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Sahapedia
My City
My Heritage
My
Lucknow

Impressum

Title:
My City My Heritage My Lucknow

Publisher:
Sahapedia

Supported by:
InterGlobe Foundation (IGF)

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My City My Heritage My Lucknow

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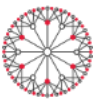


Sahapedia

Foreword

It is with great pleasure that we present to you this compendium of booklets showcasing some of the lesser known and overlooked treasures of select cities in our country. Over the past decade, the InterGlobe Foundation (IGF) has been steadfast in its commitment to preserving and restoring India's cultural and built heritage. Initiatives such as the restoration of Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khanan Tomb in New Delhi and the Qutub Shahi Tombs in Hyderabad have not only rejuvenated these historic sites but have also empowered local craftspeople and communities.

Launched in 2019 in collaboration with Sahapedia, the 'My City My Heritage' project aims to document and celebrate the cultural fabric of Indian cities. With the vision to promote the intangible culture and vibrant heritage of our country, with the support of Sahapedia, the project was launched in 2019 documenting the cultural heritage of India cities. Each city has its own unique story to tell—stories rooted in its monuments, crafts, festivals, and the lived experiences of its people. By documenting these stories, this project not only preserves our cultural fabric but also inspires pride and awareness in local communities and visitors alike. In this new and expanded phase, 'My City My Heritage' continues its journey, extending its scope to include more cities across the country.

As custodians of a shared heritage, we at IGF believe that initiatives like this are crucial for exploring a deeper connection between the communities and the spaces they inhabit. We also hope that in each of the project cities, a group of concerned citizens, institutions and government will come together to carry forward this beautiful curation of their city's history. We hope these booklets will entice you to discover these cities and their treasures and share them with others. We welcome more organizations, individuals and researchers to build on the repository created here.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the team at Sahapedia and my colleagues at the InterGlobe group of companies, as well as the researchers, photographers, and local communities who have contributed to this endeavor.

With best wishes,

Rohini Bhatia

Chairperson,
InterGlobe Foundation

Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this collection of city booklets created under the 'My City My Heritage' initiative, a collaboration between Sahapedia and the InterGlobe Foundation (IGF). These booklets celebrate the rich and layered cultural heritage of Indian cities, bringing to light their stories, unique traditions, and enduring legacies.

At Sahapedia, our journey since 2011 has been defined by a vision—to document and share India's vast and diverse cultural knowledge. Over the past 14 years, Sahapedia has established itself as an open, digital resource dedicated to exploring the histories, arts, and traditions that define our shared heritage. The Sanskrit term '*Saha*,' (together with), embodies the spirit of collaboration that fuels our efforts in documenting local contexts and pluralistic traditions, and creating meaningful engagement with India's cultural legacy.

'My City My Heritage,' launched in 2019, has become an extension of this vision. With the generous support of IGF, this project underscores the role of cities as living repositories of history and culture. Beyond research and documentation resulting into City Booklets, the project engages communities, scholars, and enthusiasts in celebrating their cities' unique identities. Initiatives like heritage walks and *Anubhutis*—Sahapedia's initiative for children with disabilities and marginalized groups—have redefined heritage engagement.

Each booklet reflects research, thoughtful curation, and a commitment to accessible heritage. This endeavor owes its success to the unwavering support of IGF and the contributions of researchers, photographers, local communities, and Sahapedia's team.

It is my hope that these booklets will not only serve as resources for exploration and education but also foster a sense of responsibility for our cultural legacy. I invite you to dive into the stories within and to share in the joy of our collective heritage.

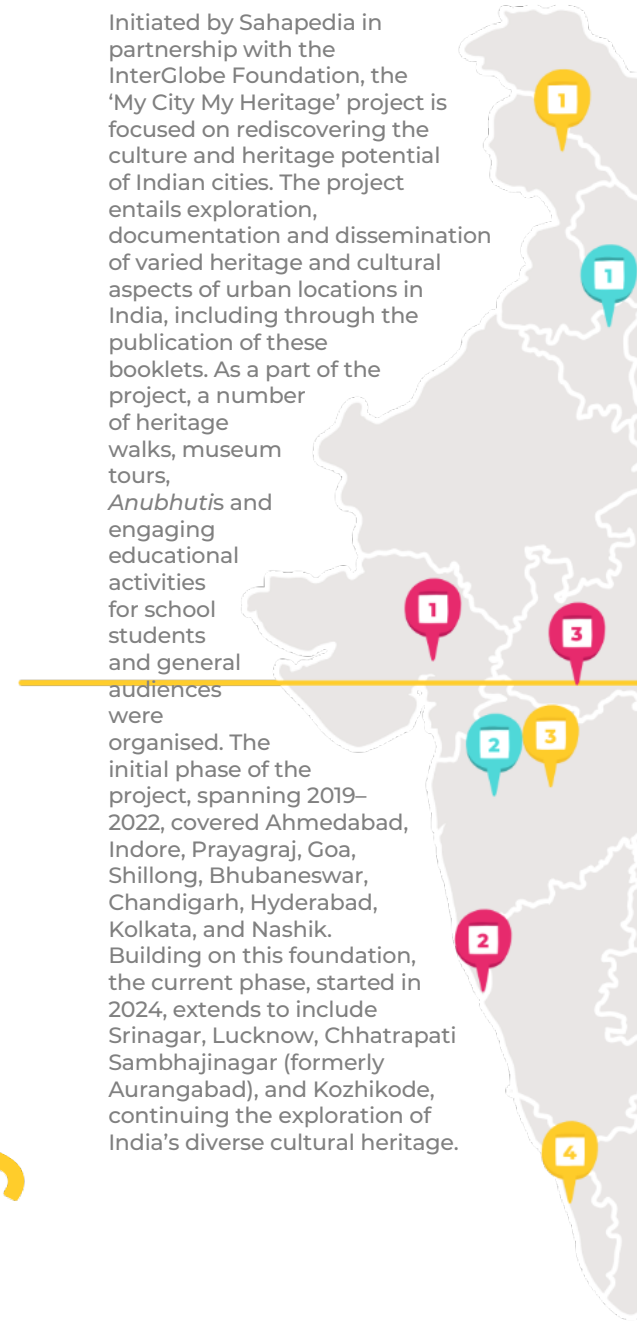
With warm regards,

Sudha Gopalakrishnan

Executive Director,
Sahapedia

My City My Heritage My Lucknow

Initiated by Sahapedia in partnership with the InterGlobe Foundation, the 'My City My Heritage' project is focused on rediscovering the culture and heritage potential of Indian cities. The project entails exploration, documentation and dissemination of varied heritage and cultural aspects of urban locations in India, including through the publication of these booklets. As a part of the project, a number of heritage walks, museum tours, *Anubhuti*s and engaging educational activities for school students and general audiences were organised. The initial phase of the project, spanning 2019–2022, covered Ahmedabad, Indore, Prayagraj, Goa, Shillong, Bhubaneswar, Chandigarh, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Nashik. Building on this foundation, the current phase, started in 2024, extends to include Srinagar, Lucknow, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (formerly Aurangabad), and Kozhikode, continuing the exploration of India's diverse cultural heritage.



More about the project

The ‘My City My Heritage’ project caters to a wide user group, including but not limited to children with disabilities and from financially and socially marginalised backgrounds, culture enthusiasts, scholars, heritage professionals and tourists. The project aims at creating opportunities, building interest and capacity of young local scholars through collaborative research, documentation and mapping.

An equally important and compelling goal is to create fresh avenues for residents, local administration and local businesses to re-engage with their cities’ living cultural heritage and renew old as well as create new relationships of participation, community and ownership within these places. This booklet is a small step in that direction. More detailed versions of all pieces covered in this editorial and more information **about each city can be found on our website.** Scan the QR code to visit our portal and get access to our entire encyclopaedia.

Phase 1
Ahmedabad, Goa, Indore, Prayagraj, Shillong

Phase 2
Chandigarh, Nashik, Hyderabad, Bhubaneswar, Kolkata

Phase 3
Srinagar, Lucknow, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, Kozhikode (more to come)

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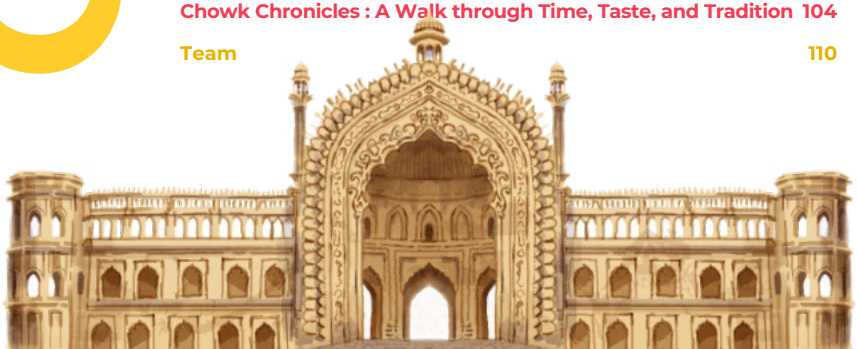


Essays

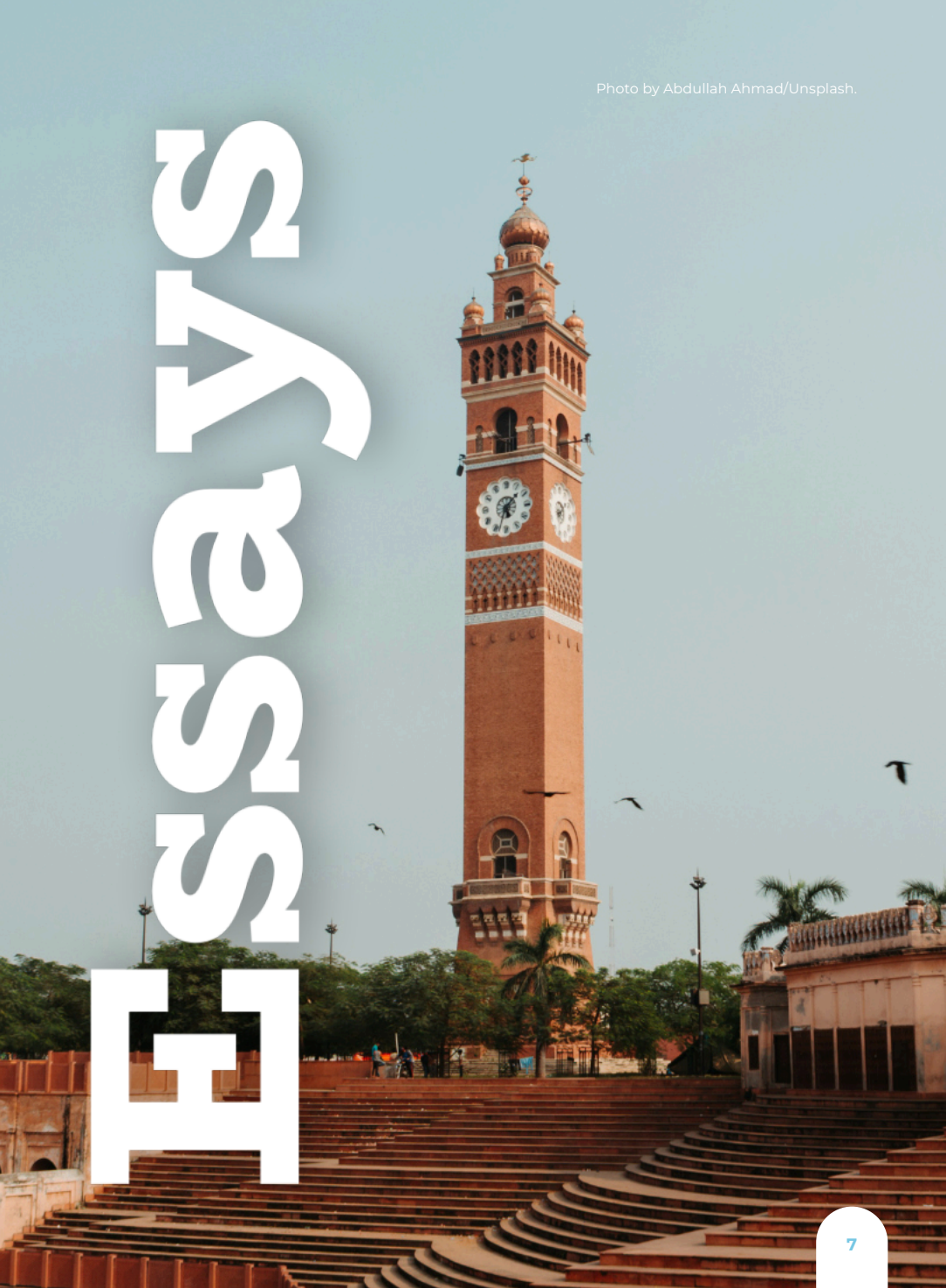


Photo by Abdullah Ahmad/Unsplash.

Introductory Note

The city of Lucknow, now the capital of Uttar Pradesh, emerged as a significant cultural centre during the eighteenth century under the Nawabs of Awadh, who shaped its identity as a beacon of sophisticated culture, elegant living and syncretic traditions that bridged different communities.

The annexation of Awadh by the British in 1856 marked the beginning of colonial rule, introducing European architectural and administrative influences that reshaped the city's landscape and character. Established as a municipality in 1858, Lucknow became a city corporation in 1960. Today, it is a major urban centre, witnessing growth in education, technology and commerce—while preserving its historical and cultural soul. The city's development can be traced through distinct historical periods, each contributing unique and lasting influences.

With its *tehzeeb* (etiquette), *taḥqiq* (inquiry), and *taliq* (expression), Lucknow continues to enchant—through its architecture, literature, cuisine, and syncretic spirit.

> **"Lucknow hum par fida, hum fida-e-Lucknow, Kya hai taqat humein chhoṛ kar chal diye."**
>
> *— Mir Taqi Mir*

The essay *Dastan-e-Awadh* traces the city's historical journey, while *Nawabi Legacy of Splendour and Culture* explores the influences of the Nawabs and the courtly traditions that defined the city's identity for generations. *Parikhana of Akhtarpiya* delves into the artistic

A Procession of Ghazi ud-Din Haider through Lucknow.
Picture Credits: Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

inclinations of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah and the unique cultural space of the Parikhana.

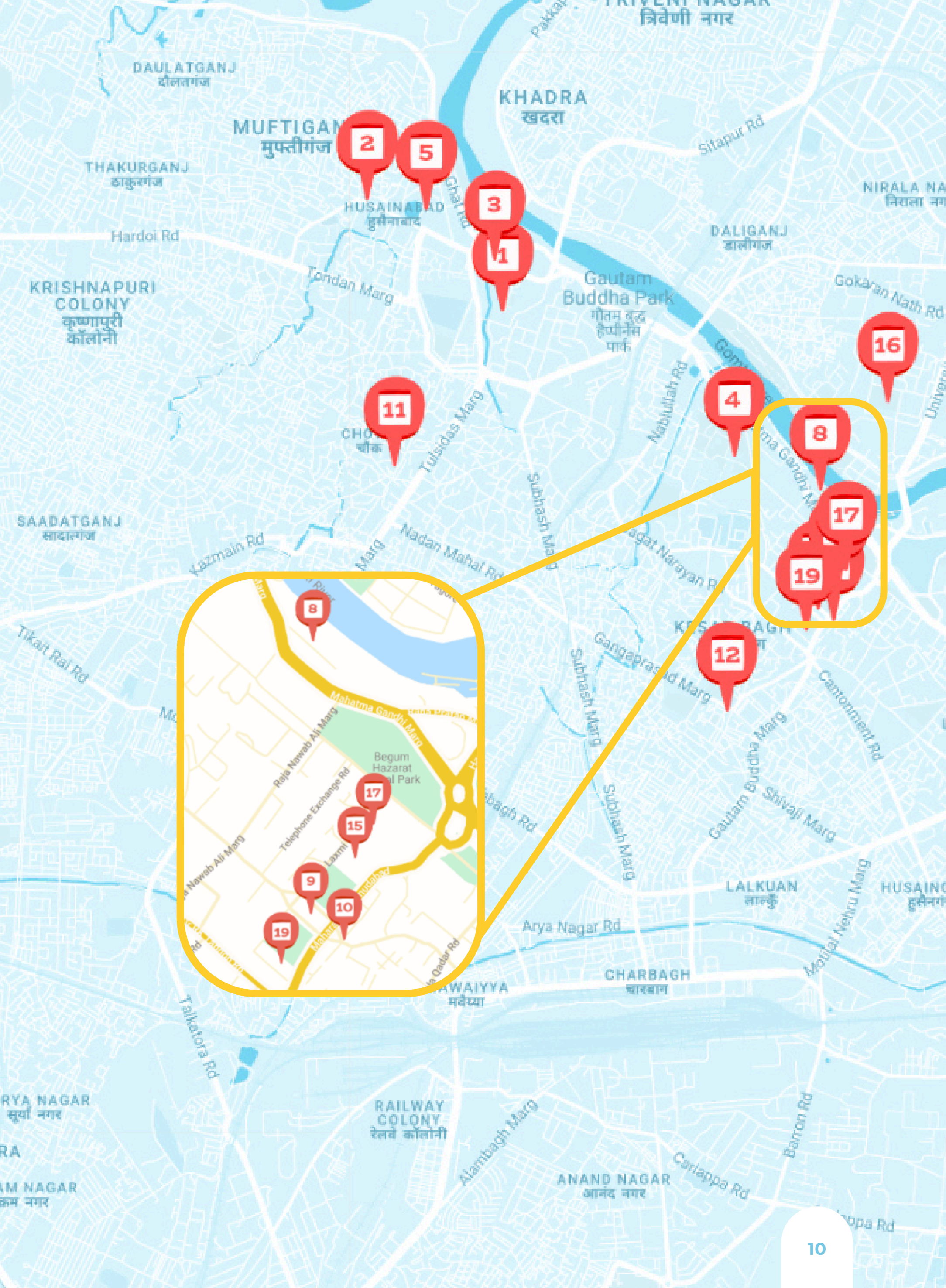
An Architectural Legacy of Cultural Fusion and *The Many Lives of Lucknow's Houses* examine the city's evolving built landscape, reflecting its architectural expressions and vernacular styles. P*oetic Echoes of Lucknow* reveals a city where Urdu poetry thrived—from the *ghazal*'s embrace and courtesans' artistry to *mushairas* resounding through elite gatherings. *Lakhnowi Zabaan* turns the lens to its lyrical *lahja*, a language steeped in gentility and wit.

Nominated as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy in 2025, Lucknow's culinary heritage is celebrated in *From Kebab to Korma and Beyond*, which explores its refined palate and long-standing food traditions. *Pulse of the City* captures the energy of its vibrant bazaars and mercantile rhythms.

Hidden Gems around Lucknow uncovers the cultural richness of nearby *qasbah*s that echo the legacies of Awadh. From *Royal Courts to Modern Runways* showcases the exquisite embroidery traditions that have flourished and adapted over time. The city's timeless cinematic allure comes alive in *Lucknow in Celluloid Reverie*.

Finally, *Sip, Savour and Soak in the Essence of Lucknow* invites readers to discover its *chai* rituals, iconic eateries and leisurely rhythms—reminding us that Lucknow is not just a city; it is an experience.

Sham-e-Awadh awaits you.


त्रिवेणी नगर
DAULATGANJ
दौलतगंज
KHADRA
खदरा
MUFTIGAN
मुफ्तीगंज
THAKURGANJ
ठाकुरगंज
HUSAINABAD
हुसैनाबाद
Sitapur Rd
NIRALA NA
DALIGANJ
डालीगंज
Hardoi Rd
Tondan Marg
Gautam Buddha Park
गौतम बुद्ध हैप्पीनेस पार्क
Gokaran Nath Rd
KRISHNAPURI COLONY
कृष्णापुरी कॉलोनी
Nabiullah Rd
Tulsidas Marg
Subhash Marg
SAADATGANJ
सादातगंज
Kazmain Rd
Nadan Mahal Rd
Tikait Rai Rd
Gangaprasad Marg
Cantonment Rd
Gautam Buddha Marg
Shivaji Marg
LALKUAN
लालकुँ
Motilal Nehru Marg
Arya Nagar Rd
CHARBAGH
चारबाग
Talkatora Rd
RAILWAY COLONY
रेलवे कॉलोनी
Alambagh Marg
ANAND NAGAR
आनंद नगर
Cariappa Rd
Barron Rd
Begum Hazarat Mahal Park
Mahatma Gandhi Marg
Raja Nawab Ali Marg
Telephone Exchange Rd
Laxmi
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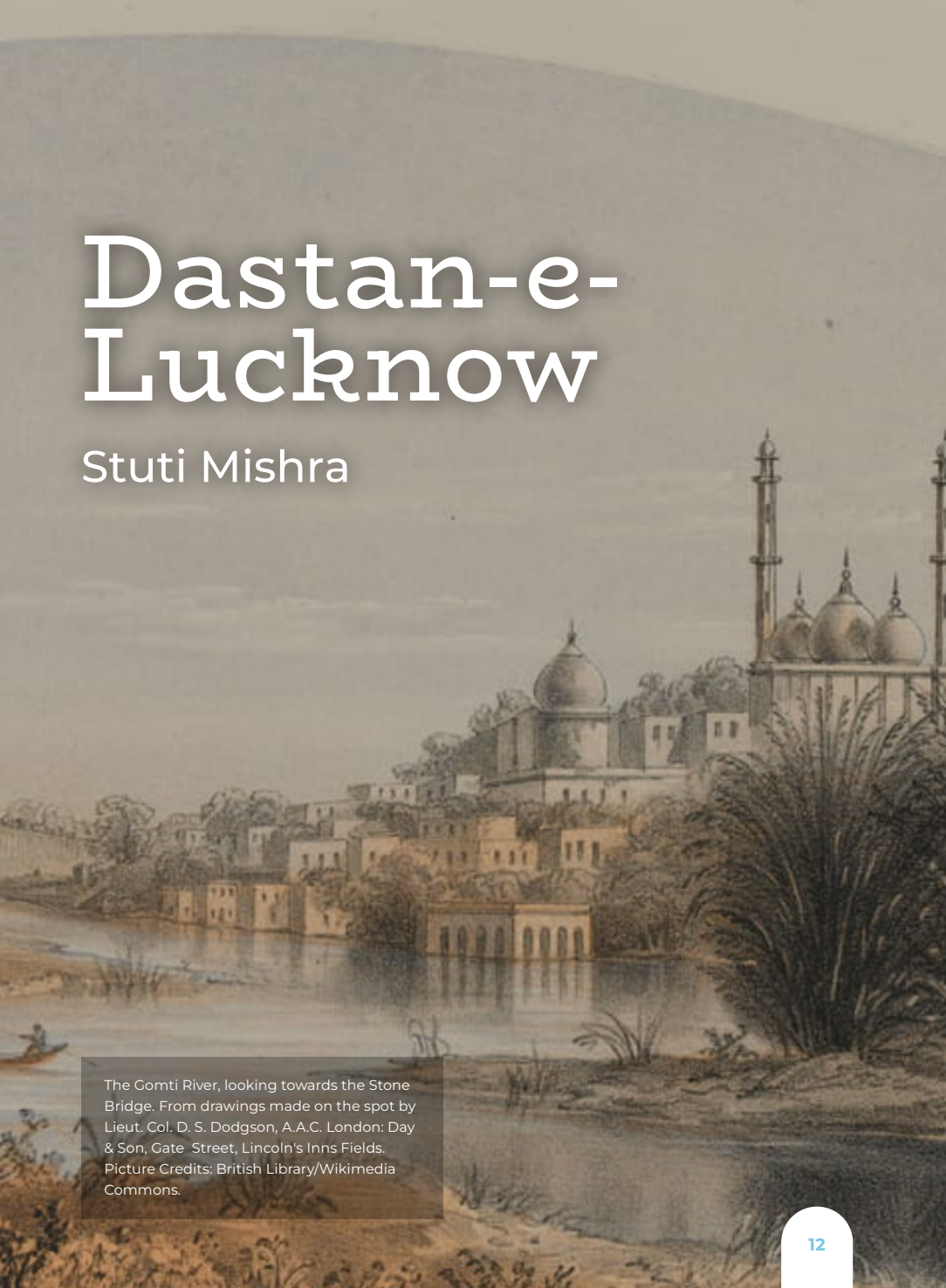
1. Bara Imambara
2. Chota Imambara
3. Rumi Darwaza
4. Residency Complex
5. Hussainabad Clock Tower
6. Shah Najaf Imambara
7. La Martiniere College
8. Chattar Manzil
9. Safed Baradari
10. Lakhi Darwaza, Qaisarbagh
11. Akbari Gate, Chowk
12. Aminabad Market
13. Hazratganj
14. State Museum and Zoo
15. Bhatkhande Music Institute
16. Lucknow University (Old Campus)
17. Saadat Khan Maqbara (Maqbara of Khurshid Zadi)
18. St. Joseph's Cathedral
19. Amir-ud-Daula Public Library
20. Dilkusha Kothi

Dastan-e-Lucknow

Stuti Mishra



The Gomti River, looking towards the Stone Bridge. From drawings made on the spot by Lieut. Col. D. S. Dodgson, A.A.C. London: Day & Son, Gate Street, Lincoln's Inns Fields. Picture Credits: British Library/Wikimedia Commons.

