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MahaKumbhMela



KumbhMela is a mass Hindu pilgrimage in which Hindus gathers at the Sangam, meeting place, of the rivers Ganges, Yamuna and mythical Sarasvati, at Prayag where bathing for purification from sin is considered especially auspicious. The festival is billed as the First biggest human gathering worship mela in the world. In 2001, more than 40 million people gathered on the main bathing day at Allahabad, breaking a world record for the biggest human gathering. The Ardh (half) KumbhMela is celebrated every six years at Haridwar and Allahabad, the Purna (complete) Kumbh takes place every twelve years, at four places Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik.

According to the Mela Administration's estimates, around 70 million people participated in the 45-day ArdhKumbhMela in Allahabad, in 2007. The last "KumbhMela" held in 2010 in Haridwar estimated by the authorities to attract between 30 and 70 million people. The current MahaKumbhMela began on 14 January, 2013 at Allahabad (Prayag). The next Kumbh will be held at Ujjain (MP) on the bank of river Kshipra in 2016. The Kumbh at Ujjain is also called "Simhastha".

Naming

KumbhaMela: Held at all the four places

ArdhaKumbhaMela: Held at Haridwar and Prayag (Allahabad), every six year

PurnaKumbhaMela: Only at Prayag, every twelve year

MahaKumbhaMela: Only at Prayag, every 144 year

Timing



The TriveniSangam, or the intersection of Yamuna River and Ganges River and the mythical Sarasvati River, where devotees perform rituals.

KumbhMela is celebrated at different locations depending on the position of the planet of Bṛhaspati (Jupiter) and the sun. When Jupiter and the sun are in the zodiac sign Leo (SimhaRashi) it is held in Trimbakeshwar, Nashik; when the sun is in Aries (MesaRashi) it is celebrated at Haridwar; when Jupiter is in Taurus (VrishabhaRashi) and the sun is in Capricorn (MakarRashi) KumbhaMela is celebrated at Prayag; and Jupiter and the sun are in Scorpio (VrishchikRashi) the Mela is celebrated at Ujjain. Each site's celebration dates are calculated in advance according to a special combination of zodiacal positions of Sun, Moon, and Jupiter.

History

The first written evidence of the KumbhaMela can be found in the accounts of Chinese traveler, Huan Tsang

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or Xuanzang (602 - 664 A.D.) who visited India in 629 -645 CE, during the reign of King Harshavardhana. However, similar observances date back many centuries, where the river festivals first started getting organised. According to medieval Hindu theology, its origin is found in one of the most popular medieval puranas, the BhagavataPurana. The Samudramanthen episode (Churning of the ocean of milk), is mentioned in the BhagavataPurana, Vishnu Purana, the Mahabharata, and the Ramayana.

The account goes that the demigods had lost their strength by the curse of Durvāsā Muni, and to regain it, they approached Lord Brahma and Lord Shiva. They directed all the demigods to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Vishnu and after praying to Lord Vishnu, he instructed them to churn the ocean of milk KsheeraSagara (primordial ocean of milk) to receive amrita (the nectar of immortality). This required them to make a temporary agreement with their arch enemies, the demons or Asuras, to work together with a promise of sharing the wealth equally thereafter. However, when the Kumbha (urn) containing the amrita appeared, a fight ensued. For twelve days and twelve nights (equivalent to twelve human years) the gods and demons fought in the sky for the pot of amrita. It is believed that during the battle, Lord Vishnu (incarnated as Mohini-Mūrti) flew away with the Kumbha of elixir spilling drops of amrita at four places: Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nashik.

The Ritual



The major event of the festival is ritual bathing at the banks of the river in whichever town it is being held that is, Ganga in Haridwar, Godavari in Nasik, Kshipra in Ujjain and Sangam (confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati) in Prayag (Allahabad). Nasik has registered maximum visitor to 75 million. Other activities include religious discussions, devotional singing, mass feeding of holy men and women and the poor, and religious assemblies where doctrines are debated and standardized. KumbhMela is the most sacred of all the pilgrimages. Thousands of holy men and women attend, and the auspiciousness of the festival is in part attributable to this. The sadhus are seen clad in saffron sheets with ashes and powder dabbed on their skin as per the requirements of ancient traditions. Some, called nagasanyasis, may not wear any clothes even in severe winter.



Most Significant Days during the KumbhMela

MakarSankranti

A Holy bath during this period carries special significance. Those who take a holy bath in the rivers Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri acquire pious credits.

PaushPurnima

The day occurs when the moon is full in the Hindu month of Paush. This is the last full moon of winter. By this time, the sadhu and hundreds of thousands of pilgrims arrive at the KumbhMela.

MauniAmavasyaSnan

For the holy men and women, this is the main bathing day. New members to various holy monastic orders receive their first initiation on this day.

BasantPanchamiSnan

This is the fifth day of the luminous half of the lunar month and is the beginning of spring in North India.

RathSaptamiSnan

RathSaptami festival is observed on the seventh day of ShuklaPaksha in the Magh Month (January - February) in the traditional Hindu calendar.

BhishmaEkadasiSnan

On this day, BhishmaPithamaha, the oldest, wisest, most powerful and most righteous person belonging to the Kuru dynasty (approx. over 5000 years ago), narrated the greatness of Lord Krishna through Sri Vishnu Sahasranama to Yudhishtira, the oldest brother of Pandavas.