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## **SOCIO-RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES OF KALPWASIS: A STUDY OF MAGH MELA AT PRAYAGRAJ**

### ***Abstract***

*The Present Research paper extends a sociological analysis of the tradition of Kalpwas in Prayag. Prayag is known as the most sacred place of Hindus and the King of all Pilgrimages (Tirthraj). Although the Kumbh Mela is organized at four holy places, the kumbh mela held at Prayag has its own special significance. At Prayag, Magh mela (can be said as a mini form of kumbh Mela) is celebrated every year in month of Magh, at the bank of holy confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati and it is only Prayag where the practice of Kalpwas can be seen in the month of Magh. Kalpwas means Religious Spiritual Migration for the upliftment of the soul. The Practice of Kalpwas performed here has its special importance in creating the sacred complex of Prayag and its cultural landscape. It is worth noting that the notions of tradition and sacred activities regarding kalpwas, are influenced and regulated by various aspects especially social and religious. In the present study an attempt has been made to see how the practice of kalpwas is socially constructed during sacred space and sacred time in Prayag and how the beliefs and Rituals Performed by the Kalpwasis create a Sociological Understanding.*

**Keywords:** *Prayag, Kumbh Mela, Magh Mela, Kalpwas, Sacred Space, Sacred time*

### **Introduction**

Throughout history, from ancient civilizations to modern era; from simple society to complex society, sacred centers have exerted a powerful attractive force on their believers. These centers serve as religious focal points where people of different backgrounds converge. Hindus have a long-standing tradition of pilgrimage to their holy deities. This tradition is believed to be ancient and enduring among the Hindu community. Multitudes of sacred places spread across the length and breadth of this land, attract millions of pilgrims every year. Visiting these places is one of the most significant events in the religious life of the believers. These places preserve a religious myth that

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appeals to the pilgrims. By visiting these places, the religious person achieves spiritual satisfaction and creates a lasting memory. Religions assign spiritual significance to specific places that are connected to the divine. The holy land becomes a destination for pilgrimage and its believers visit these places to affirm their faith in that sacred context. One such place is Prayag, which is regarded as a pilgrimage site in Hindu Sanatan Religion. Millions of pilgrims gather here every year in the month of Magh to celebrate Magh Mela.

Prayag is known as the *Tirtharaja* (King of all pilgrimages) and is believed by the Hindus to be the holiest place among all pilgrimages of them. According to Hindu mythology, the land of Prayag is regarded as the generative organ of Goddess earth. With the land between the holy confluence of Ganga and the Yamuna (*Sangam*), Prayag is seen as the mythical center of the universe (Dubey 2001). Kumbh Mela in Prayag is held every 12 years and Magh Mela, which can be abbreviated as Mini Kumbh Mela, is held every year in Prayag on the bank of Sangam in the Magh month. The Magh Mela of Prayag has its own distinct feature, because the tradition of Kalpwas can only be seen in Prayag during the month of Magh. According to Hindu Panchang, Magh month is known for its religious, spiritual significance. The present study attempts to explore the construction of Kalpwas's social and religious identity during sacred space (*Prayag*) and sacred time (*Magh* month).

Magh mela is a Hindu religious festival and a large human gathering on earth in which millions of pilgrims gather at Prayag during sacred time to carry out Kalpwas (A month-long ritualistic stay). Devotees congregate here to perform religious rituals, such as *Pitra tarpan* (offering water to their ancestors), performing spiritual practice, taking Holy dip, meeting with spiritual Saints, listening religious lectures, *bhajans* and *kirtans*, Meditating, offering *daan* etc. within the framework of scriptural authority. Magh mela held on the vast open sacred sandy site of the rivers, is perhaps the most sanctifying attractive event in the cultural life of the country. The remarkable notion that distinguishes this fair from the common run of religious fairs is its long duration, lunar and solar astronomical astrological correspondences. It starts from the Makar Sankranti i.e. when the Sun enters the sign of Capricorn. Thousands of pilgrims, belonging to all strata of society and speaking different languages and ascetics of various religious orders from all regions of the country flock to Prayag and dwell in tents and huts on the sands for Kalpwas within the sacred precincts. A miniature spiritual India is represented on the dry flood plain between the Ganga and Yamuna during the shivering cold at Magh. Mela owes its origin to ritual baths at holy confluence of rivers since the later Vedic age. The Anusasanaparvan of Mahabharata refers to the living institution of Magh snan where it is said "Those who bathe with the restrained mind and observing rigid vows at Prayag in the month of Magh is cleansed of all their sins and attains heaven." (Shukla and Kumar 2019)

