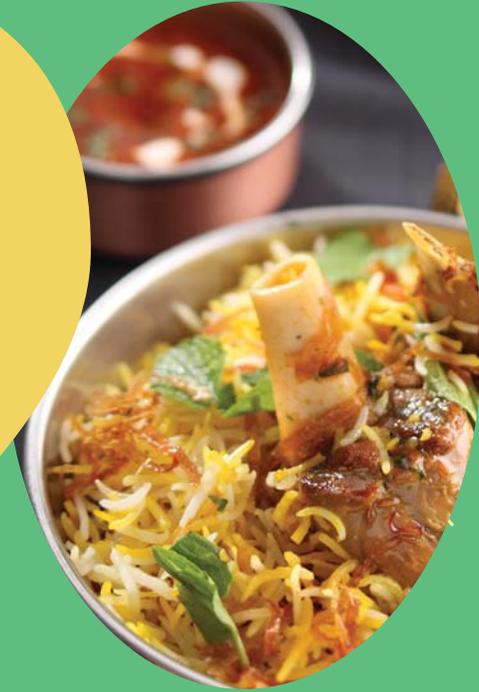
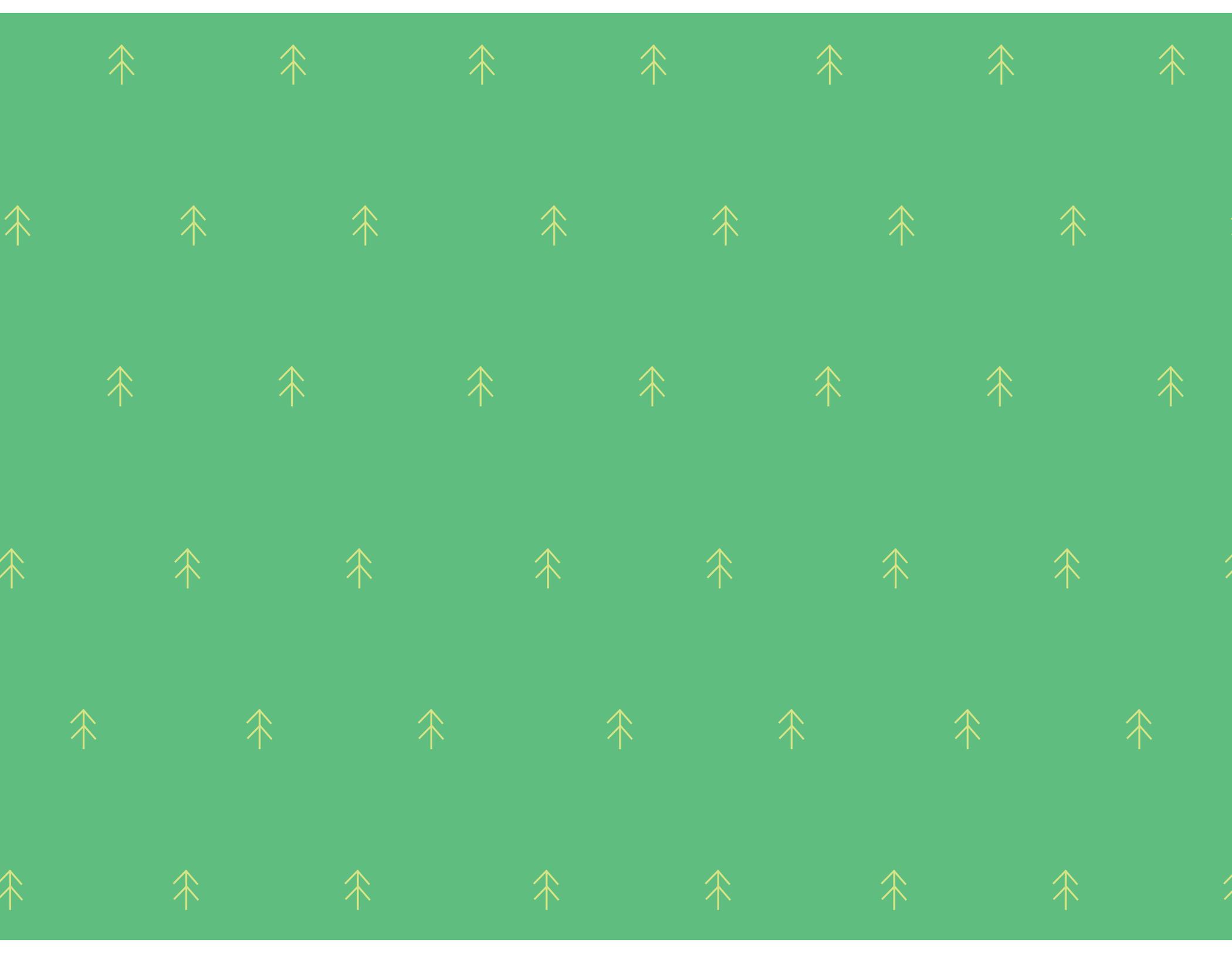


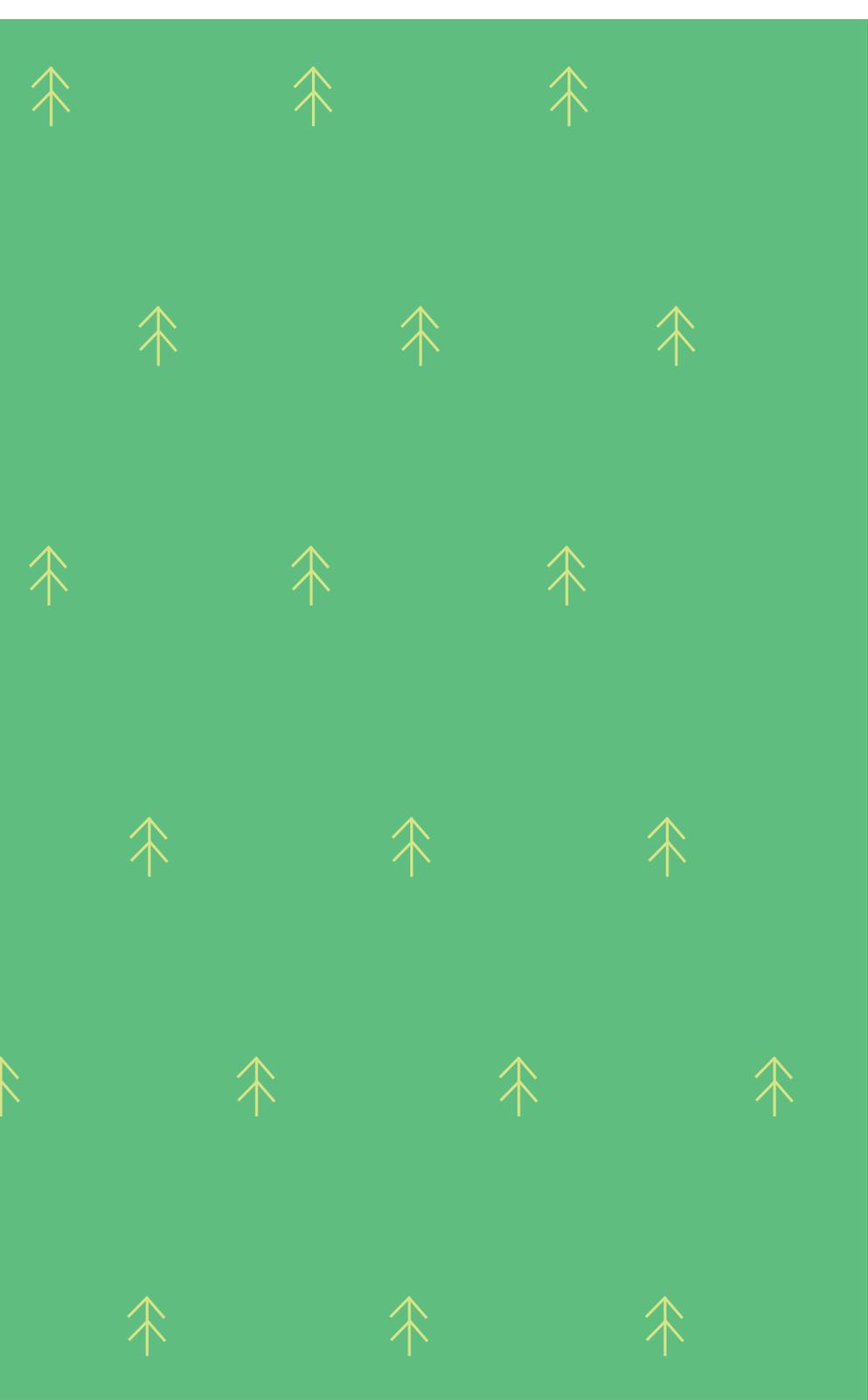


Dāstārkhwān

“ Stories of the Awadhi Nawabs
& their love for food & culture ”







Dāstārkhwān

The Awadhi Food Culture :

Design Research Seminar

Stories of the Nawabs and their
love for food & culture.

Prof. Nina Sabnani

Guide

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VC, 146250013

December, 2015

IDC, IIT Bombay

*Cover : Nawab Wajid Ali Khan

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A special gratitude I give to the project coordinator **Prof. Nina Sabnani**, whose contribution in stimulating suggestions and encouragement, helped me to coordinate my project; **Prof. Rowena Robinson** for her workshop that introduced us to methods for conducting ethnographic research.

