

KUMBH - A RIVER OF FAITH



Our Mythology and rituals are just metaphors.
The Kumbh is a place to ask questions, to invite transformation, to begin the journey of understanding.
One need not be religious to be moved by the intensity of this shared human experience.



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Anjan Ghosh



Meta Visser



Rajesh Pamnani



Gaurav Upadhyay

We gratefully acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the photographers whose work has elevated this photobook with their artistic vision and skill.

Each image reflects a moment thoughtfully preserved.

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Your efforts have made this photobook truly memorable.

Acknowledgements

This Kumbh journey was never a solo pilgrimage-it was a collective yatra of stories, souls, and serendipity.

This journey ;as layered and luminous, as the Kumbh cannot be captured alone...

This book is the result of many hands, eyes, hearts, and miles-each one essential.

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And finally, to the spirit of the Kumbh itself-uncontainable, unpredictable, unforgettable. You changed me.

This book is Dedicated to all seekers of wonder.
With folded hands, a full heart & with gratitude,

Thank you

Rajesh Pamnani
(Your humble editor)

Our Journey - at the Kumbh



Our Group Introduction



People of images left to right -

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Gaurav Upadhyay | 6. Tanvi Pamnani |
| 2. Anjan Ghosh | 7. Rajesh Pamnani |
| 3. Maria Ona | 8. Deepali |
| 4. Brigitte Zwerver-Berret | 9. Meta Visser |
| 5. Heidi Stiehler | |



Mr. Anjan Ghosh sharing his recent book with Rajesh Pamnani at the Kumbh mela tent. He shared an meaningful insight on the passion what drives him to his creative approach to photography and taking story telling picture.

Preface



Pic credit : Pankaj Chauhan

Once every twelve years,
A city rises on the banks , where the holy rivers meet.
Millions of pilgrims travel thousands of miles to assemble at the kumbh mela.
They find themselves connected by the rivers of faith.
Time in our ancient teachingsit details not between life & death but in the churning
of our lives.

All tales from Indian mythology sound fantastic and fascinating. Many people, who merely listen to the stories with a casual attitude, question the logic behind these tales. Many even believe that these stories are a mere fabrication of someone's highly hyper-active imagination! But the truth is startlingly different. Indian mythology has always tried to teach humankind some profound principles in life, through its many tales and anecdotes. These interesting tales actually have many hidden meanings and connotations, which, if delved into deeply enough, could reveal some of the highest philosophical truths to mankind. Applied properly to real life, the Samudra Manthan can be seen as being an extremely effective guide on how to live our day-to-day life. Let us now analyze the Samudra Manthan in detail.

The philosophy of "churning" in life, especially in the context of the Hindu myth of the churning of the ocean of milk (Samudra Manthana), emphasizes resilience, cooperation, and the balance between good and evil.

Kumbh - Samudra Manthan (about the Cover Page)



The story of Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean) originates from Indian mythology and is described in the books like Bhagvata Purana, Vishnu Purana and Mahabharata .

All these books are considered as directional in Hinduism.

The books describe how the Devas (gods) and the Asuras (demons) churned the ocean under the aegis of Vishnu, to produce the divine elixir of immortality (Amruta).

The demons hold the head of the serpent Vasuki and the Gods hold its tail. At the centre of the sea, Vasuki is coiled around Mt Mandara, which turns and churns up the water in the tug of war between the demons and the gods. Vishnu, incarnated as a huge turtle, lends his shell to serve as the base and pivot of Mt Mandara. Brahma, Shiva, Hanuman (the monkey God) and Lakshmi (the Goddess of wealth and prosperity) all feature in the canvas.

Legend behind Samudra Manthan

Once Indra – the King of Gods, while riding on an elephant came across sage Durvasa who offered him a special garland. Indra accepted the garland but put it on the trunk of the elephant. The elephant was irritated by the smell and it threw the garland on the floor. This enraged the sage as the garland was a dwelling of Sri (fortune) and was to be treated with respect. Durvasa Muni cursed Indra and all devas to be bereft of all strength, energy, and fortune. Post this incident, devas lost all the battles to asuras and the asuras gained control of the universe. Devas sought help from Lord Vishnu who told them that the only way to get back their power is through consuming holy nectar which lies under the ocean. The holy nectar can be brought out only by churning the ocean. Since devas were bereft of any power they approached the asuras to jointly churn the ocean for the nectar of immortality. Devas, however, already had an understanding with Lord Vishnu that the holy nectar will be handed over to them.

Samudra Manthan (Churning of the Ocean)

The churning of the milk – ocean was an elaborate process. Mount Mandara was used as churning rod and Vasuki, the King of Serpents, became the churning rope. Lord Vishnu himself had to intercede in so many ways to aid the process. But as the pole entered the water it kept sliding into depths of the ocean. To stop this, Vishnu took the form of a tortoise and placed the mountain on his back. This image of Vishnu as the tortoise was his second avatar called ‘Kurma.’ Once the pole was balanced, it was tied to the gigantic snake, Vasuki, and the gods and demons started pulling it from either side. All kinds of herbs were cast into the ocean and many creatures and objects were produced from the ocean which were then divided between asuras and devas.

Towards the end of the churning Dhanvantri (god of medicine) appeared with the pot of holy nectar. Once the amruta was out, the demons forcefully took it away which was followed by a war between the devas and the asuras. Finally, Vishnu disguised as the enchanting Mohini (danseuse) tricked the demons and recovered the nectar pot and handed it over to the devas. This story is known to almost everyone in India.

Interpretation

The story of Samudra Manthan isn't just a myth but a mirror of our contemporary existence. It is an inner quest like the Devas and Asuras seeking Amrita; we too seek fulfillment, often in material pursuits. This encourages us to channel our efforts toward spiritual growth and enlightenment. This also symbolizes inner conflicts. Just as churning brought forth both nectar and poison, life presents dualities.

It teaches us to navigate challenges with equanimity, for they lead to growth and transformation. The celestial items found during the Samudra Manthan represent a balance between material and spiritual desires, reminding us to seek abundance while recognizing the impermanence of worldly pleasures. It also has the metaphorical meaning of wisdom and healing.

Conclusion

The story of Samudra Manthan, which we once regarded as a myth without meaning in the present-day world, emerged as a timeless guide to leading a balanced and enlightened life. Its symbols and teachings resonated deeply with our modern world, offering invaluable insights into steering life's challenges, finding equilibrium, and realizing our true spiritual potential. It was a journey of revelation that left me profoundly grateful for the wisdom embedded in the rich stores of Sanatan dharma scriptures.

Introduction of Kumbh



Pic credit : Pankaj Chauhan

A beginners' Guide to Kumbh Mela

The Kumbh Mela is a spectacular event that stands as one of the largest and most vibrant religious gatherings in the world. Every twelve years, millions of pilgrims, sadhus (holy men), and tourists converge at four rotating locations in India to partake in this sacred festival. Among these locations, Prayagraj (formerly known as Allahabad) holds a unique significance due to its geographic and spiritual prominence.

Prayagraj is renowned for the Triveni Sangam, the confluence of three rivers: the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati. This confluence is considered highly auspicious in Hinduism, believed to cleanse sins and bestow spiritual merit. The city's name, Prayagraj, translates to "king of all pilgrimage sites," reflecting its paramount importance in Hindu tradition.

For a first-timer, the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj can be an overwhelming experience, given its immense scale, vibrant energy, and profound spirituality. The festival spans several weeks, with key bathing dates known as Shahi Snan attracting the highest number of devotees. These dates are considered the most auspicious times for taking a dip in the holy waters, **a ritual believed to cleanse one's sins and grant liberation from the cycle of rebirth.**

The Kumbh Mela is not just a religious event; it is a cultural extravaganza showcasing a rich tapestry of rituals, music, art, and communal harmony. From the majestic processions of Naga sadhus to the mesmerizing Ganga Aarti, the festival offers a myriad of experiences that reflect India's diverse spiritual heritage.

This guide aims to provide all the essential information to help you navigate and enjoy the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj. Whether you are drawn by spiritual curiosity, cultural interest, or the sheer spectacle of the event, this guide will equip you with the knowledge and tips to make your visit safe, meaningful, and unforgettable.

History and Significance – First-Timer's Guide to Kumbh Mela

The Kumbh Mela is deeply rooted in ancient Hindu mythology and has evolved over centuries to become a symbol of faith, spirituality, and cultural unity. The festival's origins are linked to the legend of Samudra Manthan, the churning of the ocean of milk, which is a central story in Hindu mythology. The historical significance of the Kumbh Mela extends beyond mythology. The earliest records of the festival date back to the 7th century when Chinese traveller Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang) documented his visit to a Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj during the reign of King Harsha. This historical account suggests that the Kumbh Mela has been a significant event for well over a millennium.

Over the centuries, the Kumbh Mela has grown in prominence, attracting millions of pilgrims from across India and the world. The festival is a melting pot of diverse religious practices, philosophies, and traditions. It is a place where ascetics, sadhus, and ordinary devotees come together to renew their faith, seek spiritual knowledge, and engage in religious rituals.

The confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers in Prayagraj holds profound religious significance. The Ganges is considered the holiest of all rivers in Hinduism, symbolizing purity and forgiveness. The Yamuna is revered for its association with Lord Krishna, and the mythical Saraswati represents wisdom and learning. Bathing at the Triveni Sangam during the Kumbh Mela is believed to purify the soul, wash away sins, and grant moksha (liberation from the cycle of rebirth).

The Kumbh Mela also plays a crucial role in the social and cultural life of India. It serves as a platform for the dissemination of religious teachings, philosophical discourses, and cultural exchanges. The festival showcases a rich tapestry of rituals, from the elaborate processions of akharas (monastic orders) to the mesmerizing Ganga Aarti ceremonies. It is a celebration of faith, unity, and the timeless spiritual heritage of India.

In contemporary times, the Kumbh Mela has gained global recognition as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The festival's grandeur and spiritual significance continue to draw millions of visitors, making it an event of unparalleled scale and importance.

For first-time visitors, understanding the history and significance of the Kumbh Mela provides a deeper appreciation of the festival's profound impact on India's religious and cultural landscape. It is an opportunity to witness and participate in a living tradition that has been cherished and celebrated for millennia.

Key Bathing Dates (Shahi Snan)

The most significant aspect of the Kumbh Mela is the Shahi Snan, or Royal Bath, which occurs on specific auspicious dates. These dates are known as the main bathing days and attract the largest gatherings of devotees. The Shahi Snan dates are determined by astrological configurations and are considered the most spiritually potent times to bathe in the holy waters of the Triveni Sangam.

