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# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

## poses real threat

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# Young journalists, beware! AI might take away your jobs

**ARPIT D SAXENA**

ASCO Alumnus

It's a question every journalism student and young reporter is asking these days: will AI steal the stories, the deadlines, and the bylines we've worked so hard to earn? With every technological shift, from typewriters, computers, television, and to social media now, the industry has had to adapt, and now AI is the latest change shaking things up. By 2025, most of you have already experimented with AI: drafting summaries, generating social media posts, or even helping with research for assignments. The real challenge isn't whether AI will replace you. It's whether you know how to work with it.

AI isn't here to write your stories for you. Instead, it handles the repetitive, time-consuming tasks: transcribing interviews, summarizing reports, and organizing research notes. These are the parts of the job that can easily eat hours of your day. AI takes them off your plate so you can focus on what machines cannot do: verifying facts, adding context, and crafting narratives that truly connect with your audience. Think of it not as a competitor, but as a coworker that makes your work sharper, faster, and smarter.

## Prompting Is the New Questioning

The skill that matters most is knowing how to prompt AI effectively. A vague question will give a vague answer; a clear, precise prompt can produce insights you can actually use. In many ways, prompting is just another form of journalistic judgment. It's about knowing what you want to uncover and how to frame the question.

## Ideas and Content Planning

AI can also accelerate story planning. Whether you're analyzing data, reviewing past coverage, or looking for new an-



gles, it can highlight patterns, point out gaps, and suggest options. Covering a feature article or a policy announcement? AI can show what similar stories have done before, helping you focus your reporting rather than starting from scratch. But the editorial decision, the angle, the voice, the narrative always remains with the journalist.

Visual storytelling is another area where AI is gaining traction. Illustrations, infographics, or quick visual mock-ups can now be generated faster, helping reporters and designers collaborate more efficiently. This doesn't replace the creative process. It simply allows journalists to test ideas, experiment with layouts, and make stories more engaging from the start.

## AI in Newsrooms Today

Many newsrooms already use AI behind the scenes. Automated transcription, headline testing, and real-time monitoring of trends are part of everyday workflow. These tools don't replace journalists; they raise the bar

for speed and accuracy. Learning to use them effectively gives young reporters an edge, helping them enter the field with both traditional craft and modern workflow skills.



**BA (J&MC)  
Batch 2021-24**

## The Unchanged Core

Ultimately, the core of journalism hasn't changed. Accuracy, credibility, curiosity, and the courage to ask tough questions remain entirely human responsibilities. AI can summarize a document or track patterns, but it can't read hesitation in a source's voice, sense the

mood of a crowd, or understand the human impact of a story. What it does do is give reporters crucial time to dig deeper, think critically, and tell stories that truly matter.

For young journalists stepping into this evolving landscape, AI isn't the enemy. Think of it as that super-organized coworker who never complains, never drinks all the chai, and always has your back. Learn to work with it, and you won't just survive in the newsroom, you'll actually enjoy it. ■

# Where heritage meets hazard

*How Mirzapur's iconic pink stone became a curse for its own people*



Pictures: SURESH SAHU

**SANJAY M JOHRI**

Professor Emeritus & Head Centre for Media Studies

The pink sandstone that frames India's most celebrated landmarks—from the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya to the new Parliament building, and Lucknow's striking Ambedkar Memorial—has its roots in the rugged terrains of Mirzapur's Lalganj, Chunar, and Madihan.

This stone, chiselled into temples, pillars, and public architecture for centuries, should have been Mirzapur's economic backbone. Instead, it has evolved into the epicentre of a slow-moving humanitarian and ecological disaster—fuelled by unchecked mining and relentless violations of environmental norms. This sandstone is woven deep into India's architectural story. The Ashokan Pillar of the 3rd century BC and the ancient Chunar Fort carry its imprint, serving as timeworn ambassadors of its durability and beauty.

## A District Sitting on Riches - and Ruins

Spread across the Vindhyan hills, Mirzapur is one of Uttar Pradesh's most mineral-rich belts. Mining spans over 4,500 square kilometres, shaping both the region's economy and its vulnerabilities.

Open pits supply stone slabs and boulders, while hundreds of crushing units convert them into building

materials—construction stone, gravel, sand, and aggregates. The hills of Chunar and Madihan shudder day and night as explosives detonate without any regard for safety. The blasts leave fractured homes, and the air is thick with dust—so dense that villagers describe living inside a permanent haze.

