Chapter 6

A Case of Kumbh Mela at Allahabad:
Learning for Urban Space Management and the BoP Market

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ABSTRACT

Management of mega events like Kumbh Mela, rests on the involvement of communities and local authorities who have rich learning heritage with them. Using Kumbh Mela as a case, this chapter highlights the role of various factors which are important for urban pace management. Understanding of the market at Kumbh Mela offers insights related to the BoP market. The chapter has following key inquiries: a) What kind of space was the Magh/Kumbh Mela? What kind of economic activities happened? b) What was the value system? c) What were the things being communicated? What were the things being remembered by them? This chapter uses exploratory research methodologies. Towards the end of the chapter, findings and its implications have been discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Increasing importance of urban space management, environmental issues, and search for new markets have given new impetus to the understanding of various Indian events where large gathering of citizens happen at one single place. These consumers also act as consumer-citizens. It seems that on one hand Indian value system has been able to maintain many traditional events for long. On the other hand, global forces further trigger this as these spaces provide them with opportunities for management of sustainable cities, event management, retailing, and consumer research for the bottom of the pyramid market. This chapter highlights that such events are part of meta organizational spaces (a space beyond the boundaries of organization) wherein both conventional and unconventional spaces come together. The chapter highlights that main drivers for these events are various communities and local authorities who have rich learning heritage with them. Core which bind communities, local authorities, and local executives

of corporations together revolves around the faith and solace which Kumbh/maagh mela offers. Nothing can be more luxurious than myth for ultimate experience, hope for salvation and deep rootedness in one's history. This chapter also highlights the role of various factors which have contributed to the growth of research in the area of urban pace management. Many come to the megacity of Magh Mela from different parts of India. In this manner, the study of Kumbh Mela also highlights the process and outcomes of urbanization. In this case urbanization is temporary as this is Pop-up city. Urbanization creates newer market, particularly when it dominated by low income class. Understanding of this market offers insights towards understanding of the BoP market.

Case of Kumbh Mela: A Sustainable City

The Kumbh Mela is an extreme example of a religious congregation in which approximately five million people gather for 55 days. Additionally, 10 to 20 million join for 24 cycles on the six main bathing dates (Mehrotra and Vera, 2015). This congregation takes place at Allahabad or Prayag. To understand the evolution of this mela, it is important to mention Prayag's mythological importance. The celebrated *Hindi* poet *Sant* Tulsidas describes *Prayag* as *Tirthraj*, i.e. the "King of all *Tirthas*" in his classical epic *Ram Charit Manas* – the *Ramayan*. He claims when the sun crosses the line of Capricorn every year usually on January 14 (with a few exceptions) all the *Tirthas*, saints and other *Rishis*, etc. visit the *Tirthraj Prayag* as he quotes: "Teerath-patihi aav sab kou" (Mishra, 2016). This gathering of pilgrims gave rise to the world-famous *Kumbh Mela*, which is organized there every 12 years. Remarkably, it is the world's biggest assembly of people on this planet (Mishra, 2016).

Maagh Mela, which happens every year, is considered to be one of largest gathering and religious event. It is an annual event at Allahabad. As name suggests it happens in lunar month of Maagh- normally in January by Solar calendar. At such an event, there is a bombardment of all sorts of information. People get exposed to information of various kinds like religious, social, political and commercial. However, in such a scenario, there is a set of information, which reaches many, being liked and enjoyed. The information with greater impact is also likely to get transmitted in certain fashion. So many shades of content and delivery style/pattern are likely to be noticed at the *Mela*.

The space offers many dialogues in various forms. The space may be seen as cluster of events, cluster of malls as well as clusters of communication. The space speaks to people in many forms. It has a product, mind and behaviour to offer. Now due to onset of technology shade is supposed to get changed.

Maagh Mela is an event which has been in existence for ages. There are beliefs and rituals associated with it. The most popular belief is if you take bath in Ganges during the month of Ganges, you move towards salvation. So, without opting for renunciation one gets salvation one goes to heaven. So, one thinks that does this belief about liberation maintain this event. Looking at functional aspects of, it helps one in coping with daily life stressors. Functionally it acts as coping strategy.

In many parts of the world such events have been happening e.g. like going for Haj to Mecca. There are people who have visited such places every year. There may be newcomers in that. So, it leads to different notions of time co-existing. The time notion differential is likely to create different level of communication receiving for different individuals. It also leads to various kinds of space occupancy in Mela.

In recent past as like anywhere else, Mela is also invaded by technology like cell phone, close circuit cameras etc. Media coverage has also increased. There are changes in communication content as well due to onset of liberalized economy. Earlier the space was penetrated by religious camps, video on wheels, loud speakers, circus, food shops, Khadi Gramyodog, ethnic apparels, etc. That is localized, regional brands

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