

Lucknow: A Wonder of the Golden Days

Where Time Wears a Fragrant Veil of Culture, Splendor, Grace, & Verse

By: Qazi Dr. Shaikh Abbas Borhany al-Waleed

PhD. (USA), NDI, Shahadat al Aalamiyah (Al Hawzah, Najaf, Iraq), M.A, LLM (Shariah)

Musheer: Fed. Shariat Court of Pakistan

Member: Ulama Council of Pakistan

Chairman: The Guardian Pakistan

The Writer is an Attorney at Law and a Religious Scholar

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This article is dedicated to my learned friend, trusted confidant, and scholar of international repute from Lucknow- Prof. Dr. Syed Husain Mohammad Jafri-a renowned scholar; authored the celebrated The Origins and Early Development of Shia Islam; served, inter alia, as Chair of Islamic Studies at Aga Khan University, Karachi; founded the Pakistan Studies Department at the University of Karachi; and held senior faculty appointments at the American University of Beirut and other renowned institutions. At the height of his career, he migrated to Pakistan upon the special invitation of former President General Zia-ul-Haq-who later neglected him-yet he remained a true ambassador of old Lucknow, the cradle of eastern culture and refinement. After reading this article, he smiled and remarked: "Perhaps you were in Lucknow during the era of Wajid Ali Shah Akhtar!" May Allah, by the Wasilah of Khamsah Ath'ar (as), shower His abundant Rahmah upon his soul. Aameen.

Abstract: *This article offers a concise socio-historical and cultural portrait of Nawabi Lucknow by presenting selected "wonders of Owadh" as gateways to its larger civilizational legacy. Known by reminiscent appellations such as "The Constantinople of India," "Shiraz'e-Hind," and "The Golden City of the East," Lucknow is depicted not merely as a city in northern India, but as a refined urban universe shaped by patronage, scholarship, etiquette, artistic excellence, and composite social values. It also remains an important center of both Shia and Sunni Ulama of high repute. The study argues that Lucknow's rise, particularly after the decline of Mughal authority and the transfer of the Awadhi capital from Faizabad, transformed it into a major site of Muslim intellectual, artistic, and linguistic life in South Asia. The Nawabs of Awadh-especially Wajid Ali Shah-are examined as patrons of literature, music, poetry, performance, and cultured public life. The article simultaneously reconsiders colonial depictions of Nawabi "decadence," contending that British narratives, often aided by local intermediaries, caricatured Awadh's rulers and institutions to legitimize annexation, plunder, and political dispossession. The exile of Wajid Ali Shah is treated as both a political tragedy and a site of cultural resilience. Particular emphasis is placed on Lucknow's formative contribution to classical Urdu, including the flourishing of Ghazal, Masnavi, Marthiyah, Salaam, and Nuha, and the emergence of the Lucknow school associated with Anis, Dabir, Nasikh, Atish, and others. The article also foregrounds Lucknowi Tahzib-refined speech, etiquette, modes of address, and the Ganga-Jamuni ethic of shared civility and coexistence. Beyond literary culture, the essay surveys Lucknow's material and sensory worlds: Chikankari, Zardozi, Kamdani, silverware, attar, Paan Gilori, Kite-flying, Chowk, Muharram ceremonial arts, and Awadhi cuisine, especially Dum Pukht and Kabab traditions. Although cruelly looted and damaged under British rule, Lucknow endures as a resilient archive of grace, creativity, and memory, preserved through architecture, poetry, language, living traditions, and the writings of later custodians of its lost heritage.*

Keywords: Lucknow; Awadh; Nawabs; Culture; Tehzib; Ganga-Jamuna; Urdu literature; Marthiyah; Courtesans; Tawaif; Cuisine; Civilisation; Poetic skill

1. A Wonderful Cultural Hub:

When we talk about Lucknow, India, our mind converges towards its glorious culture and magnificent civilization, promoted by the Nawabs. Lucknow, a city in Northern India on the banks of Gomti, is a shining star and pride of its ethnicity, tradition, sweet language, courtesy, friendliness, religious tolerance and harmony. Even today, boat rides in the Gomti River are common which provide a glance of the Nawabi grandeur of Lucknow. With its magnificent palaces, splendid gardens, resplendent houses and impressive architecture, one can witness the majesty of the city and imagine its glory during the Nawabi era. Prominence of Lucknow as a center of Muslim cultural hub came after the decline of the Mughal power in the second half of the 18th century. Nawab Asifuddaulah shifted his seat from Faizabad to Lucknow for certain reasons. He was a benevolent ruler for whom the following idiom was common among his non-Muslim population:

"Jisko na de Maulā, usko de Āsaf-ud-Daulah."