The health toll is staggering. Residents chronically battle asthma, tuberculosis, and silicosis. Former quarry workers say that the dust clings to their lungs long after they leave the mines. According to local doctors, Silica dust embeds deep into the lungs. Even miners who stopped working a decade ago remain vulnerable to TB and silicosis.

While the respiratory crisis has drawn attention, the hidden emergency is water. Continuous blasting and quarrying have punctured underground aquifers. Villagers report an alarming fall in groundwater levels—wells that once brimmed are now bone-dry.

## Lives Broken by Dust

Take the story of Chanda, once an Asian Games athlete. Her father, a mine worker, spent years fighting TB and asthma before his health collapsed entirely.

Village after village, similar stories echo—families fractured by chronic illness, breadwinners too weak to labour, children growing up around dust clouds instead of open skies.

A book published by Springer bluntly

states: "Every second person here suffers from lung disease. It's rare to find a household without at least one member not battling respiratory illness."

A NITI Aayog study revealed glaring lapses, stating that 17% of workers suffer chronic respiratory problems; 25% report hearing loss; 44% face threats from waterborne diseases, and even those not employed in mining experience dust-related illnesses. Mining companies are required to secure Environmental Clearances and Consent to Operate certificates. Yet, compliance is superficial at best. ■

## A BITTER IRONY

The stone that adorns India's grandest monuments, a symbol of heritage, beauty, and pride, has become a curse for the very land it emerges from.

Mirzapur's pink sandstone continues to build India's future, even as it chips away at the lives of those who mine it. Until mining is brought within legal and ecological boundaries, this story of pride will remain overshadowed by a tragedy carved into the hills of Mirzapur itself.

# From pockets to accounts



Picture: ADYA MISHRA

# INDIA GOES DIGITAL

**AADYA MISHRA**

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

Gone are the days when people scrambled for loose change for every small purchase. Today, a simple tap on phone has replaced that hassle. Javed, a vegetable vendor, says, "We vendors used to be worried about running out of change, but now, just a click on the phone does the job."

It's said that change is the only constant. In life, humans and payment systems have always undergone continuous evolution. From the barter system to the use of coins, followed by paper money, and the current digital era, payment platforms and systems have evolved significantly. Cards and net banking through Electronic Clearing Service (ECS) and National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) had gained popularity in India in the mid-2000s. However, the real game-changer in this transition was the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), introduced by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).

This came more into recognition after demonetization in 2016, which also sparked a huge shift towards cashless transactions and gradually led to the



revolution of digital payment in India. We now see a QR code available for scanning almost anywhere we go. Whether it is a wholesale store or a small vendor on the street, 'Paytm/GPay accepted' is the first thing that catches the eye. Ganesh, a tailor operating out of a makeshift shop by a busy road divider, with just a sewing machine and a chair, owns a keypad phone but still accepts online payment. He says, "A smartphone may not be a necessity, but accepting UPI is."

Digital payment apps have become popular among people of all generations. Arushi, a proud Gen Z, says, "Although easy transactions lead to more transactions and less money left, it feels weird to carry cash everywhere." While younger generations are concerned about

unnecessary expenditures due to such a hassle-free payment system, the elderly are worried about online scams. Narendra Kaur, a 70-year-old retired lady, was a victim of one such fraud where she lost around 80K rupees from her bank account. "I used to be happy with online payment platforms, but after the fraud, my children won't allow me to use UPI. I face a lot of issues with withdrawing money and payments, but it is better than somebody siphoning it!"

Despite concerns over scams, India's strong push towards digital payments highlights a national shift toward convenience, accessibility, and a cashless economy. Across backgrounds, digital platforms are seen as essential to modern life and commerce. ■

# The American Dream (no more): The awakening of Indian youth



Picture: ALISHA HAIDER

## KAVYA SHARMA

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

For decades, the “American Dream” was more than a phrase—it was a feeling. It lived in the stories parents told their children and in the posters of New York skylines pinned to hostel walls. It was the promise that if you worked hard enough, success, stability, and happiness were waiting across the ocean. But ask a student today, and the tone is different—mellowed, more thoughtful, and sometimes uncertain. The sparkle that once surrounded the idea of going to America seems dimmer now. Many young people say the dream feels distant, weighed down by endless paperwork, costly education, and the fear of being unwanted in a foreign land.

