

KUMBH MELA 2013. RELIGIOUS RITUALS AND PERFORMANCE FACING MEDIA COLONIALISM.

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Abstract: Kumbh Mela is a pan-Indian religious gathering. It is considered by Hindus to be the oldest religious festival known in the World History. Undoubtedly, it is the biggest: according to the Indian officials more than 100 millions people attended the 2013 Kumbh Mela. The devotee's main purpose is to acquire a strong purification of karma through bathing in the Ganges River in some auspicious days. But Kumbh Mela has been always a religious fair also, a place where believers are searching for their gurus and "holy men" are gathering their followers flock. Anything goes here and everything is transformed in a performance: lepers, fakirs laying on barbed wire, sadhus reciting the puranas by hard, yogis meditating – all are performing in public forming what BBC has named "the greatest show on Earth". In the last two decades, media attention and aggression on the Mela festival has raised, due to his exotic potential to the Western audience, but also because of the increased usage of media means by the religious leaders and organisations in their communication and advertising. Today Kumbh Mela is under media siege. Televisions, documentary producers, and tourists, eager to capture every moment, aggress pilgrims' privacy. Monastic congregations' use media for advertising and, even the pilgrims and sadhus themselves, capture memorable religious moments on their smart phones. The paper is presenting the influence of the global media intrusion on this archaic event in the purpose to appreciate in what aspects, and how far, the deep religious mentality and mind of the Hindu believer has been changed.

Keywords: Religious performance, media, Hindu music, religious ritual, globalisation

The religious legacy

Kumbh Mela is the oldest religious gathering in the world. Its main purpose is associated with the ritual of bathing and the worship of the Ganges as goddess, known as *Ganga Devi* - the Ganges Goddess or *Ganga Maa* - Mother Gange. The bathing as ritual is very old: Historian S.B. Roy¹ indicates it's presence before 10,000 BC. Bathing is mentioned as an important purifying method from the early Vedic texts, being describes in many ways. It is compulsory to all excepting ill peoples. The Vedas and Upanishads advise the married people to take bath twice daily and require Saints for bathing thrice a day. Failing to perform this ritual, one remains impure and all his activities will be impure, so he cannot do any Deity worship. He is a sinner in the influence of lower planets. Besides the daily bathing, dipping in sacred water on special days was considered also very auspicious. The existence of the river *melas* or bathing gatherings were mentioned in the early Buddhist writings at 600 BC. Roy places at about 300 AD the actual *mela* configuration based on the myth about the dropping of the nectar of immortality at the four sacred sites². The melas are taking place every year in a different site alternating between *Prayag*, at the confluence of the rivers Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical river Sarasvatī, *Nashik*, on the banks of Godavari, *Ujjain*, on the banks of Shipra and Haridwar, where the Ganga leaves the Himalayan mountains. Some of them are special melas, considering the enhanced auspicious time and year: *Ardha Kumbh Mela*, held at Haridwar and Prayag every 6 years, *Purna Kumbh Mela* held only at Prayag every 12 years,

¹ S. B. Roy, *Prehistoric lunar astronomy, [19000-3100 B.C.]*, Institute of Chronology, 1976.

² *The Mahabharata*, vol. I, Oriental Publishing Co., Calcutta, p. 65.

and the most important one, the *Maha Kumbh Mela* held only at Prayag, every 144 years. The first note on Kumbh Mela in Prayag is due to the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang, who attends mela at about 635 AD³. The first that organised the Kumbh Mela was Hindu sage Adi Sankara, who also founded in the ninth century the first religious orders – *akhara s*, dividing the ascetics in two large categories: *astradhari* or weapon-holders, and *shastradhari* or scripture-holders. He popularized mela among the common people, and since then ascets and believers have come in increasing larger numbers every year. Now the participation is huge: 30 million attendants were estimated at the main bathing day on 10 February 2013 and over 5000 ashrams hosted them⁴. Foreign conquerors of India could not ignore such a large gathering and interfere with it. During his campaign in India general Timur Leng, after defeating the sultans army at Delhi, ordered the slaughter of the Haridwar Kumbh Mela attendants because the reigning sultan was "too tolerant" with Hindus⁵. The emperor Akbar changed the name of the city Prayag into *Allahabad* - The City of God, claiming to esteem the holy place, but politically giving to one of the most venerated Hindu town a Muslim name. In 1780, 1938 and 1940, the British administration established rules for bathing, rules that are followed even today. All these interference had their political purpose because, due to its religious importance and large attendance, Kumbh Mela gained also a Hindu political and nationalist importance, becoming important to preserving the Hindu nation and identity. Today, Indians are aware of this force. 'Khumba weaves our nation into one' says Mahant Ganga Puri leader of the Mahanirvani Akhara religious movement⁶.

