

THE AWADH REGION

GEO - CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The Awadh Region is strategically located in the isolated north-central part of the Great Plains. It occupies an area of approximately 70,398 Km², which is about 23.94% of the total surface area of the state of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.).

This micro-region of the Indo-Gangetic basin is set within the deep alluvial trough that was formed in the recent Pleistocene epoch of the Cenozoic era. The alluvium occupying the depression had been carried down by the river Ganga and its effluents and deposited in their vast flood plain, rendering the land fertile. Physiognomically, Awadh's terrain is devoid of any striking feature, infact even the change in the elevation of the plain is scarcely perceptible. The apparently homogenous plain seldom rises above 150m above sea level, sloping, very gently, from the north west to the south east.

The only distinctive feature of the Awadh Plain is the Tarai (moist land) that lies in a narrow elongated belt immediately below the Himalayan foot hills. This sub-micro region constitutes a buffer zone between the Ganga Plain in the south and the Himalayas in the north. Its northern boundary coincides completely with the Indo-Nepalese frontier while its southern limits have been advancing and retreating alternately (Singh, L.R. 1965). Presently, the Tarai occupies an area of 5005 Km² approximately, which is hardly 7.1% of the total area of the Awadh. Due to abundance of water, the Tarai is infested with reeds, tall grasses and scrub forests. Geologically and physiographically, it is no less monotonous than the Awadh

plains themselves, except in the district of Kheri where the uniform surface has been scooped out at several places to form numerous **tals** (lakes) .

The homogeneity of the Awadh plain is broken by the river Ganga and its tributaries - the Ghaghara, the Gomati and the Sai. The river Ghaghara descends the plains in Kheri district from the Siwaliks after cutting across the Indo-Nepalese international frontier. While flowing in the southward direction, it cordons off the northern districts of Bahraich and Gonda, that shares the trans Ghaghara plain. The Ghaghara is joined by the Sarda* river at the conjugation of Kheri, Bahraich and Barabanki district boundaries. To the left of the Ghaghara, the rivers Sarju and Terhi conflux with the main stream in the district of Gonda. In the extreme north-east corner of the trans Ghaghara plain it flows southeastwards after crossing the international frontier between India and Nepal.

The river Gomati is the only stream that does not originate in the mountains, instead it rises in the Pilibhit district, just adjacent to Kheri. It flows tortuously southwards through Kheri, Sitapur and Lucknow where it bends sharply south eastwards through Barabanki and Sultanpur only to joint its master stream - the Ganga - in Ghazipur, off the Awadh region, eastwards. In between the Ghaghara (North) and the Gomati (South) is the Ghaghara - Gomati Doab,

* Also called River **Chauka**.

the area between the Gomati and the Sai, the latter being an effluent of the Gomati river. The river Ganga, that margins the region all along its southern extremity is accompanied by the Ramganga along its east, that combines with it in Kannauj. The land between the Sai and the Ganga rivers is known as the Sai - Ganga Doab.

TABLE - 1

AWADH : Temperatures Recorded at Meteorological Centres 1989-90.

Centres	Temperature ($^{\circ}\text{C}$)	
	Max.	Min.
Sultanpur	+ 44.2	+ 2.1
Gonda	+ 42.5	+ 3.0
Bahraich	+ 42.5	+ 3.0
Lucknow (City)	+ 41.4	+ 4.5
Hardoi	+ 43.0	+ 2.5
Kheri	+ 42.9	+ 3.0

Source : Board of Revenue, U.P.

Climatically, the region is no different from the rest of the Indian sub-continent which is characterised by three distinct monsoonal rhythms-winters, summers and rains. In general, the period between October to March is climatically most suitable for recreation. During this climatic span the temperatures begin to lower progressively until in January they fall well below 10°C almost throughout the region as a whole. Towards the close of March, increasing thermic

recordings indicate the advent of summers. The sweltering heat of the summers keeps the recreationists at bay from the Awadh plains. The highest annual temperature has been recorded at Sultanpur (44.2°C) followed by Lucknow city (43.8°C). The harshness of the weather comes as a barrier to mobility both for the residents as well as the visitors. The mounting heat and the intense barometric lows culminate into monsoonal outbursts. Rains have been recorded to be abundant all along the frontier districts as they lie just beneath the Himalayan foothills. With the onset of the monsoons the surface is full of seasonal streamlets that eventually drain into perennial rivers, causing them to overflow and rejuvenating the parched land.

