

Report for Sixth Visit: to document deconstruction of city

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I Activity Report for Sixth Visit: to document deconstruction of city

Data Collected:

- Jal Nigam water supply plans
- Photographs of deconstruction
- Archival documents of Kumbh
- Administrative structure of Kumbh
- Permission letter for auction documents and final vendor lists
- UP Tourism Board posters

Interviews conducted with:

- PWD store staff
- Mela Administration staff
- Sustainable toilet watchman
- Sweeper communities at Kumbh
- Jal Nigam Staff
- With Mela deputy manager
- Miscellaneous people on site
- Dr Arun Kumar
- Meeting with Alok Sharma (IG) and Devesh Chaturvedi (Divisional Commissioner) handed invitation letters for August workshop

Photo Documentation (Dinesh Mehta)

- Ariel photography: From both sides of the bridge. Sectors 3 and 4. Sangam, Laxmi Kutir, and Pontoon bridge deconstruction.
- Ground Photography: Complete river edge documentation, pontoon deconstruction, ground patterns and remains on site, and new activity on site.

II Deconstruction

Timeline

- The Kumbh Nagri dismantled post the last major bathing date of 17th of February.
- There were three days of heavy rain. This drenched the tents and caused floods in certain parts of the Kumbh Nagri (Sector 7,8). A large number of akhadas, ashrams, and kalpavasis packed up and left because of this.
- The 20th through the 26th saw major movement out of the Kumbh. Most of the people left by the end of the month.
- By the 10th of March, the last bathing date, there were just two or three private parties left at the Kumbh site. Most of the government structures were left standing.
- A large number of people visited the site on the 10th of March but hardly any of them were residents.
- It is estimated that 2 lakh people camped and 12 crore visited.
- On the 16th when we arrived 50% of the government structures on the flood plain were still standing. Most of these were the electricity board structures.

Mechanisms of deconstruction:

Akhadas and Ashrams

- When an akhada or an ashram wanted to leave, they sent word to either the sector magistrate (if their camp was constructed for free by the mela administration) or they sent word to the contracting company that set up their site.
- Most of the holy men and pilgrims left earlier and took their individual things by trucks, cars, and tractors.
- The chief organizers of each akhada and ashrams (and their chelas (juniors)) stayed.

- Trucks and laborers from the contractors arrived at the sites on pre decided days and removed everything—the tents, the plywood, and the steel sheets that formed fences, bamboos etc.
- These were carried to the compounds and store. They were then counted, sorted for damaged pieces, and sent to the various stores that the tent suppliers have across India. The tent supplier we spoke to has a large storage area in Benares where most of his material was going. Each truck is generally full of one specific kind of material.

Jal Nigam

- The Jal Nigam contractors removed all the tap connections, they dug up all the pipes, both water supply and wastewater. These were taken to the Jal Nigam store from where there will be orders issued from the state government to send them to different parts of Uttar Pradesh for Jal Nigam projects.
- A meter-long pipe was welded to the tube wells to extend their height. They were capped to prevent the shifting river from filling them up. The motor and pipes were all sent to Jal Nigam stores.

Health Department:

- The sewage pits were treated with chemicals, the bamboo coverings removed and the pit covered with sand.
- Wastewater reservoirs were treated with chemicals and the sand bags are being removed.
- Garbage is gathered and carted to sanitary landfill sites.
- The sweepers community is in charge of removing all the toilets built by the mela administration. They have a special mason break apart the toilet blocks removing the ceramic seats. The sweepers cart these back to the main health store location.
- The brick, bamboo, seats and other materials are sorted and auctioned off. Various contractors are bidding on all the items.

PWD

- The roads are taken apart sector by sector and placed onto trucks
- The pontoon bridges are broken up—first the railings removed, then the plates, then the joists and lastly the pontoons
- There are three main storage locations for the pontoon and road materials: on the parade ground, near the railway yard, and the largest is in Jhusi next to the bus stand.
- Individual ministers in the state government will decide on what their district needs. Accordingly, metal plated roads and pontoons will be deployed to various parts of UP. These will be used largely in villages with mud roads and areas prone to flooding. E.g. after 88-89 Kumbh the pontoons were used in the Hindon river.
- There are contractors for deconstruction who arrange for dismantling, transport, and unloading.

Electricity

- The wires are taken down and wound up. The poles disassembled- the concrete and metal separated. Each part is then taken back to storage.
- The electricity board has a digital inventory in which the returned volumes are recorded.

