



Mahakumbh and its economic footprint: A case study of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

The Kumbh Mela is one of the most significant and ancient religious gatherings in the world, rooted deeply in Hindu mythology and cultural tradition, held every 12 years at Prayagraj at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati rivers. This mega-event symbolizes spiritual purification and communal harmony. Historically the Kumbh Mela mentioned in various Puranas particularly the legend of the Samudra Manthan where gods and demons fought over the nectar of immortality (Amrit). Its significance lies in the belief that bathing at the Triveni Sangam during this period cleanses sins and helps attain moksha. Over the centuries, the Kumbh has evolved from a purely religious pilgrimage into a socio-cultural and logistical phenomenon that attracts not only devotees but also scholars, tourists, businesses and international media. MAHAKUMBH "Maha" means great (the greatest of all Kumbh Melas) held every 144 years after every 12 Purna Kumbh Melas at Prayagraj. Mahakumbh was held in 2025 and next one expected in 2157. This year Maha Kumbh has significantly contributed to the employment and economic growth of Uttar Pradesh as well as India. With over approximately more than 66 crore devotees attend the mahakumbh this year, the demand for goods and services has surged, creating thousands of jobs across multiple sectors. Although Himachal Pradesh does not host the Mahakumbh but the event's national prominence has led to increased economic activities in the state. This event has experienced increased sales of traditional handicrafts and religious paraphernalia and created temporary employment opportunities in sectors like hospitality, transportation, and retail within Himachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Mythology, immortality, prominence, paraphernalia

Introduction

The Kumbh Mela is one of the most ancient, sacred, and grand religious festivals of India and is recognized as the largest peaceful human gathering in the world. It holds immense spiritual, cultural, and historical significance in Hinduism and reflects the deep-rooted traditions of Indian civilization. Millions of devotees, saints, ascetics, and pilgrims from India and abroad gather to participate in this holy event. The origin of the Kumbh Mela is linked to the famous Hindu mythological event known as the Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean). According to legend, during the churning, a pot (*kumbh*) containing amrit (the nectar of immortality) emerged. To protect it from demons Lord Vishnu carried the pot during which four drops of amrit fell on Earth at Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik. These places became sacred pilgrimage centers, and the Kumbh Mela began to be celebrated there. The Kumbh Mela is held at these four locations in a cyclical manner, based on specific astrological alignments of the Sun, Moon, and Jupiter. Each place hosts the Kumbh Mela once every 12 years. The most important ritual of the Kumbh Mela is the holy dip (Snan) in the sacred rivers. The Ardh Kumbh Mela is celebrated every 6 years, halfway between two Kumbh Melas and is held only at Prayagraj and Haridwar. Though smaller than the full Kumbh it remains a major spiritual gathering of saints, sages, and pilgrims.

The Mahakumbh happens in Prayagraj once in 144 years (after every 12 Purna Kumbh Melas) which makes it super special due to its most raw and colourful form. Mahakumbh is not just an event it is a kind of feeling where faith brings millions of people together in one place, all with the same hope i.e spiritual peace and connection. People from every corner of the country standing shoulder to shoulder is a living example of "unity in diversity". The Maha Kumbh

Mela 2025 stands as a profound testament to India's rich mythological, spiritual, and cultural heritage. Rooted deeply in Hindu mythology, the festival symbolizes the eternal quest for purification and enlightenment.

The mela has significantly impacted India's tourism sector, drawing an unprecedented number of visitors and boosting economic activity across multiple industries. The event attracted approximately 660 million visitors with a notable rise in international tourists from the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Russia, and Japan.

The event's economic impact is projected to approx. 2 lakh crore which is estimated to reach Rs 3.2 lakh crore by the end of this event. The hospitality sector has seen a major boost, with hotels and rental accommodations generating over Rs 40,000 crore, food and beverage industry has also flourished earning around Rs 20,000 crore as restaurants, vendors and caterers serve millions of visitors. This turnout generated revenue benefiting local businesses and service providers Throughout India.

To ensure proper sanitation during the Mela, the government installed 12,000 Fiber Reinforced Plastic (FRP) toilets with septic tanks, 16,100 prefabricated steel toilets connected to soak pits, and 20,000 strategically placed community urinals throughout the Mela grounds. A temporary city spanning 4000 hectares housed ,150000 tents. 92 roads were renovated and 30 pontoon bridges constructed. this event has set a benchmark for environmental stewardship, ensuring a cleaner and more sustainable pilgrimage experience. 10,200 sanitation workers and 1,800 Ganga Sevaduts deployed for cleanliness, 22,000 sanitation workers ensuring litter-free fairgrounds.