Those ignored by Allah, will be taken care of by Asaf ud Daulah.

In Lucknow, one can find a hundred thousand diversities. When it comes to Eastern civilization and culture, Iran has lead for centuries. This is relevant as the civilization of Lucknow was enriched by the Iranians who migrated to Lucknow in search of prosperity and made it their home.

2. Nawab - The Patron of Intellectuals:

Even as the Mughal influence declined, the city of Lucknow flourished under the command of the Nawabs. It was Nawab Wajid Ali Shah Akhtar who patronized unique intellectuals of each field. Like his ancestors, the Nawab was a scholar of Arabi, Farsi and other languages. Many don't know that the emperor of Owadh has written sixty two voluminous books without the help of any ghost writer. Each book has high academic value. He had also composed more than 100 Marathi, apart from a number of poems. It is undeniable that art and crafts reached its zenith in Lucknow. Wajid Ali Shah followed the policy of Tipu Sultan and tried to kick out the cruel invaders of the East India Company from India. He recruited youngsters from the surroundings of Owadh in large numbers, and sent them to his military academy under the watchful eyes of the French military officers who had been employed to train them. He himself punctually attended the army drill early in the morning, in uniform. However, his associates betrayed him. Alarmed and sensing danger, the foxes of East India Company understood that Owadh's power was a great danger for their survival in India; therefore, they annexed Owadh by force prior to their attack on Delhi. The British painted a portrait of Nawab with malafide intentions to make legal their military invasion of Lucknow. Indian touts also supported their white masters; therefore, a number of writers used their pen with prejudice to present the Eastern nobility in poor light. The alleged corruption of its rulers became an excuse for taking over Owadh, the most prosperous region of India at that time. Loot by the East India Company which was sent to England is an eye-opener; a lot of it was kept by the company officials for personal gain.

It was the British and their touts who painted an ugly picture, and created concocted stories about the Allah fearing emperor of Owadh. The Nawab spent his remaining life in Matya Burj, Calcutta, in exile with great patience. The Nawab, although in exile, made all possible efforts to preserve the glorious tradition of Lucknow at Matya Burj and contributed immensely to secure

the literary heritage and off course the Urdu language. As mentioned above, Wajid Ali Shah was a gifted poet and wrote under the pen name Akhtar. This is one of the verses that he composed in prison:

*Chor ghar luṭe, shāh bāndhā Jā'e;
Merī pābandī kī hai yih ṣūrat.*

*Thieves have plundered my house and arrested the king;
This is the condition of my detention.*

When the Nawab was exiled from Lucknow to Matia Burj, Calcutta, he composed the following famous Geet:

*Bābul morā, naihar chhūṭo hī jā'e
chār kahār mil, morī ḍoliyā sajāvē (uṭhāvē)*

*O my father, I must now leave my childhood home is being left behind
Four bearers together adorn (and lift) my palanquin.*

*morā apnā begānā chhūṭo jā'e
āṅgnā to parbat bhayo, aur dehrī bhayī bidesh*

*All that was mine-kin and familiar-slips away from me.
The courtyard has become a mountain, and the threshold a foreign land.*

This is a bride's lament at bidā'ī (departure), mourning her leaving her father's home for her husband's household. In pure grief, it compares with Bahadur Shah Zafar's poems on his helplessness or Amir Khusro's poem on Nizamuddin Awliya's death. Joosh Malihabadi has composed a "Shahr Aashub", which is by nature Marthiyah of the great Owadh Empire:

*Yād to hogī woh Matiyā Burj kī bhī dāstān?
Ab bhī jis kī ḵhāk se uṭhtā hai rah rah kar dhu'ān.*

*Surely you remember the glories of Matiya Burj as well?
Even now, from its ashes, smoke rises again and again.*