The key bathing dates for the Kumbh Mela of 2025 were :

Makar Sankranti (January 14)

Marks the transition of the sun into the zodiac sign of Capricorn. It is considered a highly auspicious day for taking a dip in the holy rivers.

Paush Purnima (Full Moon in January) (January 13)

A significant day for devotees to commence their ritual bathing, marking the beginning of the pilgrimage season.

Mauni Amavasya (New Moon) (January 29)

One of the most important bathing days. It is believed that on this day, sages and saints observe silence and meditate, enhancing the spiritual atmosphere.

Basant Panchami (Fifth Day of the Magha Month) (February 3)

Celebrated to mark the arrival of spring, this day is associated with the worship of Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and wisdom.

Maghi Purnima (Full Moon in the Magha Month) (February 12)

Another significant full moon day when devotees gather to take a holy dip.

Maha Shivaratri (February 26)

Dedicated to Lord Shiva, this day is observed with fervent devotion and is an important occasion for spiritual seekers.

Key Areas and Landmarks

Triveni Sangam

The confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers is the focal point of the Kumbh Mela. It's where the majority of the pilgrims gather for the holy dip.

Akhara Camps

These camps are vibrant hubs of spiritual activity. Visiting different akharas gives you insight into various sects and their traditions.

Pilgrim Tents and Camps

These are spread across the grounds and offer different levels of accommodation. Knowing the layout of your camp and its proximity to the main attractions is essential.

Main Stage and Cultural Zones

Areas where cultural performances, lectures, and religious discourses take place. These are great places to experience the rich cultural heritage of the Kumbh Mela.

Kumbh - Celestial Alignment of Planets

In January 2025, a planetary alignment, also known as a planetary parade, occurred, showcasing multiple planets in the night sky. Six planets lined up, including Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. While some planets like Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn were visible to the naked eye, others like Uranus and Neptune required binoculars or telescopes for observation.



Pic credit : www.nasa.gov

The Kumbh Mela's timing is determined by specific planetary alignments, particularly Jupiter's position in relation to the Sun and Moon. This alignment is believed to amplify Earth's electromagnetic fields and is a key factor in the timing of the festival. The 2025 Maha Kumbh is considered especially rare, with a specific planetary alignment that occurs only once in 144 years.

ANCIENT ASTRONOMICAL KNOWLEDGE

The Kumbh Mela is not simply held at random intervals.

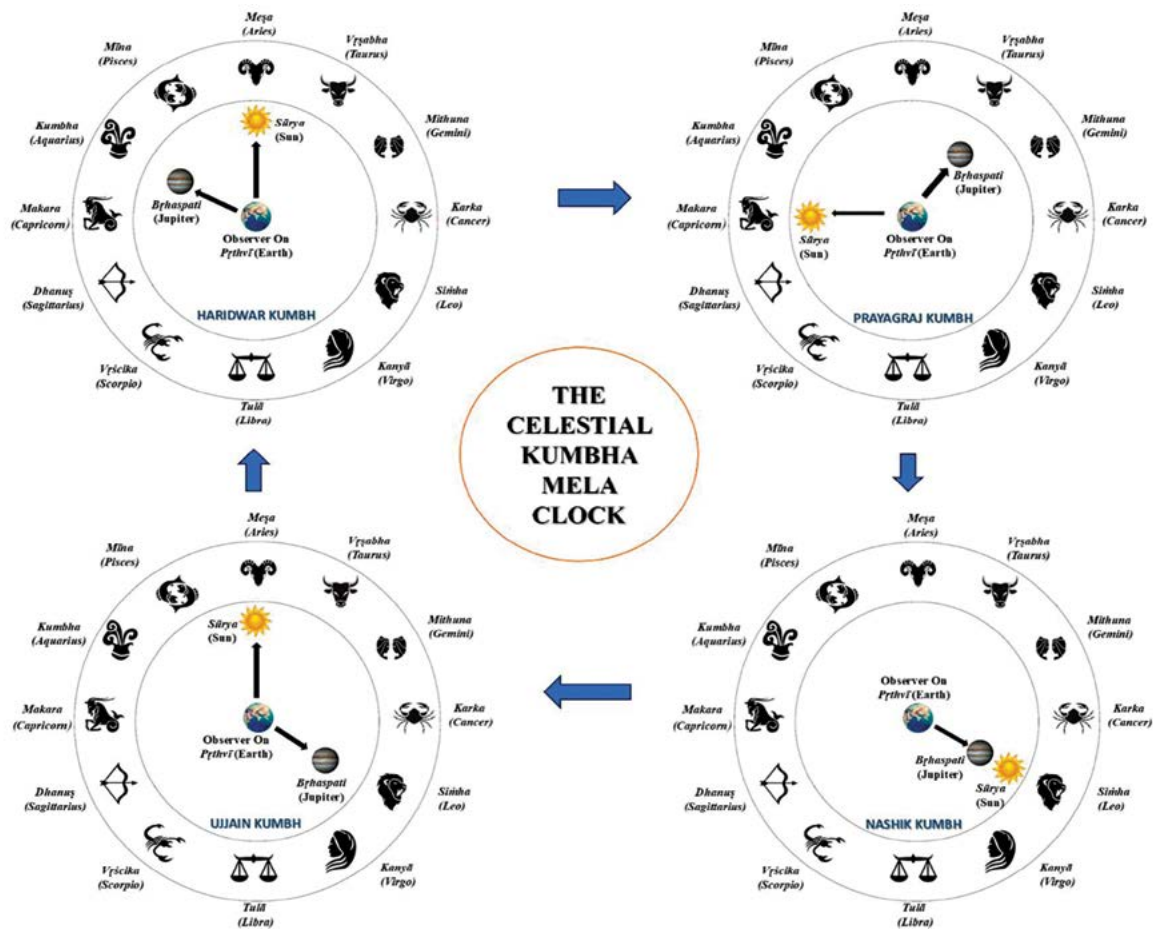
Its intricate schedule hinges on a meticulous interplay between the Sun, the Moon, and the planet Jupiter, all observed within the framework of the Hindu lunisolar calendar, known as the Panchangam. This calendar intricately tracks the cycles of celestial bodies and their positions relative to the Rashi (zodiac) and Nakshatra (lunar mansions).

Held in a rotating cycle across four sacred locations in India — Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik — the Kumbh Mela transcends mere religious significance. It whispers a fascinating tale of ancient astronomical knowledge embedded within its practice. While millions of devotees gather to seek spiritual solace, the festival is also a testament to the fusion of astronomy and culture. To fully appreciate the significance of this festival, one must delve into its cosmic underpinnings and the meticulous astronomical principles guiding its occurrence.

Here's a more detailed look -

- * **Jupiter's Role:** Jupiter's transit through specific zodiac signs, especially Aquarius (Kumbha), is crucial for determining the Kumbh Mela's start and location.
- * **Sun and Moon Alignment:** The Sun and Moon also need to align with Jupiter in a specific way to create a "powerful cosmic moment" that is believed to enhance the spiritual benefits of the festival.
- * **12-Year Cycle:** The Kumbh Mela operates on a 12-year cycle, coinciding with Jupiter's journey through the zodiac.

2025 Significance



Pic credit: ScienceIndiamag

From time immemorial, humanity has sought meaning in the vast, starry expanse above. The motions of celestial bodies have guided agriculture, marked seasons, and given rise to some of the most intricate cultural practices.

Among these is the Kumbh Mela, a festival so vast and profound that it is recognised not just as a spiritual gathering but as a monumental event reflecting ancient Indian astronomical knowledge.

This intersection of celestial phenomena and human devotion is a hallmark of the Kumbh Mela, offering a unique lens through which to explore the interplay between ancient Indian astronomy and cultural practices. The journey into this celestial tradition reveals a rich tapestry of science, history, and spirituality, inviting us to decode the astronomical foundations that underpin one of humanity's most awe-inspiring events.





Akhara : Guardians of Tradition

Akhara are ancient spiritual orders at the heart of the Kumbh. These ascetic brotherhoods, especially the Naga Sadhus, uphold timeless rituals, fierce discipline, and warrior-like devotion, offering a glimpse into India's mystical past and its living spiritual heritage.



Ascetics Assemble : The Monks of the Mela

The Kumbh becomes a stage where thousands of ascetics, some naked, others robed-gather after years of seclusion. Their presence transforms the fair into a spiritual congregation of yogis, teachers, and seekers.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

Naga Sadhus, who are considered the followers of Shiva, are believed to be the first to take the holy dip due to their devotion to Shiva and this custom has been maintained since the start of this Kumbh Mela. The word 'Naga' in Sanskrit means 'mountain' which signifies those who either live on or around mountains, often in complete isolation, in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. Nagas are known for their ash-smeared bodies and matted hair.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

श्री गुरु कार्तिकेभ्योःनमः



श्री गुरु विंजन देव



Ageless Orders : Brotherhoods of the Sacred Path

Akhara life is a blend of austerity, devotion, and debate. These lineages date back to Adi Shankaracharya's time, preserving India's philosophical streams and anchoring the massive pilgrimage in spiritual purpose.





Pic credit : Sathish Lal

Bath : A Sacred Immersion

The Shahi Snan or royal bath is the spiritual climax of the Kumbh. Millions gather to dip into the holy confluence, seeking liberation from sin and a path toward moksha in the sacred waters.



Bath : Bodies, Belief, and the Ganges

An endless sea of humanity flows toward the water's edge. Each splash is a vow, each submersion a story-this is the faith of a billion distilled in sacred drops.



Baptism of Belief

This is no ordinary dip-it is an act of rebirth. Pilgrims, young and old, submerge into the river with chants on their lips and faith in their hearts, believing they are washed anew.



Confluence (Sangam)

Meeting point of Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati



Confluence : Rivers that Unite

Triveni Sangam-the meeting point of the Ganga, Yamuna, and mythical Saraswati-is not just a place, but a symbol of spiritual unity. It draws seekers to its banks for the ultimate purification.



Pic credit : Pankaj Chauhan



Devotion : Heart of the Mela

The Kumbh beats with devotion-from chanting grandmothers to meditating saints. Amid the crowd, it is this silent surrender to something greater that binds all.



Divine Dedication

Beyond ritual lies surrender. Pilgrims arrive not just to witness but to dissolve into the divine. The Kumbh becomes a theatre of faith enacted through everyday acts of prayer.



