

STROLLING – OR ‘GANJING’ AS IT’S KNOWN TO LOCALS – THROUGH ONE OF LUCKNOW’S OLDEST NEIGHBOURHOODS, HAZRATGANJ.

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THE ART OF ‘GANJING’

Walking through the two-km stretch of Hazratganj on a stifling afternoon needs more mental exertion than physical endurance. You need to make a veritable effort to pluck out the urban visuals of discordant metro construction, glitzy boards that veil colonial shopfronts and the blaring assault of incessant traffic. And when you can successfully do this, a compelling colonially-crafted image emerges – one that takes you back to the time of British occupation of India, when the street was one of the most elite shopping promenades.

Hazratganj Market, Lucknow pic credit: By Mohit (Own work) [CC BY-SA 4.0] (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>) via Wikimedia Commons



The bustling neighbourhood of Hazratganj is a must-visit spot.

EXPLORE

A friend and I arrived in Lucknow and immediately outsourced the responsibility of discovering the area to experts who conduct heritage walks around the city. It's a travel ruse that works to perfection when one has little time and getting the essence of the destination is a priority.

I had 'Chowk-ed', 'Aminabad-ed' and 'Nakhas-ed' on earlier trips, but somehow left 'ganjing' for another time. This time, the agenda was clear.

Four hours. All ganjing.

Even the most seasoned travellers fall prey to quarrying facts, figures and legends on the Internet instead of yielding in to a fluid plan. Pankaj, our congenial guide, first patiently batted a barrage of questions that my Google foraging had thrown up the previous night. When my World Wide Web smugness of who's, what's and when's had subsided, we finally set out on a journey into how ganjing came into being.

For years the word has conjured two images for me. One, of young men and women sharing tentative smiles, some sneaking a brush of the hand and certainly a dreamy chat over an ice

cream. But then again, I'm a certified early millennial whose idea of romance is lodged in 1990's pop mush.

The second is that of the same young men and women, strolling aimlessly, window shopping with absolutely no intention of parting with the paltry bucks in their pockets. As the minutes inched into Pankaj's rehearsed annals, the real meaning of ganjing, seemed to chisel into a blend of both.

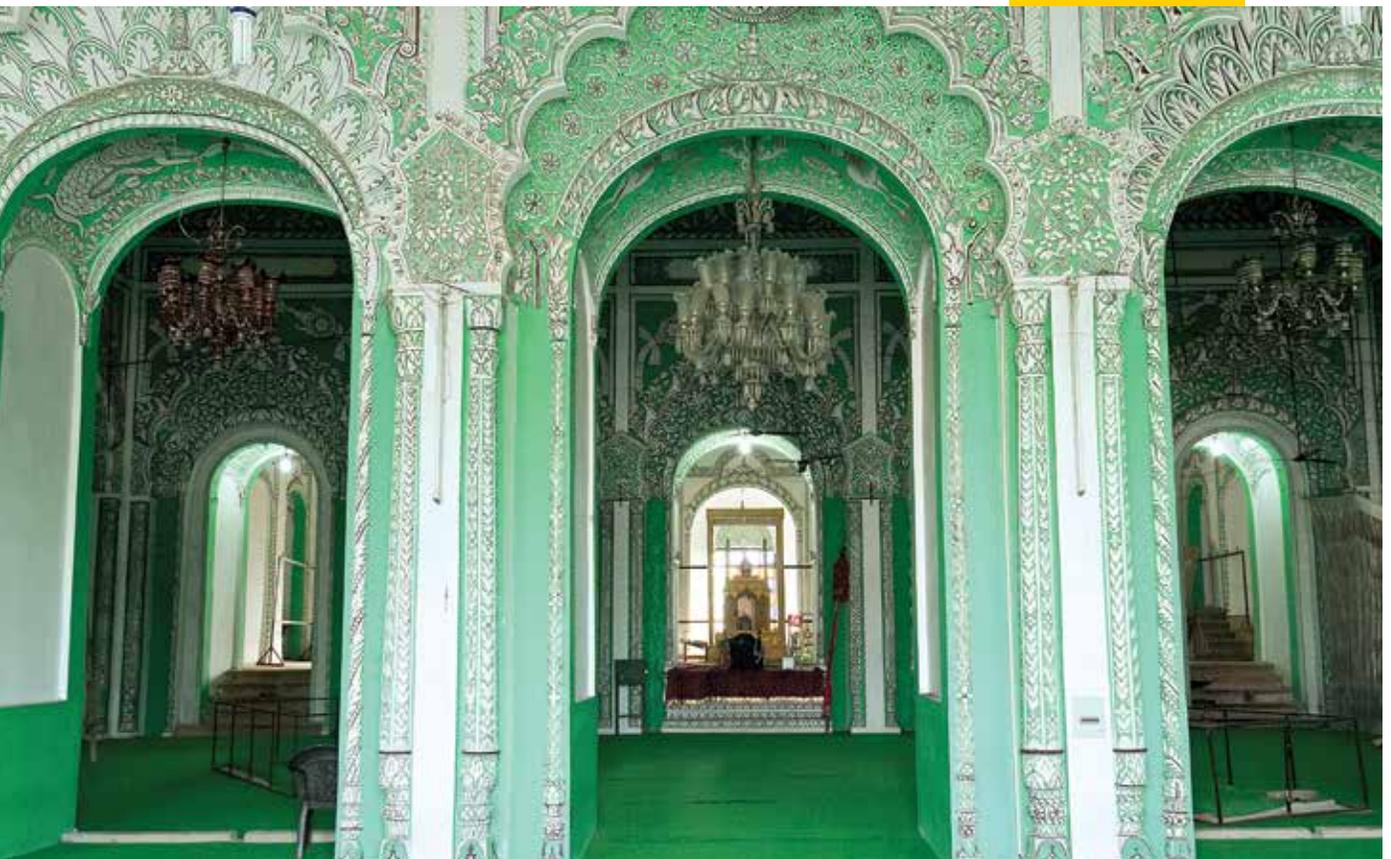
It is said that Nawab Saadat Ali Khan II (ruler of the Lucknow region called Oudh between 1798–1814) was a devoted loyalist of the British regime and their methods of town planning and architectural prowess. He fervently injected

