

My memories of Awadhi food

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I was born and raised in Lucknow in 1950s and so had ample opportunity to sample Lucknowi food, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian.

I am not a connoisseur of food, but enjoy tasty and wholesome food. Also food evokes childhood memories and though one has tasted very delicious food later on in life, somehow the early memories of great food are the strongest.

Hence what I am going to describe in this essay are my childhood memories (early 1960s) of Awadhi food and different places and restaurants that we frequented in Lucknow.

I had recently written a small essay entitled [“Where has my Lucknow gone?”](#) and had posted it to my friends and groups. It elicited a tremendous response from present and past Lucknow niwasis. The maximum response however was regarding the memories of delicious food that some of the Lucknow residents had in their childhood. Hence I thought of writing my memories of them and do hope that others will add theirs to it.

A) Vegetarian food

My earliest memories of good food are those of Salam Hotel. This was a small eatery at the corner of Naval Kishore Road and Shahnajaf Road. The elderly muslim gentleman who owned this hotel was from Bijnor and made excellent milk bread. I have eaten a variety of excellent breads world over, but the smell of that freshly baked sweet bread is still fresh in my memory.

From early 1950s till 1960 we used to stay in a bungalow in Hazratganj. It was an old British bungalow whose main entrance was from Naval Kishore

Road opposite the Naval Kishore Press. I must be 6-7 years' old and sometimes it was my job to get the freshly baked bread from Salam Hotel which was just 3-4 minutes walk from our house. The hotel is long gone now but its fond memories have remained. It also sold excellent tandoori chicken but an order had to be placed in advance since in the 1950s there were few people who ate costly tandoori chicken. I remember vividly that when my father's friend Shri. Sunder Lal, who was the youngest member of Parliament in 1951, would come to Lucknow we always got the tandoori chicken.

Then there was the excellent restaurant called Kwality. It was situated in Mayfair Cinema building in Hazratganj and the quality of food both vegetarian and non-vegetarian was unbelievable. Whenever my grandfather came from Meerut he would take me in the evening for a walk in Hazratganj. I would always direct him towards Kwality restaurant and we would eat their famed ice cream. The ice cream slab was served in a plate with a biscuit wafer stuck on top of it. Daily dose of ice cream would inevitably lead to constipation in a 5-6 year old boy and my father would get very angry with my grandfather for over-indulging me. Kwality was also famous for their biscuits and pastries.

Next to Kwality restaurant used to be a paan shop. Both the sweet and masala pans were delicious. Again those childhood memories are fresh and powerful. In late 1950s some of my parents' friends came from Meerut to Lucknow. In those days there were no phones and somehow their letter telling us when they will come got lost in transit. However, they knew that we lived in Hazratganj and they also knew that my father daily ate pan with tobacco. So when they reached Hazratganj in a rickshaw from the railway station they inquired from the paanwala where we lived and he immediately told them how to reach our house!

In the chat category the most famous was the chatwala in Aminabad. The shop was on a slope on the road connecting Aminabad to Latouché road.

Their *aloo tikki*, *matar* and *golgappas* were out of this world. Later on after the owners death his two sons fought and set up their individual shops on the same road. The quality deteriorated and soon they closed shop.

In 1960 we moved to Lal Bagh flat opposite Basant Cinema. Very near to our flat used to be Sharma Chat house near Lal Bagh circle. Sharma chat was famous for its *dahibara*, *samosas*, *kachoris* and *masala chai*.

Another good chatwala near our house used to be Kings of chat who used to operate his *thela* in the verandah opposite Halwasiya market. He served good chat and used to advertise that he used boiled water for golgappas.

Then came Jain chatwala sometime in the early 1990s who operated his stall in the verandah near Novelty Cinema. Rumour has it that he is still the best chatwala in town. Now he has a big shop across the street in Lal Bagh. I remember eating *matar* and mouthwatering *golgappas* at his shop.

Lucknow is full of chatwala's but I guess people have their own favorite places and mine was Jain chat place. I thought his chat even beat the Aminabad one!

For sweets we used to frequent Choudhry Sweet House in Hazratganj. They provided very decent sweets and in Hazratganj they were the best for a very long time till they were overtaken by various others. Some of the best *rabri* was available in Saligram, Narahi (close to Lucknow Coffee Shop). So was *kachori* and *samosas*.

