

Lucknavi Nawabi Heritage Days

DOWN THE MEMORY LANE

By DR. GAUTAM CHATTERJEE

LUCKNOW, the seat of socio-cultural amalgamation, remains the epitome of 18th and 19th Century's cultural centre. Here the traditional dances, school of poetry and cuisine reached its zenith in this millennium. However, the Nawabi culture remains its main patronage and facilitators for creating a common platform for multi-ethnic base.

With the passage of time Lucknow underwent tremendous socio-economic changes and its direct impact was on the pan-Oudh culture. Famous film directors like Satyajit Ray had delved deep into this culture in the 'Satranj Ke Khilari' where the cultural nuances and aesthetic sensibilities were shown to its perfection. Again the immortal acting of Rekha in the film "Umrao Jaan" takes one to flip through the pages of yesteryears where culture spoke its unified language under the patronage of Nawabs.

To feel the pulses of Nawabi culture I met Nawab Jafar Mir Abdullah one of the living Nawabs of Lucknow. For eight generations they are living in the Shees Mahal of Lucknow. As a privileged guest I could see the present Daulat Khana. On entering questioned myself whether I was entering a Museum or a Drawing Room! There were huge collection of art and artefact. Here one can see the ceramics from world over. Ancient paintings on glass and canvas. Utensils of various kinds. There are rare stones to medals of heritage days which is part of his family's collection.

Nawab's family itself is a heritage one. It's said they are Saiyaad as from both sides of parents were direct descendent of Imam 7th and 8th. He told that during his birth somebody had told his parents that he should be adopted, so his great grandfather adopted him in a ceremonious manner. There is a tradition of offering *Sainak* made of rice, curd and sugar.

tion of Zamindari system some 539 Talukdars and Nawabs the affluency of Nawabs diminished with time. So the culture caved in due to lack of wealth. To survive those one time regal class started selling their jewellery and Mahajan became richer.

Nawab told that his parents were 'practical' and taught them to 'adopt' the cultural and status change. Well there were other Nababs who could not forget the past and remained isolated in their 'dream world' of Nawabi nostalgia. And slowly many who could not adjust to changes were eased out of social system.

Nawab also informed that 'Tawaif' or Nautch girls were the epitome of etiquette and culture. So in yesteryears the sons of Nawab were sent to them to learn the art of talking, body movement, gesticulation which can be broadly headed under the concept of *aadab* of Lucknow. However, Nawab Jafar said in their family none were sent as etiquettes were nurtured within the family. And rather they were distanced from *Mujra* dance. As he recollected that in their family children were kept away from all. Yet, there were *Mujras* for 'Married' and for 'Elders' where even bachelors were not allowed. Thus the tradi-

tion of dance remained isolated at different levels. And to wean away its negative influence children were kept in distance.

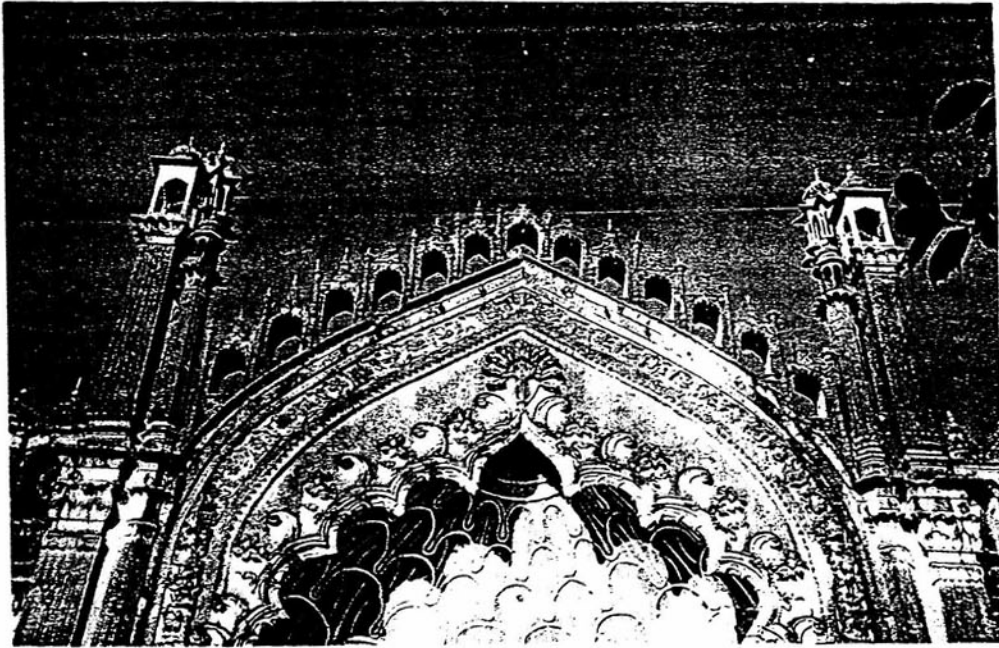
To educated children of Nawabs there were system of 'Story Telling' or 'Kissa go' who used to teach people through their imaginative stories. He recollects in