*Tum ne Qaisar Bāgh ko dekhā to hogā baṛhā?
Āj bhī ātī hai jis se 'Hai Akhtar!' kī ṣada*

*You must have seen the grandeur of Qaisar Bagh-
Even today, from it there comes the cry: Ah, Akhtar!"*

3. The focal point of rational renaissance:

Lucknow became the focal point of a cultural renaissance with the shifting of the capital from Faizabad to Lucknow in 1776. Under the royal patronage, Gazals, Qawalies and Sher-o-Shairi reached its zenith. As the heart of Muslim tradition, Lucknow witnessed the formation of Lucknow school of poetry under renowned poets like Anis, Dabir, Imam Buksh Nasikh, Mirza Mohammad Raza Khan Burq, Atish, Mirza, Shauq, Asar, Josh and others. Apart from Gazals, another form of a long narrative poem for which Lucknow is famous is Masnavi.

Marthiyah writing in Urdu also reached a new height through three forms - Marthiyah, Salaam and Nuha. Urdu language attained perfection in Lucknow and slowly Lucknow emerged as a cradle of unforgettable Gazals, Mathnavi and Marthiyah. Moreover, Lucknow is called the "City of Ad'ab". In fact, it is here that one can experience the sweetness of the language in its true sense of expression. Youngsters always paid respect to their elders by performing Taslim seven times. Various cultural ingredients have contributed to the richness of this unique city. Amir Menai was convinced that he wouldn't find a wonder like Lucknow even in paradise, and expressed as follows:

*Kahān hūngī, amīr, aisī adā'en hūr-o-ghilmān meñ;
Rahegā khuld meñ bhī yād ham ko Lucknow barsoñ.*

*"O Amir, where-among the Houris and the Ghilman-shall such elegance be found?
Even in Paradise, the memory of Lucknow will remain with me for years."*

4. Unique Costume:

The Nawabs of Owadh were great patrons of fine arts and famous for their flair of detailing on their outfits. Chikankari is a unique and well known craft involving delicate and artistic hand embroidery, with delicate designs created originally on pristine white fine mulls and muslin. Noorjehan gifted this art to India. It had its finest flowering in the 17th and 18th centuries under the Nawabs of Owadh. There is a popular legend that a courtesan in the Nawab of Owadh's Harem was a master of this art. He was so impressed by the work of his beloved that under her supervision he established a training workshop where this art of embroidery would be developed further. Chikankari thus received great impetus during the Nawabi period. The source of most design motifs in Chikankari is Mughal. These motifs can also be seen in the ornamentation of Mughal buildings like the Taj Mahal and the monuments of Fatahpur Sikri. Besides Chikankari, the Zardozi and Kamdani works of Lucknow are also appreciated far and wide. These hand embroidered works with gold and silver threads are done on Angarkha, Dupattas, Lahengas, Cholis, Dupalli Topi and shoes. Lucknow is in fact among the few cities that duly understands the grace of the 'Dupatta' or the covering cloth. Angarkha was commonly used by the nobles of Lucknow until 1920s when it was replaced by the English dress code by force.

A poet cherished the glory of Lucknow as follows:

*Log mushtāq the, dīdār ke dīwāne the;
Haft iqlīm meñ, is shahr ke afsāne the.*

*"People were eager-mad for a glimpse (of its splendour);
Across the seven climes, the tales of this city were on everyone's lips."*

5. Masters of Arts and Crafts:

From time immemorial Lucknow is known for its gems, jewelry and enameling work. Exquisite silver wares like Pandaan, Atardaan, Qidaah (silver cup for drinking), tea set, dinner sets with pattern of hunting scenes and roses are very popular. The Bidri and Zarbuland silver works of Lucknow find expression on excellent pieces of jewel boxes, trays, bowls etc. Life-like ivory and bone carvings from Lucknow with motifs of flowers, leaves, creepers, trees, birds and animals are widely appreciated. The master craftsmen create intricate items like Khanjar, knives, lamp shades and small toys. In fact the ivory works from this city continue to find a place at museums and private collection of admirers. Fine pottery from Lucknow is yet another work of art that has captured the imagination of the viewers.