The media interest on Kumbh Mela

Following we will consider the mirroring in media of this huge gathering. There are no statistics for media interest in Kumbh Mela but we can make an estimation considering the statistics regarding the search for the keyword 'kumbh mela' on Google using the *Trends* tool⁷ which has available data from 2004 until present time. The Regional Interest **pole** shows 100 points⁸, which is always 100 for India, followed by United Arab Emirates with 20 points. Any other country does not exceed 4 points. Considering that the searches from United Arab Emirates are made also by the large Indian expatriates community that works there, we can conclude that the media interest is wide larger in India than in the rest of the world.

Due to this big discrepancy between indigene Indian and global searches frequency, we will study these two communities separately. The following graph shows the interest over time in India for the keyword 'Kumbh Mela':

³ T. W. Rhys 1843-1922 Davids et al., *On Yuan Chwang's travels in India, 629-645 A.D.*, Royal Asiatic Society, London, 1904, p. 361.

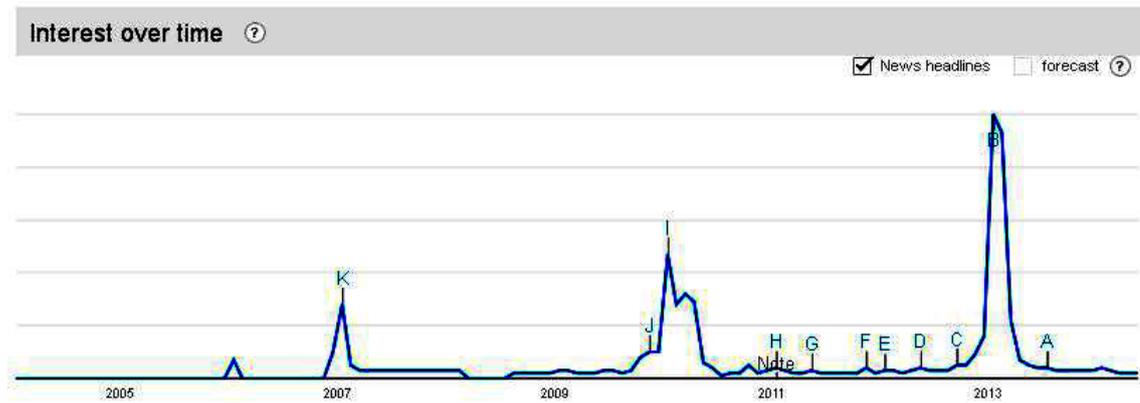
⁴ „Kumbh Mela 2013 at a glance”, *Official Website of Kumbh Mela 2013*, http://kumbhmelaallahabad.gov.in/english/kumbh_at_glance.html, accessed 13 May 2014.

⁵ Meirs Henry Eliot, „The Mahomedan Period as Described by its Own Hystorians”, in *Hystory of India*, vol. V, The Grolier Society, London, p. 225.

⁶ From the Editors of Hinduism Today, Himalayan Academy Publications, *What Is Hinduism?: Modern Adventures Into a Profound Global Faith*, Himalayan Academy Publications, 2007, p. 244.

⁷ <http://www.google.com/trends/>,

⁸ Numbers shows relatives to the highest value.



The peaks (points K, I and B) represent the high interest during the Kumbh Mela festivals in 2007, 2010 and 2013. Comparing them, results a doubling of the interest at every festival. We can also see that the media interest in 2013 is five times higher than in 2007. Does this mean that the interest of the Indian people has grown so considerable in this period? To appreciate this only the number of search is not relevant, because in this seven years the Hindus access to Internet has also grown. According to *Internet World Stats*⁹ the number of Internet users rise from 42,000,000 in 2007 to 137,000,000 in 2013 which is a rate at 3,2 to 1. Both indices have approximate the same grown so we can infer that the five time growth of the interest for the electronic media about Kumbh Mela is mostly due to a technologic development.

Not the same are the conclusions for the Western world. Considering the same sources results that the number of searches for 'Kumbh Mela' in USA has increased four times while the number of Internet user had only a little growth. In other western countries the situation is the same. In conclusion, comparing India with the Western world, we observe that the media interest for the Mela had a sensible 4/1 grown in both regions, but this grown infers a rise of the human interest only in West.

