

Where has my Lucknow gone?

[Anil K Rajvanshi](mailto:anilrajvanshi@gmail.com)
anilrajvanshi@gmail.com

Last week I visited Lucknow to deliver a lecture at [Lucknow Management Association](#) and also to see my birthplace. It has become extremely congested, very noisy and in some places a very dirty city. I long for my 1960s Lucknow.

I was born and raised in Lucknow. I did my schooling in St. Francis' High School (situated on Shahnajaf Road and very close to Hazratganj) and then went in 1967 to IIT Kanpur (IITK) to study Mechanical Engineering. After graduation from IITK I went to [US for higher studies](#) and returned in 1981 to rural Maharashtra to run [my own NGO](#).

The house in which I was born was situated in the center of Hazratganj. It was an old British bungalow which was allotted to my father in 1947. We lived in this house till 1960 because in that year it became unlivable after the great Lucknow floods. We then moved to a Lal Bagh flat which was opposite Basant cinema. We surrendered this flat to the building owner in 2006 after my father's death and thus ended my physical connection to Lucknow.

I had a great love for parks and the outdoors and I vividly remember going quite regularly to National Botanical Garden (NBG) to sit and study under a tree. NBG is part of National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI) and is on Rana Pratap Marg and close to Hazratganj. In 1960s NBG used to remain open the whole day and very few people came during day time. After coming home from school, I would have my lunch and then take my books and go to NBG.

Since we lived in Lal Bagh near Hazratganj – a mere one km from the park, hence it was very easy to go there. Also the road to NBG which passed through Hazratganj and Shahnajaf Road, used to be deserted during afternoon with just a few cycle rickshaws plying and very rarely would one see an ambassador or a fiat car.

The walk from our flat in Lal Bagh to National Botanical Garden took about 15-20 minutes one way. Spending 2-3 hours surrounded by trees and a garden full of flowers was a lovely way to study and relax.

Nowadays the NBG is closed during the day. It opens only in the morning or evening for daily walkers and the crowd is so heavy that sometimes it is difficult to walk on the paved pathways in the park.

When I recently visited Lucknow and went to see our flat, I was shocked to see the horrific traffic. It was impossible to cross the Lal Bagh Road since it was completely choked by two wheelers which were parked three layers deep! Also the Shahnajaf Road on which St. Francis' College is located is now completely jammed with cars, motorcycles and rickshaws. When the school gets over in the afternoon it is impossible to even walk on the broad road.

Similarly I remember very vividly that in the morning I used to go for long walks starting from our flat in Lal Bagh, going by Lucknow Zoo (called Banarsi Bagh), passing along the side of the lovely golf course, through La Martiniere College and ending at the Shamshan Ghat (Cremation ground) in Dilkusha Garden. The return journey would be via Loreto Convent School, Raj Bhavan and General Post Office (GPO). The total journey of about 8-9 kms was done in about 1½ hours.

Recently during my Lucknow visit when I tried to retrace my walks I got lost after crossing Banarsi Bagh (Lucknow Zoo). Because instead of the small tree-lined road going to La Martiniere College there was this 4-lane highway going towards Faizabad! The La Martiniere College itself has become a gated college, so the open atmosphere with the large number of trees that existed has all gone.

The same is true all over Lucknow. The beautiful parks and open spaces are now all converted to high-rise apartments with manifold increase in traffic and deafening noise pollution. Gomatinagar – a new colony for upscale community has the Ambedkar Park with about 125 stone elephant statues! During summer months this whole area is like an oven since it bakes under the sun and with hardly any trees the whole place radiates absorbed solar energy at night.

After passing Indian School Certificate Examination in 1966 I joined Colvin Taluqdar College. This old college with beautiful buildings of Mughal era is located across Gomati River and from our flat in Lal Bagh would take about 10-15 minutes by bicycle. I would carry my younger brother double-seat to the college. The journey was very pleasant with Monkey Bridge over Gomati River nearly empty and there was hardly any danger of a young 16 years' old lad meeting an accident.

Today it is impossible to go over the bridge due to car and two wheeler traffic jams and is very dangerous to ride even a two wheeler let alone a bicycle.

Similarly it is now impossible to cross Hazratganj road in the evening since the automobile traffic is unbelievable. With no parking facility the traffic jam in once beautiful Hazratganj is horrendous. With all this traffic I am sure the quality of air in Lucknow must be really horrible.

A great city is known by its open and green spaces. I have visited famous cities all over the world and they are all characterized by beautiful parks and gardens. Unfortunately in India we do not value these things and with rampant corruption and unholy nexus between politicians and builders all these spaces are destroyed by ugly high rise buildings. This has made most of India's cities unlivable. And Lucknow is no exception.

My memories of Park laden Lucknow are now only that with the reality being very ugly. And I wonder what will be the impressions of young children who will be growing in this city full of pollution-both air and noise. I wish they would have in future the green Lucknow that I grew up in.

[HOME](#)

©Anil K Rajvanshi. October 2015.

Article [published in Huffington Post.](#)