TABLE - 2

AWADH : Rainfall - 1989

(in mm.)

District	Rainfall
Lucknow	745
Unnao	743
Rae Bareli	564
Sitapur	713
Hardoi	700
Kheri	1265
Faizabad	1071
Gonda	1150
Bahraich	1102
Sultanpur	675
Pratapgarh	777
Barabanki	689

Source : Board of Revenue, U.P.

Flora :

The Awadh Region is naturally endowed with fertile soil, and abundant water supply which together enrich the landscape with a variety of plant and animal life. While much of the land has been taken up by agriculturalists, a considerable portion, specifically the Tarai, continues to abound in biotic resources.

The waterworn topography of the Tarai is an ideal condition for the Savanna type of vegetation. Marsh, bog, fen, coarse grasses reed thickets, sluggish streams and water-choked morasses define the Tarai landscape. The trees here belong to the tropical moist deciduous forest type. The most common ones include, sal (*Shorea Robusta*), ber (*Ziziphus Jujuba*), gular (*Ficus Glomerta*), jhingan (*Adinai Wodier*), palas (*Buten Frondosa*), mahua (*Bassia Latifolia*), semal (*Bombex Malabaricum*), khair (*Accacia Cateche*), dhak (*Butea Monosperma*), amla and jamun.

Prior to Muslim domination in India, the entire Awadh Region lay dormant blanketed by virgin forest stands and thickets, that made it almost impenetrable, but as the region grew in importance more and more of its wilderness was at stake. Large tracts of natural forests continued to be sheared-off and brought under the plough until the swampy marshland of the Tarai checked the destructive advances of man, in the north. Much of the native vegetation suffered greatly at the hands of timber merchants, whose offensive exploitations have disturbed the ecological balance of the Tarai region. To save these 'green gold' treasures from further annihilation, restrictions have been imposed for the protection of jungles and the abounding inhabitants therein.

Fauna :

The Tarai is the virtual home of U.P.'s best wildlife. It's marshes and mucky waters teem with life of all forms and varieties. The human inaccessibility has sanctified the land into residential refuge for the wildlife alone. The Tarai Carnivora include many species of the Felidae (Cat family) specially the *Panthera Tigris* (tiger), *Felis Pardus* (leopard) and *Panthera Pardus* (panther). The forest ranges of the Awadh Tarai is distinctive for the many varieties of Cervidae (deer family) too. Much of the wildlife seen here belong to the grassy habitat of the tropical lands. The enchantment of avifauna is no less specially during the cooler months when forests and groves come alive with infinite species and numbers of migratory birds from distant lands.

Besides Tarai, pockets of wilderness and wildlife centres are scattered all over the Awadh region. Of the many, a few have been recognised as potential parklands while a still greater number are yet to be discovered and tapped before they destroyed by human intervention.

Demography :

The region, in general, is the most densely populated part of Uttar Pradesh. It's population (25.56 million) accounts for almost one-fourth of the total of U.P. state (in 1981). From amongst the twelve districts, Gonda (district) ranks the highest with a population of approximately 28.35 lakh people in 1981. Faizabad

and Sitapur rank next (923.83 lakh and 23.37 lakh respectively) followed by Hardoi and Bahraich (22.75 lakh and 22.16 lakh respectively). The peripheral districts of Unnao and Pratapgarh record lowest human numbers (18.12 lakh approximately). Although the primacy of Lucknow has a population well below the regions average (20.15 lakh approx.), yet it records the highest density (797 persons Sq.Km.) among the districts that form the Awadh region (Mukerji, 1975). This can be accounted for by the high percentage of urbanisation of Lucknow city (Maurya and Devi, 1984). On the contrary most of the Awadh is characterised by very low degree of urbanisation. Almost 88% of the population is rural in nature. This is a very clear indicator of the level of economic slow growth in the region.