Reactions to the media coverage

The growth of the interest in media about Kumbh Mela has caused an intensification of the media production on the subject. In 2013 almost every major television network had filmed in Allahabad and all the major travel channels had produced a substantially documentary on Mela. The electronic media is also considerable: Google returns 1.150.000 pages and Youtube contains 53,600 video clips related to the subject. Some of the Youtube videos have over 1.000.000 views. There are even 13 Android applications featuring the festival. Selling rights to such a media event could be a considerable income for the Indian State. *The Economic Times* estimated the amount to 12k crore rupees (approx. 200 millions USD)¹⁰, but the real numbers were not made public.

However, money does not mean everything, even in a country that struggles poverty, so voices rose against the commodification of the Kumbh Mela. Indian religious leaders have reacted angrily to a proposal to sell broadcast and advertising rights to BBC in 2013 arguing

⁹ <http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/in.htm>

¹⁰ „UP may earn Rs 12K cr revenue due to Maha Kumbh Mela: Assocham”, *The Economic Times*, http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-01-11/news/36280025_1_maha-kumbh-foreign-tourists-tourists-arrivals, accessed 14 May 2014.

that commercialising Kumbh Mela would be highly offensive and the fair, being a place where different cultures come together, one organisation can not monopolise it.¹¹

Even private people can become aggressive when they are annoyed by media. The photographer Daniel Berehulak narrates:

"At one stage, I was standing on a fence to shoot from an elevated position. From one side, a policeman began hitting my legs with his heavy wooden lathi stick and on the other, a Hindu holy man hit me with a metal rod. As I climbed down from the fence, a Sadvhi, or holy woman, clocked me in the head with a sandal. Some of the sadhus loved to get the attention of the photographers, while others made it their mission and felt it was their duty to whack anyone who came within reach."¹²

However arguments against the excessive media had less to deal with the mythical purpose of the gathering. Although Kumbh Mela is religious gathering, selling media rights is not against its spirit. In fact, traditionally, Mela is also a fair. You can find here all traditional commodities: bowls, items of worship, fresh foods and vegetables, beads for meditation and pray, incense, inexpensive blankets, every type of traditional Indian clothes. It is a fair for religion too: every sadhu and akhara is advertising itself trying to enlarge its believers flock. Further, Hindus use religion as agent in advertising. You can see Lord Shiva featured in a detergent add¹³ or a women embracing a Shiva Lingam in a head pain relief medicine add¹⁴.

A reason for the Hindu reluctance was the fact that Indians perceived Westerner media production less interested about the profoundly religious topics that the Mela offer and emphasising on shallow facts like overcrowded area, poverty, dirtiness and the nudity of the naga babas. As a result the Haridwar 2010 Kumbh Mela Administration has required Journalist Visa to issue media pass, hoping to sift the media participants. Still, the results were disappointing: even the senior media person did not respect rules and expect preferential treatment some of them being arrogant¹⁵. An other motif is that filming or making photos can interfere with the intimacy of the religious act. In many times, Western media persons or tourist, while exploring religious curiosities, do not understand the human situation they are recording and, willing to capture more, they disturb the religious rituals or the attendants peace. This disturbance was perceived and by the ascetics too. In 2013 the Juna Akhara congregation banned the access of the foreigners in their akhara s because they 'pollute the atmosphere'¹⁶. Even non participants to the mela were affected by the media footage. Indians and Indians in the UK in particular, have complained about a Channel 4 footage showing naked people and sadhus at the ritual bath. They accused the TV channel producers of

¹¹ „Row over Kumbh Mela rights plan”, *BBC News*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-19424592>, accessed 14 May 2014.

¹² Daniel Berehulak, „The Kumbh Mela in 2013: One Photographer’s View”, *Time*, <http://lightbox.time.com/2013/03/11/the-kumbh-mela-in-2013-one-photographers-view/#1>, accessed 14 May 2014.

¹³ Namit Arora, *River of Faith*, Shunya Production, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQNoimABjMQ&feature=youtube_gdata_player, accessed 14 May 2014. Time 33:06

¹⁴ *Ibidem*. Time 33:16.

¹⁵ Ashok Kumar Sharma, „J-Visa, International Journos and Kumbh Mela”, <http://indianblogger.com/j-visa-international-journos-and-kumbh-mela/>, accessed 14 May 2014.

¹⁶ Piyush Srivastava, „UP: Juna Akhara bans entry of foreigners : Lucknow, News - India Today”, *India Today*, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/juna-akhara-bans-entry-of-foreigners/1/211516.html>, data accesării 14 May 2014.

