



BY INVITATION
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Prospering Industry OF NOSTALGIA

To An Untrained Eye, Lucknow May Come Across As A Laid-Back City. Dig Deeper To Find Its True DNA Of Pursuing Happiness. The City's Warm, Happening & Full Of Happy Happenstances



If ever work life balance worked out perfectly, it had to be in Lucknow. A recent survey rated Lucknow amongst the highest, on the 'Happiness' index, and that surprised many. Probably because a lot of us, who were born and/or brought up here, do not realize that happiness is actually a way of life.

Having spent nearly seven decades in Lucknow, in the midst of a manufacturing environment, I sometimes feel that the biggest industry that Lucknow ever produced was that of Nostalgia! After my formal education in the UK, I chose to come back to the land-locked Lucknow to helm an automotive component manufacturing business with my father in the 1970s and after struggling to survive in a non-industrial environment, found a way to grow as a company, despite the challenges, by going global. All this to enjoy the good life the city offered. Of course, a lot has changed since, and for the better!

Traversing the last few decades, I have seen time stand still in Lucknow too! While there was a complete transformation at the turn of the century, with the malls and multiplexes and towering apartment buildings dotting the 'new' Lucknow, some traditional industries just preferred to brave the travesty of change. The Chikanankari and Zardozi artisans, the Awadhi food magicians, the traditional perfumers, i.e. itr makers, the delectable and laid-back 'paan and zarda' culture of the nawabs and the scent of the delicious Dussehri mango withstood the test of

time. And that is what makes Lucknow my protagonist for the industry of Nostalgia! So, while the younger lot moved on with the new opportunities coming their way, the older ones preferred to watch the winds of change from within the comfy confines of nostalgia. Lucknow was never a city that thrived on industrial development. In fact, the only industry that thrived in Lucknow and perhaps still does, is politics. That is why, perhaps, the importance of UP's role, and particularly Lucknow's, in the governance of India is something that's etched in stone in the country's history.

And in this industry of Nostalgia, I have had my fair share. I vividly remember the days when telephones existed but never worked, when the transistor was a fad, and Vividh Bharti, Forces Request and Radio Ceylon, the only radio stations to die for; when television was black and white with two boring channels, and school jam sessions and friends' birthday parties held the sway. There was no concept of the weekend as any day of the week was good for partying, going to movies and hanging out with friends. As we grew up and moved to college, we would wagger with friends

on frivolous trivia, just so we would end up eating out at Simson's ... that sumptuous plate of chicken chowmein and a chilled Coca Cola, all for a mere Rs 10.

Fortunately, short distances in Lucknow were always a factor in the way people socialize or party. No matter what your mode of transport, the time taken was always a few minutes and even today it is a significant factor, as the partying junta manages to cover two and sometimes even three parties in the same evening!

Having lived in Lucknow for almost seven decades now, I have actually seen the city grow in size and population without losing its warmth. In fact, I would rate Lucknow as one of the most liveable cities in India where culture, heritage and modernity co-exist. Somehow friendship and even acquaintances, over the years are retained. There are familiar faces almost everywhere, though with the spread, the frequency of seeing them has reduced drastically. But what a wonderful feeling it is, to be greeted with an 'adaab', a 'namashkar' or just a warm 'hello' whether you are taking a walk in the park, out shop-



ping, at the movies, the train station or airport or just about anywhere in the city. At times by a familiar face with no name. And despite the strains of getting out of a slumber and getting metro bound, the character of Lucknow, pervades.

Lucknowites have more 3am friends than perhaps anywhere else. Friendship is devoid of cast, creed and status and the warmth comes through as you meet. This is so much in contrast with cities like Delhi where first you are sized up, evaluated on the basis of your place of stay, the car you drive etc., and then either accepted or rejected as 'friend' material. It's a perpetual game of 'Keeping up with the Joneses' that people play. Thankfully, Lucknow's DNA is different, and life is devoid of the complicated character of relationships in big cities. The laid-back culture of Lucknow is a gift of the genetics of lifestyle of the people who lived through the ages. The Nawabiyat is so much a part of what we do.

Another unique but lovable aspect of social do's in Lucknow is the concept of timing. Arriving on time is 'shaan ke khilaf'! So, a party that is supposed

to start at 8pm probably gets under way by 10pm and even if the next day is a working day, dinner is not served till midnight! But then again, the next day also starts lazily and shops and businesses mostly open doors by 10.50 or even 11 am. A true blue Lucknowite aptly said, "Life is a party. You join it after it has started and leave before it is over!"

Life is too short to miss out on moments of mirth, fun, friendship and bonhomie. The sole object of being with friends and family is to chill, de-stress and leave your inhibitions behind. If you can do that, you are truly in a 'happy' state of mind and with the people you ought to be with! And Lucknow accords you these opportunities in abundance!

Despite the state of organized chaos that is so much part of our everyday life, the DNA of Lucknow has remained intact. So, instead of trying to make Lucknow another Shanghai, I would rather go back in time and make it the Awadhi of yesteryears with a modern backdrop.

Lucknow, for me, is a place to be born in. Again and again.

Photo: V Sunk