Draped in Faith

Every turban, every tilak, every garlanded deity is soaked in devotion. The air buzzes with bhajans and mantras, echoing a love for the divine deeper than ritual.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal





Pic credit : Sathish Lal

Eternal Flame: Devotion After Dusk

Even after the crowds thin, the glow of aarti persists. It is a symbolic gesture of lighting inner darkness with the flame of faith, witnessed nightly by the Ganga.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal



Pic credit : Sathish Lal



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

Faith : Pilgrimage of the Soul

Faith drives the journey. It pushes pilgrims to walk miles barefoot, fast for days, and bathe in icy waters-all in pursuit of inner cleansing.



Following the Call

The Kumbh is a pilgrimage not just of distance, but of resolve. Even in discomfort, the faithful radiate peace, believing they are answering a divine summons.



Fuel of the Fair

From saints to sadhaks, faith fuels every act-be it a holy dip, a ritual chant, or simply serving food.





Ganga: River of Life

The Ganga is more than a river; she is mother, goddess, and purifier. At the Kumbh, she becomes the medium between earth and heaven.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

Grace of the Ganges

Her waters quench both thirst and soul. Pilgrims carry her home in copper pots, believing every drop holds grace enough to transform lives.



Goddess in Flow

Flowing past rituals, flags, and chants, the Ganga is alive in every breath of the mela. She connects time, myth, and mankind in her embrace.



Havan (Fire Rituals)

Smoke, fire, chanting



Havan: Flames of Purity

The sacred fire consumes offerings and ego alike. Sadhus and householders alike chant around the havan, invoking peace and purification.





Havan (Fire Rituals)

Smoke, fire, chanting



Heat of the Divine

Each flicker of the havan flame mirrors the inner fire of seekers - the longing to transform, to awaken, and to return renewed.



Havan (Fire Rituals)

Smoke, fire, chanting



Holy Fire Rituals

Smoke spirals into the sky, carrying prayers upward. Fire becomes a bridge between the mortal and divine, burning away impurities of mind and soul.



Icons: Faces of Divinity

From massive effigies to hand-held deities, icons turn the Kumbh into a mobile mandir. These symbols bring the celestial to the streets.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal



India's Spiritual Symbols

The sacred is everywhere-painted on skin, engraved in wood, sculpted in sand. The Kumbh becomes a gallery of devotion through imagery.



Incarnations and Imagery

Deities from every tradition appear in processions and tents. In their colorful company, pilgrims feel the divine watching, listening, and blessing.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

Journey: The Path to the Kumbh

Pilgrims walk, ride, and sail-sometimes from hundreds of miles away. Their journey is not just physical but spiritual, each step a prayer, each mile a meditation.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

Jal Yatra: Pilgrimage Over Water

Many pilgrims travel via rivers and canals, echoing ancient traditions of river pilgrimages. Boats with flags fluttering glide toward the Sangam, bearing passengers full of hope.



Joyful Steps of Faith

Despite dust and crowds, faces are filled with joy. The journey itself becomes the destination, where every hardship is a reminder of purpose.





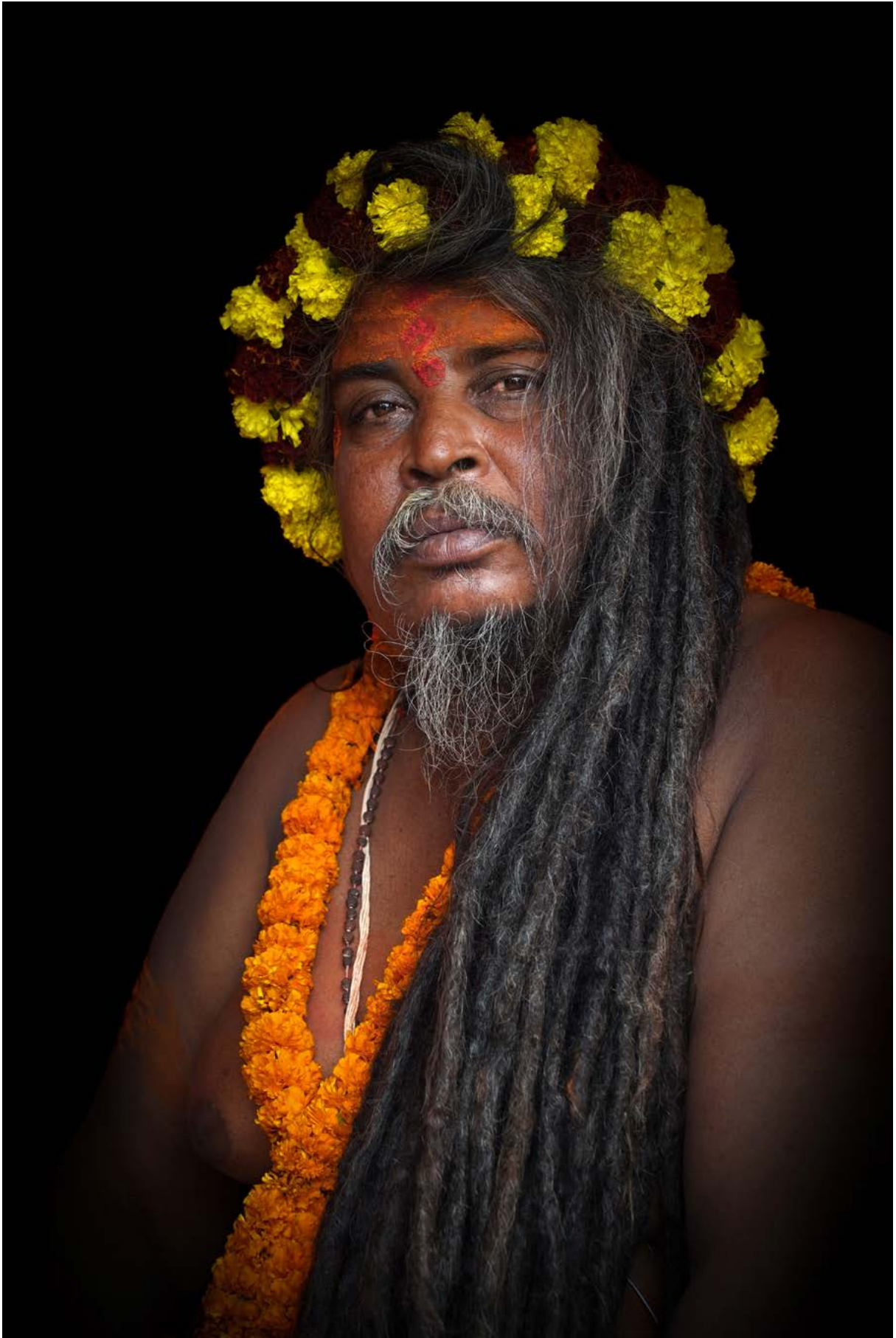
Kumbh Ka Karamat : Diversity of Belief

Kumbh embraces all. From monks to modern mystics, from the marginalized to the mighty-all find space, voice, and divinity in the fair's sacred sprawl.



Kindred Souls of the Kumbh

A spiritual democracy unfolds-caste, class, gender dissolve in shared baths, shared meals, and shared chants. In this unity lies the true miracle.





Kinnar Akhara : Pride in Faith

The Kinnar (transgender) Akhara has emerged as a proud voice at the Kumbh, challenging norms and asserting their right to spiritual inclusion and visibility.



Pic credit : Internet download



Langar (Community Kitchens)

Serving food, unity, charity



Pic credit : Ravi Mittal

Langar : Feast of Equality

Community kitchens serve free meals to millions, regardless of religion or status. Volunteers pour love into every roti, dal, and ladle of sabzi.



Pic credit : Flicker.com

Lines of Gratitude

Pilgrims sit in lines, hands extended, hearts open. Food becomes prasad, and service becomes sadhana for those cooking and serving.



Langar (Community Kitchens)

Serving food, unity, charity



Living Langar: Serving the Soul

Langars at the Kumbh are more than meals—they are expressions of compassion. Feeding the hungry becomes a sacred act, echoing the core of seva (selfless service).

Lifelines of the Mela

Behind the spiritual grandeur of the Kumbh lies a massive logistical operation: water pipelines, temporary roads, mobile toilets, security networks, power grids, and medical stations. These “lifelines” quietly sustain the influx of millions. They represent the seamless fusion of devotion and civil planning—where spirituality runs on infrastructure.





Merging with the Divine

The Maha Snan symbolizes ego dissolving into the divine. For many, it is the peak of a life's yearning, the single dip that could change destiny.



Maha Snan : The Great Immersion

The royal bathing days draw the biggest crowds. At sunrise, with chants echoing, the rivers witness a tide of saffron, silver, and skin submerge in devotion.



Mystical Moments by the River

These are the snapshots that stay-sadhus with raised arms, sunlight striking water, silence just before the splash. Time slows, and something sacred takes hold.





Naga Sadhus

Themes: Naked ascetics, processions, rituals



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

Naga Sadhus : Warriors of Spirit

Naked, ash-covered, and fierce, the Naga Sadhus are the Kumbh's most photographed and mystifying figures. Their presence recalls ancient Vedic warrior traditions blended with renunciation.



Naked Truth : Renouncing the World

Their nudity isn't spectacle-it's a vow. With no possessions, no shame, they walk the Kumbh like spirits untethered from the world's distractions.



Naga Nirvana: Beyond the Body

Their trance, their chants, their eyes burning with tapasya-Nagas remind us of the limits they've crossed and the body they've left behind in pursuit of the soul.



Overflowing Faith

Hands reach skyward, casting flowers into the river. These offerings are love letters-simple, sincere, and boundless in faith.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

Offerings : Gifts to the Divine

From marigold garlands to bowls of ghee and coconut, the river becomes a recipient of endless offerings-a medium to reach the gods.



Objects of Blessing

Every pilgrim brings something to give. Each item, no matter how humble, becomes sacred when given with pure intention.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal



Processions : A Parade of the Holy

Shahi Snan days begin with vibrant processions-elephants, drums, tridents, flags. Akharas march like royal armies, announcing their arrival to the sacred bath.



Pomp and Penance

It's both pageantry and prayer. Spectacular visuals meet deep spirituality as color and austerity walk side by side in the streets of the Kumbh.



