ride in the holy rivers. Thereafter, in a special ceremony symbolising unity and peace, flags of 72 countries were jointly hoisted by the visiting envoys – creating history on the banks of the Sangam.

The historic event, and the flags flying full mast during the entire duration of the Mela, put the ethos of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* at the core of the Kumbh 2019 theme and came in for high praise from the diplomatic community. The envoys were unanimous that it would not only boost tourism but also build cross-cultural bridges among nations.

At the end of their Kumbh Mela visit, Frank Hans Dannenberg Castellanos, Dean of Diplomatic Corps in India, was to remark, “I am grateful for the opportunity given to Heads of Mission to come and experience Kumbh Mela preparations. We now can share our experiences with our citizens who would be visiting India during Kumbh 2019. All facilities are in place to make this Kumbh a grand and magnificent event... The diplomatic community is impressed by the detailed way in which the visit has been organised.”

LEFT: Heads of Mission of 72 countries on a boat cruise during their visit to Prayagraj and Kumbh Mela area on December 15, 2018 – a month before the official commencement of the mega religious event.

Photo: Rajesh Kumar Singh









Photo: Rajesh Kumar Singh

THIS PAGE AND FACING PAGE: A spectacular curtain-raiser, one of the many firsts at the Kumbh, in which Heads of Mission of 72 countries are walked through various Kumbh 2019 preparations on December 15, 2018. The visit – hosted by the Government of Uttar Pradesh and led by Hon'ble Union Minister of State for External Affairs General (Retd) Shri V K Singh – included a river cruise and a 72-country flag-hoisting ceremony.

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019



# Hon'ble President at Kumbh



Photo: Rajesh Kumar Singh

Prayagraj Kumbh Mela 2019 not only witnessed religious and spiritual activities but also the participation of Indian and foreign dignitaries.

Hon'ble Indian President Shri Ram Nath Kovind's visit to the Kumbh Mela on January 17 was the first by a President to the Kumbh since the visit of President Shri Rajendra Prasad in 1953. The Hon'ble President and his wife, Savita Kovind, participated in Ganga Pujan in the Sangam area along with Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Governor Shri Ram Naik, Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath, Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister Shri Keshav Prasad Maurya and Hon'ble Health Minister Shri Sidharth Nath Singh, among others.

During his visit, Hon'ble President Shri Ram Nath Kovind also inaugurated the three-day Gandhian Resurgence Summit at the Parmarth Niketan camp in the Kumbh Mela area and unveiled the 30-feet-high statue of revered Vedic sage, Bharadwaj Muni, in Prayagraj city.

Describing Kumbh as an important part of India's spiritual and cultural heritage, the Hon'ble President said that he was happy that the event coincided with the 150th birth anniversary celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi.



Photo: Rajesh Kumar Singh

TOP AND ABOVE: Hon'ble President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind, Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Governor Shri Ram Naik, Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath and other dignitaries perform Ganga Pujan during the Hon'ble President's visit to Kumbh Mela on January 17; the Hon'ble President unveils the miniature version of the 30-feet statue of Bharadwaj Muni.





Hon'ble President Shri Ram Nath Kovind, Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Governor Shri Ram Naik, Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath and other dignitaries and top officials outside the Allahabad Fort during the Hon'ble President's visit.



Hon'ble President Shri Ram Nath Kovind addressing the Gandhian Resurgence Summit in the Kumbh Mela area.



Hon'ble President Shri Ram Nath Kovind, Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Governor Shri Ram Naik, Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath and other dignitaries walk towards the Sangam during the Hon'ble President's visit.



# Hon'ble Vice President at Kumbh



On a day-long visit to Kumbh on February 16, Hon'ble Vice President Shri M Venkaiah Naidu described it as “the biggest cultural event and one of the greatest wonders of the world”. He said that the Kumbh Mela 2019 was not only successful in projecting India’s magnificent ‘soft power’ to the world but also helped Prayagraj develop into a historical tourist destination.

While felicitating Kumbh Sewa Mitras at the Yuva Kumbh Sammelan, the Hon'ble Vice President asserted that people’s participation was a must in achieving the goals of Namami Gange and Swachh Bharat, especially during Kumbh when crores of people gather to offer prayers to River Ganga. Highlighting the relevance of Kumbh, the Hon'ble Vice President said that since rivers sustain us like divine nectar or ambrosia, they are divine and must be worshipped.

He also addressed the Kiva Kumbh Mela whose purpose is to unify ancestral cultures of the world in one dance, song and prayer for the protection of holy rivers.

In the presence of representatives from Mexico, Colombia, Paraguay, Chile, Peru, Netherlands and Brazil, among others, Shri M Venkaiah Naidu highlighted the need to evolve a social behaviour which was compatible with nature. He further said that such behaviour, if in consonance with nature, would be *sanskriti* or culture.

The Hon'ble Vice President, accompanied by Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Governor Shri Ram Naik and Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Health Minister Shri Sidharth Nath Singh, also visited the holy Sangam to offer prayers.





CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath with Hon'ble Vice President Shri M Venkaiah Naidu at the Prayagraj Airport; the Vice President and Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Governor Shri Ram Naik perform Ganga Pujan; the Hon'ble Vice-President performs a ritual as Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Governor Shri Ram Naik looks on.

FACING PAGE: Hon'ble Vice President Shri M Venkaiah Naidu, Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Governor Shri Ram Naik and Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Health Minister Shri Sidharth Nath Singh at the iconic Kumbh Mela selfie point.





# Hon'ble Prime Minister at Kumbh

Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 got off to an auspicious start on December 16, 2018, when Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi performed *Ganga Pujan*, a formal worship of River Ganga that traditionally precedes the commencement of Kumbh Mela – a first by a Prime Minister in the history of Kumbh. During this visit, he met representatives of various religious and spiritual organisations, attended a photo session at a special photo point developed in Arail Ghat, visited the Swachh Kumbh exhibition, unveiled 366 projects and inaugurated the new terminal of Prayagraj Airport. The Hon'ble Prime Minister also visited Akshayvat and declared it open for public *darshan*.

The highpoint of Kumbh 2019, however, came when at a felicitation ceremony in the Mela area on February 24, the Hon'ble Prime Minister in a rare gesture, washed and wiped the feet of *safai karamcharis* as an acknowledgement of their services to millions of pilgrims and visitors at the Mela.

RIGHT: Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi with Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Governor Shri Ram Naik on his left and Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath on his right, during Ganga Pujan on December 16, 2018. Ganga Pujan is a traditional rite in which River Ganga is worshipped prior to the formal start of Kumbh Mela.











Lauding the Swachh Kumbh vision and the effort taken to ensure cleanliness at the largest gathering of mankind, the Prime Minister said that with “over 20,000 dustbins and 1,22,500 toilets, it is even difficult to imagine how *safai karamcharis* worked.”

He said that sanitation workers were “*karmayogis*”, “brothers and sisters who woke early, slept late only to ensure cleanliness in the

Mela area.” Emphasising his crusade for a Clean India, Shri Narendra Modi said that these were moments that would stay with him for life.

The Hon’ble Prime Minister also took a holy dip in the Sangam and paid obeisance to River Ganga.





ABOVE: In a rare gesture, Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi washes the feet of *safai karamcharis* during a felicitation ceremony on February 24.

FACING PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi addresses a public gathering during the felicitation ceremony of *safai karamcharis* on February 24; Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi takes a dip in the holy Sangam; Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath, Deputy Chief Minister Shri Keshav Prasad Maurya, State Cabinet Ministers Shri Sidharth Nath Singh and Shri Suresh Kumar Khanna and Bharatiya Janata Party functionaries Smt Uma Bharti and Shri Mahendra Nath Pandey wave to the crowd at the function held in Ganga Pandal.

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019



# Mauritius PM and Pravasi Bharatiyas at Kumbh



THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019

After a holy dip in the Sangam on January 24, Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, wife Kobita Jugnauth and a 25-member Mauritian delegation perform rituals at the Bade Hanuman temple.



Besides the President, Vice President and Prime Minister of India, numerous other foreign and national dignitaries visited Prayagraj Kumbh 2019, prominent among whom were Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, Pravasi Bharatiyas or Non-Resident Indians who had earlier participated in the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in Varanasi. and foreign delegates from 186 countries.

Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth who led a 25-member delegation from Mauritius on January 24, took a holy dip in the sacred waters of the Sangam and performed *aarti* in the presence of Narendra Giri, president of the Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad at the Bade Hanuman temple. He also visited the sacred Akshayvat and took a round of the Mela area.

The Mauritian Prime Minister, who visited Prayagraj after attending Pravasi Bhartiya Divas celebrations in Varanasi, was all praise for Mela arrangements, the unique spiritual experience of Kumbh and cleanliness of Mela area and the waters of the Sangam.

Kumbh 2019 was also an emotional journey for the more than 2,300 non-resident Indians who participated in the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in Varanasi. Immediately after the conclusion of the Divas, the

PBD convention would tweet, “It’s over to @PrayagrajKumbh! After the successful conclusion of #PBD2019, the Pravasis travel to take dip in the Ganges at the #KumbhMela, which has been inscribed on the list of ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity’ by @UNESCO in 2017”.

Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, who led them, thanked the Indian government and Hon’ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi for linking the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas with Kumbh and making their visit to India doubly fruitful.

The entire entourage visited the Sangam, Hanuman temple, Akshayvat, Saraswati Koop and the Integrated Command Control Centre to understand the logistics involved in the successful conduct of what is inarguably the largest human congregation in the world. Amazed by the foolproof arrangements, mesmerised by the spirituality and fascinated by the display of vibrant human diversity in one place, they were effusive in their praise for the government, especially the “unprecedented” cleanliness of the Mela area. Hon’ble Union Minister of State for External Affairs General V K Singh guided them around the Mela area, including Sanskriti Gram and Kala Gram.



Kumbh Mela administrative team members in escort boats during the Pravasi Bharatiya delegation’s visit to the Sangam.





FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: For the first time in any Kumbh Mela, more than 2,300 Pravasi Bharatiya delegates drawn from around the world, participate in the spirit and spirituality of Prayagraj Kumbh on January 24.







# Foreign Delegates at Kumbh

Another feather in the cap of the organisers of Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 was the recognition accorded to the event by the global community. On February 22, about 189 delegates from 187 countries, accompanied by Hon'ble Union Minister of State for External Affairs General V K Singh, visited the Kumbh Mela. Visibly elated, the Union Minister said that "Kumbh Mela's significance has been enhanced at the global level and everyone in the world should know what it is." He was happy that about 22 crore people had visited the Mela, including women representatives from Saudi Arabia. Mark Lemti from Finland was to remark, that his first visit to the Kumbh fair had been "a wonderful experience and, considering its scope, a surprisingly well-organised one".







THIS PAGE AND FACING PAGE: Delegates from 187 countries, led by Hon'ble Union Minister of State for External Affairs, General V K Singh, arrive in Prayagraj to a rousing welcome on February 22 and then soak in the sights, sounds and spirituality of Kumbh 2019.

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019



# Personages at Kumbh



Photo: Rajesh Kumar Singh

The Hon'ble Union Minister of State for External Affairs General Shri V K Singh, besides accompanying the Heads of Mission delegation prior to the commencement of Kumbh, also accompanied Pravasi Bharatiyas and foreign delegates.

Among other personages who participated in Kumbh 2019 were BJP president and now Hon'ble Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah, the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India Shri Ranjan Gogoi, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Vijay Rupani, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Haryana Shri Manohar Lal Khattar, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Uttarakhand Shri Trivedendra Singh Rawat, former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Shri Akhilesh Yadav, yoga guru Swami Ramdev, Art of Living founder Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and several eminent *shankaracharyas*, *mahamandleshwars*, *mahants* and *acharyas*.

LEFT AND TOP: A shower of flower petals greet Bharatiya Janata Party president and present Hon'ble Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah during his visit to Kumbh 2019; Shri Amit Shah, along with Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath offers prayers at the Bade Hanuman temple.





The Hon'ble Chief Justice who visited Kumbh on February 22, paid obeisance to River Ganga at the Sangam and offered prayers at the Bade Hanuman temple in the presence of Shri Narendra Giri, president of the Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad. Hon'ble Justice Gogoi also visited Sanskriti Gram and Kala Gram and, mesmerised by the colourful ambience, praised the Mela Authority for impeccable and pilgrim-friendly arrangements. Impressed by the efforts to make Kumbh successful, the Chief Justice of India also said "it was an experience that he would cherish forever".

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Hon'ble Union Minister of State for External Affairs General Shri V K Singh with the Heads of Mission during their Kumbh visit on December 15, 2018; Hon'ble Chief Justice of India Shri Ranjan Gogoi and his wife offer *aarti* at the Bade Hanuman temple; Hon'ble Gujarat Chief Minister Shri Vijay Rupani at Kumbh Mela on February 8, 2019.









FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: Millions of visitors from all across the world find Kumbh 2019 an inimitable example of sociability.

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019



# DIVYA KUMBH, BHAVYA KUMBH

DR. ASHISH KUMAR GOEL

DIVISIONAL COMMISSIONER, PRAYAGRAJ AND CHAIRMAN,  
PRAYAGRAJ MELA AUTHORITY





Inscribed by UNESCO as an “intangible cultural heritage of humanity”, and famed as “the largest of human congregation on earth”, the Kumbh Mela is not just a pilgrimage of faith and devotion, but also an arduous task, whose sheer magnitude, complexity, and sensitivity makes it the most challenging of assignments in the delivery of public management goals. Kumbh 2019 was a perfect testimony to unparalleled human endeavour that would always be remembered for its exemplary management, splendour, and magnificence; in which nearly 240 million people descended to take a holy dip in a span of 49 days.

When the government entrusted me with the task to conceptualise, plan and execute Kumbh 2019 by posting me as Divisional Commissioner Allahabad (now Prayagraj) and the nodal officer (in-charge) in April 2017, I was completely overwhelmed to be at the helm of such an important mission. However, there was also a degree of apprehension

as it was one of its own kind of assignments where there was no scope of failure. The Hon’ble Chief Minister had already delineated a broad vision about how magnificent he wanted Kumbh 2019 to be. The guidelines were clear: a clean mela, with special focus on sanitation and toilets, improved infrastructure of the city (mostly permanent infrastructure), traffic management, transportation and facilities for the pilgrims, proper electrification, beautified tourist and cultural heritage sites, and public conveniences to be available within a 30-kilometre radius.

The term ‘Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh’ denoted the vision for this Kumbh and even the likelihood of creating a dedicated and permanent Mela Authority was discussed! Although, we were assured that there would be no shortage of funds ‘for right and useful projects’, emphasis was laid on the fact that most of the budget should be used on







Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath spells out his vision of Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh 2019 at a meeting on April 21, 2017.

permanent infrastructure development – with October 2018 as deadline. This was a unique situation one doesn't encounter usually in the government system, as from one perspective, we had the government's affirmation that funds would not be a problem for the right projects, while from the other we were facing the test of identifying useful projects for which the government would be willing to allocate funds. This created a mood for innovation with an objective to enhance user experience.

As I had been the District Magistrate of Allahabad in 2007-08 and had even witnessed Kumbh Mela preparations in 2013 as Principal Staff Officer to the Chief Secretary, I had some idea as to what the management of Kumbh Mela involved. We began recce and the survey of the Mela territory, its fringe, and city sites. We often voyaged late night when the streets were empty to identify the right projects

and eventually shortlisted prospective projects into three categories: Essential, Desirable and Aspirational. In the course of planning, it was additionally felt that since hundreds of projects worth thousands of crores and involving 28 departments would be required to be executed within a short span before Kumbh 2019, an advanced computerised project monitoring and information system would have to be set up to preclude time and cost overruns.

Finally, more than 700 projects worth ₹4,300 crore – that entailed multi-stakeholder management and highest degree of project management skills – were executed.

Prayagraj witnessed sweeping metamorphosis: substantial encroachments were removed, roads and traffic intersections were expanded, traffic clogs were eliminated, and the city was given a face-lift by following the model of Sustainable Development. Permanent



infrastructure development included construction of 9 flyovers and railway over-bridges, 6 railway under-bridges, widening and strengthening of 140 roads, beautification of parks along with improvement of 64 traffic junctions along with aesthetically designed murals, upgradation of the public transport system, railway stations, foot over bridges, skywalks, and development

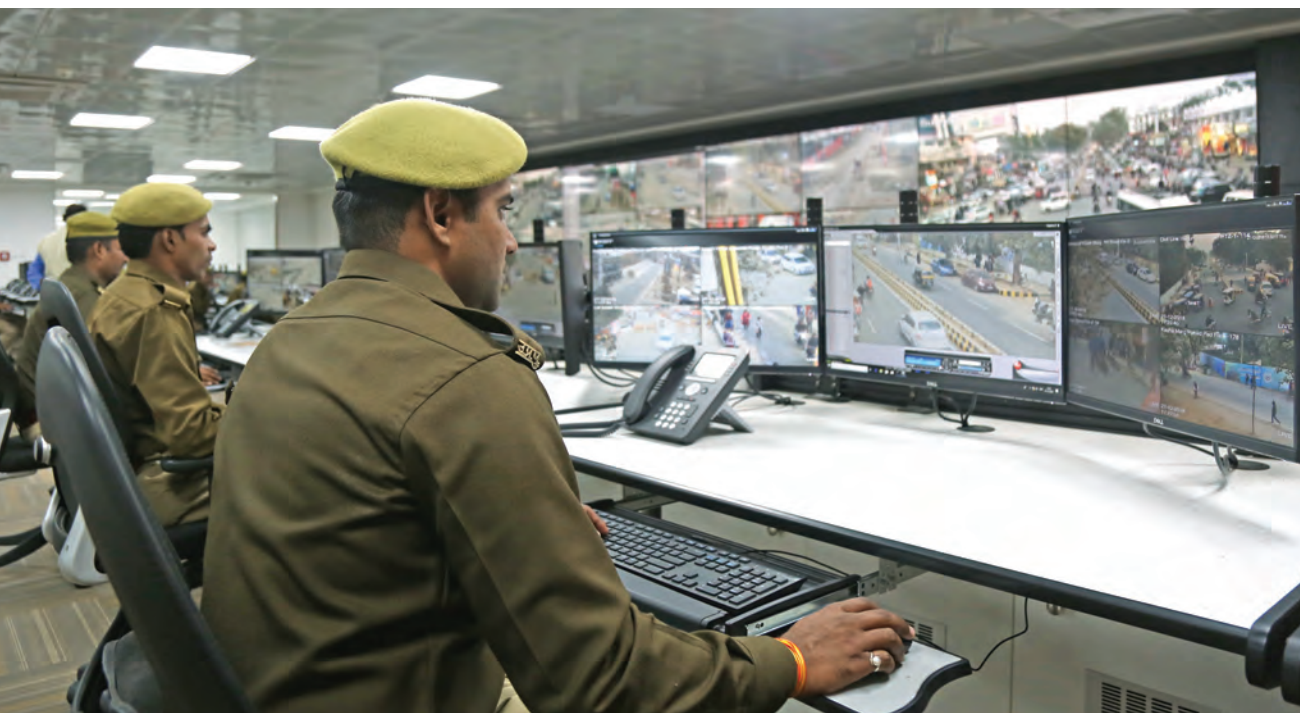
of a new civil airport terminal. Besides, special arrangement for the Mela area that included of arrangement of 500 shuttle buses, 1,000 e-rickshaws, 95 parking lots including 18 lots developed as Satellite Towns (special parking zone) with a capacity for over five lakh vehicles were also done to make this mega fair a memorable one for its ease of user experience.



Projects entailing numerous stakeholders and a high degree of management skills in motion.