"immorality" and asked the Kumbh Mela commissioner to ban their access in the fair. Although this did not happen, TV crews were restricted to film from fixed points and photography and filming were strictly banned at the bathing site.¹⁷

Media as religious platform

Such a huge gathering is an opportunity for the religious congregations and holy men to promote their activity a religious believes. Kumbh Mela is a fair and every religious community is trying to attract new followers. In this purpose they build large tents for prayers, garnished with sumptuous adorn, and the akhara entrance is marked with huge gates garnished with colourful banners and flags. Also meals are offered to the poor mela participants. Some of them organise religious theatre performance or Indian devotional music sessions. However, the main way to attract people is promoting their holy men, the *sadhus* and *naga babas*. In fact this is one of the main and deep reason of the Kumbh Mela: the people want to be in the presence of the sadhu's and nagas, to watch them performing rituals, or to listen their wise words and to purify by bathing in the same place they did bathe. Every one of these holy mens is relatively well known for his recognised powers or qualities, and every sadhu is a very wise speaker. Naga babas are famous for their resilience in enduring pain and bearing penances due to intense yogic training. Though they are public persons, most of them wants to distinguish himself visually, using clothing accessories, weapons, or specific headdress, some uncommon even for the Hindus. Shri Panchayati Mahanirwani wears a huge black hat, and Pilot Baba a black beret reminding his former army pilot career.

The use of modern media only enhances their traditional means of promotion. Sadhus are participating to press conferences with a star worthy easiness and eloquence, and some naga are eager to show of their skills in front of the camera. Sometimes these means are used in extreme. Luminous light adorns richly attached to the massive gates make the mela night landscape very similar to Las Vegas. Sound amplified to the limit, competes with the neighbour's sonority in an innocent cacophony. Cars equipped with countless speakers accompany sadhu's chariots spreading his recorded speeches or songs at an intensity close to the pain level. But not all the gurus accept foreign media because it can be used against him. One well known case is the use of footage with Sai Baba to advocate that his miracles were fraud¹⁸. For this reason many sadhus and guru produce their own featuring movies, being able to control the footage information.

Like most of us, sadhus and nagas are aware of the presence of the camera. While sitting sober on the throne in his chariot, a sadhu suddenly smiles and waves when passing near a camera. Nagas dress themselves for interviews explaining that nudity is not necessary in some social work they are involved in. Sadhu Shri Panchayati Mahanirwani answers the reporter's questions letting himself photographed. Although they may come from remote Himalayan ashrams or reclusion, they quickly adopt a proper public person's behaviour. They are also careful to avoid misunderstandings and sometimes evasive. Being interviewed on the caste subject – a sensitive issue in India – a Mahanirvani Akhara sadhu promptly interrupts and admonishes a follower who comments his statement: "Stop! Stop! Be quiet. Or maybe

¹⁷ Luke Harding, „Channel 4 faces expulsion from the Kumbh Mela”, *The Guardian*, 19 January 2001, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2001/jan/19/channel4.broadcasting>, accessed 14 May 2014.

¹⁸ There is even a blog designated to this purpose: <http://saibabaexposed.blogspot.com>.

only you should talk! Don't you see that video is recording on!" Further he explains to the reporter: "He doesn't know since he is not a Sadhu, right?" His attitude arouse reporter's suspicion who depict sadhu's statement as "evasive statements"¹⁹.

It less probable that these people, trained in long meditation, and determined to dedicate their life to God, where deeply changed by the media interference. They just adapted to these new means. But do this adaptations change the way they express, their speaking? Talking to the camera is different than talking to the audience. Because the feedback of the audience's understanding and attention is missing, gurus are more thoughtful in front of the camera. Their speech is more structured but less rich in knowledge, as they sacrifice digressions to explaining the basic notions.

Also many of the sadhus are delivering speeches in English. The reason is that Hinduism has become an international religion. Ashrams are kept all over the world. Westerners come to India for learning and meditation and gurus often are invited to West for lectures or to teach yoga or puja. Juna Akhara the oldest congregation has members from China, Japan, and USA. There are non Indian sadhus and there is even an American Kumbh Mela although no drop of immortality nectar fell there. India exports Hinduism so it has to be adapted to the needs and understanding of the consumer.