Chattar Manzil from the Gomti River, 1895. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

The story of Lucknow is equally rooted in myth and legends as it is shaped by centuries of political shifts and cultural evolution. Nestled on the banks of the Gomti River, the city's origins, and its name, is often linked with the epic *Ramayana*, where it is recorded to have been founded by Lakshmana, the devoted brother of Rama, and named Lakshmanapuri. Over time, this name evolved into Lakhanpur, Lachhmanpur and, finally, Lucknow.

Early Settlements

Historically, Lucknow was part of the larger Kosala region, one of the 16 famed *mahajanapadas* (sixth century BCE) known for its spiritual and intellectual pursuits. The city's location along the fertile plains of the Gomti not only sustained agriculture but also facilitated trade, enabling continuous human settlement. Archaeological excavations at the Hulaskhera mound, near Karela Lake in Mohanlalganj tehsil, reveal traces of habitation from c. 1000 BCE to the Sunga-Kushan period (second–third century CE), with discoveries of terracotta figurines, shell beads and structured dwellings pointing to a thriving society at that time.

Early Vedic texts, including the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, describe settlements within Kosala, while Buddhist scriptures such as the *Anguttara Nikaya* and the Jataka Tales mention nearby Shravasti, reinforcing Lucknow's significance within the region's ancient urban network. Greek ambassador Megasthenes described fortified cities in the region, aligning with the excavated brick fort at Hulaskhera, which may have served as an administrative centre.

> During the Mauryan period (c. 321–185 BCE), Kosala was absorbed into Ashoka's empire, and later, under the Kushan rulers, it flourished as an economic and religious hub, with trade links extending to Central Asia.

Archaeological evidence, such as Kushan-era silver coins, gold-coated

glass beads and a Kartikeya gold plaque, now housed in the Mathura Museum, suggest active external trade and religious diversity.

During Medieval Times

While human settlement in the region is well documented, Lucknow's recorded history emerges in the fourteenth century, when it became part of the Delhi Sultanate. Sultan Iltutmish granted the *aqta* (land assignment) of Kasmandi and Mandiaon to Malik Tajuddin Sanja, also known as Tabar Khan, integrating Lucknow into the Sultanate's administration. The first written reference to a name resembling 'Lucknow' appears as 'Alakhnau', recorded alongside Awadh and Zafrabad, during Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq's reign (1325–51 CE). The Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta, visiting the region between 1338–141, noted the region's agricultural wealth, particularly its role in supplying grain to Delhi during a severe famine.

By 1394, Lucknow came under the influence of Khwaja-e-Jahan, the founder of Sharqi dynasty of Jaunpur, before Sultan Bahlul Lodi (r. 1451–89) annexed it and assigned it to his grandson Azam Humayun. During this period, Lucknow's landscape reflected a cultural blend that would go on to define its character for centuries. Mohsin Kakorvi's verse metaphorically captures this confluence:

> **"Simt-e-Kaashi Se Chala Jaanib-e-Mathura Baadal**
>
> From Kashi to Mathura, the clouds move,
> The breeze carries Ganga water on lightning's shoulders.

With Babur's victory at Panipat (1526), Lucknow came under Mughal rule. Though Babur's son Humayun briefly lost control to Afghan rebels, he reclaimed his territories in 1528. The *Baburnama* describes Humayun's crossing of the Gomti en route to Faizabad, noting the region's pleasant climate and flavourful rice. Following Humayun's defeat, under Sher Shah Suri (r. 1539–45), the region's governance was entrusted to Isa Khan and Qadir Shah, who established a silver and copper mint, elevating Lucknow's economic standing.

During Akbar's reign (1556–1605), Lucknow became a vital administrative centre, the headquarters of a *sarkar* in the *suba* of Awadh. The earliest known Mughal governor of Lucknow was Husain Khan, followed by Jawahar Khan, who served as *subedar* of Awadh. His deputy, Qasim Mahmud of Bilgram, played a key role in developing Shahgunj, Mahmud Nagar and Akbari Darwaza, the latter still standing in Chowk today. Abdur Rahim Bijnori, a prominent noble at Akbar's court, was entrusted with constructing Machchhi Bhavan and Panch Mahal in Lucknow. Abul Fazl's *Akbarnama* also highlights Lucknow's increasing prominence due to its favourable climate and fertile lands.

Subsequently, Emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627), who had previously visited Lucknow during Akbar's reign, expanded the city by establishing

Qaisar Pasand Palace, 1860s. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

Mirza Mandi west of Machchhi Bhavan.

> The accounts of European traveller De-Laet dating to this period describe Lucknow as a thriving trade hub, referring to it as a 'Magnum Emporium'.

Under Shah Jahan (r. 1627–58), Awadh's governorship was entrusted to Sultan Ali Shah Quli Khan, whose sons established Fazil Nagar and Mansur Nagar near Akbari Darwaza.

The Arrival of Nawabs

As Mughal authority waned, the Nawabs of Awadh rose to prominence. In 1722, Saadat Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk was appointed as the first Nawab of Awadh, establishing an autonomous dynasty. His successors, Safdar Jang and Shuja-ud-Daula, consolidated Awadh's independence, with the latter playing a decisive role in the Battle of Buxar (1764). However, his defeat at the hands of the British East India Company led to the Treaty of Allahabad (1765), making Awadh a British buffer state.

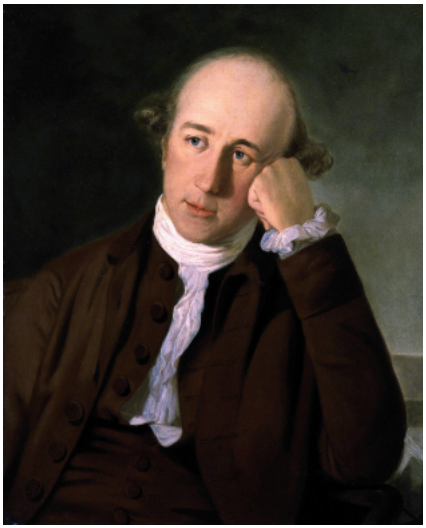
It was Asaf-ud-Daula (r. 1775–97) who truly reshaped Lucknow's destiny, shifting the capital from Faizabad to Lucknow in 1775. Under his rule, the city witnessed an architectural and cultural renaissance, which saw the construction of Bara Imambara, Rumi Darwaza and Asafi Mosque.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this era was the city's vibrant social life. Mir Taqi Mir, the legendary poet, wrote of the grandeur of Lucknow's courtyards, while European travellers marvelled at its bustling bazaars, where silk merchants, calligraphers and perfumers thrived. The *kothas*

(courtesan houses) were not just centres of entertainment but also hubs of refined poetry, dance and etiquette.

British Control and the Revolt of 1857

In 1798, the British installed Saadat Ali Khan II (r. 1798–1814) on the throne of Awadh, ensuring a ruler aligned with their interests. His reign saw the construction of Dilkusha Kothi, Hayat Baksh Kothi, Farhat Baksh Kothi and Chattar Manzil. By the early nineteenth century, British influence deepened—Warren Hastings had stationed a Resident in Lucknow as early as 1773, and by the reign of Ghazi-ud-Din Haider (r. 1814–27), Awadh had become a nominally independent kingdom under British dominance. Despite this control, Nawabs like Ghazi-ud-Din Haider, Nasir-ud-Din Haider (r. 1827–37) and



Portrait of Warren Hastings (1732–1818) by Tilly Kettle, 1772. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

Muhammad Ali Shah (r. 1837–42) continued Lucknow's artistic and architectural patronage, commissioning landmarks like Shah Najaf Imambara, the Tomb of Saadat Ali Khan, Tarbiyat Kothi, Hussainabad Darwaza, Chhota Imambara, Satkhanda and Husainabad Clock Tower.

In 1847, Wajid Ali Shah (r. 1847–56), the last Nawab, ascended the throne. More inclined towards the arts than

The Breach in Sekundra Bagh, Lucknow, photograpghed by Felice Beato. Picture Credits: Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

politics, his reign saw the construction of Qaisarbagh palace complex, a symbol of Lucknow's opulence. However, British dissatisfaction with Awadh's administration gave Lord Dalhousie the pretext to annex the kingdom in 1856, citing 'misgovernance'. Wajid Ali Shah was exiled to Matia Burj near Kolkata.

> In 1857, Lucknow became a major battleground during the First War of Independence. Begum Hazrat Mahal led the rebels in a valiant attempt to reclaim the city.

The Siege of the Residency (July–November 1857) saw British forces besieged for 87 days before reinforcements arrived. Despite fierce resistance, the British

recaptured Lucknow in 1858, forcing Begum Hazrat Mahal to flee to Nepal, where she continued her resistance in exile.

Colonial Retaliation and Cultural Resilience

After crushing the Revolt of 1857, the British demolished several Nawabi estates, replacing them with colonial structures to establish dominance.

Tomb of Begum Hazrat Mahal in Kathmandu, Nepal. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

Buildings like St. Joseph's Cathedral (1860s), Christ Church (1860s), Butler Palace (1920), General Post Office (GPO) (1929) and the Vidhan Sabha (1922–28) were constructed, while structures such as La Martiniere College and Chattar Manzil were repurposed for British use.

> Despite this, Lucknow remained a hub of cultural excellence, preserving its Urdu poetry traditions, including *marsia* (mourning poetry), *rekhti* (women's poetry) and *ghazal*.

Lucknow in the Freedom Movement

In the early twentieth century, Lucknow played a crucial role in India's freedom struggle. The Lucknow Pact (1916) marked a

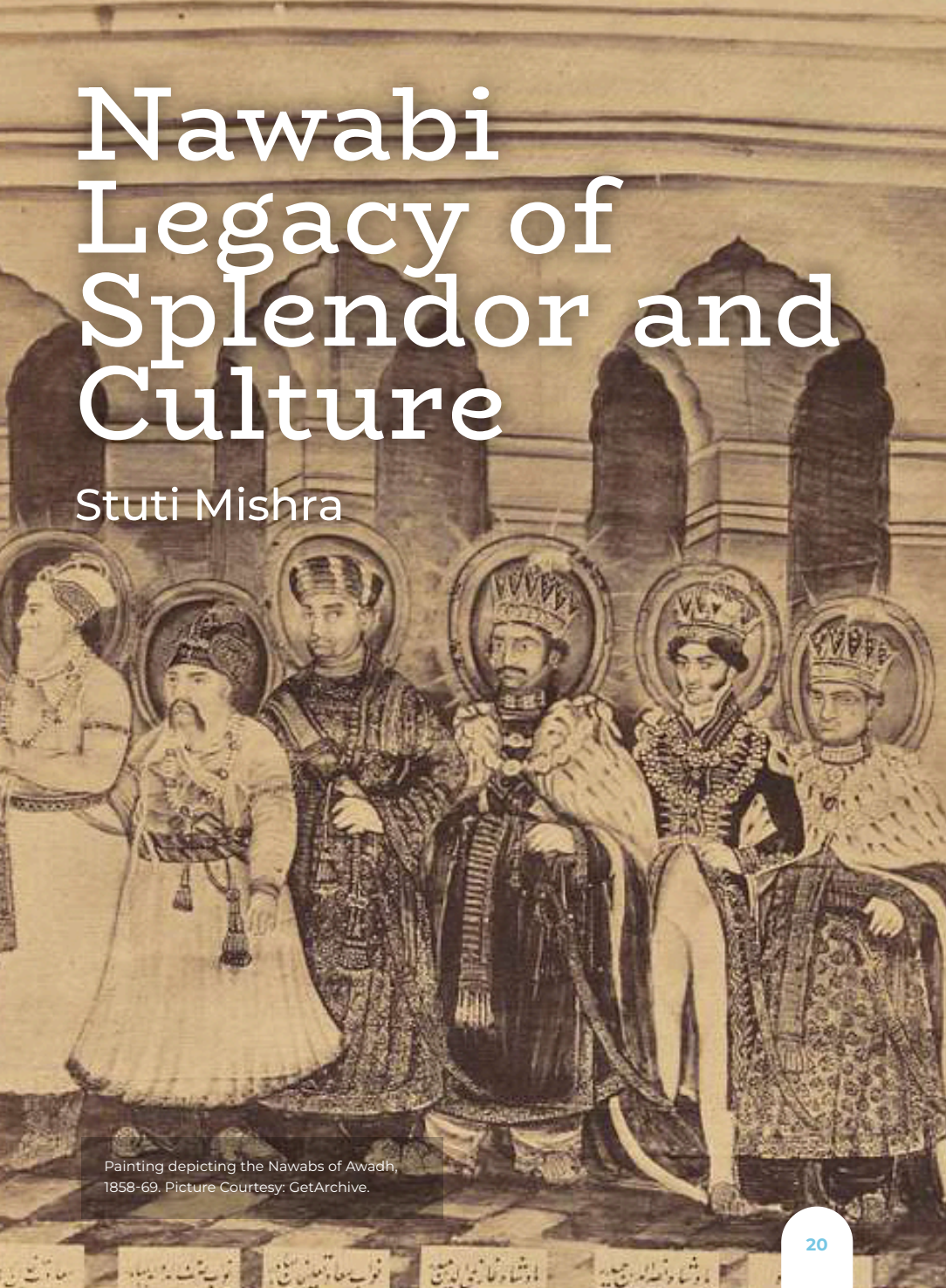
historic moment of Hindu-Muslim unity, while leaders like Abul Kalam Azad and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai emerged as key figures in the movement. During the Quit India Movement (1942), the city became a centre of protests, with students and activists leading demonstrations against British rule. By 1947, as India gained independence, Lucknow emerged transformed—its legacy of resistance deeply intertwined with its rich cultural heritage.

St. Joseph's Cathedral. Photo by Monis Khan.

La Martinière College. Photo by Monis Khan.

Nawabi Legacy of Splendor and Culture

Stuti Mishra



Painting depicting the Nawabs of Awadh, 1858-69. Picture Courtesy: GetArchive.

Lucknow, a city of monumental cultural legacy, owes much of its vibrant heritage to the Nawabs of Awadh or Oudh. While the Mughals laid its foundations, the Nawabs elevated Lucknow to unmatched grandeur. The Nawabi era began in 1722 with Saadat Khan, who established Awadh as a semi-autonomous province under the Mughal Empire. Over time, his successors shaped Lucknow's unique identity, with a few standing out for their exceptional contributions.

> In 1811, Ghazi-ud-Din Haider declared independence and assumed the title of king, yet the term 'Nawab', derived from the Arabic *naib* (deputy), remained synonymous with Awadh's rulers.

The Nawab Who Built to Feed

Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula (1748–97), the fourth Nawab of Awadh, is remembered as the visionary who transformed Lucknow into a city of architectural magnificence while earning the love of his people through acts of generosity.

During the devastating famine of 1784, Asaf-ud-Daula initiated the construction of the Bara Imambara, a project that transcended mere charity. Rather than dispensing aid, he provided dignified employment to thousands, from common labourers to noblemen. Beyond his humanitarian intentions, Asaf-ud-Daula's role as a patron of architectural splendour is evident in the massive vaulted hall and the enigmatic Bhool Bhulaiyaa (maze) of the Bara Imambara.

Portrait of Asaf-ud-Daula, Nawab of Awadh (r. 1775–1797), 1780. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

Under Asaf-ud-Daula's patronage, Lucknow blossomed into a cultural epicentre. He attracted poets, musicians and artists from across the subcontinent, especially those migrating from Delhi due to political upheavals.

The Poet-King of Elegance

The last Nawab of Awadh, Wajid Ali Shah (1822–87), was an enigmatic figure whose reign, though marred by political turmoil, is remembered for its profound cultural and artistic contributions. While history often judges him for the annexation of Awadh by the British in 1856, his true

Qaisarbagh complex captured by Felice Beato after the destruction during the siege of Lucknow, 1858. Picture Courtesy: GetArchive.

legacy lies in his artistic soul.

Wajid Ali Shah was both a patron and practitioner of the arts. Trained in music by Tansen's descendants and in *kathak* by Thakur Prasadji and Bindadin Maharaj, he infused the dance form with theatrical elements, shaping the Lucknow *gharana*. His Raas Leela performances reflected his devotion to Krishna, while his influence on *thumri* music endures.

Writing as 'Qaisar' and 'Akhtarpiya', he composed poetry and songs, including the iconic composition '*Babul Mora Naihar Chhooto Hi Jaye*'. His extensive literary works, including *Ishqnama*, offer deep insights into nineteenth-century

Lucknow's cultural landscape.

The Nawab's aesthetic sensibilities extended to architecture as well. Designed to emulate paradise on earth, the Qaisarbagh Palace complex featured fountains, gardens and the famed Parikhana (Palace of Fairies), which housed his consorts and female performers. Despite its partial destruction after the Revolt of 1857, it remains a testament to his aesthetic sensibilities.

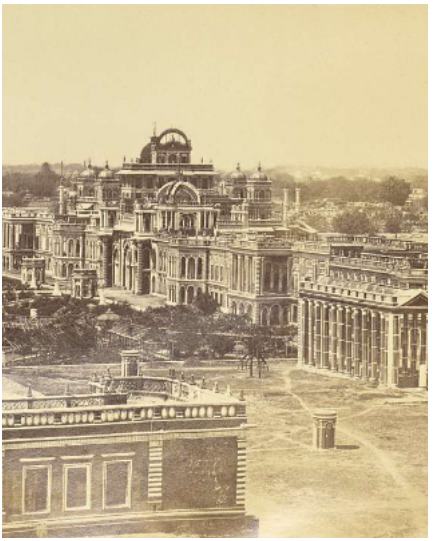
His exile in 1856 deeply affected the people of Awadh, sparking widespread mourning. For days, the streets of Lucknow resonated with cries of grief, and poets penned poignant lamentations in his memory.

Bara Imambara. Photo by Monis Khan.

A Glimpse of Nawabi Splendour

The legacies of Asaf-ud-Daula and Wajid Ali Shah offer us a window into the opulent lifestyle of the Nawabs, where beauty and grandeur were integral to daily life. Imagine, during Wajid Ali Shah's reign, strolling through Lucknow's lanes at dusk—the air infused with rose water, *ittar*-lit lamps casting a golden glow—a vision of royal processions for every citizen. Even the most ordinary objects bore the imprint of refinement—fly whisks inlaid with rubies, carpets woven with threads of gold and garments embroidered with real silver.

The Nawabs' penchant for extravagance extended to their royal kitchens, where culinary artistry reached unprecedented heights.



View of Qaiser Pasand Palace in the Qaisarbagh complex, 1863-1887. Picture Courtesy: GetArchive.

Wajid Ali Shah's chefs perfected the *dum-pukht* technique, which involved slow-cooking dishes within sealed pots to lock in flavours. The result? Fragrant biryanis enriched with Persian saffron and garnished with edible gold and silver foils.

Then there were the grand processions. On auspicious occasions, Wajid Ali Shah would ride through Lucknow, seated regally atop an elephant adorned with a gold-plated howdah. The elephant itself would be draped in fabrics embroidered with shimmering *zari* threads. But perhaps the most romantic tale of excess comes from a moonlit garden in Qaisarbagh.

> On one magical night, Wajid Ali Shah, intoxicated by the beauty of his surroundings, ordered pearls to be scattered across the lawns. The silver glow of the moon kissed each pearl, turning the garden into a celestial dreamscape.

The Begums

Bahu Begum (1727–1815), the wife of Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula, was one of the most powerful women in Awadh's history. After her husband's death, she amassed immense wealth, controlled vast *jagirs*, and exercised significant influence in court politics. Even the British acknowledged her financial and political acumen, referring to her as 'the wealthiest woman of her time'. She commissioned the grand Bahu Begum ka Maqbara in Faizabad, where she was eventually laid to rest.

Tomb of Bahu Begum in Faizabad. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

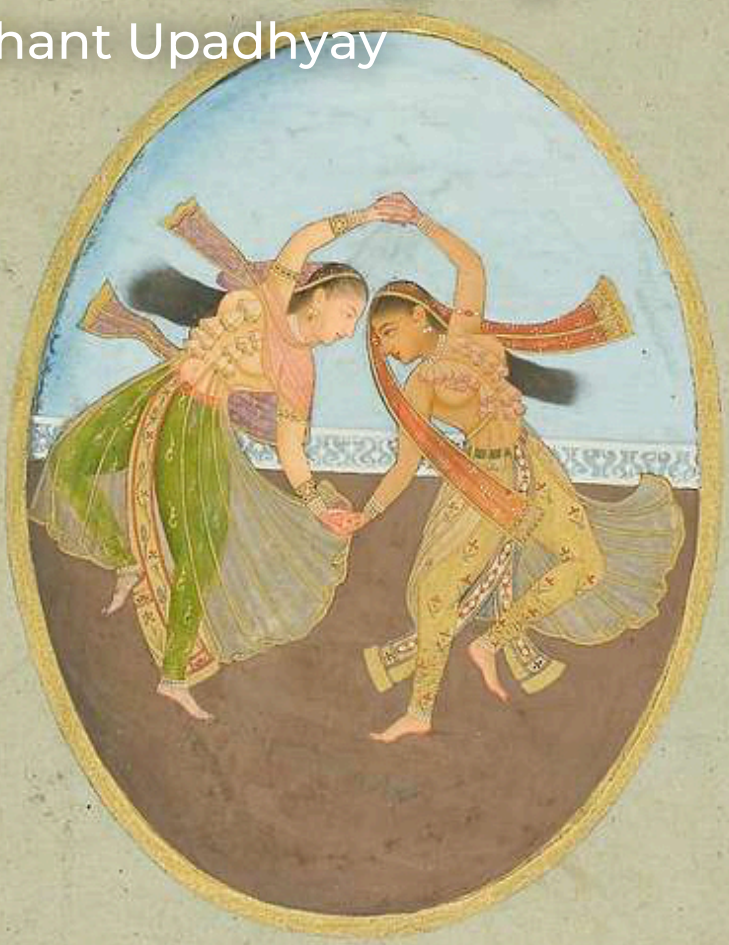
> Another influential royal woman was Begum Hazrat Mahal, the courageous wife of Wajid Ali Shah, who became a central figure in the 1857 Revolt. After her husband's forced exile to Calcutta, she refused to surrender and instead led the rebellion against the British.