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019





ABOVE: The state-of-the-art Integrated Command and Control Centre in the Kumbh Mela area.

RIGHT: Hon'ble Uttar Pradesh Governor Shri Ram Naik, Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath, former Chief Justice of Allahabad High Court Hon'ble Shri D B Bhonsle and other top dignitaries pledge their commitment to Swachh Kumbh.

## INTEGRATING COMMAND WITH CONTROL

Given the humongous task to oversee more than 200 million pilgrims (projected estimate at the time of planning) that was before the administration, various other innovative technology initiatives were taken. This included providing technological solutions to various administrative departments and activities, ensuring foolproof security, establishing a state-of-the-art Integrated Command and Control Center (ICCC) in a span of just 6 months for better surveillance and support system, installing 1,103 CCTV cameras at 268 strategic locations for real-time alerts and Intelligent Traffic Signals, Variable Message Signboards and Adaptive Traffic Control System for effective Traffic Management and enabling Video analytics based Crowd Management System to measure crowd density (used for the first time to preclude and prevent stampede).

## SANITATION - WHEN AMBITION MET REALITY

Since maintaining sanitation and hygiene in the entire 3,300 hectare of the Kumbh Mela area and the city of Prayagraj was a gigantic task, the Kumbh Mela team was extremely perspicacious from the very beginning about two challenges – making Kumbh Mela Open Defecation Free and formulating a robust Solid Waste Management (SWM) plan. Hence, sanitation facilities were designed meticulously, using contemporary technological tools and with due consideration to all distinct components of these challenges, which included discarding liquid waste from toilets to treatment facilities, solid waste to waste treatment plants at the disposal site, and drainage management to ensure river water quality.

Even before the procurement procedure was set in motion, extensive brainstorming with regard to the potential designs and process to be utilised for toilets and urinals, their projected number, ease of use, septic tank prerequisites, interior lighting, odour control, and the mechanism for ensuring round the clock interior and exterior cleanliness was done. Once this exercise was over, suitable vendors who could carry out this gargantuan task with reliability were identified through a transparent procurement process.

The Magha Mela 2018 (which occurred the year before Kumbh Mela 2019) turned into a practice ground to test different suppositions and a pilot project was run to test the viability of innovations in the sanitation plan to be carried out later in Kumbh Mela 2019. Broadly,







Toilets to ensure an open defecation free Kumbh and changing rooms for enhanced pilgrim experience.

two types of toilets were built in the Mela area – septic tank-based toilets in the low-lying area near the river bed to keep the sludge from permeating into the river (suction process was used to empty and clean them regularly) and soak-pit based toilets away from the river bed. Around 4,000 public toilets were deployed in the Magha Mela 2018 and the vendors mandated to build these toilets were also tasked to maintain them and keep them odour free. This not only gave encouraging results by containing open defecation but also boosted the Mela team's confidence, whereafter motivated *swachhagrahis* (village volunteers trained under 'Swachh Bharat Mission') were brought onboard and trained to carry out the bigger ground level tasks for Kumbh 2019.

To test the approach in Solid Waste Management (SWM) during Magha Mela 2018, pilot project was run in one crucial sector of the Mela around the Sangam nose. New techniques regarding SWM procedures which prevented solid waste from contacting the ground during transportation were successfully demonstrated. Automated and manual street sweeping, garbage transfer from tipper to compactor and consequently to disposal and treatment sites were done in a seamless way. Strong waste disposal chain started with trash bins, tailored for the Mela, installed at a distance of 50 metres all along the Mela roads, in vending areas, inside camps, near ghats, and in circulation areas of the Mela.

Every trash bin had liner bag, so that garbage collection could easily be done and transferred to tipper vehicles, with least possibility of overflow or spillage. Sufficient number of dustbins, tippers, and compactor vehicles were utilised for this seamless solid waste management process.



Thus, the learning from the Magha Mela 2018 was applied in Kumbh Mela 2019 and a total of 1,22,500 toilets, including 20,000 urinals were deployed with special focus on sludge management. While jet spray cleaning was done on a regular basis to keep the toilet complexes clean, draining through suction method, using 250 suction vehicles employed for the purpose, was done to clean the sludge from them.

Since keeping the river water clean was a major objective, Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) were used to treat sludge from the city and Mela areas.

All untapped drains from upstream Ganga and Yamuna until Prayagraj were treated using bioremediation and geo-tube technologies to prevent untreated water from getting discharged into the rivers.

Besides, nearly 20,000 garbage bins, 120 tipper vans, 40 compactors, 36 lakh liner bags and river trash skimmers were deployed onsite during Kumbh 2019 for Solid Waste Management. Moreover, the vector control unit of the health department did periodic hot fogging to make the entire Mela area a no-fly and no-mosquito zone.

Over 20,000 sanitation workers and 1,500 *swachhagrahis* were deployed for solid and liquid waste management.

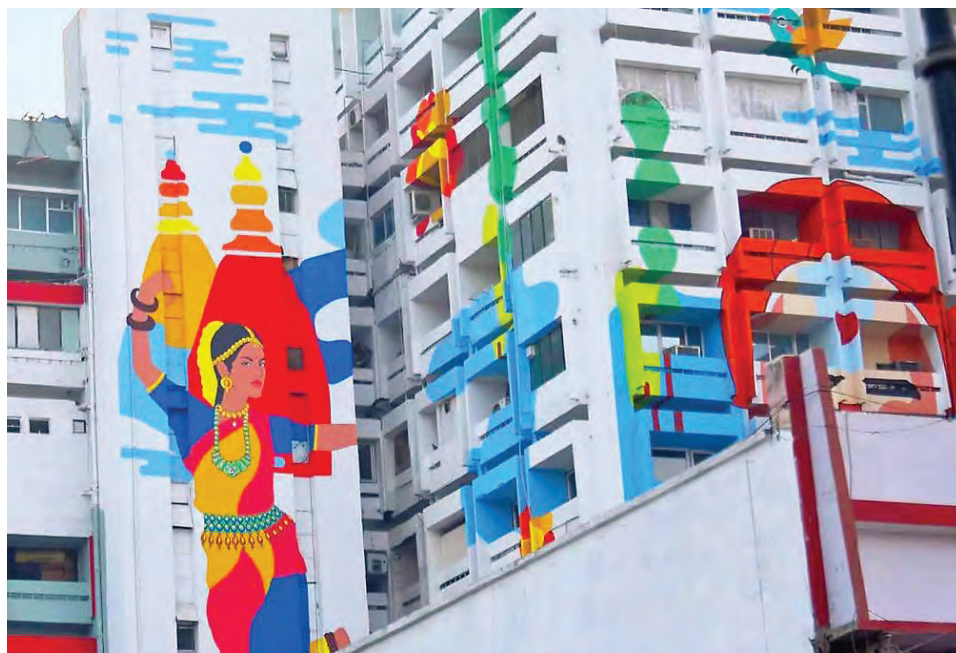
Supervision and monitoring of sanitation efforts was done by Health Department officials and *swachhagrahis* through a mobile app, linked to a control room, which made the entire task of toilet maintenance and cleanliness very transparent, effective and real-time, making Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 open Defecation Free, Garbage Free and Odour Free.



## PAINT MY CITY – THE CITY AS A CANVAS

The notion to enhance the splendour of this mystical city by aesthetically painting the city walls and showcasing the numinous significance of the Kumbh Mela through the hues of mythology, sprouted in September 2017. As the entire city was splattered with posters and different kinds of wall writings with a tilt towards negativity, all of which didn't quite give a positive impression, 'Paint My City' campaign was conceived to crowd out defacement and unattractiveness from the city landscape.

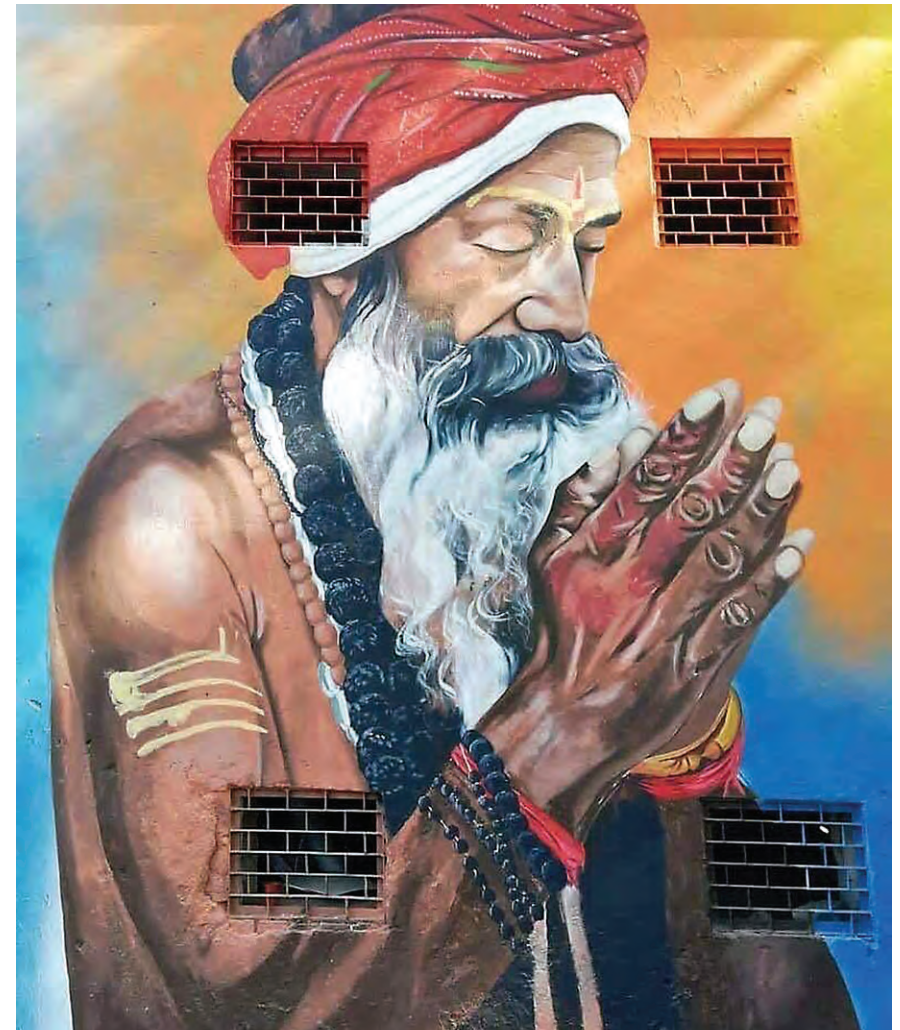
Since a large number of travellers was anticipated during Kumbh 2019, an aesthetic ambience, featuring the mythological, cultural and historical significance of Prayagraj would have accentuated their experience. Also, since there was a general tendency of the crowd to defile the walls during their sojourn, running such a campaign would have served many purposes. Other than mirroring the soul of the Kumbh Mela, the campaign would have also precluded people from besmirching the walls and would have motivated them to maintain cleanliness.



With this thought in mind, a small pilot project was run during Magha Mela 2018 which gave wonderful results. From across several schools, students were roped in to see how the walls would look if painted with aesthetic designs, which eventually set the tone for the actual project. But because it was a project with a gigantic goal, professional artists from across the country were invited to present their concepts, before a decision was finally taken.

Fortunately, we were able to get the funding from UP Tourism Department and Namami Gange to start with. Whereafter, professional agencies were roped in using a transparent procurement process. As this was the largest project of its kind in the world with over 20 lakh square feet of wall space to be painted, the agencies were quite excited from the beginning and eventually, over 500 national and international artists worked on it and gave it its current contour.

As the campaign was being run at Mela Administration's behest, we were extremely cautious about the subject that these canvases reflected. We had to ensure that the designs on the city canvases were not insensitive to people's sentiments and mirrored an ambience of celebration. Finally, themes highlighting India's intangible cultural heritage, mythology of Kumbh, architecture, eminent personalities, and modern art were approved for depiction. The canvases for these







paintings included public building walls, railway underpasses, flyovers, water tankers, bus stops, railway stations and coaches, public transport vehicles, metal shutters and foot over bridges, to mention a few. The campaign altered the perception of administrators and planners with regard to beautification of the city and proved that beautification was possible; and it is possible to give a human and artistic touch to brick-mortar-concrete development.

### 360-DEGREE SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

In view of all the security challenges that an event of such a magnitude faces, a 360-degree security architecture was crafted. This included special strategies for effective people-flow management, traffic management, and surveillance. Different traffic and people-movement plans for peak (bathing) days and non-peak days were also formulated to manage the flow of pilgrims and their vehicles. Exercise to flush out vehicles from the Mela area and the city in advance before peak days to avoid traffic congestion, activation of farther parking lots to contain the incoming traffic flow and relocation of shuttle bus depots prior to the peak days, were some important steps in that direction. The entire Mela area was divided into 9 zones and 20 sectors and every sector was headed by a Deputy Superintendent of Police rank officer. Altogether, 40 police stations and 58 police outposts were established to cover the entire Mela area. Thousands of personnel belonging to different police formations were deployed for impeccable security management.

Plans for disaster management (excessive rain, fire, and other natural disasters) and potential terrorist attack or devastating incidents, and for coordination between all the agencies engaged in the Kumbh Mela work were also made. Special emphasis was given on surveillance,



THIS PAGE: Personnel of various police formations effectuate fail-safe security at Kumbh Mela.

FACING PAGE: Paint My City campaign run on public spaces across the city.

riverine and fire safety, communication and public convenience by using modern technology. Police emergency response system was enhanced by establishing Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC) in two places (one within the vicinity of Mela area and the other in Traffic Police lines in the centre of the city). Continuous monitoring of the entire city and the Mela area was done using 4 extra viewing centres to make the whole area a fool-proof security zone.

Since millions of people were expected to gather to take a holy dip in Sangam, special provisions for river safety were also made. This



included water control room, floating jetties, rescue and speed boats, deep water barricading, reflective river line, diving suits for police and rescue divers. It was made mandatory for everyone to use life jackets before heading for a boat ride. All the boats were inspected for safety and boatmen were trained. They were also provided with 10,000 life jackets to be used for pilgrims. Besides, to ensure fire safety, high pressure trolley mounted water mist fire extinguishers, 52 bikes enabled with water and foam mist fire extinguishing system and fire-fighting speed boat (for the first time in Kumbh) along with portable water pumps were also deployed.

State-of-the-art technology was also used in a big way this time. This included geo-mapping of the Mela area (for better navigation and reducing the response time of police response vehicles in case of an incident), use of remote control lifebuoys (to save the pilgrims from drowning in case a boat capsized) and drone cameras for effective surveillance. In a unique initiative to blend technology with tradition, fully computerised lost and found systems were used for the first time. Fifteen centres in different sectors interconnected with state-of-the-art communication system and with facilities to hold the lost and found persons were established. Coordination with NGOs, roping of police *mitras* (volunteers), usage of LED screens for displaying lost and found details and creation of centralised digital lost and found system with 12 physical kiosks, were some of the other ground-breaking steps which were implemented successfully this time.



## THE TOUCHSTONE OF SUCCESS

Kumbh 2019 offered a number of modern amenities to the visitors with the primary objective to enhance user experience. Construction of premium tents in the form of a tent city for promoting tourism, arrangement of tourist walks, façade lighting on bridges and noticeable structures, laser light and sound show, virtual reality experiences, and water sports were some of the major attractions. Initiative taken up by Inland Waterways Authority of India to run *CL Kasturba* (semi cruise of IWAI) for explorers and sightseers to take a joy ride also ended up being extremely successful.

Public accommodation for 20,000 pilgrims, dedicated vending zones (including night markets), development of seven convention halls for over 2,000 cultural programmes, establishment of Kala Gram (creative handicraft village designed to showcase distinctive artwork with 13 dedicated pavilions developed under unique themes from every corner of the country), and Sanskriti Gram, were integral of part of special arrangements done to enhance user experience this time. Developed over a sprawling 7-acre campus, Sanskriti Gram was a reflection of India's rich cultural heritage with 17 galleries on different themes. Some of these themes included: Indus Valley Civilisation, Vedic Age, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Buddha, Mauryan Empire, Kalinga War, Architecture of Medieval India, Bhakti Movement, the Revolt of 1857 and Freedom Movement. The idea was to develop a mini museum and educate visitors of India's glorious past through these artworks.







TOP AND ABOVE: Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath engages with Kumbh stakeholders.

RIGHT: Flags of 72 countries fly high in the Kumbh Mela area.

FACING PAGE: Kala Gram and Sanskriti Gram enhance pilgrim experience of Kumbh 2019.

## GOING GLOBAL

Kumbh 2019 got far-reaching approbation from individuals from all over the globe, including the ones featuring high in the hierarchy of accomplishment. Setting a matchless precedent, Heads of Mission of 70 countries, visited the city on December 15, 2018 – a month before official commencement of Kumbh Mela – and got an opportunity to see the splendiferous exposition of Indian ethos. Special exhibition by the Mela team titled, 'Making of Kumbh', was organised to apprise them of Mela preparations and how the government endeavoured this Herculean task of enhancing user experience this time by undertaking inconceivable and unimaginable arrangements. Foreign diplomats also created history by hoisting the flags of their respective nations at the banks of the Sangam, sending out a message of amity and unity to the global audience.

Kumbh 2019 also witnessed the arrival of Pravasi Bhartiya (non-resident Indians) in the first of its kind event. Special arrangements were made for the travel of around 2,300 NRIs from Varanasi (where they had come to participate in Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas) to Prayagraj, where they got to witness the splendour of this mega event. Everything ranging from folk performances to boat rides to Akshayvat *darshan* and even visit to some prominent Mela areas, and of course a holy dip in Sangam were part of their itinerary.

The visit of delegates from 187 countries was the third big event that added to the glory of Kumbh Mela. Representatives of the countries who came as emissaries of harmony and peace, were given an opportunity to see the heritage of Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj through the lens of tradition as well as modernity, so that they could go back to their respective nations with a message of unity in diversity – something which the Kumbh Mela has stood for generations.







Photo: Rajesh Kumar Singh

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019





THIS PAGE AND FACING PAGE: Aerial views of the Mela area highlight the glory and grandeur of Kumbh 2019.

## HATTRICK OF RECORDS: THREE IN THREE DAYS

It is also noteworthy to mention that three Guinness World Records were made during the course of this mega fair on three consecutive days. First, for the longest parade of buses, second, for most number of people sweeping the roads at a particular time, and third, for the most contribution to a handprint painting in hours.

These records signified our efforts and achievements made in the fields of transportation, sanitation and city beautification. The painting thus made by contribution of thousands of people now adorns the arrival hall of Prayagraj Airport. All this simply added to its glory and grandeur of the Mela, taking it higher on the global tourism map and wish list of pilgrims around the world.

## TESTIMONIALS

Kumbh 2019 also saw great participation of international and national political leaders. The Prime Minister of Mauritius, who visited along with his wife, the President of India, the Vice President of India, the Chief Justice of India, and scores of other senior political leaders, all of whom commented positively about its magnificence and management with

special approbation for its robust sanitation and security architecture.

The Prime Minister of India visited Kumbh Mela twice – first on December 16, 2018 – a month before the formal inauguration of the Mela – to launch projects undertaken for Prayagraj’s metamorphosis and oversee Kumbh Mela preparations and second on February 24, 2019 for a special ‘Swachh Kumbh’ event in which he not only felicitated ‘*swachhta karmayogis*’ and ‘*swachhagrahis*’, but also applauded the successful sanitation initiatives undertaken by the Kumbh Mela team. Notably, in many of his speeches in India as well as abroad, he referenced Kumbh Mela as a model of commendable public management, particularly with respect to sanitation, security, probity, and transparency.

