

Lucknow: A Living Charm in the Modern Age: A Journey through the Lens of Cinema**Sumedha Dwivedi**

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DOI: 10.53032/tcl.2020.4.6.18**Abstract**

Cultures take centuries to evolve, but fade away faster than we think. Lucknow has been sighing for over a century and a half, but somehow it is only recently that modern communication and tourism has begun to question its sad state, through which nostalgia has begun to emerge larger than life, as a saviour of this celebrated region. Cultures, as we would like to feel them will survive when we grow out of magnified visual ugliness and horrific amplified sounds. Cultures speak to the heart and any imposition through amplified sound as in modern India is a sure way of ringing in their death knell. Hindi films, Indian politics and religion are solely responsible for this mindless assault on our sensibility and whatever that remains of our acquired refinement.

Keywords: Society, Culture, Nawabi, Awadhian, Language, Poetry, Art, Cinema

Poets are the mirrors of a society. They dream of an ideal world and are the romantics that bring about change. Unfortunately, the poets of Lucknow have been more subtle and as Mohammad Iqbal says, “nations are born in the hearts of poets and die in the hands of politicians”. There was no Faiz or Makhdoom or Iqbal to stir the passion for revolt. But the silent *marsiya* of the city has acquired the power of a huge emotional upsurge which can change the world. A poet from across the border praises the language of Awadh by saying that,

*“Na vo Ada-e Takallum Na Ehtiyaat-e Zabaan,
Magar Yeh Zid Ki Humein Ahl-e Lucknow Kahiye”*

- Habib Jalal

The Urdu language had its origin in Delhi and its poetry originated in the Deccan. Wali of Gujarat came to Delhi with his collection of poems and awakened those who spoke the language to its charm. There was such magic in the melody of these poems that they were immediately on everyone’s tongue and thus Urdu poetry made its debut in Delhi. Lucknow’s contribution to Urdu literature and poetry is significant. It would not be wrong to say that

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Awadh, particularly Lucknow was the capital of Urdu. Nawabi culture was so tailor-made and conducive for Urdu poetry that it reached greater heights in Awadh than its place of origin i.e. Deccan or of further development, Delhi. The reason for this was the twists and turns of politics. When they lost power, the Mughal emperors could not afford to patronise poets in their courts, as a result, these poets who were traditionally dependent on the support of the court were literally on the verge of starvation. According to the legendary poet Mir Taqi Mir, when he wanted to leave Delhi for Lucknow, he did not even have enough money for the journey.

*“Lucknow Dilli Se Bhi Behtar Hai,
Ki Kisu Dil Ki Laag Idhar Hai”*

- Mir Taqi Mir

The states of Hyderabad, Murshidabad, Arcot, Farrukhabad, Rohilkhand and Awadh, were financially well placed. The rulers of these states, who had acquired the tastes of their masters, and for the sake of status, started patronising poets. Lucknow was geographically closer to Delhi and was backed by the British. Politically also Awadh presented a more peaceful picture and therefore attracted maximum number of poets. Apart from the affluence of the state which was generated by agricultural revenue, the Nawabi culture was an additional attraction for the migrant poets. Initially the poets of Delhi were reluctant to leave their city but faced with the prospect of a very bleak future in that city and the tempting offers made by the Nawabs of Awadh, they changed their mind.

When we carefully consider these latter phases one clearly realizes what a strong tradition of linguistic eloquence and poetry had been established in Lucknow. In a short period of time it became the fashion to compose poetry and it is unlikely that there has ever been a greater concourse of poets in any other language. Women also started to discuss poetry and language and even in the speech of the uneducated, one could find poetically inspired thoughts, similes and metaphors.

Beyond the magnificence of the Awadhian landscape, its unique Indo-Persian and European architecture and its much-evolved gastronomic recipes, is the beauty of the language. The starting point of Persian poetry was the *masnavi* or a long narrative poem with specific subject matter and style. It has been considered as the most powerful and the most forceful form of poetry. Another important form of poetry is *marsiya* or the elegy. In the ancient times recital of elegy and battle hymns was a display of perfection in verse and eloquence. *Vasokht* consists of a special kind of six lined verse of an erotic nature. *Hazalgoi* by far has been the most senseless of all. There was another form known as *rekhti* or verses written in the language of women. If *rekhti* had refrained from obscenity and immorality and had dealt in ideas of virtue and chastity, the art would have been worth cultivating to a certain extent. But it failed. *Rekhti* always marched outside the path of culture and moderation and although it might have added something to the language, it certainly had a harmful effect on morals.