Marked by chronic rurality and backwardness, the economy of Awadh is overwhelmingly agrarian. With the exception of Lucknow, Faizabad and parts of Sitapur, almost the whole of the region suffers from a depressed infrastructural growth which intensifies in a 'longitudinal poverty trough' located along the southern border of the Awadh and the 'Purvanchal' (Dubey 1985). Circumscribed within such a morbid environment, the primate city of Awadh-Lucknow manifests its urban capitalism drawing heavily from its rural surroundings. This dependence is the direct result of its historical past that had been reinforced in the post independence era (after 1947) during which Lucknow assumed economic, administrative and political responsibilities (Mukerji, A.B. 1975), with marginal spread effect or decentralisation.

Histo - Cultural Background :

The evolution of Awadh's present day socio-cultural landscape was a gradual and a cumulative historical process which was asserted by a succession of penetrations by various cultural groups in different time periods (Majumdar and Pusalker, 1955 '58, '60, '62; Vidyarthi, '52; Majumdar, '68; Roychoudhary, '84; Shah, '89) Thus it becomes relevant to delve into the historical event to review the cross-turns of theology, religion and history that have helped to shape the landscape of Awadh. Although the narrative may appear somewhat drab, yet it is necessary to dialate on these episodes and chronicles of time for a better grasp and to have a proper holistic view of the past.

The early history of this area severely suffers from authentic documentation. However, on the basis of oral history and traditions, scholars believe that the fertile flood plain of the Indo-Gangetic basin once lured a certain tribe of short and dark people to occupy this region about 10,000 years ago (Tripathi, 1984). Historically, Awadh was part of a great kingdom of Kosala* of the ancient period and was the prime domain of the Aryans. It is believed that some of these early infiltrators crossed the river Ganga and came to settle in the Ghaghara valley while the remaini chose to settle down in Varanasi. The former group of Aryans selected Ayodhya as their capital city. Being larger of the two premises, Ayodhya

* The kingdom of Kosala stretched across the Ganga Yamuna Doab and even beyond the River Saryu (Ghaghara).

grew both in importance and territory. In due course of time, it became the seat of the great 'Suryavanshi' kings of the solar dynasty. Of the one hundred and thirteen monarchs hailing from this dynasty, Raja Ramchandra, the son of the fifty-sixth emperor-Raja Dashratha- is glorified as a Hindu god. The Vedic religion of this period gave birth to the Brahmaic culture whose roots still continue to have a stronghold in the Indian soil. The philosophic thoughts prevalent in those days were manuscripted into Vedas, Puranas and Shastras, and these form an invaluable contribution of that age to the entire civilization of today.

After the Mahabharata, Indian polity and cultural exuberance came to a virtual standstill, and the region was converted almost into a wilderness. The great Kosala kingdom, with its cultural and religious values, was in a state of utter shambles. From amongst the numerous religious beliefs (363 approx.) and ideas that sprouted spontaneously, Jainism emerged as the only redeeming pathway. But, in due course of time, this faith also developed complexities making it difficult for the commoners to practise its basic tenets and principles. At this point, the simple doctrines of righteousness, preached by Gautama Buddha, found their way to the hearts and minds of the people. Thus Buddhism spread far and wide, blending with the native cultures of India, Burma, Lanka, China and Japan. In India, Buddhism continued its stronghold all through the Mauryan and Gupta periods, after which again there was a long duration of chaos and social disintegration.

