

# The City as Text: Journalism, Digital Discourse, and Literature in Prayagraj

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**Abstract:** Prayagraj, one of India's oldest and most culturally layered cities, provides a unique lens for examining the interplay between journalism, digital media, and literature. This paper explores how the city emerges as a "text"—a narrative space shaped by journalistic practices, digital discourse, and literary representation. As a site of political activity and literary tradition, Prayagraj is continually rewritten through the lenses of media and language. Drawing upon case studies and scholarly analysis, the paper highlights the ethical challenges of digital journalism, particularly in reporting sensitive matters, and considers the enduring role of literature in mediating the city's identity. It argues that Prayagraj becomes both a subject and a narrator, a lived and interpreted experience shaped by the ever-evolving media landscape. Historically revered as a centre of spiritual, cultural, and intellectual activity, Prayagraj has witnessed significant transformations in its urban narrative, particularly with the rise of digital journalism and instantaneous media. By examining key events such as the Kumbh Mela's shifting coverage, the publicized criminal incidents like the murders of Umesh Pal and Atique Ahmad, and the widespread ethical discourse on digital platforms, the study highlights how media technologies influence public memory and civic perception. Further, the paper delves into the literary representations of Prayagraj by figures like Harivansh Rai Bachchan, Mahadevi Verma, and Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala,' showcasing how literature has historically preserved and reimagined the city's ethos amidst change. Through an interdisciplinary approach combining media studies, urban cultural theory, and literary analysis, this paper argues that Prayagraj today exists as much in mediated imaginaries as it does in physical geography. Journalism and digital discourse are not merely documenting but actively producing new meanings of the city, while literature anchors Prayagraj's identity in the face of relentless temporal shifts. Ultimately, the paper invites reflection on how cities in the digital age become contested spaces of memory, spectacle, and continuous narrative reconstruction.

**Keywords:** Prayagraj, Digital Journalism, Media Ethics, Urban Discourse, Literature, Kumbh Mela, Digital Media, Crime Reporting.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

To speak of the city as a "text" is to interpret its geography, memory, and public discourse as part of a continuous narrative. The phrase, drawn from urban studies and cultural theory, suggests that cities are more than built environments—they are storied terrains, rich with cultural symbols, historical memory, and discursive practices (Lefebvre 38). Prayagraj, formerly known as Allahabad, is a city that powerfully embodies this textual metaphor. With its mythological significance, its role in India's freedom movement, and its literary contributions, Prayagraj offers fertile ground for analyzing the convergence of journalism, digital discourse, and literary memory.

Journalism and literature are deeply interconnected, often overlapping in their use of narrative, language, and cultural impact. Both forms rely on storytelling—journalism presents true stories grounded in facts, while literature conveys human truths, often through fiction or creative expression. This intersection becomes especially clear in the genre of literary journalism, where factual reporting is combined with literary techniques such as vivid imagery, character development, and emotional depth. Writers like Truman Capote and Joan Didion have famously blurred these boundaries, bringing the richness of literature into journalistic writing. Both fields also share a strong reliance on language; while journalism values clarity and conciseness, it often draws from literary styles—especially in feature writing or opinion columns—to engage and move readers. Moreover, journalism and literature each grapple with truth: journalism seeks objective truth—what happened, when, and how—while literature

delves into subjective truths, exploring the meaning and emotional resonance behind events. Authors like George Orwell exemplify this dual role, using both reportage and fiction to address political and moral realities. In terms of social commentary, both disciplines serve as platforms for resistance, reform, and awareness, giving voice to the marginalized and challenging structures of power. In India, figures like Mulk Raj Anand and Khushwant Singh seamlessly merged journalism and literature to critique caste, inequality, and partition. Ultimately, journalism informs the public, while literature fosters empathy—and together, they help individuals not only understand the world but also connect with the deeper human experiences within it.

### 2. JOURNALISM IN PRAYAGRAJ: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Prayagraj has long been a node in India's journalistic and political landscape. During the nationalist movement, newspapers like *The Leader* served as platforms for anti-colonial resistance and public debate (Natarajan 102). Figures such as Motilal Nehru and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya were active in both politics and journalism, shaping public opinion through print media. The Allahabad High Court, one of India's oldest, along with the University of Allahabad—often referred to as the "Oxford of the East"—made the city a center for legal, educational, and journalistic activity.

This tradition continues today through Hindi-language dailies like *Amar Ujala*, *Dainik Jagran*, and *Hindustan*, as well as the English-language *Times of India* and *Hindustan Times*. Local journalism in Prayagraj is deeply tied to civic issues, religious events like the Kumbh Mela, university protests, and legal affairs. Journalists act not only as informers but also as cultural narrators, documenting the evolving identity of the city.

### 3. DIGITAL JOURNALISM AND THE ETHICS OF REPORTING

In recent years, digital journalism has reshaped the dynamics of reporting in Prayagraj. Social media platforms, YouTube channels, and hyperlocal news websites have become prominent sources of information. While these platforms democratize news production and expand access, they also introduce challenges around misinformation, sensationalism, and the ethics of reporting.

The transformation brought by digital journalism is not just technical but narrative as well. The way Prayagraj is perceived—historically as a city of learning, pilgrimage, and political thought—has been significantly altered through new modes of reporting. Events like the Kumbh Mela, once framed primarily through spiritual and cultural lenses, are now increasingly portrayed in terms of crowd control challenges, sanitation issues, political messaging, and economic impact. Similarly, incidents of crime have come to define new narratives about the city's civic life. The murder of Umesh Pal, captured on CCTV and virally circulated, and the subsequent live television broadcast of Atique Ahmad's killing, set off intense digital debates about governance, criminality, and the rule of law. Media coverage by major outlets such as India Today, NDTV, and ABP News amplified these events, crafting an image of Prayagraj as a city grappling with chaos and lawlessness. The immediacy and emotive charge of digital reporting thus reframe Prayagraj's public image, shaping not just information flows but collective emotional and political reactions as well (Castells 78). In this digital age, the city is continually rewritten through the lens of viral events, real-time updates, and emotional amplification.