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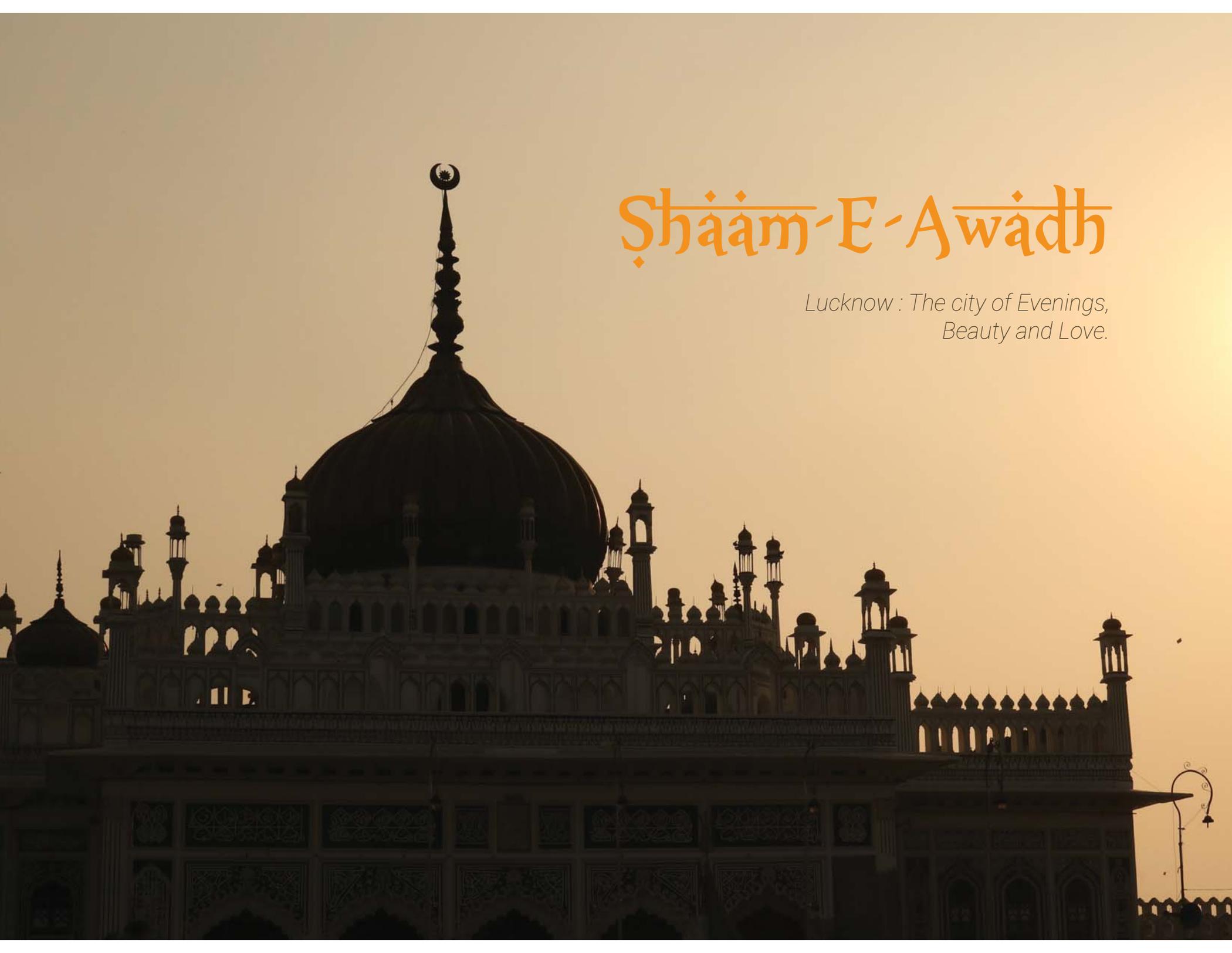
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Abstract

Lucknow, the capital city of Uttar Pradesh, is one of the most vibrant cities in India, and is among the top ten fastest growing non-major-metropolitan cities of India. Today's Lucknow has a varied character, that boasts extravagant, pedantic recent architectural additions that lack ethos, a mixed cultural scenario, thriving commercial opportunities and a highly sought after active political arena. However, less than a hundred years back, it was primarily known as the leisure city, the cultural capital of the Awadh that thrived under the reign of the Nawabs, who left a cultural legacy of appreciation for food, music, dance and beauty. as well as a series of delicate, beautiful spaces and experiences that are faintly reminiscent of the rich Nawabi culture. Despite a rich former identity it held strongly in its historical background, the city has evolved through rapid globalisation and fast paced ways of new era. However, some of its past has managed to find a place in the lives of the contemporary population.

Local food habits and demands in particular, seem to have been very accepting of the new additions while also being inclusive of the older ways, which is quite delightful an experience for the foodies who often wander into the city to try out the local delicacies. Had it not been for the immaculately ancient ways of the local natives, their longing for the past, and the brilliant old token heritage buildings, museums and music and dance schools, the cultural of the Nawab's would have been almost mythical by now.

Having had my own personal encounters with the Awadhi food culture, I took on this project out of sheer fascination, to understand the nuances of a culture which is till date celebrated for its delicate character. Visual ethnography, the chosen method of research proved to be a suitable tool during field work. The aim was to understand and effectively capture changes that were brought about in Awadhi culture and food over the years and what promise it holds for the future.



Shāam-E-Awādh

*Lucknow : The city of Evenings,
Beauty and Love.*



Introduction : The contemporary city

Back in early 2000, when I moved into the city of Lucknow with my family, it seemed like any other North Indian conservative, cosy, invasive in personal spaces, and yet reserved in public character. People lived in closely knitted families and interaction across classes or acquaintances was limited.

Our rented home in Lucknow was located in the newly established suburbs. Most days would be spent lounging around on the cold cemented floor of home. Afternoons outside were, silent and blazing, and evenings, when the surroundings would cool down, were actively spent on chirpy playgrounds in the neighbourhood. Naturally, home and surroundings seemed comfortable and sufficient. As quiet and safe as it seemed in the comfort of home, the city was transforming heavily, reeling under the monumental changes brought about under the assignment of the then-chief minister Ms. Mayawati, who helped built vast spacious public parks and gardens laced with political symbols of BSP, Lucknow's first mall and many others that followed, and roads that barely accommodate

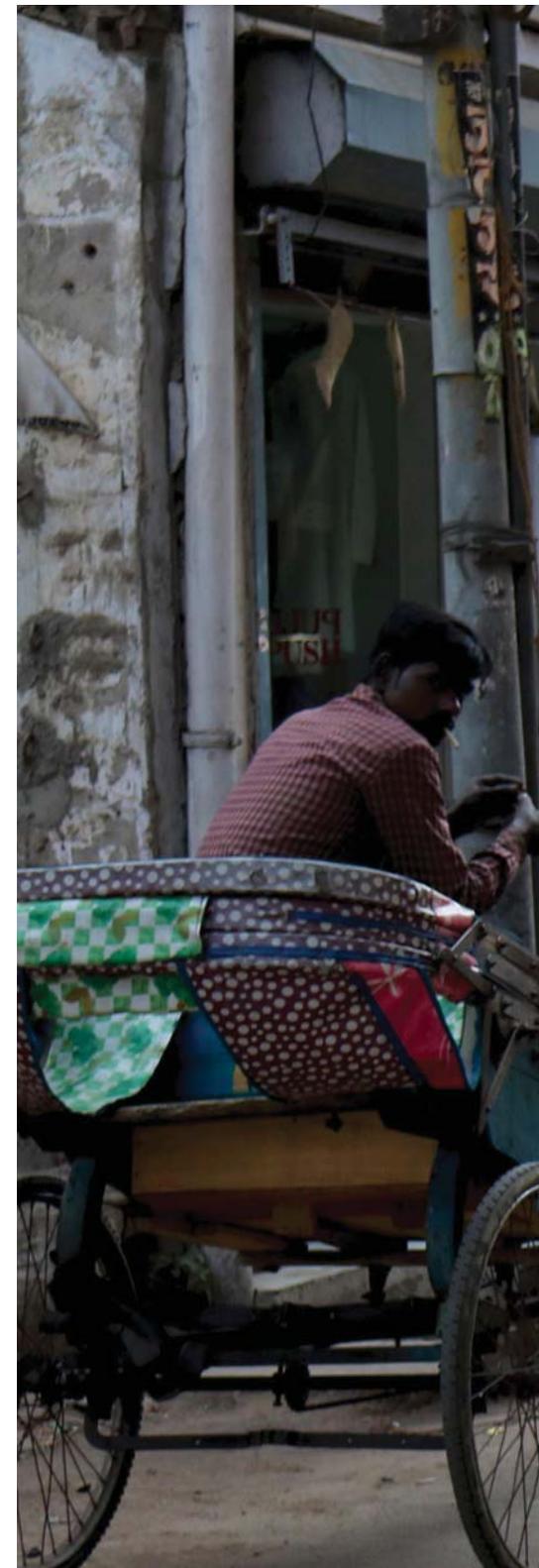
the monstrous volume of traffic and people that constantly crawls through the city now. Politics apparently played a major role in shaping and constantly altering the city's equation with it's people. Over the years, sometime during the tussle between the two leading political parties in power, BSP and SP, and consequently the making and breaking of massive public spaces, that wasted tones of tax payers money, the city grew culturally more mixed and economically more visible and viable, through robust construction and commerce, while struggling to retain it's identity as the leisure city. Even though, the political waves rippled through all areas in Lucknow, the economical advances, did not thoroughly seep into the older areas; these spaces still remain culturally and economically stagnant. Over the years, as the city expanded into capacious spaces, in contrast, the older areas of the city now seemed more intimate and stimulating than ever before.