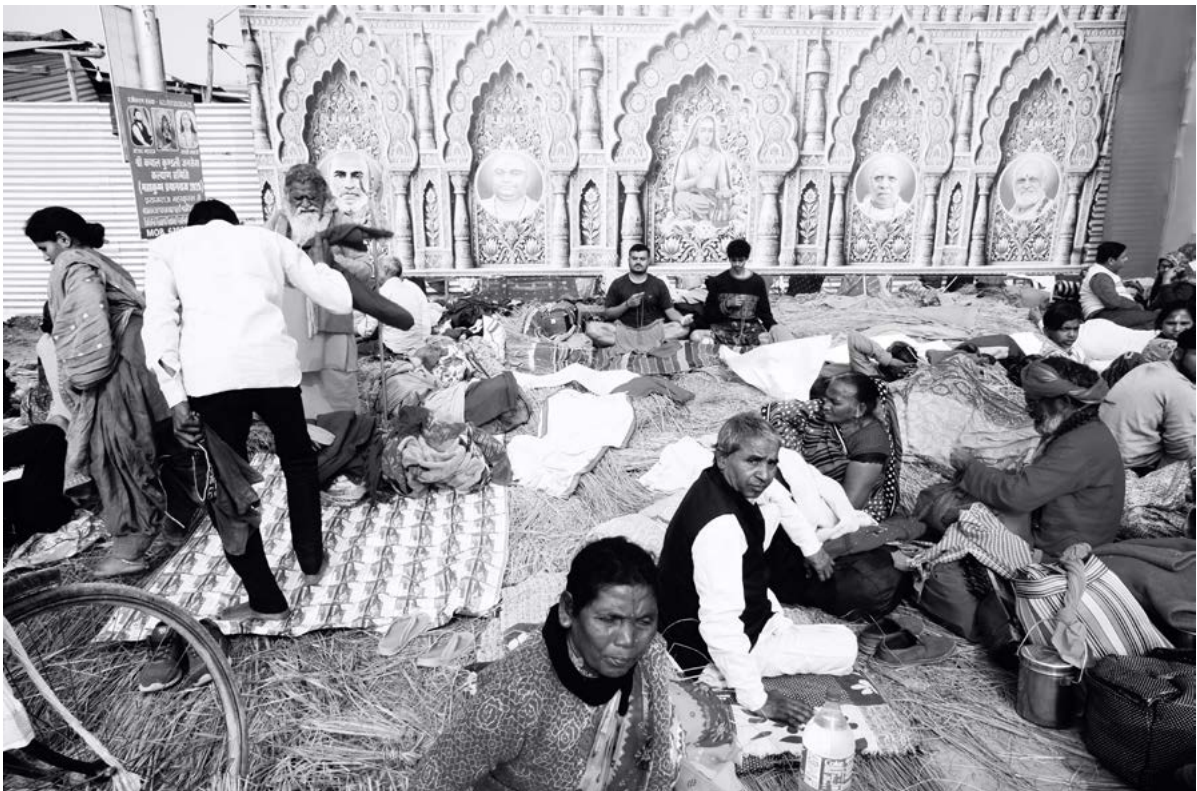
Paths of Procession

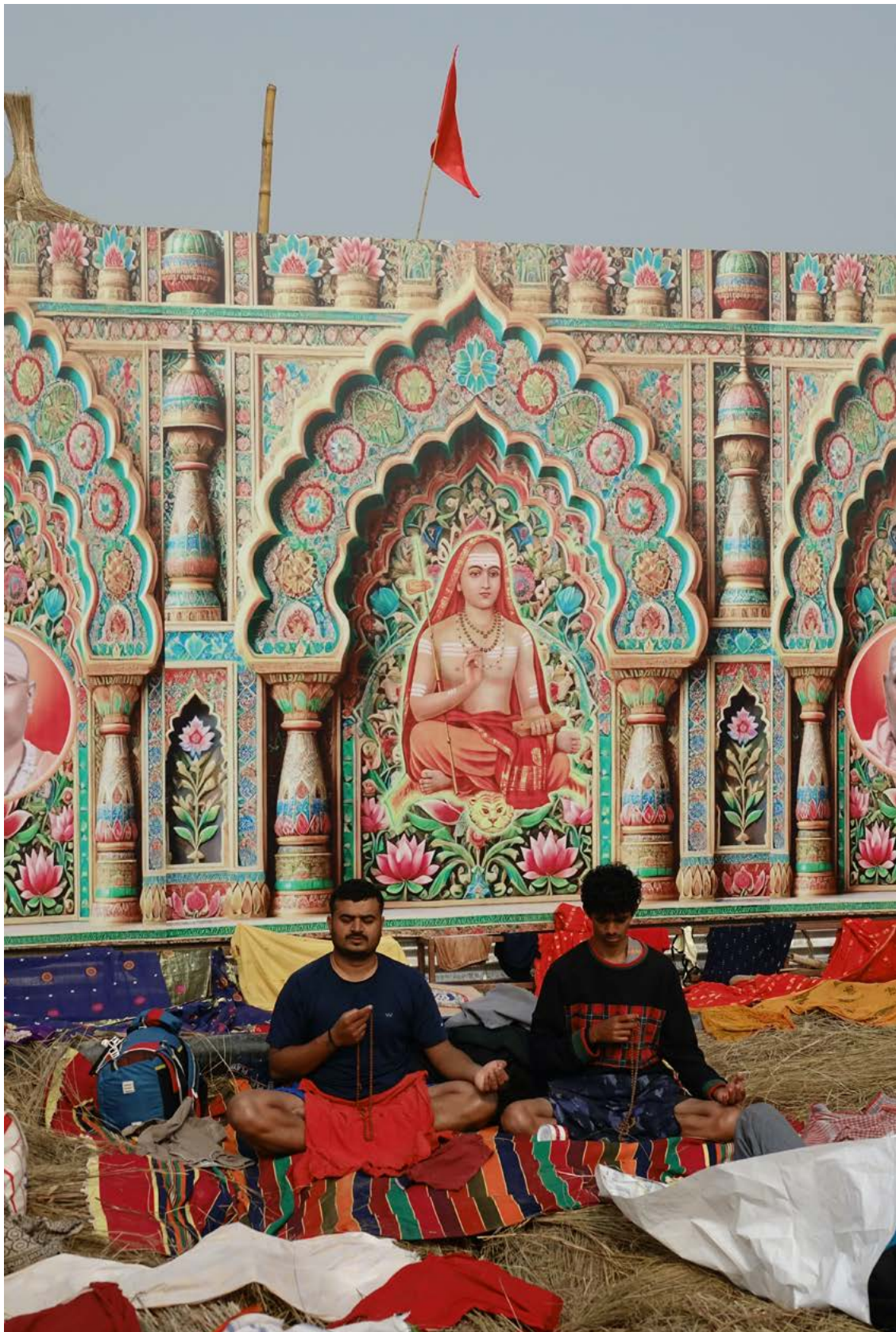
These routes are marked by centuries of tradition. As the akharas pass, spectators bow their heads-witnessing not just men, but centuries of devotion in motion.



Quest: Search for the Eternal

At its heart, the Kumbh is a quest-not for material gain, but for inner clarity, peace, and proximity to the divine.





Quiet in the Chaos

Even amid the megaphones and crowds, there are pockets of silence where sadhus meditate, seekers reflect, and the river flows without fanfare.



Questions of the Soul

“Who am I?” “What is truth?” Pilgrims come searching. The Kumbh doesn’t always answer, but it guides, reflects, and stirs a deeper inquiry.



Rhythms of the Sacred

Conches blow, bells ring, hands fold. These repeated gestures, done over days and generations, become a heartbeat of the spiritual fair.





Pic credit : Sathish Lal

River Rituals

The riverbank is an altar. Priests perform rites for the departed, families offer diyas at dusk, and seekers perform daily sandhyas by the flowing Ganga.





Sadhu Sangh: Company of the Saints

The Kumbh is the one place where spiritual seekers can interact with India's most reclusive mystics some of whom emerge only once in 12 years.



Seekers and Sages

For every pilgrim, there's a guide. The Kumbh becomes a knowledge exchange of scriptures, stories, mantras, and methods of self-realization.



Silence and Solace

In corners of the camp, sadhus sit unmoving, immersed in japa. Their silence speaks volumes, becoming a sanctuary amid the sea of humanity.



Tents of the Transcendental

The entire city of tents that rises at Kumbh is a miracle in itself. From bare-bones shelters to elaborate spiritual camps, they become temples, schools, and homes for millions.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

Temporary Cities, Eternal Faith

Built in weeks, gone in days, the Kumbh's tented town is a logistical marvel. Yet, what's temporary in structure is permanent in impact on the soul.



Unity in Diversity

Nowhere else do languages, regions, castes, and customs converge so peacefully. The Kumbh unites India in a celebration of shared spirituality.



Universal Gathering

From Tamil chants to Punjabi langars, Buddhist monks to Baul singers, Kumbh speaks a universal language: that of faith and belonging.



Uniting the Many Paths

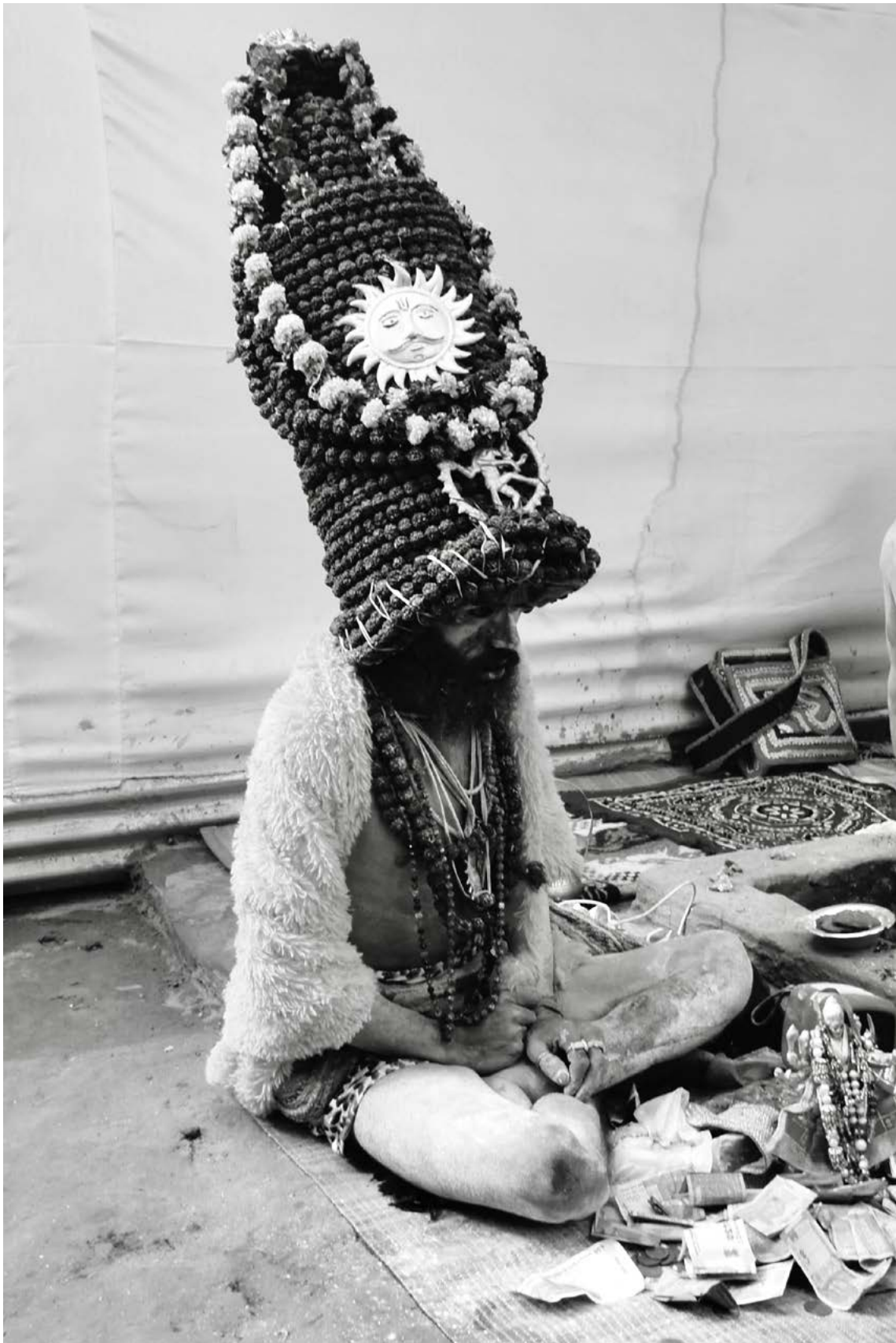
Each pilgrim may follow a different route, bhakti, yoga, tantra but at the Kumbh, all these streams merge like the rivers they've come to bathe in.