The first historical reference to the religious festivals at Prayag is mentioned by Chinese traveler Huen Tsang in the period of Emperor Harshavardhan, who gave a vivid description of the sacred occasion in his travel accounts by saying it as an 'Age - long festival' in A.D 643. Tulsidas (A.D 1532-1623) has praised the significance of Magh in eloquent terms.

माघ मकरगत रवि जब होई । तिरथपतिहि आव सब कोई॥

देव दनुज किन्नर नर श्रेणी । सादर मज्जहि सकल त्रिवेनी ।

He describes that all the sacred places, gods, demons, semi - divinities, and pious men assemble in Prayag and take bath at Triveni when the Sun enters the sign of Capricorn.

### **Magh Mela: A field view**

Magh mela is organized in 641 hectares and the total mela area is divided into 6 sectors. These 6 sectors are 1,1(A),2,3,4,5 respectively. Here, around 14 Ghats of around 6050 running feet are built. The total available land for Mela is around 649.87 hectares, out of which 487 hectares of land is available for settlement. *Acharya bada*, *Dandi bada*, *Khak chowk* and *Prayagwals* are the prominent sects of Magh Mela. Apart from these, there are some other institutions that are allotted in Mela. There are six main bathing festivals of Magh mela. The mela begins on *Paush Purnima* when Kalpwasis start their Kalpwas, second is *Makar Sankranti*, third is *Mauni Amavasya*, fourth is *Basant Panchami*, fifth is *Maghi Purnima*, when most of the Kalpwasis end their Kalpwas. The last one is *Mahashivratri* after which the Mela comes to an end.

### **Theoretical framework**

Kalpwas is a term derived from two words, '*Kalpa*' means 'transformation of self through inner determination' and '*vas*' means 'religious spiritual migration' (Chaturvedi 2016). It means Kalpwasis perform Kalpwas to worship God and uplift their souls. Kalpwas is a religious practice that offers an accessible alternative for gaining religious merits during the month of Magh. Durkheim defines ritual as the totality of practices concerned with sacred things and by which religion is made visible and tangible. In the same way Kalpwas as a ritual is considered as sacred performance and reaffirms the beliefs of Hindu Sanatan Religion. As Durkheimian theory of religion says that believers of any religion celebrate their religious festivals because through it they attach themselves to their highly respected tradition and awake certain ideas and sentiments that connect the present to the past, analogously Kalpwasis celebrate kalpwas because they follow the tradition of their ancestors and they believe that they are attached to it as a highly respected tradition and

they leave it with a spirit of moral well-being (Durkheim 1915). The concept of the sacred is related to 'purity'. Devotees often observe kalpwas as a means of gaining purity through rituals like tonsure (*mundane*), *snan* (holy bathing), and *daan* (charitable offerings). These rituals preserve special auspicious meaning during the month of Magh on account of performing it at sacred places which enhances the power and value of devotees through connecting them with the divine.

The identity of a Kalpwasi is supposed to be considered as socially constructed. Berger and Luckmann (1966) proposed the concept of social construction of reality and argued that people or groups interacting in a social system create, over time, concepts or mental representations of each other's actions that eventually become embedded in the institutional fabric of social identity. Likewise, Kalpwasis by interacting in their group, became, over time, habituated into reciprocal roles played by Kalpwasis in relation to each other. When their reciprocal interaction becomes institutionalized, it creates their religious identity.

Gazing at Prayag as a pilgrimage site in an anthropological context, L.P. Vidyarthi (1961), opined three dimensions of sacred space as geography, performances, and specialists, which constitute a complex called 'sacred complex'. This complex is an intricate and interdependent grouping of sacred centers followed by regular or periodical but specific performances by specialists. Kalpwas at Prayag, as a sacred performance, represents one essential component of the sacred complex of Prayag. According to Vidyarthi, this component also helps in tracing the socio-cultural, economic, and religious aspects of the sacred complex.