Besides these well-known craft works, Gota weaving, dyeing, silver-warq making, wood works and Tazia making were specialties of the Lucknawi tradition. Beautiful Tazias and Zari prepared with gold and silver papers are made by master craftsmen to mark the solemn occasion of Muharrum.

6. House of Attar:

Attar or ittar (eastern fragrance) which was introduced in India by the Muslims reached a new height in Lucknow. Lucknow can be counted as one of the few cities in the North India where the love of exotic fragrances and the art of Attar making reached exalted heights. The credit for popularizing perfumery in Lucknow goes to the Nawabs of Owadh, particularly to Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. Like his predecessor, Nawab Nasiruddin Haidar, he built fountains of Attar around his bedrooms which were continuously running, spreading fragrance in the atmosphere. Fragrance has always been an important part of the cultural life of Owadh. In the days of the Nawabs, perfumes were used not only for wearing, but also added to the food to give it more fragrance and taste. It was created from various aromatic herbs, spices, Sandal oil, Musk, abstract of flowers, and leaves. The Motia Attar of Junpur, Rose Attar of Ghazipur, Khus Attar of Musapur and Oud-Agar Attar of Assam are always available in Attar shops at Lucknow. Apart from Attar, Lucknowi Paan-Zarda and Qiwan Khamira are hot favorites which admirers exchange as gifts. Even today in Lucknow, it is not rare to find in a typical Muslim wedding the breathtaking fragrance of Attar.

7. Lucknowi Gilori:

In Lucknow, Paan is known as Gilori. The Paan was the first item served to a guest at the time of his arrival and then at departure. This custom, recorded by Ibn Batutah - the famous historian of the medieval era – still remains popular. Paan is a leaf which grows in hot and humid climate but under the shade so that sunlight does not burn it. Generally Paan is used with catechu (Kattha) and quick lime which brings red colour to the mouth. Beetle nuts and other items like clove, cardamom, and peppermint are added for special taste and aroma. Some of the Lucknowi ingredients of Paan are as follows: Gulqand, Kharik, Munaqqa, Grated Coconut, Cashew Chutni, Pistachio Chutni, Cherry, Special Salli Supari, Rose powder, Cardamom Water, Badam Chutney. Offering someone Gilori, for instance, is a sign of respect. Shahjehan, the architect of the Taj Mahal, once offered poisoned Paan to an unwanted suitor of his daughter. The young man, not wanting to offend Shahjehan, accepted the Paan, and died quickly thereafter. It was Queen

Noorjehan - the mother of Shahjehan - who popularized the chewing of Paan as a royal tradition in India. Queen Noorjehan discovered that Paan made her lips red which is why it was also used as a beauty supplement back then.

8. Recreation and Chowk of Lucknow:

Although kite making was popular throughout India, this activity flourished in Lucknow. Under Nawabi patronage, kites of different types, shapes and sizes were developed. Bird fights and parrot flying kept the elites busy throughout the year. Expert servants were appointed to train and look after the parrots and pigeons. Their sports were not only for joy but a sense of pride. The art of training pigeons was perfected by the nobility of Lucknow. The pigeon flying event is yet another exciting game that is eagerly awaited. The other prestigious sport of the Nawabs was hunting; it was a pleasing hobby which was adopted by each and every monarch.

No account of Lucknowi culture is complete without the mention of the famous 'Chowk' of Lucknow. The term 'Chowk' has become synonymous with Lucknow. 'Chowk' has played a vital role in the development of the Lucknowi culture. It was the pivotal point around which the traders, engravers, painters, artisans, weavers, singers thrived and grew.

