



Social and Cultural Development in Prayagraj City: An Assessment of Social Infrastructure, Cultural Assets, and Urban Vitality

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Abstract

Urban development is an inherently multidimensional process in which social infrastructure and cultural assets serve as foundational determinants of quality of life, social cohesion, and cultural continuity. This research paper examines the social and cultural development of Prayagraj City—one of India's most historically significant urban centres—through a systematic assessment of its social infrastructure and cultural assets. Situated at the sacred Triveni Sangam, Prayagraj holds immense religious, historical, and educational importance. The study evaluates key components including elderly care centres, community centres, religious institutions, major fairs and festivals (Kumbh Mela, Ardh Kumbh, Magh Mela, and other religious events), educational institutions, and health facilities. Methodologically, the research employs a descriptive-analytical approach grounded in secondary data sourced from the Prayagraj Master Plan 2031, Census of India, Prayagraj Municipal Corporation records, and other authoritative planning documents. The findings reveal a spatially uneven distribution of social infrastructure, with central zones relatively better served than peripheral areas. Religious institutions—temples, mosques, churches, and gurudwaras—serve as critical nodes of social interaction and cultural identity. Large-scale cultural events impose considerable pressure on urban infrastructure while simultaneously reinforcing economic vitality and cultural tourism. The study concludes that while Prayagraj possesses a vibrant social and cultural base, achieving inclusive and sustainable urban development requires equitable planning, strengthened public infrastructure, and integrated governance frameworks that align social, cultural, and physical development strategies.

Keywords

Social Infrastructure, Cultural Development, Urban Planning, Prayagraj, Kumbh Mela, Religious Institutions, Social Cohesion, Quality of Life, Spatial Distribution, Inclusive Development



1. Introduction

Urban development is widely recognised as a complex and multidimensional process shaped by the dynamic interaction of economic, social, environmental, technological, and governance-related factors. Rather than being a static or linear phenomenon, urban development continuously evolves in response to changing global, regional, and local contexts, necessitating adaptive planning frameworks and integrated policy approaches. Contemporary urban scholarship increasingly emphasises that understanding urban development requires a holistic perspective—one that accounts not only for structural transformations such as infrastructure expansion and economic growth, but also for lived urban experiences, social relations, and cultural practices.

A significant body of literature highlights the influence of economic and technological dimensions on urban development. Kashef and El-Shafie (2020) conceptualise urban development as a continuous process of assembly, disassembly, and reassembly of urban systems, driven by land-use regulations, public policies, transportation networks, and communication technologies. They argue that technological innovation plays a central role in transforming cities into more livable, productive, and resilient spaces. Similarly, Mischczak and Wrona (2023), examining urban development in the context of the 'new economy,' stress that cities must adopt locally tailored development strategies rather than uniform planning models.

The social and environmental dimensions of urban development have also gained prominence in recent literature, particularly through the lens of quality of life and sustainability. Wesz and Miron (2023) conceptualise urban quality of life as a multidimensional construct encompassing environmental quality, urban design, and residents' perceptions. Their work underscores the importance of integrating environmental sustainability into urban planning to enhance overall well-being. In a similar vein, Keser (2023) argues that sustainable urban development can only be achieved through integrated governance approaches that align social, economic, environmental, and institutional policies.

Within this multidimensional understanding of urban development, social infrastructure has emerged as a critical component in enhancing quality of life and fostering social cohesion. Social infrastructure encompasses physical and social spaces such as community centres, parks, libraries, cultural venues, and public gathering places that facilitate social interaction, trust-building, and collective identity. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that social infrastructure plays a foundational role in strengthening communities, especially in disadvantaged and vulnerable urban areas.

Prayagraj occupies a unique and prominent position in the historical, religious, cultural, and educational landscape of India. Historically known as Prayag, the city has been a centre of civilisation since ancient times. Its location at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati rivers—the



Triveni Sangam—has endowed it with immense religious significance, making it one of the most sacred pilgrimage centres in Hinduism. The city hosts world-renowned religious gatherings such as the Kumbh Mela, Ardh Kumbh, and Magh Mela, which attract millions of pilgrims from across the country and abroad, reinforcing Prayagraj's identity as a global spiritual hub.