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It would not be untrue to say that the foundation of Lucknow's Urdu poetry was laid by the poets who migrated from Delhi. But that does not mean that Awadh did not produce any poets of its own. Imam Bakhsh 'Nasikh', the first non-Delhi poet, was the founder of the Lucknow School of Poetry. He was born in Faizabad into an ordinary family. This talented poet joined the *darbar* of Nawab Mohammad Taqui Khan, a noble of Faizabad, at the early stages of his career. But his talent required a wider canvas, and therefore he came to Lucknow. He not only continued his education here but also sought the patronage of Meer Kazim Ali.

Poets needed to win over their masters in order to get patronage. Therefore, in order to please Prime Minister Agha Mir, Nasikh wrote a poem in the *hajo* style decrying his political rival Hakim Mehdi Ali Khan. He was rewarded adequately for this. Unfortunately, the poem proved to be a costly exercise for him as Nawab Nasir-ud-din Haider eventually appointed Hakim Mehdi as the Prime Minister of Awadh in 1830. Under the changed political circumstances, the poet had no option but to flee from Lucknow. However, just two years later Hakim Mehdi was sacked from his post and Nasikh returned to Lucknow.

Contrary to the assertions of British historians, quite a few Nawabs of Awadh were culturally evolved rulers and a good number of them were acknowledged poets. The eleventh and last Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was a prolific poet. His pen name was Akhtar and he wrote almost all styles of poetry like *hajo* (satirical), *marsiya* (elegy, dirge), *ghazal* (amatory song or poem), *masnawi* (verse), *salam* (a form of religious poetry) and *nauha* (mourning poetry). The poetry of Wajid Ali Shah is considered to be the best among all the Nawabs.

*"Jab Chor Chale Lucknow Nagri,
Kahein Haal Ke Hum Par Kya Guzri"*

- Nawab Wajid Ali Shah

Urdu prose, as far as the old literary style is concerned, had its origin in Lucknow. Certainly, the style originated in Delhi but wherever possible Lucknow competed with Delhi in an effort to improve. Humorous and witty writing in particular was initiated and came to perfection in Lucknow. The development of Urdu language in Lucknow was not confined to the efforts of letters alone. Contributions were made at all levels of society. It caused the language to improve, broaden and assume aspects which were source of interest to all classes. Another important thing to note is that Awadhi pronunciation of Urdu language is the easiest to learn and repeat. While the Delhi version of Urdu was hard and stringent, the Lucknow version was refined. This was one of the main reasons why Urdu gained such popularity in cinema also.

The lyrics and dialogues by Lucknow's very own Shams Lakhnawi in the 1950 movie *Shama* reflect the richness of the spoken language. This is clearly reflected in lines like "*Chaand mein daag honge par phir bhi chaand ko koi badsoorat nahin kehta*" and "*Kahin apna thikana nahin zamaane mein, Na aashiyaane sey baahar, na aashiyaane mein*". The film *Mehndi* is immortalised by the couplet "*bedard zamana tera dushman hai toh kya hai, duniya mein nahin jiska koi, uska khuda hai*".

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The film *Mere Mehboob* is a classic presentation of vintage Lucknow, immaculately capturing its culture and etiquette. The diction, the costumes, the rituals and the traditions portrayed in the film faithfully display *lakhnawi* culture. Each character speaks in a style of lyrical prose that makes every spoken dialogue in the film a masterpiece of Urdu poetry. In those days *mushairas* were a regular feature of college life encouraging numerous *shayar* students.

In the movie *Mehndi*, the young girl Umrao is a *shayara* who writes poetry under the pen name Ada. *Palki* is a simple story of a struggling poet Naseem who refuses to sell his poetry to make some money. Such was the love he had for his art. In *Mehboob Ki Mehendi*, the Nawabs are *shayars* and the young girl Shabana despite being uneducated is a *shayara*. This is one of her many virtues. In *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah is himself shown to be a *shayar* who takes part in *mushairas* regularly.

