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RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Eco-Friendly Measures in Mega Gatherings: A Case Study of Prayagraj's Maha Kumbhmela, 2025

V. Prabhakar Rao^{1*}, L. Md. Bhakshu², B. L. Prasanna Latha³, A. Ramesh Babu⁴, T. Gunasekhar⁵, B. Annapurna Sarada⁶, Vipparla Neelothpal⁷, B Narasimha Reddy⁸, P. Venkatesu⁹

Department of Chemistry, Dr. YSR Government Degree College, Vedurukuppam- 517569, Andhra Pradesh, India
 Department of Botany, Dr. YSR Government Degree College, Vedurukuppam-517569, Andhra Pradesh, India
 Department of Zoology, Dr. YSR Government Degree College, Vedurukuppam-517569, Andhra Pradesh, India
 Department of Chemistry, SVA Government College, Srikalahasti- 517644, Andhra Pradesh, India
 Department of Chemistry, S. V. College of Engineering, Puttur-517583, Andhra Pradesh, India
 Principal, Dr. YSR Government Degree College, Vedurukuppam- 517569, Andhra Pradesh, India

⁷B.Tech (Electrical and Electronics Engineering), National Institute of Technology (NIT) Puducherry, Karaikal, Puducherry, India

⁸Department of Chemistry, Government College(A), Ananthapuramu- 515001, Andhra Pradesh, India ⁹Department of Physics, Dr. YSR Government Degree College, Vedurukuppam- 517569, Andhra Pradesh, India Corresponding author mail: vipparlaprabhakararao@gmail.com

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Abstract:

The 2025 Maha Kumbhmela in Prayagraj, India, stands as one of the world's largest religious gatherings, which attracted 660 million pilgrims across the globe, who were in search of spiritual purification by bathing at the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati rivers. To accommodate this massive influx, a temporary city spanning 4,000 hectares was constructed, featuring 200,000 tents, 250 miles of roads, and 30 pontoon bridges. Recognizing the environmental challenges posed by such massive congregations, organizers implemented several sustainable practices during the 2025 Maha Kumbhmela and the festival was promoted as the first 'Green Kumbh' emphasizing sustainability and waste management. Sustainable practices in sanitation and waste management, usage of renewable energy, sustainable transportation, plastic waste reduction, Ganga River conservation, these were the initiatives at Kumbhmela which highlighted the organizers' commitment to environmental sustainability, setting a precedent for ecofriendly practices in large-scale events. On this backdrop, the present manuscript focusses on all the innovative ecofriendly initiatives and practices implemented during the Maha Kumbh mela.

Keywords — Maha Kumbh Mela, Waste Management, Renewable Energy, Green Kumbh, Sustainable Transportation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The kumbhmela is a religious and spiritual festival that is celebrated every 12 years with immense fervour and reverence by millions of people across India. The festival is held in a cycle of every three years at four distinct places, namely Prayagraj, Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain [1]. The Kumbhmela is not just a festival but a symbol of India's rich cultural heritage, spirituality, and belief in unity and diversity.

With its roots in Hindu mythology, the Kumbhmela holds a place of profound importance in the religious calendar. The main attraction of the Kumbhmela is the ritual bathing in the sacred rivers Ganges, Yamuna, and Godavari, which is believed to cleanse one's sins and help in attaining Moksha (liberation) [2]. The event attracts millions of pilgrims from across India and even from abroad. The Ardha Kumbhmela is held every six years at one of the four locations and is considered a smaller version of the full Kumbhmela. Although

ISSN: 2581-7175 ©IJSRED: All Rights are Reserved Page 1633

smaller in scale, it still attracts a large number of devotees, and the significance of taking a holy dip in the river is as high as the full Kumbhmela. Ardha means "half," and hence, the Ardha Kumbhmela is half the duration and scale of the full Kumbhmela. The Maha Kumbhmela is once-in-a-lifetime event that occurs every 144 years (12 full cycles of Kumbhmela) [3]. The Maha Kumbh was held at Prayagraj from 13 th January, 2025 to 26 th February, 2025 and is regarded as the most sacred and significant of all Kumbh melas [4]. The event saw the highest number of pilgrims, about 660 million people gathering to take part in the divine dip. Figure 1 shows the human gathering at the Kumbh mela. The origins of Kumbhmela trace back to ancient times. The event is mentioned in several Hindu texts, including the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and Puranas. The most famous mythological story connected to the Kumbhmela is that of the churning of the ocean. When the gods and demons churned the ocean in search of the nectar of immortality, it is said that drops of the nectar fell at the four locations where the kumbhmela is held. As a result, these sites became revered as places of spiritual importance. Prayagraj, the most popular and spiritually significant location for the kumbhmela, has been a place of pilgrimage for centuries. The confluence of the ganga, yamuna, and the sarasvati river, known as the sangam, is considered the holiest spot for taking a ritual dip.