Having only been acquainted with the docile spaces and reserved, isolated residential colonies in the city, I became aware of the endearing, crowded and inviting markets and streets of old Lucknow, much later.

Being born a girl into a conservative Hindu family, I wasn't allowed to wander around on my own and was made wary of the dangers of experimenting with almost everything, including my first love, food. The minutest of fiddling with the conditioned comprehension on the subjects of freedom and choice, is considered too outrageous by our religious and cultural standards. Through carefully curated family trips, I frequently visited an old market that now gleams vaguely in its nostalgic charm, displaying plentiful of colonial buildings, most of which have been turned into extravagant showrooms and commercial spaces. It did give a glimpse of what Lucknow could be about in its entirety, a delicate mix of old and new imagery and experiences. However I never did fully realise it, that is, until I joined college.

By bunking classes on random sunny afternoons and navigating through the narrow, shady and intimate lanes of Ameenabaad and Chowk, I experienced a different city within the city I knew. Old Lucknow seems to have been carefully

preserved in time. It seems like a gradual act deeply rooted in local people's unwillingness to let go of sophistication of the rituals in ways they hold dear in their hearts and the desire to bask in the subtle afterglow of the fading Nawabi culture. The reluctance didn't surprise me either, it is, in every sense, worthy of being held on to. Despite the reluctance, the atmosphere was very accepting of outsiders like me. These old lanes sheltered many of such 90s kids, dressed in uniforms worn casually, discovering their own personal freedom through the intriguing spaces and people of the old markets.



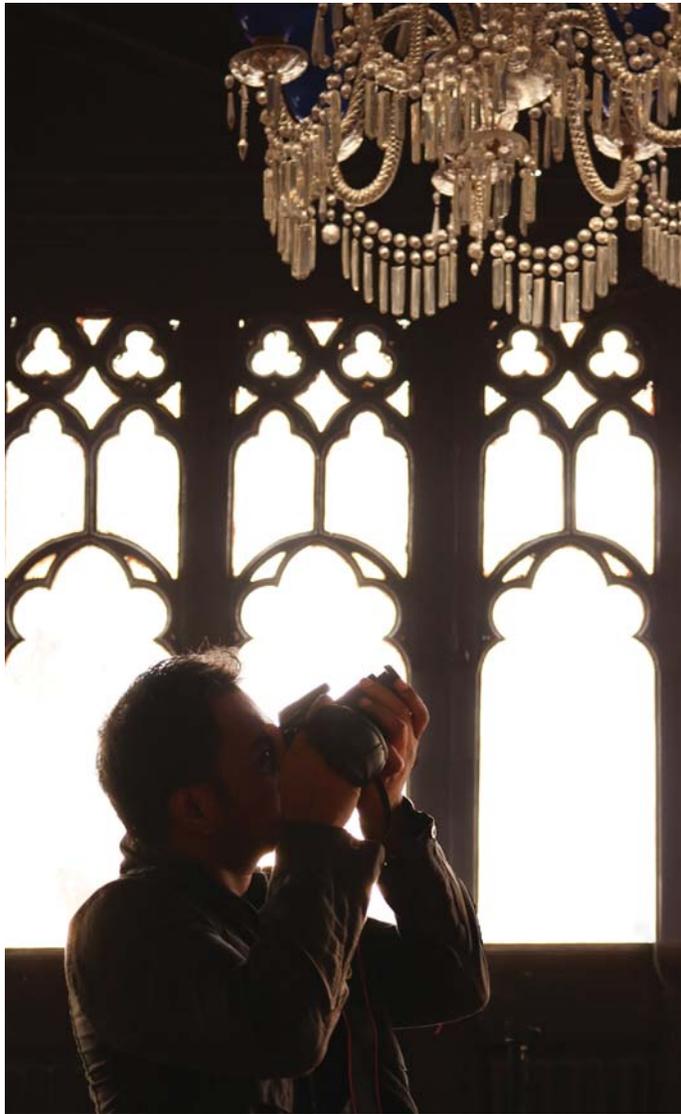


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Visual Ethnography

This project being of a particular personal interest to me, was undertaken to understand the peculiarities of the local food culture across various times and eras, and provide a comparative analysis of the effect of such drastically varying times on the local food scenario. Ethnography essentially is all about factual description of people and cultures with their customs, habits and mutual differences. Hence, ethnographic methods were found to be the most suitable to conduct research on this project that essentially focuses on the food habits of the people of Awadh over the years

In order to conduct relevant research on a through level, the following methods and ways were employed :

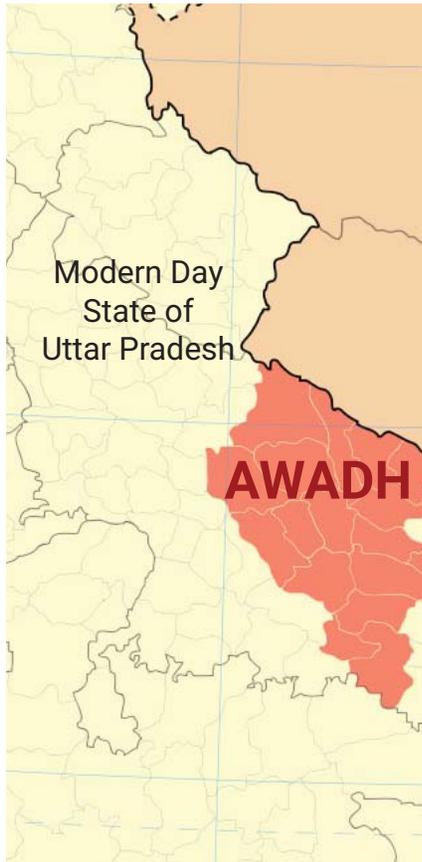
Personal acquaintance and guide : Initial few days were utilised in understanding the important localities and significance in context of the project. One of my friends who I knew from school, introduced me to some restaurant owners in the main city which turned out to be useful in making further acquaintances. A day or two more was spent on making the acquaintances a little better and more friendly before moving on to questioning them over their own practices in the local food industry. Most of them were happy to oblige, however, held in information that they considered was too crucial for the business. In the process, I did make some new, extremely kind friends from the older markets, while revisiting the older acquaintances in the local shops, who could barely recognise us.

Day long stroll in the markets and subsequent purchases : Occasionally, we enquired about the local food items by

posing as buyers. Documentation of such conversations, once they reached a certain level of comfort, was conducted on request. Documentation : Most of the time was spent on meeting new people on the go who knew the right places and then clicking pictures of significant moments relevant to this project, followed by conducting brief interviews on specific matters.

Repeated observations : Some observations that were made repeatedly for more than three days, were eventually taken in as valid factors in the research methods.

Qualitative analysis of the collected data : Most of the data that was collected was based on notes and interviews conducted and hence, further analysis and contemplations were needed to figure out indirect facts that the data implied. Through comparison and juxtaposing elements from the present scenario and the stories and legends from history, certain conclusions were eventually made which are mentioned in the latter part of the report.



Lucknow : The center of Awadhi culture

Awadh is a region in the centre of the modern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, which was before independence known as the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. It was established around 1722 AD with Faizabad as its capital and Saadat Ali Khan as its first Nawab and progenitor of Nawabs of Awadh. The traditional capital of Awadh had originally been Faizabad, but it was later moved to Lucknow, which serves as the present-day capital of Uttar Pradesh.

The term 'Awadh' was derived from Ayodhya and is known in British historical texts as Oudh or Oude. Awadh's political unity can be traced back to the ancient Hindu kingdom of Kosala, with Ayodhya as its capital.

Geographical area

The Awadh region lies in the centre of the modern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, which was, before independence known as the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. The current construct of Awadh geographically includes the districts of Ambedkar Nagar, Bahraich, Balrampur, Barabanki, Basti,

Faizabad, Gonda, Hardoi, Lakhimpur Kheri, Lucknow, Pratapgarh, Raebareli, Shravasti, Sitapur, Sultanpur and Unnao from Awadh and Kanpur, Kanpur Dehat, Fatehpur, Kaushambi and Allahabad from Lower Doab. A strip of the northern areas of the region, i.e., parts of Terai area (Inner Terai and Outer Terai), now lies within Nepal (Tulsipur Dang) and main parts of Gorakhpur district. The region is home to the culture of Nawabs and a distinct dialect, Awadhi, spoken by Awadhis.

Demographics.

According to recent census, the population of Lucknow is majorly divided between Hindus and Muslims, with Hindus comprising about 71% and Muslims about 26% and rest 3% being small groups of Sikhs, Jains, Christians and Buddhists. Despite Hindu population being larger in number, the Muslim influence, considering the significant cultural history of the Mughal rule and the reign of Nawabs, still remains visible and prominent through Indo-Islamic Architecture, Art, Hindustani music and classic Awadhi food.

The city is majorly divided into two main areas based on the prevalent cultures :

The older areas in Lucknow, and the New/ Developed areas in Lucknow. Most of the Muslims population is cramped up in the serpentine and intimate lanes of Old Lucknow, while the new areas have a mix of people from all religious groups. The divide, of course isn't entirely clear cut, but was done to accurately sum up the cultural implications of religious and historical background in the current scenario.





Humayun (1530-1556)

*One of the early Mughal Emperors
in India.*

The Mughal influence that perpetuated under the rule of the Nawabs of Awadh, remains, till date the biggest historical influence on Lucknow.