Paramahansa Nithyananda is leader of the Nithyananda Mission an organisation alleging that it has 10 millions followers and 1000 centres in 150 countries. The organisation has also its own daily Web TV broadcast featuring his guru frequently²⁰. In his 2009 book, *Bliss Is the Goal and the Path* Nithyananda supports the theory of the holy water bringing as argument Masaru Emoto's researches on this substance.²¹ He also explains the source of this miracle as thought in *Taittiriya Upanishad*. Citing the fragment from the Upanishad²² he translates the word Brahman with 'cosmic energy'. It works brilliantly: the two sources are intelligible and conclusive connected to explain the phenomena to Westerners. But the mystic sense of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* is changed into a New Age causality. Curiously, he surrenders to the need for fabulous facts falsifying Emoto's data: he claims that when water was exposed to readings from Koran the crystals took the imprint of Holy Kaaba²³. In a previous version of this statement, a speech at Haridwar Kumbh Mela in 2007, speaking to an Indian audience he emphasised his emotions about the subject, and being a good speaker he determined the listeners to empathise with him. But in an even older speech, the 2006 Californian version, being in front of an American audience, he limited his argue to the facts and did not used the Koran example. There are and others gurus who had adopted Western terminology to explain Indian religious facts. This led to a shift of the Hindu terminology into a New Age discourse witch pollute the media religious discourse in English language.

Naga Sadhus, the Smoking Superstars

The most publicized participants at the Kumbh Mela are the naga babas. In fact almost any news mentions them every documentary contains a section on this subject. Interviews are

¹⁹ Namit Arora, *River of Faith*, Time 51:35.

²⁰ www.nithyananda.org

²¹ Paramahansa Nithyananda, *Bliss Is the Path and the Goal*, Life Bliss Foundation, 2006, p. 217.

²² Swami Sharyananda, *Taittiriya Upanishad*, The Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1921, p. 53.

²³ Paramahansa Nithyananda, *Bliss Is the Path and the Goal*, p. 216.

a must but the questions are the same. If the interview is not possible, some footage are inserted, usually featuring bizarre and exotic aspects of their life.

Nagas were in the centre of attention at Kumbh Mela for long before media. In fact mela is their gahering too. Here the akharas meet to elect their leaders and to perform the ritual of initiation for new members. Their emergence is mystically linked to the sage Adi Sankara. He would have formed these orders as an army of yogis to defend the Hindu people and monasteries against Muslims. Historians²⁴ trace them back to the 15th century after Timur Leng ordered the mass slughter in 1399. Naga babas or nagas sadhus had entered the collective mind as ascetic warriors, feared and respected for their magic powers gained in yogic training. Their code of living sustained this image: always naked, as a sign of renunciation to the materialistic world, and covered with ash like their patron, Lord Shiva, they were always caring weapons, being very well trained in martial arts. As a result of their yogic training they were fearless and capable to endure tremendous pains, and they use to perform fairyism numbers to show their superpowers. In the eyes of the people they were supermen, ready to defend the Hindu religion.²⁵ Their condition did not change during the British Raj and they played an important role in spreading the Non-cooperation movement to the masses.²⁶

The warriors time of the naga sadhus ended tragically at the 1954 Kumbh Mela. During their traditional armed rush to the bathing site, they swooped over the crowd causing a stampede. In panic thousand of pilgrims crushed themselves underfoot while trying to escape. Over 800 lives were estimated to have been lost. The police inquire found the nagas responsible for their reckless behaviour. Nagas were already notorious for their aggressively and fights for supremacy between akharas, which determined British to issued a law in 1780 establishing the bathing order for the akharas. But in 1954 the naga aggression was against the pilgrims, against the Indian people. From defenders they become villains. "Sadhu means perfect, excellent, good, virtuous, pious, righteous." was state in the report and sadhus were far from this standard.²⁷

Since then, akharas are trying to change, or at least to present, the nagas as in the above cited definition. The new generation of nagas, many of them with high Scholl and some with bachelors studies, seem more bound to the wise yogi model than to the warrior side. But is hard to change a six hundred years tradition. This contradiction shows up and in their media appearance. They talk about peace and surrender to God, but keep their fierce appearance. Akharas claim that only wrestling is thought to nagas, but they do astonishing martial arts demonstration with all kind of curious weapons. And old issues did not vanish. When talking

²⁴ David Gordon White, *Sinister Yogis*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2009; Meirs Henry Eliot, „The Mahomedan Period as Described by its Own Hystorians”; William R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

²⁵ Such descriptions of naked warrior yogis from travellers in the 15th century are cited by David Gordon White in the sixth chapter of his book, *Sinister Yogis*.