Fig. 1 Human gathering at Prayagraj Maha Kumbh mela, 2025 (Source: https://cultureandheritage.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/xyz-1200x676.jpeg)

The environmental impact of such an event which involved extremely large-scale gathering could be enormous if not managed correctly. There has been a concerted effort by authorities, local communities, religious organizations, and volunteers to ensure that the Kumbhmela is organized with sustainability and environmental consciousness at its core. To manage this event successfully about 10,000 sanitation workers were engaged for cleaning activity, the Uttar Pradesh State Government deputed 500 dedicated Ganga Praharis for cleaning the river during Maha Kumbh [5]. About 40,000 police officers from the Uttar Pradesh Police and surveillance systems were deployed for the event. Additionally, forces from the Uttar Pradesh Provincial Armed Constabulary (UP-PAC), National Disaster Response Force, and Central Armed Police Forces assisted in maintaining security. A network of around 2,300 cameras provided round-the-clock monitoring,

enhancing surveillance across the Mela area [6]. Underwater drones capable of diving up to 100 m (330 ft) were used in recovery operations. The total length of bathing ghats has increased from 8 kilometres in 2019 to 12 kilometres in 2025. The following table in a nutshell gives various events and sustainable activities taken up in the Kumbhmela.

TABLE
LIST OF MAJOR EVENTS AND SUSTAINABLE
ACTIVITIES TAKEN UP IN PRAYAGRAJ MAHA KUMBH MELA,
2025

S.No	Event/Activity	Information about	Reference
		the activity	
1	Maha Kumbh mela at	Took place between	
	Prayagraj, Uttar	13 th January and 26	4
	Pradesh, 2025	th February, 2025	
2	Devotees attended	660 million	4
3	Total budget allocated	Rs. 7500 crores	
	for the event		
	Infrastructure	A temporary tent	
	developed	city of 4000 hectares	
4		area, with 2 lakh	4
1		tents, 250 miles	
		internal roads and 30	
		pontoon bridges on	
		Ganga River	
	Number of sanitation	10000, 500 and	
5	workers, Ganga	40000 respectively	5
	praharis and security		
	personnel engaged		
	Solar electricity and	70000 LED bulbs,	
6	LEDs	2016 solar hybrid	
		lights installed. 200	10,11
		MW solar current	
		generation station	
		established	
7	Bio- toilets	1.5 lakhs bio-toilets	
		established	
	Sewage water	15 STPs were	
8	treatment plants	established with a	14
	(STPs)	capacity of 75	
		million litres of	
		sewage water	
		treatment per day	
	Technologies used for	Hybrid Granular	

	faecal sludge,	Coguanging Datah	
	faecal sludge,	Sequencing Batch	
	greywater, and solid	Reactor (hgSBR),	
9	waste treatment with	Geotube	9
	capacity	Technology, and	
		bioremediation	
		technology used.	
		Which treated 16	
		million litres per day	
		of faecal sludge and	
		240 million litres of	
		grey water per day	
	Removing trash from	Cleantec trash	
10	rivers	skimmers were used	7
		to remove total 600	,
		tons of floating	
		waste from rivers	

This article explores in-depth the sustainable and eco-friendly practices adopted at Kumbh mela under various headings such as waste management, water conservation, renewable energy use, sanitation, transportation, environmental education, and more. The following sections present detailed insights into the innovative steps taken to minimize the ecological footprint while simultaneously ensuring the spiritual significance of the event is preserved.

1. WASTE MANAGEMENT AND RECYCLING INITIATIVES

1.1 Comprehensive Waste Segregation System

One of the most critical challenges during Kumbh Mela is managing the enormous waste generated by millions of pilgrims. Waste bins were strategically placed at various locations, marked with clear signage indicating how to separate biodegradable (organic) and non-biodegradable (plastic, glass, metal) waste. Volunteers and waste management teams actively participated in monitoring waste disposal to ensure proper segregation. Biodegradable waste is sent to composting facilities, while recyclable waste is taken to nearby recycling centers. Furthermore, awareness campaigns within the Mela encourage pilgrims to adopt waste segregation at the individual level, reducing contamination and ensuring the safe disposal of materials. The Uttar Pradesh government has allocated ₹1,600 crore from the total ₹7,500 crore Maha Kumbh budget for waste and water management [7]. This includes ₹316 crore for creating open defecation-free infrastructure, highlighting the emphasis on hygiene and sanitation. Prayagraj Kumbh mela set a record of sorts by collecting 600 tons of floating waste using Cleantec trash skimmers as shown in figure 2, showcasing an unprecedented model of faith, technology, and sustainability.