None of this would have been possible without the continuous and inspirational support of the government led by Hon’ble Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who gave the Mela team the liberty to identify and execute the best possible projects sans budget constraints. His review meetings, periodic inspection visits to Prayagraj, which often extended until late night, and boundless energy kept the entire Mela team motivated. His guiding force turned out to be the biggest enabler in making Kumbh 2019 a commendable model of human endeavour.







# FAIR OF THE PITCHER





A curious mix of mythology, astrology, astronomy and historicity, Kumbh Mela is the largest religious gathering in the world. It is also, perhaps, the oldest.

Literally meaning ‘Fair of the Pitcher’, Kumbh Mela is symbolic of water as the source of creation of the universe. It dates to prehistoric times and is held in Prayag, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik, based on complex astrological calculations defined by the alignment of stars in each of these riverbank sites.

While there are many legends regarding the origin of the Kumbh Mela, the most well-known narrative is related to *Samudra Manthan* or the churning of *Ksheersagar*, the ocean of milk. According to Hindu holy texts *Vishnu Purana*, *Vayu Purana* and *Padma Purana*, *Samudra Manthan* was an indirect consequence of Sage Durvasa’s curse on Indra, the king of the *devas*. A passing reference of this story also appears in *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* and *Agni Purana*.

Another version of the legend – mentioned in the epics and *Matsya Purana*, another holy text – states that in the beginning of time, gods and demons joined together to churn the milky ocean to extract its divine treasures. The churning that took place with the help of Mandar

Parvat, the sacred five-peaked mountain of Hindu cosmology, and Nag Vasuki, the king of serpents, yielded fourteen *ratnas* or jewels, including Dhanvantari with the *amrit kumbha* – the pitcher containing the nectar of immortality. However, a fight ensued between the gods and demons over the distribution of the *amrit* and Jayant, the son of Indra, the king of the *devas*, changed himself into a rook and escaped with the pot of nectar. He is said to have roamed the Moon, Sun, Jupiter and Saturn to protect the pitcher, although while being taken to the heavens, *amrit* spilled in four places on earth – Haridwar, Prayag, Nasik and Ujjain. As Jayant took twelve days to complete his flight and one divine day is of the same duration as one earth year, Kumbh Mela is held in the four holy places, every twelfth year, in cyclic order.

Kumbh Mela takes place in Prayag when Jupiter enters the zodiac sign of Aries and the Sun and Moon are placed in Capricorn on the new moon day in the Hindu calendar month of Magha, corresponding to January/February of the Gregorian calendar.

प्रयागे भास्कर क्षेत्रे मकरस्थे रवौ सति ।  
मेघे जीवे मृगे चन्द्रे कुम्भाख्यो योग उच्यते

*Prayage Bhaskar Kshetre Makarasthe Rabou Sati  
Meshe Jiwe Mruge Chandre Kumbhkhryo Yoga Ucchhate*

Another alternative astronomical conjunction that is also followed for Prayag Kumbh Mela is when the Sun is in Capricorn and Jupiter moves to Taurus on the new moon day in the month of Magha.

Kumbh Mela in Prayag has special significance. Prayag is where Ganga, Yamuna and the invisible and mythical Saraswati rivers meet – a holy confluence or *sangam* known as Triveni Sangam. Prayag came to be known so in the Epic Age as a conjunction of Sanskrit words ‘*pra*’ meaning excellent or great and ‘*yaj*’ signifying sacrifice.

According to *Vamana Purana* (23.19-20), among the five sacrificial altars of Prajapati Brahma, Prayag is the middle sacrificial altar or *madhyama vedi*. The Prajapati is said to have performed a sacrifice at Prayag in order to gain power for creating the universe in the beginning of creation (*Padma Purana* 4.128).

The earliest reference to Prayag occurs in *Khila Sukt* of *Rig Veda* (22.1) which alludes to the place as *Sitaasita Sangam* – Sita signifying River Ganga and Asita denoting River Yamuna.







Installation art at Kumbh 2019 depicting *Samudra Manthan*, the popular narrative of the origin of Kumbh Mela.

By the 4th-5th century CE, the importance of Prayag had greatly increased and it came to be recognised as *Tirtharaj*. It was described as the abode of the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh (Shiva).

The *Brahma Purana*, in fact, states that there is no god like Madhav, no river like Ganga, nor any *tirth* equivalent to Prayag.

न माधव समो देवो, न च गंगासमा नदी  
न तीर्थराजसाद्रीशं क्षेत्रमस्ती जगत्रया

*Na Madhav Samo Devo, Na Cha Gangasama Nadi,  
Na Teerthrajasadrisham Kshetramasti Jagattreya*

*Padma Purana* also states that Prayag is the most important amongst the *tirthas* – in the same way as the Sun is important among the planets and the Moon among the *nakshatras* (constellations). It goes on to assert that Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, as well as the great sages, are always present at Prayag (*Padma Purana* 3.48.5).

Noted historian Dr D P Dubey in *Prayaga: The Site of Kumbha Mela* notes: “The antiquity of Magha Mela can be traced back to the Gupta period (300-600 CE), when most of the *Puranas* were composed and the final rendition of the *Anusasanaparva* of the *Mahabharata* was completed. It may even claim a date as early as 3rd century CE, when the principles of zodiac signs were established in India.”





Kumbh Mela in Prayag has special significance since Prayag is where the Ganga, Yamuna and the invisible and mythical Saraswati rivers meet – a holy confluence or *sangam* known as Triveni Sangam.





The first historical description of this annual bathing festival appears in the narration of Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang who wrote that in 643 CE more than half million pilgrims “gathered on the banks of the holy river in Prayag” in an “age-long festival” near the confluence of the holy rivers. King Harshavardhan, who was reigning then, would also visit the fair every fifth year and give away his riches to the needy.

In the 9th century CE, Adi Shankaracharya is believed to have contributed greatly in the organisation of the Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj. According to tradition, it is due to his efforts that the gathering of saints at Prayag during Kumbh acquired a pan-India character – later becoming popular during the Bhakti movement since its ideals matched those of Bhakti saints.



TOP AND RIGHT: Prayagraj is regarded the holiest of the *tirths* and devotees flock to Triveni Sangam during Kumbh Mela to bathe and symbolically cleanse themselves of sin.







An aerial photograph capturing a massive crowd of people gathered in a river. The majority of the crowd is wearing bright, multi-colored headbands, creating a vibrant mosaic of colors from above. The people are densely packed, filling the upper two-thirds of the frame. In the lower third, a line of small, narrow boats is moored along a yellow, textured barrier. The boats vary in color, including red, blue, green, and yellow, and some contain people. The water is dark and reflects the scene above.

# A FESTIVAL OF FAITH





ABOVE: A 1920 hand-coloured magic lantern slide of Newton & Company depicting Kumbh Mela in Allahabad.

FACING PAGE: Held for over a month, Kumbh Mela is where anyone – irrespective of caste, creed, age or gender – can take a ritual bath, especially on auspicious *snan* days in the Hindu calendar month of Magha, corresponding to January-February of the Gregorian calendar.





Kumbh Mela also known as Purna Kumbh or Full Kumbh takes place every 12 years at one of the four sites – Prayag, Haridwar, Nashik and Ujjain. In 1874, G H M Ricketts, the then Divisional Commissioner of Allahabad, wrote that the fair became more sacred every seventh year, attracting larger numbers of pilgrims and merchants. Beyond this, he wrote, the administration had little knowledge of the factors that resulted in any increase or decrease in attendance at the fair on any given year.

The earliest reference to a Kumbh Mela in Allahabad is from a British report of 1868. In this report, G H M Ricketts, the then Magistrate of Allahabad, discusses the need for sanitation control at the “Coomb Fair” or Kumbh Mela to be held in 1870. He also mentions that he had witnessed huge crowds at an “Ad Coomb” (Ardh Kumbh) four years earlier.

In his report on the 1870 Magh Mela, the Commissioner of Allahabad J C Robertson also stated that the fair was a “Koombh”. This report is also the earliest extant source that mentions a procession of sadhus at Allahabad – a procession which occurs only during a Kumbh Mela and not during a Magha Mela. In this context, noted historian Kama Maclean has hypothesised that the 1870 Mela was the first fair at Allahabad to be called a Kumbh Mela.

Historical evidence apart, Kumbh has been a pilgrimage for lakhs of Hindu devotees since long. It is widely recognised as a mass Hindu pilgrimage of faith in which devotees gather to bathe in a sacred or holy river, symbolically cleansing themselves of sins. It is a time when they revere the gods, take holy bath in the waters of the Triveni Sangam, perform *satsang*, pay obeisance to Hindu deities, offer alms to the poor and needy and think and act spiritually.





THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019





FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: In true, age-old Kumbh Mela tradition, lakhs of pilgrims arrive at Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 to attain spiritual enlightenment – especially on *Mauni Amavasya*, when the waters of River Ganga are believed to turn into nectar.

The age-old belief of taking a holy dip in the sacred waters of the rivers to wash away sins can be traced to the Indian tradition of equality or *samarasta* – where all devotees who bathe in the sacred waters are equal before the Almighty. In fact, among all religious practices, the most significant is the holy dip.

Albeit pilgrimage is not obligatory in Hinduism, a multitude of humanity undertake onerous journeys to perform complex rites and bathe in the river to attain spiritual enlightenment – some in the belief that religious rituals can help them attain worldly success, some in the belief that learnings from mythology will purify their souls. The Kumbh Mela, in fact, provides an opportunity to the pilgrim to imbibe the wisdom of saints and ascetics who impart spiritual knowledge and wisdom to those who wish to listen. It is an attraction for religious discourses in which pilgrims listen and return to their homes to disseminate the values they learn. Various *akharas*, individual seers and social and religious organisations set up *pandals* for *pravachans* or discourses.

Back in 1895, Mark Twain, enamoured by the sea of faith among devotees at Kumbh Mela wrote, “It is wonderful, the power of a faith like that, that can make multitudes upon multitudes of the old and weak and the young and frail enter without hesitation or complaint upon such incredible journeys and endure the resultant miseries without repining. It is done in love, or it is done in fear; I do not know which it is. No matter what the impulse is, the act born of it is beyond imagination, marvellous to our kind of people, the cold Whites.”

The Kumbh Mela is inarguably the largest public gathering and collective act of faith anywhere in the world. The congregation at this unique religious fair primarily comprises of saints, sadhus, *sadhvis*, *kalpvasis* and pilgrims from all walks of life. The Mela possesses an innate uniqueness in terms of the number of visitors it receives and their heterogeneity in physical appearance, language, culture and caste. From Naga sadhus and members of various *akharas* to aged pilgrims, young children, foreign tourists and more – people from all walks of life visit Kumbh Mela to experience the divinity of the event.

Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 through its vision of a *divya* and *bhavya* Kumbh was grand in scale and scope. From the scale of arrangements to the quantum of facilities provided in the Mela grounds as well as permanent infrastructure in the city of Prayagraj, the Kumbh lived up to the honour bestowed on Kumbh Mela by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) – “an intangible cultural heritage of humanity” and “the largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on earth”.









FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: Ascetics and pilgrims of different cultural and social backgrounds celebrate faith at Kumbh 2019.

Twenty-first century India has witnessed the embracing of Kumbh Mela by people of both rural and urban spaces in larger numbers, prompting Prime Minister Narendra Modi to state during his visit to Prayagraj before Kumbh Mela, on December 16, 2018, that “Kumbh unites cities and villages” and that it is “the duty of the Government to take care of each and every one who visits and attends the Kumbh since it is a matter of India’s dignity”.







Kumbh 2019 lives up to the honour bestowed on Kumbh Mela by the UNESCO – “the largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on earth”







# AN ADMINISTRATIVE MARVEL











The October 2018 meeting of Kumbh Mela Margdarshak Mandal, comprising delegates of organisations of various denominations responsible for formulating the principles and direction of 'Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh'. Seen on the dais from left to right are Hon'ble Urban Development Minister Shri Suresh Khanna, present Chief Justice of Gujarat High Court Shri Vikram Nath, former Chief Justice of Allahabad High Court Shri D B Bhonsle, Hon'ble Governor Shri Ram Naik, Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath, Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad president Shri Narendra Giri and Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad secretary general Shri Hari Giri.







Many a time, imagination transcends normal logic. Kumbh Mela is a perfect example – a manifestation of how myriad issues of urban planning, public health, business and religious expression converge and convert a riverbank into a city housing millions of pilgrims and tourists.

Across the world, planners, policy makers, researchers and observers are still in awe of how the temporary city of Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 was built, as if by magic, to accommodate the 240 million visitors for 49 days – how it was conceptualised, created, developed and maintained with an administrative system catering to the smallest of needs of pilgrims and tourists.

Often, in the resplendence and glitter of the fair, the administrative machinery's role is forgotten – although it is its immaculate planning and 24-hour toil that helps make Kumbh Mela the largest, peaceful congregation of humanity on earth. During Prayagraj Kumbh 2019, large in scope and scale, the challenges of the administration

at first appeared intimidating. Not only had the Mela area expanded to 3,200 hectares from 1,936 hectares of the 2013 Kumbh – even the number of pilgrims and visitors expected was double than in the previous Mela.

However, though the volume of work had increased, the time for preparations remained the same. Also, since the Mela was envisioned as a *divya* and *bhavya* Kumbh, arrangements had to be created in contemporary style, and tradition had to be blended with technology.

Under the direct supervision of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the prodigious scale of the event and the enormity of the tasks were made to appear as simple as ABC.

The ephemeral landscape of Kumbh Mela 2019 was interesting because of the scale of coexistence of its formalities and informalities. It did not fail to impress.

Its magnitude and the experience were amazing – a spectacle that was marked by the presence of several researchers from across the world







THIS PAGE AND FACING PAGE: Prayagraj Kumbh City, laid out as various zones over 3,200 hectares and convenience with 22 temporary bridges built with more than 1,795 floating steel pontoons.









FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: Multiple measures – from traffic roundabouts in Prayagraj to advanced sewage treatment plants, power stations, a stabilised riverbank, water control room, thematic gates and levelled, checkered plate roads in the Mela area – to ensure a *divya* and *bhavya* Kumbh.

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019





FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: Permanent infrastructure – new airport terminal, upgraded railway stations and more – created for the first time during any Kumbh Mela as well as a host of facilities ranging from media centres and bank ATMs to female changing rooms, define Kumbh 2019.

who studied the various aspects of organisation and execution that went into the making of the 49-day religious and spiritual extravaganza.

The role of the government and the administrative machinery which, after Independence, had made several rules for the provision of basic amenities to facilitate religious observances, security, traffic management, lighting and health care, was expanded manifold. Working in unison to ensure that there were no stampedes, accidents, epidemics or other public health disasters in a temporary space created from makeshift and disposable/reusable materials, the sincere endeavours of all government departments awed one and all into speechless admiration.





To make Kumbh 2019 an event of unparalleled grandeur, the government took multiple measures. Besides welcoming pilgrims and tourists with gigantic theme-based gates, building tents to facilitate their stay, food courts to cater to multi-cultural tastes and huge *pandals* for cultural shows and religious discourses, infrastructure was created and upgraded in Prayagraj and its environs. Flyovers and railway under-bridges were built, roads were widened, and major intersections and parks beautified to put the city on the global map of tourism.

Key initiatives such as upgradation of railway stations, construction of a new airport terminal, upgradation of highways connecting Prayagraj to Pratapgarh, Rae Bareli and Varanasi and five new jetties to facilitate point-to-point ferry rides to bathing ghats







The vast Mela grounds lit up at night with 175 high masts, 40,700 LED lights and 2,80,000 camp connections.











were carried out by various government departments and agencies. As many as 140 roads were widened and beautified and 18 parking lots developed into temporary satellite towns with public conveniences and vending zones.

Considering the vastness of the Mela area, the campus was lit up with 40,700 LED lights and 175 high masts with round-the-clock maintenance mechanism and an efficient system of complaint redressal. For ease of navigation within the Mela area, 300 km of road were built, 1,795 pontoons constructed for 22 pontoon bridges and more than 524 shuttle buses and CNG auto-rickshaws were deployed for carrying pilgrims.

Public health was ensured through 5,000 water stand posts, 200 water ATMs, 150 water tankers and 100 hand pumps. Telecommunication services, banking services, civil supplies to *kalpvasis*, *akharas* and other religious organisations and health services – including ICU-level facilities and water and air ambulances – also functioned seamlessly, leading to an enhanced pilgrim experience.

Monitored round the clock by a large security set-up composed of four police lines, 40 police stations, three women police stations,

62 police outposts, 30,000 police personnel, 40 firefighting centres, 15 fire outposts, 40 watch towers and over 1,100 CCTV cameras and controlled by an Integrated Command and Control Centre, Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 turned into the most magnificent Kumbh Mela ever.

Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh will go down in history for its many firsts.

It is for the first time that a dedicated administrative tool to conduct the fair was created in the form of the Prayagraj Mela Authority.

It is for the first time that technology such as geo-mapping of parking lots and video analytics for crowd management was introduced.

For the first time, theme-based vending zones – food, grocery, garments, utensils and so on – were created and stall allotments done through online registration and identification of vendors.

It is also for the first time that permanent infrastructure was created in the city of Prayagraj – in terms of roads, bridges, sanitation, traffic, and security.

Last but not the least, it is for the first time that a Swachh Kumbh was envisioned and ensured – making it one of Kumbh 2019's greatest achievements.

Immaculate planning and 24-hour toil by Central and State government agencies and departments for a magnificent Kumbh 2019.







The success of Kumbh 2019 was also largely due to the continual clean, unpolluted waters of River Ganga. This marvel, achieved through sustained planning under the Namami Gange project, not only enhanced the quality of water before the commencement of the Mela, but also provided support to Kumbh Mela authorities to ensure a *swachh* Kumbh. The project extended financial assistance to the tune of ₹113 crore for 27,500 toilets and 20,000 urinals, ₹3.6 crore for 16,000 dustbins and lining bags, ₹16.68 crore for public outreach/IEC activities, including Paint My City Campaign.

The Namami Gange project also ensured bioremediation of drains through bioremediation/phytoremediation for six months and mass awareness activities by Ganga Praharis, Ganga Vichaar Manch and Ganga Task Force. A slew of measures were undertaken for sanitation

as well as checking outflow of sewer drains into the Ganga at a cost of about ₹250 crore. More than 40 big drains, which egressed directly into the river, were checked and treated through bioremediation and polymer-based techniques to provide clean water for Kumbh 2019. Namami Gange also undertook projects for ensuring solid waste management and sanitation at the Kumbh, with construction of 27,500 toilets, 20,000 urinals and 1,60,000 dustbins.

During Kumbh Mela, the Namami Gange pavilion located at the main entry point of the Mela from the city side of Sector I, was a big draw and widely acclaimed both for its design and substantive information on initiatives to promote public awareness and participation of villagers, religious groups, youth and local communities in the 'Clean Ganga' mission as well as its lyrical presentation on River Ganga.





TOP AND ABOVE: Ganga Praharis with dignitaries at the National Mission for Clean Ganga pavilion; Ganga Praharis line up during the inauguration of the Namami Gange pavilion in Kumbh Mela area.

FACING PAGE: The VIP jetty floats pretty on clean river waters during Kumbh 2019.

Under the project, the Uttar Pradesh Jal Nigam also treated sewer waters of Arail, Salori, Mawaiya, Lote Haran and Rajapur drains. Several new sewage treatment plants were set up in Prayagraj and the satellite towns of Jhusi, Naini and Phaphamau, in addition to the project of cleaning 21 ghats in the Kumbh Mela area.