Apart from their political roles, the Nawabi begums were great patrons of art, architecture and charitable institutions. Malka Jahan, the mother of Amjad Ali Shah, was instrumental in the the construction of the Malka Jahan Mosque and several gardens that adorn the city. Similarly, Qudsia Begum, another influential queen, contributed to the architectural legacy of Lucknow by commissioning public works that enhanced the city's cultural appeal.

These women were not mere consorts; they were administrators, warriors, patrons and custodians of Awadhi heritage.

Parikhana of Akhtarpiya

Nishant Upadhyay



Two girls performing *kathak*, painting, 18th-century.
Picture Credits: Art Institute of Chicago/PICRYL.

An engraved portrait of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah (r. 1847-1856), 1872. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

The cultural history of Lucknow is deeply intertwined with the artistic and aesthetic pursuits of its rulers, especially the eleventh and the last ruling Nawab of Awadh, Wajid Ali Shah (1822–87). Renowned for his profound passion for the arts, poetry, music and dance, Wajid Ali Shah differed markedly from his politically inclined predecessors, dedicating much of his reign (1847–56) to enriching the cultural heritage of Lucknow.

> An accomplished poet and dancer himself, he played a significant role in refining *kathak*, composed *thumri* music and introduced grand theatrical productions like *rahas*.

Among his many contributions, the Parikhana stands as a unique institution, often misunderstood yet crucial in shaping Lucknow's artistic identity. Despite his cultural achievements, his reign unfolded against a backdrop of political turmoil. In 1856, the British East India Company annexed Awadh, deposing Wajid Ali Shah on allegations of 'poor governance'. Exiled to Matia Burj near Calcutta (now Kolkata), he nevertheless continued his patronage of the arts.

An Academy of Performing Arts

Literally translated as 'House of Fairies,' the Parikhana was a sanctuary for beautiful and talented performers. Both as an artistic institution and in its physical manifestation, the Parikhana is well documented in archival records and recent scholarship. Contrary to its common perception as a leisure palace, the Parikhana functioned as an academy of artistic excellence. As an institution dedicated to the refinement of performing arts, it served as a hub where talented poets, musicians and dancers converged to create and perform under the patronage of the nawab. The physical space of the Parikhana, within the Qaisarbagh complex in Lucknow, embodied beauty and sophistication, with gardens, ornately decorated halls and specially designed performance stages. These elements coalesced to foster an atmosphere of creativity and artistic immersion.

Wajid Ali Shah was deeply influenced by Persian and Indian traditions of poetry and dance, and his vision for the Parikhana centered on

Students learning *kathak*. Photo by Monis Khan

establishing a space where creativity could flourish unfettered by rigid courtly norms. The Parikhana, therefore, functioned as both an artistic retreat and a space for the systematic training of performers, resembling an elite cultural academy. The Nawab personally oversaw its operations, acting not just as its benefactor but also by actively participating in its artistic endeavours; he wrote poetry, composed music and choreographed dance performances. Young women, known as *paris* (fairies), received rigorous training in classical dance forms, especially *kathak*, alongside vocal and instrumental music. There was also a system of merit-based advancement within the Parikahana, rewarding the efforts of exceptional artists.

One of the Parikhana's most significant contributions to Indian performing arts was its role in refining the Lucknow *gharana* of *kathak*. Trained in *kathak* under Thakur Prasadji and Bindadin Maharaj, Wajid Ali Shah, a dancer and choreographer himself, emphasised the *bhava* (expressive) aspect of *kathak*, incorporating delicate gestures, fluid movements and sophisticated story-telling techniques into the dance form. His influence helped transform *kathak* into an elegant courtly art form that continues to be celebrated even today.

The Parikhana also provided a platform for renowned musicians and composers to experiment with new ragas and compositions. Wajid Ali Shah himself is credited with composing several *thumris*, a semi-classical genre of Hindustani music that remains popular in Indian music traditions to this day. Poetry, too, flourished within the Parikhana, Wajid Ali Shah being a prolific poet who wrote under the *takhallus* (pen names) 'Qaisar' and 'Akhtarpiya'. His verses, often romantic and melancholic, including the poignant composition '*Babul Mora Naihar Chhooto Hi Jaye*', reflected his deep love for art and his emotional connection to his city and people. Many poets and courtiers in Lucknow emulated his literary style, ushering in a golden age of Urdu poetry.

> Grand theatrical productions, including *rahas*—a dance-drama blending poetry, music and elaborate storytelling—emerged from the Parikhana as a signature form of entertainment under Wajid Ali Shah's patronage. Such performances likely laid

the foundation for modern *nautanki* and/or musical theatre in Awadh and beyond.

The Parikhana: A Sociopolitical Event

Wajid Ali Shah cultivated a remarkably inclusive environment within the Parikhana. During celebrations marking the birth anniversary of the 12th Imam, the palace would be lavishly decorated and host an elaborate feast, where he dined alongside all the *paris* and his companions, each allocated a seat at the communal table. This practice, symbolising equality, sought to effectively dismantle prevalent social hierarchies. Thus, the Parikhana was an institution built on the principles of gender empowerment, egalitarianism and merit-based progress.

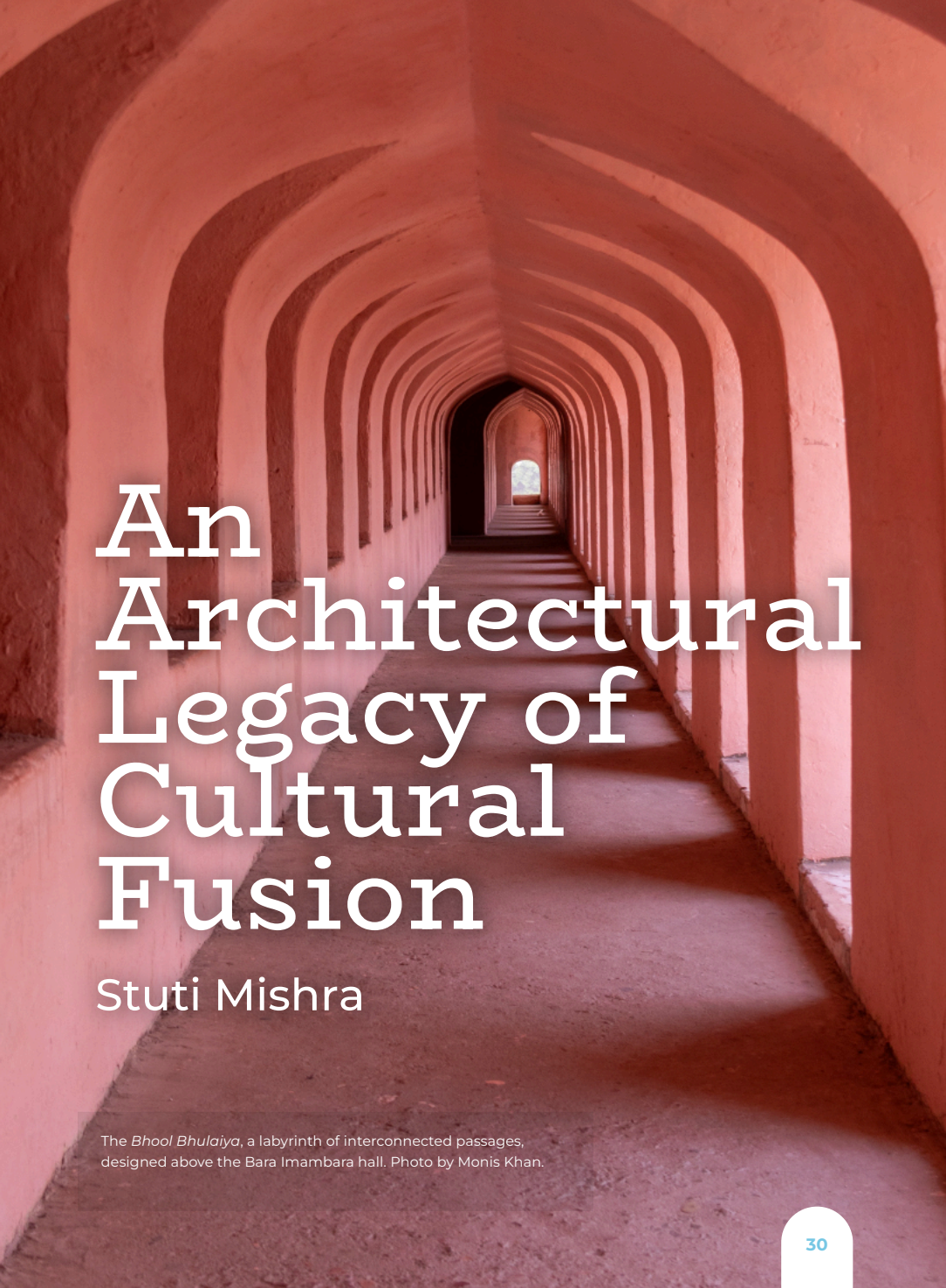
Despite its artistic grandeur, the Parikhana was not without controversy. British observers and colonial administrators often misunderstood and misrepresented the Parikhana as an extravagant indulgence, failing to recognise its role as a serious artistic institution, leading to its dissolution after the Annexation of Awadh in 1856.

Despite the political upheavals that led to its decline, the legacy of the Parikhana endures in the classical arts of India today. *kathak* dancers continue to practice the innovations introduced by Wajid Ali Shah, while *thumri* remains an essential part of Hindustani classical music. Additionally, the aesthetic sensibility that was cultivated in the Parikhana continues to inspire literature, cinema and performing arts in modern India.

Recent years have seen concerted efforts to reclaim and honour Wajid Ali Shah's contributions to the arts. Cultural historians and artists have revisited his legacy, staging performances of *rahas* and exploring his poetry. The ongoing revival of traditional Lucknowi culture owes much to his artistic vision and the influence of the Parikhana.

In the aftermath of the first war of independence in 1857, British forces destroyed large parts of Qaisarbagh, including the Parikhana. Later, in 1926, an institute, formerly known as Marris College of Music, was established by the renowned musicologist Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, now known as Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya. While an existing public notice board identifies the Bhatkhande building as the site of the original Parikhana, this remains historically uncertain, as the current structure clearly dates from a later period.

Bhatkhande Sangeet Vidyapeeth. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.



An Architectural Legacy of Cultural Fusion

Stuti Mishra

The *Bhool Bhulaiya*, a labyrinth of interconnected passages, designed above the Bara Imambara hall. Photo by Monis Khan.

Painting of Nadan Mahal, 1814. Picture Credits: British Library/Wikimedia Commons.

Lucknow's built heritage reflects a confluence of Indo-Islamic, Persian and colonial influences. Each structure in the city narrates a story—of power, patronage, cultural exchange and artistic evolution.

The earliest traces of architectural development can be found in Mughal-era monuments like Nadan Mahal, known for domed mausoleums, octagonal turrets, and stucco ornamentation.

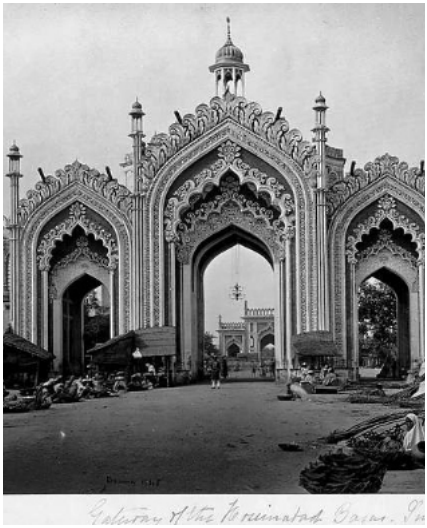
> A defining moment came in 1775 when Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula shifted the capital from Faizabad to Lucknow. This led to an influx of Delhi-based artisans and architects, establishing the foundation of a distinct Awadhi style.

Nawabi Architecture: A Distinctive Blend of Styles

The Nawabs of Awadh visualised an architectural style that brought together Mughal grandeur with Persian, Turkish and European influences.

One of the most prominent architectural legacies of the Nawabs is the Bara Imambara. Commissioned by Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula in 1784 and designed by architect Kifayat Ullah, the Imambara was initiated as a relief project generating employment during a famine. The structure is famed for its Bhool Bhulaiya, a labyrinth of over 1,000 interconnected passages designed to confuse intruders. Constructed using *lakhori* bricks (flat, thin, red burnt-clay bricks) and *surkhi*-chuna

Southwest view of the Bara Imambara, 1858. Picture Courtesy: GetArchive.



Picture of Hussainabad Gate by Samuel Bourne, 1863, reflecting a glimpse of Lucknow streets in Hindi cinema. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

(mortar and lime), the structure was reinforced with organic materials such as jaggery, lentils and *bel* pulp to ensure durability. The complex also includes the Asafi Mosque with grand domes, carved arches, and tall minarets, and the Shahi Baoli, a five-storey stepwell that still holds water, though only the top two storeys remain visible. Departing from the Mughal use of red sandstone and marble, the Nawabs favoured materials that were both economical and locally available—highlighting their adaptive architectural approach.

Other prominent *imambaras* in Lucknow include the Chota Imambara (1837), built by Nawab Mohammad Ali Shah, known for its stunning chandeliers and calligraphic panels, and the Shah Najaf Imambara (1814), which houses the tomb of Nawab Ghazi-ud-Din Haider. Along with Talkatora Imambara (1818), they reflect Awadh's deep-rooted Shia traditions.

> In addition to grand imambaras, Nawabs and nobles built private mourning houses or *azakhana*s, such as the Shahi Azakhana, Karbala Rafiq-ud-Daula (Karbala Abbas Bagh), and the Rauza of Ali Ibn Muhammad. These spaces, often within noble households, continue to host majlis gatherings, preserving Awadh's Shia cultural legacy.

Asaf-ud-Daula's architectural vision extended beyond religious sites to the 45-acre Daulat Khana complex, which included Mehtab Bagh, later used as a British parade ground. The

Bara Imambara Complex. Photo by Meenakshi Vashisth.

iconic Rumi Darwaza (1784), inspired by Istanbul's Sublime Porte, stands nearly 60 feet tall. With its floral stucco work, ornate arches, and *chhatri*-topped minarets, the gateway blends Mughal and Turkish styles and exemplifies Lucknow's refined, wood- and iron-free craftsmanship.

Another significant palace complex was Chattar Manzil (1780s–1830s), the primary royal residence. This Indo-European structure is distinguished by its gilded *chhatri*s, arched verandas, deep colonnades and underground cooling chambers.

Qaisarbagh, commissioned by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah in 1847, was the last grand palace complex of the Nawabs of Awadh. Designed as an opulent paradise, it featured elegant structures like Chaulakhi Kothi and Chandiwali Baradari set amid gardens and courtyards. The Lakhi Darwaza, or 'Gateway of a Hundred Thousand', adorned with gilded details and intricate stucco embellishments, served as a regal entrance.

The Lakhi Darwaza, also known as 'Gateway of a Hundred Thousand,' with its gilded details and intricate stucco, 1858. Picture Courtesy: GetArchive.

> Blending Mughal, European, and Awadhi styles, the complex was adorned with delicate plasterwork, *jharokha*s, and domes. The Mahi Maratib fish emblem, symbolising prosperity, marked its gateways, while the palace's intricate designs echoed the finesse of Lucknow's *zardozi* craft.

British traveller George Russell called Qaisarbagh a 'bewildering maze of palaces and gardens, fit for an Eastern prince,' while Lord Dalhousie dismissed it as 'a monument of

Mahi Maratib, or fish insignia, on a gate in Sikandara Bagh. Photo by Monis Khan.

extravagance,' reflecting British disdain for Nawabi opulence. French writer Louis Rousselet, however, praised its 'delicate ornamentation and dreamlike beauty,' calling it one of India's most remarkable palace complexes. After 1857, the British partially demolished sections in retribution, though significant parts, including the Safed Baradari and several gateways, remain.

Apart from Qaisarbagh, the Nawabs created several gardens, shaping Lucknow into a *gulistan* (garden city). Gardens like Charbagh, Aminabad, Aishbagh, and Musa Bagh gave their names to neighbourhoods. Musa Bagh, a riverside retreat, had sprawling lawns and a baradari, while Aishbagh was a paradise-like escape. Sikandar Bagh, commissioned by Wajid Ali Shah, was a walled garden with arched gateways and stucco work, later becoming a key battleground during the Revolt of 1857.

European Influences

By the late eighteenth century, European architectural elements had begun to make a debut in Lucknow's built environment.

> The British and French, who initially arrived as traders and soldiers, gradually established fortified residency complexes and expansive villa-style *kothis*, reshaping the city's architectural vocabulary.

One of the best examples is the Dilkusha Palace (1800), designed by Gore Ouseley for Nawab Saadat Ali Khan. Modelled after Seaton Delaval

Dilkusha Kothi. Photo by Monis Khan.

The Residency's bullet-ridden walls and ruins. Photo by Monis Khan.

Hall in Northumberland, it features tall Corinthian pillars, arched verandas, Gothic-style battlements and decorative balustrades. Originally built as a hunting lodge, it was later repurposed as a British military residence.

Built in 1775 by Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula to house the British Resident, the Residency became the residence of the chief commissioner of Awadh and gained historical significance during the 1857 uprising. It withstood an 87-day siege by Indian rebels against British forces led by Sir Henry Lawrence, who died from injuries. The Residency, blending Gothic and neo-classical styles, features thick brick walls, pointed arches, and defensive bastions. Key structures include the Banqueting Hall, Dr Fayrer's House, the treasury, church and cemetery (where Lawrence and other officials were buried), and the Bailey Guard Gate. Today, the Residency stands as a poignant memorial to the 1857 revolt.

During this period of architectural experimentation, Claude Martin (1735–1800), a French adventurer, architect and philanthropist serving under Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula, left an indelible mark on Lucknow's built heritage. Blending European aesthetics with Indo-Islamic traditions, his most renowned creation is the Constantia building (now part of the La Martiniere College complex), named after his motto *Labore et Constantia* (By Labour and Constancy), which features Palladian symmetry, Gothic turrets, Rococo ornamentation and Indian elements like *chhatri*s and *jharokha*s. Constantia influenced later structures like Khursheed Manzil, Shahnajaf Imambara and the Sher Darwaza of Qaisarbagh.

Beyond Constantia, Martin's influence extended to Farhat Baksh Kothi (compared to Chateau de Lyon

Major General Claude Martin, a French adventurer in British service, commissioned Constantia. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

in France) and Bibiapur Kothi, a riverside retreat for Nawabi *durbar*s (courts). These structures introduced European villa aesthetics to Lucknow while integrating indigenous elements.

> La Martiniere (1798), Martin's residence and final resting place, is a remarkable study of fusion. The interiors boast ornate stucco work, vaulted ceilings and a blend of European frescoes with traditional Indian craftsmanship. Its basement, designed as a flood shelter with hidden chambers, reinforces its fortress-like character.

Following the 1857 Revolt, the British introduced public institutions such as the High Court, and the Secretariat, all designed in a style incorporating domes, colonnades and *chhatri*s over distinctly British layouts. Institutions like Loreto Convent (1872), with its arched windows, high ceiling, and colonial-style corridors, stands as a fine example of this fusion. Isabella Thoburn College (1870) showcases a similar architectural synthesis with its elegant facades and decorative motifs, while Canning College (1864) (now part of Lucknow University) features domes, minarets and European-style columns. The King George's Medical University (1911) is another prominent structure, distinguished by its majestic domes and intricate detailing that reflect Indo-Saracenic influences.

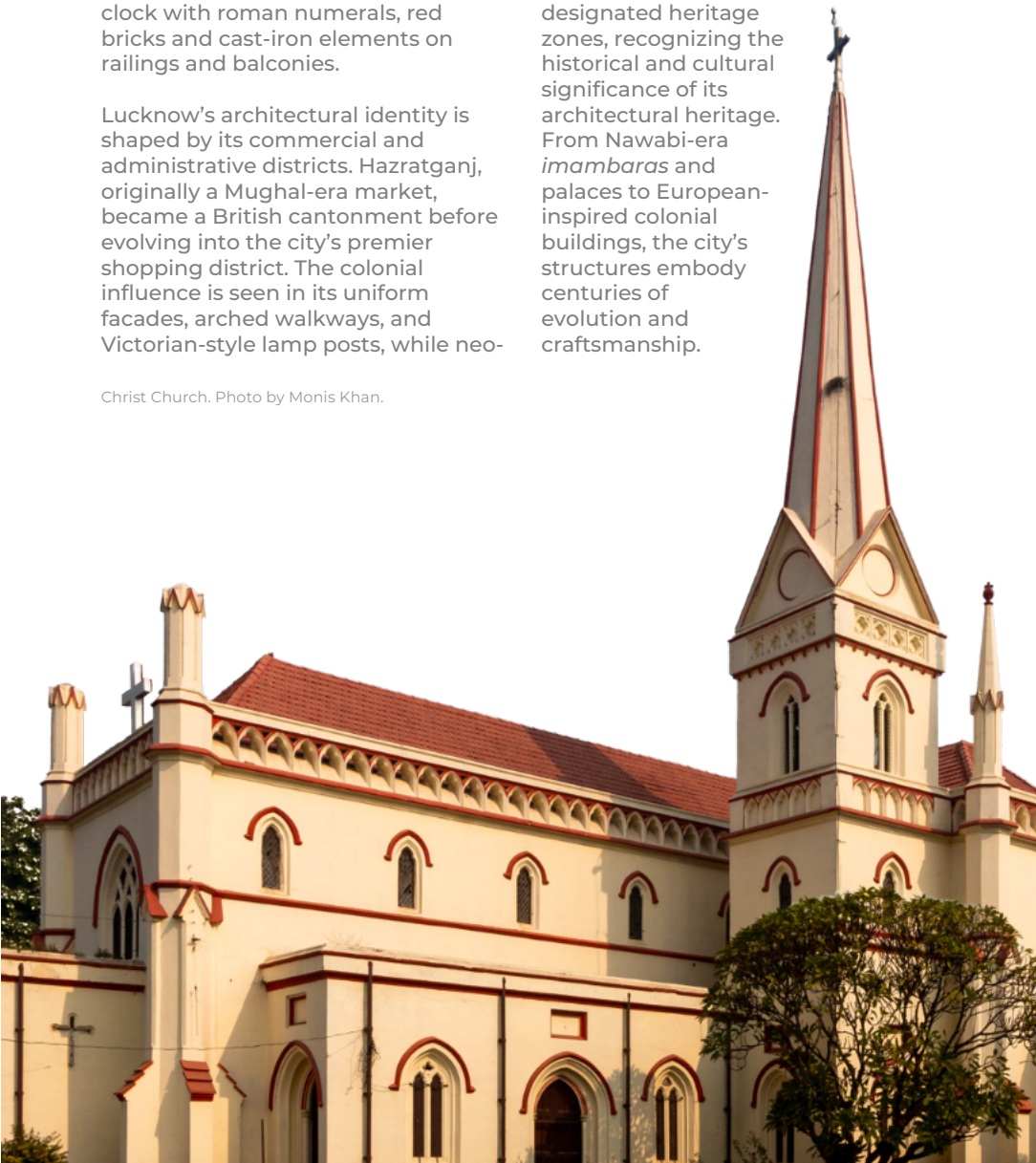
Constantia (now La Martiniere). Photo by Monis Khan.