9. Courtesans of Lucknow and Urdu:

The uniqueness of Lukhnawi Tahzib can also be noticed when original natives of Lucknow converse with others since it is such a delicate language. The city of graces uses exalted terms to address such as "Huzoor", "Jan'ab", "Hazrat" and "Shukriyah". While speaking, people generally use "Ji" (for "Haan" or yes) as a mark of respect; when someone elder calls a younger person, they reply with "Ji Janaab". This is a city that still speaks the language of "Aap-Jan'ab" and the dictum of "Pehlay Aap" is still a part of everyday life for a true Lucknowi. Youngsters still pay "Taslim" and "Ad'ab" thrice to elders - these Lucknowi manners have their own charm. Also, a Lukhnawi will prefer to use the "Hum" over "Mai" (both words mean I or me). These peculiarities of Lucknowites can be easily observed even when they go out of the city and get instantly identified by the way of their usual Lukhnawi dialect. The kids are groomed in accordance with the customs and traditions of the city where they greet elders with proper salutations such as "Namaste", "Salaam", "Dhanyaw'ad" and "Shukriya" instead of "Thanks". "Hamara Lucknow" is the popular phrase used by the natives of Lucknow, thanks to the cultural heritage, unique lifestyle and old world charm that the city still has intact. There is a sense of brotherhood and the famous "Ganga-Jamuni" tradition is still prevalent in Lucknow where Hindus and Muslims live together in harmony. This cultural uniqueness of the city has actually blended the customs of the two communities that have been coexisting peacefully for centuries. Nazakat, Tahzib and Tamiz occupy a distinct place in the hearts of die-hard Lucknowites and they are likely to be hurt even with the slightest hint of rude language or behavior. "Hamari Sh'an May Ghustakhi" phrase still holds relevance in the life of a true Lakhnawi. The people of Lucknow actually take pride while addressing the other as "Aap" instead of "Tum", which is used extensively elsewhere in India. The word "Tum" is regarded as demeaning in Lucknow and people get offended if someone refers to them as "Tum". It is akin to using abusive language.

In Lucknow, association of the nobility with the courtesans started with the reign of Shuja ud Daulah (1753-74). It became fashionable for the noblemen to associate with courtesans, either for pleasure or social distinction. An educated man like Hakim Mahdi, who later became Vazir of Owadh, owed his initial success to a courtesan named Piyaro, who advanced her own money to enable him to make an offering to the Nawab Sultan on his first appointment as Governor of a Province of Owadh. This situation went so far that it is said that until a person had association with courtesans he was not a polished man. Courtesans in Lucknow were recognized as entertainers as well as preservers of high culture of the royal court. They held respect within the Nawabi court despite their providing private services to specific patrons; this is why they were not entirely considered part of the Ashr'af (respectable gentry). With the decline of the Mughal Empire in Delhi, the power of Nawabs of Owadh increased. Many courtesans as well as poets who belonged to noble families of Delhi and the surrounding areas moved to Lucknow.

The close association of the court, courtesans, and Urdu cannot be denied. The impact of courtesans on Lucknow's poetry can be judged from the fact that under their influence, the poets of Lucknow gave a new direction to the Ghazal. They chose a female 'sweet-heart' in place of the hitherto universally popular male or at best without gender, as the object of their love. Their expressions amply prove that their sweet-heart is usually an accomplished courtesan. This was a landmark in Urdu poetry in as much as it imparted genuineness and sincerity to the expression of Urdu poets who, for the first time, presented a clear and distinct concept and picture of 'women', the desired woman, in Urdu poetry, which was an accomplished courtesan.

The Tawaif culture of Lucknow was one of the most sophisticated-and most misunderstood-institutions of North Indian urban life. Far beyond the simplified label of "courtesan," the Tawaif occupied a complex social space in which artistry, etiquette, and patronage intersected under the Nawabs, shaping the city's aesthetic and moral imagination. In nineteenth-century Lucknow, Tawaif Kothas functioned as elite salons. They were centres of refined music (Thumri, Dadra, Ghazal), classical dance (Kathak in its courtly form), poetry, and high Urdu prose. A talented Tawaif was trained for years in voice, rhythm, literature, and the fine codes of Tehzib-how to converse, host, improvise verse, and conduct herself with poised intelligence. Many were formidable cultural authorities, setting standards of taste in language, attire, and performance, and contributing to the very texture of Lucknow's famed refinement. Patronage was central. Nobles, merchants, and aspiring gentlemen sought not only entertainment but cultural polish: learning diction, manners, and appreciation for the arts. The Tawaif's world was also an economic system-often granting women an unusual degree of financial agency and professional recognition compared to many other spheres of the time. Yet this agency existed within constraints, as respectability was negotiated constantly, and social acceptance could be selective and fragile. The decline of Tawaif culture is tied to colonial moral regulation and the hardening of Victorian notions of respectability, which recast many performance spaces as sites of "vice." To write about Lucknow without the Tawaif is to miss one of its most influential classrooms of culture. Their legacy endures in the repertoire of semi-classical music, in the cadence of Urdu, and in the quiet, enduring ideal of grace under pressure-an artistry that made beauty, conversation, and performance inseparable from the city's identity.