Fig. 2 Image of Cleantec Trash Skimmer for collecting floating trash from the rivers at Prayagraj Maha Kumbh mela, 2025 (Source: https://www.newsonline.media/articles/maha-kumbh-2025-sees-record-600-tons-of-floating-waste-recycling-offers-lessons-for-many/)

1.2 Eco-Friendly Packaging Solutions

To curb the widespread use of plastic during the event, vendors and participants have been encouraged to use eco-friendly alternatives. This includes the use of biodegradable materials, such as paper, bamboo, and plant-based items, for packaging food and goods. Leaf plates and cups are used instead of single-use plastic, and jute bags replace plastic bags for carrying purchases. These practices help reduce plastic pollution and support a circular economy by utilizing renewable resources [5].

1.3 Waste-to-Energy and Recycling Plants

In recent years, the Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj has seen the incorporation of innovative waste management solutions, including the establishment of waste-to-energy plants and advanced recycling facilities. These initiatives not only tackle the challenge of waste generation at such a massive event but also contribute significantly sustainability efforts by producing renewable energy and minimizing the environmental footprint. UltraTech, in partnership with Prayagraj Nagar Nigam, launched a waste management initiative (Figure 3) at the Maha Kumbh. The initiative, titled Mahakumbh ka Mahasankalp [8], aimed to address the challenge of plastic waste at the Maha Kumbh. This initiative commenced on January 22nd, 2025 and ran up to February 28th, 2025. The initiative collected plastic waste and processed it to use as alternative fuel for cement manufacturing at Dalla Cement Works, UltraTech's integrated manufacturing unit located in Sonbhadra district in Uttar Pradesh.



Fig. 3 Ultratech cement's initiative to collect plastic waste and use it as fuel at the cement factory

(Source:https://www.ultratechcement.com/corporate/media/stories/ UltraTech-drives-sustainable-plastic-waste-management-at-Maha-Kumbh) In addition to the above, a centralized recycling plant has also been established to efficiently process recyclables such as plastic, glass, and metals. During the 2025 Kumbh Mela, over 100 tons of recyclable waste was processed every day at the plant. The plant sorted, cleaned, and processed materials, diverting them from landfills and encouraging recycling efforts among the millions of pilgrims and visitors. By introducing a centralized collection system for recyclables, the Mela organizers ensured that plastic waste, which is a significant environmental concern, was properly handled and repurposed.

2. WATER CONSERVATION PRACTICES

2.1 Efficient Water Distribution and Use

Given the large number of visitors, water distribution systems have been designed to minimize wastage. Water-efficient taps and faucets were used in public toilets, shower areas, and wash stations. Additionally, there is a system for monitoring water consumption throughout the event, ensuring that the resources are used judiciously and responsibly. A vast network of pipelines, extending over 550 kilometres and operated by 42 pumps, was installed to distribute water across the Mela grounds. This infrastructure ensured that water reached various facilities, including camps, sanitation units, and communal areas.

2.2 Treatment and Recycling of Used Water

During the Prayag Raj Kumbh Mela, used water from bathing, washing, and cleaning activities was treated using advanced filtration techniques to ensure minimal environmental impact. This event showcased cutting-edge waste management solutions, including the Hybrid Granular Sequencing Batch Reactor (hgSBR), Geotube Technology, and bioremediation [9]. These systems efficiently treated vast amounts of faecal sludge, greywater, and solid waste, ensuring environmental cleanliness and public health. The event handled an enormous volume of waste daily: approximately 16 million litres of faecal sludge, 240 million litres of greywater, and solid waste generated by millions of pilgrims. Advanced technologies and infrastructure are deployed to manage this staggering amount effectively. India's leading scientific institutions, including ISRO and BARC, played a

crucial role in developing and implementing these innovative waste management solutions. Their contributions underscore the seamless integration of science and tradition. The treated water was then reused for non-potable purposes such as irrigation of grounds, landscaping, and sanitation facilities, minimizing freshwater consumption. This practice not only conserves water but also reduces the strain on local water resources, which can be crucial during large events like the Kumbhmela.