### **Kalpwasī's social identity and their sensory experience**

Kalpwas during Magh mela at Prayag is one of the world's largest congregations of men and women who stay at this place to take holy dip at Sangam and perform sacred rituals. The camps set up by godly Hindu pilgrims near the holy confluence of Prayag in the month of Magh for temporary stay and devotion to God are called 'Kalpwas'. Many devotees, particularly elderly couples, vow to participate in Kalpwas during the month of Magh. The Kalpwas becomes a melting pot of various elements of Hindu belief system and presents unified imagery of Hinduism which is realized in the form of common understanding over sacred geography, sacred rituals, and sacred literatures. It can be observed that the Kalpwas is basically held at the confluence of sacred geography on sacred time. Kalpwas involves sacrifice of comfort and luxurious life devoted to God during the month of Magh in Magh mela at Prayag. When Kalpwasis come to mela, their only aim is to attain salvation (*Moksh*) and for the attainment of salvation, not only Purity of body but also purity of soul is a precondition. Kalpwasis believe that by performing some Rituals, they can purify their soul and attain salvation.

The pilgrims who commit to take possession of Kalpwasi's social identity, commit to shoulder several religious rituals. They must live on the bank of the Ganges for a whole month, eat simple and satvik bhojan (*Ann*) and perform several religious activities to cultivate their spiritual being. Kalpwasis are easily remarkable and distinguishable by their daily routines and by the areas they occupy at Mela site. Thus, they differentiate themselves from non Kalpwasis of Mela. There is a tenacious shared identity with Kalpwasis seeing each other as a part of the same single group (Shankar, et al. 2014). This Social identity defines what is expected from a Kalpwasi and shapes their experience and negotiation of physically demanding environmental conditions. They also concluded that cold can be interpreted and experienced in relation to group member's social identity. It is revealed that shared identity of Kalpwasi with other pilgrims lead to forms of mutual support that made it easier to cope with the cold and it impacts upon participant's ability to endure cold conditions. By performing the sacred performance i.e. Kalpwas, the Kalpwasis build their sacred world and give meaning to their great Hindu Sanatan culture. A great contrast can be clearly visible where we see that Kalpwasis consider some things, performances, directions etc. as sacred and they avoid *tamasic bhojan* and luxury life as profane i.e. impure. All the rituals that they perform during Kalpwas are on the clear specification of sacred and profane. These are also mentioned about the different ceremonies dealt with *Grihya Sutra*. There is a clear specification of use of right and left. The opposition between right and left, even numbers vs odd numbers, vegetables vs meats, four directions i.e. East/West/North/ South, give attention to the opposition of pure and impure. (Das 1991)

### **Methodology**

Out of all the Kalpwasis, attending the Magh Mela 2023, 220 Kalpwasis were selected through simple random sampling. Interviews were strategically conducted from the selected Kalpwasis from all the 6 sectors to span the diversity of age, gender, and social category. The resulting sample contained 134 Male and 86 Female with an age range of 45-70 years. To generate an in-depth, multi- faceted understanding of the lifestyle of Kalpwasis in their real-life context, ethnographic observation and a few case studies have been undertaken.

### **Social category of Kalpwasis**

Among the selected Kalpwasis, 47.2% are from the General category, while 29% are from OBC, 21.8% are from SC, and 1.8% are from ST category. Although it is believed that Kalpwas is open to all irrespective of caste and class, the observation reflects the inclination of high caste towards performing Kalpwas more than others. The reason behind this is that Brahmins have been involved in religious

<b>Social category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
General	104	47.2
OBC	64	29.1
SC	48	21.9
ST	4	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: The Author (Primary Data)

activities since ancient times and they are intrigued in performing such a religious activity because they consider themselves as a part of their great tradition. In terms of caste, the analysis shows that not only the devotees of the priestly caste perform Kalpwas, but also of other castes, take an interest in carrying out this highly respected tradition. It reveals that members of other castes have been attracted towards the tradition of Kalpwas by encountering other religious people. With the knowledge of the history of Kalpwas and its religious importance, people of other castes also perform Kalpwas to empower themselves religiously. Majority of Kalpwasis (27.2%) are illiterate, 21.8% are educated up to primary level, 24.5% are up to high school level, 12.7% are graduates and 5.4% are post graduates. This somehow shows an inverse interconnection between religiosity and educational level, because those who are more educated, less inclined towards the tradition of Kalpwas than the less educated devotees. A possible reason for this is that the Kalpwasis who have more education tend to think more scientifically and rationally, and therefore have less interest in performing these kinds of religious activities.