Alongside its religious importance, Prayagraj has a rich cultural heritage shaped by its association with the freedom movement, literary traditions, and artistic expressions. Institutions such as Anand Bhawan, Swaraj Bhawan, and the Allahabad Museum reflect the city's historical and cultural legacy. Furthermore, Prayagraj has long been recognised as an important educational centre, with the University of Allahabad—once known as the 'Oxford of the East'—and several other higher educational and research institutions contributing significantly to academic excellence and social transformation.

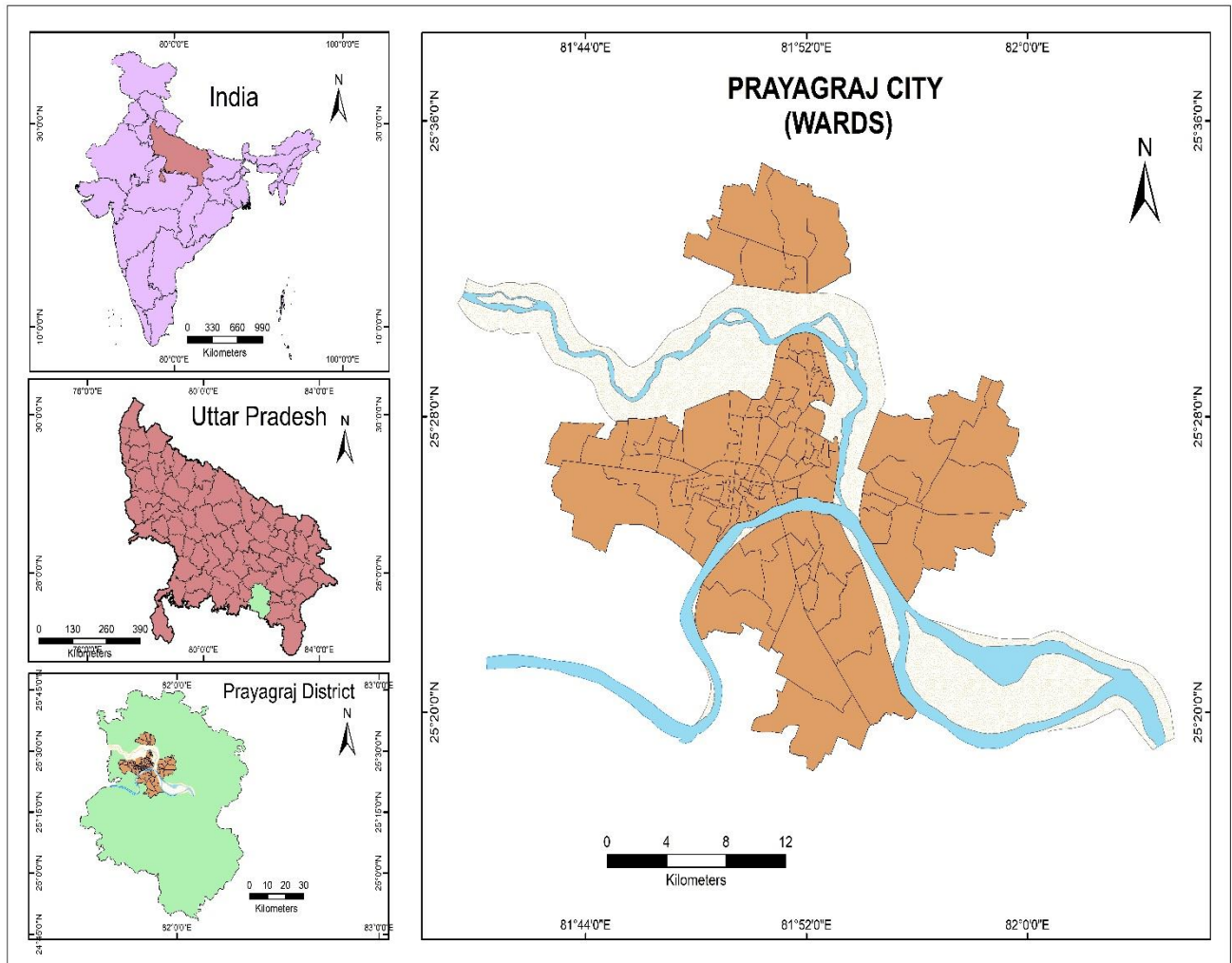
The present paper aims to examine the social and cultural development of Prayagraj City by analysing the key elements and indicators that shape its social life, cultural identity, and community well-being. Specifically, the study focuses on social infrastructure such as elderly care centres, community centres, educational and health facilities, as well as cultural components including religious institutions, fairs and festivals, and heritage sites. It seeks to assess the availability, distribution, accessibility, and functional role of these elements in enhancing quality of life, fostering social cohesion, and sustaining the city's historical and cultural character.