“It’s not that we don’t want to dream big anymore,” one student said with a half-smile, “It’s just that our dreams have

changed shape.” A recent student survey reflects this shift. While some still hold on to the dream of going abroad, many no longer see it as the only route to success. Stricter visa rules, high costs, and limited job prospects overseas have reshaped their outlook. Beyond finances, students now weigh emotional comfort, work-life balance, and the wish to build something of their own in India.

What’s striking about this generation is their awareness. They view the world not just as a map of opportunities but as a landscape of choices. Some still want to explore and study abroad—but more and more, they’re asking, “Why can’t we build something just as good here?”

India’s growing economy, booming startup culture, and creative industries are rewriting the narrative. Staying back no longer feels like settling; it feels like standing tall—for one’s country, and one’s own story. Of course, the old dream lingers. Many still imagine life in a

faraway city—bright lights, fast trains, a foreign accent. But when reality settles in, they find meaning in simpler things: creating, learning, and defining success on their own terms.

The fading of the American Dream isn’t the end of ambition—it’s the beginning of self-belief. Success doesn’t need a visa stamp; it needs vision.

The dream hasn’t died; it has matured—just like those who once chased it. And maybe that’s what makes it more real. Because now, the dream isn’t about a place called America—it’s about a feeling called hope. ■

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”

—Franklin D. Roosevelt



# The HORROR COASTER RIDE

Butler Palace



## Exploring Lucknow's haunted sites

**RAMZI HASAN**

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

From its monuments and delicious cuisine to its bustling local markets, culture, and rich heritage, Lucknow has many gems that attract tourists. These elements form the vibrant face of the city. Yet beyond these celebrated attractions, Lucknow also conceals forgotten horror sites, each buried beneath its own unsettling stories. These long-suppressed tales of fear are no longer hidden if one decides to embark on this ultimate horror coaster ride.

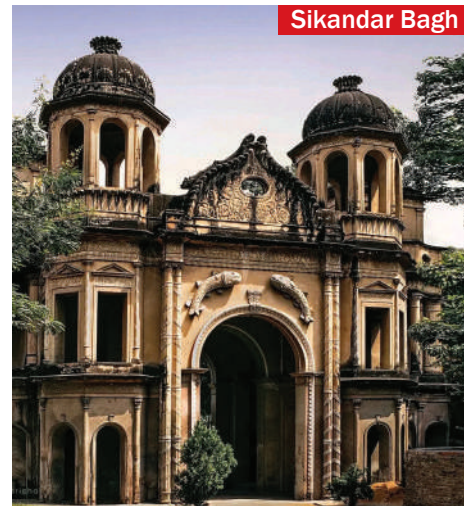
It begins with the OEL House, located on Rana Pratap Marg in Hazratganj, which was once the residence of the last Nawab, Wajid Ali Shah. In 1857, during the Great Indian Revolt, several British soldiers were killed, and their bodies thrown into a well inside the house. People believe the place is haunted because the bodies were left to decompose and never given the proper last rites. After independence, the Vice Chancellor of Lucknow, with his family, moved into the house. One morning, he saw his son

innocently tossing pebbles into the same well, an action believed to have disturbed the angry spirits. Soon after, the boy fell mysteriously ill and eventually passed away. The Vice Chancellor later had the well sealed through holy rituals.

The Railway Quarters in Lucknow once served as a bungalow for Bill Turner, a chief engineer. One day, he discovered his wife's affair with a British officer. Driven by rage, Turner killed both of them before taking his own life. Locals claim to have seen the apparition of a tall white man pacing the property at night.

Sikandar Bagh, spread across 4.5 acres near Ashok Marg, was built by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. Named 'Garden of Villa' after his wife, Sikandar Mahal Begum, the place once carried a sense of grace until the British captured it and renamed it Secundra Bagh. In 1857, it witnessed a brutal massacre where thousands of Indian men were killed. The cruelty continued as families were denied the right to claim the bodies or perform the final rites. The bodies were later eaten by falcons. What was once a symbol of love turned into a site of haunting sorrow. People living nearby say they hear

Sikandar Bagh



OEL House



Pictures: RAMZI HASAN

erie cries from within, and no one dares to enter after sunset as the place turns unnervingly silent and strange at night.