As the courtesan was the center of their thoughts, they freely gave expression to their ideas and feelings on different parts of their sweet-heart's body which was unheard off earlier. That is why in the Urdu Ghazal, Mathnavi, and Wasokht of those days, we come across references to physical intimacy itself. True, some of the verses written in those days can be considered vulgar but let us not forget that they represented the general state of morals of that era. These women also formed the central theme of a peculiar type of poetry called Rekhti in which the male poet used feminine language and liked to give expression to their suppressed thoughts.

A Lucknowi scholar, Muhammad Baqir Shams, has disclosed in "Lucknow Ki Tahzib" as follows: "Maulvi Shibli Nomani, Niyaz Fatahpuri and other literates were the regular audience of the Kutha of Chaudra'in, the famous courtesan. When Maharaja Patyala visited Lucknow, a Mahfil of Ghazal was arranged in his honour. Mushtari, the famous courtesan was invited to entertain. She held command over extempore poetry composition. Members of royal retinue requested her to read something in praise of the Maharaja. She followed the instruction with perfection. The Maharaja was extremely impressed upon witnessing her command over the language. Due to this, she was invited again in a gathering of monarchs during her pregnancy. Another poet was also there, who sensing her physical condition, spontaneously recited a verse loudly mocking her, which is as follows:

*Ḥamal-nu mahīne kā hai Mushtarī ko;
Koī dam meñ bachchā huā jātā hai.*

*"Mushtari is in the (final) months of pregnancy;
Any moment now, she is about to deliver the child."*

*Mushtari did not lose her temper and spontaneously responded in the same Qafiyah as follows:
Khushī āp ko is qadar kyūn na ho,
Ke hamshīr-zāda huā chāhtā hai.*

*"Why should you not be so happy,
when a sister's son is about to be born?"*

The legendary biography of Umrao Jaan Ada - the famous courtesan and poetess of the last phase of the Nawabi era - provides a glance on Lucknow's distinct cultural heritage, its Nifasat and Tahzib (etiquette). Her beauty, style, sensibility and affairs continue to inspire writers, poets and film makers. According to all historical accounts, Nawabs and noblemen used to send their children to Kothas to learn regal etiquette, cultured manners, and the art of literary appreciation from courtesans - many of whom were poets in their own right. They themselves mastered the art of music and were regarded as women of virtue. They were not "Queens of the Baz'ar" and never exposed their bodies in public. Nawabs and notables usually established relation with them through the institution of "Mutah", which is legal according to the Shia Imamiyyah, like the practice of Misyar in Sunni Muslims. It was a common tradition in those days that in marriage, along with dowry, monarchs also gifted maids. Often these maids held influential positions due to their wit and glamour. The poet, Mirza Ali Baig Naznin, however, warns of this practice through the following couplet:

*Aisī jawān larkī ko jahaiz meñ na lo, Nazīn;
Tumhārā shauhar use urā le jā.egā.*

*“Do not take such a young girl in dowry, dear;
Your husband may carry her off / run away with her.”*

The fall of Lucknow brought about a dark and painful phase. The cruel East India Company snatched the power from the Nawabs by their wicked tricks and the Nawabs who didn't want bloodshed of the innocent quietly surrendered. The English writers and their touts defamed the Nawabs and their culture and coined several fabricated stories. Those vultures of literature focused their energy to present Lucknow as a hub of courtesans due to sectarian hatred only since the Nawabs were mostly Shias. The British wanted to eliminate the beautiful memories of generosity and intellectual patronage of the Nawabs from the minds so they propagated against them on a large scale. This hatred got established to such extent that every time someone said Lucknow, people smirked and recalled the Tawaifs only. The British deliberately muddled the truth about Kothas of Tawaif in order to degrade Nawabi culture, to enflame sectarian hatred (the Nawabs were mostly Shia) and to end the prestige of Owadh. In a campaign waged against Nawabi development and charities, the British Empire confiscated large properties and prime real estate donated to various public welfare institutions by the Nawabs.