For the first time in the world, a special technique called geosynthetic dewatering tube was used to clean the water of Lote Haran drain on the Jhusi side of River Ganga. Another unique technology in the form of trash skimmers were deployed for scooping out floating waste on the river.



Kumbh Mela 2019 came in from praise from none other than Shri Amitabh Kant, the CEO of NITI Ayog, who through his twitter handle highlighted the success of Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh on March 2 and 3.

“After field visit my reasons for this Kumbh Mela being so successful: dynamic officers with risk taking ability; online project monitoring; third party inspections; use of technology; high level of innovation; e-tendering and online procurement and high level of sanitation. Gr8 work!”

“The biggest human congregation on earth – 25 crore people in 50 days. Despite massive crowds, Kumbh at Sangam in Allahabad is extremely neat, clean, tidy and excellently managed. All credit to the UP Government team which has done a spectacular job.”

“With two outstanding and dynamic young officers, Ashish Goel (Commissioner, Prayagraj) and Vijay Karan Anand (DM, Kumbh) who did a remarkable job of organising the Kumbh Mela, building state-of-the-art infrastructure and basic amenities for the pilgrims. Gr8 tech usage! Congrats!”

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019









# Kumbh City

3,200 hectares planned  
on a grid pattern

20 self-sustaining sectors  
with integrated offices and  
markets

300 km roads with  
chequered plates

22 pontoon bridges

1,200 premium tents for  
tourists

Public accommodation, with a  
capacity of 20,000 beds

Ganga Pandal with a  
capacity to accommodate  
10,000 people for mega  
programmes

Pravachan pandal  
for religious and spiritual  
programmes

4 contemporary  
convention halls with  
state-of-the-art facilities  
for each zone

2,000 ATMs, 3 forex counters  
and 20 bank branches


20 mobile recharge  
counters

2000+ free Wi-Fi zones

Ration cards and permits for kalpvasis, akharas and  
religious organisations to access civil supplies

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019



An aerial photograph of a vast temporary tent city set up for the Kumbh Mela. The foreground and middle ground are filled with rows of black, peaked tents. A large, rectangular area in the center is covered with bright green artificial turf. Several white, conical tents are scattered within this green area. In the background, a long, white, translucent tent structure stretches across the horizon. To the left, a colorful mural of a cityscape is visible on a wall. The ground around the tents is dry and dusty, with some black water jugs visible in the lower-left corner. The sky is clear and blue.

Hospitality is one of the defining traditions of Indian culture and nowhere is this value reflected more than in Kumbh Mela, where planners and administrators convert a shifting river bed into Kumbh City – a city of tents that hosts lakhs of pilgrims and tourists for almost two months. From large numbers of men and women who have renounced the world to simple villagers and city folk from across India, and tourists and observers from different parts of the world – this is where one witnesses a confluence of cultures, customs and traditions in a one-of-a-kind religious extravaganza.

What is most interesting is how a temporary tent city with all kinds of facilities and infrastructure vanishes after the event. Nowhere in the world is such a transient city – with amenities that range from roads to hospitals, public conveyance to electricity, and security to bank





A unique city made of tents, Kumbh City is also notified as a separate district.





Photo: Rajesh Kumar Singh



THIS PAGE AND FACING PAGE: From elaborate living spaces with many luxuries to simple tents, dormitories, grand *pandals* and glittering lights – Kumbh 2019 composes into a delightful ambience.

services – created for a few weeks and on such a large budget. Also, it is perhaps the only example of a temporary city that is even notified as a separate district!

A temporary city provides the only feasible solution for hosting Kumbh Mela since the riverbank lies inundated in the rainy season and

River Ganga is known to often change its course. Even while preparing for Prayagraj Kumbh 2019, the Mela Authority could only ascertain the lay of the land for the Mela grounds in October 2018. Until then, strong river currents and changes in the course of the river discouraged concrete planning.

One may call it an administrative marvel or a unique example of temporary urban planning or even a perfect showcase of inter-governmental harmony – whatever be the definition, Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj has forever been an enigma for planners, an event that is appreciated with wonder and admiration.

It is an awe-inspiring example of how an arena to accommodate the largest congregation in the world is made ready in the shortest span of time and in the finest way possible.

Kumbh City was a unique city of tents – an entity unto itself. While the majority of tents housed pilgrims, there were also temporary structures that housed hospitals, banks, shops, police stations, fire stations and other government departments.

In this miniature city resided a mini globe – vibrant and buzzing with activity. The tents of pilgrims differed in size and furnishings. While some were small simple shelters, others were elaborate living spaces with air-conditioning, Wi-fi and five-star luxuries. As many as 1,200 premium tents with a capacity of 20,000 beds were erected in the trans-Yamuna Arail area and operated on a private-public-partnership basis to accommodate tourists and visitors from all over the country and abroad.

The tents in the *akhara* sector exuded a vivacious atmosphere with colourful camps, glittering *pandals* and the buzz of numerous



activities. At a distance, located across River Ganga, were the camps of lakhs of *kalpvasis* whose simple tents were turned into cosy homes during their month-long *kalpvas* on the banks of the Sangam.

In another sector, on another side, were tents that housed cultural venues, administrative offices, police stations, hospitals, vendor stalls, banks, food courts, fire stations and every other administrative arm a developed city can boast of.

Various *pandals* were also set up for cultural programmes, exhibitions, religious discourses and even blood donation camps, free health check-ups and game zones for children. Ganga Pandal, with a capacity to accommodate 10,000 people, became the venue for cultural, spiritual and official programmes. Four convention halls with state-of-

the-art facilities and modern and contemporary décor for each zone also witnessed events while *pravachan pandals* in the Mela area were everyday hubs for religious and spiritual programmes.

Viewed from a height, the city was an enchanting sight – with rows and rows of colourful tents, fluttering flags of different *akharas*, colourful gates flashing with fairy lights and fluorescent pinwheels spinning into a kaleidoscope of colours. Kumbh 2019's tent city was to leave the entire world in awe. It is no wonder that researchers and foreign tourists, thousands in numbers, flocked to Prayagraj from all over the world – much like the thousands of migratory birds who fly down to Triveni Sangam every winter and lend exquisite beauty and character to this holy place.







THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019





ABOVE: The 10,000-capacity Ganga Pandal built to host significant events, plays host to a public meeting of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.

FACING PAGE: Popularly called 'Presidential Palace', the expanse and richness of the Sri Avdheshanand Giri Maharaj *pandal* draws visitors in droves.



# Clean Kumbh



More than **15,000** sanitation workers, with **7,000** deployed round the clock

More than **1,22,000** toilets

More than **20,000** dustbins with liner bags

**40** compactors and **120** tippers for disposal of waste

**2,000** swachhagrahis engaged as foot soldiers

**500** GPS devices on sanitation vehicles

**500** bulk generators and **20** sanitation vehicles installed with RFID readers to ensure waste collection

**5** sewage treatment plants

Open defecation, garbage and odour free Kumbh Mela

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019







River trash skimmer machines under the Namami Gange Project keep rivers clean round the clock at Kumbh 2019.









ABOVE AND FACING PAGE: Swachh Kumbh 2019 ensures exemplary cleanliness in the Mela area – a people’s movement with sanitation workers, pilgrims, sadhus and tourists united through awareness campaigns and on-ground work.

Swachh Kumbh was by far one of Kumbh 2019’s greatest achievements. The initiative not only operated with an exactitude that commanded high regard from dignitaries and visitors from across the world, but also aligned itself perfectly with the government’s resolve to showcase the Mela as *swachh* (clean) and *surakshit* (secure).

Never in the history of Kumbh Mela were 1,22,500 toilets, 20,000 dustbins with liner bags, 40 compactors, 120 tippers, 15,000 sanitation workers and 2,000 *swachhagrahis* in constant service in the Mela area. The effort not only drew praise from across the world but also found mention in Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi’s speech when he received the Seoul Peace Prize in South Korea.

With millions from across the world gathering in Prayagraj during the 49-day long Mela, sanitation was the most critical of issues. It was also a significant guiding principle for the administration and, therefore, divided into three segments – Swachh Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh and Behaviour Change to enhance pilgrim experience.

From toilets to garbage management, potable and clean water, vector control, disinfection and epidemiological analysis – each detail was taken care of. Forty compactors and 120 tippers ensured timely, effective and efficient disposal of waste.

The Mela area was made vector-free by employing over 30 hot fogging machines and installing 20,000 dustbins with liner bags. For

the first time, five sewage treatment plants with bio-remediation and geo-tube remediation technologies, were also in operation.

In another of the many ‘firsts’ witnessed at Kumbh 2019, an app-based sanitation monitoring system was put in place for cleanliness workers to reach a spot in minutes – to ensure timely cleanliness of toilets and on-site and off-site septage management. Other than continuous jet sprays to keep the area free from flies, a specially-developed chemical also ensured a round-the-clock, odourless environment.

With Kumbh Mela being primarily about ritualistic bathing at Triveni Sangam, a large force of men and giant river trash skimmer machines were deployed to keep the river water clean round-the-clock. Finally, as Saloni Goel, the Prayagraj Mela Authority’s Sanitation and Environment Consultant, would say, “it was behavioural change that held the key to ensuring a *swachh* and *bhavya* Kumbh.”

Approximately 2,000 *swachhagrahis* or village-level volunteers under the Swachh Bharat Mission, motivated people to use toilets and reduce open defecation (OD). LED vans, hoardings and banners also delivered messages on public participation and contribution towards cleanliness.

Thus, despite the footfall of 240 million devotees during the 49-day Mela, the entire area remained open defecation, odourless and garbage free zone.









ABOVE: As an expression of gratitude and recognition of the earnest efforts of sanitation workers in achieving the Swachh Kumbh feat, Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi felicitates high achievers in the presence of Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath and other dignitaries on February 24.

RIGHT: Swami Chidanand Saraswati, president and spiritual head of Parmarth Niketan Ashram, enjoys a meal with sanitation workers during Kumbh 2019.

FACING PAGE: The steely resolve of the government and unique measures for sanitation and cleanliness ensure 24/7 cleanliness of river water, ghats and Mela area.



THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019









# Secure Kumbh

Civil police	●	21,000
Women police		563
River police		155
SDRF/flood companies of PAC		6
NDRF companies		2
Fire service	●	775
STF teams		2
NSG commando teams		3
PAC		26
CAPF		80
Traffic police	●	648
Mounted police		211
AS check team		15
ATS commando teams		2
Sniper teams		7
Intelligence	●	363
Anti-sabotage team		30
BDDS team		13
Dog squad team		17
Police lines	●	4
Police thanas		40
Mahila thanas		3
Police outposts		62
Fire stations		12
Helpline 1920 operators	●	30









Other than an unbelievably *swachh* and clean Mela, Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 will also go down in the history of “the largest congregation of humanity” as a *surakshit* or secure one – marked by smart and sensitive policing which ensured that the 49-day festival was always safe for pilgrims and tourists.

As S N Sabat, Additional Director General of Police, Prayagraj was to proudly proclaim, “The three-tier security plan – with Kumbh Mela area as the core area, areas adjoining the Mela area as control area and outer areas as support area – proved to be a resounding success.”

Personnel of various State and Central security agencies were not only able to maintain effective law and order but also thwart external threats. Approximately 50,000 police personnel drawn from UP Police, Armed Constabulary, Central Reserve Police Force, Government Railway Police, National Disaster Relief Force and State Disaster Relief Force were deployed to ensure safety in the Mela area.

Other than sensitised security personnel, drones, tyre killers, baggage scanners, CCTV cameras, equipment for access control/ baggage scan and dog squads were employed as security tools.











A core security team for audit of personnel and close coordination between ATS, STF, Security Headquarters and NSG also ensured that different kinds of crowds in different areas of the Mela were managed well and safety remained unimpaired.

Major security challenges such as crowd management, especially on main bathing days, prevention of terrorist attacks and other disasters, and smooth flow of road and pedestrian traffic were also easily overcome by arrangements that included surveillance, seamless communication, efficient emergency response systems, use of modern technology and constant monitoring of all aspects by the Additional Director General of Police, the Inspector General of Police and the Special Superintendent of Police, Kumbh Mela.

Fifty-eight police outposts, in addition to outposts on both sides of 22 pontoon bridges, took care of the safety of the Mela area, including the rivers. River police, trained in standard operating procedures and flood response system, and equipped with life buoys, life jackets, floating jetties, sonar system, speedboats and more, remained primed around the clock to fight untoward incidents.

With millions gathered to celebrate a 49-day festival of faith, fire, stampedes and children getting lost in the milling crowds were potential high-risk hazards. Considering the expanse and crowd density in the Mela area, advanced firefighting measures remained in constant readiness – high pressure trolley mounted water mist fire extinguishers, bikes with water and foam mist fire extinguishing systems, firefighting speedboats





THIS PAGE: Approximately 50,000 security personnel drawn from various State and Central agencies ensure round the clock security to achieve an incident-free Kumbh 2019.

FACING PAGE: The two top fire safety measures at Kumbh 2019 – high-pressure trolley-mounted water mist fire extinguishers and bikes with water and foam mist fire extinguishing systems.





with portable water pumps, high speed water mist motorcycles and so on. While the risk of stampedes was mitigated through the installation of a round-the-clock, real-time crowd management system that analysed crowd density at various places, a fully-computerised Lost and Found system was able to reunite about 37,000 lost individuals with their kith and kin. Dedicated teams of doctors and paramedical staff with specialised kits, besides 24/7 CCTV monitoring of high-risk areas also paid dividends in ensuring a safe Mela.

Besides algorithms for crowd management, policing was made effective through automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) system, vehicle detection by colour/licence plate/date-time combinations, real-time information dissemination of warnings, traffic advice, route guidance and emergency messages, text and graphic-based message display of the integrated traffic management system and so on.

Social media was another effective tool – with the Facebook page and Twitter handle of Kumbh Police becoming great hits among Mela visitors. By providing live information about crowd and traffic, pilgrims and tourist movement was not only controlled but also efficiently managed to enhance pilgrim experience.







THIS PAGE AND FACING PAGE: Security personnel at the Kumbh distinguish themselves not only by ensuring safety of citizens and visitors but also boosting pilgrim confidence during performance of rituals. In commendation of their efforts towards a *surakshit* Kumbh, Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi felicitates Kumbh duty personnel in the presence of Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath and other dignitaries.







24/7  
1920  
HELPLINE

कम्प्यूटरीकृत  
खोया पाया केन्द्र



बिछड़ों को  
अपनों से  
मिलाए  
परिवार  
की  
खुशियाँ  
लौटाए

बिछड़ों को  
अपनों से  
मिलाए  
परिवार  
की  
खुशियाँ  
लौटाए

बिछड़ों को  
अपनों से  
मिलाए  
परिवार  
की  
खुशियाँ  
लौटाए

24/7

1920

HELPLINE

कम्प्यूटरीकृत  
खोया पाया केन्द्र



In what was one of the firsts in a Kumbh Mela, Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 boasted of a fully computerised Lost and Found system in addition to the traditional public address system. The centralised digital system was integrated with social media while its public address announcement system was linked to LED screens that displayed images of lost-and-found citizens. Events were monitored 24/7, as were its related content on social media. More than 37,000 lost individuals were reunited with their kith and kin through:

- 12 high-tech registration kiosks in the Mela area and one each in Jhansi bus station and the Prayagraj and Prayag railway stations;
- 15 centres in different Mela sectors to hold lost/found persons; and
- Close co-ordination with NGOs and Police Mitras, traditionally involved in the exercise.





# Ease of Experience

State-of-the-art airport terminal and runway; new platforms, skywalks, counters, infotainment and holding enclosures at **railway stations**

Pictograms to guide illiterate pilgrims and information-packed **Rail Kumbh Seva** app

5 temporary jetties and 4 floating terminals on Prayagraj-Benaras waterway

Traffic diversion from 7 directions

84 parking areas for over 5.63 lakh vehicles

18 parking lots as satellite towns

Coloured strips on pedestrian routes

Maps and VMDs in specific areas

2,000 signages for ease of navigation

54 holding areas and barricading and **watch towers** at strategic locations

Feeder conveyance – e-rickshaws, CNG autorickshaws and shuttle buses

Earmarked routes for shahi snaan

City area **No Vehicle Zone** for three days (Peak -1 day, Peak day, Peak +1 day)







Eighteen parking lots were developed into temporary satellite towns with public conveniences and vending zones.





THIS PAGE: Traditional holding enclosures, feeder conveyances like e-rickshaws and shuttle buses and a no-vehicle city area on auspicious days ensure ease of movement during Kumbh 2019. Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath experiences the comfort of a Kumbh shuttle bus prior to Kumbh Mela.

FACING PAGE: The mega religious convergence managed in a seamless manner with the aid of integrated traffic management and real-time crowd density detection systems.



Adroit planning by the government ensured ease of movement for devotees during Kumbh 2019. In fact, the Mela was a perfect case study of how 240 million people could navigate the ‘largest congregation of humanity’ in the most uncomplicated and seamless manner. Other than extensive use of digital technology, it was multi-modal transport facilities created ahead of the mega affair and an integrated crowd and traffic management system that gave Mela visitors the *bhavya* feel that was promised by the administration.

From airways and railways to roadways and waterways, each department concerned ensured that Prayagraj hosted millions of visitors with the ease and cordiality that is expected of global tourist-friendly cities. Bamrauli airport with a new runway for low-visibility and large aircraft landing, a state-of-the-art terminal building and enhanced number of flights from all corners of the country not only made travel easy for foreign dignitaries and overseas visitors but also pilgrims from various cities of the country.

About 800 special trains run by Indian Railways, besides augmented facilities such as footbridges and skywalks, new terminal with seven platforms at Prayag Ghat station, new platforms at Chheoki and Allahabad junction and infotainment for pilgrims within station premises went a long way in pilgrims enjoying a *bhavya* Mela.

With most pilgrims arriving the Mela by train, train schedules and boarding were efficiently executed – holding enclosures ensuring that when pilgrims returned to the station after *snaan* (bathing) they could be guided to their respective trains without confusion, crowding or stampedes.

Hundreds of buses transported pilgrims from the hinterland while shuttle buses and e-rickshaws served as feeder conveyance for visitors to and from Kumbh areas within Prayagraj city.

The adoption of waterways as a mode of transport was also a sagacious decision since many pilgrims could visit the Mela via the Prayagraj-Varanasi stretch.

Four floating terminals – Kila Ghat, Saraswati Ghat, Naini Bridge and Sujawan Ghat – and five temporary jetties – Chatnag, Sirsa, Vindhyachal, Sitamarhi and Chunar – developed by the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) functioned along the Ganga to ease movement of pilgrims. *CL Kasturba* and *SL Kamla* were also pressed into service during the Mela.

Finally, it was a brilliant use of artificial intelligence and modern logistic systems that fused into ensuring that no overcrowding or traffic bottlenecks or stampedes could mar the magnificence of Prayagraj Kumbh 2019.