### **Case study 1**

Mangri Devi (59 years), a resident of Goorpur in Prayagraj belonging to SC community has camped with the upper castes in Acharya Nagar, engrossed in Bhajan, worship, and performs her month-long religious rituals. She said, "I have been performing Kalpwas for 10 years and never had any problem or faced any sort of discrimination here." She is inspired by her guru ji. She revealed that through worshiping and singing bhajans while being in the company of her guru ushered in peace and a sense of fulfillment in her faith increased.

### **Age of Kalpwasis**

<b>Age Groups of Respondents</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
45-50	7	3.1
51-55	4	1.8
56-60	77	35
61-65	117	53.1
66-70	15	6.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: The Author (Primary Data)

Analysis reveals that majority of the Kalpwasis belong to 61- 65-year age group followed by a lot of Kalpwasis belong to 56-60-year age group. The reason behind this may be most of the Kalpwasis decide to perform Kalpwas after completing their household responsibilities and when they feel free from their family and professional duties. Since to get Kalpwas here, it is very crucial to be free from the worldly responsibilities, to be calm and to move towards spirituality. And these age groups are more suitable for any Kalpwasis for performing Kalpwas at the holy confluence of Sangam.

### Case study 2

Rakesh Pathak and his wife stayed here for Kalpwas in the Shivir of Golakwasi pandit Janardhan Pathak at sector 4 of Mela area. It is his third year of Kalpwas. He is a resident of Pratapgarh. He is a retired lecturer from an intermediate school. He has been coming many times to Prayag to see Magh Mela but after a long time he started to commit Kalpwas. He says that old age is suitable for doing Kalpwas. Because at this age one is free from one's responsibilities. He said "*Kalpwas should not be done until a person becomes free from his / her responsibilities*".

### Marital status of Kalpwasis

Out of all selected Kalpwasis, 75.4% are married, 3.6% are separated, 2.7% are unmarried, 9.5% are widow and 8.6% are widower. Analysis mentions that majority of the Kalpwasis are married, who perform Kalpwas than other category Kalpwasis. The reason behind this is that for those who are married, it becomes convenient for them to perform Kalpwas because there are a lot of strict rules regarding Kalpwas that need at least one person for the easily performing of Kalpwas. If two persons are there i.e. husband and wife then it becomes convenient for one Kalpwasi to perform Kalpwas. On the other hand, those who are separated/ unmarried/ widow/ widower, all require a person with them who may be a relative, neighbor or anyone. So, it is found that married persons are frequently performing Kalpwas. Moreover, one prominent reason could be that Our Hindu holy scriptures also give preference to the married couples for any sacred religious ceremony to be performed.

### Social background of Kalpwasis

Type of Area from where Kalpwasis have come	Frequency	Percentage
Rural	149	67.7
Urban	71	32.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: The Author (Primary Data)

Above table states that 67.7% of Kalpwasis come from rural areas while 32.3% of Kalpwasis come from urban areas. The analysis shows that most of the

people from rural areas come to perform Kalpwas. One reason for this could be that the countrymen are of religious tendency, so they are more inclined towards religious and spiritual traditions like Kalpwas, while on the other hand the people from the urban areas are of less religious tendency than and think of more logical and scientific way, so they believe less in the tradition of Kalpwas.

### **Motivational forces to perform Kalpwas**

Out of all the selected Kalpwas, the highest percentage (41.7 %) of Kalpwas have come here with the inspiration of their *Panda* (a sacred specialist), 21.7 % inspired by their tradition, 10% inspired by their relatives, 16.6% with the inspiration of their neighbors and 10 % randomly planned to perform Kalpwas. These things show that Panda has a very close relationship with ritual of Kalpwas. Even nowadays most of the Kalpwas are performing Kalpwas with the help of their Panda. "Panda-Yajman" type refers to the hereditary relationship and mutual obligations that have come to exist between the Panda and Yajman families to clan castes of different parts of India whose members always come to their Panda for taking religious assistance to perform Rituals. It is also reflected in the work of Vidyarthi where he gave the instance of Panda - Yajman relationship and revealed that Gayawal priests / Pandas provide an effective mechanism to identify and regulate "Priests- sacrificers" (Yajmans) system from generation to generation. Such mechanisms are (1) Inheritance of lineage designations and hereditary nicknames (2) Maintenance of record books containing genealogical details of all their Yajmans. This relationship is based on their mutual obligations.