Built to commemorate first lieutenant governor of the United Province, Geroge Couper, the Hussainabad Clock Tower (1887) features Victorian architectural elements such as pointed arches, spines and finials, ornate carvings, clock with roman numerals, red bricks and cast-iron elements on railings and balconies.

Lucknow's architectural identity is shaped by its commercial and administrative districts. Hazratganj, originally a Mughal-era market, became a British cantonment before evolving into the city's premier shopping district. The colonial influence is seen in its uniform facades, arched walkways, and Victorian-style lamp posts, while neo-classical and Indo-Saracenic buildings with ornate details blend British town planning and Nawabi aesthetics.

Lucknow is one of the first Indian cities to have designated heritage zones, recognizing the historical and cultural significance of its architectural heritage. From Nawabi-era *imambaras* and palaces to European-inspired colonial buildings, the city's structures embody centuries of evolution and craftsmanship.

Christ Church. Photo by Monis Khan.



The Many Lives of Lucknow's Houses

Nimra Rizvi

Aangan of Itaunja House in Qaiser Bagh, reflecting details of historic homes and reha'ish of Lucknow. Photo byTasveer Hasan and Yashas Chandra.

Khun Khunji Haveli, Chowk Chauraha. Photo by Tasveer Hasan and Yashas Chandra.

Lucknow's historical legacy remains imprinted on its present, with its homes offering a perfect window into the many lives that the city has lived, continues to live and will live. Lucknow's houses and *reha'ish* (lifestyle) is the most tangible evidence of how Lucknow has grown and shrunk over the last three hundred years, beginning when Asaf-ud-Daula named it the capital city of Awadh in the late eighteenth century.

The Haveli of the Traditional Nobility

Lucknow's famed Chowk, now considered to be a part of the old city, is lined with a profusion of *haveli*s, owned by erstwhile nobles, businessmen, moneylenders, clerics, among many others. A *haveli*, which loosely translates to a mansion, stood behind high walls, its interior well hidden from onlookers beyond its gates. Though often unassuming, the gateways to these *haveli*s are embellished with stucco typical to Lucknow—the hibiscus and the fish. Advertently or inadvertently, these gateways referenced a visual vocabulary of the Nawabs, who up until the nineteenth century positioned themselves as the *wazir*s of the Mughals. The fish was a continuation of the symbol of the title of 'Mahi Maratib' the Nawabs received from the Mughals, and its presence on gateways to *haveli*s is a stamp on their vintage.

The most distinctive feature of a Lucknow *haveli* is its *aangan* or courtyard, accessed directly from the gateway. Verandas line at least three sides of the *aangan*, which continues to be the life of the house for its

Aangan of Bansi Palace, Siddharth Nagar district. Photo by Tasveer Hasan and Yashas Chandra.

Aangan of a house in Golaganj. Photo by Tasveer Hasan and Yashas Chandra.

residents even today, as it was envisioned a few centuries ago. While dwelling rooms behind the verandas served as valuable storage space, the *baramda*, *sehen* and *aangan* were the centre of all household activity.

> Over the years, these have been expanded, partitioned and repurposed across homes to accommodate for personal privacy—a concept foreign to original designers of the *haveli*, for they segregated spaces based on gender rather than to provide for personal space.

While the ground floor is reserved for the mardana or the men's quarters, with direct access to the world inside and outside, the *zenana* or woman's quarter is often located on the first floor or towards the rear end of the *haveli* to curb direct access from public quarters of the *haveli*.

Professional Community Spaces

Havelis were not the only defining contours of Chowk. The entanglement of people, professions, homes and the city comes alive in other parts like the *bawarchi tola* (chef's colony), *phool wali gali* (flower street) and *qasai bada* (butcher colony), to name a few. Segregated on the basis of professions, these localities or *mohallas* house *karkhanas* (workshops) and shopfronts that line the street, with the homes of the owners located right above the shops. The personal and the professional space is marked

Phoolon Wali Gali, neighbourhood of flower traders in Chowk. Photo by Ayan Bose.

Oel House showcases a refined design with high doors, ornamental façades, and a distinct spatial organization. Photo by Tasveer Hasan and Yashas Chandra.

by a crossover, where labour is divided across the family—one part public facing and the other behind closed doors away from the public gaze.

The Anglo-Nawabi Kothi

If *haveli*s are a part of the old city, *kothi*s represent the more anglicised interpretation of the Nawabs' rule in Awadh in the nineteenth century. Influenced by the European architects employed in the Lucknow court and Residency, the Nawabs commissioned and purchased several colonial residences and public buildings, and repurposed them for their own use. Unlike *haveli*s, *kothi*s are a solid block of masonry with no inner courtyards and the rooms designed with specific functions—hosting, entertaining and eating. Most *kothi*s in Lucknow follow this vocabulary, with adaptations that were more suited to a familiar lifestyle, particularly to maintain the *zenana-mardana* distinction. While a veranda on the ground floor leads into a drawing room, which is the centre of the house, and the 'public rooms', the *zenana* is usually housed on the first floor.

> Ornamentation was given a lot of attention in *kothi*s—both on the facade and the interior. High doors, intricate cast-iron window grills, Corinthian pillars, staircase bannisters of wood and marble, and stained-glass windowpanes dominate the visual vocabulary.

The emphasis on embellishment was symptomatic of a marked shift in the city skyline. Unlike *haveli*s, the façades of *kothi*s were meant to be seen from the street. Most *kothi*s in Lucknow were built along the banks of the Gomti, moving away from Chowk and into what would later be Lucknow's British high street, Hazratganj.

The Colonial Bungalow

After the annexation of Awadh in 1857, the cityscape of Lucknow underwent a substantial change to accommodate for a much larger British military and bureaucratic presence in the city. Military engineers designed cantonments and civil lines following a gridiron layout of parallel roads, with large compounds on either side, housing single-storey bungalows. The compound-to-building ratio indicated hierarchy of rank.

A typical bungalow in Lucknow features spacious and symmetrical design, with Doric and Tuscan pillars and a front veranda. Thick walls, smaller windows and verandas for protection from the summer months and low winds guided the design vocabulary.

Today, these bungalows continue to be allotted to officers of the Indian Army.

Adaptive Reuse

While the bungalow represented a new type of housing in Lucknow for a new political order, Lucknow also had a parallel tradition of reusing existing structures. The Nawabs often gave buildings as grants to members of their family, and many royal imambaras are extended into

Chakravarti House, Hazratganj. Photo by Tasveer Hasan and Yashas Chandra.

family homes that are still occupied by descendants. The Nawabs also had a robust tradition of buying and selling built property—over a short period of a hundred years, many houses in Lucknow changed owners. After the Uprising of 1857, parts of the Nawab's erstwhile estate were redistributed to the *taluqdars* loyal to the British during the Uprising, and continue to be occupied even today.

> What emerges in Lucknow homes, much like its political landscape, is a complicated nonlinear trajectory. *Haveli*s, *kothi*s, bungalows co-exist with apartments, and all remain relevant, each marking a distinct historical period.

If each of these houses is a stamp on Lucknow's historical past, then it is important to recognise that these competing forms of life and living together make up Lucknow's present.

Habibullah Estate, Hazratganj. Photo by Tasveer Hasan and Yashas Chandra..

Poetic Echoes of Lucknow

Meenakshi Vashisth

Portrait of Mir Taqi Mir. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

Mir Babar Ali Anees. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

To speak of Lucknow is to invoke a world of exquisite *tehzeeb* (etiquette), refined speech and fine poetry. Here, poetry does not belong solely to the poet; it permeates the air of the *chowks*, flows with the scent of *keora* in the *kothas* (courtesan houses), and echoes through the corridors of once-glorious mansions.

> From the *ghazals* of Mir Taqi Mir and the *rekhtis* of Allah Khan and Rangin to the *marsiyas* (elegiac verses) of Mir Babar Ali Anis and Mirza Salamat Ali Dabeer, and the *nazms* (verse) of Josh Malihabadi, Lucknow's centuries-old literary tradition is a palimpsest of emotions, weaving together tales of love, loss, rebellion and nostalgia.

Here, poetry was not merely an artistic pursuit; it was a way of life. The *mushairas* (poetic symposiums) that flourished in the city were not just performances but communal celebrations of linguistic richness and intellectual engagement.

Dilli's loss. Lucknau's gain

The waning fortunes of the Mughal Empire in Delhi in the mid-eighteenth century left its poets in financial ruin. Deprived of royal patronage, many migrated to the prosperous courts in Hyderabad, Murshidabad and, particularly, Awadh, which despite maintaining their status as Mughal vassals, had gained considerable autonomy and wealth. Poets such as Sauda, Mir Taqi Mir and Ghulam Hamdani Musahfi, who formerly graced the imperial

Portrait of Mirza Salamat Ali Dabeer. Picture Credits: Khabir Hasan/Wikimedia Commons.

Painting of Mirza Muhammad Rafi Sauda by an anonymous painter of the Mughal Empire. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

courts of Delhi, found new patronage in Lucknow, where the Nawabs, eager to enhance their cultural stature, lavished generous stipends upon them.

> Sauda, initially hesitant, eventually accepted Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula's invitation and was granted the title *Malik-ush-Shu'ara* (Poet Laureate). Mir Taqi Mir, disillusioned by Delhi's decline, reached Lucknow in 1782 and secured employment under Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula.

Despite the initial dominance of Delhi's literary émigrés, Lucknow produced its own poetic stalwarts too. Imam Bakhsh Nasikh, a native of Faizabad, laid the foundation of the Lucknow School of Poetry, characterised by linguistic opulence, complex metaphors and a heightened focus on aestheticism. His rival, Khwaja Haidar Ali Atish, brought an unpretentious, soulful depth to Urdu *ghazal*s. Subsequently, Mirza Dabeer and Mir Anis emerged as two towering *marsiya* poets. Their dramatic recitations, full of vivid imagery and emotional intensity, showcased the power of the *musaddas* (a form of poetry spanning over six lines). Beyond the grandeur of the deeply evocative *marsiyas* that mourned the tragedy of Karbala, the city became synonymous with the *shahr-ashob* (poems of lament for urban decay), *qasidas* (panegyric odes) and *masnawi*s (narrative poems).

Contrary to colonial narratives, many Nawabs were avid patrons of

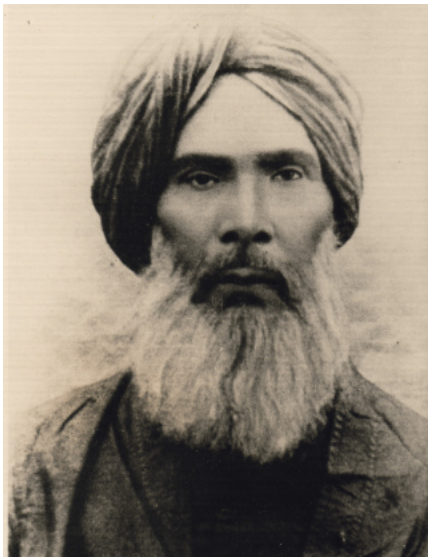
Khwaja Haider Ali Aatish. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

literature. Asaf-ud-Daula was a poet and Meer Soz's disciple. Wajid Ali Shah, writing under the pseudonym 'Qaisar' and 'Akhtarpiya', composed *ghazal*s, *marsiya*s and *masnawi*s, his verse steeped in longing:

> **"Meri chashm-e-ibarat ne dekha yeh manzar, Jahan bhi nazar daali, tumhi tum nazar aaye."**
>
> My eyes beheld this wondrous sight, wherever I looked, I saw only you.

Ghazal's Embrace and Courtesan's Influence

If the *marsiya* lent grandeur to public mourning, the *ghazal* was the heartbeat of intimate gatherings. In the interiors of Lucknow's *kotha*s, poetry found an unspoken ally in music and dance. The *tawaif*s, guardians of classical arts, were more than mere performers; they were patrons and preservers of poetic traditions. These women, simultaneously celebrated and ostracised by society, held the power to make or break a poet's reputation.



Photograph of Poet Amir Meenai, c. 1890. Picture Credits: Aaminai/Wikimedia Commons.

> Their *mehfil*s were where poetry was refined and perfected; it was said that a poet's success was often determined by the praise of the *tawaif*s, their discerning ears and artistic sensibilities shaping the course of literary taste.

The courtesans dictated poetic fashion—an impromptu couplet from their lips could elevate a poet's stature, just as a dismissed verse could consign one to obscurity. In these dimly lit chambers, adorned with chandeliers and silken drapes, poetry found a home beyond the courts. The voices of poets like Jur'at, Insha Allah Khan Insha, Jafar Zatalli, Rangin and Aatish Lakhnawi, with their playful yet profound verses, were carried by the melodies of the *tawaif*s, turning poetry into song, and song into a timeless memory.

Decline, Revival and the Legacy

Like all cultural efflorescence, the poetic grandeur of Lucknow saw a decline with the political upheavals during the British annexation of Awadh in 1856 and the subsequent Revolt of 1857. The devastation wrought by the Revolt sparked a new wave of poetic expression in voices like Ameer Minai and Josh Maliha-

Firaq Gorakhpuri on a stamp. Picture Credits: India Post, GOI/Wikimedia Commons.

badi, who wove resilience into their couplets.

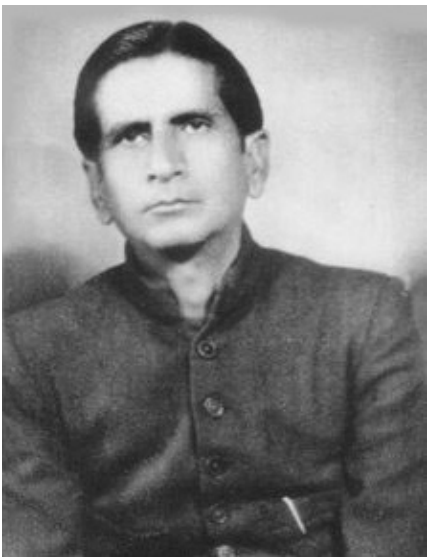
Beyond the mainstream literary culture, Lucknow also harboured underground poetic traditions. Exclusive gatherings in Mohalla Pir Bukhara continued to host readings in secrecy, even after the upheavals of 1857.

> Similarly, there existed a lesser-known tradition of *mushairas* dedicated to bawdy and irreverent poetry, recited in elite private circles. Figures such as Sahib Qaran, Jan Sahib and Chirkin were known for composing verses that defied the decorum of conventional literary spaces.

In the twentieth century, the Progressive Writers' Movement redefined the poetic currents of Lucknow. No longer confined to the realms of aristocratic melancholy, poetry became an instrument of resistance, a call to justice. The verses of Firaq Gorakhpuri and Majaz Lakhnawi pulsed with social consciousness, painting the city in the hues of revolution and romance. Majaz, a poet of intoxicating despair and undying hope, wrote:

> **"Ae Lucknow ki shaam, bata tu ne dekha hai kahin, Ek shaks jo har raah pe rukta hi chala jaaye?"**
>
> O evening of Lucknow, tell me, have you ever seen a man who pauses at every path, yet keeps moving on?

Today, Lucknow's poetry is no longer confined to the courts or *kotha*s, but



Majaz Lakhnawi. Picture Credits: The Lucknow Observer/Wikimedia Commons.

continues to evolve, finding expression in contemporary platforms.

> Lyricists such as Shakeel Badayuni, Kaifi Azmi and Javed Akhtar have carried forward the tradition of Urdu poetry, infusing it into film lyrics that resonate with millions.

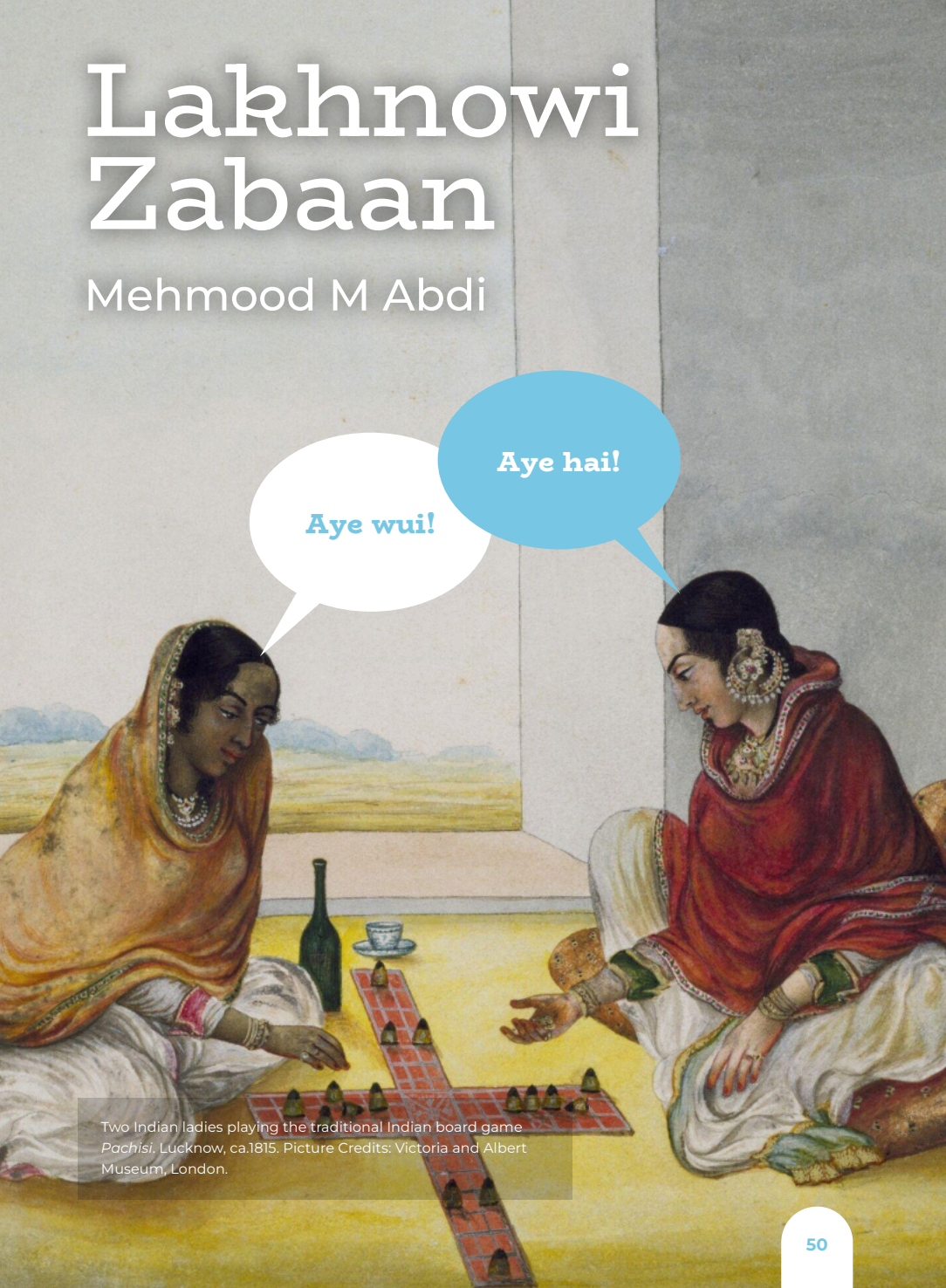
Songs like '*Chaudhvin ka Chand ho*' (Shakeel Badayuni) and '*Tum itna jo muskura rahe ho*' (Kaifi Azmi) embody the delicate poetic sensibilities that originated in the poetic circles of Lucknow.

Even today, the city breathes in couplets—whether in tea stalls where young poets recite verses, in literary festivals where new voices emerge or in the cinematic verses that reach a global audience. In this, Lucknow remains not just a city but a living poem, eternally unfolding, waiting to be recited.

Josh Malihabadi. Picture Credits: Photo Division, GOI/Wikimedia Commons

Lakhnowi Zabaan

Mehmood M Abdi



Two Indian ladies playing the traditional Indian board game *Pachisi*. Lucknow, ca.1815. Picture Credits: Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

In most historical cities, heritage is tied to grand buildings, where walls, halls and minarets silently narrate tales of the past. However, Lucknow stands as an exception. Here, history is not merely confined to architectural marvels but continues to thrive in everyday life, carried forward through one of its most distinctive cultural elements—its *zubaan/zabaan* (tongue). This *zabaan* has two significant connotations: one refers to the city's celebrated cuisine, while the other signifies its refined language. Together, they make Lucknow not just a place of the past but a city that continues its legacy through its traditions. This essay explores the latter.

Avadh Akhbar captures the elegance of Lucknow's zubaan, 1st January, 1875. Picture Credits: British Library/GetArchive.

Delhi's political and cultural influence declined, Lucknow rose as a centre of poetry, literature and fine arts. Poets, wordsmiths and artists flocked to the city, enriching its cultural fabric. Among them was Mir Taqi Mir, who, disillusioned by Delhi's fall, found refuge in Lucknow. Alongside local literary giants like Meer Anis and Mirza Dabeer, he contributed to the linguistic refinement of the city, making Lucknow a hub of literary excellence.

The language of Lucknow has multiple layers, each reflective of different social groups and historical influences. From the polished Persianized Urdu of the Nawabs to the dialects spoken in the streets and homes, Lucknow's linguistic landscape is diverse and fascinating.

The Melody of Lucknowi Speech

If food is the heart of Lucknow, its language is its soul. Although Urdu and Hindustani are spoken across Delhi, Agra, Hyderabad and other parts of India, what sets Lucknowi Urdu apart is its vocabulary and *lahja* (intonation). The city's dialect is a harmonious blend of Persian and Awadhi, resulting in speech that is both elegant and endearing.

During the eighteenth century, as

The Many Shades of Lucknowi Speech

Lucknowi zabaan is not uniform but varies across different social and cultural strata. Some of its key linguistic variations include:

- **Begamati Zabaan** – The language of noblewomen, spoken in the *zenana* (women's quarters) of royal and aristocratic households, as well as by maids and house helps. Known for its overly effeminate tone and poetic expressions, it is

rich in idioms and proverbs.

- **Taksali Zabaan** – The dialect spoken in specific localities of Lucknow, rooted in the historical *taksal* (mint) established during Sher Shah Suri's time.

- **Rekhti** – A poetic form of Urdu used to express female voices and perspectives.

- **Awadhi (Oudhi)** – The local dialect, spoken primarily by the common folk and often intertwined with Urdu in daily conversations.

The Language of Grace and Wit

Contrary to popular belief, *Begamati zabaan* was not exclusive to the begums of royal palaces but was spoken in noble and middle-class households alike. Characterised by its lyrical quality and intricate idioms, it was a dialect in which the most mundane matters found poetic expression.

Some fascinating expressions from *Begamati zabaan* include:

- **Aye wui!** – An exclamation of astonishment, often accompanied by a hand gesture (palm on the chin, fingers curled inwards).

- **Aye hai!** – Used in moments of distress or disbelief, much like 'Oh my God!'

- **Nigora** – A term of endearment or pity, meaning 'poor fellow'.

- **Panyachey bhari hona** – Refers to someone arriving late or acting overly important, derived from royal women whose heavy embroidered skirts required attendants to help them rise.

- **Bagharna** – Describes the bumpy journey on uneven paths, likened to jamuns being stirred in a mud pot.

- **Barasna** – While commonly meaning 'to rain', in this dialect, it is also a compliment, suggesting something suits a person perfectly.