Balrampur Hospital, the oldest hospital in Lucknow, built in 1869 in Golaganj, is home to thousands of patients daily. It is believed to stand on an abandoned graveyard. Patients and staff have reported mysterious knocks on doors at night, sounds of children crying, and unexplained footsteps echoing through the corridors. Some even speak of the spirit of a British soldier's wife, who died on her way to deliver food to her husband, and is said to appear as a woman dressed in white.

These frightening stories from Lucknow are sure to leave you with chills. Yet tales like these often divide opinion. Those who have encountered such moments cannot dismiss them, while those who have never experienced anything similar naturally find it difficult to accept. This makes it challenging to determine what is true and what is not. While some people seek evidence before believing these accounts, perceptions of paranormal experiences ultimately vary from person to person. ■

# Desperate bid for survival

## Cycle rickshaws in the fast lane of change

**NISHTHA SINGH**

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

Every morning, Shivdayal, with his cycle rickshaw, waits outside the Badshah Nagar Metro Station, hoping for the sound of a passenger calling out. But in a city racing ahead with metro, e-rickshaws, and app-based cabs, his wait often stretches into hours. For the 42-year-old father of three, each ride is not just a fare but a desperate fight to earn bread and butter for him and his family in a world that seems to have moved on without him.

In Indian towns and cities, cycle rickshaws used to be the most popular transport for short distance commutation. Introduced in the early 20th century, these three-wheeled vehicles became the most affordable, eco-friendly and accessible means of transport.

They offered convenience to passengers by moving through narrow lanes where bigger vehicles could not pass, and low capital employment to poor migrants and unskilled workers, for whom pulling a rickshaw was not just a job but also the only way to feed their families. However, with the introduction of e-rickshaws, and app based taxis such as Uber and Ola, these tricycles find it difficult to find potential commuters.

Shivdayal described his daily struggle, saying, "Earlier, I would be picking passengers back-to-back, but now these taxis take them all." He added, "I have a wife and three children at home. If I don't earn at least ₹300 daily, we can't afford three meals."

Manilal Yadav, one of the rickshaw pullers close to the Aminabad market, highlighted how policy assistance never comes to them. "When Akhilesh Yadav distributed e-rickshaws, we expected the government to help us too. If we had some assistance, perhaps we could also upgrade and earn better."

Ramu, who has been pulling rickshaws for the last 21 years near the Begum Hazrat Mahal Park, Kaiser Bagh, pointed out the physical toll this job takes. "This work is not for old men. My back and legs don't allow me to ride all day, but I can't afford an e-rickshaw. Banks require documents I can't provide." At his age, every trip feels heavier than the last. Yet stopping isn't an option for him.

For men like Shivdayal, Manilal and Ramu, the rickshaw is their lifeline. Every day, they return to the same stands, hoping for enough passengers to cover the day's meals and basic needs. Yet, as metros expand, app-based cabs grow cheaper and e-rickshaws multiply, their space in the city continues to shrink. The struggle of these men is not only about

earning money but also about holding on to the dignity in work that is physically exhausting and socially overlooked. Their stories remind us that development should not move forward by pushing the most vulnerable further back. ■



Shivdayal, outside the Badshahnagar metro station, sharing how the app-based autos and taxis have taken away most of his passengers.



Manilal Yadav at the Aminabad Market, explaining how government schemes missed rickshaw pullers like him.



Ramu, struggling with age and fatigue after more than two decades on the road.



Picture: ASHUTOSH

## AKANKSHA MASALA MATHRI KENDRA

# Empowering women, preserving traditions

**ANSHIKA SRIVASTAVA**

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

**E**conomic empowerment for women from marginalised communities remains one of India's most pressing challenges. Addressing this, Akanksha Masala Mathri Kendra in Lucknow has emerged as a beacon of hope. It offers a sustainable livelihood to over 110 women and girls from economically weaker sections. The initiative blends traditional culinary skills with modern quality standards, ensuring not just income but dignity, confidence, and a sense of purpose. By encouraging collective decision-making, transparency, and skill development, Akanksha proves that grassroots models can transform lives and create lasting social impact.

The initiative is led by Shyamala Kalyan Krishan, the wife of the Chief Secretary of UP. They have been serving since 1987, continuing to 2025. The current president is Surabhi Ranjan (who launched an online portal for their product).

