



Maha Kumbh Mela 2025

For Prelims: [Godavari River](#), [Shipra River](#), [Sangam](#), [Ardh-Kumbh](#), [Vijayanagar empires](#), [Delhi Sultanate](#), and [Mughals](#), [UNESCO](#), [Intangible cultural heritage](#)

For Mains: Significance of Kumbh, Historical Evolution.

Source: [PIB](#)

Why in News?

The Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, a sacred pilgrimage, will be held in Prayagraj from **13th January to 26th February 2025**, drawing millions of pilgrims for spiritual purification, cultural celebration, and unity.

- The word '**Kumbh**' comes from the root '**kumbhak**' (the sacred pitcher of elixir of immortality).

What are the Key Facts About Kumbh Mela?

▪ About:

- It is the largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on earth, during which participants bathe or take a dip in a sacred river. This gathering takes place at 4 different places, namely:
 - In **Haridwar**, on the banks of the **Ganges**.
 - In **Ujjain**, on the banks of [Shipra](#).
 - In **Nashik**, on the banks of [Godavari](#) (**Dakshin Ganga**).
 - In **Prayagraj**, at the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the mythical invisible [Saraswati](#).

▪ Different Types of Kumbh:

- The **Kumbh Mela** is celebrated **4 times over a course of 12 years**.
- At **Haridwar and Allahabad**, [Ardh-Kumbh](#) Mela is held **every 6th year**.
- The **Maha Kumbh Mela** is celebrated at Prayag after 144 years (after 12 'Purna Kumbh Melas').
- **Maagh Kumbh** is celebrated **every year** in the month of **Maagh (Jan-Feb)** in **Prayagraj**.

▪ Historical Evolution:

- **Background:** The Maha Kumbh Mela, transcribed by **Adi Shankaracharya**, originates from the **Puranas**, describing gods and demons battling for the sacred pitcher of Amrit, with Lord Vishnu (as Mohini) securing it from demons.
- **Ancient Origins:** During the [Maurya](#) and [Gupta periods](#) (4th century BCE to 6th century CE), the Kumbh Mela began as smaller gatherings of pilgrims from across the Indian subcontinent.
 - Its significance increased with the rise of **Hinduism**, particularly under rulers like the **Guptas** who elevated its status.
- **Medieval Patronage:** Supported by royal dynasties like the Chola and [Vijayanagar empires](#), [Delhi Sultanate](#), and [Mughals](#).

- Akbar promoted religious tolerance and granted **Naga Sadhus** the honour of leading the **royal entry to the Mela in 1565**.
- **Harshavardhana king of the Pushyabhuti dynasty** started the organisation of the Kumbh fair at Prayagraj.
- **Colonial Period:** British administrators, fascinated by the Kumbh Mela's scale and diversity, observed and documented the festival.
 - In the 19th century, **James Prinsep** chronicled its ritualistic practices and socio-religious dynamics.
- **Post-Independence Significance:** The Kumbh Mela symbolises national unity and India's cultural heritage, **recognized by UNESCO in 2017 as an [intangible cultural heritage of humanity](#)** for its enduring ancient traditions.
- **Kumbh 2019 creates 3 Guinness World Records:**
 - Largest traffic and crowd management plan.
 - The biggest painting exercise of public sites under the **Paint My City Scheme**.
 - Biggest sanitation and waste disposal mechanism.
- **Significance of Kumbh:**
 - **Spiritual Relevance:** Bathing at the **Triveni Sangam** (Ganges, Yamuna, Sarasvati confluence) is believed to purify sins and lead to spiritual liberation (**Moksha**).
 - **Cultural Showcase:** At the Kumbh Mela, devotional **kirtans, bhajans, and traditional dances like Kathak, Bharatanatyam, and Kuchipudi**, highlight **themes of spiritual unity and divine love**.
 - **Astrological Timing:** Determined by the alignment of the **Sun, Moon, and Jupiter**, making the event highly auspicious for spiritual activities.
 - At **Nashik and Ujjain**, if the mela is held when a planet is in **Leo (Zodiac)**, it is called **Simhastha Kumbh**.
- **Rituals and Activities:**
 - **Shahi Snan (Royal Bath):** Procession of saints and **Akharas (spiritual orders)** performing ceremonial baths. Also known as 'Rajyogi Snan,' it signifies the **start of the Maha Kumbh Mela**.
 - The word 'akhara' originates from '**akhand**,' meaning indivisible. **Adi Guru Shankaracharya** sought to unify ascetic organisations to safeguard the 'Sanatan' way of life.
 - **Akharas** symbolise social order, unity, culture, and ethics, focusing on spiritual and ethical values. They emphasise virtue, morality, self-restraint, compassion, and religiosity, and are symbols of unity in diversity.
 - Akharas can be categorised based on their favoured deity.
 - **Shaiva Akharas:** Worship Lord Shiva in various forms.
 - **Vaishnava Akharas:** Worship Lord Vishnu in various forms.
 - **Udaseen Akharas:** Founded by Chandra Dev (son of **Guru Nanak**, the first Sikh Guru).
 - **Peshwai Processions:** A grand spectacle featuring the traditional procession of Akharas, known as '**Peshwai**,' which includes participants on elephants, horses, and chariots.
 - **Spiritual Discourses:** The event features spiritual discourses led by revered saints and spiritual leaders, alongside a vibrant convergence of Indian music, dance, and crafts.

UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

- This coveted list is made up of those intangible heritage **elements that help demonstrate the diversity of cultural heritage** and raise awareness about its importance.
- The list was established in **2008 when the Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage** came into effect.
- **Intangible Cultural Heritage of India, recognised by UNESCO:**
 - **[Intangible cultural heritage](#)** is the practices, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and sometimes individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage.
 - Also called **living cultural heritage**, it is usually expressed in one of the following forms:
 - Oral Traditions
 - Performing Arts
 - Social Practices

- Rituals and Festive events
- Knowledge and Practices concerning nature and the universe
- Traditional Craftsmanship

S.No.	Intangible Cultu	Year of Inral Heritage Element scription
1	Kutiyattam, Sanskrit Theater	2008
2	Tradition of Vedic Chanting	2008
3	Ramlila, the Traditional Performance of the Ramayana	2008
4	Ramman, Religious Festival and Ritual Theatre of the Garhwal Himalayas, India	2009
5	Chhau Dance	2010
6	Kalbelia Folk Songs and Dances of Rajasthan	2010
7	Mudiyettu, Ritual Theatre and Dance Drama of Kerala	2010
8	Buddhist Chanting of Ladakh: Recitation of Sacred Buddhist Texts in the Trans-Himalayan Ladakh region	2012
9	Sankirtana, Ritual Singing, Drumming, and Dancing of Manipur	2013
10	Traditional Brass and Copper Craft of Utensil Making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab	2014
11	Nowruz	2016
12	Yoga	2016
13	Kumbh Mela	2017
14	Durga Puja in Kolkata	2021
15	Garba of Gujarat	2023

Drishiti Mains Question

Discuss how Kumbh Mela reflects India's cultural diversity and spiritual heritage.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims:

Q1. With reference to the religious history of India, consider the following statements: (2020)

1. Sthaviravadins belong to Mahayana Buddhism
2. Lokottaravadin sect was an offshoot of the Mahasanghika sect of Buddhism
3. The deification of Buddha by Mahasanghikas fostered Mahayana Buddhism

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

Q2. With reference to Manipuri Sankirtana, consider the following statements: (2017)

1. It is a song and dance performance
2. Cymbals are the only musical instruments used in the performance
3. It is performed to narrate the life and deeds of Lord Krishna

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1, 2 and 3

(b) 1 and 3 only

(c) 2 and 3 only

(d) 1 only

Ans: (b)

Q3. With reference to India's culture and tradition, what is 'Kalaripayattu'? (2014)

- (a) It is an ancient Bhakti cult of Shaivism still prevalent in some parts of South India
- (b) It is an ancient style bronze and brass work still found in the southern part of the Coromandel area
- (c) It is an ancient form of dance-drama and a living tradition in the northern part of Malabar
- (d) It is an ancient martial art and a living tradition in some parts of South India

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. Safeguarding the Indian art heritage is the need of the moment. Discuss (2018)