History : Early influences

Since 1350 AD different parts of the Awadh region were ruled by the Delhi Sultanate (Turkish Influence), Sharqi Sultanate, Mughal Empire (Persian Influence), Nawabs of Awadh (Indo-Islamic Influence), East India Company and the British Raj, all of which shaped the contemporary culture of Lucknow and surrounding areas. Resultantly, over the years, the Awadh region has had multiple cultural influences that yielded under the reigning political power contemporary with the era.

The Mughal influence & the Nawabs:

The first Mughal Emperors were of Turkic origin, claimed direct descent from Genghis Khan, and spoke Chagatai Turkic. However, Persians were the second largest nobility of the Mughal Empire of South Asia; hence they soon became culturally Persianized, adopted Persian, and later Urdu, as the official language of the empire, and took on Persian and Indian wives. The beginning of the Mughal empire in the Awadh region is conventionally dated to the founder Babur's victory over Ibrahim Lodi, the last ruler of the Delhi Sultanate in the First Battle of Panipat. As Awadh grew in importance, a distinct, refined courtly culture developed, influenced by the sophistication of the Persians under the Mughal rule. The Mughal Empire did not try to intervene in the local societies during

most of its existence, but rather balanced and pacified them through new administrative practices and diverse and inclusive ruling elites, leading to more systematic, centralised, and uniform rule. Hence, the local culture further inundated with the ways of the mixed Hindu-Muslim local population that lead to the origin and flourishing of the Indo-Islamic culture.

In 1856, British East India company abolished local rule and took complete control of the city along with the rest of Awadh and later transferred it to the British Raj in 1857. In 1901, the capital of Oudh, Lucknow, was merged into the newly formed United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. In 1920, the provincial seat of government moved from Allahabad to Lucknow. Along with the rest of India, Lucknow became independent from Britain on 15 August 1947, and the United Provinces were reorganised into the state of Uttar Pradesh, and Lucknow remained its capital.

Despite the British annexation, the Mughal influence that perpetuated under the rule of the Nawabs of Awadh, remains, till date the biggest historical influence on Lucknow. The core of the legacy of Awadhi cultural in context of today's Lucknow, lies in the life and ways of the Nawabs.

Nawabs of Oundh & Lucknow : 1722- 1879

Origin of the Nawabs

A nawab or nawaab is an honorific title ratified and bestowed by the reigning Mughal emperor to semi-autonomous Muslim rulers of princely states in South Asia. "Nawab" usually refers to males; the female equivalent is "begum". The primary duty of a nawab was to uphold the sovereignty of the Mughal emperor of a certain province.

After years of the Mughal Rule in the Awadh region, Emperor Humayun's grandson Emperor Jahangir (1569–1627) granted an estate in Awadh to a favoured nobleman, Sheikh Abdul Rahim, who later built Machchi Bhawan on this estate. It subsequently became the seat of power from where his descendants, the Sheikhzadas, controlled the region. Later, Persian adventurer Saadat Khan, also known as Burhan-ul-Mulk, was appointed Nawab of Awadh in 1722 and established his court in Faizabad, near Lucknow. He is considered the first Nawab of Awadh. The capital was later moved to Lucknow, which serves as the present-day capital of Uttar Pradesh. Lucknow rose to prominence when Asaf-ud-Daula, the fourth nawab, shifted his court to the city from Faizabad to Lucknow in 1775, became the First Nawab of Lucknow. The Nawabs' reign continued to flourish for years in Lucknow, until the British rule intervened in 1856.



Saadat Ali Khan
(Nawab of Aundh)



Safdarjung
(Nawab of Aundh)



Shuja-ud Daulah
(Nawab of Aundh)



Asaf-Ud-Daula
(First Nawab of Lucknow)



Wazir Ali Khan



Saadat Ali Khan II



Ghazi-ud-Din Haider



Nasiruddin Haider



Muhammad Ali Shah



Amjad Ali Shah



Wajid Ali Shah



Begum Hazrat Mahal



Cultural influences of the Nawabi rule :

Rulers of the Mughal dynasty were famous for their religious tolerance and secularism. Akbar's court, for instance, was adorned with many noteworthy Hindus i.e., Raja Mansingh, Raja Birbal, Raja Todarmal and Tansen. The Nawabs of Awadh too, followed the footprints of the Mughals to get confidence of the Hindus for the solid foundation of their reign. During the golden years of the Nawab rule, Hindu and Muslim populations co-existed peacefully, both in the upper classes and the common masses. While all the Nawabs (and Kings) were Shia Muslims, many Hindus were assigned to hold up official courtly duties. This Indo-Islamic cultural influence, based on the mixed Hindu Muslim population in the Awadh region, came together to foster a highly stylised culture which is now known as the Nawabi culture.

The Persian-loving Shia Nawabs of the city, not only encouraged and patronised the local culture of Awadh but were also accepting of the new thinking brought in by the British rule in India. They were progressive and liberal in thinking and supported all super and sub-sectors in the society. Most of the Nawabs were great philanthropist and patrons of art, beauty and culture. Their support lead to the forging of a composite culture Lucknow is known for, till date. Through out, under their rule, Hindus were equal participants in the courtly responsibilities; Exquisite Chikankari craftsmen underwent further honing and refinement; Many Indo-Islamic architectural monuments, were erected; and, Major

advancements were made in Culinary Arts. The local code of chivalry still considers the language of "aap-janab" and the dictum of "pehle aap" as a part of everyday life for a true Lakhnawi. Such was the glory of the exquisite Nawabi rule that it inspired many stories, artworks, literature and cultural changes that were yielded in that era as well as works that was produced in the times that followed. The Nawabs respected their women, wine and wisdom. Under their rule, women were highly respected and courtesans were accorded the position of respect and dignity. Local fabels constitute that the sons of Nawabs were deliberately sent to the 'Kothas' to learn the culture, sophistication and respect for the fairer sex. One of the early, most famous piece of Urdu literature that was written during those times, Umarao Jaan that was later turned into the famous movie 'Umrao Jaan' is believed to be based on a real 'Tawaiaf'.

Lucknow was also, once considered the love capital of India. One of the preferred past time activities of the Nawabs, Patangbaazi, or kite-flying was employed as an ingenious way of sending love letters to the beloved during those times. A story goes that once a Chhote Nawab wrote "kal shaam kothe pe aana, hum intezaar kareinge tumhara"—(Tomorrow in the evening come to the terrace, I'll wait for you) did this with his beloved and instead of the beloved getting the letter her mother found it and the love bug bit her, assuming that the Bade Nawab has done this sweet and naughty thing, she reciprocated in the same manner writing "Intezaar

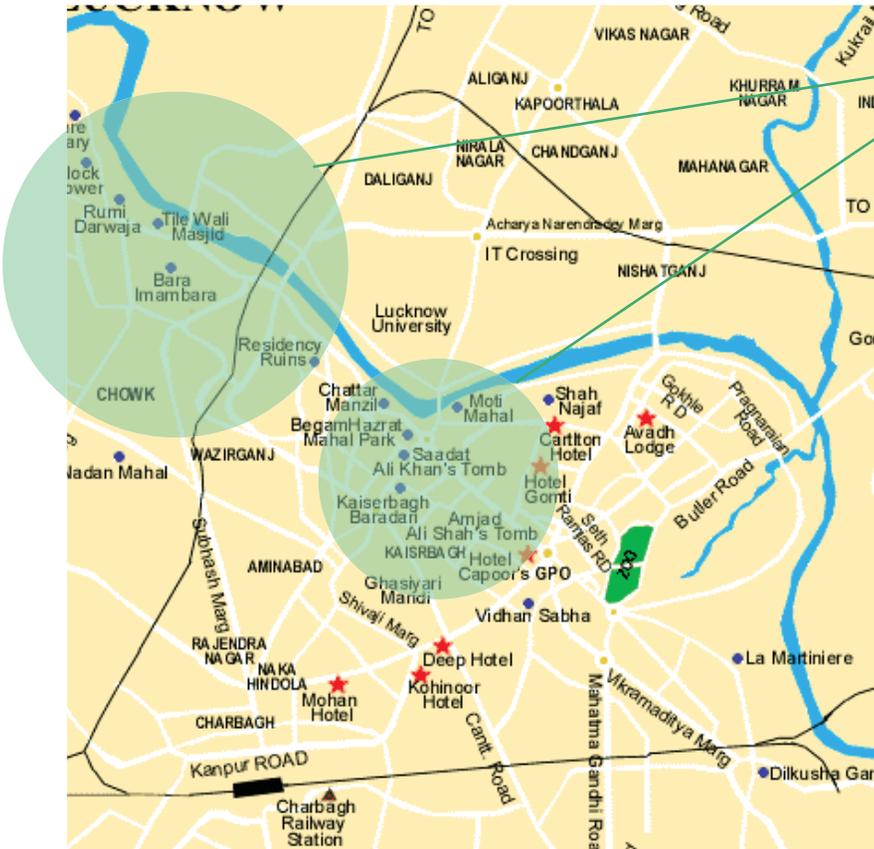
tumhara hi to tha humein, umra bhar rahein takte rahe, der lagee aane mein tumko, shukr hai phir bhi aaye to"—I was waiting for this all my life, you came late yet now you have come. Thus started the love between the Bade Nawab and the Badi Begum which ended up in their marriage and left the real ones to repent. Many stories and historical accounts from the times of the Nawabs testify their generosity towards culture and their people. Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula, for instance, who built the Bada Imambada, was famous for his philanthropic nature. The Nawab started Bada Imambada as a charitable project to generate employment during the famine of 1784. He employed over 20,000 people for the project (including commoners and noblemen). During daytime, common citizens employed on the project would construct the building. On the night of every fourth day, the noble and upper-class people were employed in secret to demolish the structure built, an effort for which they received payment. This ensured that work lasted and people did not starve. Asafuddaula, the fourth reigning Nawab of Awadh, was one of the most famous Nawabs amongst the common people. He was believed to be extremely open minded, and treated the bourgeoisie and the proletariats as equals. He had immense respect for people who used filthy language and the more the obscene language the more he was pleased. The last reigning Nawab, Sajid Ali Khan was a poet, playwright, dancer and great patron of the arts. He is widely credited with the revival of Kathak as a major form of classical Indian dance.