### **Food practices during Kalpwas**

Food habit of Kalpwas is regulated by several strict rules. During Kalpwas, there are many rules and restrictions related to their food habits, which a Kalpwas must follow. But with the time, variations are being seen regarding their food habits. According to holy scriptures, a Kalpwas should take *Ann* (Bhojan) once in a day, take rest only once in a day at night and intake only *falahaar* (fruits). The food that they take, should be of *satvik* nature. There are a lot of restrictions in the food materials they should take, variations are found here too. Out of all selected Kalpwas, 86 % of the Kalpwas believe that they should avoid some vegetables specially Onion, Garlic, Brinjal, Carrots, Reddish, Cauliflower, *Masur Daal* (Red Lentils), *Urad daal* (Black Gram Split), Mustard oil etc., and 14 per cent of Kalpwas believed in avoiding only onion, garlic and mustard oil and they don't consider any other restrictions regarding food. A very few Kalpwas consider masur and urad daal in *Ann* and avoid it during Kalpwas. They believe that a Kalpwas should follow rules and restrictions by their convenience and capacity. Most of the Kalpwas take food once in the evening because they believe that if they take food in afternoon, then they would like to feel taking rest. However, taking rest in afternoon is restricted



during Kalpwas. 80% Kalpwasis consider *kuccha bhojan* (raw food) in the fruit diet, in which *peanuts*, *makhana* (fox nuts), *Til ke laddu* (sesame balls), Tea and fruits etc. and 20% Kalpwasis consider Roti (Wheat), Sabzi (Cooked Vegetables), Daal (Lentils) and Chawal (Rice) etc. in Pucca food. Here it is necessary to know the difference between Kuccha and Pukka food. Most of the scriptures and Kalpwasis also have faith in the belief that fried roasted food is pukka food and apart from that the food which is not oily and fried, that is kuccha food. Here too, diversity can be seen in the views of Kalpwasis. The important thing to understand here is that the kuccha bhojan or pukka bhojan, is not a universal and equal assumption but this concept is different in terms of individuals, groups etc. 95% Kalpwasis use Gas fuel as the medium of cooking and 5% Kalpwasis use *stoves* or *Chulha* for preparing food. Most of the Kalpwasis use steel utensils while remaining use aluminium, copper, or other potteries for preparing the food. On special occasions, (Makar Sankranti, Basant Panchami, etc.), most of the Kalpwasis take some special food such as *Poori*, *Kachori*, *Kheer*, *Halwa* etc.

### **Dressing pattern of Kalpwasis**

Holy scriptures recommend Kalpwasis to wear pure silk or wool, white or yellow coloured and simple and sober clothes during Kalpwas but a lot of changes can be seen regarding the dressing pattern of Kalpwasis with the time and their convenience. 81% of the Male Kalpwasis wear dhoti kurta or pants and do not consider Jeans and T-shirts suitable for Kalpwas because of their age and social perception. 82% women Kalpwasis believe that Saree should be worn during Kalpwas and they should not wear any other type of modern apparel. 18% female Kalpwasis were seen wearing maxi or gowns and they believe that this dress is comfortable for them. Some of the Kalpwasis were also of the opinion that there is no restriction regarding wearing dress during Kalpwas. Majority of Kalpwasis i.e. 90% believe that a Kalpwasi should wear yellow, red, or light coloured dress during Kalpwas and 10% of them believed that there is no any restriction regarding colour of the dress, that a Kalpwasi wear during Kalpwas. Out of all selected Kalpwasis, 40% believed in wearing cotton clothes and 33.3% believed in wearing clothes of mixed material and a very few of them (26.7%) believed that there is no any restriction regarding the material of dress that a Kalpwasi wear. Nevertheless, one very identical notion among them was that every Kalpwasi wear woollen clothes to avoid excessive cold. During January-February, the cold is at its extreme level. The afternoon of this weather is normal and from the evening the cold starts to intensify again. In such a situation, Kalpwasis wear light, pure silk, and cotton clothes in the afternoon, but in the evening, when the cold increases, they wear more warm clothes to avoid cold.