Umrao Jaan, Muzaffar Ali's adaptation of Mirza Hadi Ruswa's novel *Umrao Jaan Ada*. Most often a *tawaif* was educated in the art of writing and appreciating poetry, holding knowledgeable conversations. She was also skilled in singing, dancing and being flirtatious. Umrao writes poetry under the pen name Ada which adds to her prestige. The movie shows her reading out her poetry to Khanum Jan a number of times. *Anjuman* presents a very apt picture of Lucknow and its traditions, using the charming local dialect. Words like *nakhlaw*, *banka*, *mua* and *tanik* peculiar to Lucknow are used frequently by *paan*-chewing characters. With *Sehar* came a change in the way people spoke in the movies. The language was now crass and use of abusive language was what came to be associated with this linguistically rich region. The dialogue "*Bees saal me is shehar ka mijaaz he badal gaya, Hazratganj se jab guzare to laga ki kisi aur he shehar me aa gae hain. Zabaan me jo thodi bohot nafasat thi vo bhi khatam ho gai. Pehle jaisa kuch bhi nahi raha*". This dialogue by Suhasini Mulay in the movie speaks for itself at the deteriorated state of the culture and language of Awadh.

In *Bullet Raja* an authentic flavour of the various dialects spoken in Awadh, "*Aaisi koi harkat mat karna, Jisse hamara Apman ho. Kahin baura gaye to pahle mar mar ke badan ko dard denge. Phir mar denge....!*" *Dedh Ishqiya* has a very unique contest in Urdu poetry where the leading lady Begum Para is herself the prize. The contest is a comedy of exaggerated manners and bad poetry. Lucknow has been the city of both, the written and spoken word, the language of day-to-day life, of humour and etiquette, love and romance, poetry and compliment. Even the illiterate wrote poetry and spoke in velvet smooth tones. Today the city is confronted with cinema and television with a language of politics and modern education. Political bigwigs from outside Awadh have devastated the delicate and vulnerable ethos of this city.

"Jis pe Duniya ko Fakhr hai Aslam,

Woh Zabaan-e-Khaas Lucknow ki hai"

- Aslam Lucknowi

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Lucknow, especially Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, has been credited with popularising classical North Indian music, helping it emerge from a select circle of admirers and practitioners to a wider audience. Music became so popular in Lucknow that it was common to find even street urchins singing ragas in such perfect melody that anyone could have taken them for trained singers.

Music was always an intrinsic part of Awadh. Several of its cities, such as Benaras, Jaunpur and Ayodhya, were centres of musical training. In the Nawabi era at the time of third Nawab Shuja-ud-Daulah, singers from all over the country and even from Tansen's lineage, migrated from Delhi and started making their presence felt in Lucknow. Later, during the reign of Shuja-ud-daulah's son Asif-ud-daulah, music attained greater heights: the renowned book *Usulun Naghmatul Asafiya* (The Principle of the melodies of Asaf) was brought out at this time. The sixth Nawab Saadat Ali Khan did not give much importance to music. As a result musicians were unable to do well during this period. Music did not thrive during the reigns of the ninth Nawab Mohammad Ali Shah and the tenth Nawab Amjad Ali Shah. It was the last king of Awadh Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, who popularised music in Lucknow.

Wajid Ali Shah was himself musically talented. Trained under the renowned Ustad Basit Khan, Wajid Ali composed *raginis* like *jihi*, *jogi* and *shah pasand* meaning “king’s favourite”. Wajid Ali was so musically adept that he composed a *thumri* by the name *Kadar Piya* (mean lover). In Wajid Ali’s time, complicated *ragas* like *hori* and *dhrupad* were ignored and easier *raginis*, like *tilak*, *pilu*, *sendura*, *khammach*, *bhairvi* and *jhanjhauti* were encouraged. As these were liked by the king and easily understood by all sections of society, they came to be well-loved by commoners. It was because of this reason that Lucknow’s *bhairvi*, which is sung in the morning, became a favourite all over the country. Wajid Ali has been accused of cheapening the classical tradition and promoting lighter forms of music such as *ghazals* and *thumris*.