Awadhī Food Culture

- An ethnographic study on what went into the **inception and development** of the **Awadhi Cuisine**, and how it **evolved** over the years.
- Brief study on standard methods of food preparation and the culture surrounding the food.
- Ways in which people contributed to the evolution of the cuisine.
- Ways in which the local food industry influenced it's people.

Recollecting my own experiences in Lucknow, local food was the most memorable one. My initial nomadic experiences in the city, revolved around, the striking visuals of the bejewelled Ittr Gali that was also a treat to one's olfactory senses, the Chikenkaari based garment collections in local stores, and the platter of Kebabs, Biryanis and other local savouries. Food, especially, was captivating. It was then that my equation with food went from being a committed, considerate relationship based on love, to an insatiable, polygamous series of affairs. The aloo chat stall in the neighbourhood and mom's home-cooked khichdi was no longer the favourite. There was so much variety when it came to local Awadhi food, each food stall was a discovery. While mom's affection still remained the preferred comfort food for my soul, the new discoveries in the local food market were enough to drag one out of the comfort zone. There were food items to cater to each nuance of my mood, the kebabs were to comfort during exams, the zestfulness of biriyani to tackle with a boring evening, and the famous Faluda kulfi was an instant relief from the scorching heat of the day. I, of course, gained weight, which I have no regrets over.

It was only after getting acquainted with the food there, did I notice and appreciate the people and culture that surrounded it. From the pristinely dressed and well spoken men of the perfume shops boasting the lineage of their craft and trade skills, the know-it-all and crafty tanga drivers-cum-tourist guides, to the pronounced and enthusiastic descendents of the royal cooks of the Nawabs who speak in a tongue so sweet, it never fails to mesmerise and stir up immense respect and affection, the experience was overwhelming. It isn't uncommon for interesting conversations between strangers to conjure up over an informal pan chewing or Hukka sessions at a local pan kiosks or good food on community tables at local restaurants initiating the most gripping stories about food from the times of the Nawabs. The food experience in Lucknow is not only mouth-watering but also, quite wholesome catering to more of your senses than you could expect.



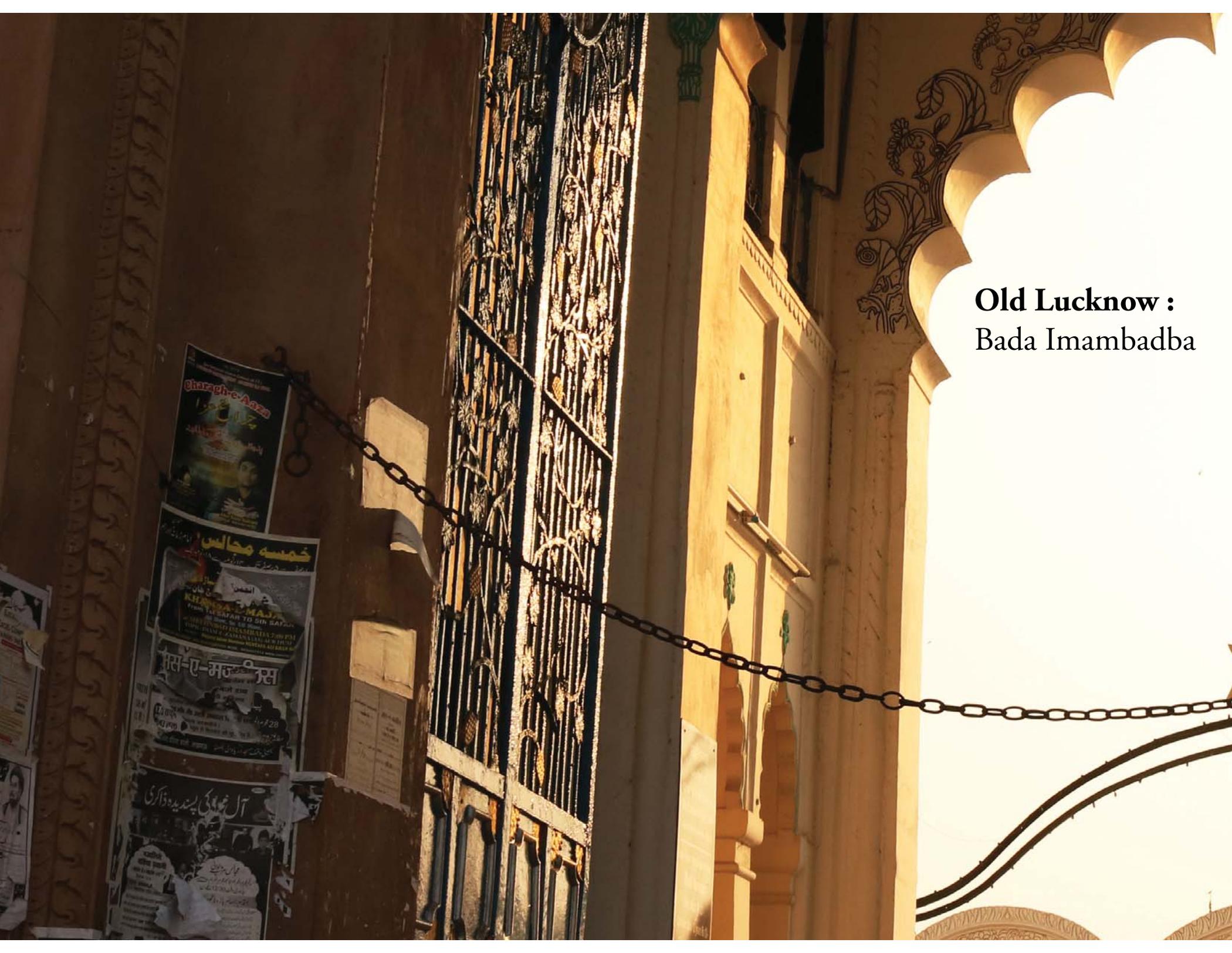
- Areas surrounding the Gomti river and nearby, were established first and hence are now considered the older areas of Lucknow, which are famous for their readily available snippets and experiences of culture.
- Some of the main markets include, Chowk, Aminabad, Kaiserbagh, Chota aur Bada Imambada.
- Most of the unmarked areas in the map are the suburbs that were established much later after the annexation of the British rule in India.

Old Lucknow

The Old part of Lucknow, is in my experience, the most intriguing, visually striking and busy part of the city. It also houses some of the most well known, old brands in almost everything, including good food.

Lucknow, due to its rich heritage in food, now has the dense spread of restaurants all over the city for its plentiful and insatiable food patrons. However, the most known old players in the competitive local food industry of Lucknow, continue to be concentrated in the older parts of Lucknow, close to their origin. Old markets like Chowk, Ameenabaad, Hazratganj, house some of the most famous restaurants and food joints, like Raheems Biryani, Idris ki Biryani and of course, the very famous, Tunday ke Kebab. The relatively newer areas in Lucknow like, Indranagar, Alambagh, and commercial areas of Hazratganj etc. house the richer, more recent, yet well-performing chain of restaurants and hotels which derive inspiration from the older, known recipes of the Awadhi cuisine. In such a mixed commercial facade of local food businesses, the vintage names, however, win the bet in terms of brand value, and stronger and consistent customer base.





Old Lucknow :
Bada Imambadba



कसौर तादाद में शिखर
मिन्जानिब : हैद
दरिया के किनारे

मजलिस
बनुकाम
12 डिसेंबर 2015 (सुब)

शामल-ए-इकबिल
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مجمع المذاهب
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سالانہ مजلیس-ع-انجا
29 دسمبر 2015 (سुब)
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(17/4 سیکٹر 2، کراچی)

پہلے سانس



Mir Jafar feasting Anglo-Indian British Officials

Awadhi food under the Nawabi rule :

Most of the experimentations with food were done in the elaborate kitchens of the Nawabs and the rich officials. The upper class was where most of the social courtly mingling occurred, and eventually trickled down to the common masses. The distinct Awadhi cuisine emerged from the innovative food experiments done during the reign of the Nawabs of Lucknow and surrounding areas. The cooks of the nawabs creating newer dishes from older Mughal ones, not merely to impress their patrons (the Muslim nobility as well as the Hindu administrators) but also the British residents and visitors from other princely states who had to be entertained. The Nawabs were masters of the sophisticated courtly culture and diplomacy, in which food played a role of paramount importance.

Innovation was constant in their kitchens. Nawabs were very easily bored, so demanded and expected constant innovation from their cooks, who obliged. Often the Awadhi Cuisine is confused with Mughlai food. But Awadhi cuisine is not Mughlai food but has, rather, been influenced by Mughlai cooking style. Awadhi cuisine is famous for its, a cooking style achieved through the magical blending of spices, slow-fire cooking and its seasonal harmony with nature. This compilation presents timeless recipes from the stately kitchens of the Awadh region.