HISTORY BYTES

Sibtainabad Imambara: A mausoleum built to commemorate Nawab Amjad Ali Shah, the structure is an oasis behind the Hazratganj chaos. The Indo-Islamic structure is open to visitors who come here to see the jaw-dropping beautiful archways and intricate designs on the ceiling.

Cliff Richard's House: British pop singer Cliff Richard is said to have spent early years in Lucknow – a fact that he is known to decidedly not speak of. His grandfather's house sits opposite Sibtainabad Imambara, and has changed many hands since 1940s.

Below: A glimpse of the interiors of the Sibtainabad Imambara.



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Tornes India

a colonial look into Lucknow's sleepy streets with a dash of Calcutta (now Kolkata), from where he hailed.

One such important arterial boardwalk that joined his *kothi* (bungalow) and a residency for the British, was the street that would be later known as Hazratganj. The ambitious plan was fuelled with money and intention, and two impressive arched gateways were propped at its extremes.

This was also an unsaid residential complex of Indian royalty with a number of palatial buildings, which were also a function of the Brit-Indian camaraderie. Since a number of British officers and their families were based here, many English shopping establishments slowly found an address in this street.

People started frequenting this area for romantic strolls and leisurely shopping, or to simply pass time. This aimless walkabout in the street is possibly where ganjing originated. One can only conclude that Hazratganj's foundation was steeped in a mix of lamentable pretention and endearing aspiration.

The post-Saadat Ali era was followed by Nawab Amjad Ali Shah at the helm. In 1842, the name of the area was changed to Hazratganj to commemorate the Nawab, who was popularly known by his alias 'Hazrat'. In fact, his mausoleum stands behind the buzz of the market at the Sibtainabad Imambara and makes for a quiet respite after manoeuvring through the bustling Hazratganj.

Ten years hence, the growing resentment against the British and finally the uprising of 1857 against the rule petered out the glory of the Ganj.

Only a year passed before the British took charge again in 1858 and a true colonial period held sway. Hazratganj too saw a fair amount of resurrection and was modelled after London's Queen's Way. Old

Above: The much-loved landmark of the city, Christ Church set in Hazratganj, was designed in 1860.

Inset: Love perfumes? Don't forget to make a pit stop at one of the many stores that sell attar.



Mughal structures were nearly decimated and on their rubble rose 'fresh from London' brands.