Other Deconstruction Activity

- A large number of scavengers from areas in and around Allahabad arrive at the site. They begin to remove everything. They dig up waste coal dumped by restaurants to use as fuel; they empty the sand bags from which the ghats were constructed to make ropes. They take any discarded wood or bamboo to burn on their fires.
- The scavengers take almost everything completely cleaning up the site. They are responsible for zero waste entering the Ganges.
- A large amount of pilferage and theft is taking place at the site. There are giant stockpiles of material lying in very makeshift enclosures in PWD stores, contractor stores etc. There are continuous complaints that things are being stolen at night. I suspect large-scale theft is also taking place with respect to metal plates and other very expensive items.
- Trucks are in high demand and have been brought from major cities all over Uttar Pradesh.

The Archeological remains of the Kumbh

- The Kumbh Nagri is like an archeological site. Several patterns and layers exist on the sandy bed of the Ganges.
- What remains on site are often the bricks from which plinths and the main altars were made, the toilets built by the administration, pieces of cloth and rope that are not usable. Concrete blocks from manhole covers are also seen.
- There are a large number of pools of wastewater with rubbish mulling in them.
- Rows of pipes are dug up and placed on the ground.
- Sewage pits are covered up with sand, but their outline can be seen.
- Tent enclosures are seen marked on the ground with holes where bamboo and pipes stood.
- The plinths and grass floor finishes of tents and enclosures are seen.
- Large yagna pits and the brick plinths for the placement of deities are left behind.
- The banks of the Ganges see a number of sandbags and bamboo poles—gradually disintegrated and being removed.
- Toilets, bamboo meshes, bricks, concrete stones dot the landscape
- Small items, shivlings and statues are left behind.
- The strong winds kick up shifting sands: these begin to cover up signs of the Nagri—the sand cover the footprints of tents, shifts onto roads and begins to drown signs of settlement.
- The number one non-biodegradable item is Styrofoam plates strewn across the entire plain.
- The wastewater drains that drained into the Ganges at Daraganj and at Sangam and on the other side of the bank are opened up. These were blocked up during the Kumbh so as to keep the Ganges clean. The water of the Ganges is a distinct shade darker.

III Return to Everyday Practices

On the bed of the Ganges—the site begins to establish its yearly patterns

- People from nearby villages begin to dig trenches and small beds to plant seasonal vegetables. Currently cucumbers and seasonal gourds are being planted. It is fairly late for them but they were waiting for Kumbh to end.
- Small wells are built near the agricultural sites in order to water the vegetables.
- The locals burn the thick grass that the holy men used to cover the ground in their tents in order to make the soil more fertile and suitable for sowing.
- The Allahabad buffalos that used to graze on the banks of the Ganges also return to it and the water. They make their way from their cowsheds in the city to the Ganges and back everyday.
- Vendors—of water cans to fill holy water with, garlands, holy texts etc—return to their usual sites on the banks and along the road leading to Sangam. They were pushed back to the peripheries of the Kumbh Nagri during the Kumbh
- The Pandas return and make their makeshift tents.
- The cremation ground in sector 5 is reestablished and a steady stream of dead bodies make their way to it.
- On the parade grounds: sweets vendors snack shops, garland vendors claim their spaces. They use some of the material lying around the construct their stalls.
- The site is swarming with an unbearable number of mosquitoes and flies and the locals are gathering and burning piles of rubbish in order to get rid of them.

IV Commentaries and thoughts on the Mela

Mela Office

- The Mela office is calm again and people return to their sleepy states.
- It is still in the new office that was built for them.
- People have time to sit and chat and everyone seems to be more available.

- There are complaints from the junior staff about incompetent senior staff.
- The reverse rumor is that the introduction of a tendering processes reduced opportunities for kickbacks at the junior ranks.
- The paperwork phase of the Kumbh takes place now. The accounts are gathered and an audit will take place both at the State Government and Central Government level.
- Work for the Magh mela will also begin soon.

Different Government Departments

- There seem to be a lot of miscommunication about where things are supposed to go and who is in charge of taking them. For e.g.:
 - PWD said that there is a fight going on with local farmers who are opposing the placement of pontoon bridges and metal plates on their land near Jhusi (the PWD claims it is their land). They have decided to place the items on Forest Department land instead.
 - The zero waste discharge toilets have been gathered on one spot but are not being taken anywhere because nobody knows where to send them.
- The Electricity department is lauded as the most organized department, with the most well executed system. The Health department is being praised as well—there was no major outbreak at the Kumbh. The Jal Nigam is rumored to have performed the worst out of all administrative departments, second only to the land allotment team.
- The administration now awaits transfer orders. There is a strong sense of anticipation of where each will land up. Their performances at the Kumbh are set to be evaluated.
- Administrators say that the hardest challenge was to keep the morale of the workers high as they worked long hours at an end.