Nawab Jafar Mir Abdullah

With this ceremony he got adopted within his family.

Nawab Jafar is one of the eye witnesses to the changing times of Nawabi life-style of Lucknow. He recalls in his early childhood days he witnessed the transition of Nawabi life-style and culture. There used to be real aristocracy and with the aboli-



Roomi Gate, Lucknow

the summer season, in the afternoon they were not allowed to play rather they were forced to sleep in a 'conditioned' atmosphere. There was one ninety year old Kissa Go, who used to narrate stories to his grandfather and all the children of the family. Those were some time romantic, mysterious and inquisitive stories. The end summing up of those stories used to be 'Good prevails over evil'. However, with the passage of time those story tellers had become oblivion for the lack of Nawabi patronage.

Elaborating the language culture of Urdu, he feels this language has all the elements and being this 'Laskari' language it incorporated all the good elements of other languages. The sweetness, and the delivery remains its cue point. And again the *Shairi* or poetics of Urdu remains an unbeatable aspect of Lucknow culture which looms large over other cultures as well. However, with the passage of time, especially after independence, and to be precise by the 70s of this century Urdu took the back seat. And was reduced to a 'Madarsa' language of India. Though in schools Urdu remains one of the State languages, but lack of proper teaching staff

has hindered the progress of Urdu. Yet, it is surviving as a language of the Lucknow at the lingua-franca level. Urdu is so sweet a language that one can abuse somebody without attracting a 'negative' reaction immediately.

Nawab informed that Lucknow remains a place where cultural continuance is an unending phenomenon. After the diminishing of Mughal power the seat of cultural aesthetics was shifted to Lucknow. Here came many illustrious figures like Mir-Taqi Mir and other intellectuals from all over. Then Lucknow remains a cultural centre and patronage was given to many people and right from Ghazals to classical music were nurtured by various Gharanas. However, due to lack of fond the Nawabi courtyard never smelt alike as it used to be in the last century. Nevertheless, culture continued to rule and individuals continued to frame it for international audience. And today if you talk about Gharanas without mentioning about Lucknow the list will be incomplete.

The other aspect of Nawabi cuisine which attracts international attention is the types of food and the kitchen management with hundreds of *Masalas* and recipes. This is

now matter of heritage and got frozen into history. However, the touch continues as one sees rare aroma of Lucknavi dishes which though very rich but remains sumptuous. Nawab recalled there used to be *bawarchis* who used to prepare special aroma which are not available now. The recipes got buried with time. Yet within the Nawabi kitchen the special *rotis* and dishes are prepared even today. Perhaps no other Indian kitchen would require so huge investment as in the Lucknow thus without the fund of Nawab the kitchen died its unnatural death. But once you are in Lucknow do taste the famous *kababs* like *Tunde-kar-Kabab* and *Kakori Kababs*.

Nawab Jafar's collection of heritage properties and items is another stopover in Lucknow. Those collection started with his father Nawab Jafar Al-Haj-Hawab and he continues his role. Nawab Jafar's private collections are worth a Museum and he had shown his collections from several Government platforms like 'Lucknow Mahotshav' etc.

Nawab looks forward to show his heritage collection to the world, yet one must recognise his endeavour.