Street Lingo

Lucknow's *Taksali zabaan* emerged from the city's mint district and is known for its playful distortions of words, reflecting both linguistic creativity and a subtle arrogance unique to Lucknowis. Some common examples include:

- **Darwazza** instead of *darwaza* (door)

- **Idharwal** for *iss taraf* (this side), **udharwal** for *uss taraf* (that side)

- **Rashka** for *rikshaw* (rickshaw)

- **Minisiblty** for *municipality*

- **Filam** for *film*

- **Ilam** for *ilm* (knowledge)

Additionally, Lucknowis often use plural forms for singular nouns:

- **Chanwal** instead of *chawal* (rice)

- **Mirche** for *mirch* (chili)

- **Kapde** (clothes) even when referring to a single garment

This unique pluralisation likely has roots in Awadhi influences and is commonly heard in both urban and rural settings.

Theatrical Charm

Lucknow's language has an inherent dramatism, making spoken words feel like a performance. Traditional storytelling forms like *Dastaan-goi* (Persian-originated oral storytelling) and *Qissa-goi* (storytelling infused with poetry and prose) captivated audiences for centuries, proving that in Lucknow, a story is not just heard or read—it is performed.

The melodious blend of Persian and Awadhi further enhances the sweetness of Lucknowi Urdu. Phonetic expressions like *dhadaam se gir pade* (fell with a loud thud) or *hawa sana san chal rahi hai* (the wind is blowing swiftly) add musicality to speech, making even everyday conversations poetic.

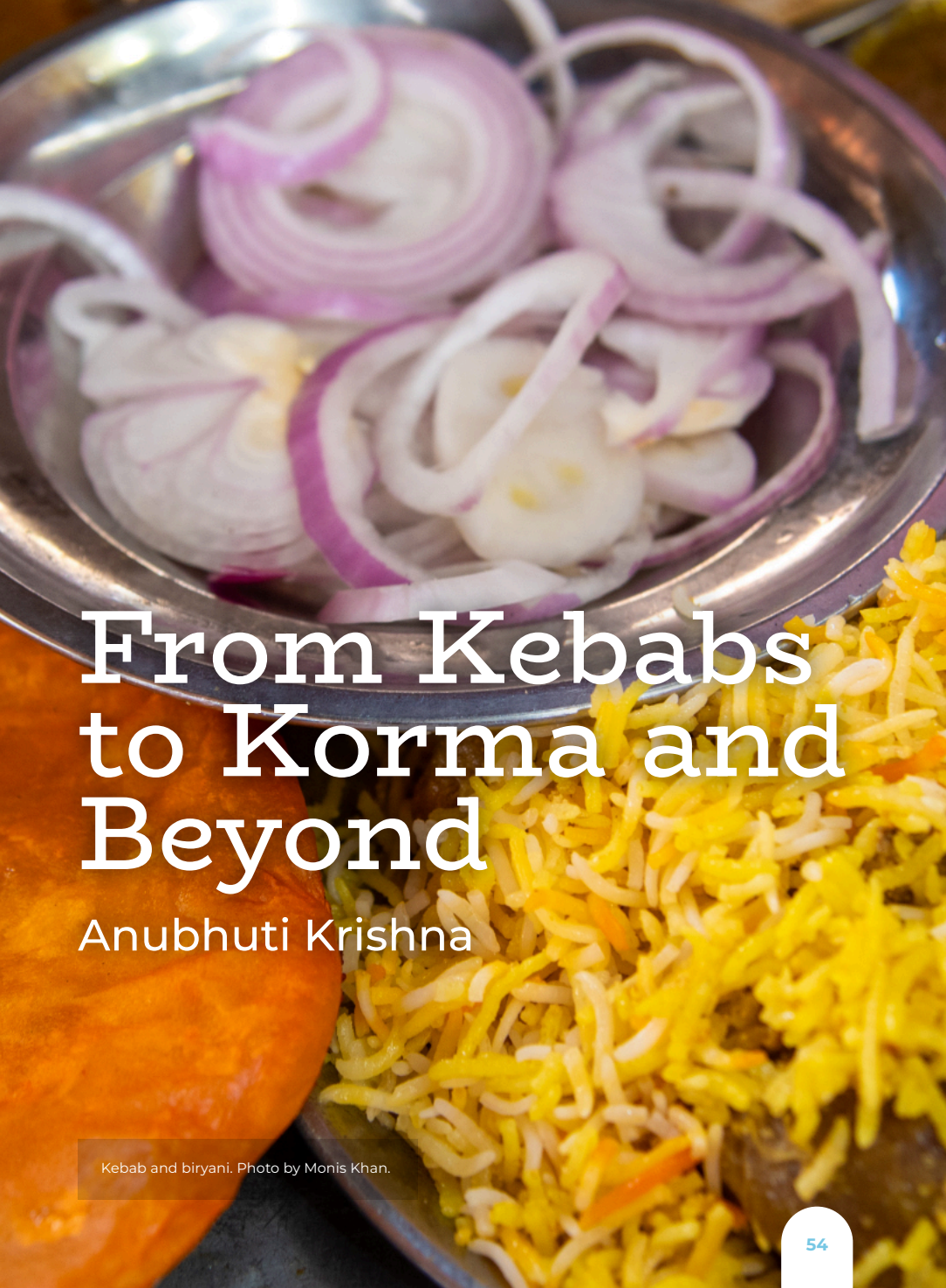
Javed Akhtar, a poet from the Lucknow school of thought, masterfully used such rhythmic expressions in Bollywood lyrics, for example, the song '*Chale jaise hawaein sanan sanan...*' from the film *Main Hoon Na*.

The Ever-Evolving Street Slang of Lucknow

Like any living language, Lucknow's colloquial speech is constantly evolving. Some colourful slang terms include:

- **Bankey** – Ruffian
- **Shagirad** – Disciple
- **Rangbaaz** – Flamboyant person
- **Uthaigeerey** – Thieves
- **Late Lateef** – Habitual latecomer
- **Lappu Jhanna** – Someone weak and frail
- **Paglait** – One who acts insanely
- **Bhaukal** – Someone with an exaggerated sense of self-importance

In Lucknow, one does not merely speak—one performs, charms and captivates. Whether in its poetic idioms, its elegant intonation or its playful street slang, the city's language continues to thrive, carrying forward the legacy of Nawabs, begums, poets and storytellers.



From Kebabs to Korma and Beyond

Anubhuti Krishna

Kebab and biryani. Photo by Monis Khan.

Melt-in-the-mouth magic—*Galawati Kebab*. Photo by Monis Khan

If Lucknow is known for one thing beyond its rich history and refined culture, it is its legendary *kebab*s, with the Tunday Kebabi outlet being the most iconic. However, Haji Murad Ali, or Tunday Mian, was not the first to create *galawat ke kebab*. Before these melt-in-the-mouth delicacies emerged from Awadh's royal kitchens, *kebab*s across North India were simple charred meat, often cooked by traveling armies. While the Mughals in Delhi refined them, Lucknow elevated *kebab*s into an art form, developing a version that even fit a toothless nawab.

The Evolution of Awadhi Cuisine

The story of Lucknow's food is intertwined with the city's founding in the eighteenth century. When the Nawabs of Awadh shifted their capital from Faizabad, they sought to transform it into a city of grandeur. Asaf-ud-Daula, who led this shift, modelled it on great European capitals, ensuring perfection in every aspect—including its cuisine.

Even before Lucknow became the capital, Awadhi cuisine flourished under Shuja-ud-Daula, Asaf-ud-Daula's father and a noted connoisseur.

> Historical records mention six royal kitchens, each catering to different household members. These were overseen by *darogas* (chief supervisors), with *rakabdars* (head chefs) responsible for exquisite dishes, including pulaos, curries, pickles, chutneys and desserts.

Each *rakabdar* specialised in a particular dish, ensuring unmatched craftsmanship. Large-scale cooking was entrusted to *bawarchi*s, who mastered *korma*, *kebab*, *pulao* and various sweet treats. Meals used to undergo thorough inspection before being served.

Sheermaal. Photo by Monis Khan.

Culinary Innovation in Nawabi Lucknow

Lucknowi Pulao. Photo by Monis Khan

Under Asaf-ud-Daula, culinary traditions peaked. In the book *The Lion and The Lily*, Ira Mukhoty describes how the city's elite became discerning patrons of gourmet cuisine, ushering in an era of highly specialised chefs. These *rakabdars* created iconic dishes like *motia pulao*—a luxurious preparation with egg whites, silver and gold *warq* (edible metallic foil) and goat's small intestine—and *nargisi kofta*, a Mughlai take on Scotch eggs, with spiced minced mutton wrapped around boiled eggs. One of the most extravagant dishes was goat *mussalam*, where an entire goat was stuffed with chicken, quail eggs and minced meat before being slow-cooked to perfection in a *tandoor*.

Legends speak of the Nawabs' lavish feasts—Asaf-ud-Daula's *paan* was dusted with gold and silver, while almonds and pistachios were carved into rice grains for *pulaos*. Another enduring tale recounts how the Nawab of Kakori, offended by a guest's remark on his *kebabs*, commissioned his cooks to create the legendary *Kakori kebab*, renowned for its delicate texture, made with the softest leg meat of a goat, milk solids and a secret spice blend.

> Secrecy defined Awadhi kitchens, with recipes so closely guarded that many traditional dishes vanished with their creators.

Pulao Wali Gali in Lucknow once housed the city's famed *khansamas*, filling the street with the aromas of Nawabi *pulao* and *kebabs*. Photo by Tasveer Hasan and Yashas Chandra.

European Influence on Awadhi Cuisine

Saadat Ali Khan II, Asaf-ud-Daula's successor, refined the art of feasting. At a banquet in 1814, guests enjoyed a lavish spread influenced by European dining traditions. The long table featured dishes by English and French chefs alongside the finest

Oudhyana at Taj Mahal, Lucknow. Photo by Stuti Mishra.

Shukla Chaat Bhandar. Photo by Stuti Mishra.

Awadhi preparations. Among the drinks served was cherry brandy, which the Nawab called 'English syrup'.

As Europeans became more prominent in Lucknow, western elements like soups, stews, roasts and wine blended seamlessly with local flavours. By the time Wajid Ali Shah ascended the throne, Lucknow's cuisine had reached its peak.

This era introduced delicacies such as *malai paan*, a layered clotted cream dessert; *galawat ke kebab*, crafted for a toothless Nawab; and *kebab*, a saffron-infused meaty *pulao*. Desserts like *shahi tukda* and *ande ka halwa* further enriched the city's culinary legacy.

Preserving Lucknow's Culinary Heritage

Even after the fall of the Nawabs, Lucknow retained its culinary identity. Today, the city remains a hub for food lovers, with efforts underway to revive lost recipes and preserve traditional flavours. Dishes once forgotten are making a comeback. Chef Mohsin Qureshi at Azrak has recreated *mutanjan* after decades, while *lehsun ki kheer* (garlic pudding) is now served at the restaurant Oudhyana, housed in the Taj Mahal Hotel. Home chefs are documenting family recipes, ensuring these traditions endure. More books on Lucknow's food are being published than ever before, capturing its rich culinary legacy.

> Lucknow has also emerged as a top destination for culinary tourism. From slow-cooked *dum biryani* perfected by Awadhi *khansamas* to the city's renowned *kebabs* and *chaat*, its gastronomic excellence remains unmatched. While Tunday Kebabi, Shukla Chaat and Idrees Biryani dominate the food scene, even roadside stalls offer refined, flavourful dishes in a budget.

Culinary expert Debashish Kar, who organises food and culture experiences, believes home-cooked food is Lucknow's hidden gem—featuring meat stews, rich curries, lentils, diverse breads and homemade sweets. Others are bringing these traditions to a wider audience. Sheeba Iqbal, curator of Naimatkhana, specialises in authentic Awadhi home-style meals, while chef Taiyaba Ali is introducing Lucknow's flavours nationwide through modern adaptations.

The city's annual food festival further revives forgotten flavours, with home chefs presenting treasured family

recipes. According to Noor Khan, the festival curator, dishes like *laal mirch ka keema* (spiced mutton with red chilies), *aloo ghost, chane ki daal ka halwa* and *yakhni pulao* are among the first to sell out—a testament to Lucknow's enduring love for its cuisine.

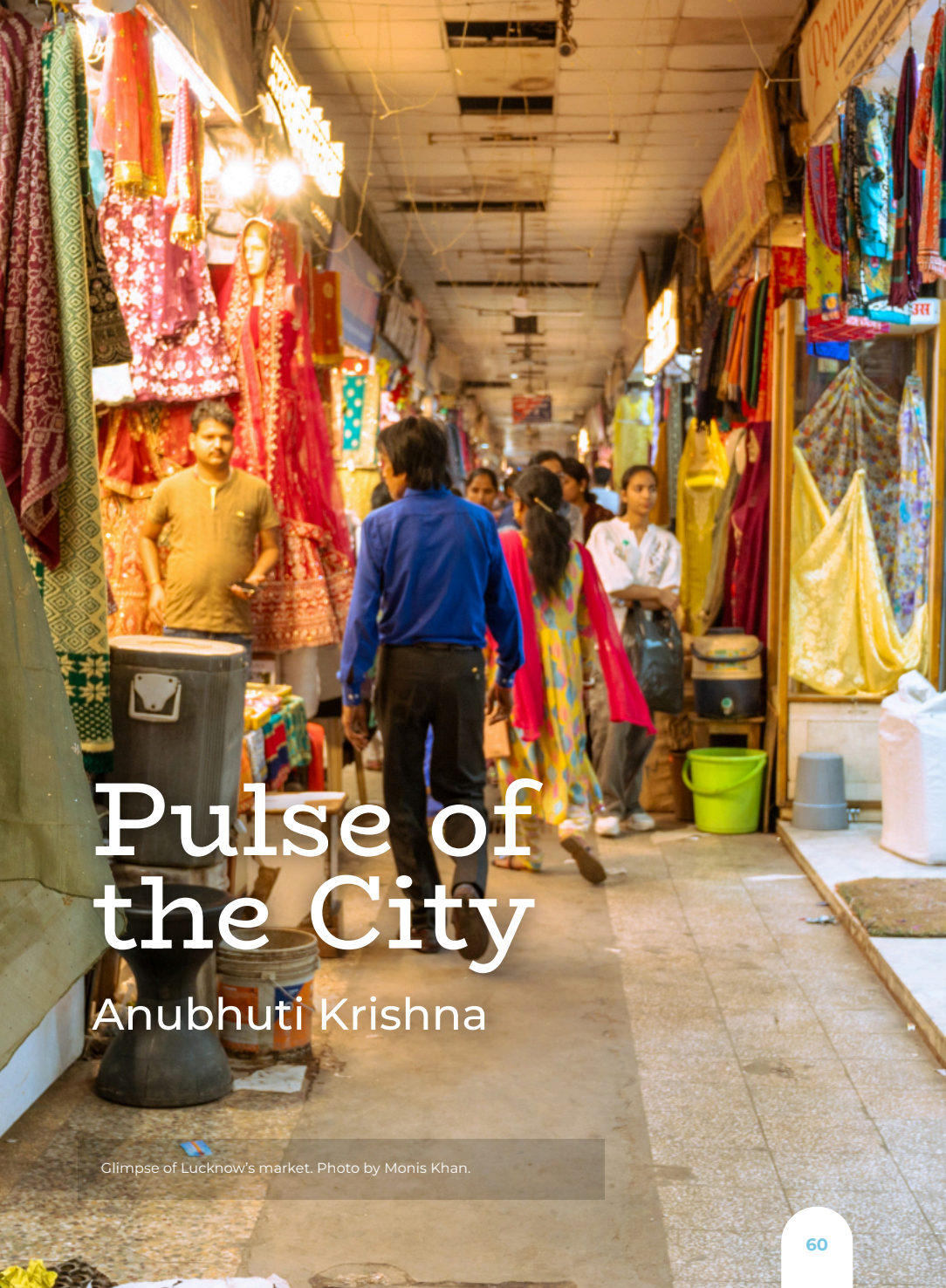
> The Nawabs may have left, but the *nafasat* (refinement) and *nazakat* (elegance) they instilled in their people and their food continue to thrive, in homes and streets alike.

Where to Eat in Lucknow:

1. Tunday Kebabi – *Galawat ke Kebab*
2. Idrees – Biryani
3. Ram Asrey – *Malai Paan*
4. Chhappan Bhog – *Motichoor Laddoo*
5. Chowk – *Malai Makhan*
6. Naimatkhana – Homestyle Awadhi meals
7. Oudhyana – Classic royal flavours
8. Azrak – *Mutanjan* and *Majlis Kebab*
9. Shukla Chaat Bhandaar – *Chaat*
10. Prakash Kulfi – *Kulfi*

Pulse of the City

Anubhuti Krishna



Glimpse of Lucknow's market. Photo by Monis Khan.

From Qaisarbagh *chauraha* to Aminabad. Photo by Monis Khan.

By mid-morning, Lucknow's streets are already teeming with life. Shopkeepers call out to customers, hawkers set up their stalls, and *pheriwala*s (travelling salesmen) offer bags and sunglasses to passersby. In one corner, large shops are stacked with freshly made snacks, while pushcarts overflow with the season's freshest produce.

> Rickshaw-pullers navigate through the crowd, and pedestrians brush past each other in a constant rhythm. A walk through Aminabad, one of the city's busiest markets, is not for the fainthearted, but it remains one of the best ways to experience Lucknow.

For those who prefer a gentler introduction to the city, Hazratganj offers a stark contrast. Just a short distance from the cacophony of Aminabad, it stands at the crossroads of old and new Lucknow. Symmetrical buildings, colonial facades and quaint coffee shops create a setting reminiscent of European high streets. Between these two contrasting worlds lie dozens of vibrant markets, each offering a glimpse into the city's culture, heritage and history.

A City Built Around Its Markets

Like every great city, Lucknow thrives in its bazaars. These markets come in

Glimpse of Lucknow's historic markets. Photos by Monis Khan.

Zardozi work. Photo by Monis Khan.

many forms—wholesale and retail, daily and weekly, seasonal and permanent, upscale and modest. Long before it became a Nawabi bastion in the eighteenth century, Lucknow was a marketplace.

> Serving as a granary under the Mughal Empire. Lucknow's ideal location attracted traders and merchants from Bengal, Bihar and Delhi, shaping its evolution into a bustling commercial hub. Lucknow's transformation accelerated with the shifting of the capital from Faizabad.

Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula envisioned the city as an example of grandeur and elegance. Planners and architects were invited to shape this vision. Majestic mansions and palatial residences were constructed along the banks of the Gomti River. Inspired by modern capitals, the city was designed with wide avenues, expansive *bagh*s (gardens) and ample open spaces. Integral to this design were bustling marketplaces, from Chowk in the city's heart to Nakhas and Aminabad, each built not just to serve daily needs but also to showcase the finest craftsmanship.

Author Mehru Jaffer notes that Asaf-ud-Daula saw Lucknow as a poem, with its bazaars forming the most ornate verses. Just as he invited people from all walks of life to settle in his capital, he encouraged artisans from across the country to establish themselves in its markets. Over time, Lucknow became synonymous with exquisite craftsmanship. The markets were filled with the finest *zardozi* (gold and silver embroidery), *chikankari* (delicate embroidery work), *ittar* (natural perfume), and bone carving objects, which rivalled the intricacy of ivory.

In her book *A Shadow of the Past*,

From the stalls of Aminabad to designer ateliers, *chikankari* threads tradition into every fold of fabric. Photo by Monis Khan.

Jaffer describes how the Nawab would often visit Chowk Bazaar just to hear the rhythmic beating of silver being crafted into *warq*—thin sheets used to decorate sweets. The sound, for him, was as enchanting as the artistry itself.

Bazaars of the Old City

Predating the Nawabs, Chowk remains the heart of Lucknow's old city. The word *chowk* translates to 'intersection', but the leisurely *Lucknowwallah*s never found it necessary to name the market beyond that. It is spread across a large area, interspersed with residential complexes, inns, banks, post offices and the historic Kotwali. The market's oldest landmark, Akbari Darwaza, has stood since the reign of Emperor Akbar. The second major landmark, Gol Darwaza, built during Asaf-ud-Daula's time, reflects Nawabi architectural influences with its arches and domes.

> Once home to flower vendors, silversmiths, bangle sellers and perfumers, Chowk has evolved into a marketplace catering largely to the middle class. Yet, its old-world charm remains. Traditional establishments like Shree Lassi, Ram Asrey, Izhaarsons and Lal Behari Tandon continue to attract visitors.

During winter, the market reaches its peak *raunak* (bustling charm) when *malai makhan* vendors set up stalls at Gol Darwaza, drawing crowds from across the city eager to sample the legendary dessert.

If Chowk is Lucknow's historic core, Aminabad is its commercial powerhouse, with a labyrinth of overflowing shops, narrow lanes and the constant hum of commerce. Dating back to the eighteenth century, Aminabad was once a posh residential neighbourhood, home to influential families and sprawling mansions. Over time, it transformed into the city's busiest market, where generations of traders have kept its legacy alive. Among them is Vinay Vijayvergiya, a fourth-generation perfumer who runs a 200-year-old *ittar* shop from his ancestral home.

Ittar shops in Old Lucknow. Photo by Monis Khan

His family's Art Deco mansion stands as a reminder of Aminabad's past grandeur. Nearby, other historic establishments—Mata Badal Pansari (since 1860), Aroura Achaar (since 1944), Sardar Ji Papad Wale (since the 1970s) and Netram (serving traditional sweets and snacks since 1854)—continue to preserve the market's legacy.

Nimish or *makhan malai*. Photo by Monis Khan.

Colonial Imprints and Modern Markets

Hazratganj is the colonial counterpart of Lucknow's old bazaars. Established in 1810 by Nawab Saadat Ali Khan, it was named after him—his people affectionately called him 'Hazrat'. Modelled after the Champs-Élysées in Paris and Oxford Street in London, the grand boulevard was once lined with the most ornate *tongas* and horse-drawn carriages. However, the glamour was short-lived. Following the 1857 Revolt, British troops razed much of Lucknow, including Hazratganj. After annexing Awadh, the British rebuilt it as Queen's Way, restricting access to only European residents.

> Today, Hazratganj is a vibrant commercial centre where old and new worlds meet. Its Indo-Saracenic and Art Deco facades are protected by local regulations, ensuring architectural uniformity in cream and pink hues.

The market boasts luxury boutiques, major consumer brands and historic establishments, making a stroll down its lanes the quintessential Lucknow experience.

As the city expanded into a mini-metro, new commercial hubs emerged to meet modern needs.

Hazratganj. Photo by Monis Khan.

Markets like Bhoothnath, Gole Market, Kapurthala and Patrakar Puram have developed over the last four to five decades, serving as essential hubs for daily life. Weekly markets, which appear in different localities on designated days, supplement these permanent bazaars. Their lower prices make them accessible to the working class while providing a lively shopping experience for families.

Sahu Cinema in Hazratganj. Photo by Monis Khan.

Where Tradition Meets Change

While Lucknow's historic bazaars remain central to its social fabric, newer boutique spaces blend tradition with modern retail. Sanatkada, located in Qaisarbagh, is one such initiative. Founded by Madhavi Kukreja, the store is an offshoot of the Mahindra Sanatkada Lucknow Festival, a vibrant crafts bazaar held every February. Realising the demand for year-round access to traditional crafts, Kukreja established Sanatkada as a permanent space to showcase Awadhi artistry. With an attached museum and restaurant, it offers a glimpse into Lucknow's past.

> Meanwhile, annual festivals keep Lucknow's bazaars vibrant. During Holi, Aminabad overflows with *papads*, *achaar* and *gulal;* Diwali brings *chivda*, *batasha* and clay figurines. No matter the occasion, the markets remain at the heart of celebrations.

