

Lucknowi Tehzeeb

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

I was born and raised in Lucknow in early 1950s and 60s respectively. Lucknow is known for its tehzeeb (culture, politeness, manners, etc.) but slowly and steadily it is changing. Tehzeeb is being replaced by language full of profanity and four letter words as portrayed in Bollywood films and other forms of entertainment.

For youth the use of such language signifies that they have arrived. So anytime when I go Lucknow it is very difficult to find youth who can speak one sentence in Hindustani and with tehzeeb.

I wrote recently an [article on the tehzeeb of Atal Behari Vajpayee](#) who was known for his tehzeeb, wit and charm in speaking both in Parliament and in public fora. That article elicited great response and from the feedback on it most people felt that tehzeeb is losing out and there is a need to inculcate it in youngsters.

This article is my small attempt at narrating few anecdotes of the Lucknowi tehzeeb that I witnessed and heard about.

In mid 1960s Ravindralaya, in front of Railway Station, was the most important indoor theatre in Lucknow. All major musical programs, theater and other cultural events used to take place in it. If I remember correctly in mid 1960s a Russian Ballet group had come to Lucknow to perform. I and my mother were very keen on going to see it. Since the tickets were costly my father was not very keen to take us.

So he procrastinated and we reached Ravindralaya very late - almost near interval time. My father asked the man at the theatre gate whether it was possible to get the tickets to which he replied that now it is too late. Then my father asked him what the price of the ticket was. The gateman got little annoyed and said in chaste Urdu; *“Huzoor, gustakhi maaf ho, pur jab janaza uth gaya to kaffan ke bare me kyon bat kari jae”!* (Sir, please pardon me, but when the coffin has already left why talk

about the shroud to cover the dead body!). My father was speechless, but I really marveled at the finesse and politeness of the gate usherer.

Another example of Lucknowi tehzeeb was shown by a famous kabab shop owner. He was an older gentleman who used to run a small one - room but very popular kabab shop near Oudh Gymkhana club near Hazratganj. Our flat was in Lal Bagh opposite Basant Cinema and quite close to the kabab shop. So whenever I went to Lucknow I used to go to this shop to buy the delicious kababs. His kababs and other non-vegetarian eatables were out of this world and in the evening when he opened his shop within an hour or so everything was sold out. Thus there used to be a line of Mercedes, BMWs, etc. parked outside his shop - such was the name and fame of his kababs.

There used to be huge crowd of buyers outside his shop with everybody screaming to get his attention to buy the kababs. I remember once when I went there, a smartly dressed person came and threw a hundred rupee note where the kabab shop owner was sitting and asked for the kababs to be packed urgently. Hundred rupees was a lot of money in early 1980s. The owner kept on giving kababs to other customers without paying any attention to this money-thrower. After few minutes the money-thrower got impatient and asked why he was not taking his order. To which the kabab shop owner replied "*Huzoor yeh jo paise apne pheken hain ap inhe utha lijiye aur jab aap tehzeeb seekh len to kabab lene ajayiega*" (Sir, please pick up the money that you have thrown and when you have learned some manners please come back and I will give you the kababs!). The man was speechless, did not know how to react and meekly picked up his money and left.

But the final word on tehzeeb goes to this young *sahabzade* (person). My father used to tell this story often.

A father in Lucknow was beating his young son for misbehaving. After some beating the son said to his father "*jara theriye*" (please stop). The father thought that maybe he has hit the boy really hard and so asked him what had happened. The boy replied "*Kya apke walid bhi apko aise he marte the*" (did your father also beat you like that?). The father said "*Han Han jab mein badtameezee karta tha to aise he hamari*

pitayee hoti thi (yes, yes when I used to misbehave I used to be thrashed like this).
“*Aur unke walid bhi unhe aise he marte the*” (And my grandfather was also beaten like that?). The father answered “Yes it was the same, but why are you asking all this”. To which the boy replied “*Yeh maloom to ho ki yeh badtamezee hamare khandan may kab se chali aarahi hai*”! (I would like to know for how many generations these bad manners have been practiced in our family!)

Long live Lucknowi tehzeeb!

[HOME](#)

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