स्वच्छ कुम्भ



# केन्द्रीय चिकित्सालय - कुम्भ मेला - प्रयागराज

Designed-Created & Fabricated  
By  
ANCHOR CONTAINER SERVICES PVT. LTD  
DELHI  
Mail-Info@anchorcontainerindia.com  
Contacts - 9310044921, 9810814656, 9313005734







# Swasth Kumbh

Spraying of water  
in Mela area to check dust  
clouds

Restriction of vehicles in Mela  
area to control **air pollution**

Polythene-free Mela  
area

**95** million litres of drinking  
water per day

**5,000** drinking water  
stand posts

**200** water ATMs, **150** water  
tankers, **100** hand pumps

**1** central hospital with  
**100** beds

**2** infectious disease hospitals

**9** hospitals with **20** beds  
each in different sectors

**150** ambulances and **1** air  
ambulance in Mela area

**6** advanced life supply  
ambulances

**10** motorised river  
ambulances

**2,000** medical staff

**40-bed** trauma care facility









Mass gatherings potentially expose people to a range of health risks – the primary being water-borne diseases. The focus during Kumbh 2019 was, therefore, entirely on mitigating this risk through 24/7 supply of drinking water. Potable water, continuously safeguarded by water-testing, was made available to over 20 lakh *kalpvasis* and crores of visitors at 5,000 drinking water stand posts, 200 water ATMs, 100 hand pumps and 150 water tankers serviced by a 900-km pipeline.

Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 will also be remembered for a long time for its charitable endeavour – Netra Kumbh. Inside a grand *pandal* in Sector 6, 400 ophthalmologists performed over 10,000 cataract operations and distributed more than 1,00,000 free spectacles. More than five lakh people also received free-of-cost eye check-up.

Other than multiple Prayagraj hospitals, equipped with new wards and upgraded medical equipment, Kumbh 2019 also boasted of 22 hospitals with more than 450 beds, 150 ambulances and 2,000 medical staff in the Mela precincts. State-of-the-art motorised river ambulances, advanced life supply ambulances, an air ambulance and a 40-bed trauma care facility were also in place to deal with likely emergencies such as stampedes, accidents or other disasters.

FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: Swasth or healthy Kumbh can be credited to many measures – state-of-the-art motorised river ambulances, well-equipped hospitals in the Mela precincts, Netra Kumbh services and 24/7 supply of drinking water.





# Smart Kumbh

2 Integrated Command and Control Centres and 4 viewing centres

1137 CCTV cameras at 268 locations

40 variable message display boards

Video analytics for crowd management

34 mobile towers

43 traffic junctions with Adaptive Traffic Control System (ATCS)

Automatic Vehicle Number Plate Recognition System

Live streaming of events on website and mobile app

Website links between UP Police/Mela Authority/Railways/Roadways

Facebook page, Instagram account and Twitter handle

Automation of public distribution system

GPS devices on sanitation vehicles











Adjectives in praise of Kumbh 2019 have been countless, of which the loftiest would be ‘Smart Kumbh’. Other than the fact that Kumbh Nagari – as the temporary city was christened – was organised smartly and swiftly in grids in a matter of weeks, Kumbh 2019 also witnessed extensive use of digital technology that went a long way in enhancing pilgrim experience, a guiding principle of the Mela.

Digital initiatives equipped the Mela with state-of-the-art technological innovations – from digitisation of land allotment to geo-tagging of important places, landmarks, roads and bridges and more.

The icing on this digital cake, however, were two state-of-the-art Integrated Control and Command Centres (ICCC) – one in the Kumbh Mela area and another for overall city surveillance – that served as centralised decision-making hubs with state-of-the-art dashboards.

Providing an integrated overview of smart features highlighting key performance indicators, situational awareness, incident management, integrated system monitoring, they functioned as the pulse of the Mela Authority with traffic movement, sanitation, disaster management, water supply, vehicle detection, pilgrim security, power supply, milk supply, banking, digitised route guidance and crowd control devices



TOP AND ABOVE: Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Hon’ble Uttar Pradesh Governor Shri Ram Naik, Hon’ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath and other dignitaries at the ultra-modern Integrated Command and Control Center (ICCC) in the Kumbh Mela area after its formal inauguration on December 16, 2018. The ICCC is an exemplar of Kumbh 2019’s essence of a ‘technologically-enhanced traditional Mela’.



all digitally received for execution and monitoring. As Mela Officer Vijay Kiran Anand put it, “From first information to action, result and feedback – everything was organised on the digital platform.”

Real-time data uploaded on the Mela website and mobile application also went a long way in enhancing pilgrim experience. Geo-tagged places, parking lots, food vendors, accommodation facilities and more, helped pilgrims to navigate and access the plethora of attractions and facilities that were available at a single touch on their cell phones. A dedicated helpline with round-the-clock operations addressed queries of pilgrims and locals and triggered instant responses from city administrators. Key notices, other than routine updates, were also communicated across the city through 40 variable messaging displays in strategic areas.

Approximately 1,137 close-circuit cameras tracked pedestrian

and traffic movement – serving the twin purposes of managing crowds and preventing untoward incidents. This was most evident on auspicious *snaan* days, with the system of real-time crowd density detection and alert algorithm automatically detecting crowds at the ghats and facilitating diversion of routes to avoid stampedes. In fact, it is this digital interface that prevented any major incident during the 49-day-long Mela attended by about 15 crore people.

Other ‘smart’ support measures were automatic number plate recognition system, vehicle detection by colour/licence plate and date-time combinations, adaptive traffic control system, real-time information dissemination of warnings, traffic advice, route guidance and emergency messages, text and graphic based message display, integrated traffic management system, and requirements in the akhara sector, food vending zones and ghats.



Digital interfaces such as real time data on Kumbh Mela mobile app enhance pilgrim experience at Kumbh 2019.



# SMART PRAYAGRAJ











Mesmerising Kumbh Mela – with its crowds and many expressions of tradition, faith and spirituality – gave administrators the wonderful opportunity to take forward Prayagraj’s Smart City projects and showcase the *tirthraj* as a 21st century city where one can witness profound spiritual culture. Albeit famed for its mystical aura since time immemorial, Prayagraj had to retrofit and renew itself into a citizen-friendly and sustainable city – that would also host 240 million people during the 49-day Mela.

Following massive infrastructure-building and innovative architectural and beautification drives in the run-up to the Mela, Prayagraj wore a new look during the Kumbh. Pretty as a picture, thanks to the remarkable Paint My City campaign and architectural lighting, the

city not only boasted of several Smart City features, but also amenities that ensured a magnificent experience for pilgrims and tourists – broad, well-lit and clean roads, roads over bridges, roads under bridges and traffic junctions for ease of movement, environmentally aesthetic green zones, upgraded parks with recreation facilities, spruced-up ghats, clean toilets backed by an effective solid waste management system, tourist walk trails, demarcated night-vending zones, and last but not the least, bringing most facilities under the ambit of the Integrated Command and Control Centres (ICCC).

Using state-of-the-art technology, the Tourism Department, went the whole shebang to prettify the city and put together amenities and ornamentation developed by various government departments.





ABOVE AND FACING PAGE: Besides enhancing pilgrim experience with thematic gates and installation art, permanent infrastructure such as flyovers and road under bridges also define Prayagraj's rapid march into the Smart City category.

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019

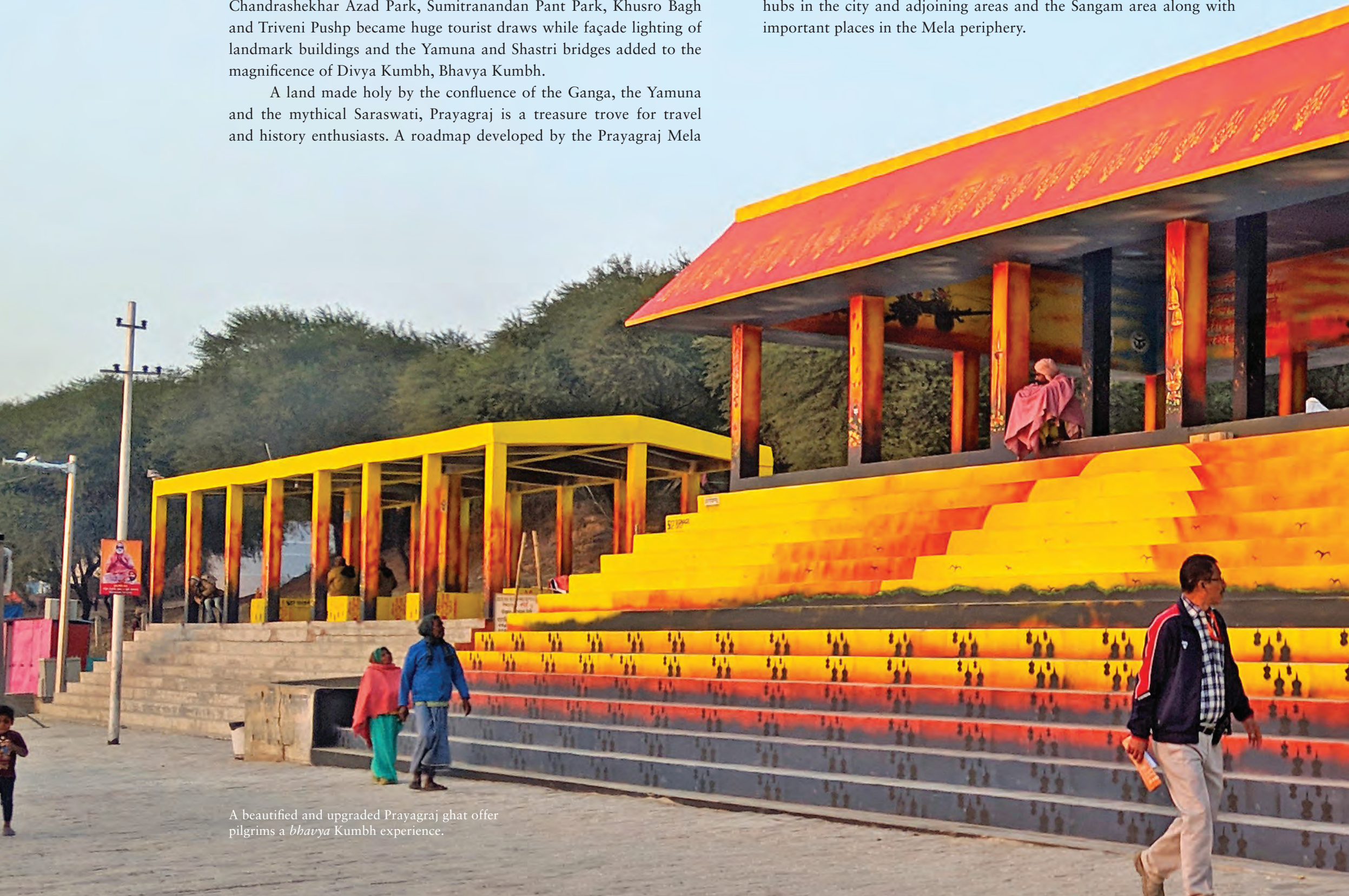


Temporary thematic gates and spiral lighting on 1,200 pillars marked the approach roads and entrances to various sectors in the Mela area. Embellished with backlit signage, sculptures, murals and greenery, prominent traffic junctions and various selfie points developed by the administration became beautiful photo-op backdrops.

Well-equipped and aesthetically pleasing Bharadwaj Park, Chandrashekhar Azad Park, Sumitranandan Pant Park, Khusro Bagh and Triveni Pushp became huge tourist draws while façade lighting of landmark buildings and the Yamuna and Shastri bridges added to the magnificence of Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh.

A land made holy by the confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati, Prayagraj is a treasure trove for travel and history enthusiasts. A roadmap developed by the Prayagraj Mela

Authority to revive the draw of mythologically significant but little-known places in the city thus turned out to be a hit among pilgrims. Other than Triveni Sangam which was at the top of the list of must-visit places, pilgrims and tourists explored the city's many facets, mostly following the four set thematic trails – historical buildings, places of religious and mythological significance around the main temples, food hubs in the city and adjoining areas and the Sangam area along with important places in the Mela periphery.



A beautified and upgraded Prayagraj ghat offer pilgrims a *bhavya* Kumbh experience.











The most significant and germane was the Sangam Walk which began at Shankar Viman Mandapam and trailed through Bade Hanumanji Temple, Patalpuri Mandir, Akshayvat, Allahabad Fort and Ram Ghat.

Other than enhancing experience and easing navigation with the help of 2,000 signboards across the city and Mela area, the safety of pilgrims was also ensured with 1,200 LED light poles and 115 high mast lights on MG Road, Hewitt Road, Leader Road, Stanley Road, PD Road, Nawab Yusuf Road, Jawaharlal Nehru Road, Chauphatka, Maharana Pratap Crossing, Eklavya Crossing, MNNIT Crossing and Dhobi Ghat. Pontoon bridges, parking areas, Panchkoshi Parikrama Marg and the Dwadash Madhavs were also outfitted with electrical connections.

Essentially a theme-driven street art campaign, Prayagraj Mela Authority's Paint My City campaign simultaneously precluded defacement of walls, beautified prominent roads, buildings, colleges, organisations, offices, boats, e-rickshaws, flyovers, bus stops and railway stations as well as educated pilgrims about the religious, spiritual and scientific aspects of Kumbh Mela. As Awanish Kumar Awasthi, Additional Chief Secretary and Director General, Department of Tourism was to put it, "Pilgrims and tourists should go back with memories of magnificent experiences."





# Pretty Prayagraj

Street art spread over more than **20 lakh** square feet across Prayagraj.

The story behind Kumbh narrated on **25** art panels on the boundary wall of Central Jail, Naini.

A walking art gallery created by over **500** artists, **5** agencies, professionals and student volunteers

Religious, spiritual, scientific and **mythological** connotation of Kumbh, cultural diversity and heritage of Uttar Pradesh – the main themes of Paint My City campaign

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019

























# THE PEOPLE











THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019

ABOVE AND LEFT: A gathering of many peoples – from sadhus, tourists, pilgrims, researchers, *mahants*, *acharyas* and more – at Prayagraj Kumbh.

FACING PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Saints of major *akharas* perform religious rituals; Sri Avdheshanand Giri Maharaj, Acharya Mahamandaleshwar of the Juna Akhara with others; Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad secretary general Hari Giri with others at Kumbh 2019.

In keeping with the intrinsic nature of the Mela, Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 was a confluence of people of all ages, cultures, nationalities and religious leanings. From aged believers to young children to Naga *sadhus* and members of various *akharas*, foreign tourists and researchers and national and international dignitaries – millions participated to experience the *divya* and *bhavya* event.

Albeit an age-old pilgrimage, born of a curious mix of astrology, astronomy, mythology, spirituality and rituals, Kumbh 2019 wonderfully preserved its ethos in what was essentially a technology-driven Mela.

Kumbh is about faith – it is faith that inspires devotees to brave inclement weather and converge on the banks of the Triveni Sangam. And it is faith that motivates *kalpvasis* to stay in the Mela area for a month.





Photo: Rajesh Kumar Singh



Photo: Rajesh Kumar Singh

While it is believed that the holy waters of the Sangam wash away human sins, Kumbh is more of a pilgrimage than a premise for penance. Therefore, religious fervour and traditional gaiety, pervaded the festival as millions of people descended on the banks of Triveni Sangam for Kumbh 2019. From *shankaracharyas* to *mahamandleshwars*, *mahants*, *acharyas* and ascetics of all hues and from *kalpvasis* and pilgrims to tourists and researchers – all gathered without invitation to celebrate the holy event.

Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 was marked by the presence of large numbers of foreigners. Although separate camps were set up for them in Arail across the Yamuna, most mingled with Indian pilgrims who arrived in hordes on the six *snaan* (bathing) days during the 49-day Kumbh Mela. Maria, a student from Arizona University, was attracted when she heard about Kumbh Mela during a study tour. Sharapov from Russia decided to visit Kumbh to “celebrate Indian winter”. Even NRIs who visited Kumbh after attending the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in Varanasi unanimously felt that remembering their roots in a significant religious atmosphere was an enlivening experience.

Prominent people have visited Prayag Kumbh over the ages – from Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang during the reign of King Harshvardhana to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Swami Prabhupad, Swami Vivekananda, J Krishnamurthy and even noted 20th century writer Mark Twain.







THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019

THIS PAGE: Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath participates in religious and social occasions at Kumbh Mela.

FACING PAGE LEFT TOP AND BOTTOM: Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath doing puja at the Sangam; with Shankaracharya of Puri Peeth, Swami Sri Nischalananda Saraswati-ji Maharaj.





Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath and several Uttar Pradesh State Cabinet ministers at Akshayvat.



Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath at a Kumbh 2019 felicitation ceremony.

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019









# Sadhus and Sadhvis

Kumbh Mela is not only the largest religious gathering in the world, it is also the largest congregation of sadhus and *sadhvis* – men and women who have renounced the world, left their families and have devoted their lives to the service of their faith, the *Sanatana Dharma* or eternal religion. They take a vow of celibacy and dress in saffron robes – while adhering to the path of simple living and high thinking. Many of these sadhus are members of *akharas* or religious sects, although there are those who are not affiliated to any single order, but who mostly reside in the Himalayas or wander from place to place.





Several religious groups and leaders who have hundreds of followers also set up their camps on the riverbank. Swami Ramdev who has made yoga a household word set up camp at Prayagraj Kumbh as did Swami Chidananda from Paramarth Niketan Ashram in Rishikesh who has worked extensively in favour of Green Kumbh and ban on plastics or even Art of Living founder Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. In fact more than 5,000 social, spiritual and religious organisations set up camps in the Mela area – all of which became centres for religious discourses and spiritual discussions.





FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: Sadhus, sadhvis and members of religious and social organisations devoted to the service of their faith at Kumbh 2019.



## DANDIWADA

Ascetics who hold wooden logs, called *bhramba dandas* are known as *dandi sanyasis*. They are not a sect but a tradition of the *ashrama* system. Under this system only Brahmins have the right to take up this *sanyas*. It is said that Lord Vishnu was the first *dandi sanyasi* who held the *danda*.

नारायणं पद्म भवं वशिष्ठः  
शक्तिं च तत्पुत्रं परश्रमं च  
व्यासम् सूक्तम् गौर पदम् महन्तम् गोविन्द  
योगिन्द्रमथास्य शिष्यं  
श्री शंकराचार्यं मथास्य पद्म पदम् अ  
हस्तमलंकम् च शिष्यं  
तं त्रोटकं वर्तिकरं मानस्य  
गुरुं संततं मानतोसिम

Narayanam Padya Bhavm Vashinshtah,  
Shaktim Cha Tatputra Parashram Cha  
Vyasam Sukam Gaur Padam Mahantam  
Govind Yogindramathaasya Shishyam  
Shri Shankaracharya Mathaasya Padya Padam a  
Hastamalankam Cha Shishyam  
Tam Trotankam Vartikkar Manmansya  
Guru Santat Maanatosim

Thereafter, Adi Guru Shankaracharya established four *mathas* in four directions and appointed *dharmacharyas* in all of them. For the protection of the *Santana Dharma*, he also founded the *Dashanam* (ten) *Sanyas* of which three (*Ashram*, *Teerth* and *Sarasvati*) became *dandi sanyasis* and while the remaining seven were established as *akharas*.









ABOVE: Prayagwals help devotees settle in and perform various rituals on platforms allotted to them in the Mela area.

RIGHT: Followers of the Acharya Bada sect perform a ritual bath of their deity in the holy waters of the Sangam.

## PRAYAGWALS

Prayagwals share a very close relationship with historically-celebrated Tirthraj Prayag. Believed to be the original citizens of Prayag, most Prayagwals have been residing in the city since generations. During Kumbh and Magha Melas, Prayagwals who are allotted land at the Mela site on a negligible rent, welcome and settle pilgrims and devotees in the Mela area besides helping them perform various rituals. *Matsya Purana* and *Prayag Mahatamya* mention that as a practice, a *teerth purohit* (priest) accompanies pilgrims who visit Prayag and their relationship is that of guru-*shishya* or student-teacher.

