

7. SACRED KUMBH MELA-A LARGEST HUMAN GATHERING

The origin of Kumbh Mela was transcribed by the 8th Century philosopher Shankara. Puranas recount how Gods and demons fought over the sacred pitcher (Kumbh) of Amrit (nectar of immortality) called the Ratna of Samudra Manthan. It is widely believed that Lord Vishnu (disguised as enchantress 'Mohini') whisked the Kumbh out of the grasp of the covetous demons who had tried to claim it. As he took it heaven wards, a few drops of the precious nectar fell on the four sacred sites we know as Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik and Prayag. The flight and the following pursuit is said to have lasted twelve divine days which is equivalent to twelve human years and therefore, the Mela is celebrated every twelve years, staggered at each of the four sacred sites in this cycle. The corresponding rivers are believed to have turned into Amrit at the cosmic movement, giving pilgrims the chance to bathe in the essence of purity, auspiciousness and immortality.



Mount Mandara was used as churning rod, and Vasuki, a naga raja, became the churning rope. Vishnu, in the form of turtle supported the mountain on His shell. Goddess Lakshmi emerged from the ocean during the churning process.



There is a mention of 'Kumbh' and the bathing ritual associated with it in the Rig-Veda. It speaks of the benefits of bathing at sangam during this period, elimination of negative influences and rejuvenation of mind and soul. Prayers for the 'Kumbh' are also expressed in Atharva Veda and Yajur Veda. The main bathing times are during Makar Sankranti, Paush Purnima, Mauni Amavasya, Bsant Panchami, Magha Purnima and Maha Shivaratri.