The kitchen (bawarchikhana)

A better understanding of the Nafasat (Refinement) and Nazaakat (Delicateness) of Nawabhi food, both today's and yesterday's, can be achieved by taking a closer look at the kitchen's of the Nawabs and the traditional locals. The cooks in the Bawarchikhana had a standing order: the food had to appeal to all their senses. It had look good (eye), give out good aroma (nose) and of course taste appetising (palate). Hence, the famous Bawarchikhana of the Nawabs were the birthplace of many exquisite food varieties, cooking styles, designation in the culinary world, and of course the Awadhi cuisine that Lucknow is known for today. A quick peek into one of such kitchens reveals a plethora of elements, some of which have been described below :

The cooks and staff

During the times of the Nawabs, it was men who majorly handled the royal kitchens. Even in the houses of the locals and the poor, men assisted in the cooking as much as women did. The Nawabi kitchens were majorly adorned by three kind of cooks : The Bawarchis who prepared food in large quantities and were responsible for consistency and balance in food. The Bawarchis also worked in tandem with the hakims (doctors) incorporating their inputs all the time. The

Rakabdars were the gourmet cooks, who did most of the experimentation with food and cooked in small gourmet quantities. They also specialized in garnishing and presentation of dishes. The lowest in the hierarchy of cooks were the Nafus who prepared varieties of rotis, naans, sheermals, kulchas and taftans which were additional bread based foods which are to facilitate consumption on gravy preparations. In a Nawab's kitchen, one cook never prepared an entire meal. Apart from the Bawarchis, the Rakabdars, and the Nafus, there were also a variety of helpers like the Degbos who washed the utensils, the Masalchis who grind the masala, and the Mehris who carry the food trays. The Nawabs and the wealthy officials also had supervisors for their kitchen called Daroga-e-bawarchi, who would ensure the food quality.

In today's times, usually it's the women in the house of the locals, assisted with a few helpers, who oversee the food preparations. However, in commercial spaces for local food, men continue to participate predominantly in the cooking.



Dum cooking style :

Lucknow is known for its own cooking style very well, which is called the Dum cooking style. Dum means to 'breathe in' and pukht to 'cook'. Dum pukht (Persian) or slow oven cooking is a cooking technique associated with the Awadh region of India, in which meat and vegetables are cooked over a very low flame, generally in sealed containers. The technique is believed to have its origins in the earlier Persian cooking methods introduced to India through the Mughals. This cooking style however was fully realised, recognised and developed under the reign of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daulah. Legends claim that when Nawab Asaf-ud-daulah (1748–1797) found his kingdom in the grip of famine, he initiated a food-for-work programme, employing thousands in the construction of the Bada Imambara shrine. Large cauldrons were filled with rice, meat, vegetables and spices and sealed to make a simple, one-dish meal that was available to workers day and night. Then, one day, the Nawab caught a whiff of the aromas emanating from the cauldron and the royal kitchen was ordered to serve the dish. It was from there, that the cooking style was picked on by the bawarchis (chefs) and rakabdars (gourmet cooks) of Awadh who, through further experimentation, invented the dum style of cooking. Other stories, however, simply state that dum pukht appears to be based on a

traditional Indian method of cooking dishes buried in sand. The Persian influence is most evident in this method though in Awadh it has acquired its own distinct character. The magic of dum' is the excellent aroma, flavor and texture which results from slow cooking.

Dum pukht cooking uses a round, heavy-bottomed pot, a handi, in which food is tightly sealed and cooked over a slow fire. There are two main aspects to this style of cooking; bhunao and dum, or 'roasting' and 'maturing' of a prepared dish. In this style of cuisine, herbs and spices play an important role. The process of slow roasting gently persuades each to release maximum flavor. The sealing of the lid of the handi with dough achieves maturing. Cooking slowly in its juices, the food retains all its natural aromas and becomes imbued with the richness of flavors that distinguishes the dish.

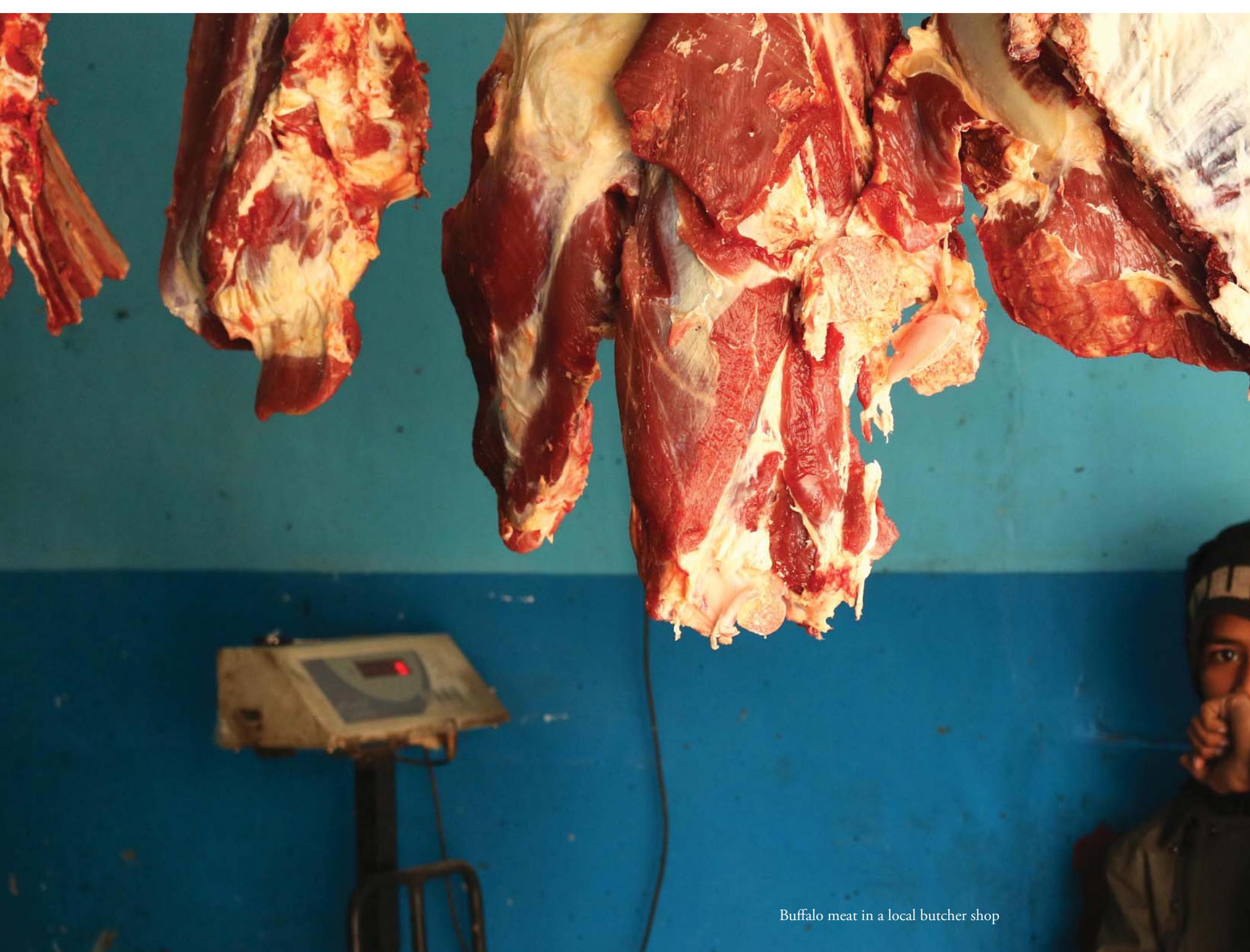


Spices :

The Mughal cuisine that inspired the Awadhi cuisine later, was rich in spices combined with loads of cream and milk. On the contrary Awadhi cuisines are not a concoction of hundred odd spices instead the difference lies in the preparation of the food by preserving all the nutrients in the cooking. Some of the major spices that went into the mix of kebabs and biriyanis in various proportions during cooking, include : **black and green cardamom, cinnamon, bay leaves, black peppercorns, cumin, nutmeg, mace and cloves.** All the spices were added in proportions that were easy on the stomach since most of the Nawabs had gastric issues. Fish, red meats, vegetables and cottage cheese were **marinated in curd and spices.** This helps to soften the taste and texture of them as well as remove any undesired odors from the fleshy materials. The use of other softening agents such as **papain (from raw papaya) or kalmi shora** to tenderise meat or milk, to tenderize biriyani, was also popular and continues to be so. The Rakabdaars also used natural colors in their recipes, no artificial colors (so no chemicals) ever, which would ensure that the food looked as good as it tasted. The use of nuts and fruits in garnishing for addition taste and texture is still popular. Ittar was readily used as a common food perfume to enhance the fragrance of Awadhi food.

The mix of spices meant for various food recipes were based on the Rakabdars' and Masalchis' own individualistic expression. The makers special spice mixes varied according to the different palates and andaaz of balancing the taste. There were no generic mixes. And there was also no awe associated with many of these. Each Nawab's kitchen and royal homes simply had their own recipe. Precisely due to this reason, the famous kitchens were discreet with their mixes and guarded the recipes made out of these spice mixes.