### 4. REPORTING ON SENSITIVE AND RELIGIOUS MATTERS

One notable example highlighting the intersection of media, digital discourse, and ethical responsibility occurred during the announcement of the Supreme Court's verdict on the Ayodhya Ram Temple dispute. As the decision, largely favouring the majority community, was awaited and then declared, an extraordinary wave of messages circulated across various WhatsApp groups and social media platforms in Prayagraj and beyond. These messages urged individuals not to celebrate the judgment with outward fervour, out of respect for the sentiments of the minority community. This spontaneous, decentralized appeal reflected a deep ethical awareness and emotional maturity within the digital public sphere. It demonstrated how digital media, often criticized for amplifying polarization, could also serve as a vehicle for fostering restraint, empathy, and social harmony in moments of profound historical and emotional significance.

Prayagraj is a site of intense religious and cultural activity. As the meeting point of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati rivers, the city attracts millions during the Kumbh Mela. Reporting on such gatherings demands ethical sensitivity and journalistic rigor. In the digital space, however, the line

between reportage and spectacle often blurs. Sensational headlines, unverified content, and communal rhetoric risk exacerbating social tensions.

As Robin Jeffrey suggests, the Indian media has often struggled with balancing commercial imperatives and ethical considerations, especially when religion and identity are at stake (Jeffrey 122). In Prayagraj, this dilemma becomes even more pronounced, as religious events are deeply embedded in the city's socio-political fabric. Ethical journalism in such contexts requires a careful navigation between factuality, cultural sensitivity, and public interest.

## **5. LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF PRAYAGRAJ**

Prayagraj's cultural and emotional landscape has been richly chronicled through literature, enhancing its visibility far beyond its geographical confines. Writers such as Harivansh Rai Bachchan, Mahadevi Verma, and Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala' have inscribed the city into the collective literary consciousness, depicting it as a site of both spiritual reflection and socio-political ferment. In *Kya Bhooloon Kya Yaad Karoon*, Bachchan offers intimate portraits of Allahabad's academic and cultural life in the early twentieth century, painting the city as a vibrant center of learning, cultural exchange, and nationalist thought (Bachchan 87). Mahadevi Verma's *Ateet Ke Chalchitra* reveals a city filled with quiet dignity, where forgotten lives, domestic workers, and animals populate the margins yet leave a profound moral imprint on the urban soul (Verma 54). Similarly, Nirala's essays, especially in works like *Chaturi Chamar*, depict the city as a place where caste, poverty, and human dignity collide, exposing the contradictions of an evolving modernity (Nirala 112).

The city's literary visibility is further reinforced through Hindi literary movements such as Chhayavaad and the Progressive Writers' Association, both of which found strong footholds in Prayagraj's academic institutions and literary circles. These movements positioned the city as a crucible for ideological and artistic innovation, with Prayagraj acting as both subject and witness to the debates around nationalism, socialism, and modernity. In contemporary times, Prayagraj continues to feature in memoirs, regional fiction, and journalistic essays, often as a symbol of a vanishing intellectual and moral order, especially as the city undergoes rapid urban, political, and digital transformations.

Literature thus functions not merely as a mirror but as an active agent that shapes how Prayagraj is imagined, remembered, and contested. Through these literary representations, Prayagraj transcends its physicality, becoming a metaphor for a broader Indian experience of transition, struggle, and renewal. The city's presence in literature ensures that even as its material realities change, its ethical, emotional, and intellectual heritage continues to live on in the collective imagination.

## **6. JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE: A SHARED LANGUAGE**

The boundaries between journalism and literature are porous. Both rely on narrative, metaphor, and voice to convey meaning. In Prayagraj, this convergence is especially evident. Literary figures have historically contributed columns and editorials to newspapers, while journalists often employ literary techniques in their reportage. This mutual influence enhances the public discourse around the city, offering layered interpretations of events and identities.

As Keval J. Kumar notes, Indian journalism has often been enriched by writers who understand the nuances of language and cultural context (Kumar 211). The literary heritage of Prayagraj thus infuses its media landscape with a reflective depth, where stories are not only told but interpreted.

## **7. THE DIGITAL CITY: MULTIMODAL NARRATIVES**

In the digital age, the city is no longer interpreted solely through print. A single event—such as a student protest at Allahabad University or a judicial verdict—can be reported in newspapers, debated on Twitter, dramatized on YouTube, and analyzed in blogs. This creates a layered narrative structure, where the city is "read" through multiple modes and perspectives.

The digital discourse shapes not just perception but also policy and public memory. Algorithms, hashtags, and comment threads participate in the production of meaning. As Manuel Castells argues, digital networks are not merely channels of communication but agents of cultural production (Castells 78). For a city like Prayagraj, this means that its identity is constantly evolving—reshaped by each post, headline, or hashtag.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Prayagraj exemplifies the idea of the city as text—an evolving narrative formed at the intersection of journalism, digital discourse, and literary memory. As the media landscape transitions from print to pixel, the city continues to be interpreted, critiqued, and imagined through various forms of language and media. Ethical journalism remains essential in maintaining a balanced and inclusive narrative, especially when reporting on culturally sensitive issues. At the same time, literature provides a slower, more contemplative reading of the city—one that deepens our understanding of its past and present. Together, they shape the way we read Prayagraj—not just as a place, but as a complex, living story.

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