2. Study Area

Prayagraj (formerly Allahabad) is a major urban centre located in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. Situated at the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati rivers—known as the Triveni Sangam—the city occupies a strategically important geographical position in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab region. It lies at approximately 25.43°N latitude and 81.85°E longitude, at an elevation of approximately 98 metres above sea level. The city is bounded by Ganga to the north and east, Yamuna to the south, and extends westward towards fertile alluvial plains.

Prayagraj is one of the largest cities in Uttar Pradesh and functions as the administrative headquarters of the Prayagraj district and division. The city has experienced significant urban growth over the past few decades, with an expanding urban agglomeration that includes areas such as Naini, Phaphamau, Jhunsi, and Bamrauli. According to the Census of India 2011, the population of Prayagraj urban agglomeration was approximately 1.11 million, though current estimates suggest significant growth since then.

Figure 1: Location Map of the Study Area



Source: Prepared by the Authors using ArcGIS based on Survey of India (SOI) Topographical Sheets No. 66G/14 and 66G/15

The urban landscape of Prayagraj is characterised by a historic core developed during Mughal and British colonial periods—including Civil Lines, George Town, and the old city areas—alongside modern residential colonies, industrial zones, and rapidly expanding peripheral areas. The city demonstrates strong socio-spatial differentiation, with older centrally located areas exhibiting dense and well-established social infrastructure, while peripheral zones face deficits in public facilities and services.

As the site of the Kumbh Mela—the world's largest religious gathering—Prayagraj assumes temporary demographic proportions vastly exceeding its permanent population, creating unique challenges and opportunities for urban infrastructure planning, environmental management, and service delivery. This dynamic interplay between its permanent urban character and periodic large-scale religious events defines the distinctive urban development context of Prayagraj City and makes it a highly significant case study for examining social and cultural dimensions of urbanisation in India.



3. Database and Research Methodology

3.1. Database

The present study is primarily based on secondary sources of data to examine the level, structure, and dynamics of social and cultural development in Prayagraj City. A comprehensive database was developed by systematically compiling information from a wide range of authentic and authoritative sources to ensure reliability, relevance, and academic robustness. Key planning documents such as the Prayagraj Master Plan-2031 and the City Development Plan constituted the core sources, as they provide detailed insights into the provision, distribution, and planning framework of social infrastructure and cultural facilities.

Demographic and socio-cultural characteristics of the population were derived from the Census of India, which served as a foundational source for understanding population composition, social diversity, and community structure. In addition, reports and records published by the Prayagraj Municipal Corporation, the Department of Tourism, and other concerned government agencies were utilised to gather information on religious institutions, fairs and festivals, heritage sites, recreational amenities, welfare facilities, and community infrastructure. Data from the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Office, Prayagraj (2024) and the National Health Mission (NHM), Uttar Pradesh Health Facility Registry (2023–24) were used for health infrastructure analysis. The Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA) District Prayagraj Office and District Education Office provided data on educational facilities. Official government portals and documentation related to major cultural events—particularly the Kumbh Mela, Ardh Kumbh, and Magh Mela—were also consulted. Additionally, digital sources including JustDial and Google Maps (2024) were used for mapping elder care centres and community facilities, with spatial visualisation conducted using ArcGIS software.