*Abd al-Halim Sharar has mentioned in “Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture”:
A person's manner of speech is the first sign of his good breeding and manners, and every developed civilisation the world over improves and reforms its language. The people of Lucknow have developed a very polished and refined language. The masses and uneducated people speak better Urdu than many poets and men of letters of other cities of India, and they show great delicacy and discretion in their choice of words. A courtesan expressed her menses to a Hakim as follows:*

*Is mahīne merī namāz qazā nahī huī.
“I did not miss (any) Namaz this month.”*

Poet Taslim praised the command of Urdu of the people of Lucknow as follows:

*Yih laṭāfat ho zabānī, ghair ko kyūkar nasīb;
Rashk'e mauj-e āb-e Kausar hai zabān-e Lucknow.*

*“Such delicacy of conversation cannot be found by outsiders (of Lucknow);
Language of Lucknow is so pure that even the spring of Kaus'ar would be proud of it.*

A Lucknowi Aalim visited Karbala, Iraq, and stayed there for long, neglecting the responsibilities of his family. After some time one of his friends intended to travel to Karbala, and asked the family of his friend if they wished to send something to the said Aalim. The elder brother of the above Aalim asked his sister in law (the wife of the self-exiled Aalim) to write a letter to her husband and ask him to come back. She was shy by nature so she requested him to write himself. The brother in law proposed this famous verse of the Manqabat, which is as follows:

*Yā mujhe Karbalā bulā bhejo;
Yā mire dard kī dawā bhejo.*

*“Either summon me to Karbala,
or send me a cure for my pain.”*

*Mir Anis visited Hyderabad Dakkan to attend a Majlis where he recited a Marthiyah. Contrary to the tradition of Lucknow, nobody in the audience showed any appreciation on any of his stanzas. The tradition of Lucknow was such that when a student recited his verses and if he committed a mistake, seniors would correct him, whereas when the seniors recited their verses, the audience whole heartedly acknowledged it with salutation and appreciative remarks. Mir was used to such atmosphere; hence, when he found the audience unresponsive, he read several stanzas with patience and afterwards put the paper aside and chanted spontaneously:
Hā.e Lucknow! Tujhe kahā se lāū?*

“Ah, Lucknow! From where can I possibly find your equal?”

10. Nawabi Cuisines of Owadh:

Discussion on Lucknow will be incomplete without its mouthwatering Nawabi cuisines. The dinner of the Nawabs usually comprised of 25 to 30 dishes. On special occasions, however, hundreds of dishes were prepared. The Nawabs loved to experiment with their food. Major credit goes to Nawab Wajid Ali Shah for enriching much of Lucknow's cultural potential. An unusual man whose preference for the finer things in life was matched by his equal interest in state affairs, this poet-King composed verses that inspire singers to this day. The Nawab's interests in the arts was shared by his people who freely indulged their refined and artistic inclinations by playing chess, visiting the theatre and gorging on fine cuisine. Chronicles list about 37 types of breads, 47 types of Pulao, 35 types of Zarda, 5 types of meat curry and 37 types of Halwa cooked in those days. Once Wajid Ali Shah tricked Prince Asman Qadar of Delhi by serving a mutton curry which looked like marmalade. Asman Qadar then reversed the trick and served a lot of dishes made of sugar which looked otherwise.

In the 1780s, the kingdom of Owadh was struck by famine. Nawab Asifuddaulah began building the Bara Imambargha in his capital Lucknow to provide employment to the people. Feeding hundreds of workers was an enormous task, so the cooks used an ingenious traditional way to prepare the food. Rice, meat, vegetables and spices were put in huge vessels, the top sealed and the dish allowed to boil in the slow heat of Bukhari ovens. As the Handis were being opened, the Nawab, who happened to pass by, decided to taste the food.