Uniting the Many Paths

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Vows Carried in Silence

Even the unspoken becomes powerful. A silent sadhu or fasting devotee is a picture of quiet resilience, holding their resolve like a sacred flame.



Vrat : Vows of Purity

Many pilgrims undertake fasts or abstain from speech, meat, or comfort. These vows, vrats are acts of purification and discipline during the pilgrimage.



Virtue Through Vrat

Self-restraint is the hidden current at the Kumbh. Fasting bodies and focused minds create a stillness amid the crowd, proof that inner work is the real pilgrimage.



Radhepuri Maharaj, a hatha yogi from Madhya Pradesh, has kept his right arm raised for 14 years as part of his vow. Earlier, he stood for years and even slept in that position. His right arm has become significantly thinner than his left, and his long nails have curled up.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

Witnesses of Wonder

Photographers, journalists, and poets come to document the Kumbh- but many leave transformed, realizing that to witness is also to participate.



Wandering Eyes, Wondering Souls

Whether through a camera lens or bare eyes, every visitor is struck by the surreal intensity-where the mystical becomes mundane, and vice versa.



Water

Holy water, splashes, rituals



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

“Where water meets faith, the divine takes form.”



Writing with Light

Through powerful images and stories, the Kumbh is captured not just on film but in the world's imagination-etched in pixels, paint, and poetry.



Xenial Spirit : Welcoming the World

Despite the chaos, the Kumbh embraces all. Foreigners and first-timers alike are welcomed with kindness, curiosity, and shared cups of chai.





Experiential Pilgrimage

The Kumbh is not seen—it is lived. The smells, sounds, heat, dust, and sacred chants wrap visitors in a full-sensory immersion into India's spiritual soul.



Yatra : The Sacred Journey

Yatra means pilgrimage, and at the Kumbh, it's everywhere. Whether arriving by train, boat, or barefoot, the act of coming is as sacred as arriving.



Your Journey, Your Faith

No two yatras are alike. Some walk in silence, others in groups; some come once, others for life. The Kumbh honors all journeys, without hierarchy.



Zenith of Devotion

The Kumbh is the peak of spiritual celebration in Hinduism- where myths manifest, rivers sanctify, and humanity gathers in sacred synergy.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

Zero Point: The Soul's Beginning

For many, the Kumbh marks a return to zero—to simplicity, to silence, to surrender. A chance to reset, to realign, and to rediscover what truly matters.

Un-Told Stories - Kumbh -Lost Child



Most people know the heart-sinking feeling of losing someone in a crowded place. Imagine the feeling of being lost at the largest gathering of humanity in the world, the Kumbh Mela. It's a scene so dramatic, and so common, that it's a theme in many Bollywood movies - families who attend the Kumbh are separated and then reunited decades later.

"Tiny Feet, Big Crowd and a Helping Hand"

The little boy stood amidst the chaos, clutching the policeman's hand, his tear-streaked face

searching for the warmth of his parents.

The officer's voice echoed in the loudspeakers, but the boy's cries drowned everything else.

As my wife saw this, her tears mirrored the boy's fear - a reminder of the deep bond between a parent and child, even in a sea of strangers.

In the vastness of the Kumbh, a child's tears reminded us of how small we all are, searching for something familiar in a world of strangers.

The Kumbh Mela has two guaranteed experiences: finding salvation and finding yourself in the Lost and Found tent.

People lose more than their shoes here - kids, parents, and sometimes even their sense of direction! Thankfully, the Kumbh police have mastered the art of reconnecting people faster than a WhatsApp group.

My wife, gripped by the scene, whispered,

"How fragile is faith when held in such tiny hands?"

Getting lost at the Kumbh Mela, a massive religious gathering in India, is a common occurrence due to the sheer size and density of the crowds. The Uttar Pradesh government has implemented several measures to assist lost pilgrims, including digital lost-and-found centres, QR codes, and RFID-enabled wristbands. These efforts have resulted in a near 99.9% re-unifications.

The Maha Kumbh saw over 660 Million (66 Crore) pilgrims in 45 days.

A lost and found centre was set up to reunite separated families, and for many, it worked.

More than 35,000 missing people were registered, and most were reunited.

*"In the crowd of millions, this rope is our lifeline-tying us together,
so no one is lost on the path of faith."*



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

"Journey that Bind"

Un-Told Stories - “Mala Seller Turned Internet Sensation”

Monalisa Bhonsle’s Viral Fame



Monalisa Bhonsle, initially a mala (garland) seller, gained unexpected fame as her images went viral, symbolizing the festival's ability to spotlight everyday individuals.

Meet Monalisa, the girl who captured hearts at the Maha Kumbh with her beauty and grace, and discover the rich yet complex heritage of the Pardhi community she belongs to. From their historic ties to hunting for royals to their branding as 'criminal tribes' under British rule, the Pardhis have a story of resilience, adventure, and survival.

Un-Told Stories - Kabootar wale



The Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj is known for its spiritual grandeur, attracting saints and ascetics from across the country. And amid a sea of men, women and children at the venue, a seer draws a lot of attention for his unusual companion - a pigeon that sits gracefully on his head.

Known as the “Kabootar Wale Baba” (the Pigeon Saint), Mahant Rajpuri Ji Maharaj from the Juna Akhara has been walking this unique path for nearly a decade.

Speaking about his companion, he said, “The pigeon’s name is Hari Puri,” adding with a smile, “I have spent 8 to 9 years with this pigeon.” For the seer, the pigeon symbolises love and harmony, embodying his philosophy of compassion towards all living beings.

He adds, “Serving living beings is considered the highest form of duty.

It is our responsibility to show compassion and care towards all living creatures.

Our ultimate goal in life should be to dedicate ourselves to the service of living beings.”

Metaphor for “Kabootar Baba” (The Pigeon Saint):

He is the quiet whisper between the sky and the earth—a feathered metaphor of surrender. Clad in white and surrounded by pigeons, Kabootar Baba is less a man and more a living prayer, drifting between motion and stillness. Just as pigeons return home guided by invisible instincts, his life is a homing call to the soul—unattached, unafraid, and utterly present. In the swirling chaos of the Kumbh, he is a pause—a soft coo of peace in a world that never stops flapping.

Un-Told Stories - Dishka

“At the Kumbh Mela, one of the most soul-stirring and rarely witnessed events is the Diksha, or monk initiation ceremony, where individuals embark on a spiritual journey to uncover the true meaning of life. It was here, for the first time, that I formally renounced my worldly life to become a sadhu, an ascetic on a path toward spiritual liberation. This sacred rite, conducted by the revered leaders of the Akharas—spiritual monastic orders—marked my complete surrender of material attachments.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

I was dressed in simple white, preparing myself for days of rigorous rituals: fasting, reciting scriptures, and undergoing symbolic acts like shaving my head. All of it was meant to prepare me, mentally and spiritually, for the transformation I was about to undergo. When the chosen day arrived, I stood with other initiates by the sacred river, often at dawn, as senior monks guided us through our final vows. And then came the most dramatic moment: the first dip in the holy river as a renunciate.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

When I emerged, I was no longer the person I had been. Clad in saffron or ash, I symbolized rebirth. From that moment on, I was no longer an individual but a part of the Akhara community—custodians of timeless spiritual traditions. It was a moment both solemn and celebratory, a profound transformation that I shared with fellow ascetics, pilgrims, and sometimes even photographers and scholars, who saw this rare event as a living testament to India's spiritual heritage.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

Un-Told Stories (Tent Troubles and Midnight Tales)



Camping near the river seemed serene until nature and neighbors had other plans. We stayed near two zone ; an old temple and a parking zone (the nearest parking zone at Jhusi in Prayagraj It was 5km away from the bathing ghats). So what do drivers or attendants do the whole night ? Listen to "Kirtan or Bhajans"(songs at temple) over a loud microphone for the whole night. And as luck would have it ; sound on the plains of the Ganga travels a long way ...loud and clear. Hint: Choose your tent wisely and keep earplugs handy for unexpected nighttime concerts! Our ultimate goal in life should be to dedicate ourselves to the service of living beings."



Un-Told Stories (Security & Mounted Police Tales)

Mounted Police ,Crowd Control & AI Technology used.

Officials believe that mounted police remain much more effective in crowd control than any other available option. The state police have assembled an elite force of 130 specially trained horses and 166 personnel. Known for their efficiency in crowd control and their ability to navigate inaccessible areas, the mounted police will be instrumental in maintaining safety and order throughout the event.



AI-Powered Crowd Management

“Technology Meets Tradition: AI Ensures Safety”

Advanced AI-powered cameras were deployed for crowd control, blending modern technology with ancient traditions to manage the vast gatherings effectively.