The Prince of Wales, Mayfair and Plaza propped up as theatre and film hubs. Music from live bands wafted from the Halwasiya Court (now Royal Café) and Valerio's Tea Room & Dance Floor heralded socialising in the evenings. Other prominent British establishments included

Above: Colourful bangles of a wide variety on display.

Below: Pick up some chikan kari dress pieces or kurtas as souvenirs. It is one of Lucknow's best known textile embroidery styles.

Murray & Co. (general merchants), Anderson's tailors and AN James Pharmacy.

Some of these crumbling establishments still reveal remnants of British architecture and a mammoth sense of colonial 'charm' in the minds of the uninitiated. The Mayfair building is the only one that has resisted change; its board stands as a beacon on the edge of the road. The Love Lane has merrily metamorphosed into love of shopping instead. It is choked with economically-priced watered-down versions of latest in fashion and the love is reflected mostly in the eyes of ladies.

The British exited the country in mid 20th century and it took until 1970 for Hazratganj to see a change. It was the alterations made then and later in 2010 that have carved the modern Ganj. Removal of shanties which had swathed the sidewalks, automation of traffic signals, adoption of a colour scheme for all buildings, refurbishing of heritage structures and street lamps replaced like the ones in late 1800s all make a bona fide case to restore the earlier tenor of the market.

Perhaps for a seasoned traveller and even for the locals ganjing may be about its historical buildings and chapters from history, and going on a hogging spree in the neighbourhood. To my mind, the innocent ice cream sharing, idle loitering and giggly window-shopping retains as the art of ganjing.

TOURING ON FOOT

While ganjing is essentially a local ritual of enjoying the simple pleasure of strolling in the market, it can be vastly amplified with a guided walk. The dedicated walks around the city give a flavour of the different aspects of the city. The Victorian Heritage walk at Hazratganj lets you into its rich history, legacy and of course the market that has evolved with times to cater the cultured and the elite of Lucknow.

Tornos India has been offering customised, flexible walks in city for over two decades that dip you right in the heart of early 19th century, when ganjing actually began.

Some of the walks organised include Evening Culinary walk, Tea with Nawab, Kotwara Insight, Revisiting Lucknow of 1857-58, and Tea at the Tornos Studio, among others.



GANJING CARNIVAL

A monthly carnival is plugged in the summer calendar for Lucknow residents, when the Ganj becomes a no traffic zone between 6pm–11pm. In winters and monsoon (5pm–10pm), the carnival is held every fortnight. A stage is set on one end of the street where local musicians and dancers take to the stage. The general air of festivity spikes retail opportunities. For some, the art of ganjing still takes precedence.

This page:
From kebabs to chaat, indulge in mouthwatering street food.

FOOD – USE THESE PIT STOPS IN AND AROUND HAZRATGANJ TO REFUEL:

ROYAL CAFÉ: The ritualistic preparation of the basket chaat is equally important to savour as the snack itself. The smiling chaat-maker makes a final twirl balancing the large plate in his hand before presenting it to you. 51, Opp Sahu Cinema, Hazratganj
12pm–9pm
www.royalcafe.in

SHUKLA CHAAT: A small shanty on a perpendicular road off Hazratganj is the address to another chaat specialist, 'Shukla'. He sits back relaxed at the far edge of a large cart, while his minions flit around, serving *paani-poori* and *paapri chaat* to regulars. The 60-year-old establishment is one of the oldest snack joints in the market. 5pm–10.30pm

BAJPAI POORI: A hole in the wall shop, parallel to Ganj, Bajpai Poori has been around since 1973 under the ownership of veteran Bal Kishan Bajpai. His grandson helps him run the show till date. Go here for dollops of spicy aloo curry and *pooris* or *kachauris*. 7am–7.30pm

SHARMA JI KI CHAI
The perpetual buzz around Sharma's chai stall is testimonial enough for its popularity. Kulhad chai and bun maska cravings can be demolished here. Trilokinath Marg, Lalbagh
6am–10.30pm

CHANAKYA KULFI
This place can even convert someone who's not into kulfis. Go here for one of the creamiest, yet lightest milky delight. Qaiserbagh
10am–11pm

QUICK FACTS

GETTING THERE

Jet Airways operates regular flights to Lucknow from Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad and Pune.

ACCOMMODATION

A plethora of budget and luxury accommodation options are available in the city.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Log on to www.uptourism.gov.in