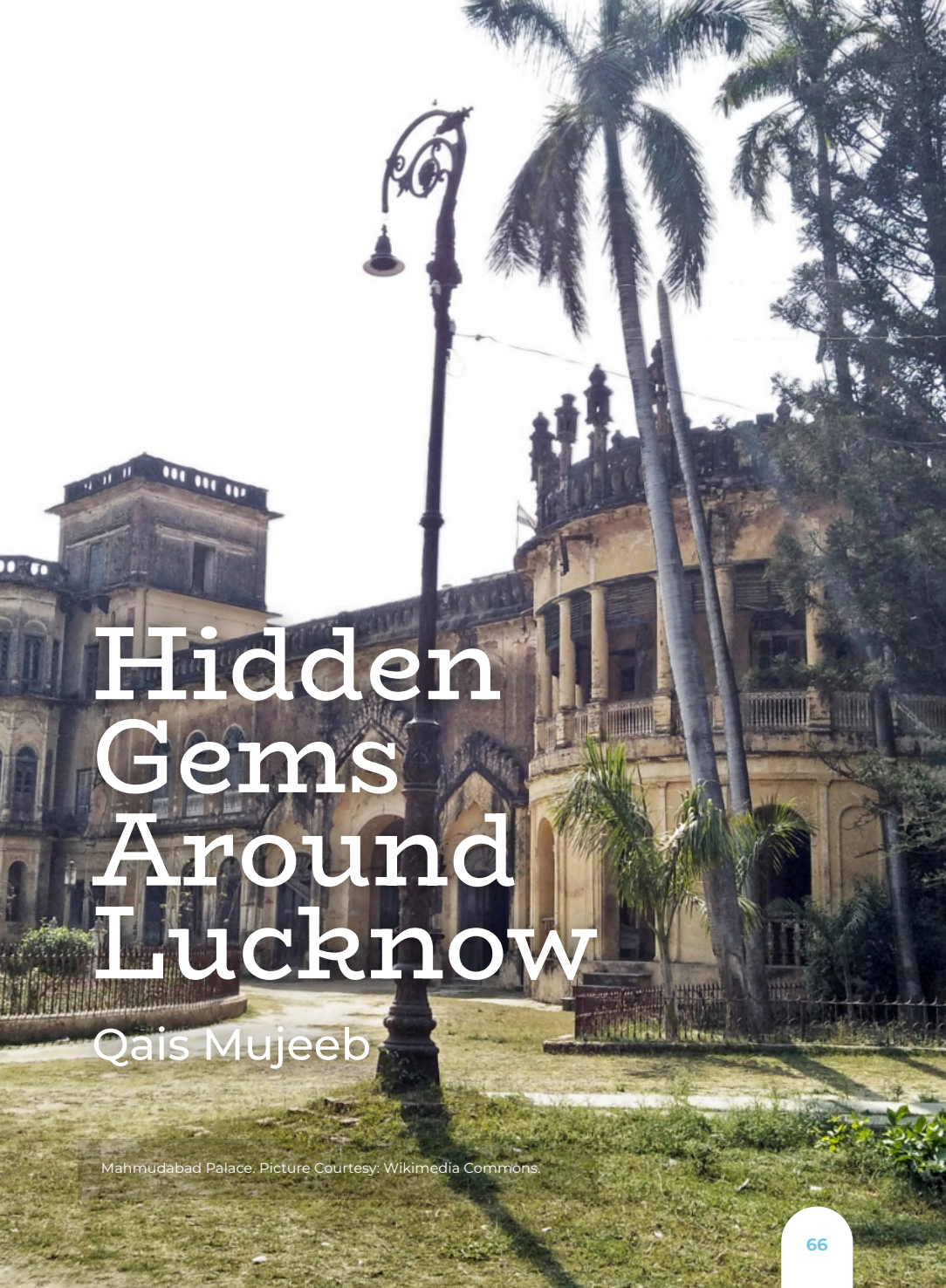
Lucknow's bazaars are more than just shopping destinations—they are a living, breathing testament to the city's heritage, where history and commerce intersect every day.

Best Bazaars for Travelers

1. Aminabad – Clothes, food souvenirs, bangles, jewellery
2. Hazratganj – High-street brands, *chikankari*
3. Chowk – *ittars*, *chikankari*, *zardozi*
4. Gomti Nagar – Boutiques, malls
5. Nakhas – Antiques, vintage furniture

Hidden Gems Around Lucknow

Qais Mujeeb



Mahmudabad Palace. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

Awadh's grandeur was never just confined to its capital cities. It spilled onto its historic *qasbahs*—semi-urban centres that thrived under aristocratic patronage—each reflecting the status, opulence and *mehmaan-nawazi* (hospitality) of its rulers. These townships, granted as *jagirs* to noble families, became epicentres of literature, architecture, cuisine and music, where the echoes of *mushairas* (poetic symposium), the aroma of slow-cooked delicacies and the craftsmanship of artisans still linger in the air.

A Glimpse of Awadh's Qasbahs

The princely estates of Mahmudabad, Balrampur, Nanpara, Mankapur, Kotwara, Oel, Salempur and Khajurgaon stand as living testaments to Awadh's heritage.

Kotwara Palace in Gola Gokarnath, Lakhimpur Kheri, under the stewardship of Raja Muzaffar Ali, stands as a testament to Awadhi heritage. I vividly remember visiting Kotwara Palace in February 2016. Invited by Mr Muzaffar Ali, a filmmaker, designer and cultural revivalist, I joined him on a trip to his ancestral estate, a four-hour drive from Lucknow with a brief stop at the Oel Retreat. By sundown, we turned onto a secluded road flanked by dense teak and *sal* trees. After what felt like an endless stretch, the fort's towering walls and chessboard-like watchtowers emerged. The palace complex, with its sprawling *havelis* and *kothis*, features grand archways, courtyards and a *mehmaan khana* (guesthouse) adorned with antique furniture, chandeliers and vintage portraits, reflecting the opulence of Awadh's nobility.

In Lucknow, Kotwara House near Qaisarbagh *chauraha* (crossroads) serves as both a heritage home and a living museum. Reminiscent of Pondicherry's French colonial homes, it houses vintage cameras, film posters, antique furniture and a horse-drawn buggy. It is also a thriving craft centre, where artisans create exquisite *zardozi*, *mukaish* and *chikankari* embroidery for the 'House of Kotwara', ensuring the continued legacy of Awadh's artistic traditions.

Poster of *Gaman*, a movie by Raja Muzaffar Ali, on display at Kotwara House—a glimpse into his cinematic journey. Photo by Monis Khan.

Mahmudabad, a historic *qasbah* of Awadh, embodies the region's rich cultural, religious and architectural heritage. Located 55 kilometres from Lucknow, the estate, under Raja Mohammad Amir Khan's stewardship, continues to uphold its Nawabi legacy. At its heart stands the grand Mahmudabad Palace, boasting arched gateways, intricate woodwork and sprawling courtyards. The estate remains a vibrant centre for *majlis*

ceremonies, where recitations of *marsiyas* and *nohas* preserve Awadh's oral traditions and elegiac poetry. The Mahmudabad Imambara and Karbala serve as focal points for Shia rituals. The estate also houses a vast library with rare manuscripts on history, theology and Awadhi culture, ensuring the preservation of its intellectual and spiritual heritage.

> Not far from Mahmudabad, Malihabad stands as a culturally significant *qasbah*, renowned for its world-famous Dussehri mangoes and literary heritage. It was home to Josh Malihabadi, the celebrated Urdu poet known as *Shair-e-Inquilab* (Poet of Revolution).

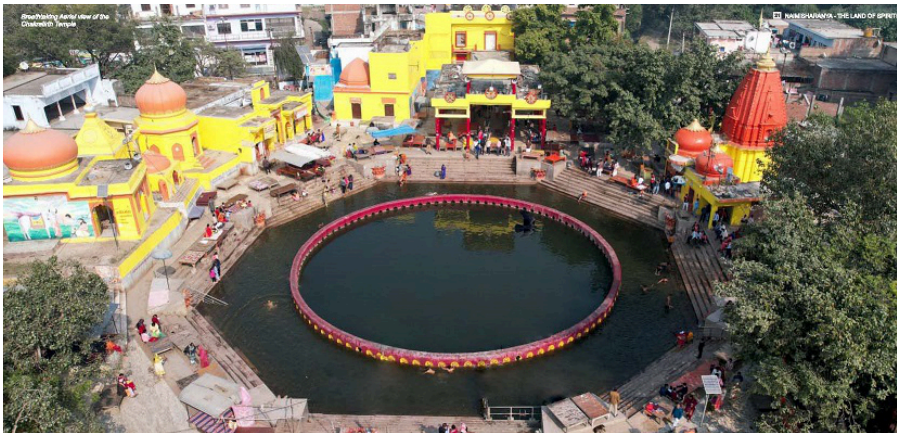
His ancestral *kothi*, though not officially recognised as a heritage site, remains a literary landmark. The town's aristocratic past is also reflected in Raja Sahib's *kothi*, though its current accessibility is uncertain.

Sacred Landscapes

Awadh's spiritual landscape is deeply embedded in its Sufi heritage. In Barabanki, Dewa Sharif, the shrine of Haji Waris Ali Shah, is a beacon of unity, drawing devotees from all backgrounds. The annual *Dewa Mela*—a blend of *qawwali*, spiritual gatherings and fairs—celebrates this enduring harmony. Uniquely, Dewa Sharif also hosts a Holi celebration, where colours and Sufi traditions merge in a vibrant display of communal amity. Not far away, Masauli is home to the shrines of Shah Abdur Razzaq Bansvi and Syed Makhdoom Ashraf Jahangir Simnani in Kichaucha, both attracting thousands during *urs* festivals.

> Besides the Sufi circuit, ahead of Malihabad, Hardoi, steeped in mythological significance, is linked to Hiranyakashipu, the demon king of Hindu lore. Nearby, Naimisharanya is a

Kotwara House houses workshops of *chikankari* and zardozi. Photo by Monis Khan.



A sacred pilgrimage site in Sitapur revered as the abode of Vishnu and the gathering place of 88,000 sages. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

revered site where sages are believed to have composed sacred texts, including the Vedas. Here, pilgrims partake in simple satvik meals—*kuttu puri*s and *aloo ki sabzi*—served near the temples.

Dewa Sharif in Barabanki. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

To the west, Farrukhabad serves as the gateway to Sankisa, a major Buddhist site where Lord Buddha is believed to have descended from Tushita heaven after preaching to his mother. The site, marked by an Ashokan pillar and an ancient temple, is a significant stop on the Buddhist circuit. Further along, Kannauj, once the capital of Emperor Harsha's empire, is now India's *ittar* (perfume) capital. Its centuries-old *ittar* industry continues to flourish, extracting fragrances from flowers, herbs and even the earth itself (*mitti ittar*). Kannauj's Perfume Park and traditional distilleries offer glimpses into its rich history and craftsmanship.

Artisanal Traditions

Awadh's *qasbah*s are not just relics of the past; they are thriving hubs of craftsmanship. Farrukhabad remains a centre for intricate *zardozi* embroidery, once patronised by the Nawabs. Khairabad is famed for its handwoven carpets and *durries*, while

Sultanpur specialises in *moonj* (grass) weaving, producing eco-friendly baskets through traditional techniques. Hardoi and Barabanki have upheld their legacy in handloom weaving and textile printing.

Kakori, synonymous with its legendary *kebab*s, is also known for its delicate wooden inlay work, where artisans craft intricate designs with remarkable precision. The town is deeply tied to India's freedom struggle, with the Kakori Memorial honouring revolutionaries like Ram Prasad Bismil and Ashfaq Ullah Khan. Nearby, Mohaan preserves the legacy of Hasrat Mohani, the poet and freedom fighter who coined the slogan '*Inquilab Zindabad*'.

Camel skin *ittar* bottle from Kannauj. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

Qasbahs like Kakori, Mohaan and Malihabad remain vital centres for *chikankari* embroidery, from where artisans supply their work to Lucknow's historic Chowk area. Meanwhile, Malihabad's renowned mango orchards continue to yield exquisite varieties, with families preserving age-old recipes of *aam panna*, pickles and chutneys.

Painted Stork. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

Natural Heritage

Beyond their rich history and craftsmanship, these *qasbah*s provide a gateway to Awadh's captivating natural landscapes. Dudhwa National Park, near Lakhimpur Kheri, shelters Bengal tigers, swamp deer and the elusive one-horned rhinoceros.

> Pilibhit Tiger Reserve, nestled along the Indo-Nepal border, offers an immersive experience amidst dense sal forests and diverse wildlife. For bird watchers, Nawabganj Bird Sanctuary (now Shahid Chandra Shekhar Azad Bird Sanctuary) in Unnao attracts migratory birds like Siberian cranes and painted storks.

Seasonal wetlands in Hardoi and Sandila offer additional birdwatching opportunities, while the Gomti River winds through these historic towns, providing scenic landscapes and glimpses of traditional riverine life.

Culinary Remains

Awadhi cuisine is far more elaborate than just the celebrated non-vegetarian fare. Breads from various millets, the use of seasonal vegetables such as *sarson* (mustard) and *methi* (fenugreek), and porridges including sweet potato *kheer* or *rasawal*—a dessert made from sugarcane juice and rice—reflect the diversity of its culinary traditions. The mango season

brings a variety of delicacies, from mango *kheer* and *aam panna* to pickles and a special Awadhi mango chutney called *navratan chutney* or *galka*. Also noteworthy are the mango orchards of Malihabad and Barabanki, fresh jaggery from the sugarcane belt of Sitapur, Lakhimpur, and Bahraich. Beyond Malihabad, Sandila is known for its famed *Sandila peda*, a sweet delicacy perfected over generations.

Awadh's *qasbah*s are not just about nostalgia; they are living, breathing spaces where heritage is not only preserved but practised. They offer an invitation—to step beyond the grand facades of Lucknow and Faizabad and into the heart of a culture where history, hospitality and craftsmanship endure. For those who venture into these forgotten townships, the past is never too far away—it lingers in the air, in the flavours and in the echoes of poetry, waiting to be rediscovered.

Mangifera indica L.. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

From Royal Courts to Modern Runways

Isha Priya Singh

Chikankari embroidery. Photo by Monis Khan.

While Lucknow is often associated with nawabs, *kebab*s and *chikankari*, the city's identity runs much deeper for Lucknowis. It is essentially the city of poets, artists, *karigar*s (artisans) and *qadrdaan*s (connoisseurs) of literature, art and craftmanship. The crafts of *mukaish* and *zardozi* are as integral to a Lucknowi's sartorial life as *chikankari*.

Chikankari

White-on-white *chikankari*. Photo by Monis Khan.

Lucknow's signature craft, *chikankari* features white-on-white embroidery in which fine stitches create floral patterns and lattices on fine fabrics. While its origin—from Persia or Bengal—remains debated, its refinement in Lucknow under the patronage of the Nawabs is undisputed. Historically, as many as 32 stitches *phanda* (knot stitch), *hool* (creating small eyelet holes), *tepchi* (running stitch), *murri* (french knot and *zanzeera* (*chai*n stitch) were recognised in *chikankari*, but over time, the repertoire has shrunk to just eight to ten predominant stitches.

> The Nawabi period celebrated fine *jaalis*, while in the 1980s, *bakhiya* (reverse herringbone), also known as the shadow stitch, became popular.

The craft experienced highs and lows in its patronage and revival, given the political turmoil in the region during the Revolt of 1857 and India's Independence movement. With the establishment of SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association), stitches like *murri*, *jaali* and *phanda* were reintroduced. SEWA played a significant role in empowering artisans and recontextualising the craft, bringing *chikankari* to cities like Mumbai, Delhi and Bangalore, where it became synonymous with quality. However, SEWA's popularity in metro cities led to the misuse of its name. Every second *chikankari* shop in Lucknow bears the name of SEWA (or

Wooden blocks are used to create patterns for the embroidery. Photo by Monis Khan.

Seva) despite having no association with the organisation.

The 1990s ushered in another chapter in *chikankari*'s history, as designer labels like House of Kotwara and Abu Jani Sandeep Khosla showcased it on the ramps, thus elevating it to the level of Indian couture. These designers introduced and popularizsd premium silk georgette as a base material for *chikan* embroidery. However, this led to several mass manufacturers using synthetic fabrics under the guise of georgette.

Celebrity Shweta Bachchan donning a Abu Sandeep *chikankari* lehenga for one of her pre-wedding functions made the craft acceptable as bridal wear, which was not the case earlier. At the turn of the millennium, *chikankari* appeared in several blockbuster films like *Devdas*, *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham* and *Mohabbatein*, boosting even the menswear segment of *chikankari*.

Currently, the *chikankari* aesthetics are governed by social media influencers and paparazzi pictures of celebrities. Visibility of the embroidery has taken precedence over understated elegance. The delicateness of *chikan* can seldom be captured in photographs, therefore, the bold stitch of *ghaas-patti* or the *ghass-patti* (satin stitch) dominates the *chikan* mass market.

Mukaish and Kamdani

Lucknow is also known for its textile crafts of *kamdani* and *fardi*. Both crafts involve flattened wire embroidery on sheer fabric. In *kamdani*, the wire is used to create motifs, while *fardi* (literally 'dots') uses the same wire to create silver and gold dots arranged in patterns.

> The *hazara butti* (thousand dots) design in *fardi* is a signature of Lucknow. The embroidery is called *mukaish* in Punjab and *badla* in Gujarat and Mumbai; however, even Lucknowis commonly use both terms.

Kamdani, *mukaish*, and *fardi* are intricate metallic embellishment techniques to add shimmer, texture, and sparkle to traditional embroidery. Photo by Monis Khan.

In the 1990s, *fardi* work was popular on chiffon and georgette sarees, dupattas and kurtas. However, as finesse declined and finishing quality deteriorated, *fardi* became uncomfortable due to the wire irritating the skin. With the rise of chikan couture, *mukaish* and *kamdani* have regained attention as complementary crafts.

Chatapati

Chatapati, a lesser-known craft from the Awadh region, involves creating geometric patterns with fabric pieces that are cut, stitched and embroidered together.

> It has two variations—one where strips of four or more colours are stitched in various patterns (diagonal, vertical, horizontal or zigzag), and another where *tukris* (small pieces) are joined to create a multicoloured pattern. This variation is also referred to as *tukriyon ka kaam.*

*Tukri*s can be triangular, square, octagonal or diamond-shaped, with a fish-scale pattern (called mahipusht) being most popular among Awadhi women. *Chatapati* patterns are often embellished with *kamdani*, *salma-sitara* or *zardozi* work. The craft found its finest expression in Awadhi *gararas*, beautifully captured in director Muzaffar Ali's film *Umrao Jaan* (1981).

Zardozi

Before *chikankari* and *mukaish* entered the bridal couture realm, *zardozi* was the preferred craft for bridal wear. The term karchobi often encompassed all *zari*-based embroideries done on a frame—called *adda* or *karchob*—including *aari* and *dabka* work. Luxurious fabrics like velvet and chenille were favoured for *zardozi* menswear, with velvet also commonly used for women's blouses and *kurtas*.

In the 1990s, the specific style of *zardozi* known as *salma-sitara* became popular, featuring *salma* (short wiggles of wire) and *sitara* (sequins).

> This style often included contrasting appliqués on the base fabric, with tiny leaf shapes made of salma

Zardozi incorporates the use of gold and silver threads, *dabka*, sequins, pearls, and beads to create intricate, raised patterns on fabric. Photo by Monis Khan.

> scattered across. The base was typically tissue silk, with replicas made on synthetic tissue.

However, this style began to feel outdated by the early 2000s, though a revival is underway thanks to designer labels like *Divani*.

Leheriya

Awadhi *leheriya* is primarily a non-commercial home craft practised by women from old Awadhi families. Its dyeing process differs significantly from the more popular tie-and-dye method. A thick cotton *dori* (string) is soaked in various dye vats and then pressed onto fabric folded twice. As the dye-soaked dori is pressed, the colour transfers through the layers, revealing patterns once opened. The dyed fabric is then dried and crinkled to enhance the wave or *leheriya* effect, a process known as *chunaai*. Optionally, it may be edged with *gota* or finished with heavier embroidery like *kamdani* or *fardi*.

As the joint family system disintegrated and lifestyles changed, this craft saw a sharp decline. Although this craft was also featured in *Umrao Jaan*, it failed to gain enough attention for a revival. Organisations like Sanatkada are working to bring Awadh's *leheriya* into the commercial realm to ensure its survival.

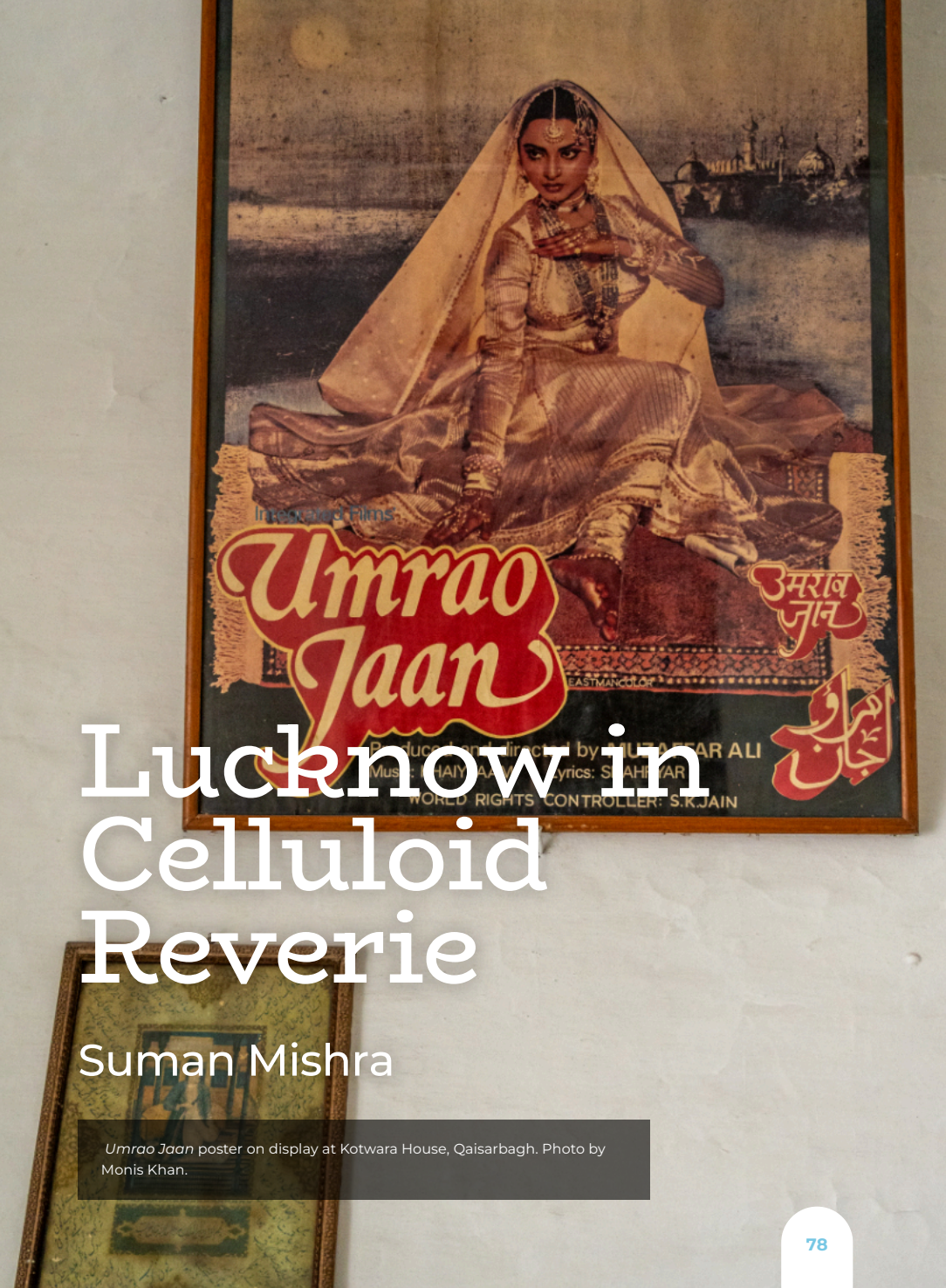
> In Lucknow, for most embroidery crafts, except *karchobi*, the creative force and its skilled execution reside predominantly with women. These artisans, often working within the intimate spaces of their homes, are the custodians of generations-old techniques.