According to a District Gazetteer of the British period, pilgrims who pay their homage at Prayag perform all kinds of religious rituals – including *daan-updaans* – with the help of Prayagwals. The first ritual is a visit to Beni Madhava followed by *sankalp*, *mundan*, *snaan*, *pind daan* – offering of libations of water to the gods – *shaiyya daan* (donation of bedding), *gau daan* (donation of cows) and *bhumidaan* (donation of land).

Prayagwal Sabha, the organisation of Prayagwals, fix the number of *takhats* or wooden platforms that serve as points of performance of religious rituals for their pilgrims. Like a family priest, Prayagwals maintain records of genealogies of pilgrims, based on area and family name – all of which are maintained in registers that are kept in a big box on their *takhats*. Prayagwals display their banners on tall bamboo poles which help pilgrims identify their Prayagwal.

## ACHARYA BADA

The first *acharya* of the Acharya Bada sect, also known as the Ramanuj sect, was Shathkop who used to sell winnow baskets. The sect's fourth *acharya* propagated its teachings by creating various holy books and is it since then that the sect has come to be known as the Shri Ramanuj sect. Its followers worship Lord Narayana or Vishnu and revere Goddess Lakshmi as their deity. Their main pilgrimages include those on the banks of the Tri-dand and River Cauvery.







ABOVE: Ascetics walk into Kumbh 2019 grounds carrying holy books.

RIGHT: Khak Chowk of the three Vaishnav *akharas*.

The Acharya Bada sect bestows *brahmchari diksha* on boys above eight years who thereafter study the Vedas. They achieve *sanyasa* only after passing multiple stages of examinations. They have the freedom to choose family life or *grihasta* after completion of their studies, although if they choose to take *sanyas*, they are required to forfeit family relations.

## KHAK CHOWK

Khak Chowk, an old Kumbh tradition, is the place that houses over hundred *mahants* and *mandaleshwars* affiliated to the three Vaishnav *akharas*. Khak Chowk is run and managed by a committee headed by a saint. Quite like Prayagwals who provide facilities to individual pilgrims and visitors, the Khak Chowk Management Committee – an organisation that is second only in importance to the Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad – manages the *mahants* and seers of the three Vaishnav *akharas* and accommodates them in the land allotted for Khak Chowk.





Naga Sadhus







ABOVE AND FACING PAGE: Reclusive Naga sadhus – the main attraction at Kumbh Mela.

Like always, Naga sadhus were the major attraction at Prayagraj Kumbh 2019. Shaivite saints and sadhus, who are part of *akharas* such as Juna Akhara and Dasnami Akhara, Naga sadhus reside in their *akhara* camps spread over a large area. A large exclusive community, with a well-established organisational structure and hierarchy, Naga *sanyasis* generally remain naked with ash smeared over their bodies. Some of them are *hat* yogis who perform difficult religious penances such as standing on one leg, or keeping a hand raised for many years.

















ABOVE AND LEFT: *Dhunis* or fire-pits in front of tents of Naga sadhus offer protection from the chilly Kumbh weather and are also used to prepare tea.

FACING PAGE: Naga ascetics brandish swords and *trishuls* during Maghi Purnima *shahi snaan*.



They have individual fire pits (*dhuni*) in front of their tents, the flames of which protect the saints from the chilly cold weather that prevails during the Kumbh Mela season. As a rule, a *sanyasi* does not ignite a fire or cook food; but an exception is made at the Kumbh and often *dhunis* are used to prepare tea.

The most spectacular sights in Kumbh Mela are the Shahi Snaan of Naga sadhus and the induction of novices into the fold after an initiation ceremony. The Shahi Snaan procession is perhaps the grandest and most photographed – with hundreds and hundreds of Naga ascetics, brandishing swords and *trishuls* (tridents), marching for a ritual dip in the river on the designated bathing days.





*Kalpvasis* arrive the Mela grounds on January 21, prior to *kalpvas* or the period of austerity.





# Kalpvasis

Pilgrimages have always been important ways to absolve oneself of sin and gain religious merit. While performance of religious rituals are complex, many a time requiring the assistance of priests, pilgrimages are more simple and less expensive. They are also widely popular because they have always been open to everyone – irrespective of caste, sex and economic status.

The *Prayag Mahamatya* states that the sins of an individual disappear the moment he enters the boundaries of Prayag. Even merely sighting the holy place, or remembering it or rubbing its clay on the body can be a purifying act. Hindu holy texts mention that one with a pure heart can be liberated from sins even if he hears the name Prayag. A pilgrim can attain the benefits of *ashvamedha yagna* (horse sacrifice) and *rajsuya yagna* (king's consecration sacrifice) by sprinkling the waters of the holy Triveni Sangam on oneself.

Unlike the majority who visit the Magha and Kumbh Melas for ritual bath, there are pilgrims who camp on the banks of the Rivers Ganga and Yamuna at Prayagraj for a month and observe rituals prescribed in the *Puranas*. Known as *kalpvasis*, these pilgrims provide serenity, equanimity, vibrancy and a city-like ambience to the Mela. As a matter of fact, it is the *kalpvasis* and the *akharas* that are integral to the Mela – with major arrangements for the Kumbh done while keeping them in mind.

At Kumbh 2019, *kalpvasis* primarily inhabited Sector 6, although their presence also enriched the ambience in Sector 13 and parts of Jhunsi in the trans-Ganga and Arail in the trans-Yamuna areas.











THIS PAGE AND FACING PAGE: *Kalpvasis* observe rituals prescribed in the *Puranas*.

Kumbh 2019 Mela Officer Vijay Kiran Anand confirmed the presence of 10 lakh *kalpvasis* at any given point of time – with *kalpvasis* formally living in the area since Paush Poornima on January 21, 2019.

A *kalpvasi* is required to bathe at least twice a day, perform *tap* (prayers, rituals), *hom*, *daan* and Vishnu Puja, listen to religious discourses, observe celibacy, take simple meals once a day, keep fast on auspicious days, sleep on the ground and so on. The *udyapan* or completion of rituals of the month-long *kalpavas* is performed by feeding thirteen Brahmins and presenting them with clothes and a *dakshina*.

An important ritual which is performed at the end of the month-long *kalpavas* or when *kalpavas* is discontinued after performing the same for six or more years is *shaiyyadan*. A *shaiyya* or cot, bedding, a garlanded idol of Lord Vishnu, preferably a gold one, set of six clothes, shoes and an umbrella are donated to a Brahmin. Thirteen Brahmins, friends and relatives are also fed in the camp on the banks of the Ganga-Yamuna. The *daan* is given to Prayagwals as Brahmins from outside are prohibited from accepting *daan* at Prayagraj. The Prayagwals, priests who have been residing in Prayag since centuries, also assist *kalpvasis* in performing the many rituals that are required during their stay.



## MUNDAN

*Mundan* or shaving of the head, moustache and beard is the first ritual that a pilgrim performs after taking a bath in River Ganga on reaching Prayagraj. It is believed that when one reaches the *teertha* and takes a dip in the waters of the holy River Ganga, the sins committed by the pilgrim accumulate in the hair and, therefore, requires to be shaved off.

Usually, it is the male pilgrims who do the *mundan* while women only have a lock of their hair cut and thrown into the waters of the river – accompanied by the chanting of hymns. Widows tonsure their heads.

According to the *Puranas*, *mundan* at Prayagraj immediately absolves one from past sins and the devotee enjoys bliss in heaven for as many thousands of years as the number of hair and nails sacrificed in the waters of the holy Ganga.

## SNAAN

*Snaan* or ritual bath has been an integral part of Hinduism. According to the *Matsya Purana*, purity of body and mind can be achieved only by bathing. It is also essential to keep the mind refreshed.

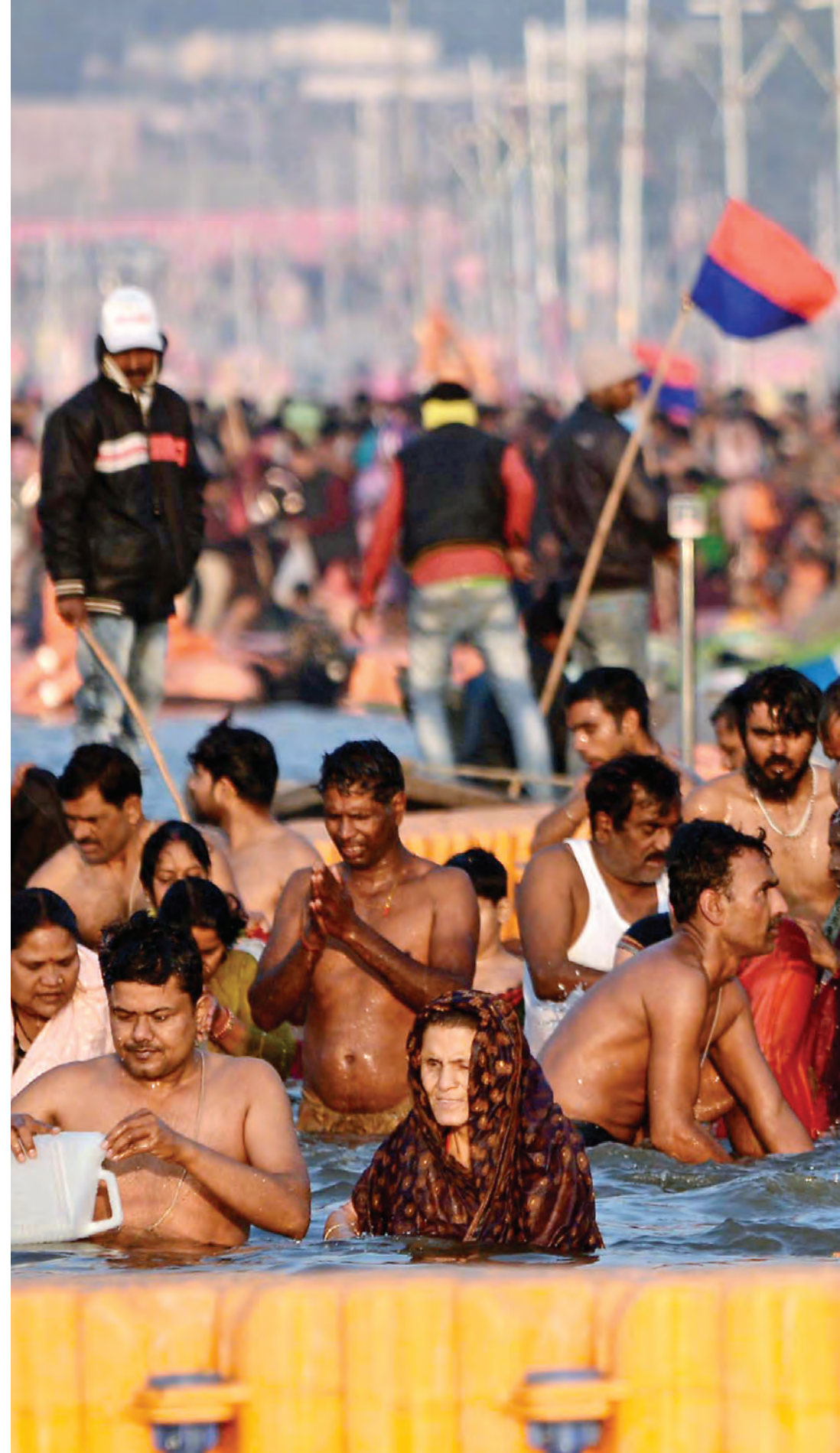
The *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* mention that members of all the four *varnas* and *ashramas* are entitled to bathe in the *teertha*. Immense religious merit is attained by bathing at Prayagraj. The *Puranas* state that those who bathe at the *Prajapati Kshetra* attain heaven. According to the *Skanda Purana*, one who bathes in the confluence at Prayag is freed from all sins and attains the realm of divine beings.

In the Hindu calendar month of *Magha*, the waters of the holy Sangam is especially sacred and hence bathing here during this period has special significance. Even the *devas* or divine beings are believed to bathe here in invisible forms.

## TARPAN

*Arghya* and *tarpan* are subsidiary acts of the bathing ritual, usually done while standing in the water at the *teerth*. While *arghya* refers to offerings made to gods, *tarpan* is an elaborate form of water offering to the manes with *kusa* grass. Hindus believe that souls of ancestors reside in sacred places and are happy if an offering of holy water is made in these sites.

The *Vishnu Purana* and *Vayu Purana* contain hymns that have to be chanted during the *tarpan*. The *Vayu Purana* states that if one is unable to perform an elaborate *tarpan*, he may fill his palms with water and offer it three times with the chant, “May the universe from Brahma down to a clump of grass be satisfied.”







In the Hindu calendar month of Magha, the waters of the Sangam are especially sacred and bathing during this period has special significance for *kalpvasis*.





ABOVE: Offerings to gods and ancestors in the waters of the holy Sangam – a key ritual that *kalpvasis* perform during their Kumbh pilgrimage.

## ARGHYA

This is performed after the ritual bath. The pilgrim puts the sacred thread on his right shoulder and offers uncooked rice and water to gods and *rishis* (holy men). He then puts the sacred thread on the left shoulder and offers rice, water, sandal, sesame seeds and so on to ancestors. The pilgrim also prays to Hindu sun god, Surya.

## DAAN

*Daan* refers to giving gifts, generally to Brahmins, as part of rituals, or to the poor and needy. It is an act of benevolence. The *Kurma Purana* states that there is no *dharma* greater than *daan* for human beings in this world. The *Garuda Purana* states that doing charity at Prayag is greater than the performance of any other religious rite (*Garuda Purana* I 51-29). The *Agni Purana* states that a man who does charity at Prayag goes to heaven after death and becomes a monarch in his next birth. The *Brahma Purana* states that *daan* made at Prayag yields one thousand times more merit than at any other *teerth* (*Brahma Purana* 59 11b-12a). The *Matsya Purana* (105. 13-14) lists the preferred list of *daan* items as cows, gold pieces, precious stones, pearls and other belongings. However, the *Naradiya Purana* advises that charitable gifts at Prayag should be given according to one's capacity (*Naradiya Purana* 11.63.113b).

The *Puranas* state that one who offers a milch cow (preferably red) with her horns adorned with gold, hoofs with silver and neck covered with a silken-cloth, along with a milking pot of bell-metal, cloth and jewels to a virtuous and dispassionate Brahmin well-versed

in the Vedas at Prayag, dwells or stays in heaven for as many thousand years as the cow has hair pores on her body (*Matsya Purana*, 105.16-19, *Padma Purana*, 42.17-21).

*Kanyadaan* or giving one's daughter's hand in marriage, at Prayag in the *arsa* form of marriage, grants immense religious merit. The person is saved from going to hell and thrives in the Uttara Kuru region (*Matsya Purana* 105.21-22).

*Annadaan* or offering food at Prayag causes the same merit as that of providing food to one crore Brahmins.

Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang in his travelogue states that it was at the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna rivers that every fifth year King Harshavardhana donated all his wealth and riches.

## UPVAS AND CELIBACY

*Upvas* or fasting refers to abstinence from food and drink during the day and a light diet at night. However, *upvas* does not only mean physical abstinence from food and drink, but also refers to spiritual self-control. The *Bhagvata Purana* (Brahmapava, 64.4) states that *upvas* is living in union with good qualities, an aversion to sin and abandonment of all enjoyment.

उपावृतय पापेभ्यो यस्तु वासो गुणैः सह ।  
उपवासः से विजयः सर्वभोग विवर्जितः ॥

*Upavrutaya Papebhyo Yastu Vaso Guneh Sah  
Upavasah Se Vijayaha Sarbabhoga Vivarjitaha*





*Deepdaan at Prayagraj – believed to yield one thousand times more merit than at any other *teerth*.*

The *Brahadaranayaka Upanishad* states that fasting is a kind of penance or *tapas* (*Brahadaranayaka Upanishad*, IV., 4.22). It is stated that a fast is not broken if one consumes water, milk, roots, fruits and medicines. Fasting at Prayag grants great religious merit. *Prayag Mahatmya* of *Matsya Purana* states that if a fast is observed by a person of good health and perfect continence in Prayag, he gets the reward of performing a horse sacrifice at every step. Such a man gets emancipation from the bondage of his manes and posterity for ten generations. Celibacy or sexual abstinence is observed by all *kalpvasis*. They lead austere lives – performing rituals, taking ceremonial baths and praying.

## DISCOURSES / PRAVACHANS

Kumbh is an attraction for its religious discourses – with pilgrims listening to discussions of saints and sadhus and returning to their homes to disseminate the stories heard and learnt.

In fact, an integral part of the daily routine of *kalpvasis* at Kumbh 2019 was visiting *pandals* of saints and socio-religious organisations to listen to discourses on various themes.



## SHRADDHA

The word *shraddha* is derived from the word *sraddha* or faith. *Sraddha* refers to that which is offered to the manes with faith and devotion. While defining *shraddha*, Brahma Purana states that, “whatever is given with faith to deserving Brahmins for the pleasure of *pitras* at a proper time, in a proper place and in accordance with the prescribed procedure is called *shraddha*.” (*Brahma Purana* dp 3-6)

The *Skanda Purana* states that *shraddha* is very important among the rituals to be performed at the *teerths* – “*Shraddha* should be performed at all *teerths* immediately after the mandatory bathing and *tarpan*, regardless of the time and other circumstances. No delay should be made, nor should one interfere with it.”

न वारं न च नक्षत्रं न कालस्तत्र कारणम् ।  
यदैव दृश्यते तीर्थं तदा पर्वसहस्रकम् ॥

*Na Varan Na Cha Nakshatram Na Kalastatra Karanam  
Yadaiva Dhrishyate Teertham Tada Parwasahastrakam*







Boats ferry pilgrims to the many sub-*teerths* situated around Triveni Sangam.