3.2. Research Methodology

Methodologically, the study adopts a descriptive and analytical research approach to evaluate the key elements and indicators that support social and cultural development in Prayagraj City. The analysis is structured around selected indicators such as elderly care centres, community centres, religious institutions (including temples, mosques, churches, and gurudwaras), major fairs and festivals, educational and cultural institutions, heritage and historical sites, and health facilities.

Secondary data collected from different sources were carefully screened, organised, and classified to ensure consistency and comparability. The evaluation focuses on parameters such as availability, spatial distribution, accessibility, functional role, and cultural significance of social and cultural infrastructure across different parts of the city. Descriptive statistical techniques and tabular



presentations were used to highlight patterns, variations, and disparities in the distribution of social and cultural facilities. Spatial analysis was performed using ArcGIS, enabling the cartographic representation of facility distributions.

The analytical framework emphasises understanding the role of social infrastructure and cultural assets in enhancing quality of life, promoting social cohesion, and sustaining the historical and cultural identity of the city. Comparative assessment was undertaken to identify areas of concentration as well as zones of relative deficiency in social and cultural facilities. Interpretation of the findings was guided by established urban planning principles, social development theories, and concepts of cultural sustainability and inclusiveness.

4. Results and Discussion

The results and discussion section presents a systematic analysis of social and cultural development in Prayagraj City, examining key elements that influence social well-being, cultural identity, and community cohesion. The assessment integrates empirical evidence from secondary data with conceptual insights from urban social and cultural development literature, highlighting both the strengths and challenges of social and cultural development in the city.

4.1. Elderly Care Centres

Elderly care centres are an essential strand of social infrastructure in Prayagraj City, addressing the growing needs of an ageing population and the socio-economic changes that weaken traditional family-based support systems. These facilities range from residential old-age homes and vriddha ashrams to hospice, geriatric outpatient services, and home-nursing agencies. Their core functions include providing safe accommodation, routine medical support, nutritional care, psychosocial activities, day-care services, palliative and hospice care, and opportunities for social engagement.

The city's elderly care provision exhibits three prominent characteristics. First, supply is limited and unevenly distributed—most residential homes and higher-tier geriatric services are clustered in accessible central wards near Civil Lines, Naini, and Daraganj, while peripheral neighbourhoods remain underserved. Second, service diversity varies considerably across institutions. Third, non-residential services including home nursing, attendant agencies, and physiotherapy are increasingly common, reflecting evolving family care preferences. Major facilities include Adharshila Old Age Home, Dhanraj Old Age Home and Vridha Ashram, Ravindranath Gaur Anand Vruddhashram, Prayag Hospice (Palliative and Geriatric Care Centre), and Old Age Home Phaphamau, along with home-nursing agencies such as Medizone Nursing Services and Wellup Home Health Care.



Key gaps include limited residential bed capacity, constrained funding, weak linkages to formal health facilities, awareness and accessibility barriers, and inconsistent quality oversight. Policy implications include systematic mapping and registration of facilities, expanding affordable residential and day-care centres in peripheral wards, and strengthening connections between elder-care homes and municipal health services.

4.2. Community Centres

Community centres represent a crucial component of social infrastructure in Prayagraj City, serving as focal points for neighbourhood interaction, cultural expression, and collective activities. These centres include community halls, multipurpose social centres, and public grounds that accommodate social functions, cultural programmes, festivals, and social ceremonies. In a city characterised by strong historical traditions and cultural diversity, community centres play an essential role in maintaining social cohesion and facilitating civic engagement.

The spatial distribution of community centres in Prayagraj shows marked unevenness. Older and centrally located areas such as Civil Lines, George Town, Katra, Lukarganj, and Daraganj have higher concentrations of community halls, while peripheral areas including Naini, Phaphamau, and Jhunsi have limited access to dedicated community spaces. A total of 17 identifiable community facilities were documented across the city.