2.3 Preserving the Sacred Rivers

For preserving the purity of the sacred rivers, including the Ganges, Yamuna, and Sarasvati, strict regulations were in place to prohibit the disposal of harmful chemicals, soaps, oils, and pollutants into the water. Pilgrims were educated about the importance of keeping the rivers clean and are provided eco-friendly soaps and shampoos made from natural ingredients to minimize pollution. To ensure water quality of water, the treated water was tested through methods like the Coliform Test and Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD) analysis to ensure it meets safety standards.

3. ENERGY CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE POWER USE

3.1 Solar-Powered Infrastructure- LED bulbs, solar pumps

Maha Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj witnessed a significant leap in sustainability efforts, as the event embraced renewable energy sources to reduce its environmental impact. As part of this initiative, authorities implemented extensive solar-powered infrastructure to accommodate the vast influx of devotees. Notably, over 70,000 LED lights and 2,016 solar hybrid lights were installed across the 4,000-hectare Mela site. These solar hybrid lights, strategically placed along main roads, were programmed to automatically activate in the evening and deactivate in the morning, enhancing energy efficiency and ensuring well-lit pathways for pilgrims [10]. LED lighting reduces energy consumption by up to 80% compared to traditional lighting sources, contributing to a significant reduction in overall energy use. Furthermore, solar-powered water pumps were installed at key locations for sanitation and drinking water needs, contributing to the event's eco-friendly operations. These pumps were not only energy-efficient but also ensured a steady water supply without relying on grid electricity. In addition to lighting, the event featured over 200 MW of solar energy capacity, marking it as one of the largest renewable energy projects for a single event in India's history [11]. This initiative significantly reduced the environmental impact of the Mela and highlighted India's growing solar manufacturing capabilities.

3.2 Low-Carbon Footprint Generators

For backup power, energy-efficient generators were used at the 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj. A total of 150 generators were deployed across various locations to ensure an uninterrupted power supply during the event. Each generator had a power output of 250 kVA (Kilovolt-Amperes),

providing reliable energy for critical infrastructure, including medical facilities, security systems, and communication hubs. These generators were specifically chosen for their lowcarbon footprint and ability to operate on cleaner fuels such as compressed natural gas (CNG) and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), both of which are more environmentally friendly compared to traditional diesel-powered generators. By using CNG and LPG, the event organizers were able to significantly reduce carbon emissions and limit the environmental impact of backup power generation. The responsibility of providing and maintaining these generators was entrusted to Tata Power, a prominent company known for its sustainable energy solutions. Tata Power supplied the required equipment and ensured that each generator was regularly serviced and maintained to run at optimal efficiency. This proactive approach helped prevent energy wastage and ensured that power was delivered consistently and reliably, even during high-demand periods. In addition, the generators were equipped with smart monitoring systems that allowed realtime tracking of their performance, further enhancing operational efficiency.

4. ECO-FRIENDLY TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS-PROMOTION OF ELECTRIC VEHICLES (EVS)

With millions of people attending the Kumbh Mela, transportation is a major concern. To reduce air pollution and carbon emissions, reports indicate that app-based e-rickshaws and e-autos were introduced to enhance local transport for devotees, aiming to provide convenient, eco-friendly, and affordable transportation options [12]. The app-based service will launch with an initial fleet of 300 e-rickshaws, fully equipped with GPRS tracking and covered seating. Moreover, no commission will be charged to drivers, ensuring affordable rides for passengers. Additionally, Tata Motors has been expanding its electric vehicle portfolio and charging infrastructure in India, planning to have 10 EV models by 2025 and more than double its EV charging stations within the next two years. By incorporating EVs into the Mela's transportation network, the event not only ensured smoother travel for the pilgrims but also significantly minimized its environmental footprint, showcasing a commitment to sustainability at one of the world's largest religious gatherings.

5. SUSTAINABLE SANITATION PRACTICES

5.1 Installation of Eco-Friendly Toilets

A significant challenge during the Kumbh Mela is maintaining cleanliness, particularly in public toilets. To address this, the organizers have introduced eco-friendly biotoilets. These toilets, developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), utilize natural bacteria and enzymes to break down human waste without the need for water-intensive flush systems. Instead, waste is processed into compost, which can later be used in agricultural activities, significantly reducing landfill waste. Over 150,000 such biotoilets were installed across various locations during the 2025 Prayagraj Kumbh Mela to ensure hygiene while promoting sustainability. About 10,000 sanitation workers were engaged for cleaning activity [13,14]. These toilets operate on a self-

contained, low-maintenance system, reducing water consumption and ensuring cleanliness in the densely populated event. Sulabh International, a prominent sanitation solutions provider, played a key role in the installation of these eco-friendly toilets, ensuring the proper setup and functioning of these systems throughout the Mela.