## UPTEERTHS AND PARIKRAMA

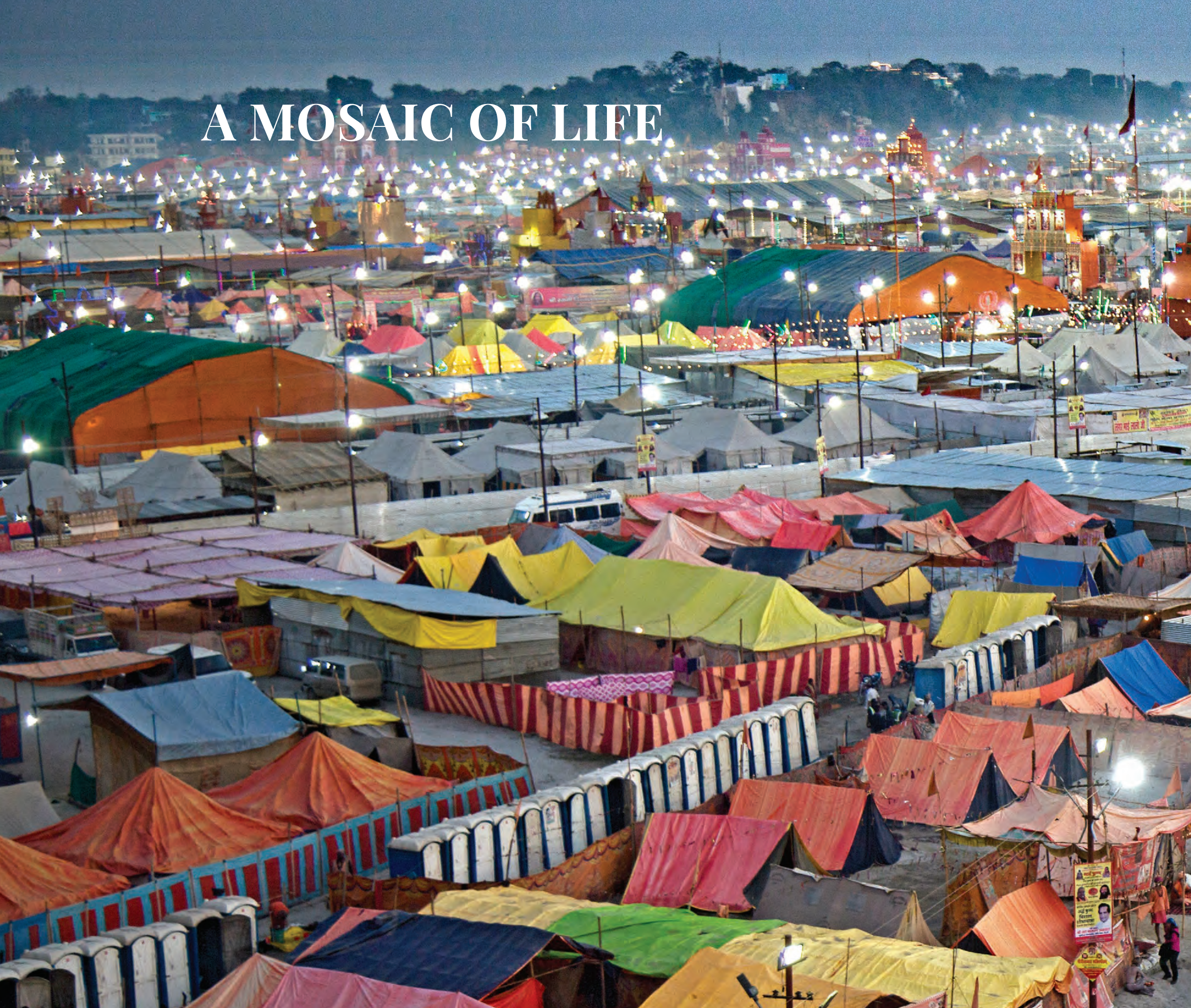
The confluence of Ganga and Yamuna, a single sacred place in the Vedic period, in course of time, developed into *Prajapati Kshetra* and then into *Prayag Mandal*. In the age of the *Puranas*, the number of sub-*teerths* swelled as mentioned in *Nibandh Granthas* and *Prayag Mahatamya Satadhyayi*. There are more than three dozen sub-*teerths* situated around Triveni Sangam in *Prayag Mandal*. Pilgrims on a pilgrimage to Prayagraj visit all, or at least the main ones, during their pilgrimage. Two types of *parikramas* – *Antervedi Parikrama* which takes two days and starts and ends at Triveni and *Bahirvedi Parikrama* which

takes 10 days to complete and in which *Antervedi Parikrama* is also included – are recommended in the holy texts. Both the *parikramas* begin from the Triveni after a bath, and terminate at the Triveni. Several of the *upteerths* that are enjoined to be visited and prayed at are not mentioned in the epics and *Puranas*. Some of them are situated beyond Prayag Mandal. Some holy sites such as Anarak *teertha* mentioned in the *Puranas* have also not been included in the list of sub-*teerths* to be visited during these *parikramas*. Various sacred rituals such as night halt, fasting, observing celibacy, ceremonial bath and *shraddha* are specifically recommended at some of these *upteerths*.





# A MOSAIC OF LIFE















FACING PAGE AND ABOVE: Breathtaking sights of Prayagraj Kumbh – clusters of boats, milling crowds and city of tents lit up at night.

From the top of the embankment that one crossed while approaching the Mela *kshetra* from Prayagraj, one could witness a sight that was breathtaking in scope and splendour – a sight whose experience stirred the soul. Scores of colourful tents spread out as far as the eye could see, with intersecting roads laid out with iron sleepers. With people milling around in the daytime and the *kshetra* a kaleidoscope of lights at night – Kumbh Mela 2019 was an exceptional visual experience.

One could not help but be arrested by the view – flags of various shapes and sizes, but mostly saffron, flying over rows and rows of tents of various *akharas*, criss-crossing temporary roads, pontoon bridges, Curzon and Shastri bridges in the distance, clusters of boats, the magnificent fort built by Emperor Akbar, the green waters of River

Yamuna lashing at its walls, the new suspension bridge on River Yamuna and the old bridge in the distance, and so much more.

The Mela area was a hub of activity. Walking around was a treat of unforgettable sights. There were sadhus with matted hair and smeared in ash, deep in meditation. Some known as *mauni babas* would not speak a word, others stood on one leg or even buried in the sand, with only heads visible above the ground. Yet many other sadhus rode around the Mela *kshetra* on motorbikes, cycles, camels and elephants. There were holy men huddled around small campfires, smoking *afeem*, a bitter narcotic made from opium poppy, and *ganja* or cannabis. There were also soothsayers, magicians, trapeze artistes or *nuts* doing tightrope walking, while hawkers sold interesting wares ranging from









FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: An unforgettable visual treat of many spiritual practices and guises at Prayagraj Kumbh.





THIS PAGE: Pilgrims and ascetics on horses, camels and bicycles enliven the ambience at Prayagraj Kumbh 2019.





Reading religious texts and engaging in worship of the divine at Prayagraj Kumbh.

puja articles to books, jewellery, utensils, travel bags, toys, flutes and even sugar candy. In some camps there would be distribution of free food, with long queues outside them.

Across the tent city, with camps ranging from simple shelters to lavish tents of *mahants* and *swamis* (religious heads) and even those housing hospitals, banks, shops, police stations, fire stations and other government departments, one could not help but be mesmerised by the buzz of activity. Hordes and hordes of pilgrims milled everywhere – from simple village folk carrying *potlis* or cloth bags to women in colourful saris, some with their faces and heads covered with one end of the sari, the young and not-so-young immersed in clicking selfies, small children towing behind their elders, the faces of the elderly rapt with faith – all walking through this saga of spirituality.

There were curious tourists from various parts of India – some dressed in traditional attire, others in the newest fashionable outfits – and numerous foreign tourists, some in search of peace and enlightenment, some eager to observe and some just to be a part of the greatest religious congregation in the world. One could also see *kalpvasis* going about their daily tasks – while some would be knitting inside their tents, others would be cooking food, drying clothes, socialising, dressing for the day or engaging in rituals and worship of the divine.

Religious and philosophical discourses were ubiquitous – at informal gatherings in the *akhara* camps or in *pandals* set up for such discussions across the Mela area. The spiritual atmosphere resonated with the sonorous sound of *bhajans* and *kirtans* – songs in praise of the gods.





THIS PAGE: *Bhandaras* and folk cultural programmes – among the many events and activities at the 2019 Prayagraj Kumbh.

FACING PAGE: Hawkers sell wares that range from travel bags to candy floss, jewellery, puja articles and more at Kumbh 2019.









In many places *Ram Leela* from the holy epic *Ramayana* would be enacted, close to shops and exhibitions showcasing Indian handicrafts or even informative stalls on subjects ranging from Agriculture to Health and Hygiene.

The sea of humanity in the Kumbh Mela was as diverse as one can possibly imagine – all bound together by the unbreakable tie of

unwavering faith. Prayagraj is perhaps the only living *teertha* in the world where people have been coming since ancient times for ritual bath at the holy Sangam. This huge sea of humanity surges to the *teertha* in thousands, sans invitation, only driven by an unseen force that gives them the power to overcome all constraints – be it of money, health, time or distance.





THIS PAGE: Selfies at Prayagraj Mela Authority's selfie points and elsewhere – the flavour of techonology-driven Kumbh 2019.

FACING PAGE: A bird's eye view of saris left to dry on the sands of the riverbank at Kumbh Mela.









# संस्कृत

THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019







Akharas







*Akhara* camps are set up with much fanfare.

Although on hearing the word *akhara*, it is wrestling that comes to mind, the meaning here is different and related to the origin of the word. *Akhara* in the context of Kumbh is a distorted form of *akhand*, whose literal meaning is indivisible. Adi Shankaracharya who attempted to protect the ‘*Sanatan*’ way of life, established various *akharas* to bring ascetics and followers of similar religious customs, views and ideologies under the umbrella of a single organisation.

According to traditional Hindu belief, *akhara* refers to an organisation of sadhus or holy men. Saints and ascetics associated

with an *akhara* specialise in scriptures and are also experts in the art of combat. Initially, it was used with reference to a militant sect of Naga sadhus although, according to historian Prof. Jadunath Sarkar, no reliable information is available on the origin and history of *akharas* before 1750 CE.

However, with the help of a manuscript maintained by the hereditary bards of the Nirvani Akhara, he tried to trace out the chronological order of the establishment of different *akharas* (*A History of Dasnami Naga Sanyasis*).





Religious accoutrements and spiritual discussions – the heart and soul of Kumbh akharas camps.

The history of *akharas* can be traced to 12th century CE, the probable period of their formation. The *dasnami sanyasis* took to arms probably to protect Hinduism from the onslaught of Islam.

The rise of the militant Naga sect in the 12th century CE, coincides with the probable period of the organisation of the Kumbh Mela. It is probable that initially the Naga sadhus became interested in Kumbh Mela and gradually other sects also started attending it. Since the Kumbh Mela was a very important religious event, all major organisational activities of the Naga sadhus such as initiation of novices into the sect, election of office-bearers and resolution of disputes, if any, was done during the Kumbh Mela.

The *akharas*, who set up camp in the Mela area with much fanfare, can be divided into three groups – Shaivites comprising the Juna, the Niranjani, the Mahanirvani, the Atal, the Avahan, the Anand and the Agni *akharas*; Vaishnavs comprising the Nirvani, the Nirmohi and the Digambar *akharas*; and the Udasins comprising the Bada Udasin, the Naya Udasin and the Nirmal *akharas*. The collective body of these thirteen *akharas* is known as the Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad.

At Prayagraj Kumbh 2019, *akharas* had an added attraction when a group of *kinnars* or transgenders who participated in full grandeur, later announced their merger with Juna, the biggest of the *akharas*.

The favoured deity of the Shaiva *akharas* is Lord Shiva and *akhara* members worship Him in various forms, based on the specific beliefs and ideologies of their organisation. Vaishnava *akharas*, on the other hand, worship Lord Vishnu in various forms, based on the specific beliefs and ideologies of their organisation. Udasin *akharas* founded by Chandra Dev, the son of Guru Nanak, the first guru of the Sikhs, principally offer their adulations to ‘Om’.





## PESHWAI

Of all the major festivities during Kumbh Mela, it is Peshwai that holds a significant position. Peshwai in the local dialect stands for *praveshai* which denotes the grand procession carried out to mark the entry of the various *akharas* into Kumbh Mela. In this procession, saints arrive at the Kumbh on elephants, horses and lavish carriages. In addition, to welcome the procession of *akharas* and to further enhance its grandeur, large numbers of people provide their services as attendants and shower petals of flowers on the passing procession. The atmosphere during Peshwai is that of festivity and enthusiasm. The Peshwai *juloos* are grand and splendid and enter the Mela area in great style, almost like a royal procession.

Peshwais of various *akharas* at Kumbh 2019 were festive affairs with dancing to music of commercial music bands. Naga sadhus, riding horses and elephants, brandishing swords or *trishuls*, preceded the bands. *Mahamandaleshwars* – those authorised to share the guru mantra with novice sadhus – rode in regal grandeur on throne-like chairs on tractors and trucks and under bedecked canopies.







Grand Peshwai  
processions marking the  
entry of various *akharas*  
into Kumbh 2019.



The many-splendoured Peshwais at Kumbh 2019 – with sadhus on bikes, horses, camels, elephants and tractors.











FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: From ornate chariots with *mahamandaleshwars* on throne-like chairs to sadhus brandishing swords and *trishuls*, great pomp and splendour mark Peshwais of various *akharas* at Prayagraj Kumbh.

A five-member committee – traditionally considered the representatives of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Ganesha and Shakti – supervised the order and festivities of the Peshwai. In terms of numbers, the Juna Akhara was the largest, closely followed by the Niranjani and Mahanirvani *akharas*. Customarily, during Peshwai and Shahi Snaan, *Mahamandaleshwars* lead the procession on ornate chariots, accompanied by Shri Mahanta, followed by their secretaries on elephants, Naga sadhus on horses and the rest of the saints on foot. *Akharas* display great pomp and glory by highlighting their traditional skills with weapons and other such paraphernalia during the procession.

At the next most important function, the installation of a high flag called *dhwaja* at the temporary campsite, people gathered in large numbers to watch the hoisting of a 50-foot-high flag. Once the *akharas* set up camps, their enclosures were festooned with lights and *bhajans* and *kirtans* enlivened the atmosphere. Naga sadhus could be seen from a distance, naked, smeared with ash, with long matted hair, often sitting around campfires, holding their *chillums* and smoking *ganja*.

*Akharas* are the heart and soul of the Kumbh Mela. The faith and respect they inspire has to be seen to be believed. They are a symbol of social order, unity, culture and ethics. The greatest responsibility of the *akhara mathas* is to establish spiritual and ethical values in society.

Indian culture and unity derives its strength from these *akharas*; so, despite being divided under various organisations, they remain the symbol of unity in diversity.





THE  
MAGNIFICENCE  
OF KUMBH  
PRAYAGRAJ 2019



## DIKSHA

*Diksha* or initiation ceremony of novices into the various religious orders is done during Kumbh Mela – after which the novices become part of the akharas. During Kumbh 2019, for the first time ever, about 800 saints, including six foreigners, were given sanyas diksha by Dashanami Juna Akhara Acharya Mahamandaleshwar, Swami Awadeshanand Maharaj.

The ceremony was initiated with tonsuring, followed by a holy dip and performance of other rituals on the banks of River Ganga on January 28. Barbers from Haridwar and Varanasi were specially invited for the ceremony. Several rituals were performed within the precincts of the *akhara* camp as well.

The newly-recruited *sanyasis*, who were given *diksha* after close monitoring of behaviour during their three years in the *akhara*, participated in the second Shahi Snaan on the day of Mauni Amavasya on February 4.









# Shahi Snaan

The Shahi Snaans of *akharas* are important events in the calendar of the Kumbh Mela and are spectacles whose memory lasts a lifetime. Shahi Snaans are ritual baths that *akharas* perform on three of the six main auspicious bathing days of the Mela, their grandeur manifest in the procession of hundreds to the Sangam Ghat.

The word *shahi* means royal or regal and the processions of the *akharas* for a ceremonial dip are grand and awe-inspiring. Special routes are demarcated for these processions and since the possibility of a clash between two rival *akharas* is always very high, the Prayagraj Mela Authority during Kumbh 2019 was specially vigilant during Shahi Snaan days.

The Shahi Snaans at Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 that took place first on the day of *Makar Sankranti* on January 15 and then again on the day of *Mauni Amavasya* on February 4 and *Basant Panchami* on February







Basant Panchami Shahi  
Snaan procession at 2019  
Kumbh







10, surpassed those of previous years in their splendour. Exceptionally regal, the processions comprising sadhus and *sadhvis* of thirteen *akharas* – including Naga sadhus and *sadhvis* – were colourful cavalcades of chariots, horses and elephants.

Oil-smeared Naga sadhus led the parade with swords and *trishuls*. Traditional fanfare and gaiety marked the procession as saints attired in dark orange and saffron with *tilaks* of sandal and ash on their foreheads, carrying weapons such as swords and *trishuls*, marched towards the Sangam with cries of 'Har Har Mahadev'.

Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 also witnessed a historical moment when a group of *kinnars* led by Mahamandaleshwar Lakshmi Narayan Tripathi, a transgender rights activist and leader of the monastic order of the transgender community, participated in the Shahi Snan as a separate entity. Dressed in a Banarasi sari Lakshmi led the procession of *kinnars* on a tractor-turned-chariot, displaying a flamboyance that made the group the cynosure of all eyes. Later, the group announced its merger with Juna, one of the most orthodox custodians of the Vedic *Sanatan Dharma*.

BELOW AND RIGHT: Grand processions of sadhus of various *akharas* march towards the Sangam with cries of 'Har Har Mahadev' during a Shahi Snaan.











A Shahi Snan procession according to the set order of akharas





The ceremonial bath of various *akharas* takes place according to a set order of precedence. Earlier, in the absence of a specific order, there were numerous quarrels between Shaiva Nagas and Vaishnava Bairagis, as to which sect would take the first dip at the Sangam on the auspicious *Nahaan* (bath) days. In 1879, the British Government, after enquiring into the old time-honoured practice, laid down rules that are followed even today.

The Shaiva Naga *sanyasis* bathe first, followed by Vaishnava Bairagis, Udasi Nanak Panthis and Nirmala Sikh ascetics (*A History of Dasnami Naga Sanyasis* by Jadunath Sarkar).

That the Nagas are given precedence in the Kumbh bath gives credence to the theory that the organisation of the Naga *akhara* is intimately linked with the organisation of the Kumbh Mela.





FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: Magnificent moments of Shahi Snaan during Prayagraj Kumbh 2019.

The Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad, which has been established to promote mutual harmony and settlement of disputes among the *akharas*, determined the date, time and order of *akharas* for the processions of Shahi Snaan and Peshwai in consultation with the Mela Committee comprising the Divisional Commissioner and the Mela Authority during Prayagraj Kumbh 2019. Pilgrims were not allowed in the ghats or bathing areas when the *akharas* took their ritual dips.

The ceremonial bath on the three auspicious days took place according to the standard order at ghats designated by the Mela Authority. In accordance with an agreement that was signed in 1906 between the Government and the *akharas*, only eight processions were allowed for all the *akharas*.

For the Shaiva *akharas*, the processions for the ritual dip are in the order of Mahanirvani with Atal, followed by Niranjani with Anand and then Juna with Avahan and Agni. The duration of bath is forty minutes for Mahanirvani and Atal while for Niranjani with Anand and Juna with Avahan and Agni, it is one hour and fifteen minutes. According to the Accord of 1906 the Juna Akhara follows 300 feet behind Niranjani, as part of the same procession.

The Shahi Snaan of Vaishnava Bairagi *akharas* begin with the Nirmohi, followed by Digambar and, finally, the Panch Nirvani *akharas*. Saints and seers of Udasin *akharas* march for Shahi Snaan at the Sangam in the order of Naya Udasin, Bada Udasin and Nirmal.













# Snaan

The Kumbh Mela comprises of many rituals but since it is essentially a bathing festival, it is Snaan that is the most significant. Millions of pilgrims take part in Kumbh Snaan at Triveni Sangam since it is believed that by submerging oneself in the holy waters here, one is purged of all sins. It releases individuals and their ancestors from the cycle of birth and rebirth and leads to the ultimate attainment of *moksha*.

On all days of Kumbh 2019, round the clock, the flow of pilgrims at the Sangam was continuous. The Mela Authority took anti-slip measures by securing the riverbank at the bathing ghats with sandbags. Wooden poles and barricades along the bank also ensured that pilgrims taking the ritual dip did not slip into deep water.

Unprecedented safety measures were taken with the deployment of National Disaster Relief Force (NDRF) personnel on all the ghats – supported by river police whose trained divers aboard boats were on alert at all times. Changing rooms, sponsored by private agencies, were also erected on the riverbank.

During Snaan, devotees dip themselves in the river thrice, after which, while standing in the river, they scoop water into cupped palms and pour it back into the river as an offering to the gods. They also make offerings of flowers and coconut and float *diyas* or earthen lamps on leaves as an offering to River Ganga.

Priests, known as Prayagwals, sit on small wooden platforms on the riverbanks and help pilgrims to perform the pujas. Numerous boats are available for ferrying pilgrims to the Sangam. In the evening, Ganga Aarti or prayers to River Ganga is performed by a group of priests with lamps and to the accompaniment of hymns.