While men may facilitate aspects of production and distribution, the very soul of these traditions is woven by female hands. Consequently, ethical purchasing of authentic craft products serves not only as a direct investment in the livelihoods of these talented women but also as a crucial act of preserving their invaluable cultural legacy.

Wooden blocks are used to create patterns for the embroidery. Photo by Monis Khan.

Lucknow in Celluloid Reverie

Suman Mishra



Umrao Jaan poster on display at Kotwara House, Qaisarbagh. Photo by Monis Khan.

Lucknow's blend of Nawabi grandeur and Awadhi elegance, its stunning monuments and bustling bazaars have long fascinated Indian cinema, continuing to inspire filmmakers today. Who would not remember watching Meena Kumari in *Pakeezah* (1972) and Rekha in *Umrao Jaan* (1981) performing the marvellous *kathak* sequences, highlighting the elegance and grace of Lucknow's traditional performing arts!

Early Depictions

The movie *Chaudhvin Ka Chand* (1960), directed by Mohammed Sadiq and produced by Guru Dutt, is considered a classic of Indian cinema. Set in Lucknow, the film captures the essence of Lucknow's Nawabi culture, showcasing its refined lifestyle—evident in its architecture, traditional attire, and the rich Urdu language.

Mere Mehboob (1963)—directed by H.S. Rawail and produced by S. S. Vasan—set against the backdrop of Lucknow's timeless beauty, showcases key landmarks such as the Bara Imambara, Rumi Darwaza, and the city's historic *havelis*. The period-appropriate costumes and set design evoke the Nawabi era's elegance.

Rafiq Rizvi directed *Palki* (1967) beautifully showcases the city's iconic landmarks, including the Bara Imambara, Rumi Darwaza and the *bagh*s (gardens) that characterise the city's landscape. The film also stands out for its detailed depiction of Lucknow's socio-cultural milieu during the 1960s, captured in its set design, costumes and dialogue.

In *Mere Huzoor* (1968), directed by Vinod Kumar and featuring Raaj Kumar, Mala Sinha and Jeetendra, leisurely lifestyle, the love for poetry, music and fine arts, and a deep sense of pride in the cultural heritage of Lucknow's aristocracy take centre stage. The film's sets recreate the opulent interiors of Nawabi palaces,

These two dancing girls are likely from Lucknow, suggested by the painting of Chattar Manzil in the studio background, 1905. Picture Credits: Johnston & Hoffmann/Wikimedia Commons.

A Nawab of Awadh. 19th century. Color and gold on paper. Picture Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

with ornate furniture, chandeliers and rich tapestries. Urdu poetry is central to the film, while *kathak* sequences and *mushaira*s (poetry recitations) celebrate the city's performing arts heritage. The costumes in the movie are reflective of the traditional attire of Lucknow's nobility—with the men in *sherwani*s and *achkan*s, and the women in *gharara* and *sharara*.

Considered one of the classics, *Pakeezah* directed by Kamal Amrohi, is renowned for its evocative depiction of Lucknow's cultural and historical milieu. The film stars Meena Kumari, Ashok Kumar and Raaj Kumar, telling the poignant story of a courtesan named Sahibjaan. Courtesans were a significant part of Lucknow's social fabric during the Nawabi era. The film provides a nuanced view of the life, social status and artistic contributions of courtesans. The film's elaborate set design is a tribute to the architectural splendour of Lucknow. The music in *Pakeezah* includes classical compositions and traditional *ghazal*s while also incorporating *kathak*, both an integral part of Lucknow's courtesan culture. The film's costume design, featuring exquisite sarees, jewellery and traditional attire showcases traditional Lucknowi fashion of the period.

> Satyajit Ray adapted one of Munshi Premchand's short stories in his historical drama *Shatranj Ke Khilari* (1977) set in 1856 Lucknow. The film focuses on two noblemen who are so obsessed with playing chess that they remain oblivious to the political turmoil surrounding them. The film provides a satirical yet poignant commentary on the decline of the Nawabi era in Lucknow.

Junoon (1978) directed by Shyam Benegal, is a period drama set in the backdrop of the Rebellion of 1857, focusing on the Nawabi culture of Lucknow. The film stars Shashi

Artist wearing *ghungroo* for *kathak* performance. Photo by Monis Khan

Kapoor, Nafisa Ali and Heena Kausar. The detailed representation of traditional ceremonies, rituals and domestic life highlights the cultural richness of the Nawabi era.

Umrao Jaan (1981), based on the Urdu novel *Umrao Jaan Ada* (1899) by Mirza Hadi Ruswa, was directed by Muzaffar Ali. The film provides a poignant depiction of the life of a courtesan in a *kotha*.

> The film sheds light on the cultural intricacies and societal structures of the time. It showcases *kathak*, particularly from the Lucknow *gharana*. The film's use of Urdu poetry highlights the city's rich tradition of literature and its significance in Lucknow's social life. The film's costume and set design are meticulous in their representation of nineteenth-century Lucknow.

A landmark film in Bollywood, *Nikaah* (1982) revolves around complex relationships and societal norms. Its depiction of Lucknow's societal structure and traditional values offers a close-up look at the city's social fabric.

Modern Films

The first half of the predominantly Partition film *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (2001) is set in pre-Partition Lucknow where different communities coexist peacefully. The film showcases Lucknow's old-world charm, its markets and traditional architecture.

Anwar (2007) explores the themes of love, identity and societal conflicts using Lucknow's historical and cultural backdrop. The city's old quarters, mosques and local life play a crucial role in setting the mood of the film, reflecting the conflict between tradition and modernity.

Portrait of a girl in traditional Lucknowi attire from the 1874 album *Beauties of Lucknow*, reminiscent of depictions in films like *Pakeezah* and *Umrao Jaan*. Picture Credits: Darogah Abbas Ali/Wikimedia Commons.

Dedh Ishqiya (2014), directed by Abhishek Chaubey and produced by Vishal Bhardwaj, is a significant film in Indian cinema for several reasons, especially in the way it portrays the city of Lucknow and its cultural heritage, including the sophisticated *adab* (decorum), *tehzeeb* (etiquette) and the genteel lifestyle associated with the city. The film features Urdu poetry, traditional *mushaira*s (poetry recitals) and Lucknow's historic architecture, including old *haveli*s (mansions) and bazaars.

Jolly LLB 2 (2017) is a courtroom drama showcasing the city's blend of old and new. The city's legal fraternity, its public spaces and local culture of Lucknow not just become a backdrop but characters in the narrative.

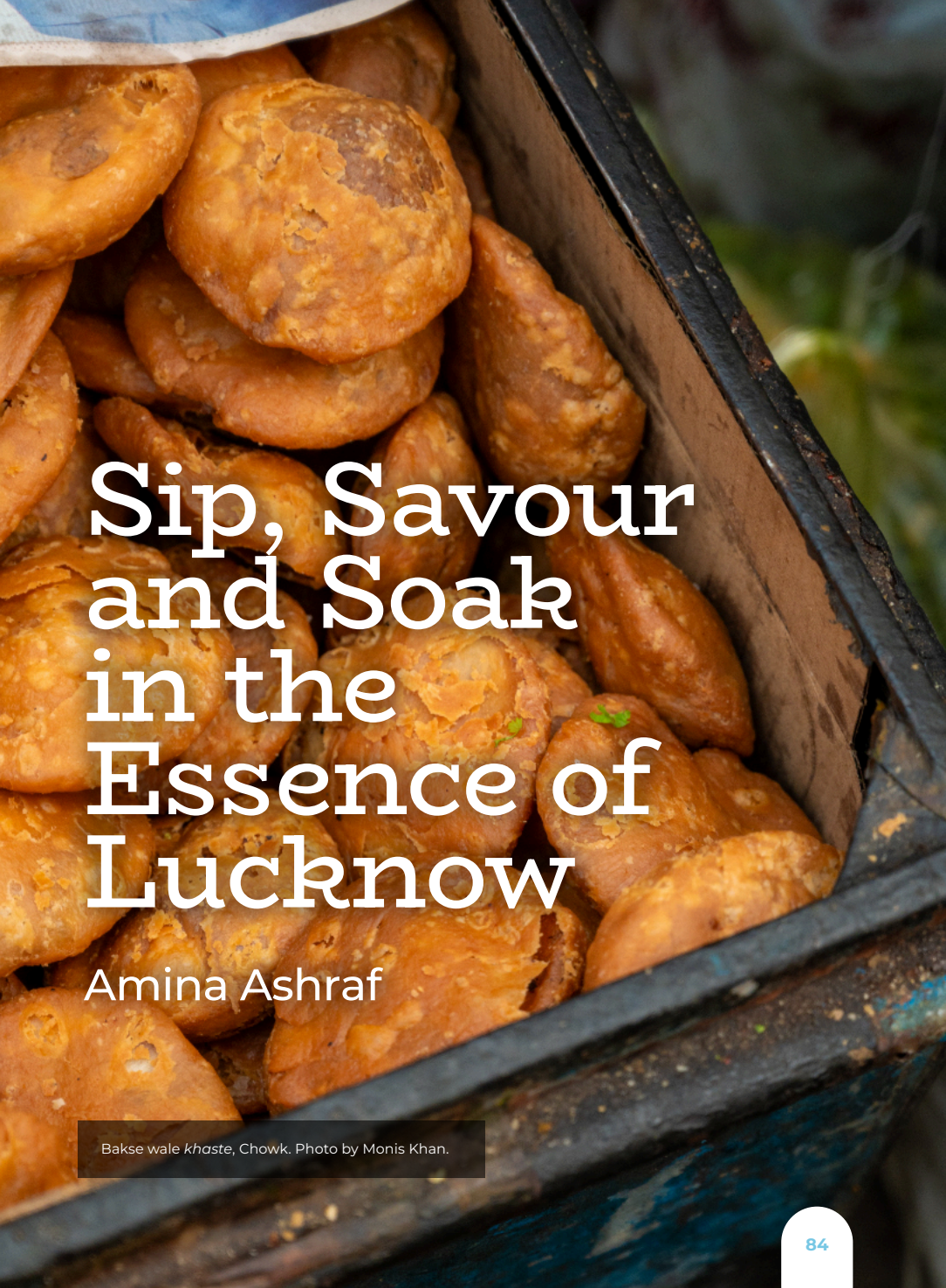
Directed by Shoojit Sircar and released in 2020, *Gulabo Sitabo* is a film that delves into the everyday life of Lucknow's residents. The movie, starring Amitabh Bachchan and Ayushmann Khurrana, offers a vivid portrayal of the city's cultural and social landscape. The film's use of the Awadhi dialect and local idioms adds authenticity to the portrayal of Lucknow's linguistic and cultural identity. The movie portrays the social dynamics of Lucknow, particularly the class differences and the relationships between various social strata, captured in the interactions between the rich landlord and his tenants.

> The depiction of local markets, street scenes and daily routines offers a snapshot of the city's vibrant life and its blend of old-world charm with modern realities. The film's title itself is derived from the traditional puppet characters Gulabo and Sitabo, which are part of Lucknow's folk culture.

If Not the Plot, Then the Presence

Mughal-e-Azam (1960) directed by K. Asif, although not set in Lucknow, features *kathak* in a way that reflects the broader cultural influence that Lucknow had on classical arts. The iconic dance sequence '*Pyar Kiya To Darna Kya*', performed by Madhubala as Anarkali, has immortalised the grandeur and cultural richness associated with *kathak*, much like it is revered in Lucknow.

Many films, such as *Ishaqzaade* (2012), utilise Lucknow as a setting to lend authenticity and a gritty realism to their narratives. The city's blend of historical grandeur and lived-in urban spaces provides their stories backdrops of complex social dynamics and power struggles. For instance, *Daawat-e-Ishq* (2014) effectively used Lucknow's food culture and traditional architecture to ground its romantic comedy in a specific cultural context. Similarly, films like *Youngistaan* (2014) and *Raees* (2017) included scenes filmed in Lucknow to add a layer of political and social realism to their storylines, leveraging the city's unique atmosphere to enhance their narratives.



Sip, Savour and Soak in the Essence of Lucknow

Amina Ashraf

Bakse wale *khaste*, Chowk. Photo by Monis Khan.

In contrast to the ever-rushing metro cities, Lucknow embraces every visitor with its signature warmth, where culture, tradition and *zubaan* come together in a soulful blend. The city invites you to slow down and savour its charm—best experienced with a steaming cup of *chai* (tea), paired with varieties of *nashta* (snack) and iconic locales to accompany your conversation. Here, *chai*, *nashta aur charcha* (discussions) are not just a pastime but a hallmark of togetherness.

Chai Culture

In Lucknow, *chai* is more than just a drink—it's an emotion, a ritual, a connection. Conversations flow effortlessly. At the heart of this culture is Sharma Ji Ki Chai, a legendary tea stall established in 1949, that has hosted everyone—from Bollywood stars to everyday visitors—all drawn in by its signature *kadak chai*, *bun makkhan* and crispy golden *samosa*s. It has become a go-to place for *tafree* (casual gatherings). Manav Sharma, the current owner, speaks with pride:

> **"My grandfather left behind more than just a tea stall; he created a haven where people find warmth, love and joy in the simplest of moments."**

Closer to it, Kewali Ki Chai is always packed with devoted patrons. In the heart of *purana* (old) Lucknow, a beloved *chai* stall near Chhota Imambara draws an early morning crowd eager for its rich *malai* (creamy) *chai*, perfectly paired with *meetha samosa*, offering a sweet and indulgent twist to the city's tea culture.

A stop at Globe Café in Hazratganj or the humble yet iconic tea stall at Burlington *chauraha*, where elderly patrons gather over endless cups of tea, is a must. As one tea vendor proudly shares,

> **"When someone travels from another city just to taste our food, we ensure they don't just savour the flavors but also experience the hospitality they've read about Lucknow."**

New-age tea spots like Talab, The Chai Junction (known for their concoctions *Nawab Pasand* and *Mohabbat-e-Residency*), Tea Vibe (*Ginger Clove and Masala Chai*), Sooo Tea Café (*Tulsi* and *Ginger Tea* with *pakora*s) and Tea

Sharma Ji Ki Chai, Lalbagh. Photo by Monis Khan.

Hub (*Daalchini* and *Masala Chai* with chili potatoes) are redefining the scene. The city's love for its timeless, old-world tea stalls remains unshaken—because in Lucknow, old is always gold.

Iconic Eateries

If *chai* is the soul of Lucknow, its legendary food spots are its heart. A

Khasta kachori. Photo by Stuti Mishra.

perfect starting point is Madras Café, known for its crispy *dosa*s and soft, fluffy *idli*s. Located near Sahu Picture House, this unassuming eatery has remained a comforting presence for generations.

For a taste of nostalgia, Exer Club is a cherished spot, famous for its mushroom sandwiches and coffee. It has been a favorite among government officers, students and locals alike. Manager Rajesh shares how he met many customers first as youngsters, who now visit with their families.

Another icon, India Coffee House in Hazratganj, was once a hub for political debates and literary discussions. Deeply tied to the city's literary heritage, it remains a place where conversations over coffee keep history alive.

No drive through Lucknow is complete without stopping at Shikanji Wala, founded by brothers Anoop and Ranu in 1992. Their refreshing *shikanji* (fresh lime soda) still draws a queue of cars from morning till night. Nearby, Chedi Lal Ram Prasad Vaish, hailed as the 'King of Shakes', serves rich, creamy milkshakes—a must in Hazratganj.

> For those fond of savory delicacies, Rovers' Frankies remain unbeatable, while Marksmen and Jone Hing are classic gathering spots. Falaknuma at Clarks Awadh offers breathtaking city views, and Moti Mahal is synonymous with authentic Awadhi flavors. No food journey in Lucknow is complete without indulging in *paani batasha*, a beloved street-side delight.

In Lucknow, *khasta* holds a special place—deep-fried to perfection and traditionally served with spiced *sukha aloo* and *safed matar* (white peas). Ratti Lal (since 1937), Bajpai Kachodi (famous for its spicy filling), Netram since 1854 (with *aloo tamatar* and

Bajpai Kachori Bhandar, Hazratganj. Photo by Monis Khan.

sukha baingan), Durga Khasta and Bakse Wale Khasta (sells out before 9 AM) are all legendary spots.

The city also thrives on its *kebab* rolls. The classic *galawati kebab roll* melts in the mouth, while the *seekh kebab roll* offers a heartier bite. Vegetarian options like *rajma*, *chana* and mushroom *galawati rolls* pack Awadhi flavors. Served with chutney, onions and lemon, they're the perfect on-the-go indulgence. Tundey Kababi, Shakhawat and Mubeen's are bustling landmarks, while Dewa Food Mart keeps vegetarian *kebab* lovers happy.

Café Culture: Blending Old with the New

While historic eateries remain cherished, Lucknow's modern café culture adds a fresh twist. Peddlers Café is a cozy retreat embodying Lucknow's warmth, a favourite for the younger crowd. Fresh Factory in Kisan Bazar, known for its farm-to-table approach, offers a diverse menu. A regular visitor says: 'This place perfectly blends Lucknow's serene pace with a taste of world flavors.'

Café enthusiasts also flock to Cappuccino Blast, Cherry Tree Café

Tunday kebab. Photo by Monis Khan.

and Sassy Canteen—each reflecting Lucknow's evolving food scene. Whether it's indulgent desserts at Butter Story or the green setting of The Pebbles Bistro & Bar, these cafés are redefining the city's culinary and social landscape.

Among heritage-inspired cafés, Sanatkada's Naimatkhana stands out, reviving lost Awadhi recipes in an ambiance reflecting Lucknow's artistic heritage. Roastery Coffee House at Jahangirabad Palace lets visitors experience Awadhi grandeur in a modern café setting. Saraca at Lebua offers fine dining in a beautifully restored building.

Together, heritage cafés and modern coffee spaces effortlessly blend the past with the present—each cup steeped in culture.

A Sweet Farewell

No culinary journey in Lucknow is complete without its legendary desserts.

Take *malai gilori*—a delicate sweet made from thickened cream folded like a *paan* and stuffed with dry fruits, a royal creation of the city. *Jalebi dahi* offers a twist on *jalebi*, balancing crisp and creamy. *Phirni*, served in clay bowls, brings the taste of home. *Shahi tukda* remains an all-time favourite, while *meethi sheermal*, a mildly sweet saffron bread, pairs well with tea or *kebabs*.

In winter, *kali gajar ka halwa* with its deep purple hue and caramelised flavor takes centre stage. Alamgir Halwe Wala in Chowk (est. 1954) offers everything from *ande ka halwa* to *lauki halwa*.

Anarsa, a crunchy rice-flour pastry, features in festive menus, while *revdi*, a sesame candy, is a sweet souvenir from Lucknow.

> For an unforgettable treat, there is Prakash Falooda Kulfi. This layered dessert is a city staple, an experience perfectly described in so many words: '*Prakash ki kulfi jaise Lucknow ki zindagi—thoda mithas, thodi masroofiyat*.'

Whether it's a roadside *kulhad* of *kadak chai* or a quiet modern café corner, Lucknow offers moments steeped in flavour and nostalgia. The charm of the city lingers in its speech, in its street food and in the soft cadence of '*Ama yaar*!' echoing across tables.

Saraca Hotel, originally a 1936 Art Deco bungalow, now combines colonial architecture with modern hospitality. Photo by Stuti Mishra.

CITY'S FIRSTS

Notable moments in the city's modern history, related to its development.

La Martiniere College (Constantia House)

Established in 1845, as per the will of Major General Claude Martin, La Martiniere College is celebrated for its unique Constantia House architecture and its remarkable defense during the 1857 Uprising, earning it a rare royal battle honour.

Rifah-e-Aam Club (1917)

The Rifah-e-Aam Club, established in 1917, became a vital center for Indian nationalism and intellectual discourse, frequented by individuals such as Munshi Premchand and Mohammad Amir Ahmad Khan. Notably, it hosted the founding meeting of the Progressive Writers Movement and the signing of the pivotal Lucknow Pact in 1916.

Nawal Kishore Press (1858)

First printing press of north india, revolutionized Urdu and Hindi publishing, printing books in Arabic, Persian, Hindi, and Urdu. Also launched Avadh Akhbar, North India's first daily Urdu newspaper in 1877.

The Oudh Punch (1877)

Launched in 1877, The Oudh Punch was a significant satirical Urdu weekly that critiqued British colonial rule. It used humor to address social and political issues, playing a key role in shaping public opinion and Urdu journalism.

Lucknow Zoo (1921)

Founded in 1921 as the 'Prince of Wales Zoological Gardens,' the Lucknow Zoo is now known by the name of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah Prani Udyan. It occupies the historic 'Banarasi Bagh' established in the eighteenth century by Nawab Nasiruddin Haider of Awadh, and even today, locals frequently refer to it by this older name.

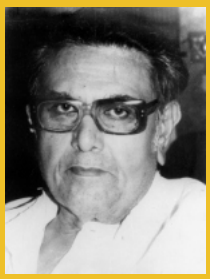
CITY CHRONICLERS

Prominent writers from Lucknow who have chronicled the city's historical and cultural legacy.

Abdul Halim Sharar (1860–1926)

Sharar's *Guzashta Lucknow* (1926), later translated as *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture* (1975), documents the city's Nawabi-era customs, etiquette, architecture, and artistic traditions before colonial rule. Written in Urdu, it remains a key reference on Awadhi culture.

Amrit Lal Nagar (1916–1990)



Nagar's Hindi novels, *Ghadar Ke Phool* (1970) and *Shatranj Ke Mohre* (1959), depict the 1857 Revolt and British colonial transformations, focusing on the lives and struggles of Lucknow's people.

Yogesh Praveen (1938–2021)

Praveen documented Lucknow's literary, cultural, and artistic heritage through works like *Dastan-e-Lucknow* (2006) and *Lucknow Nama* (2010), written in Hindi and Urdu. His research highlights the city's poetry, festivals, performing arts, and the fading grandeur of Awadh.

Roshan Taqui (1958)

Focusing on Awadh's political and cultural history, Roshan Taqui's *Awadh Symphony* (2019) and *Nawabi Lucknow* (2009) explore Indo-Islamic governance, court traditions, and British colonial impact.

Veena Talwar Oldenburg (1946)

A native of Lucknow and a historian, Oldenburg's seminal work, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow*, 1856–1877 (1984), examines the transformation of the city under British rule, focusing on urban restructuring and its socio-cultural impacts. She also edited *Shaam-e-Awadh: Writings on Lucknow* (2007), a compilation that captures the city's rich cultural tapestry.

FESTIVAL FOOTPRINTS

A range of diverse festivals that reflect Lucknow's cultural landscape.

