

## THE OTHER LUCKNOW

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Reviewing this book\* is quite a difficult personal task for me for several reasons. I am someone who has spent close to 40 years in this city. Through associational ties Lucknow consequently has great significance to me as a city, as a symbol of distinct cultural traits, one that lingers on both on the minds of a sundry visitor to the city as well as the one like me who lived in it for a sufficiently long period to also witness the changes it has undergone from what it was during the rule of the *Nawabs*, the British, and thereafter the native 'Raja Sahibs' of the Congress, the assorted and unstable coalitions thereafter, the *Samajwadi Party (SP)*, the *Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)*, and the *Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)* and assorted coalitions during the post-Independence period of 68 years. In ways more than one, unconsciously I also developed some of the traits that a typical *Lakhnavi* resident either born or otherwise living in the city for a sufficiently long period possesses. Thus, I too have what one may call as a fairly experiential world view of what *Lakhnavi* culture was and how has it changed at least during my long stay in the city. Lucknow is just not another historical city like Kolkata, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Benaras or for that matter Agra, and Allahabad which had been seats of the Mughul / the British rulers respectively during earlier periods of history when Lucknow was not preferred as a seat of temporal political power. On the contrary, it is a city that has its distinct cultural stamp that refuses to fade despite traumatic changes that Lucknow has culturally undergone that warrant a rethink on its old cultural labelling. It is a city that has its share of depiction by the foreigners as well as the natives that is largely hung on the *Nawabi* cultural tag that the city came to acquire although all the while it was much more than what the *Nawabs* ruled and lived for. I am also someone who has been an urban planner and consequently undertaken useful research work involving urban ethnography to have required credentials to judge a notable research work from an outstanding Anthropologist like Nadeem Hasnain.

Every social scientist cannot undertake a research project requiring use of meticulous urban ethnography. It requires certain qualities that not

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*\*The Other Lucknow: An Ethnographic Portrait of A City of Undying Memories And Nostalgia* by Nadeem Hasnain. Vani Prakashan (2016), New Delhi

every ethnographer possesses. Hasnain has impeccable credentials to undertake such a research exercise.

The book is the result of a research project fully funded by the *Ayodhya Shodh Sansthan*, an autonomous institution of the Department of Culture, Government of Uttar Pradesh. Nadeem indicates that during almost six decades that he came to live in Lucknow, he had always kept the dream of writing something on Lucknow live (page 15). As it turns out, the book is not exactly only something that the foreign and Indian tourists to Lucknow talk about, but quite a very distinct opposite of the totally one-sided depiction of the city by most if not all previous researchers, historians and sundry writers! The book in fact substantially corrects the historical injustice done by previous writings with the fuller and much more wider cultural entity of Lucknow.

There is agreement among scholars on Lucknow that its physical development, economic activities, and cultural identity has been shaped most notably by the ruling classes. While the nostalgia about the *Nawabi* influence lingers on, the fact remains that river Gomti flowing quietly in the heart of the city has witnessed tremendous changes in the city's cultural profile during the last 68 years of the post-Independence period. Hasnain's book contains two very excellent pieces, although at two different sections of the book, that deal with the evolution of the contours of Lucknow's culture at two different time periods: one by Sandra Freitag (pp 21-46) giving a short cultural history of Lucknow that covers pre-Independence better but is somewhat sketchy for post-Independence period and the other by Aseem Hasnain under the heading of *The Changing Lucknow* and titled "Lucknow Today: Dalit Imaginations" (pp 317- ). However, there is a gap of quite a few decades in the narrative of evolution of Lucknow's physical, economic, social and cultural profile that was brought about by the Congress governments until 1967, by an assortment of coalitions after 1967 tectonic political change followed by instable governments by a variety of political combinations and mid-1980s by coalitions featuring SP, BSP, BJP first and then independent BSP and SP governments. Each of them left an imprint of their political culture on the city's cultural fabric. There are scattered studies of different aspects of these empirical events in the efforts of a number of scholars but an integrated analysis collating the entire post-Independence period is yet to be accomplished. Lucknow's culture is no longer 'you first' (*Pehale Aap*) that it was but has been more of 'I, me, myself' for the rulers of the post-Independence period, and this has percolated down to different segments of the Lucknow society including its subaltern segments. This is an independent full scale research theme and Nadeem had his hands full by devoting himself to graphically sketching the cultural profile of the subaltern Lucknow that earlier studies almost totally ignored. Consequently, he was not expected to complete this onerous task within the limited resources of his study. This is a task that someone else may undertake in future.