Un-Told Stories (Visible from Space)



NASA astronaut Don Pettit shared stunning nighttime images of the 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela captured from the International Space Station (ISS). These images showcase the illuminated banks of the Ganga River and the massive gathering of devotees. The photos highlight the scale of the world's largest religious gathering as it appears from space.

The Mahakumbh is the world's largest religious event, where millions of devotees take a dip in the Ganga River to attain spiritual peace. So far, over 13 crore devotees have experienced this blissful and religious moment by bathing at the confluence. The images emerging from here have amazed the entire world. These space photos are sure to draw the attention of people worldwide to the Mahakumbh. Don Pettit, while sharing the images, wrote that the incredible view of the 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela was captured from the International Space Station (ISS). The world's largest human congregation was glowing along the banks of the Ganga River.

American astronaut and chemical engineer Donald Roy Pettit, is known for his work in astrophotography and innovation in space. Pettit is also the inventor of the first patented object made in space, the 'Zero-G Cup'. He, at the age of 69, is NASA's oldest active astronaut.



ISRO Satellite-Before Kumbh



ISRO-During Kumbh

Un-Told Stories (Women Naga Sadhus)

Women Naga Sadhus:

The 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, held from January 13th to February 26th, was a grand event with millions of devotees attending, including the unique presence of women Naga Sadhus and stories of pilgrims' innovative travel plans.



Pic credit : Sathish Lal





The journey of a woman Naga Sadhu is not one of simple devotion, but of profound transformation - a shedding of the material world as well as the very self. Before she turns an ascetic, she is someone else - a woman, a wife, a mother, a daughter. But she leaves behind the comfort and joy of home and earth to devote herself entirely to Shiva.



Women Naga Sadhus undergo strict celibacy for six to twelve years before initiation and many of them retreat to remote caves, forests, or mountains. They live within akharas, following strict rituals, but unlike their male counterparts, they wear an unstitched saffron cloth called “Ganti” and are marked by dreadlocks and a tilak on their foreheads. As part of their renunciation, they perform their own ‘Pind Daan’- a ritual symbolising the death of their old life and their rebirth as ascetics.

Un-Told Stories (First Airmail of the World)



On February 18, 1911, French pilot Henri Pequet carried the first official mail flown by airplane. The flight occurred in India. Pequet carried a sack with about 6,000 cards and letters on his Humber biplane. The plane flew a distance of five miles, from an Allahabad polo field, over the Yamuna River, to Naini.

On February 18, 1911, French pilot Henri Pequet took off in his biplane from an exhibition ground, carrying about 6,500 mails and postcards and soared into the evening sky of Allahabad, as it was known then, and into the pages of aviation and postal history.

This was the world's first official airmail flown by an aeroplane and the pioneering milestone coincided with the Kumbh Mela that took place in Prayagraj 114 years ago, according to philately experts.

The aircraft that became part of this historic flight, flew a distance of about five miles, crossed Yamuna and landed at a site near the Naini Jail in a span of nearly 13 minutes.

Among the recipients of the mails was a young Jawaharlal Nehru (later India's first prime minister) who was in England at the time, and George V - the then king of the British empire. Mails were also addressed to many royals and commoners. Each of the mails carried a special postmark depicting an airplane, mountains and bore the text - 'First Aerial Post, 1911, U. P. Exhibition Allahabad'.

Un-Told Stories (Running on Karma points)

Joyful Steps of Faith

Despite dust and crowds, faces are filled with joy. The journey itself becomes the destination, where every hardship is a reminder of purpose.



"Fitbit meets Faith"

"Meta - 14th Jan - I think for me my perception of it is different since I walked over 25 km on the day of the Royal Bath and being on my feet for 14,5 hours".

Satish - Each day, I walked nearly 20 kilometers amidst lakhs of devotees, absorbing the colors, emotions, chants, and quiet reflections that make the Maha Kumbh.

"Pilgrimage or Marathon?"

Counting steps at the Kumbh turns into an unintended fitness challenge for one lazy visitor.

Hint: Wear comfortable shoes-your feet will thank you!

Introduction to “Anjan Ghosh” ! Our mentor for this trip.

I graduated from Calcutta University with a diploma in Computer Graphics and Animation from IBM. Also, I have completed my diploma in Applied Art from Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata, India. Currently, I am working in India as a senior graphic designer and visualise at Trisys Communication Pvt Ltd. My hobby includes painting and my passion is photography. My photography has been exhibited across the world and got several photography awards. I love capturing the rural essence primarily. My skills include photography, graphic design, web design digital painting.

What inspired you to approach photography? How did this journey start? I've always been drawn to the power of visual storytelling, and photography provides a unique and captivating way to convey stories and emotions. I started my photography journey when I was given my first camera as a gift. At first, I was simply taking pictures of anything and everything that caught my eye. But as I began to study the art and learn more about the technical aspects of photography, I realized that I could use my camera to capture moments that were meaningful to me and to others. My passion for photography grew as I learned to see the world through a different lens. I began to notice the beauty in the smallest details, the colors of the sunset, the way light falls on a face. Photography allowed me to freeze time and capture memories that I could hold onto forever. As I continued to develop my skills, I started to share my work with others, and the positive feedback I received encouraged me to keep going. I love the way photography connects people, and how it can evoke emotions and start conversations. I'm constantly learning and evolving, always searching for new ways to tell stories through my images.

What is your mission in photography? What photography means to you? Photography is my passion because it allows me to give a voice to those who may not have one and to shed light on the experiences of rural people. It is my mission to use photography as a tool to effect positive change in the lives of those who are often overlooked in our society. Through my images, I hope to raise awareness and inspire action, working towards improving the lives of rural communities. Many stories of rural life are not often shared or recognized in our society, and I believe that photography can help to change that. By documenting the challenges and triumphs of rural life, and sharing those stories with a wider audience, I hope to make a difference in the lives of those I photograph. I am committed to using my skills as a photographer to raise awareness and promote change that will lead to a better life for those living in rural areas. I am passionate about my work, and I am dedicated to using photography as a means of effecting positive change in the world. I will continue to tell the stories of those who do not have a voice and use my images to inspire others to act toward building a more just and equitable society.



Anjan Ghosh is an acclaimed photographer known for capturing the raw beauty of humanity, culture, and everyday life. Specializing in travel, humanitarian, and portrait photography, his work tells powerful stories that evoke deep emotions. Anjan's

passion for exploring remote villages and connecting with people allows him to reveal the resilience and spirit of his subjects.

His remarkable talent has been recognized through prestigious

awards and featured in prominent exhibitions worldwide. Anjan's evocative visuals continue to inspire art lovers and fellow photographers, leaving a lasting impression on all who experience his work.



Anjan Ghosh

Photographer

Photographer | Graphic Designer | Painter
Kolkata's Beauty & Tribal Villages
Workshops & Documentaries
www.anjanghosh.com

Anjan Ghosh is one of India's best photographers. He graduated with an art degree and is currently working as a graphic artist at an advertising agency. He captures with his camera the essence of humanity, the soul of rural life, and pure emotion through powerful portraits and street moments with documentary value. Anjan is a photographer who believes that art can be a powerful tool for social change and his intention is to help families in rural areas of West Bengal and India.



For as long as I can remember, India has always fascinated and captivated me. As a nineteen-year-old art history student in France, it felt only natural to enrol in a tiny Sanskrit class. This opened a window on to a world I longed to know more deeply, allowing me, at times, to feel connected to the extraordinarily rich culture and vibrant people of that great country.

The years slipped by, and I devoted myself to another passion, translation. It is, I believe, a wonderful way to build bridges between cultures and, in some small measure, to help improve lives and contribute to a slightly fairer world.

So, when my dear friend Anjan Ghosh, an amazing Indian photographer with a big heart, invited me to join him on the extraordinary journey of the Kumbh Mela, I did not hesitate for a second. Thus, I had the privilege of sharing one of the most remarkable spiritual experiences with this group. Amidst the pilgrims and sadhus, we walked side by side and witnessed the most unbelievable scenes of devotion. The photos captured by these talented artists speak for themselves; no words of mine could convey the essence of this religious gathering better than their images do.

However, I might add that in Prayagraj, I found myself a spectator twice over. Not only was I able to immerse myself in the vibrant atmosphere of rituals and mantras, adorned in magnificent colours, but I also had the joy of watching my photographer friends swept up in the fervour of their craft. I shall treasure these images too.

As I turn the pages of this book, I realise that perhaps only now, back in our pragmatic worlds, we can grasp the full significance of what we experienced and understand its deeper meaning. We arrived in Prayagraj as strangers – Gaurav, Anjan, Maria, Heidi, Tanvi, Rajesh, Deepali, Meta and myself – and left, just a few days later, united by an experience like no other. For all these moments of happiness, I would like to thank each and every one of them.

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Introduction -

Hello Everyone! Myself Gaurav Upadhyay who goes by the name of @thewanderlustmariner in Instagram. Professionally I am working as staff chief engineer on cruise ship. I'm someone who's lucky enough to call the open sea my workplace. I work on a cruise ship, and it's honestly one of the best things I've ever done. It's a lifestyle that not only lets me travel to some of the most beautiful places on Earth but also gives me the chance to meet people from all over the world. No two days are the same, one day I might be exploring the cobblestone streets of a small European port, and the next I'm soaking up the sun on a tropical beach in the Caribbean.

Travel has always been something I've been passionate about, and being on a cruise ship makes that dream a constant reality. But it's not just about ticking places off a list, it's about the stories, the people, the unexpected little moments that happen along the way. That's where photography comes in for me. I love capturing those fleeting scenes, whether it's a quiet sunrise over the ocean, a candid smile from a street vendor, or the chaotic charm of a local festival. My camera is basically my travel buddy; it helps me freeze time and hold onto the magic I find in each place.

This lifestyle has taught me to appreciate the small things, adapt quickly, and find beauty in unexpected places. And I wouldn't trade it for anything. Life's never boring when you're always on the move, Isn't it?

About Kumbh festival experience -

Attending the Kumbh Festival was one of the most intense, beautiful, and unforgettable experiences of my life. As someone who travels constantly and loves photography, I thought I'd seen a lot, but nothing really prepares you for the energy of Kumbh. It's more than a religious gathering; it's a massive wave of humanity, devotion, color, and chaos that completely surrounds you. The highlight for me was photographing the Shahi Snan, the royal bath. It's the most sacred part of the Kumbh, when the Naga Sadhus and other Akharas (spiritual sects) lead the charge into the sangam. I woke up well before sunrise that day, camera in hand, surrounded by thousands of people, all waiting for that exact moment when the holy dip would begin. The air was thick with smoke from fires and incense, the sounds of conch shells and chanting echoed all around, and there was this almost electric sense of anticipation.

