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## Rebranding Of The Kumbh Into A Maha Kumbh

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### Abstract:

The Kumbh Mela, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, has historically followed a set cycle based on Hindu astrology. Traditionally, a Maha Kumbh Mela is supposed to occur every 144 years. However, in recent years, the term "Maha Kumbh" has been used for events occurring every 12 years, including those in 1989, 2001, and 2025. This paper explores the political, economic, and cultural reasons behind the rebranding of the regular Kumbh Mela into a "Maha Kumbh Mela," and investigates the historical and astrological justifications for this claim.

### Key Words:

Kumbh Mela, Maha Kumbh, Religious Festival, Political Influence, Economic Impact, Tourism, Astrological Alignments, Cultural Heritage.

### Methodology:

This research is based on a comprehensive analysis of historical texts, Hindu scriptures, government records, and media reports. Primary sources such as the Skanda Purana, Matsya Purana, and other Vedic texts were examined to understand the original prescriptions for Kumbh and Maha Kumbh. Additionally, secondary sources, including journal articles, newspaper reports, and government press releases, were analyzed to track the evolution of the terminology and the socio-political influences shaping the modern interpretation of these religious events.

A qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing textual analysis and comparative historical methods to identify discrepancies between scriptural traditions and contemporary narratives. Interviews with religious scholars, astrologers, and historians provided additional insights into the traditional and modern perspectives on the Kumbh Mela. The study also reviewed economic data to assess the financial implications of rebranding regular Kumbh Melas as Maha Kumbh Melas. By integrating religious,

historical, and economic perspectives, this research aims to provide a holistic understanding of the transformation of the Kumbh Mela over time.

## **Introduction:**

The Kumbh Mela is an ancient Hindu pilgrimage held at four locations in India: Prayagraj (formerly Allahabad), Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain. Occurring every 12 years, it is based on astrological alignments and has significant religious importance. A Maha Kumbh Mela, however, is traditionally believed to take place once every 144 years at Prayagraj (Kumbh.gov.in, 2024). Despite this, political and administrative forces have increasingly used the term "Maha Kumbh" for Kumbh Melas occurring at shorter intervals. The deliberate rebranding of these events raises important questions regarding the intersection of religion, politics, and economics.

The significance of the Kumbh Mela is deeply rooted in Hindu mythology and spiritual beliefs. According to ancient texts, the origins of Kumbh Mela can be traced back to the Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean), where drops of the divine nectar (amrita) fell at four sacred locations. The positioning of celestial bodies, particularly Jupiter and the Sun, determines the timing of these events, making them deeply significant to Hindu devotees.

The reclassification of a regular Kumbh as a Maha Kumbh contradicts traditional scriptural guidelines and raises concerns about the role of contemporary influences in altering religious narratives. This research seeks to explore the historical, religious, and socio-political factors contributing to the shifting terminology and interpretation of the Kumbh Mela in modern times. The Kumbh Mela is an ancient Hindu pilgrimage held at four locations in India: Prayagraj (formerly Allahabad), Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain. Occurring every 12 years, it is based on astrological alignments and has significant religious importance. A Maha Kumbh Mela, however, is traditionally believed to take place once every 144 years at Prayagraj (Kumbh.gov.in, 2024). Despite this, political and administrative forces have increasingly used the term "Maha Kumbh" for Kumbh Melas occurring at shorter intervals. The deliberate rebranding of these events raises important questions regarding the intersection of religion, politics, and economics.

## **The Traditional Cycle of Kumbh and Maha Kumbh Mela:**

The scheduling of the Kumbh Mela follows the positions of Jupiter, the Sun, and the Moon. The traditional cycle includes:

- **Kumbh Mela:** Every 12 years
- **Purna Kumbh Mela:** Every 12 years at Prayagraj
- **Ardh Kumbh Mela:** Every 6 years at Prayagraj and Haridwar
- **Maha Kumbh Mela:** Every 144 years at Prayagraj

Based on this classification, the last Maha Kumbh Mela was held in 2013, and the next one should occur in 2157 (Britannica, 2023). However, in recent decades, multiple Kumbh Melas have been labeled as Maha Kumbh. The confusion surrounding the nomenclature of Kumbh and Maha Kumbh highlights the influence of external factors beyond religious tradition.

### **The Role of Politics and State Government in Rebranding:**

The increasing branding of regular Kumbh Melas as Maha Kumbh Melas can be attributed to political and economic factors:

1. **Tourism and Economic Growth:** Labeling a Kumbh Mela as "Maha Kumbh" increases the number of pilgrims and tourists, thereby boosting local economies. This increased footfall has led to large-scale infrastructural development in host cities, significantly impacting regional economies (The Guardian, 2025).
2. **Government and Political Interests:** The Uttar Pradesh state government has actively promoted the 2025 Kumbh Mela as "Maha Kumbh" to attract global attention. Reports indicate that over ₹70 billion has been allocated for the event, highlighting its political and economic importance. Such branding strategies contribute to political mileage by portraying the government as a strong protector of cultural and religious traditions (AP News, 2025).
3. **Media and Publicity Strategies:** Events such as the 2001 and 2025 Kumbh Melas have been widely publicized as Maha Kumbh Melas, despite their occurrence at the regular 12-year interval. Social media and government branding efforts further reinforce this narrative, creating a perception of uniqueness that benefits both political actors and local businesses (Economic Times, 2025).