With the establishment of the Delhi 'Sultanate', under the Islamic regime, the Awadh region was brought under the Mughal empire. When Akbar, the Great Mughal, ascended the throne, his entire empire

was reorganised into twelve provinces, of which the Awadh Suba (province) played the most dominant role in the political, cultural and economic spheres for reasons of its strategic setting and its rich agricultural potential (Raza, 1975). Ayodhya, in the suba of Awadh, was selected as the seat of provincial administration. When the feudal lords denied the overlordship of the Mughal Sultanate, the Imperial court at Delhi appointed Nawab Burhan-ul-Mulk Saadat Ali Khan as the subedar and care-taker of the province in 1722.

The appointment of the first Nawab to Awadh heralds the beginning of Nawabian period in Awadh. The Nawab subdued the Shaikhzadas who were then occupying the Lakshmanpuri (Lucknow) area, and reclaimed the sovereignty of the Mughal Empire over the whole of the province. The Burhan-ul-Mulk stayed on in Ayodhya to restore law and order. The humble dwelling of tents, enclosed within a mud wall where the Nawab resided with his troops, was known as the "Baugh" ^{*} This Baugh later formed the foundation of the Faizabad city, to the west of Ayodhya. During his rule the Suba of Awadh witnessed territorial expansion. The next Subedar, Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula, renamed the "Baugh" and called it Faizabad. He worked hard to develop it into an attractive city, beautifying it with gardens and five pleasure grounds. Within a short period, Faizabad acquired great importance as a commercial and political city and hence it drew crowds of people for settlement. On the other hand, the ancient city of Ayodhya began to lose its political significance and was reduced to just a religious centre.

* Baugh actually means trapezoid settlement.

3



Umbrella shaped marble memorials and twelve doored Barhdari style of architecture are common in the Nawab landscape. Barahdari is Rajput style of architecture and served multiple purpose (rest places in natural surroundings, auditoria for dances and poetic concerts). (Picture A is a memorial dedicated to Begum Hazrat Mahal and B is a Barahdari in the Zoological gardens).

4



BARAHDARI

Nawab Shuja-ud-daulah, the third subedar of Awadh had to part with a portion of his territory to the British East India Company¹ before assuming power in 1765. It was he who first decided to shift the provincial capital to Lucknow, but was unable to accomplish this goal. After nine years of Nawabdom, Shaja-ud-daulah died leaving Awadh in the care of his wife and son. In 1775, his illustrious son, Nawab Asaf-ud-daulah took charge of the province, and eventually he shifted the capital from Faizabad to Lucknow. With this momentous change Faizabad could not maintain its grandeur and faded away in importance, while the city of Lucknow began to be groomed into a grand capital of Awadh.

Even with the fall of the Mughal empire in Delhi, Lucknow continued to boast as a centre of oriental culture in India. The Nawab Wazirs, particularly Asaf-ud-daulah, did their best for the betterment of this city.

Awadh, by now had gained so much political importance that almost all political powers had their coveted eyes on this 'Orchid House' (Dixit, 1975). The successive Nawabs found it a difficult task to safeguard the territory from these powers. Eventually, the East India Company was successful in annexing the province to their territory in 1857. Awadh, was then merged with the North-Western provinces, and renamed as 'North Western Provinces and Oudh' in 1877, with Allahabad as the headquarters. Later, in 1902 the joint territory was known as the 'United Provinces of Agra and Oudh'² and still later, in 1937 only as the 'United Provinces'.

1 By the treaty of Allahabad - LLewellyn-Jones (1985) p.4

2 Oudh is the same as Awadh or Avadh.

In 1936 Lucknow was declared as the provincial capital and the government offices were transferred from Allahabad. Eleven years later (in 1947) this province formed one of the states of the 'Republic of India'. Finally in 1950 the entire Province was given the name of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) Since then, Lucknow has remained the capital of the state of U.P.

Within the Awadh Region, the primate city of Lucknow and the secondary twin cities of Ayodhya and Faizabad were the only centres of social, economic and political activities in various time periods, and were directly exposed to cultural influences of the different groups who came to settle here. Hence these two cities, in Awadh, are representatives of unique cultures which have developed out of the combined forces of History and Geography.