



The Lucknow COOKBOOK

CHAND SUR & SUNITA KOHLI

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Lucknow's famous Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb—a melding together of influences—is seen in its art, architecture, dance and music. But nowhere is this tehzeeb better represented than in its food, redolent with the tastes of Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan, and infused with the flavours of Sindhi, Parsi, Punjabi, Nawabi, Mughlai and British food.

When Sunita Kohli's parents, Chand and Inder Prakash Sur, first settled in Lucknow after having to leave Lahore following Partition, they brought with them only the memories of home. In *The Lucknow Cookbook* Sunita Kohli and Chand Sur bring together the taste and smells of home in these 150 well-loved dishes from their kitchens and from the kitchens of family and friends. These delectable kebabs and soups, biryanis, pulaos and raitas, mutton, chicken and fish dishes, paranthas and rotis, vegetables, sweets and puddings, cocktail snacks, chutneys and pickles are a taste of the fabled Lucknowi tradition of hospitality.

A celebration of the tehzeeb of Lucknow as well as its nazaakat (elegance) the book is also a portrait of the city and its storied history.

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A Note About the Book

Lucknow has always been a city of refinement and its cuisine reflects these sensibilities. In many ways, Lucknow was considered the cultural capital of North India. It was here that the Urdu language was developed to near perfection. It was here, too, that the Lucknow Gharana of Kathak dance and the Bhatkhande Institute of classical music—both major institutions—were established. Art and architecture, particularly Indo-Saracenic architecture, flourished in this city built along the banks of the river Gomti. Architectural heritage is history written in stone. This is true of the many fine buildings that still exist in this city.

Most importantly, Lucknow was and still is a city known for its composite culture, its Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb. The material manifestations of this syncretic culture and refinement, this tehzeeb, were symbolized in the combined use of gold (Ganga) and silver (Jamuna)—such as in silver objects, parts of which were gold washed, or in the use of gold and silver threads in Awadh's famous brocades woven in textile centres in Varanasi and Lucknow. The quintessence of this culture was an amalgamation of the finest of Hindu and Muslim thoughts and their mutual acceptance. This composite culture, of plurality and complexity, was also reflected in the easy acceptance of the varied cuisines of the various communities that resided in Lucknow.

My father had arrived in Lucknow in 1947, shortly after the Partition of India, to make a home in this city. Seventy years later we still call Lucknow our home-town although most of us no longer live there. Lucknow has always been an accepting society—my parents were warmly welcomed by several old residents when they first moved here. The city's rich and varied cuisine is partly due to this easy acceptance of people and their cultures from other parts of India and of those who arrived from beyond its borders, as did my parents and a maternal aunt and her husband after they were compelled to leave Lahore and their home in Undivided India.

The culture of Lucknow, which my parents encountered in the late 1940s, was undoubtedly Muslim. But Lucknow was also home to communities of Hindus—Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Kayasthas—along with British residents who had stayed on post 1947, Anglo-Indians, Christians, Parsis and Bengalis. They had, for generations, resided in Lucknow. Sindhis and Punjabis were rather late entrants. Each community had its own food preferences and many different methods of cooking.

The samosa, in its present form, was invented in Lucknow. Today, it has become ubiquitous and is found the world over. Chaat also originated in Lucknow. Lucknow also has its own distinctive biryanis and pulaos, both non-vegetarian and vegetarian. It introduced the dum pukht style of cooking. Lucknow's cuisine was influenced by the cuisines that travelled down the Silk Road from Turkey, Persia, Afghanistan and then down to Quetta and Lahore, eventually finding their way to Lucknow. Many of the recipes in this cookbook are distilled from this rich culinary heritage.

The British presence in Lucknow had changed the eating habits among the elite. So most homes began to serve a desi lunch and an angrezi dinner. Among my mother's women friends, coffee parties became very popular, as did high teas. After the Carlton Hotel introduced its popular Sunday brunches, many families also started to serve brunches at home. Anglo-Indian food, where continental recipes were adapted to suit Indian tastes, has been the subject of a previous book by my mother—*Continental Cuisine for the Indian Palate*. That book has recipes of what we called 'angrezi khana'.

The recipes in this cookbook are quite distinctly Lucknowi, whose hallmark is food that is delectable to behold, is aromatic and delicate and is, most importantly, nutritious. Many recipes are the signature dishes of particular homes. This book is primarily about the food that was served in our homes and in the homes of our numerous friends, with all its seasonal variations. This cookbook needed to be written by my mother, a legendary cook, to complete the story of Lucknow's delicious and varied everyday cuisine. It is a privilege to be asked to co-author this book with her and to write an account of my parents'

fractured histories. These are the histories that have produced the food we serve in our homes.

David Lowenthal, the American historian renowned for his work on heritage and spatial concepts of the past and the future, had famously pronounced that ‘the past is a foreign country’. This cookbook, although palpable with nostalgia, selectively recaptures events and objects from the past that are a part of the intangible heritage of food and familial memories of gentler times. These are collective memories that conserve a sense of continuity, of belonging and of being rooted. I believe food engenders social and family harmony; it anchors us and connects us to the past, grounds us in the present and gives us a sense of identity and belonging. Our personal histories define us and I have chosen to define this partly through Lucknow’s food traditions. The preparation of food is learnt by observation, it is a process of osmosis. In our family, all four generations are reasonably good cooks. This book documents the recipes that we have learnt from my mother and from our many friends in Lucknow.

One can certainly cook from this book, but one can also read through the recipes to get a glimpse of Lucknowi culture and of the lives behind these recipes. This is a book for cooks and for armchair cooks because, for people who really love food, it is a lens through which to view this particular world.

Sunita Kohli
New Delhi, 2017

'The Lucknow Cookbook', as featured in Mumbai's Mid-Day, on October 11th 2017, by Malavika Sangghvi.

TO LUCKNOW, WITH LOVE



Photo: Pranay Gupte

Sunita Kohli with her mother Chand Sur and her daughter Kohelika

"In many ways, Lucknow was considered the cultural capital of North India," says Delhi-based designer and aesthete Sunita Kohli, about the soon-to-be published 'The Lucknow Cook Book,' which she has coauthored with her mother Chand Sur, the author of the earlier 'Continental Cuisine for the Indian Palate'. "The culture of Lucknow, which my parents encountered in the late 1940s, was undoubtedly Muslim. But Lucknow was also home to communities of Hindus - Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Kayasthas - along with British residents who had stayed on post 1947, Anglo-Indians, Christians, Parsis and Bengalis," she says.

Slated to be released in early December, the book, replete with recipes, also traces the area's unique contribution to India's heritage. As is known, not only was Urdu developed to near perfection in Lucknow, but it was here that the Lucknow Gharana of Kathak dance, and the Bhatkhande Institute of classical music were established.

"The samosa, in its present form, was invented in Lucknow. Chaat also originated in Lucknow. Lucknow also has its own distinctive biryanis and pulaos, both non-vegetarian and vegetarian, and gave us the dum pukht style of cooking," says Kohli, whetting our appetite for the book already.