Lucknow is the birthplace of musicians including Naushad, Talat Mahmood, Anup Jalota, and Baba Sehgal as well as British pop celebrity Sir Cliff Richard. That Lucknow has been a major influence on the Hindi film industry is clear from the fact that the *Pakeezah* (1972) song “*Chalo dildar chalo, Chaand ke paar chalo*” was shot with the Gomti River in the background. With great lyrics, classy music, stupendous set-design and brilliant choreography, *Pakeezah* is an absolute poem onscreen, a pure delight to watch. No other film, before and after *Pakeezah* has thrived solely on the strength of the music of *tawaif*. The creative dialogue between the director and the music director has resulted in an authentic text of the traditional music of the *kotha*. The recurrence of traditional *bandish* (lyrics) in *raag khammaj* and *jhinjhoti*, *taal dadra* and *kaharwa*, and the *bol-banav* (where a sentence/ word is repeated to express a new meaning), *thumri* and *bol baant thumri* (where the specific meaning of a word or sentence is elaborated through repetition), instruments like *sarangi*, *tabla*, *ghunghroo* and *tali* (claps, which are typical of leathale dance which has roots in the culture of Awadh), and *lehari* and *baithaki mehfil* are good examples of the same. The intertwined life stories of

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Gauharjan and Sahibjan slowly reveal themselves through music and poetry. The film is also remembered for Lata Mangeshkar's unforgettable rendering of *mujra* songs "*chaltay, chaltay yun hi koi mil gaya tha*" and "*thaday rahio o bankay yaar*". These are fine examples of *baithaki mehfil* and *khari mehfil* respectively. *Umrao Jaan* too has given some of the best songs of history "*dil cheez kya hai aap meri jaan lijiye*" and "*in aankhon ki masti ke*" are masterpieces.

The famous poet Kumar Barabanki wrote the lyrics of the movie *Mehndi* which were sung by Lata Mangeshkar. The songs of the film *Chaudhavin Ka Chand*, Shakeel Badayuni's lyrics set to music by Ravi were big hits and the music got critical acclaim. Guru Dutt chose to present the track "*Chaudhvin ka chand ho ya aftar ho*" in colour while the rest of the film was black and white. The film also has a very famous song "*Ye lucknow ki sar zameen*" which talks of the grandeur of the land of the Nawabs and their *nawabiyat*. The movie *Shama* has some memorable *ghazals* by Kaifi Azmi rendered by Suman Kalyanpur "*Is jurm par ke humne chaaha tha muskurana, Marne na de mohabbat, jeene na de zamaana*". The movie *Mere Mehboob* has a beautiful song "*Mere Mehboob tujhe meri mohabbat ki qasam*" which is an ode that beautifully captures the yearning of a lover searching for his beloved among *burqa* clad women in the college. *Palki* is most remembered for its songs. Lucknow born Naushad has composed the vibrant music. The lyrics, soaked in love for both the sweet heart and the city, are penned by the romantic writer and poet Shakeel Badayuni who belonged to Western Uttar Pradesh. This was the time when Shakeel as lyricist and Naushad as composer were a duo to compete with. Much of the *tehzeeb* and *tameez* that they took from Lucknow to Bombay was obvious in their art and greatly responsible for their immense popularity. Here are two examples: "*aye shahr-e-lakhnau tujhe mera salaam hai, tera hi naam dusara jannat ka naam hai*" and "*kal raat zindagi se mulaqaat ho gayi, lab tharra rahe the magar baat ho gayi*".

It is through its timeless music that the film *Mere Huzoor* lives on charming lyrics by Hasrat Jaipuri and melodies by Shankar Jaikishan. The famous filmi ghazal "*Rukh se zara naqab utha do mere huzoor*" sung by Mohammed Rafi is pictured on a train so it has the rhythm of a moving train and even a train whistle in the background. The fast-paced Kathak dance number based on a classical *raag* "*chanak chanak tori baje payaliya*" was sung by Manna Dey that brought the National Film Award to him. The highlight of *Gaman* is its soulful music. "*Seeney mein jalan*" evokes the sentiments of the millions caught in the chaos of a metro city and "*Aapki yaad aati rahi*" conjures up the longing for home which is there deep inside all of us. "*Aaja sawariya tohe galwa laga loon*" is one more outpouring in the vocabulary of grieving for what is lost. The music of *Anjuman* by Khayam and lyrics by Shahryar harmonize with the artistic visuals. Songs like "*Aisa Nahin Ke Isko Nahin Jante Ho Tum*", "*KabYaad Mein Tera Saath Nahin*", "*Tujhse Hoti Bhi To Kya Hoti Shikayat*" harmonize with the visuals of exploitation of *chikankari* workers that the movie has highlighted.