Sweepers:

- Sweepers said that there were not enough facilities made for them. Even now large communities of them live there, cleaning up the Kumbh and there are no toilets and is no water supply for them. The nala banks and unseen corners are akin to large defecation grounds.
- A lot of them did not even visit the akhadas. A few went to eat there for free but there was a general fear of holy men from their community—probably due to caste issues.

Vendors:

- Local squatters who sold gutka on the peripheries of the parade ground said they made about 4000 INR at the Kumbh and that the festival went very well.
- Vendors, who came in from Maharashtra, bought garlands wholesale and sold them told me that it went very well and that they sold about INR 24000 worth of things.
- Overall people seemed to have made a lot of money from Kumbh. It was very good for the city economically.
- Hotels, restaurants, tourism related facilities have improved.

Harvard at Kumbh

- Dr Arun Kumar complained to me about the behavior of a Harvard student: who forced his way, wearing shoes, into a sanitized burn unit tent saying he was a Harvard student and took pictures of the burn victim while they were trying to treat him.

Infrastructure in Allahabad

- The Kumbh helped build infrastructure in Allahabad. The roads are painted and asphalted. Some of them have been widened.
- There are brand new street signs.
- New Ghats have been added and the riverbanks strengthened in places such as Daraganj.
- A large amount of electricity cuts are expected to compensate for the amount of electricity used at the Kumbh.

V Damages

- Water damage—several days of continuous rain post Mauni Amavasya created a lot of road and pontoon damage. The Ganges swept away parts of one pontoon bridge. Large banks of sand

under metal-plate roads were swept away leaving the roads hanging in the air. Major repair works had to be conducted.

- The Railways Station Bridge collapse: a large number of administrative staff feels that the credibility of the entire Nagri organization was ruined because of the singular stampede incident. A large number of explanations and instructions were given including:
 - Schools should have been opened earlier to house part of the crowd that was waiting for the trains.
 - The railway authorities are at fault and have caused all of them to look bad.
- Land issues: a large number of disputes and disgruntled-ness over land allotment still permeates the atmosphere. The land allotment is said to have been very badly handled.
- Sanitation System: The systems did not hold up adequately to the number of crowds that came in. There were huge lines at the toilets and a lot of them overflowed due to high usage.

VI Waste Water Drainage Systems

- There are two canals on the banks of the Ganges that carry wastewater. One of them empties into the Yamuna and the other into the Ganges. These were dammed during the Kumbh using sandbags—to support the Green Movement.
- There was a system of waste water pipes with manhole connections every 15m. These fed into large wastewater ponds.
- On the Allahabad side at and near Sangam: the wastewater ponds were pumped at night and the water was poured into a large sewer that runs along the Allahabad bank. The sewer leads to the Daraganj sewage treatment plant.
- A large number of the wastewater pools were not pumped and the water was allowed to percolate through the fine sand.
- A number of waste water pipes led to the two canals and here too wastewater was allowed to gather in them and percolate down.

VII Miscellaneous Question and Clarifications

- Large amount of the wood used was Sal
- Each water tap connection cost INR 600 unless it was given free of cost to you—as it was in the Akhadas.
- There were two fire fighting tanks
- Administrative structure:
 - Mela Adhikari (MA) who reports to District Commissioner Allahabad who reports to Divisional Commissioner who reports to the chief secretary who reports to the Chief Minister.
 - Each UP government body (Jal Nigam, Van Vibhag etc) had a deputized head for the Kumbh who co-ordinates with the MA. They report to their immediate superiors who report to the chief secretaries of each department who report to the state ministers.
 - The MA office has 4 additional district magistrates—and deputy mela officers. Under them are a number of sector magistrates who have shayak prabandhaks (assistant managers) reporting to them.
 - The MA also has a mela administrator who has several mela managers and assistant managers reporting to him. They do accounts, land allocations etc.
 - Each department has junior engineers/ staff at sector levels who co-ordinate with sector magistrates. The junior engineer and staff them have a team of assistants who have a team of laborers or contractors working with them.
 - Arail falls under Allahabad district. Special powers are given to the MA to allow him to take over parts of Jhusi. He coordinates with the Jhusi panchayat.
 - The MA is empowered with special powers to control the entire Kumbh district.
 - Each department formulates a budget at the beginning and they are responsible for maintaining it.

- Each department has its own chain of command but they co-ordinate with the sector magistrate or the MA at the respective hierarchical level.
- The MA office handles all the free distribution—tap connections, tents etc. They handle land and auctioning of the shops.