Fig. 4 Eco-friendly bio toilets installed at Maha Kumbh Mala, Prayagraj, 2025 (Source: https://youtube.com/shorts/x6TcoIL1vpU?si="00lE9SobWZJDCQYW)

5.2 Wastewater Treatment Plants

Wastewater from the Mela is treated using decentralized sewage treatment plants (STPs) to ensure that it is clean and safe before being returned to the environment [14]. In the Kumbh mela, a total of 15 STPs were established to handle the vast amounts of sewage generated. Each plant had a capacity to treat up to 5 million litres of wastewater per day, ensuring effective treatment across the entire event. This resulted in a total treatment capacity of 75 million Liters per day, helping manage the large-scale sewage efficiently. The STPs used advanced technologies, including biological and chemical processes, to purify the water, making it suitable for reuse in various applications. The treated water was primarily used for irrigation purposes within the Mela area, helping cultivate greenery and maintaining an environmental balance. The leftover solid waste from the water treatment was converted into compost, which was used for agricultural activities, further promoting sustainability.

6. ECO- FRIENDLY FOOD PREPARATION AND SERVING

Maha Kumbhmela in Prayagraj, implemented significant eco-friendly measures in food preparation to minimize environmental impact. It is estimated that millions of meals were prepared and distributed daily to the pilgrims.

6.1 Eco-Friendly Fuels Used:

To reduce carbon emissions, many community kitchens and food stalls adopted sustainable fuel alternatives. Biogas, produced from organic waste, and solar cookers were prominently utilized, aligning with the event's green initiatives. These choices not only decreased reliance on conventional fossil fuels but also promoted renewable energy sources.

6.2 Voluntary Organizations Involved in Food Preparation:

Several voluntary organizations played pivotal role in organizing and managing food services such as... Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which Spearheaded the 'One Plate, One Bag' campaign [15] to promote reusable utensils and bags, significantly reducing plastic waste. Local NGOs and

Community Groups, ISKCON in partnership with the Adani Group, have also involved in food preparation

6.3 Eco-Friendly Plates and Glasses Used:

In a bid to eliminate single-use plastics, the Mela introduced sustainable alternatives. Approximately 2 million steel plates and glasses were distributed to food outlets and community kitchens, replacing disposable items. Around 70,000 cloth bags were distributed to visitors, encouraging the reduction of plastic bag usage

7. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

7.1 Raising Awareness Among Pilgrims and Locals:

Over 1,000 environmental experts gathered in Prayagraj for the Green Mahakumbh event, focusing on ecological awareness [16]. This initiative aimed to engage spiritual pilgrims in environmental conservation efforts and featured discussions on nature conservation and water protection.

7.2 Involving Local Communities in Sustainability Efforts:

Collaborative efforts between community and industry leaders focused on reducing plastic waste and promoting a circular economy. These initiatives aimed to drive innovation and enable new technologies and business models to achieve environmental sustainability.

7.3 Volunteering for a Greener Kumbh:

The Kumbh Mela 2025 thrived on the support of thousands of volunteers who assisted in guiding pilgrims, ensuring safety and hygiene, and contributing to the seamless experience of attendees. Volunteering at the Kumbh Mela allowed individuals to participate in an event of immense religious and cultural significance.

CONCLUSIONS

The Kumbhmela, a celebration of spirituality, culture, and unity, has become an exemplary model of how large-scale events can be managed sustainably. Through innovations in waste management, water conservation, energy-efficient practices, and eco-friendly transportation, the organizers have made great strides in reducing the environmental footprint of the event. To further enhance sustainability, more solarpowered systems could be integrated, and the use of biodegradable materials for offerings and decorations could be encouraged. By involving local communities, educating pilgrims, and adopting cutting-edge technology, the Kumbh Mela has set a precedent for future religious and cultural gatherings worldwide. Additionally, promoting the use of digital platforms for information dissemination could reduce paper waste, while further collaboration with local agricultural practices could support waste-to-resource initiatives. These sustainable practices not only protect the environment but also ensure that the Kumbh Mela remains a sacred and responsible event for generations to come.

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