Delighted by the subtle flavour and delicate taste, he introduced it into the royal kitchens, where refined by chefs, the unique Lucknow style of Dum Pukht cuisine was born. Awadhi Cuisine in Lucknow can be traced back to when the Bawarchis (chefs) and Rakabdars (gourmet cooks) of the Nawabs of Awadh invented the “Dum” style of cooking or the art of cooking over a slow fire, which has become synonymous with Lucknow. Every great cuisine style of India carries its legends but the story of Dum Pukht is unique; vegetarian food like Dum Pukht, Dum Aloo or non-

vegetarian items like Dum Mutton and Dum Murg, Murg Mussalam, Tall-e-Shabnam, Murg Joshina are variety of Lucknow alone. The Dum style of cooking or the art of cooking over slow fire originated here. If Dum Pukht cuisine is the ultimate specialist experience, Nihari and Naan - a mutton dish served for breakfast - is the only thing that can complete a holiday to the land of Mughals.

The richness of Awadhi cuisine lies not only in its variety but also the ingredients used like mutton, panir, and rich spices, which include cardamom and saffron. The Bawarchis (cooks) of Owadh specialized in the preparation of dishes like Kawab (the Lucknowi pronunciation for Kabab). Lucknow has earned such a reputation for Kawab that it is often called the City of Kawabs. Among the 30 Kawabs are 20 non-vegetarian while the rest vegetarian. A few varieties of Kawab include Shami Kawab, Kakori Kawab, Galawat Kawab, Pathar Ke Kawab, Nargasi Kawab, Seekh Kawab, Boti Kawab, Patili-Ke-Kawab, Ghutwa Kawab are among the known varieties. Thus, it comes as no surprise that you'll find the best Kawab in Lucknow, considering how Kawab are an integral part of Awadhi cuisine. Qurma, Kulchas, Rumali Ruties, Parathas and various types of Biryani, including Dum Biryani, Noor Pulav or Mori Pulav are some of the other specialties. Taste of each dish was different, as per Arabi phrase: *Kullu jadidin ladhidhun*.

"Everything new is delightful (tastes sweet)."

11. Contribution in the socio-cultural activities:

Whether it is Rumi Darwaza or Bara Imambara, Chota Imambara, Havelis or Kothis, all are evidence of the glorious past. To preserve the residences of Nawabs - Havilies like Dilkusha, Bibipur and others - they are today used as luxurious hotels where visitors can enjoy the Nawabi atmosphere. Lucknow's medieval history began with its elevation to the capital city under the Nawabs of Owadh. The architectural contributions of the Awadhi Nawabs include numerous Masajid and places; many paintings of these are now maintained at different museums and private art galleries. During the era of Asif ud-Dawlah, resplendent buildings were constructed. The roof of the Imambargha of Asif ud-Dawlah is one of the wonders of world. He also built 400 gardens influenced by the Iranian tradition.

12. Evening of the Lucknowi culture:

The 'Golden city of the East', Lucknow represents a culture that combines emotional warmth, a high degree of grace, courtesy and a love for gracious living. There still remain people who possess these beautiful qualities. This cultural richness, famous as 'Lucknowi Tehzib', has blended the cultures of two communities living side by side for centuries, sharing similar interests, and speaking a common language - Urdu. Like the fall of other civilizations, Lucknow also suffered greatly after the English invasion. Brutal conquerors destroyed every sign of the cultural heritage, and the generous became beggars.

Historical accounts provide us with reasons behind the financial destruction of Lucknowi Tehzib. The extravagant lifestyle of the Nawabs became a burden for them at a time when their properties and incomes were declining. Friends and foes, both have admitted, that class

discrimination and the power of the courtesans lead this civilization towards its fall. The following Farsi phrase was common in Lucknow, which pointed out the reason of economic disaster:

*Chār chīz ast bar ra'īsān farz;
Gurgurī, palkī, patariyā, qarz.*

*“Four things are deemed obligatory for the elite:
the huqqah, the palanquin, an illicit romance, and debt.”*

Several famous Hindi movies used Lucknow as their backdrop such as “Junoon”, “Shatranj Kay Khilari” and many more. You can discover and rediscover Lucknow every day. The following lines cannot present even an iota of Lucknow, as volumes are required to cover its golden heritage and civilization. No one has known Lucknow to its fullest potential, and never will. That is why the following phrase was coined:

Jise āp kahte haiñ Lucknow; Use ham kahte haiñ dūsrā jahān.

The place that you call Lucknow; We call it the other world.

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