When the procession began, it felt like time slowed down. The Naga Sadhus, naked, covered in ash, their dreadlocks flowing, charged toward the sangam in a wave of raw energy. Some were dancing, others shouting praises, completely consumed in their devotion. It was wild and powerful, but also deeply spiritual. I tried to be as respectful and discreet as possible while capturing the moment, shooting from the side, keeping my distance, but still close enough to feel the emotion.

Photographing the Shahi Snan wasn't easy, between the crowds, the movement, and the spiritual significance of what was happening, but it was an experience I'll never forget. Every frame I took felt like a once-in-a-lifetime moment. It wasn't just about getting a good shot; it was about honoring the story behind it.

Heidi Stiehler

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Introduction -

I'm coming from Wasserburg, it's a small beautiful town in the south of Germany. I've been a teacher but since I retired, I travel a lot. So - traveling and photographing are my favorite hobbies. I've been to a lot of countries and India is my favorite, I've been there since 1993 very often. India - with its rich culture, its friendly people and its colours.

Also I've been there this year and I had the opportunity with the wonderful Anjan Gosh to join the group of marvelous photographers to be at the Kumbh Mela 2025. This largest spiritual festival of the world was one of the most beautiful and unforgettable experience in my life.

It was unforgettable to be part of this century-old ritual that attracts millions of people from all over India and the world.

From the moment we arrived, we felt the powerful energy of the place. The Kumbh Mela reminded us of the immense power of faith, community and tradition - and how we each carry meaning and presence in the greater flow of life.

This journey wasn't only a spiritual adventure, it was a journey to ourselves.

My Favourite Photo :



"I'm an amateur photographer who loves to travel. I'm from Donostia/San Sebastián, a beautiful city in the Basque Country, in northern Spain.

This trip to Kumbh Mela 2025 has been a wonderful trip for me, but an even more wonderful learning experience. It doesn't matter all the videos you watch about this event or everything you read; only if you experience it will you be able to understand and feel a little of what it's all about. I was also fortunate to be able to share these days with this wonderful group led by AnjaGosh. I feel very fortunate and grateful."

My Favourite Photo :



Maria Ona

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Meta Visser

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BIOGRAPHY

I was born in 1970 in Eindhoven, The Netherlands. After graduating in Business Technology and finishing two masters in Psychology Work and Organization, I worked as a consultant in the labor market.

Now I am currently working as a contract manager and consultant at the youth department of a Mental Health Clinic. About my personal life, I am happily married to Maurits and have two wonderful, grown up daughters.

When I was four years old my grandparents took me to a tribal exhibition in Amsterdam, where photographs were showed of tribes in Papua New Guinea. My profound love for travel and tribes might have been started there.

At the age of 18 I started backpacking around the world taking my camera along. First with friends, later on with my husband and after that with my husband and daughters. I am truly blessed being able to discover many countries and meet great people all over the world. If you would ask me what my favorite countries are, I would say: India, Ethiopia and Papua New Guinea. I love leaving my western life style and going back to basic.

Since 2019 I started photographing manually and planning photographic tours to extraordinary tribes and cultural events by myself. I am so passionate about travelling and photographing, that it became an out-of-hand hobby. I try to photograph through connection and love to gain in depth information about culture, tribes, traditions, rituals, etc. I embrace cultural diversity and realize that I will be one of the last generations that will be able to witness tribal traditions and rituals.

Hope you enjoy this book and our photographs take you along the incredible and spiritual Maha Kumbh journey.

Two photos I like to highlight:



This photo symbolizes my journey to the Maha Kumbh, not knowing what to expect and just being part of an immense crowd of pilgrims.



This photo illustrates the spiritual and historical character of the Maha Kumbh. The buzzing air filled with anticipation, energy, spirituality, connection and joy made a huge and indelible impression on me. Due to the light, the photo turned out in black and white, which emphasizes the historical meaning of this event.

The Maha Kumbh Mela, an incredible journey

..... by Meta Visser

If I have to describe the Kumbh Mela in a few words, I choose the words overwhelming, mind blowing and heartwarming. Till now I can't believe what I witnessed and experienced.

As a Westerner I had never heard about the Kumbh Mela and if someone would have told me: "You will go to a festival with 660 million visitors", I definitely would have said no.

I was preparing my trip to Odisha and Chhattisgarh and asked Anjan Ghosh, a photographer from Kolkata, some help. He arranged a travel agency and invited me to join him at the Kumbh Mela. From the 12th till the 15th of January 2025 I joined him and the marvelous group he formed.

Despite we were coming from different corners of planet and leading totally different lives, there was a heartwarming connection right away.

Now I know that every 12 years, when the stars align just right, the annual cleansing ritual of Mela becomes the world's largest religious celebration. When this 12-year cycle occurs 12 times ($12 \times 12 = 144$), the 12th Kumbh Mela is called the Maha Kumbh, which is celebrated in an exceptionally grand manner of which I was part. Over a period of about eight weeks millions of Hindu pilgrims converge on the city of Prayagraj, India, to wash away their sins in the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna Rives, thus becoming one step closer to heaven. To me this was an unforgettable, epic experience!

Even at the camp, hearing stories about the huge crowd, I was doubting to go. How do I navigate in a sea of millions of people? What do I do when I get lost? What do I do when I get pushed? For a Westerner like myself, the festival seemed a chaotic scene of sensory overload with theatrical Sadhus and millions of people bathing in a polluted river. How could I as a Westerner understand a highly spiritual event like this?

The highlight of my visit of the Maha Kumbh was experiencing the Shahi Snan on the 14th of January, which refers to 'royal bath'. It signifies the ritualistic bathing of the holy men and the devotees in the sacred waters of the river. The Shahi Snan holds immense significance as it is believed to cleanse one's soul of all the past sins and pave the ways towards liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

To be able to witness the Shahi Snan Anjan, Deepali, Gauruv, Grish and me left the camp at 11.45 pm. In the cold and dark night we found ourselves in a massive crowd. Our only option was go with the flow and let us being pushed towards the river bank. I was really glad that I managed to stay with Deepali and Grish, who have helped me so much. I can't express my thanks!

The experience made me lose track of time, but I think we ended up at the river bank, where the Shahi Snan was held, around 3.00 pm. At the river bank it was too crowded and it didn't feel safe at all. We decided to put off our shoes and enter the cold Ganges till our waste. We found a pretty safe haven with some soldiers near a ponton.

When we arrived, pilgrims were taking their dip. The air was filled with joy and ecstasy. The relief on the faces of pilgrims after the dip made a tremendous impression on me. The air was filled with energy and anticipation by the time the procession started and the first Akhara arrived. The sight of the Naga Sadhus, their bodies smeared with ash, dreadlocked hair, icons like swords and conches and intense expressions made me speechless. Standing first row in the Ganges I saw hundreds of them taking their dip. I felt part of a spiritual and historical event, which will always stay as a vivid memory with me.

After we saw the first Akhara taking their dip, we managed to reach the river bank and put on our shoes. We let us be pushed by the crowds again and saw decorated cars and thousands of Sadhus walking in a procession. By 2.00 am we were back at the camp with a mind filled with unforgettable memories.

To me it was an incredible spiritual journey and a cultural extravaganza.

The words 'Har Har Mahadev', which means 'praise lord Shiva' will always be with me.

My Journey at the Kumbh



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Prayagraj. A name that echoes through the pages of history. Growing up, I'd heard countless tales about the grandeur of the Maha Kumbh, but I never thought I'd find myself in the thick of it. The 2025 Maha Kumbh, they say, is one for the ages—happening after 144 years. Yet, as I planned my trip, I will admit I was sceptical. I couldn't help but wonder, what would it truly feel like to be part of something so immense? Would it live up to the hype? Would I, someone who prefers quieter experiences, find meaning in the chaos?

A Living History

When I reached Prayagraj, the energy of the city was palpable. Crowds moved in sync, almost as if drawn by an invisible force. Approaching the Triveni Sangam, the sacred meeting point of the Ganga, Yamuna, and mythical Saraswati, I somewhat began to understand what draws millions here. It wasn't just the spiritual significance but the collective humanity that left an impression.

Conversations With Mystics

The Maha Kumbh isn't just a festival, it's a convergence of stories, traditions, and people. Among them are the Naga Sadhus, the ascetic mystics who live lives of detachment. Meeting them felt like stepping into another world. Covered in ash, their expressions were a mix of calm and intensity, their words tinged with a wisdom that seemed to transcend time.

I asked one sadhu about the significance of the Maha Kumbh, and his answer surprised me.

He described it as a reflection of life's flow, a reminder that, like rivers, everything changes and merges into something larger.

It was a simple thought but one that resonated deeply.

Taking The Dip

The highlight of my visit was the dip at the Sangam.

Finding Moments Of Calm

For me, the dip wasn't just about tradition; it was a moment of surrender, a way to connect with something beyond myself.

Emerging from the water, I couldn't shake the feeling of being part of something far larger than I could fully understand. It wasn't about being cleansed or transformed but about being present-truly present-in a moment steeped in centuries of belief. What stayed with me about the Maha Kumbh was how it balanced contrasts.

It was chaotic yet serene, deeply spiritual yet profoundly human. It wasn't just the rituals or the crowd but the sense of collective faith that lingered long after I left.

The Maha Kumbh can be a lot, in the best way possible. But even in the middle of all that energy, you need a moment to catch your breath. If you have ever wondered about staying at the Maha Kumbh, you probably know it's all about tents. But this time, the tents were something else. My stay at Shivar Tents at Jhushi had everything I could've asked for.

Even in the midst of all the action, I found spaces of calm that made the whole experience feel more meaningful. Maybe that's what makes the Maha Kumbh so special.

January, the first month of the year, often symbolizes fresh beginnings and resolutions. Yet, this year, as I reflect on the events of January, the concept of world peace feels both urgent and elusive. Across the globe, headlines oscillated between hope and despair. Conflicts simmered in some regions, while diplomatic talks attempted to mend fractures elsewhere. Amid this tumult, India offered its own unique testament to peace and spirituality through the Kumbh Mela, a gathering that serves as a profound reminder of humanity's shared yearning for transcendence and unity.

As a photographer at the Kumbh Mela this year, I witnessed millions of devotees converge on the riverbanks, each carrying their own stories, beliefs, and hopes. Despite the chaos of the massive crowds, there was an undeniable sense of harmony. Strangers offered help to one another, chants reverberated in unison, and faith bound people together. To me, this was a microcosm of the peace we wish for the world: a space where diversity is celebrated, not feared, and where the collective spirit outweighs individual differences.