The Union Government and Uttar Pradesh government have taken multiple measures to provide affordable food and ensure food safety at Maha Kumbh 2025. Subsidized

rations, free meals, and stringent food safety protocols are in place to cater to millions of devotees. Special cyber security arrangements were initiated to safeguard devotees from across the globe.

Even if the Mahakumbh physically takes place in Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh), organizations and institutions within Himachal promote related spiritual activities, organize special prayers, satsangs, and discussions when Mahakumbh is underway. Devotees in Himachal often perform special rituals at local temples or homes in sync with the Mahakumbh dates, especially during significant bathing days like Makar Sankranti and Basant Panchami. The event's national prominence has led to increased economic activities in the state.

Devotees and tourists traveling to Mahakumbh often stop in Himachal Pradesh has led to a surge in demand for religious items and souvenirs. Artisans in Himachal Pradesh have experienced increased sales of traditional handicrafts and religious paraphernalia. The heightened tourism has created temporary employment opportunities in sectors like hospitality, transportation, and retail within Himachal Pradesh.

Review of Literature

Singh (2010) and Sharma (2015) emphasize how the Mahakumbh Mela fosters religious harmony, spiritual growth, and cultural integration. The event serves as a unifying platform, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and strengthening collective identity and shared faith. Joshi (2018)^[1] highlights the festival's role as a spiritual retreat, reinforcing traditional values and shaping moral behaviour in society. Verma & Gupta (2017) indicate that Mahakumbh significantly boosts the hospitality, transportation, and retail sectors. The Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department (2019) reported that Mahakumbh 2013 played a key role in job creation, infrastructure expansion, and regional economic growth. Tiwari & Patel (2018) analyze the role of government planning, security measures, and technological interventions in crowd management. The adoption of smart city technologies, AI driven crowd control, and digital ticketing during Mahakumbh. Chaturvedi (2020) highlights how women and marginalized groups find temporary employment in services like catering, cleaning, and local crafts. Banerjee (2020)^[3] further argues that the festival's economic benefits extend beyond the host city, positively impacting surrounding regions. Research by Mishra and Kapoor (2021)^[6] highlights Mahakumbh as a vital platform for cultural preservation, where ancient traditions, rituals, music, and art are celebrated. The event ensures the transmission of cultural knowledge to younger generations, safeguarding religious and artistic heritage.

The literature shows that the Mahakumbh Mela plays a major role in boosting the local and regional economy. Many researchers have found that during the Mahakumbh, there is a sharp increase in tourism, local business activity, and employment. Sectors like hospitality, food services, transport, and small-scale vendors benefit significantly. tourism, transport, food services, local business activity hospitality, employment. Studies have also noted that the government invests heavily in infrastructure like roads, sanitation, and public facilities before the event, which often benefits the host city even after the Kumbh is over. Educational institutions and economic forums (like FICCI and NITI Aayog) have highlighted how the event creates

thousands of temporary jobs and improves income levels for local people. In short, the Mahakumbh is not just a religious event—it becomes a driver of short-term economic growth and improves the visibility of the region.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to find out how the Mahakumbh Mela affects the people and economy of Himachal Pradesh even though the event is held far away. The present study is based on the following objectives

1. To study the economic impact of the Mahakumbh on business, and other activities in HP
2. To know whether people are aware of the economic opportunities connected to such religious events.
3. To find out what kind of jobs or income-generating activities arise during the event.
4. To make some suggestions to improve the shortcoming in future.

Findings of The Study

In the present study the respondents group was almost equally split between genders with 50% male and 50% female, this balanced representation ensures diverse perspectives. The majority of the respondents i.e 77% were belongs to the age group of 21-45 indicating that youth and working-age individuals were the most engaged in the event, only 7% were under the age of 20, and 16% were above 45. A significant 93% of respondents were showing high regional participation in the event. While asking about the purpose of the visit to Mahakumbh, 80% respondents make it for Religious purpose while a smaller portion attended for tourism is 7.33% and 2.66% respondents shown cultural interests for their visit ,10% are mentioned other reason to visit. Further the study reveals that 90.6% respondents believed that the Mahakumbh created temporary job opportunities for locals, such as guides, vendors, cleaners and transporter etc. highlighting its short-term employment impact. 89.33% believed that international tourists significantly boosted income during the Mahakumbh, confirming the global tourism potential of the event. 94% believed that local businesses earned more during the Mahakumbh, reinforcing the event's economic impact on small enterprises. 54% respondents reveal that the Hotels/Lodges were seen as the top beneficiaries while 20% thinks that the Street vendors and 17.33% says that transport services also saw significant gains. Shops and others (8.67% combined) had moderate to low benefit.