²⁶ William R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires*, p. 243.

²⁷ Kamalakanta Verma, *Report of the Committee appointed by the Uttar Pradesh Government to enquire into the mishap which occurred in the Kumbha Mela at Prayaga on the 3rd February 1954*, Allahabad, 1955, pp. 106-107.

about the order in which the akharas bath in the river, a sadu infers with a threatening tone that fights could occur if someone breaks it.²⁸

Many Nagas refuse to be filmed or photographed, but are a lot of them who love it. In fact, they are performing the same spectacle they traditionally did for the pilgrims. They are not embarrassed to appear naked in front of the cameras, body painted in ash and wearing all kind of curious garnishes and strange head cuts. Many of them are willing to show of their powers or martial arts skills.

Nagas are making the show at Kumbh Mela. Media producers, seduced by their exoticism, give them the leading part in the Kumbh Mela media show, but 'casting' them in Western stereotypes. We see nagas as martial artists like Kung Fu films characters, but less disciplined and more aggressive. Reporters act like the interviewed naga could suddenly become dangerous. In my opinion, made after talking to several nagas, they use deliberately an aggressive attitude to intimidate and impress. An other kept on misunderstanding is the one about the sexual performances of the nagas. Many documentaries or footage depict sadhus performing circus like numbers, as holding weights hanging from his genitalia. One naga pulls a car with his penis.²⁹ Although, this performances are not meant to show his sexual powers, but, on the contrary, its numbness as a sign of the nagas renunciation at sexual life. An other stereotyped typology is the doped naga. Reporter underline the fact that nagas are smoking hashish, questionings themselves how the authorities allow that. Some of them film themselves smoking the dope with the interviewed sadhu, pretending that they do this 'sacrifice' to gain his sympathy. Rarely is explained that between nagas, this illegal habit is, or it should be, kept only by advanced yoga practitioners and at guru's advice.

Conclusions

“What's the kind of fun that you can, perhaps, find in Alahabad?” asked the presenter the reporter in the Kumbh Mela site³⁰. This confusion between divertissement and ritual is symptomatic for the media view about Kumbh Mela. Other examples can be added: akharas processions are described only as "a riot of colours"³¹, nagas presented as "the main attraction"³² and their meditation and penances featured under the label "Endurance test help attain Nirvana". Watching those news you have the impression that Kumbh Mela is an immense and overcrowded amusement park, a kind of religious Disney Land. Mass media, avoids systematic the profound religious themes, restricting its subject to an introduction or shallow exotic facts.

All the documentaries and footage I watched, reiterate the same information or opinions:

²⁸ Namit Arora, *River of Faith*. Time 16min. 40s

²⁹ *Worlds Biggest Festival Kumbh Mela*, National Geographic, 2013, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MlyfGOorgzw&feature=youtube_gdata_player, data accessed 16 May 2014.

³⁰ „Maha Kumbh Mela Begins in Allahabad With Piety, Fervor”, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bwl_zeTqRiM&feature=youtube_gdata_player, data accessed 17 May 2014. Time 00:55

³¹ „Maha Kumbh: The Holy Dip”, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2am_4nBzD4&feature=youtube_gdata_player, data accessed 11 May 2014. Time 21:30

³² *Ibidem*. Time 23:00

- Kumbh Mela is an ancient religious festival;
- pilgrims come here in cohorts so is the place is crowded;
- huge numbers describing Kumbh Mela are presented as bizarre facts
- Indian government makes huge efforts to manage this festival;
- naga sadhus are a kind of supermen but they smoke hashish
- naga sadhus are naked;
- Gange is over polluted, still believers bathe there and, more, they drink that toxic water;
- taking a bath here is a ticket to Nirvana.

It is difficult to go deep to the essential layers of such a huge religious events. There is a politic level to pierce through and under it the impermeability of every religion to the exterior eye. And, stronger than these are the instinctive human need to religious intimacy. By all the answers to the milligrams gave to question "why do you come to Mela?" I learned, most complete is the one a woman who gave me in the Allahabad Railway Station: "Because we have to bathe". Her answer is as simple as essential. For the Hindu believer going to Kumbh Mela is an impulse of a religious instinct. It symbolise the difference between pilgrimage and tourism. For the time being mass media confuses this pilgrimage site with a tourists destination.

However, for the moment media does not affect the pilgrims perception of Kumbh Mela. They are attached to traditions and believe. They are inside the event, having a guru nearby, while mass media is outside, on the side of the video camera. If this rapport is going to change in the future, is hard to predict.

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