Aminabad was also the place where famous Prakash Kulfiwala was located. The Kulfi was rich and delicious. However a scare took place in the late 1950s that eating their *faluda* led to cholera and typhoid. We stopped eating their Kulfi and switched to that from Choudhry Sweet House, but it was not as delicious as that from Prakash.

For rasgullas we used to go to Benbows which was at the corner of Hazratganj and Station Road and near the General Post Office (GPO). Though there was a Bengali Sweet shop near Novelty Cinema which also produced good rasgullas, we preferred Benbows.

In late 50s and 60s Lucknow Coffee house produced excellent masala dosa. Normally once a month we would go to Coffee House for a dinner meal of Masala dosa. The place was quite run down but the dosa fare was quite good. Later on Coffee House fell on bad times and was nearly shut down but was rescued and today it has transformed into a Café Coffee Day type restaurant.

Another famous sweet shop in Lucknow used to be Ram Asrey in Chowk. In those days it was considered too far from Hazratganj since the only mode of transport was either rickshaw or bicycle and hence only for special occasion or function their sweets were purchased. One of their best sweets was *malai pan*. It was delicious rabari filling wrapped in *malai* (cream) and shaped as pan and was covered by silver warak!

Ram Asrey opened their branch near Hazratganj in 1981. Since then I have eaten their sweets many times whenever I visit Lucknow. However I am told by the connoisseur of sweets that their sweets have been overshadowed by those from Chappan Bhog!

B) Non-Vegetarian

In my young age I was not too fond of non-vegetarian food. Part of the reason was that it was never cooked in our house since my mother was a vegetarian. So either we ate non-vegetarian food outside or brought home the cooked food from restaurants.

My first memory of non-vegetarian food is that of tandoori chicken from Salam Hotel. Then my real fresh and very pleasant memory is that of a rich mutton curry at a wedding party in Lucknow sometime in late 1950s. I must

have been about 8-9 years' of age, but I vividly remember that it was one of the best mutton dishes that I ever ate. Again those early memories are most powerful. I have eaten very tasty mutton curry all over India but somehow that particular curry stands out - I do not know why.

In 1960s my father had a wire drawing and barbed wire factory in Aish Bagh. So quite a number of times when he came home in the evening he would stop at a *thela* near Novelty Cinema and pick up some mutton tikkas and kababs. The *thela* owner had his left hand missing (was amputated after an accident) and so his kababs were called tunday ke kababs. Tunday is the name given to a one-handed man and not to kababs!

Naturally Lucknowi tunday kababs are very well known world over but most of the times these kababs are overrated and their taste exaggerated and not really upto the mark.

I have tasted the "tunday kababs" in Chowk and Aminabad in so called famous shops but I always felt that the *thela-wala* at the corner of Novelty Cinema in 1960s offered excellent kababs and other dishes. Unfortunately in early 1970s he closed his shop.

Some of the best butter chicken I have eaten came from Kwality. Mr. H. N. Bahuguna who was U.P.'s Chief minister was a very dear friend of my father's. He and his family came many times to our house in Lal Bagh. So anytime he came we used to get butter chicken from Kwality which was just across the road. And every time it was extremely rich and delicious. I have eaten this dish all over the world in various restaurants but I always felt that butter chicken from the Kwality restaurant was the best.

Another memory is of eating excellent fried fish in Hazratganj. Anytime I came back to Lucknow from [IIT Kanpur during holidays](#), I would spend good deal of time in excellent British Council Library or BCL as it was called. BCL was located on the 1st floor in Mayfair building and it was next door to

our flat in Lal Bagh. So every evening after spending time in BCL I would take a walk in Hazratganj and had a snack of delicious fish tikkas near Gandhi Ashram show room. The fish tikka food truck was managed by UP Government fisheries department and they really offered excellent fish which was cooked right in front of your eyes. Unfortunately by late 1970s the food truck was withdrawn.

Then there was [this small eatery near Awadh Gymkhana](#) close to Tulsi theatre near District Magistrate house which offered excellent kababs, roomali roti and *tamatar goli* (meat balls curry). It was so famous that within an hour or so of its opening in the evening everything was sold out. I discovered this place only after coming from U.S. in 1980s. So whenever I went to Lucknow to meet my parents I would bring the delicious kababs from this shop.

I am sure there are other excellent restaurants and eateries in Lucknow but these are my memories of Awadhi food.

[HOME](#)

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