The book is organized in 22 chapters, a select bibliography, and an annexure, and contains large number of photographs some of which are of rare genre. Nadeem has taken great care in organizing the analysis of urban ethnography in the book which is reflected in the very logical sequencing of the chapters. The book consists of a short Introduction followed by a short cultural history of Lucknow by Sandra Freitag. This is followed by analysis of the social fabric of Lucknow consisting of Hindu, Muslim castes and occupational groups, *Kayasths*, and religious minorities. *Lucknavi* culture was primarily gelded by the influence of its *Shia Nawabs* and its courtesans, and the book recognizes their significance by including a separate chapter on the world of *Shias*. The physical Lucknow consisting of the Mohallas, Mandi, lanes, roads and markets are then discussed. Hazratganj and Aminabad have historical significance for the cultural experience that they have offered at various points of their history of evolution to those living in Lucknow and those visiting the city. Predictably, there is separate discussion on Hazratganj, '*Ganjing*', and Aminabad. The chapter on the Subaltern and the Marginalized, that most tourist views of Lucknow gloss over, very graphically analyses their world.

Lucknow's cultural ambience is most visible not only in its historical monuments but also in its cultural landmarks, and Hasnain focusses on the notable ones among them. The Nawabi culture was a cross-breed, often referred as the *Ganga-Jamuni* culture, in which festivals of the citizens of one religion were equally shared and enjoyed by those from belonging to the other religious faiths. The chapter on Local Fairs and Festivals brings this historical legacy very vividly. Lucknow possesses some very distinct religious /spiritual centres, and arts and crafts and Nadeem devotes separate chapters on these. Many of the Lucknow's famous occupational skills that have now virtually vanished are sketched out next. Of course, some new ones have emerged in the Lucknow society, economy and polity that could have been ideally also discussed.

Hasnain himself sketches the world famous Lucknow's cuisine and culinary art but those on music, singing and dance traditions, the *Ramleela*, *Qawwali*, *Daastaangoi* and theatre are written by a sub-area expert, Akhilesh Dixit. Lucknow has a Bollywood Connection, and is known for its Urdu poetry and Urdu journalism. Others have glossed over the contributions of non-*Lucknavites* to Lucknow's cultural legacy and these include those of Claud Martin and Walter Griffin who contributed significantly in the fields of education and architecture. Nadeem separately depicts their distinct contributions. Some like those of Saurabh Gupta and Alexander Schwarz (Museum of Socialism-Jai Prakash Narayan Interpretation Centre), Lohia Park, and the Janeshwar Mishra Park that are architecturally not as loud and stone-cast as those built by the BSP leader, Mayawati, are however not mentioned.

Lucknow has expanded enormously beyond its heart and has now a

huge urban sprawl within the municipal limits of the city and has expanded its influence to smaller towns like Kakori, Malihabad and *Bakhsi Ka Taalaab* on its western and northern sides. Chinhat too was such an entity earlier on but it has been swallowed altogether by the city. Hasnain specially analyses the endemic Shia- Sunni violence in the city but balances it by also highlighting Lucknow's shared culture and communal harmony. He has devoted a section on 'Others' in Lucknow that includes the Bengalis, Kashmiri Pandits, Oriya, Marathi, Malyali, and Assamese but not the Sikh and the Sindhi refugee groups. The latter have transformed Lucknow's trade and commerce beyond recognition!