### **Perception of origin and relevance of Kalpwas**

Most of the Kalpwasis believe that Kalpwas means living in hardship,

living life of penance, and performing religious activity. Moreover, many of them also believe that Kalpwas means meditating on God. Considering Kalpwas's perception regarding history of origin of Kalpwas then it has been found that its history can be traced from the period of 'Emperor Harshvardhan' or through the great myth of '*Samundramanthan*'. A very few Kalpwas are those who don't have any idea about the historical origin of Kalpwas. One Kalpwas living in sector 3 of Magh Mela, named Bhupendra said that "We don't know much about kalpwas, our Panda ji will give you all the information because he has complete knowledge". These things reveal that the concept of kalpwas has become inherited into the sacred specialists rather than individual devotees. Most of the pilgrims strongly believe that the aim of their Kalpwas is to 'groom their next life' and many of them believe that through Kalpwas their present life will be improved. A few Kalpwas believe that by performing Kalpwas, they feel happy and peaceful. It reveals that most of the Kalpwas think in the same way about tradition of Kalpwas that the root of it lies with a fundamental notion of the rebirth of our Sanatan Hinduism that even after this life a life exists.

#### **Duration of their stay**

Out of all the selected Kalpwas, 27% stayed for 40 days in Magh Mela for Kalpwas. After this, 25% for 35 days, 20% for 45 days, 10% for 30 days, 10% Kalpwas for 42 days and 8 % for 50 days. It is believed that some Kalpwas stay in Prayag from Paush Purnima to Maghi Purnima. Some believe that it is necessary for Kalpwas to stay from Sankranti to Sankranti. All such Kalpwas who stay from Purnima to Purnima or Sankranti to Sankranti, have a stay of 40 days for Kalpwas in Magh area. But some Kalpwas believe in the *Trijata Snan* (bath). These are mostly the same Kalpwas who have come here from the areas near Prayagraj like Soraon, Pratapgarh, Holagarh, Gonda etc. There is a belief among them that Kalpwas should be considered incomplete without taking Trijata Snan. Trijata Snan is in the name of the demon named Trijata who served Sita ji, the wife of Lord Rama and got his blessings that there would be a bath in the name of Trijata and without doing it, Kalpwas would not be considered completed. Those Kalpwas who go back after taking Trijata Snan, stay in Prayag for more than 40 days. The percentage of those Kalpwas is the lowest i.e. 8% who go back after taking a bath on Mahashivratri, so they stay for about 50 days.

#### **Religiosity of the Kalpwas in Magh Mela**

All the Kalpwas have their own deity (*Kuldevta*) and 70 percent of them have Kuldevta as Laddu Gopal. Even after this, there is a resemblance among all the Kalpwas that during Kalpwas they worship Goddess Ganga and Tulsi in the form of Lord Vishnu. It is found that Kalpwas worship nature as a symbol of God followed by worshipping their Kuldevta. When pilgrims come to

the Mela area, they camp in the form of thatched huts for up to a month. After that they plant Tulsi (Basil) and Jaw (barley) as a symbol of prosperity in front of their thatched hut and worship them daily. Some people also plant Peepal and Banana saplings along with these. Most of the Kalpwasis stay in pavilions of their Religious Gurus. When Kalpwasis start their kalpwas, it is mandatory daily to take a sacred bath in river Ganga, Yamuna or at the Sangam preferably thrice a day. First bath at sunrise, followed by Surya namaskar and offer prayers to Tirtharaj Prayag, Lord Vishnu and chant 108 names of Lord Vishnu. During Magh month, they must keep all their inducements at gulf and exercise control over anger, greed, attraction, jealousy, and all other forms of human accretions. Kalpwasis are compelled to fast, surviving on a single meal a day. This maintains their health and helps them to achieve physical purity. They give alms and offer food grains and till to the needy as charity and it is believed to bring prosperity to the giver. Some believe that the charities they perform in their life will come back to them in their next life. Kalpwasis don't accept any gift offerings during the period of their Kalpwas. They sleep on the ground. They don't consume intoxicants (such as betel and tobacco) during Kalpwas. They don't use oil or soap for cleansing of their body and clothes. They stay within the ranges of the Magh mela during their Kalpwas. They occlude faith in God. They eat only austere food and drink Ganga water. They must take a bath in water mixed with white sesame (*til*). On the special bathing day such as Makar Sankranti, they give away white sesame. At the end of Kalpwas, Kalpwasis took up the Tulsi and Jow plant, which they had planted outside their tents for submission in the waters of river Ganga. Before departing, the Kalpwasis give suitable offerings including food to the pilgrim priest and obtain his blessings. It is believed that those who fulfill the requirements of Kalpwas, earn a passport to *Vaikuntha* - the residence of Lord Vishnu. Many of them spend a month at Magh Mela every year continuously for 12 years. After completion of 12 years of Kalpwas, they perform a ritual called '*shaiyyadaan*' in which they donate beds and all other things that they want to offer.