Tanvi Pamnani

<https://www.instagram.com/tanvipamnani/>

(By Rajesh Pamnani)

How did I convince her to join ?

“Simple—tell her the tent is ‘glamping,’
the crowd is ‘buzzing energy,’

and the cold water is ‘spa-like rejuvenation.’

She might not believe you, but hey, at least you tried!”

Master the art of agreeing.

If she says the Ganga water is too cold, agree.

If she wants selfies with sadhu babas, agree.

And if she wants to skip the dip and just shop at the mela, well, guess what?

Agree!”

Remind her that life, like the Maha Kumbh, is a blend of chaos and calm, crowds and connections.

Promise to walk by her side, just like the river flows ceaselessly, no matter how tough the terrain.

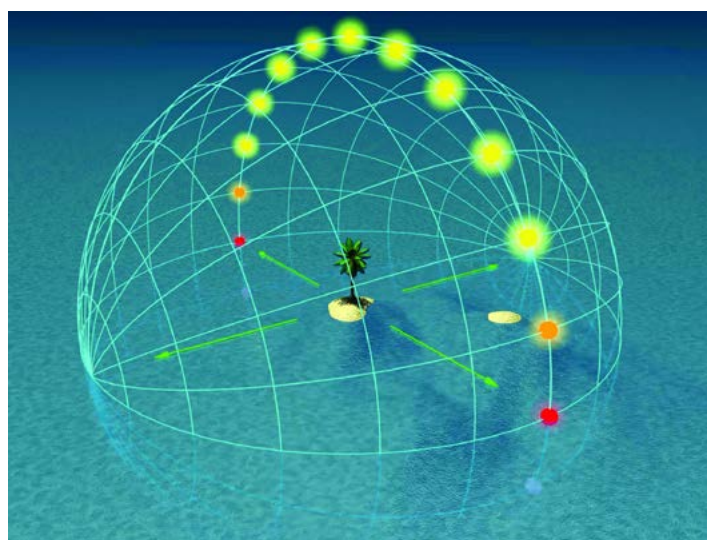
Holding her hand as we navigate through the sea of humanity, whisper sweet nothings under the starlit sky, and promise her that even amidst the chaos, she’s your calm and your true pilgrimage...

Keep her happy by treating her like the queen of the Kumbh—offer her a royal palanquin (your shoulders for her bags), a throne (a sturdy stool for riverside selfies), and an entourage (you running for chai and jalebis). Bonus points if you declare her the most divine sight amidst the millions !





Indian Philosophy



TIME IS CYCLICAL, NOT LINEAR

In the Indian traditions, time is not linear but cyclical, mirroring the periodic motions of the Sun, the Moon and the stars. Spring, like all seasons, has a beginning, a period of flourishing and an end - yet it carries the eternal promise of return.



“Andhekar Satish Lal” ! Our guest contributor to this book

ANDHEKAR SATHISH LAL is a professional photographer from Hyderabad, Telangana State, INDIA . He is into photography field from last 20 years and worked as a photo journalist for 15 years for a renowned telugu daily newspaper and presently he is a freelance photo journalist . Satish keenly keep interest in capturing the People, places and culture . from last 14 years he captured more than 60 tribal community's and documented their culture ,lifestyle in the deep forests and hilly areas from more than 20 states of India. His main aim to capture these tribal people, their attires, culture ,rituals & festivals before they vanish due to modernization and also to preserve in the form of photos & video documentation for future generations to know great Indian cultures .

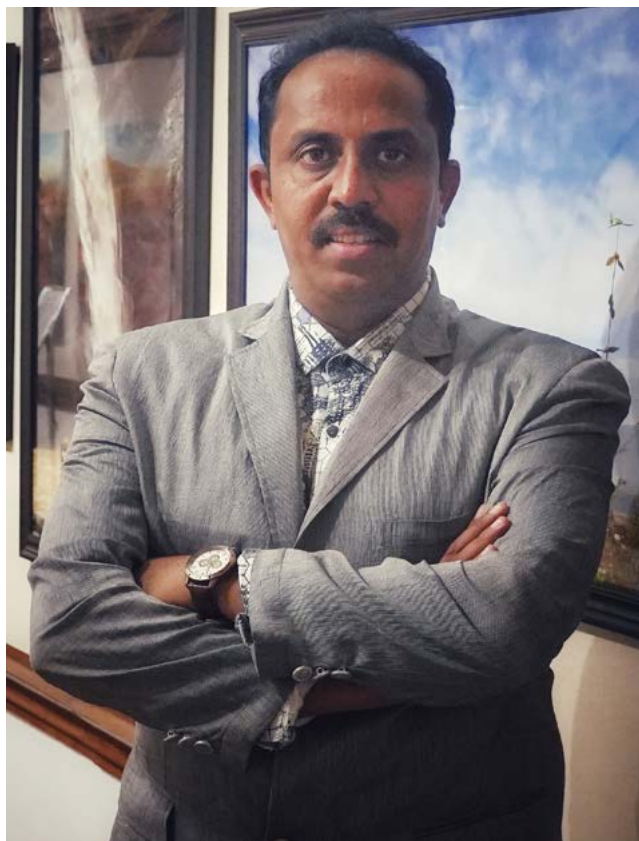
He won many national and international awards and his works had been published in many prestigious magazines and media .So far he conducted 20 solo photo exhibitions in different parts of India on different themes and participated in many group exhibitions .

He got special appreciations from the honorable PRESIDENT OF INDIA smt DROUPADI MURMU Ji where she witnessed his photo exhibition on Tribes of India at the inaugural ceremony of TRIBAL ART MUSUEM in the RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN , NEW DELHI where his 65 photographs on tribals have been exhibiting permanently there in the museum

In 2024 he got ASSOCIATESHIP(ARPS) honor from the worlds prestigious photography organization THE ROYAL PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY OF BRITAIN for the documentation on OLIVE RIDELY TURTLES of Odisha which he documenting from past 10 years to show the world the nature wonder of India where nearly 10 lakh turtles will come to lay eggs on the same beach every year . Internationally this the second highest honor for a photographer given by their society in the field of photography.

MY WORDS: My work isn't just about taking photos , it's about preserving our culture & wildlife . my aim is to capture their stories and raise awareness of the struggles they face as both subjects are in a huge declining status .i strive to reflect the rich diversity and resilience of these communities and endless beauty of wildlife.





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Once in a Lifetime Opportunity— if I had to sum up this divine journey in a single line, it would be this.

For ten unforgettable days, I immersed myself in the spiritual heart of Prayagraj, a city that transformed into a sacred landscape of awakening, unity, and inner transformation. I witnessed, through my own eyes and through the lens of my third eye — the camera, moments that words often fall short of describing.

Each day, I walked nearly 20 kilometers amidst lakhs of devotees, absorbing the colors, emotions, chants, and quiet reflections that make the Maha Kumbh a spectacle beyond imagination. I was blessed to take a holy dip at the Triveni Sangam, at the very ghat reserved for the Naga Sadhus, Aghoris, and saints on Mouni Amavasya — the most astrologically sacred Shahi Snan of the entire Kumbh.

Through my lens, I captured more than just images — I captured faith, simplicity, and the soul of Sanatana Dharma. I lived among the Kalpvasis, witnessing their austere way of life, and in their silence, I found echoes of peace I had long forgotten amidst urban chaos.

I was left awestruck by the devotion and unity of millions, all gathered with a single purpose — to connect with the divine. This book is not just a collection of photographs; it is a testament to a timeless tradition, a visual tribute to the world's largest spiritual gathering.

The Kumbh is not just an event — it's a calling. One that stirs the soul, connects us to our roots, and gently reminds us of the path we've always known



As the sun dipped low behind the sangam's shimmering waters, she sat in the rickshaw, dust trailing behind like pages of a story just told. Bells faded, chants echoed in memory, and her eyes held a stillness the crowd had given her.

The road ahead was ordinary, but her heart now held galaxies of faith, fire, and fellowship. Kumbh had ended. But something sacred would travel back with her.



Loretta Nadar

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What goes behind creating an exclusive Mahakumbh Experience covering 2 main Bathing Dates.....

The Unseen Effort: As a MahaKumbh Expert & Tour Organiser, creating a memorable trip involves meticulous planning, attention to detail, and a passion for delivering exceptional experiences. Here's a glimpse into the behind-the-scenes process which took my days & nights for creating this amazing Photography Trip to Mahakumbh.

I had to make sure that the best of 2 Maha Snan Days were covered - Makar Sankranti & Paush Purnima. Since it was a Photography Special Trip involving Photographers from mixed nationalities and covering 2 main bathing dates so lots of attention and keen study was made on the route and time to be followed. I made sure that the Group left at 3 AM from the Camps so that they can reach on time at spot to cover the best of the photography. I myself made Recce Trips before Mahakumbh started to designate and organise the logistics before the Final execution of the Trip.

The level of detail and planning that went into creating this experience is impressive. Here are some key takeaways from your behind-the-scenes

- **Research and Planning:** From selecting the spots to crafting itineraries, every detail was carefully considered to ensure a smooth and enjoyable Mahakumbh Experience.
- **Logistics and Coordination:** Booking accommodations, arranging transportation, and securing activities required precision and attention to detail which was done about 5 months in advance .
- **Budgeting and Pricing:** Balancing costs with value-added services demands a deep understanding of the market and customer expectations.
- **Communication and Customer Service:** Responding to inquiries, providing travel tips, and addressing concerns require excellent communication skills and empathy and everything was duly noted.
- **Problem-Solving and Adaptability:** Unexpected challenges arise, and being prepared to adapt and respond ensures an stress-free experience for our clients and I always stick to the idea.
- **Final Preparations:** Confirming bookings, preparing travel documents, and conducting final checks guarantee a seamless trip.

By putting in the effort behind the scenes, I was able to create unforgettable experiences that exceed traveler expectations.

Our photographs were one of the best Photographs which were covered in Mahakumbh highlighting 2 main bathing dates. Our dedication to creating unforgettable experiences is evident in the success of the trip and the showcase of photographs in exhibitions and on travel portals.

“Gone with the beat, not the spirit.”



Pic credit : Sathish Lal

He drummed his way through this life and probably into the next.
Catch him at the next Kumbh—same rhythm, less worldly baggage.
See you at the next dip, same drum, same dhuni!

Here's a schedule of the upcoming Kumbh Melas:

2027: Nashik-Trimbakeshwar (on the banks of the Godavari River).
2030: Ujjain (along the Shipra River).
2033: Haridwar (on the banks of the Ganga).
2036: Prayagraj (Sangam of Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati).(2025-2037)



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