Table 1: Community Centres in Prayagraj City (Selected)

S. No.	Name of Community Centre	Location/Area	Type
1	Parade Ground	Prayagraj	Community Centre/Ground
2	K.P. Community Hall	George Town	Community Hall
3	Cantonment Palace Community Hall	Civil Lines	Community Hall
4	KC's Multipurpose Community Hall	Civil Lines	Multipurpose Community Hall
5	Madhur Milan Garden & Community Hall	Katra	Garden & Community Hall
6	R.D. Community Hall	Teliarganj	Community Hall
7	Community Halls (Cluster)	Naini, Phaphamau, Jhunsi,	Community Hall Cluster

Source: Compiled by the researcher from Prayagraj Municipal Corporation records and publicly available local information sources, 2024.



Many community centres in the city are privately managed and primarily used for marriage functions and large social gatherings. Their commercial orientation reduces opportunities for everyday community engagement. Publicly managed and neighbourhood-level community centres demonstrate greater inclusiveness. The findings indicate that community centres significantly contribute to neighbourhood-level social interaction, but their effectiveness is constrained by uneven distribution, limited public ownership, and insufficient integration into urban planning frameworks.

4.3. Fairs and Festivals

Prayagraj City occupies a unique and distinguished position in India's cultural and religious landscape due to its long-standing tradition of fairs and festivals, deeply embedded in Hindu religious beliefs, mythology, and social customs. Throughout the year, Prayagraj hosts numerous religious, cultural, and traditional festivals that attract millions of pilgrims, devotees, and visitors, reinforcing the city's identity as a sacred and cultural centre.

4.3.1. Kumbh Mela

The Kumbh Mela is the most prominent and globally recognised religious fair held in Prayagraj and is regarded as the largest religious gathering in the world. Organised once every twelve years at the Triveni Sangam, the Kumbh Mela holds unparalleled religious importance in Hindu tradition. From an urban perspective, the Kumbh Mela transforms Prayagraj into a vast temporary settlement, with extensive infrastructure including temporary housing, water supply systems, sanitation facilities, healthcare centres, transport networks, and pontoon bridges.

4.3.2. Ardh Kumbh Mela and Magh Mela

The Ardh Kumbh Mela, organised every six years, attracts millions of pilgrims and features similar religious rituals and temporary infrastructure, reinforcing Prayagraj's role as a pilgrimage centre. The Magh Mela, an annual fair held during the Hindu month of Magh at the Triveni Sangam, holds special religious importance associated with auspicious bathing days. A distinctive feature is Kalpavas, a spiritual practice in which devotees reside near the Sangam for the fair's entire duration, following a disciplined lifestyle of prayer, meditation, fasting, and ritual bathing.

4.3.3. Other Religious Festivals

Prayagraj celebrates a rich array of Hindu festivals including Dussehra (symbolising the victory of good over evil, marked by Ramleela performances and effigy burning), Deepawali (the festival of lights, transforming the city into a vibrant cultural landscape), Holi (the festival of colours, promoting communal harmony and social interaction), and Maha Shivratri (celebrated with deep devotion at prominent Shiva temples). The city's pluralistic character is further expressed through solemn Islamic



observances including Muharram—historically observed as a symbol of communal harmony with participation from Hindu community members—and joyous celebrations of Eid-ul-Fitr and Baqreid (Eid-ul-Adha), all reflecting Prayagraj's composite cultural ethos.

Fairs and festivals play a crucial role in shaping Prayagraj's social and cultural identity. They promote social cohesion, preserve religious and cultural traditions, facilitate interaction among diverse social groups, stimulate tourism, and contribute significantly to the local economy. At the same time, the large scale and frequency of these events place considerable pressure on urban infrastructure, necessitating effective planning and sustainable management.