Kalpwasis who complete twelve consecutive years of Kalpwas are believed to have completed the cycle of Kalpwas. Moreover, they may discontinue kalpwas if they so want, but many of them use to come year after year, after 12 years of Kalpwas. This releases Kalpwasis from further birth and rebirth and brings huge merits for them, however after shaiyyadaan, Kalpwasis must sleep on the floor for the rest of their lives and live without any comfort, in their Sanyas ashram. It is believed that through Kalpwas one becomes able to eliminate one's sins. The first day when they start Kalpwas at Paush Purnima, they eat only '*khichdi*' so that they could be prepared for ascetic life during Kalpwas. When their Kalpwas becomes finish, they eat '*besan ke kadhi pakode*'. Prayagwals Pandas get up the whole responsibility of their Kalpwasis. They have their whole genealogy (records) of names, address, and all information of their Kalpwasis. Every Kalpwasi have their own panda or Tirth Purohit by contacting whom they complete their Kalpwas. When they initiate their Kalpwas, they take a

'*sankalp*' of not leaving this place till whole Magh month and of strictly following the rituals of Kalpwas. Before starting Kalpwas, they shave their beard and moustache and donate it to their Tirthpurohiths and prohibit shaving during the whole Kalpwas. This ritual is known as '*Chhaur*'. All their rituals are completed by these Pandas of ghat so these are called '*Ghatiya Panda*'.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of 'purity' is very essential and in fact central to Hinduism. People often take pilgrimage to gain purity by cleansing themselves of sins committed. The various rituals which are associated with cleansing oneself of sins like snan, daan, etc. take a special meaning during Kalpwas because it is being held as a sacred place during sacred time. By journeying these places and performing the associated rites, pilgrims obtain religious merits which help them in transforming of their life. Sacred is the aspect which separates out a space from other spaces, and it is a break in the otherwise homogeneous space. This sacredness is not chaotic, it is very much there to be seen and experienced for a religious person; the whole cosmos is a real living thing; expressing something that transcends it. At Prayag the confluence of two rivers looks magnificent and the belief that Amrit had fallen there instills mystery and awe, as it seems to be an invisible divine source. The religious person hence wants to be a part of the sacred, to participate in this reality, to be a part of this divine power. For him it is through that they connect to God, as God created it. Kalpwas is a spiritual quest, unifying divinity, and humanity. It develops a two-way relationship between the pilgrim and divine. Thus, it can be said that during Kalpwas, an attempt to be in the divine presence and reintegrating of the mythical time is reactualised by staying at Prayag (a sacred space) during the month of Magh (sacred time). It is precisely the reintegration of this original and sacred time that differentiates one's behavior during the event from his behavior after it. In a gathering like this the sins and faults of the individual and even of the community are believed to vanish or are consumed by fire. It is necessary here to understand that it is the 'original time' or the festival time during which this bathing has significance. Therefore, one of the functions that pilgrimage serves is to understand our cultural heritage allowing a harmonious relationship between man and the sacredness embedded in a place. Cultural landscapes are cultural properties that represent the combined works of nature and man. Through a deep attachment man can transform the materialist entity into a cosmic reality at a place. Homogeneous space is converted into a specific place and acted upon by human action and belief system i.e. interaction between human beings and nature over time it becomes a cultural landscape. Kalpwas made this cultural landscape of Prayag through the act of Kalpwas.

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