Sector with Maximum Economic Gain in Hp: Travel and tourism services were the biggest gainers (88.33%) and Sectors like religious item sales and handicrafts saw smaller benefits. 78% respondents felt that Mahakumbh boosted various business likes shops and travel agents, transport services (buses, taxis, etc) who earned between 100000 and 200000 and 22% reported earning above 200000 dues to Mahakumbh with the event causing higher passenger volume and demand. Nearly half 48.66% of respondents spent 20000-50000 during their visit, indicating a strong mid-range spending trend. Only 5.33% spent over 50000. 46.66% of respondents said vehicles earned 50000-100000 each, suggesting high demand and frequent usage. Some even reported earning above 100000. 96% believed that the Mahakumbh promotes local culture and tourism, confirming its cultural and economic integration in the region. During

this mela it is found that lakhs of pilgrims and tourists from Himachal travel to the mahakumbh leading to a sharp rise in demand for transport services such as buses, taxis, trains, and private vehicles. This increases income for drivers, transport companies, and fuel suppliers. Tourism also experiences major growth as visitors require hotels, guest houses, dharamshalas, and food services. Local tour operators, travel agencies, and guides benefit from increased bookings. The high tourist inflow boosts spending on local attractions, souvenirs, and cultural activities, creating temporary and permanent employment opportunities. Overall, the Mahakumbh significantly strengthens tourism and transport activities and contributes to regional economic development.

Conclusion

Maha Kumbh 2025 offers a remarkable chance to highlight India's vast spiritual and cultural legacy on an international platform. By drawing in global pilgrims and tourists, this event has the potential to greatly enhance tourism income, encourage cultural exchanges and reinforce India's status as a prominent spiritual hub. Also, realizing this objective necessitates addressing several critical issues, including language differences, infrastructure challenges and sustainability concerns. It is evident that the Mahakumbh is not just a religious gathering but a major event that significantly influences local livelihoods, tourism, business activity, and cultural identity. A majority of respondents highlighted the event's positive economic effects, particularly in areas such as travel and tourism, transportation services, hotel and lodging industries, and street vending. Additionally, the Mahakumbh proved to be a catalyst for temporary employment, with a large section of the population recognizing job opportunities created during the festival. The role of international tourists in generating additional income further emphasizes the potential of the Mahakumbh to boost global tourism in the region. The responses also point to a general satisfaction with government spending on the event, with many believing that such investment is justified given the scale and benefits of the Mahakumbh. However, the study also revealed certain areas of concern, such as the need for better infrastructure, waste management, sanitation, crowd control, and overall planning to handle the large influx of pilgrims and tourists. In conclusion, the Mahakumbh stands out as a multidimensional event that not only holds spiritual significance but also contributes substantially to local development. With proper planning, inclusive policies, and sustainable practices, future editions of the Mahakumbh can further enhance its impact on economic growth, cultural preservation, and community welfare.

Suggestions

To enhance worldwide participation for Maha kumbh a variety of focused initiatives can be introduced. Firstly, extensive global marketing efforts should be initiated, leveraging social media, international travel agencies and partnerships with influencers to showcase the event's cultural and spiritual importance. Secondly, prioritizing multilingual assistance is crucial, which includes offering multilingual signage, informational brochures and mobile applications, while also training local guides and staff in foreign languages to facilitate effective communication. Thirdly, customized tour packages should be created that

provide distinctive experiences, such as guided rituals, cultural performances and wellness programs like yoga and meditation to appeal to various interests. Fourthly, upgrading Infrastructure is vital, which encompasses enhancing accommodation, sanitation and transportation facilities to align with international standards and ensure a pleasant experience for visitors from around the world. Fifthly, strengthening safety and security protocols is necessary, involving effective crowd management systems, 24/7 helplines and dedicated assistance desks for international travellers. Sixthly, partnerships with global travel agencies and airlines can ease travel logistics and offer discounted packages, simplifying the process for international pilgrims to attend. Lastly, implementing environmental sustainability measures, such as efficient waste management and eco-friendly practices, should be incorporated to reduce the event's ecological impact. Through the execution of these recommendations, Maha Kumbh can boost its international appeal, draw a diverse audience and position itself as a premier spiritual and cultural occasion in future.

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