Although taking a dip in the sacred waters on all days of the Kumbh – beginning from Makar Sankranti, the first day of the month of Magha when the Sun enters Capricorn – is considered holy, yet there are some specific auspicious bathing dates. On these days, magnificent processions of saints and their disciples and members of various *akharas* take part in the ritual of Shahi Snaan or Rajyogi Snaan. Shahi Snaan is the central highlight of the Kumbh Mela and the most important part of the celebrations.



FACING PAGE: Pilgrims walk to the Triveni Sangam for a dip in the holy waters on the auspicious Basant Panchami day on February 10.









It is only after Shahi Snaan that the Snaan of other pilgrims are allowed. The belief is that pilgrims would be doubly blessed after a dip in the waters that would be infused with the good deeds and blessings of the saints. Since time immemorial, the Sangam has witnessed pilgrims and sages worshipping the divine on its bank. Various texts have defined the significance of a ritual bath here. *Bramha Purana* says that a bath here is equal to achieving the benefits of *Ashvamedha Yajna*. *Matsya Purana* refers to achieving the benefits of ten thousand *yajnas*. *Skanda Purana* details the benefits of various Snaans during the period January-March – Maghi Poornima, Basant Panchami, Mauni Amavasya and Makar Sankranti.

Makar Sankranti on January 15, 2019 marked the official beginning of Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh and the first of the three Shahi Snaans. It marks the entry of Sun in its next astronomical position as per Hindu calendar and the beginning of donations since it is customary for pilgrims to donate as per their will after the ritual bath at Kumbh Mela.

The next important bathing day took place on January 21, 2019, on the auspicious day of Paush Poornima or full moon day. The fifteenth day in the month of Shukla Paksh of the Hindu calendar month of Paush, it marked the beginning of *kalpvas*.

The maximum number of pilgrims to visit Kumbh Mela was on the second day of Shahi Snaan on February 4, 2019. It was the day of Mauni Amavasya, widely believed to be the most favourable – in terms of planetary positions – for bathing in the holy river. It is also on this day that Rishabh Dev, considered to be the first Jain sage, broke his long vow of silence and bathed in the holy waters of the Sangam.

The third and last Shahi Snaan day was on February 10, 2019, celebrated as Basant Panchami. A day indicative of the changing of seasons and marking the arrival of Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of knowledge, pilgrims were seen clad in yellow-coloured clothes after the ritual bath.

Maghi Poornima on February 19, 2019 also saw a surge in pilgrims at the holy ghats. Although not a day for Shahi Snaan, Maghi Poornima like Paush Poornima and Maha Shivaratri, is called *parv snaan* and part of the six important bathing days during Kumbh. It also marks the end of the month-long *kalpvas* of *kalpvasis*. Traditionally, this day is known for its association with the worship of Guru Brihaspati and the belief that Hindu god Gandharva travels from the heavens to Sangam.

Maha Shivaratri on March 4, 2019 symbolised the last day of Prayagraj Kumbh 2019. Usually, the last holy bath that *kalpvasis* take, it is directly related to Hindu god Shiva.





ABOVE AND RIGHT: Pilgrims bathe in the waters of Triveni Sangam during Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh; a child jumps for a holy bath in the waters of the Sangam.











# Aartis

Prayagraj Mela Authority organised *aartis* on the banks of the Sangam and the holy river Ganga.

Rivers typically symbolise the power of nature and since ancient times have had special significance in Hinduism. Besides ritual bathing in rivers that are considered sacred, rivers are also worshipped by performing *aartis* on their banks.

*Aartis* performed on the banks of Ganga, Yamuna and at the Sangam during Kumbh Mela have special significance and grand arrangements were made by Mela Authority and various other

communities on certain auspicious days during Prayagraj Kumbh 2019. Lakhs of devotees took part in these *aartis* that were performed in the mornings and evenings by *batuks* (priests) with beautifully-designed lamps and to the chanting of hymns.

The lamps represent the importance of *panchtatva* – with its flames signifying reverence for the holy waters and its fumes symbolising the mysticism of heaven on earth.



# Pilgrim's Path

Prayagraj has been known as the holiest of pilgrimage sites since the Rig Vedic era. Other than the fact that it is the site of the holy Triveni Sangam, Prayagraj boasts of several sacred sites that a Kumbh Mela pilgrim invariably visits to complete his pilgrimage to the holy city.

Besides eight human *Chiranjivis* or Immortals, Indian mythology and scriptures are replete with legends of immortal plants and animals. One significant legend is that of Akshayvat or the indestructible banyan tree that stands majestically outside Patalpuri temple in the eastern part of Allahabad Fort. Built in 1583 CE on the northern bank of River Yamuna, about a kilometre from the site of the Sangam, Allahabad Fort boasts of massive walls with three gateways flanked by towers.

According to *Prayag Mahatmya* of *Matsya Purana*, a pilgrimage to Prayag would only be complete after a devotee has offered prayers at this evergreen tree. Until Prayagraj Kumbh 2019, however, Akshayvat was a restricted area and closed to pilgrims.

Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 changed this by removing visiting restrictions and offering of prayers at the sacred tree. A special pathway leading to the Fort from the Mela area was also constructed to facilitate the pilgrimage. Akshayvat, situated inside Allahabad Fort that stands on the banks of River Yamuna near Triveni Sangam, is under the control of the Indian Army.

According to legend, when Rishi Markandeya asked Lord Vishnu to show his *maya* or supreme power, the lord flooded the earth with water. The only thing that did not submerge entirely was







Akshayvat or the indestructible banyan tree that stands majestically outside Patalpuri temple in the eastern part of Allahabad Fort.





the Akshayvat – which is why it is believed that the tree will survive *pralaya* or the great flood. The *Ramayana* also mentions an episode in which Lord Rama, his wife Sita and younger brother Lakshman rested under the Akshayvat tree on their way to their 14-year exile in the forest. What adds to Akshayvat’s appeal is the belief that the first Jain Tirthankar meditated under the Akshayvat at Prayag.

Many scholars believe that the Akshayvat mentioned in the holy texts is actually an underground shrine in the middle of Allahabad Fort. It is said that after the British acquired Allahabad Fort by the Treaty of 1765, it moved the Patalpuri temple and Akshayvat to the edge of the Fort for public worship.

### SARASWATI KOOP

Saraswati Koop is said to be the source of the mystical and invisible River Saraswati. The river, along with the Ganga and the Yamuna, is believed to form the Triveni Sangam or the confluence of three rivers. Situated in Allahabad Fort, the *Devi koop* (well) was also made accessible to the public during Kumbh 2019.

### PATALPURI TEMPLE

The unique, underground Patalpuri temple houses idols of several deities and is situated in close proximity to Akshayvat inside Allahabad Fort. In fact, the tree’s roots form one of the shrines in the underground temple.



TOP: Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at the sacred Akshayvat on December 16, 2018.

BOTTOM LEFT AND RIGHT: Pilgrims at Saraswati Koop; Hon’ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath offers prayers at Saraswati Koop.





ABOVE AND RIGHT: Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad functionaries and top government officials perform Ganga Pujan prior to Panchkosi Parikrama.

One of the most significant holy places in Prayagraj, the Patalpuri temple is said to be one of the oldest temples in India and is entered through a small door in the eastern wall of the Fort. According to a legend, Lord Rama performed *pinda daan* for his forefathers in this temple. Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang who visited India in 644 CE has made special mention of the temple in his travelogue.

### PRAYAG PANCHKOSI PARIKRAMA

Seers, sadhus and pilgrims received a bonanza during Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 when the revered Prayag Panchkosi Parikrama was revived after it was banned by Emperor Akbar around 450 years ago – the result of a pro-active role played by the Mela Authority and the Akhil Bharatiya Akhada Parishad.

The three-day *parikrama* by saints of the Akhada Parishad began with Ganga Pujan on February 7 at Triveni Ghat, followed by *parikrama* of Prayagraj. According to the scriptures, starting from Triveni pilgrims would need to first visit Sage Durvasa's ashram in the east – currently Kakra village, Barkhandi Mahadev temple in the west, Sage Prashar's ashram in the south and Pandila



Mahadev temple in the north to complete the Panchkosi Parikrama. The *parikrama* is believed to be the successful culmination of the Prayag pilgrimage.





### SHANKAR VIMAN MANDAPAM

A 130-feet-high four-storey temple built in the South Indian architectural style, the Shankar Viman Mandapam is close to the Sangam and near the Hanuman Temple and the Allahabad Fort at Bundh. It has idols of Kumaril Bhatt, Jagatguru Adi Shankaracharya, Kamakshi Devi, Tirupati Balaji and Yogeshwar Sahasrayoga Linga, with 108 Shivas.

Among the hundreds of initiatives taken to enhance pilgrim experience at during Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh – especially those

of the *kalpvasis* – one of the foremost was Tourist Walks. Each of the three 90-minute duration walks proved a great hit among *kalpvasis*, especially the Sangam Walk from Shankar Viman Mandapam to Harihar Aarti Sthal.

Many pilgrims and tourists also took up the Prayagraj Heritage Walk from Chandra Shekhar Azad Park to Bharadwaj Park and the Dharmik Parikrama Walk from Dashashwamedha Temple to Nagvasuki Temple.





FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: Shankar Viman Mandapam, Bade Hamuman temple, the ancient Mankameshwar temple and Bharadwaj Ashram figure on the path of Kumbh Mela pilgrims.

## BADE HANUMAN TEMPLE

Located near Allahabad Fort and Triveni Sangam is an ancient temple where the idol of the main deity, Lord Hanuman, lies in the horizontal position. A unique idol, it has several legends that explain how a 20-feet-long and eight-feet wide idol found its way to this site. Almost all pilgrims who take a dip in the sacred waters of the Sangam make it a point to visit this temple. During monsoons, when River Ganga is in full spate, the temple gets submerged in water. According to folklore, Ganga's water level rises because the river wants to touch the feet of Lord Hanuman.

## BHARADWAJ ASHRAM

Bharadwaj Ashram, about five kilometres from the Sangam, is said to be the hermitage that Lord Rama, Goddess Sita and Lakshman visited while proceeding to Chitrakoot for their 14-year exile. The Uttar Pradesh Government has announced plans to develop the ashram, along with the Bharadwajeshwar Mahadev and Goddess Kali temples within its premises.



The other religious places that a Kumbh pilgrim visits while in Prayagraj is the famous Nagvasuki temple in Daraganj locality on the banks of River Ganga, the ancient Mankameshwar temple dedicated to Lord Shiva near Saraswati Ghat on the banks of River Yamuna and the Alop Devi temple – where it is a wooden *jhula* (swing) above a platform and a small *kund* (pool) that holds religious significance.



# APOTHEOSIS

Divya and Bhavya Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 will for long be remembered as a confluence of culture, art and spirituality that manifested in wide-ranging ways. Other than a peaceful congregation of people of cultures from all across the world, it was also a multiple confluence spectacle that ranged from visual to audio-visual to performing arts.

As many as 2,000 cultural programmes were organised in seven tastefully-decorated *pandals* in various sectors of the Mela area. Besides the performance of celebrity artistes such as Hema Malini, Suresh Wadkar, Shubha Mudgal, Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Anuradha Paudwal, Dr Shoma Ghosh, Malini Awasthi and others, regional artistes also showcased the many hues of Indian culture and tradition at the Mela extravaganza.









Sanskriti Kumbh, a 29-day cultural extravaganza, was a celebration of spiritual consciousness and cultural heritage. Billed as the biggest cultural festival, Sanskriti Kumbh showcased India's arts and crafts as visualised by Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a view to reconnect people, especially the youth, with the country's heritage – folk, tribal and classical performing art forms, handicrafts and cuisine.

A magnificent programme in which people experienced the vibrant colours of Indian culture at one place, Sanskriti Kumbh was promoted digitally via social media. The performances were aired live on the Ministry of Culture's YouTube Channel and LED screens in the Mela premises.

The opulent stage near Arail Ghat in Sector 19 hosted folk dance and song performances by renowned artistes daily between 2pm and 5pm as well as between 6pm and 9pm from January 10 to February 23, excluding Shahi Snaan days. Folk dances from

FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: Classical music and dance performances by renowned artistes during the 29-day Sanskriti Kumbh.









India's east, west, north and south showcased the spirit of unity in diversity in *Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat*. Artistes representing seven zonal cultural centres not only performed on the main stage but also at various locations of Kumbh Mela.

In the premises of Kala Gram, classical dance and music performances by artistes of international stature showcased the various musical traditions of India. *Maidani kalakars* enlivened the Mela atmosphere with fringe folk art performances such as *behroopiya*, *baazigar* and *kachhi ghodi* at designated open spaces.

Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 heralded the beginning of thematic and intricately-decorated *pandals*. Besides some *akhara pandals* that were grandeur and lavishness personified, those of the media

THIS PAGE AND FACING PAGE: Folk music and dance performances from across India showcasing *Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat* at Prayagraj Kumbh.









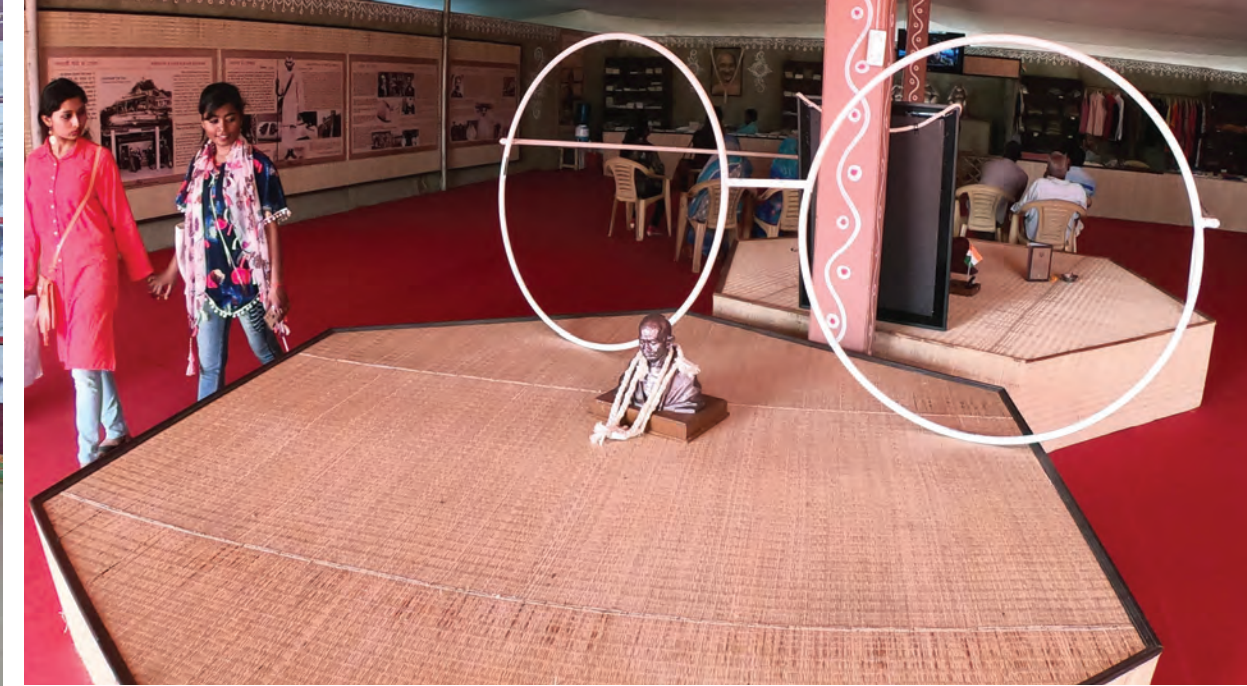






FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: Music, dance and dramas reflecting spiritual consciousness and rich cultural heritage at Prayagraj Kumbh.





THIS PAGE AND FACING PAGE: Kala Gram and Kala Kumbh showcasing the rich heritage and history of India and Kumbh Mela.





hall, cultural venues, Kala Kumbh and Sanskriti Gram were also distinctive for their sheer size and aesthetics.

The creative hub of Kala Gram situated in the Arail Ghat of the Prayagraj Kumbh Mela campus was one of the hot-spots where visitors got to see a slice of Indian art and culture.

In fact, the Rashtriya Shilp Mela and Kala Gram – comprising the pavilions of seven zonal cultural centres, the academies and museums – were organised under the umbrella of Sanskriti Kumbh between January 10 and March 4. While master craftsmen at the Shilp Haats demonstrated their skills live in front of the audience, Kala Gram pavilions

presented a cornucopia of delightful handicrafts and delectable traditional dishes served by master chefs. A Vedic exhibition gallery and a collection of the finest literature at the Sahitya Akademi pavilion added to an unparalleled experience for visitors. The Lalit Kala Akademi organised a Live Portrait Symposium while the Allahabad Museum set its own exhibition on Mahakumbh.

Yet another engaging site in Prayagraj Kumbh 2019 – that drew scholars and academicians in droves – was Kala Kumbh, where the history of Kumbh Mela was curated with an assemblage of paintings, murals, objects, historical evidence and available literature.





## SANSKRITI GRAM

A one-stop place that hosted numerous exhibitions and galleries, showcasing the rich history, heritage, culture and socio-economic development of India from pre-Harappan era until Independence, Sanskriti Gram was set up in Sector 19 of Arail Ghat. The stalls in the Gram were a mosaic of handicrafts and artefacts from across all regions of the country, probably for the first time ever in Prayagraj on such a large scale.









#### MANY FIRSTS AND MORE

Kumbh Mela 2019 was a Kumbh of many firsts and many attractions. By the time the curtains officially came down on the 49-day religious, spiritual and cultural jamboree on March 6, Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh had set three Guinness records and, with the participation of 240 million people, gone down in history as the largest peaceful congregation of humanity on earth.

Held over an area double those of earlier years and minus restriction on Akshayvat and Saraswati Koop *darshan*, Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh was a potpourri of novelty. It was the first Kumbh in which the State cabinet met and many State ministers

took a collective dip in the holy waters of the Sangam along with the Chief Minister. It was the first Kumbh in which foreign diplomats participated, and a joint unfurling of the flags of different countries took place.

A blend of tradition and modernism, Kumbh Mela 2019 boasted of helicopter rides, river cruises and air shows. Faith met fashion at an event organised by Khadi Gramodyog to present new-look khadi to the world. A 40-stall food hub with food choices from as many as 16 different states of India was another big attraction. Food vendors also set up stalls at select places to cater to pilgrims and visitors.







FACING PAGE AND THIS PAGE: Pioneering attractions of Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh – a unique light-and-sound show screened on the walls of Allahabad Fort; an elaborate amusement park loaded with a plethora of thrilling rides; night river cruises.









कुम्भ मेला क्षेत्र में प्रथम बार  
उ.प्र. शासन की  
**मा. मंत्री परिषद् की बैठक**  
29 जनवरी 2019 | प्रयागराज

श्री नरेन्द्र मोदी  
प्रधानमंत्री

श्री योगी आदित्यनाथ  
मुख्यमंत्री, उत्तर प्रदेश

The historic meeting of the Uttar Pradesh Cabinet headed by Hon'ble Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath at the Integrated Command and Control Centre in Prayagraj on January 29. This was the first Kumbh in which the State Cabinet met and many State ministers took a collective dip in the holy waters of the Sangam.





THIS PAGE AND FACING PAGE Air shows, helicopter rides, fashion shows, food hub, vending zone, virtual reality kiosks – all among the many high points of Divya Kumbh, Bhavya Kumbh.

























# THE MAGNIFICENCE OF KUMBH

PRAYAGRAJ 2019