The author devotes one section to Changing Lucknow which analyses urban villages and a very perceptive piece on Lucknow Today: Dalit Imaginations by his erudite son, Aseem Hasnain. Aseem has very perceptively analyzed the tectonic change in visual Lucknow brought about by BSP's Mayawati and making visual Lucknow substantially much more than only an entirely *Nawabi* city. Other post-Independence regimes have also contributed to significant physical changes in Lucknow—like the *Shaheed Smarak* opposite the Residency, the embankments on both sides of the river Gomti, several notable administrative building landmarks in the Lucknow of the new rulers, the new buildings of the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court in Gomti Nagar and the new building of the CDRI across the Ring Road in Janakipuram Extension, and the mind boggling incompetence of both the Lucknow Development Authority and the State Housing Board in providing just housing minus spaces for essential, social, and economic services in their areas of physical development in outer Lucknow! However, if only there was another chapter that analyzed post-Independence changes to the physical, economic, and the politico-cultural mosaic of Lucknow that would have provided icing on the cake! The book has a select bibliography and references and an Annexure that offers rare details.

A separate assessment of contributions from others is in order. The book has contributions from Sandria Freitag (on Lucknow's cultural history), Joel Lee (the Feast of Lal Beg : Dalit Religion 'Underground'), Akhilesh Dixit (on music, singing and dance and theatre) and Ramleela, Qawwali, Dastaangoi and, the Rekhti in Lucknow (Saiyed Anwer Abbas) and his equally scholarly son, Aseem Hasnain (on Lucknow Today: Dalit Imaginations). Sandra Freitag's piece is very well written but its coverage of the entire historical continuum of Lucknow's cultural history has some obvious gaps. Whereas her analysis is very fresh and illuminating for the Mughal, and British periods, its coverage of the post-Independence period leaves a gaping hole! Interestingly enough, a large number of scholars have researched it in its bits and pieces. For instance, there is Paul Brass who has done work on Charan Singh; Dipankar Gupta has worked on Bhartiya Kisan Union ;SudhaPai and Christoffe Jaffrelot have worked on the rise of 'lower castes' on the political front of UP and

changing the texture and substance of political rule in the state; AK Verma, and Raj Kumar Rawan have given very incisive analyses of BSP ideology of Dalit-Bahujan leaders; my doctoral student, Ashoka Mishra has researched the role delineation by UP Chief Ministers from G B Pant to N D Tiwari, and I myself have written on the evolution of a culture of backwardness among UP rulers of the post-Independence period ( included in Arun Kumar Singh :2012) and Lucknow's changing cultural mosaic in the third volume of my memoirs in Hindi 'Part-Dar –Part' under the heading '*Lakhnau ka Badalta Lucknawipan*' ( Shabdarambh, New Delhi, 2015). All these are published studies, and explain in some detail the cultural change that has come about in the city of Lucknow due to its Indian rulers. In the third volume of my memoirs, Part-Dar-Part(2016). Lucknow's culture is no longer 'PehleAap' that it was earlier on but more of 'I, me, myself' now. Aseem Hasnain's piece is the best cultural analysis of Mayawati's loud stone creations in Lucknow that others have bitterly denounced!Aseem's assertion that Mayawati's monuments provide an alternate monumental narrative to Nawabi cultural legacy of Lucknow is 100% spot on!The pieces by Joe Lee, and Akhilesh Dixit could not have been better written.

Overall, this is a very significant book that offers an alternate socio-cultural portrait of Lucknow, and I am quite sure that it would have huge worldwide readership of commoners as well the researchers alike. I know that the Vaani Prakashan which has published this remarkable book are essentially publishers of Hindi books, that too of the mainstream *Dwij* Hindi literary tradition. They have goofed very badly in discharging their responsibilities by not having the manuscript of the book copy edited by a competent copy editor. To further compound this folly, they have not even cared to correct proofing errors! Given the rare nature of fare that it offers to a very wide audience, I am reasonably sure that the book would go in to subsequent editions. The publishers would have the opportunity to redeem themselves and do justice with the thematic substance that Nadeem Hasnain provides.I would also expect Hasnain to fill some visible gaps in his researched narrative when he revises the manuscript for subsequent publication.