Today, the standard, readymade spice mixes are readily sold in the old markets of Lucknow in an effort to mimic the taste of the older, traditional food savouries. As cooks and other masala makers from the times that followed the Nawabi rule, started making these spice powders for retail, to be sold to the general population, the reputation of specific brands spread according to how much they were preferred and accepted by their patrons. However, the well known food shops in Lucknow still prefer the older, unique spice mixes that have been passed down and guarded through following generations of the original cooks of the Nawabs. Hence, they have been successfully keeping up with their brand value through the years.



Buffalo meat in a local butcher shop



Staple elements in food :

Awadhi cuisine consists of both vegetarian and meat dishes. However, Nawabs were all big meat eaters. Hence, meat continues to be a popular base for all Awadhi cuisine, especially amongst the muslim patrons and locals, slightly due to cultural familiarity, and majorly due to being a rich source of nutrients which is also pocket friendly. Earlier, beef was the staple food for the majority of the Awadhi population. However, mutton evenly caught up and become an equally favorite meat base. While beef and mutton were used in food preparations through out the year, most of the remaining meat items were seasonal. Other popular meat choices included, birds like partridge and quail were used upon the advent of winters since they are heat-giving meats. Fish was used from winters till spring, but was avoided during monsoons. Although, the Nawabs were heavily into meat, they also ensured enough vegetables in their diet.

Raw papaya, methi (fenugreek leaves) and spinach were added to most meat dishes, and a side dish of shalgam (turnip; a big favourite with them), bhindi (okra), aloo (potato), matar (peas) and more ensured that they did not suffer from constipation due to lack of fibre in the non-vegetarian food.

Now-a-days, amidst contemporary political controversies, one of the most frequently consumed meat during the Nawabi times, cow meat has been replaced with buffalo meat as beef and continues to be sold at the local meat shops, to be bought by restaurants and locals. Contemporary liberal locals belonging to other religion and region, too patronize the Awadhi cuisine lineage and flavours however, beef is a less preferred choice of meat for them. Muslims locals however, depend readily on beef for most of their food preparations.



Dastarkhwan

Mannerisms : Dastarkhwan

The Nawabs took their manners very seriously, so much so, that they had an elaborate system of etiquette and rules associated with the consumption of their painstakingly prepared food. It was referred to as Dastarkhwan. The dastarkhwan had at least 12 dishes or more and the tehzeeb (respect) flowed into the manner of eating.

“Dastarkhwan” literally means a meticulously laid-out ceremonial dining spread. It used to be customary in the Awadh region for three generations to sit around and share the Dastarkhwan. The meal began with the guests’ hands washed in a chilamchi (water pot for hand washing). Then a sharbat was offered, made of a what was in season – either bel, phalsa, shijkanjveenj, gulab or khus. The soup known as shorba was a light extract of meat or vegetables. There was no concept of starters then. One went directly to the main course – galawati or kakori kebabs, a salan or korma and accompaniments of breads and rice. There is usually a dedicated drink (usually tea) pourer to cater to the participants in the Dastarkhwan. Such was the value of the piece of cloth used for the food spread that one was forbidden from stepping on it.

A large cultural significance is placed on the dastarkhan among different groups, and as such, various traditions, customs, values, and prohibitions surround the use of the dastarkhan.

During the times of the Nawabs, the whole ritual of Dastarkhwan was the daily norm. However, today, the Dastarkhwan is usually used just a cloth to lay food on in a local household. This ritual occasionally does regain its older glorious significance during festive times, when families come together to celebrate their family ties and culture, through the elaborate spread of food prepared on such occasions.

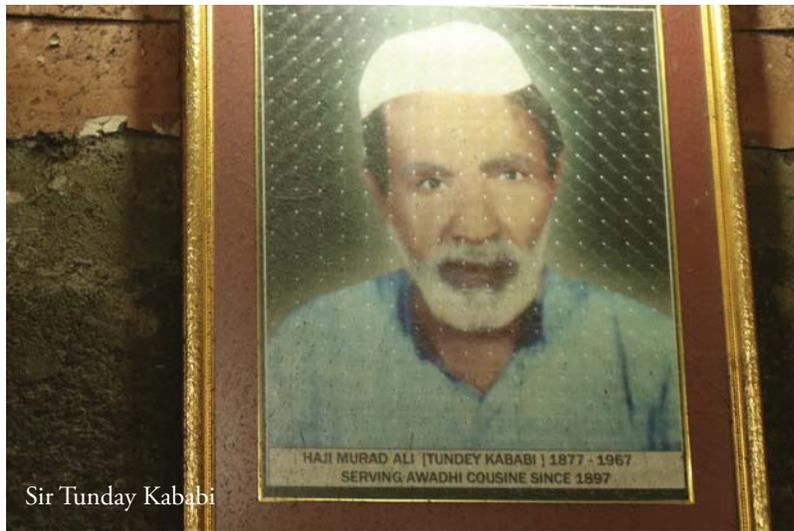
Contemporary Food

Some of the most well known delicacies that featured in a typical Dastarkhwan are discussed ahead :

Awadhi finger foods : Kebab

Kebab, being the most famous savoury, is usually the entry point into the delicious world of local Awadhi food. Kebabs are disks of minced and flavoured meat/vegetable, usually consumed with plain paratha or its variants to provide a milder base to the highly flavoured and fragrant kebabs, and hence balance out the overall flavour. My own first memory of consuming Lucknawi food was of devouring a hara bhara kebab the wrong way, that is by eating the paratha and kebab separately, when a localite friend correctly placed it between the paratha evenly to spread out the flavours. Lucknawis, it seems take real pride in their food. The Kakori Kebabs, Galawat ke Kebabs, Shami Kebabs, Boti Kebabs, Patili-ke-Kebabs, Ghutwa Kebabs and Seekh Kebabs are among the known varieties in non-veg. Vegetarian kebabs include Dalcha Kebab, Kathal ke Kebab, Arbi ke Kebab, Rajma Galoti Kebab (kidney bean kebab cooked with aromatic herbs), Zamikand ke Kebab (Lucknowi yam kebabs), etc. The kebabs of Awadhi cuisine are distinct from the kebabs of Punjab insofar as Awadhi kebabs are grilled on a chulah and sometimes in a skillet as opposed to grilled in a tandoor in Punjab. Awadhi kebabs are also called “chulah” kebabs whereas the kebabs of Punjab are called “tandoori” kebabs.





One of the most famous kabab makers in Lucknow, **The Tunday kebabs**, who are known for their Gulwati Kebabs, have a long history which it is known for till date. The famous Tunda Kebab is so named because it was a specialty of an one-armed chef. There was once a Nawab (royal family member) who really loved to have kababs, but as age caught up with him, he lost his teeth and was unable to enjoy the kababs. He apparently setup a contest that whoever created the softest and most succulent kababs, would enjoy royal patronage henceforth, under the name of Gulwati kebabs. The secret recipe was created by Haji Murad Ali, who apparently had only one hand. In India, a person with a leg disability is called Langdey, while a person with a hand disability is called Tunday, hence the name Tunday Kabab. The secret recipe apparently has 160 spices (who knew there were 160 spices out there) including Sandalwood. The recipe is discreetly passed down to the generations by the ladies of the house. It's at homes of the 'Tundays' where the ladies prepares the kebab mix, after which it is left to marinate overnight. The Kebabs preparations are later cooked on tawa in the legendary shop which is run by the men of the lineage who sell it to it's vast customer base.



Another famous variant of kebabs , Kakori kebabs, too has famous stories surrounding it's conception. This kabab is considered blessed since it was originally made in the place by the same name in the dargah of Hazrat Shah Abi Ahder Sahib with divine blessings.

Rice preparations : Biryani

Biryani is a mixed rice dish from the Indian subcontinent. The origin of the dish is uncertain, however, it is believed to have its roots in Persian food culture. Biryani, which looks very similar is different from the latter in many ways. Biryanis have more complex and stronger spices, compared to pulao, and is consumed as a primary dish in a meal, instead of a second accomplishment in a larger meal. There are many varieties in biryani based on where it evolved in different parts of India.

Avadhi biryani is a pucci biryani - where rice and meat are cooked separately and then layered to cook again on "dum", so that flavours intermingle. It is primarily known for its subtle flavours and light texture. Due to its subtlety, it's usually advised to have nothing before and after consuming Lucknawi biryani. One of the most famous Biryani joint in Lucknow is about a hundred years old Lucknowi. The founder, Mohammad Idris started the shop in 1968 and he

special recipe from his father who was an expert biryani cook. It is presently owned by Mohammad Abu Bakr & Mohammad Abu Hamza, who are the proud sons of Mohammad Idris. They usually sell a total 16 to 18 Deghs each, in a day. Copper Degh is used for cooking and the inside of Degh is oiled, which is also unique in preparing the same. Cooking is done on 'Bhatti' using 'Pathar Ka Koyla'. Their most famous, mutton Biryani, takes 3 hours for one large serving of a huge pot full of biryani to be prepared. The process starts with marinating mutton with the ingredients mentioned in the strictly guarded family recipe. The rice used in Lucknowi Biryani has to be prepared separately. Rice has to be soaked beforehand and added to boiled water using a large vessel. Other ingredients used in rice are cinnamon, milk and ghee. The secret of Dum Biryani is that it is slow steamed cooked, milk and malai are the valued ingredient along with herbs & light masala which results in delicious biryani. For the final preparation heat oil and ghee in a vessel, fry both the masalas till they leave oil, add the marinated chicken or mutton. For Lucknowi Mutton Biryani marinated mutton has to be cooked with spices in pressure cooker for 15 minutes then used for layering. Later, ghee is poured into another vessel and whole garam masalas are added. A layer of cooked chicken or mutton, and then a layer of parboiled rice and garnished with fried onions, dry fruits, food color, lemon juice and Ittr, finishes the preparation.