4.4. Religious Institutions

Religious institutions constitute a central element of social and cultural development in Prayagraj City. Situated at the sacred Triveni Sangam, Prayagraj has been revered since ancient times as 'Prayag,' the foremost pilgrimage centre of Hinduism. The city has evolved through multiple historical phases—ancient Hindu traditions, Mughal rule, British colonial administration, and post-independence urban growth—resulting in a rich and pluralistic religious fabric.

The spatial distribution shows a clear pattern influenced by sacred geography and historical settlement. Temples constitute the most numerous category, with highest concentration along the riverfront and in historic core areas. Mosques are primarily concentrated in the old city and densely populated neighbourhoods such as Kareli and Chowk. Churches, important markers of colonial heritage, are mainly located in Civil Lines. The following table highlights major religious institutions:

Table 2: Major Religious Institutions in Prayagraj City

S.N o.	Name of Institution	Category	Location	Significance
1	Bade Hanuman Ji Temple (Lete Hue Hanuman Ji)	Temple	Near Sangam	Unique reclining idol; major pilgrimage site
2	Alopi Devi Temple	Temple	Alopi Bagh	Important Shakti Peeth
3	Patalpuri Temple & Akshayavat	Temple	Allahabad Fort	Ancient sacred site; revered by Hindus, Jains, Buddhists
4	All Saints' Cathedral	Church	Civil Lines	Iconic Gothic-style church; colonial heritage
5	St. Joseph's Cathedral	Church	Central City	Roman Catholic cathedral; Italian architecture
6	Jama Masjid (Great Mosque)	Mosque	Old City	Major congregational mosque; Mughal-era heritage



7	Gurudwara Pakki Sangat	Gurudwara	Triveni Area	Associated with Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji
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Source: Ministry of Tourism, GoI; ASI; UP Tourism Department; Prayagraj Master Plan 2031; District Gazetteer, Prayagraj.

Functionally, religious institutions extend far beyond ritual worship. Temples support daily puja, discourses, and large-scale rituals. Mosques facilitate daily prayers and religious education. Churches conduct charitable outreach and social activities. Gurudwaras emphasise community service through langar. The coexistence of diverse religious institutions within close spatial proximity highlights Prayagraj's tradition of religious tolerance and pluralism, contributing substantially to social harmony.

4.5. Educational Facilities

Education constitutes a foundational pillar of social and cultural development in Prayagraj City. The city has long been recognised as a famous centre of education, attracting students from across India and abroad. The literacy rate of Prayagraj (85%) is significantly higher than the national average (74%), reflecting its strong educational tradition. The educational infrastructure spans from primary schools to prestigious higher education institutions.

The University of Allahabad, established in 1887, is one of the oldest modern universities in India—once popularly known as the 'Oxford of the East.' The Motilal Nehru National Institute of Technology (MNNIT), established in 1961, is a premier national technical institution that achieved the historic distinction of being the first institution in India to start an undergraduate programme in Computer Science and Engineering in 1976–77. Other major institutions include Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture Technology and Sciences, Indian Institute of Information Technology Allahabad (IIIT-A), and Harish-Chandra Research Institute (HRI).

Table 3: Educational Facilities in Prayagraj City

S. No.	Type of Institution	Government	Private
1	Anganwadi	535	—
2	Primary Schools	656	656
3	High School / Inter School	219	893
4	Colleges / Universities	16	27

Source: Basic Shiksha Adhikari (BSA), District Prayagraj; District Education Office, Prayagraj (2023–24). The data reveals a well-developed and diversified educational structure. At the secondary and higher education levels, the private sector plays a much stronger role—893 private high schools compared to 219 government institutions, and 27 private colleges versus 16 government institutions. This pattern



highlights Prayagraj's growing importance as a major educational hub, contributing to human resource development and stimulating the service economy through hostels, coaching centres, transport, and related urban services.

4.6. Health Facilities

The health system of Prayagraj reflects a well-developed multi-tier healthcare structure comprising both general and specialised institutions. The government health service system operates through a three-tier structure consisting of primary, secondary, and tertiary facilities, supervised by the Chief Medical Officer responsible for planning, implementation, and monitoring of all health-related activities.