Muharram

Grand processions are taken out by the Shia community during Muharram, on the 9th and 10th days, mourning Imam Hussain's martyrdom. The Tazia, a replica of his tomb, is carried from the Imambara to the 'Karbala' burial site, a tradition brought by the Nawabs from Iran, accompanied by the singing of lamentations, marsiya, and noha.

Bada Mangal

Bada Mangal, observed on Tuesdays of Hindu month of Jyeshtha (May-June), features community feasts (bhandaras) organized by local families across Lucknow. The Naya Hanuman Mandir in Aliganj, established in 1752 by Jathmal under Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula, is a key venue. This tradition, originating in the Nawabi era, reflects the city's communal harmony, with both Hindus and Muslims taking part.

Ram Leela at Aishbagh

Performed annually during the Hindu festival of Navratri, culminating on Dussehra. The event is organized by

the Aishbagh Ram Leela Samiti, with performances dating back to the 16th century.

Sanatkada Cultural Festival

Held every February since 2010, the Sanatkada Trust organizes this festival featuring exhibitions, workshops, and performances that highlight Awadhi culture, crafts, and cuisine, preserving the region's heritage.

Raj Bhawan Flower Show

Held Annually, usually in January or February it is Organized by the Oudh Heritage Car Club. The event showcases classic and vintage cars, celebrating the city's Nawabi-era love for automobiles. The rally starts from historical landmarks like La Martiniere College or Hazratganj and draws enthusiasts and tourists, highlighting Lucknow's automotive heritage.

MUSEUMS & MEMORIES

Institutions preserving the city's rich heritage.

State Museum, Lucknow

Established in 1863, the State Museum houses sculptures, manuscripts, paintings, and artifacts reflecting Uttar Pradesh's cultural and historical legacy.

- Location: Banarasi Bagh, Lucknow Zoo
- Days: Tuesday - Sunday
- Timings: 10 am - 4:30 pm
- Entry: ₹5 (Indian), ₹100 (Foreigners)

1857 Memorial Museum, Residency

Located at the British Residency, this museum narrates the history of the

1857 Uprising through maps, weapons, and letters from the period.

- Location: The Residency, Qaisarbagh
- Days: Tuesday - Sunday
- Timings: 10 am - 5 pm
- Entry: ₹15 (Indian), ₹200 (Foreigners)

Hussainabad Picture Gallery

Housed in a 19th-century Nawabi-era structure, this gallery features life-size portraits of Awadhi rulers, depicting their regal attire and courtly grandeur.

- Location: Near Chota Imambara, Lucknow
- Days: Tuesday - Sunday
- Timings: 10 am - 5 pm
- Entry: ₹10

La Martinière Museum

Located within La Martinière College, the museum preserves memorabilia of Major General Claude Martin and showcases Lucknow's colonial heritage.

- Location: La Martinière College, Lucknow
- Days: By appointment
- Timings: As per schedule
- Entry: Free

Amir-ud-Daula Public Library & Museum

Established in 1868, this historic library houses over 200,000 books in multiple languages and a neglected museum dedicated to Munshi Naval

Kishore. A recent digitization project has made 24,000 rare books accessible online.

- Location: Qaisarbagh, Lucknow
- Days: Monday - Saturday
- Timings: 8 am - 6 pm
- Entry: Free

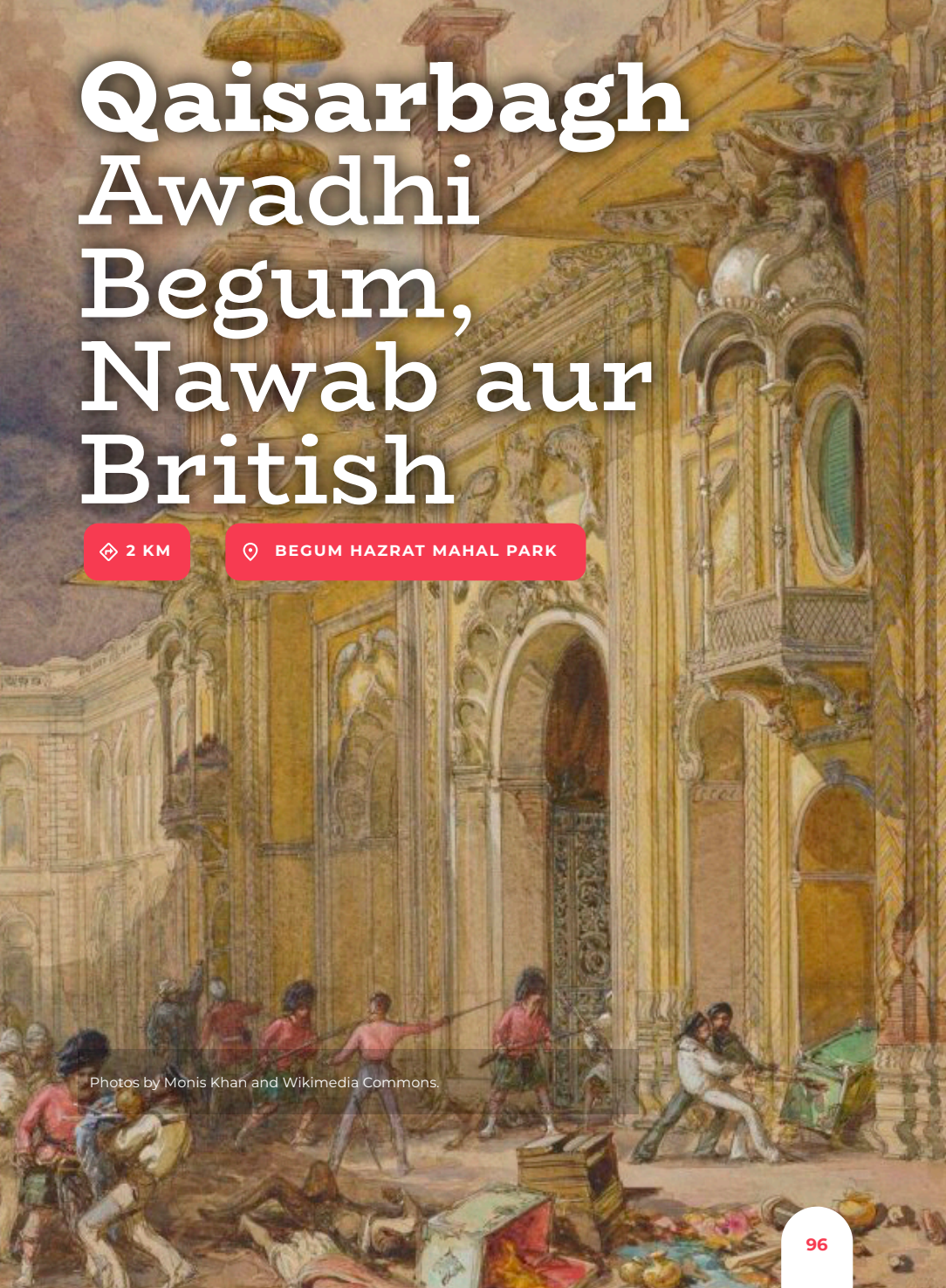
Trails

Photo by Monis Khan.

Qaisarbagh Awadhi Begum, Nawab aur British

2 KM

BEGUM HAZRAT MAHAL PARK



Photos by Monis Khan and Wikimedia Commons.

1. Begum Hazrat Mahal Park
2. Neil's Gate/Sher Darwaza
3. Saadat Ali Khan Maqbara
4. Khursheed Zaadi Maqbara
5. Sapper's Tomb
6. Butler Park (now Virangana Uda Devi Pasi Park)
7. Safed Baradari and Lakhi Darwazas (East and West)
8. Amir-ud-Daulah Park

As the seat of power in the Awadh region, Lucknow was a dynamic backdrop against which stories of love, betrayal, and royal intrigue unfolded between the Nawabs, the Begums, the British and the Nobles of Awadh.

The politics of the less than a century kept all parties involved in putting their best foot forward whether it was in culture, gastronomy, music, armament for the control of the throne of Awadh.

Through this heritage trail, we explore the cultural diversity that has shaped what came to be known as Lucknow. This trail is a mix of monuments and memories, tracing the history of a city as a regional seat of power cemented through wars and conquest as well as cultural diplomacy.

1 Begum Hazrat Mahal Park

The rendezvous point for the Qaisarbagh walk is the Begum Hazrat Mahal Park, where the stage will be set for Awadh. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah and his wife Begum Hazrat were deeply influential in defining the architecture in Qaisarbagh. The park was known as Old Victoria Park until 15 August, 1962, when Mahal was honoured at this park in Hazratganj, Lucknow, for her role in the first Indian struggle for independence in 1857. Along with the renaming of the park, a marble memorial was constructed, which includes a marble tablet with four

round brass plaques bearing the coat of arms of the Awadh royal family. The park has been used for Ramlilas and bonfires during Dussehra as well as Lucknow Mahotsav.

2 Neil's Gate/Sher Darwaza

Built by Nawab Vazir Ghazi-ud-Din Haider in 1814 as Sher Darwaza, it was also called Burj-e-Asad or Bab-ul-Fateh.

The monument is known to have had two marble lions on either side, which were eventually lost. It is a classic example of the layers of Awadh and colonial histories in Lucknow. The gateway was later renamed Neil's Gate after General GJ S Neil was shot and killed when commanding British forces in 1857.

3 Saadat Ali Khan Maqbara

The beautiful *maqbara* (mausoleum) of Saadat Ali Khan II was erected by his successor and son Ghazi-ud-Din Haidar. It stands on a green sloped mound, which is likely the original plinth, the foundation arches and the crypt.

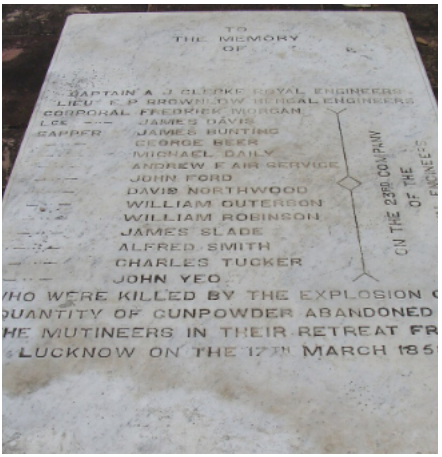
It is said that, originally, this was the site of Ghazi-ud-Din's palace, where he resided as heir-apparent. Upon ascending to the throne, the prince decreed the demolition of his former palace to build his father's mausoleum.

4 Khursheed Zaadi Maqbara

The *maqbara* of Khursheed Zaadi is located not far from Qaisarbagh. As Khursheed Zaadi had died during her husband's reign, the construction of her tomb had begun during Saadat Ali Khan II's lifetime, but it was completed by her son, Ghazi-ud-Din Haidar, in 1824, ten years after her husband's *maqbara* was built.

5 Sapper's Tomb

Adjacent to the principal *maqbara* lies a humble, stone-flagged grave, enclosed by a low railing. Known as Sapper's Tomb, it is the final resting place of officers and men of the 23rd Company of Royal Engineers who died in 1858 during the siege following the Indian Rebellion of 1857. They lost their lives in a tragic explosion caused by abandoned gunpowder.



Khursheed Zaadi Maqbara

6 Butler Park (now Virangana Uda Devi Pasi Park)

The park is located between the Safed Baradari and Bhatkhande School of Music & Performance and has an elaborate bridge over the water moats which were part of the garden landscapes around the area.

The institute, formerly known as Marris College of Music was established in 1926 by the renowned musicologist Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and is now known as Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya. Bhatkhande building is also referred to as the site of Parikhana, a fabled building of dance and music built by Wajid Ali Shah. This building which is part of later colonial construction in Lucknow seems to have set the tone for the post modernism architecture in Lucknow.

7 Safed Baradari and Lakhi Darwazas (East and West)

Safed Baradari was built by Wajid Ali Shah in 1854 and was also called Qasr-ul-Aza, which translates to a sacred place of mourning. It is said that Nawab Wajid Ali Shah built the monument in the shape of an imambara to observe sacred *azadari* (mourning) in remembrance of the martyrdom of Hazrat Hussain. The building was used later to host a number of events and house several occupants (including the Simon Commission)

in the years since its construction.

The Lakhi Darwazas on either side of Safed Baradari. Its design draws inspiration from the Constantia built by Claude Martin. It has remarkable stucco motifs and beautiful Awadhi iconography, which we will explore.

8 Amir-ud-Daulah Park

The park between the Amir-ud-Daulah library and Safed Baradari, which was built later upon the plinth of Lanka (the grand stage built by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah), has witnessed immense change in its landscaping and its surroundings. It is an integral part of Qaisarbagh much like its twin, Butler Park.

Please note:

- There is no entry fee.
- Photography is allowed (in the interior and exterior of buildings).
- It is a leisurely stroll (in the Qaisarbagh Gardens) with a number of stops to sit, talk, and discuss.

- Wear comfortable footwear, and carry a hat/umbrella along with a bottle of water.
- Start early as the roads tend to get busy and the weather becomes less enjoyable later in the day.
- Kindly respect the cultural and religious significance/sentiments of the spaces as conveyed by the walk leader.

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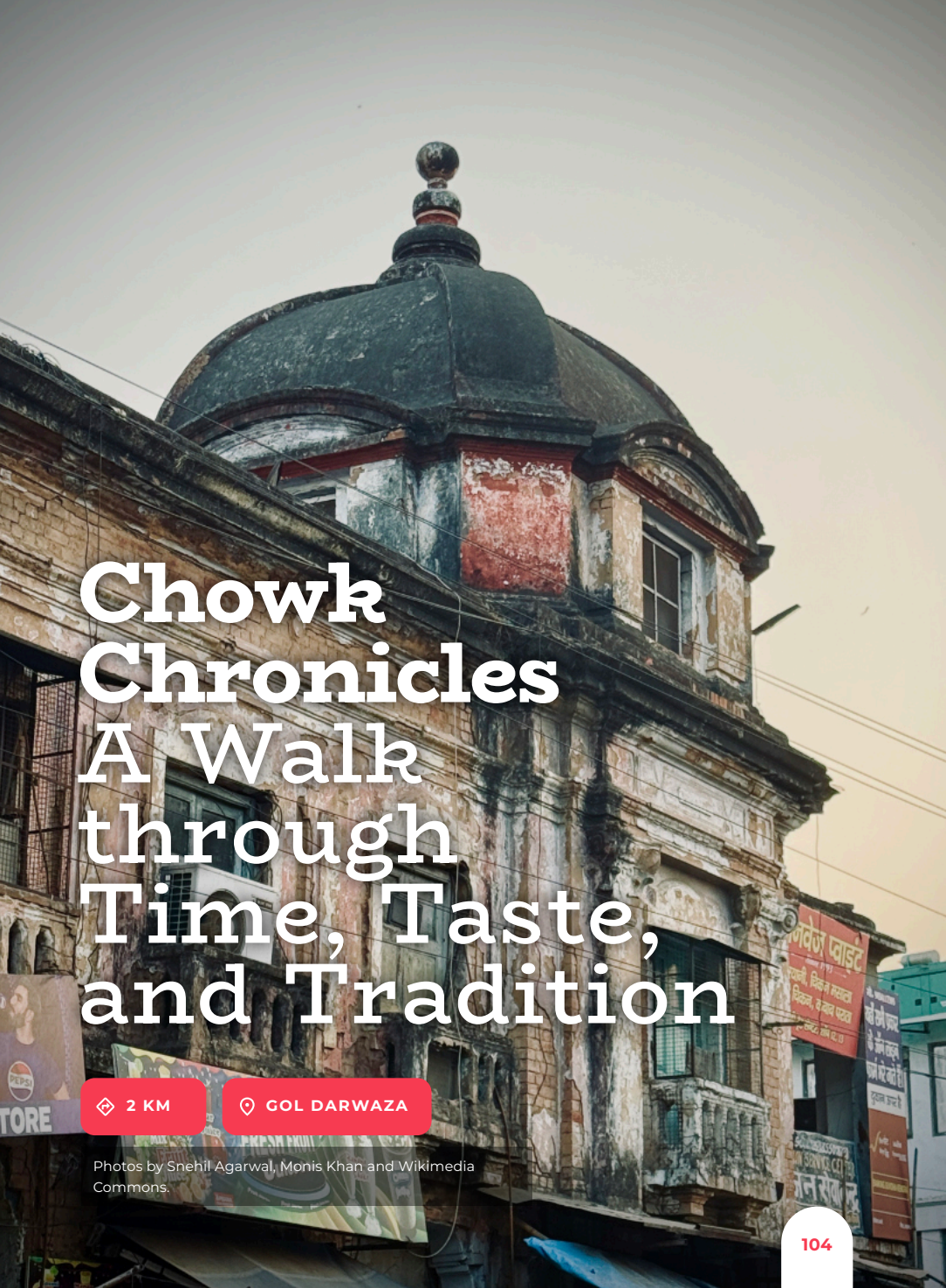

Chowk Chronicles A Walk through Time, Taste, and Tradition

2 KM

GOL DARWAZA

Photos by Snehil Agarwal, Monis Khan and Wikimedia Commons.

1. Gol Darwaza
2. Flavours that Tell Stories
3. Chikankari Shopping
4. Shahi Shafakhana and Kaptan Kuan
5. Nepali Koth
6. Saudagar Ka Imambara
7. Tehseen Ki Masjid
8. The Perfume Culture of Lucknow

MAPS

Comprising a sprawling network of narrow lanes, Chowk is more than just a market. It is home to centuries-old residential complexes, historic inns, banks, post offices, and the city's iconic Kotwali (police station). The word chowk, meaning "crossroad" or "intersection," perfectly captures its essence—a meeting point of traders, artisans, and storytellers.

The grandeur of its past is marked by Akbari Darwaza, dating back to Emperor Akbar's time, and Gol Darwaza, an architectural imprint from the era of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula. Chowk has always been renowned for its traditional crafts and culinary heritage. From the delicate artistry of *chikankari* embroidery to the fragrances of *attar*s (perfumes) and the rich, slow-cooked flavors of Awadhi cuisine, it is a place where heritage is not merely preserved but lived every day.

This trail invites you to witness the history woven into the fabric of daily life of Chowk—in its intricate hand-embroidery, beloved delicacies, and lyrical cadence of Urdu poetry exchanged in quiet corners.

1 Gol Darwaza

Built between 1784 and 1785 by Nawab Asaf-ud-Daulah, Gol Darwaza once marked the entrance to Chowk Bazaar from the Royal Palaces and Quila Machhi Bhawan.

Asaf-ud-Daulah was not just known for the grand architecture he built but for his generosity as well. A well-known tale from here speaks of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula's legendary generosity. While passing through the market, he came across an elderly woman selling a simple rosary. Misunderstanding his question about its price, she replied, '*Lakh*' (referring to the material, lac). Amused yet ever-benevolent, the Nawab paid her ₹15,000, turning an ordinary sale into a fabled act of kindness.

2 Flavours that Tell Stories

Lucknow's food culture is deeply rooted in royal kitchens and age-old street food traditions. Chowk remains a key destination for experiencing Awadhi cuisine, where slow-cooked dishes, delicate flavors, and rich textures

define every meal. While Lucknow is famed for its non-vegetarian food, there are places in Chowk that proves vegetarian food can be just as iconic.

A visit to Chowk is incomplete without sampling some of its celebrated offerings. One can explore renowned spots for breakfast dishes including

- *Chole bhature* at Shree, paired with thick, creamy lassi;
- *Malai makhan*, a saffron-infused, airy sweet reminiscent of the Nawabi love for indulgence, from any of the vendors at Chowk;
- The iconic *meetha paan*, a quintessential post-meal tradition in Lucknow;
- Slow-cooked Awadhi specialties such as *Nihari* paired with soft, flaky *kulchas*, at Raheem.

3 Chikankari Shopping

Lucknow and *chikankari* are inseparable. The intricate artistry that once graced the robes of Nawabs features, in its classic form, white-on-white embroidery, in which fine stitches create floral patterns and lattices on fine fabrics. While its origin—from Persia or Bengal—remains debated, its

refinement in Lucknow under the patronage of the Nawabs is undisputed. Historically, as many as 32 stitches were recognised in *chikankari*, but over time, the repertoire has shrunk to just eight to ten predominant stitches. The Nawabi period celebrated fine *jaalis*, while in the 1980s, *bakhiya* (reverse herringbone) known as the shadow stitch, became popular.

Walking through Chowk's bylanes, one can step into any shop and find hand-embroidered fabric. Whether

delicate shadow work or floral *jaali* patterns, this is where Lucknow's famed *chikankari* comes alive in every stitch.

4 Shahi Shafakhana and Kaptan Kuan

Established by King Nazir-ud-Din Haider, the *Shahi Shafakhana* once offered both allopathic and Unani treatments. Later, it was confined to only Unani treatment.

Today, its dilapidated gateway, adorned with the emblematic Nawabi fish motif, stands as a reminder of Lucknow's medical heritage.

Nearby, hidden beneath a modern shop, lies a well commemorating Kaptan Fateh Ali Khan. A trusted officer of Nawab Saadat Ali Khan, Fateh Ali Khan played a key role in safeguarding royal treasures. Though the Persian inscriptions on the well are now concealed, its presence adds another layer to Chowk's hidden histories.

5 Nepali Kothi

Built in the 1930s by traders dealing in *kesar* (saffron) and kasturi (musk), Nepali Kothi is a striking mansion with intricate stucco work and expansive courtyards. One of Chowk's lesser-known treasures, it offers a glimpse into the architectural grandeur of the trading communities that once flourished in the city.

6 Saudagar Ka Imambara

Commissioned by a wealthy trader in the nineteenth century, Saudagar Ka Imambara is an architectural jewel. Its twin halls are adorned with antique chandeliers, some hanging so low you could almost touch them. Many still retain their original splendor, evoking an era where even merchant homes echoed the grandeur of Nawabi palaces.

7 Tehseen Ki Masjid

Built by the nobleman Tehseen Ali Khan, this mosque is among Lucknow's most revered places of worship, alongside the Asafi Masjid and Jama Masjid. Its impressive domes and arches showcase a blend of Mughal and Awadhi architectural styles, making it a serene yet visually stunning stop on the trail.

8 The Perfume Culture of Lucknow

For centuries, Lucknow's perfumers (*attar*-makers) have perfected the art of blending fragrances that capture the essence of the city. The tradition of *attar*-making is deeply linked with the city's cultural and poetic heritage, often associated with *kothas*, Urdu poetry, and the Nawabi courts.

A visit to an *attar* shop, such as Izharson's Itr Shop opposite Tehseen ki Masjid, in Chowk offers an opportunity to explore a range of fragrances—from rose and sandalwood to musky, exotic blends.

Please note:

- The lanes of Chowk are extremely narrow, so the trail is best explored on foot. Wear comfortable footwear.
- There is no entry fee for the architecture/heritage sites included in the trail.
- Photography is allowed for exteriors; interiors upon request.
- Kindly respect the cultural and religious significance/sentiments of the spaces. Modest clothing is recommended. Expect to remove your shoes before entering.

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About Us

InterGlobe Foundation

InterGlobe Foundation (IGF) is the CSR arm of the InterGlobe Group of companies. The key focus areas of IGF include Heritage Conservation, Promotion of Livelihoods and Environment Conservation including Waste Management. The Heritage projects cover both the tangible and intangible aspects of heritage. The environment projects support development and protection of Natural Resources thereby increasing the green cover and ground water recharge. It also includes work on Waste Management. The livelihood projects support income enhancement of marginalized groups, especially women through environment friendly projects. By partnering with leading NGOs of the country, IGF has been able to impact more than 600,000 lives.

Sahapedia

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