Bread preparations : Naan, Kulcha and Sheermal

As wheat is the staple food of the state, breads are very significant. Breads are generally flat breads baked in a pan; only a few varieties are raised breads. Improvisations of the roti (or bread) are of different types and made in various ways and include the rumaali roti, tandoori roti, naan (baked in a tandoor), kulcha, lachha paratha, sheermaal and baqarkhani.

Naan is an oven-baked, flatbread served with curries, gravies and soups in the Awadhi cuisine. Kulcha is similar to naan, only thicker and with more ghee/butter, and is consumed too in a similar manner. In Lucknow, Kulchas are frequently consumed especially with Naahri, a gravy preparation.

Sheermaal : Sheermal or Shirmal is a saffron-flavored traditional flatbread. It is a mildly sweet naan made out of maida, leavened with yeast, baked in a tandoor or oven. It is eaten as a breakfast savoury.



Sweet savouries : Faluda kulfi

In the heat of summer, amidst shopping sessions with my mother or during other times of loitering around in the market, one of the most preferred ways to escape the heat and exhaustion, was to consume considerable amount of faluda kulfi. Faldu kulfi is a variant of regular kulfi, modified to better suit the taste of Awadhi food patrons.

One of the most famous places in Lucknow to have made a name for itself for its delicious preparation of faluda kulfi is Prakash Kulfi.

This place is particularly with the conservative Hindu population of the city as it complies with their religious sensibilities. This shop was started by Late Shree Prakash Chandara Arora in 1965 with view workers and he used his own formula to make this desi dessert delicious. Prakash Ki Kulfi uses their own formula of making which makes their Kulfi delicious and different from other Kulfi. For making Kulfi they boil milk for three to four hours and add Kesar and other secret ingredients to make this dessert delicious and delightful. They also use their own way of freezing Kulfi. In this process, they put sticky stuff of Kulfi in small

containers of metal and seal them with flour (Maida). At last they keep small containers in a big container of metal and add rock salt and ice in it. Then they shake the big container for one to two hours for freezing sticky stuff of Kulfi in small container. When asked about why they haven't utilised technology for mass production of their product, they imply the lack of need to disrupt the sanctity of their traditional preparing methods which go way back. They believe traditional methods ensure impeccable quality which cannot be replicated in mass production.





Beverages : Sherbat and Kashmiri tea

Sherbat is a well-known beverage in Awadhi cuisine, and is served especially during the summers. It tends to be a mixture of simple lemonade and complex drink of milk with crushed almonds. It is always served cold, and may also be quite filling.

One of my other favourite hot beverage to consume on the chilly evenings of winters in Lucknow is the Kashmiri tea. It seemingly has its origin in Kashmir, however is now a popular tea variant in the city, due to years of migration and cultural mixing. Also known as Noon Chai, this amazingly pink beverage is made from the same tea leaves as green tea but varies dramatically in taste. A bit salty and incredibly creamy, this chai (tea) is as unique in taste as it is in appearance. The tea takes minimum four hours of preparation, three of which are spent on boiling tea leaves on slow flame while constantly stirring it, which gives the tea its color. Other flavours are added later after the tea water is thoroughly saturated and is then mixed with milk. The prepared tea is eventually stored in big thermal containers which maintain a constant temperature for the tea since further boiling of the prepared tea could throw the flavours off balance. It, hence is one of the most delicate tea preparations in the city, and is appreciated for exactly that.



Hukkas & Gilori Paans

Paan was frequently consumed by the Nawabs and their Begums. Gilori Lucknowi Paan, was carefully crafted and modified to comply with the royal taste of Lucknow.

Hukkas are considered to be one of the most important symbolic representation of the Awadhi culture and the Nawabi rule. Hukkas are traditionally smoked post meals and during social gatherings. The 'Nawabs of Awadh' are to be credited for propagating and beautifying the culture of 'hookah'. Earthenware hookahs with subtle designs and intricate carvings are a speciality of Lucknow.

In today's times, the act of smoking a hukka has lost its royal significance, however it continues to be a social facilitator. Hookah, in these times, has emerged as an intrinsic part of the party circuit in Lucknow. The popularity of hookah can be gauged in the old areas of Lucknow such as Nazirabad, Akbari Gate and Chowk where people could be seen smoking hookah over lengthy conversations on local and political affairs. Some people in the city smoke hookah with traditional 'Khamira', which is a mixture of rose petals, ripened fruits, tobacco and a variety of condiments. Many Hookah parlours in Lucknow are traditionally themed and they are very popular amongst the youngsters. In Lucknow, you will find Hookah's at most weddings, parties and events. Generally, the young generation prefers the flavored hookahs whereas old people smoke traditional hookahs.





Reflections :

Preservation of culture :

The nostalgia factor : The new, fast-paced ways of Lucknow, has naturally revived a longing amongst the contemporaries across classes and religion, to experience the true Awadhi culture that belongs to simpler times, appreciates art and beauty, and caters to the hedonistic depths of one's subconscious. Those who appreciate the Awadhi culture, could broadly be classified as; the avid participants in the race of life, for whom Lucknow is a refuge, while for the nostalgists and patrons, it's a lifestyle. Even though, the two broad groups of people are different in their lifestyle choices, they are bound together in their appreciation for the past and their longing for a slow paced life. This longing for nostalgia is especially indicated in the old cooking methods and recipes that are still followed by the descendents of the royal cooks of the Nawabs and are very well received by the generic population of the city.

The economical factor : Lucknow has emerged to be one of the fastest growing cities on India, yet culture continues to be well preserved in the city. Apart from emotional reasons like nostalgia, the political choices made by the contemporary officials in the state could also be responsible for this phenomena as most of the economical advancements made in the city, did not trickle down into the older, poorer areas in Lucknow, for many passing years post the Nawab rule and continues to occur.

Smudgy religious divides :

Historically, the Mughals as well as the Nawabs were known to facilitate religious mingling. Off late, even though, there have been various sparing conflicts within the Shia-Sunni communities in the city, the overall coexistence of various religious groups like Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs have been facilitated through the accommodating culture of Awadh which includes a mixed food platter. The varied the Awadhi cuisine is consumed by people across religion, however there is indeed a faint divide visible in the choice of meat that people consume there. Most of the standard local Hindus from the city would try out a mutton biryani but not the beef kababs. In a similar fashion, Prakash kulfi is more famous amongst the Hindus as compared to Muslims. The demographic distribution of the city is heavily dependent on the land use map of Lucknow. Hence, most of the old area in the market that have concentrated presence of known names in the local food businesses are located in heavily populated Muslim areas and hence, have a larger Muslim customer base.

Economical implications of the patronage on the local food business :

Such an interest shown by the locals in the Awadhi culture has not only benefited the locals who have retained it, but has also ensured the survival of the culture itself through consistent commercial exchanges. The well known names in the food

have not felt the need to go overboard with mass production since their current customer base has been sufficient and consistent over the years. Most of the food businesses choose to stick to traditional methods precisely due to this practical reason, the other one being that they believe any fiddling with the older preparation methods would affect the quality of food.

Competition amongst the local food businesses

Since the recipes of most Awadhi food items are mostly individualistic and unique, they are known to be the cause of envy amongst the food business owners. Often, opposing food joint owners are heard talking badly about their competition. There is a lot of competition in the food market and everybody insists on having their own peculiar and unmatched spice preparation and claim a lineage in their respective food domain. The recipes are also heavily guarded and the spice preparations are usually made in the homes of the owners. The competitions have hence ensured constant efforts by the makers to keep up with the quality of food.

Patriarchy in the local food industry :

The food businesses in Lucknow are rarely seen to be handled by women, they seemingly only indulge in cooking in their own homes and strictly cook for close family members and friends. Even though, some of the guarded known recipes are guarded by women of the household, it's the men who setup the business and take things ahead.

Recent cultural contributions through food

Of all that Lucknow has to offer, local food remains one of the most mesmerising experiences. The Awadhi cuisine not only continues to attract patrons from all over the country, but also binds the local population together. It has indeed made the Lucknawi society more liberal by facilitating dialogues through food and other cultural sharing. Muslim areas are frequently visited by people for other religions who appreciate their lineage and brand value in food. Over the years, the local Muslim community has also been accepting of the new variants added to the mix of Awadhi cuisine.

Awadhi food, for years has been a medium to bind people belonging to various classes and religion together. From the time of the Nawabs when friendly culinary challenges between royal families were a common phenomenon, and Nawabs taking pride in their Rakabdars and their own lineage of food, to the current times when people from across religion drool over the same food, Awadhi food has never failed to mesmerize both its patrons and its makers.

Epilogue :

Lucknow gave me my first preview of the variety that life could offer. While the timing of the moment, allowed me to step out of the comfort of my home, the captivating flavours of the Awadhi food made sure that I kept on exploring further. Awadhi food is more than just flavours to me for my own personal reasons. Many patrons too have their own personal stories of when they fell for the Awadhi culture; People who travelled miles over a road trip to Lucknow to try its delicacies; Local Muslim families residing in Old Lucknow, that find their confidence and comfort in the traditional Nawabi lifestyle, and hence perpetuate the existence of Awadhi culture; And, people who migrated to Lucknow and surrounding areas and were welcomed and accepted by locals thus leading to further cultural morphings. One can find endless reasons to hate or love the city of Lucknow. I found my reason to love the city, deeply embedded in its food culture, and hence found out, that Lucknow truly is a city of the people, for the people, and by the people.