Table 4: Existing Health Facilities in Prayagraj – General, 2024

S. No.	Unit	No. of Hospitals	No. of Beds
1	CHC (Community Health Centre)	23	610
2	PHC (Primary Health Centre)	64	128
3	UPHC (Urban Primary Health Centre)	23	0
4	30-bed MCH Wing	3	90
5	100-bed Hospital, MauAima	1	100
Total		136	928

Source: CMO Office, Prayagraj, 2024; NHM, UP — Health Facility Registry, 2023–24; Prayagraj Master Plan 2031.

Table 5: Existing Specialised Health Facilities in Prayagraj, 2024

S. No.	Unit	No. of Hospitals	No. of Beds
1	TB Central Hospital	1	226
2	TB Hospital	1	150
3	MLR Hospital	1	156
4	DWH (District Women's Hospital)	1	146
5	SRN Hospital	1	1450
6	Children's Hospital	1	120
7	MDI Hospital	1	150
8	SNSU	1	60



Total	9	2458
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Source: CMO Office, Prayagraj, 2024; NHM, UP — Health Facility Registry, 2023–24; Prayagraj Master Plan 2031.

The district has an extensive network of 136 general healthcare units with 928 beds, including CHCs, PHCs, UPHCs, maternal and child health wings, and district hospitals. At the specialised level, 9 specialised hospitals with 2,458 beds—including SRN Hospital (1,450 beds), TB Central Hospital, District Women's Hospital, and Children's Hospital—highlight the regional significance of Prayagraj as a tertiary healthcare centre. However, health facilities appear markedly insufficient during major religious gatherings when lakhs of temporary pilgrims create sudden pressure on emergency healthcare and disease-control services. Strengthening, modernisation, and temporary expansion of medical infrastructure, particularly in fair zones and major transport corridors, is essential for sustainable urban management.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of social and cultural development in Prayagraj City reveals that these dimensions constitute a fundamental pillar of urban development, significantly influencing quality of life, social cohesion, and cultural continuity. Prayagraj's social and cultural landscape is deeply rooted in its historical evolution, religious significance, and long-standing role as a major educational and cultural centre. The presence of diverse social infrastructure—educational institutions, health facilities, elderly care centres, and community centres—combined with rich cultural assets including religious institutions, fairs, festivals, and heritage sites, collectively shapes the city's unique urban character and identity.

The study finds that educational institutions contribute to human capital formation and economic development, while health facilities ensure the provision of essential medical services across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Community centres and elderly care facilities facilitate social support systems and inclusive participation, particularly for vulnerable groups. However, the availability and distribution of these facilities are not spatially uniform—central areas are better served than peripheral and newly developed zones, highlighting the need for equitable planning and expansion of social infrastructure.

Cultural components—religious institutions, fairs, and festivals—play an equally significant role in shaping Prayagraj's social fabric. Major events like the Kumbh Mela, Ardh Kumbh, and Magh Mela not only reinforce the city's global religious importance but also contribute to economic activity, tourism development, and cultural preservation. At the same time, these large-scale events create substantial pressure on urban infrastructure, necessitating effective management and sustainable planning.



The coexistence of temples, mosques, churches, and gurudwaras within close spatial proximity highlights Prayagraj's tradition of religious tolerance and pluralism. These institutions sustain cultural continuity, promote social cohesion, and reinforce Prayagraj's role as a major religious and cultural centre. Community spaces and cultural events provide platforms for social integration and the strengthening of shared values, contributing to the development of social capital and harmony among diverse population groups.

In conclusion, Prayagraj exhibits a strong and vibrant social and cultural base, which acts as a driving force for its urban development. Nevertheless, challenges such as uneven distribution of facilities, infrastructural pressure during large gatherings, increasing commercialisation of community spaces, and the need for improved governance must be addressed. For achieving inclusive and sustainable urban development, it is essential to integrate social and cultural planning with economic and physical development strategies. Strengthening public infrastructure, ensuring equitable access, promoting community participation, and adopting sustainable management practices will be key to enhancing the social and cultural vitality of Prayagraj City in the future.

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