Kathak is one of the eight forms of Indian classical dance. *Katthaka* in Sanskrit means he who tells a story, or enacts them. The structure of a conventional *Kathak* performance tends

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to follow a progression in tempo from slow to fast, ending with a dramatic climax. A short dance composition is known as a *tukra*, a longer one as a *toda*. The Lucknow *Gharana* of *Kathak* dance came into existence mainly in the court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, the ruler of Awadh in the early 19th century and attained maturity through the efforts of Thakur Prasad Maharaj, the court dancer and guru of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah and subsequently by his nephews Bindadin Maharaj and Kalka Prasad Maharaj. Kalka Prasad's sons Achchan Maharaj, Lachu Maharaj and Shambhu Maharaj also contributed towards the further development of this *gharana* style. The Lucknow style of *Kathak* dance is characterized by graceful movements, elegance and natural poise with dance. *Abhinaya*, concern for movement, shape and creative improvisations are the hallmarks of this style. Presently, Birju Maharaj is considered the chief representative of this *gharana*. Taking its cue from nature, *Kathak* ingrained rhythm in its very existence. Expressing joyous oneness with nature to worshipping the Creator, *Kathak* advanced to royal courts. *Kathak* is recognized by fine dramatization of poetry in Urdu and *Khariboli* or *Braj Bhasha*. This repertoire is the most beautiful show-piece of *Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb*. Mughal kings preceding Aurangzeb had adapted *Kathak* to courtly celebratory expression. On absorbing Mughal influence, *Kathak* came to be danced by both the sexes. Prior to Mughal patronage *Kathak* was strictly for men. *Kathak* was introduced to Lucknow by the patronage of Nawab Asif-ud-Daula. It was the migration of Pandit Prakashji Misra from Handia near Allahabad that set the stage for Lucknow *Gharana of Kathak*. He became head of the genealogical tree bearing ace *kathak* gurus like Pandit Durga Prasad, Maharaj Bindadeen and Kalka, Achchan Maharaj, Lacchu Maharaj, Shambhu Maharaj, Birju Maharaj and Arjun Maharaj.

The last Nawab of Awadh, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was known for his active contribution to culture. *Parikhana* in Qaiserbagh complex pulsated with his love for *Kathak* a culmination of poetry, music, drama and spiritual fortitude. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah recognized the holistic element of *Kathak* and became a disciple of Pandit Durga Prasad. He perfected his *Kathak* when he ruled Lucknow and continued to dance *Kathak* when in exile at Matiya Burj, Kolkata. The Lucknow *Gharana* is rich with *Thumri*, *Bhajan* and *Pada*. Most of these were written with rhythm, mime and movement in mind for *Kathak* performances. The keeper of the keys of Lucknow *Gharana of Kathak*, treasure these compositions handed to them by their seniors.

Films like *Mughal-e-Azam*, *Pakeezah* and *Devdas* show us just the tip of the iceberg. The repertoire of *Kathak* is vast enough to be recognized as a synonym of Indian dance and concentrated enough in its *Gharanas* based in Lucknow, Jaipur and Banaras. In the earlier movies we do not see actresses dancing. In *Anhonee*, the girl Mohini who was raised by a courtesan dances at a party held by her sister. Later on, she is told that the girls of good families do not dance. It was shown as if it was always the *tawaif* who danced and sang in front of people and this is the reason why some of the best songs and dance sequences have been performed by the *tawaifs* in these movies. In *Mere Mehboob*, the Nawab could not declare his

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love for the theatre dancer for the fear of humiliation. In *Benazir*, Meena Kumari performed one of her best *mujras* choreographed by none other than Lachhu Maharaj. *Pakeezah* shows Meena Kumari and her amazing *mujras*. The dance sequences in the movie set a benchmark for the later dancers. In *Umrao Jaan*, Umrao grows to become the most celebrated *tawaif*, singing, dancing and entertaining in Khanum Jan's *kotha*.

Lucknow has been the city of both the written and spoken word of language of day-to-day life, humour, etiquette, love, romance, poetry and eulogy. Even the illiterate wrote poetry and spoke in velvet smooth tones. Films are a reflection of society and if society is truly reflected in films, then with the changing conditions and times and the speed of progress these changes in films are also unavoidable. With this deep realization you find that something has been lost. This is the only ray of hope on the firmament of the twilight of Awadh.

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