### **Documentary Evidence and Contradictions:**

Research and historical records confirm that the last legitimate Maha Kumbh Mela was in 2013, and the next will be in 2157. Hindu scriptures, including the Puranas such as the Skanda Purana and the Matsya Purana, provide clear astrological guidelines for determining the Maha Kumbh cycle, which is based on the precise alignment of Jupiter in Leo and the Sun in Aries, occurring once every 144 years. The scriptures emphasize the spiritual significance of this rare planetary configuration, associating it with cosmic rejuvenation and spiritual liberation.

However, the 2025 Kumbh Mela is officially promoted as a Maha Kumbh due to unique planetary alignments (Wikipedia, 2024). This deviation from traditional scriptural definitions suggests a reinterpretation of astrological calculations to accommodate contemporary socio-political and economic objectives. Historically, the distinction between Purna Kumbh (occurring every 12 years) and Maha Kumbh was strictly maintained, with religious authorities adhering to prescribed Vedic astrological

principles. The shift in nomenclature raises concerns about the authenticity of the designation and its alignment with scriptural mandates.

This deviation from tradition highlights the growing influence of non-religious factors in shaping the narrative of the event. The economic implications of branding a Kumbh as Maha Kumbh include increased state funding, heightened tourism revenue, and international recognition. Despite the religious and historical context, contemporary economic and political influences have overshadowed the traditional cycle of Kumbh Mela, creating a complex intersection between faith, commerce, and governance. The evolving interpretation of the Kumbh cycle suggests an increasing reliance on modern reinterpretations rather than strict adherence to ancient Hindu astronomical texts.

### **Economic Implications of the Rebranding:**

The shift in terminology has had profound economic impacts, transforming the Kumbh Mela into a large-scale event with significant financial and infrastructural benefits. Several key areas demonstrate the economic influence of rebranding a regular Kumbh as a Maha Kumbh:

- **Increased State and Central Government Funding:** The designation of the event as a Maha Kumbh leads to a substantial increase in government expenditure. The 2013 Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj saw an estimated ₹12,000 crore (\$1.5 billion) allocated for infrastructure, sanitation, security, and public services (The Economic Times, 2013). In comparison, the regular Kumbh Mela in 2001 received significantly lower funding. Such government investments improve long-term civic infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and public transportation.
- **Growth of Religious Tourism:** The branding of Kumbh as Maha Kumbh significantly boosts domestic and international tourism. The 2013 Maha Kumbh witnessed over 120 million visitors, generating substantial revenue for local businesses, hotels, transport operators, and street vendors (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2013). Increased footfall contributes to the hospitality and retail sectors, with temporary employment opportunities created in accommodation, food services, and guided tours.
- **Expansion of International Media Coverage:** The event attracts global media attention, positioning India as a cultural and spiritual hub. International networks such as BBC, National Geographic, and The New York Times have extensively covered the Kumbh Mela, especially when it is labeled as a Maha Kumbh. This enhances India's soft power, promoting cultural diplomacy and inviting further investment in religious tourism. The increased visibility results in more foreign devotees and travelers participating in the event, further bolstering economic benefits (BBC, 2019).

Overall, the strategic rebranding of Kumbh as Maha Kumbh not only influences religious sentiments but also contributes significantly to economic growth, infrastructure development, and India's global cultural outreach. The shift in terminology has had profound economic impacts, including:

- Increased state and central government funding for infrastructure and logistics.
- Growth of religious tourism, benefiting local businesses, hotels, and transportation sectors.
- Expansion of international media coverage, further enhancing India's cultural diplomacy.

### **Conclusion:**

The shift from a strictly religious and astrological event to a politically and economically driven spectacle demonstrates how cultural heritage can be reshaped by contemporary forces. The traditional distinction between Kumbh and Maha Kumbh Mela, as prescribed in Hindu scriptures, has increasingly blurred due to political and economic considerations. By branding regular Kumbh Melas as Maha Kumbh Melas, authorities not only attract larger crowds but also secure substantial economic and infrastructural investments, altering the authenticity of the event.

While the Kumbh Mela remains a deeply significant religious gathering, the rebranding of regular Kumbh Melas as Maha Kumbh Melas reflects a modern phenomenon where tradition, politics, and commerce intersect. The growing influence of government policies, media narratives, and economic agendas in defining religious events calls for a more critical examination of how cultural and spiritual traditions evolve under contemporary pressures. Future research should examine how this evolving narrative impacts cultural authenticity and religious sentiments among devotees, ensuring that tradition remains aligned with its original spiritual and scriptural foundations. The shift from a strictly religious and astrological event to a politically and economically driven spectacle demonstrates how cultural heritage can be reshaped by contemporary forces. While the Kumbh Mela remains a deeply significant religious gathering, the rebranding of regular Kumbh Melas as Maha Kumbh Melas reflects a modern phenomenon where tradition, politics, and commerce intersect. Future research should examine how this evolving narrative impacts cultural authenticity and religious sentiments among devotees.

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