The strength of this organisation lies in its Self-Help Group (SHG) structure. The management follows a structured routine where every member understands their responsibility clearly. The production area is kept spotless, with ingredients neatly organised and workers trained in maintaining hygiene. Fresh dough is prepared

each morning, spices are ground in small batches to retain flavour, and every mathri is hand-shaped, ensuring a personal touch that machines cannot replicate.

These women are organised into six SHGs, namely, Durga, Laxmi, Parvati, Saraswati, Ambey and Santoshi. The SHG members are trained to prepare traditional Indian snacks, sweets, savours and masalas in a clean, hygienic environment at Akanksha premises, under strict quality control. They use some of the best raw materials, traditional cleaning and processing methods that Indian households have been using for ages. No wonder Akanksha's products taste so fresh and naturally home-made.

Whether it's kneading the dough, grinding spices, frying the mathris, packaging the products, or managing accounts, responsibilities are shared, decisions are discussed collectively, and profits are reinvested for growth and welfare. This democratic model ensures that each member feels valued and heard. Many workers say that this centre has given them a sense of purpose and confidence. Shanti Devi shared, "Yahan hum sirf kaam nahi karte, hum ek dusre ko aage badhne mein madad karte hain (Here, we just don't work but actually help each other grow and prosper)." Through regular training, exposure to markets, and skill development, the SHG has enabled several women to become

financially stable contributors to their families.

One of the most impactful outcomes is the financial security it provides to the members. Each woman earns a fair daily wage, decided collectively during monthly meetings. The income may vary slightly based on workload, but most members earn a stable amount that directly contributes to their household expenses. For many women, this earning is their first independent income, giving them confidence, respect, and economic freedom. Workers often express pride in being able to support their families. As Ruksana shared, "Pehle hum sirf ghar sambhalte the. Ab hum ghar ki kamai ka hissa bhi hain (From homemakers, we have become contributors to the family income)." The transparency in wage distribution and equal pay for equal work make this SHG a trusted and empowering platform for women.

The management believes in teamwork and respect. Workers share a bond that resembles a family more than a workplace. They often mention that the environment is motivating and supportive. As Reeta said, "Yahan kaam ka pressure nahi hota. Hum milke banate hain, isliye taste bhi ekdum ghar jaisa hota hai (There is no work pressure. With concerted effort, our products taste as homemade stuff)." This collective spirit is the backbone of the centre's long-lasting success. ■



Pictures: ANSHIKA SRIVASTAVA

# ‘Stray’ed too far: the ‘dog’matic Indian case

**ASHKA JAIN**

Bachelor of Journalism & Mass Communication

The recent ruling of the Hon’ble Supreme Court of India on the issue of street dogs has ignited a nationwide debate — one that straddles compassion, legality, and the complex challenges of human-animal coexistence in India’s cities. On November 7, 2025 the Hon’ble Supreme Court ordered that stray dogs be removed from public institutions, mainly hospitals, schools and bus stands, and that they be sterilised and vaccinated. Most importantly, when captured, they must be relocated to designated shelter areas.

In its initial order in August 2025, the Hon’ble Supreme Court had directed that all stray dogs be caught, sterilized, vaccinated, and kept in shelters rather than being released back onto the streets. The move was intended to ensure humane treatment while protecting citizens from rabies and other forms of aggression. However, the order drew immediate criticism from animal welfare groups, activists, and sections of the public who termed it unscientific, impractical, and contrary to the existing Animal Birth Control (ABC) rules.

Following weeks of petitions, protests, and expert consultations, the Hon’ble Supreme Court revised its directive to adopt a more balanced approach. The new order stipulated that aggressive or rabid dogs would be permanently housed in shelters, while healthy, non-aggressive dogs would be sterilised, vaccinated, and returned to their original locations — in line with the ABC framework. The Court also instructed civic authorities to establish designated feeding zones to discourage haphazard feeding in public spaces such as markets or residential colonies.

This revised decision divided public opinion. Many hailed it as humane and practical, while others viewed it as an inadequate compromise that neither guaranteed public safety nor ensured animal welfare. For animal rights advocates, the verdict reaffirmed the principle of coexistence over eradication, marking what they saw as a moral and legal victory for both people and animals. “This decision shows that we can protect both people and animals,” said Nikhil Bhardwaj, a Delhi-based volunteer who manages sterilisation drives. “You don’t need to kill or cage dogs to keep streets safe.”

Animal welfare organisations, though relieved by the humane tone of the judgment, remain wary of ambiguous terms

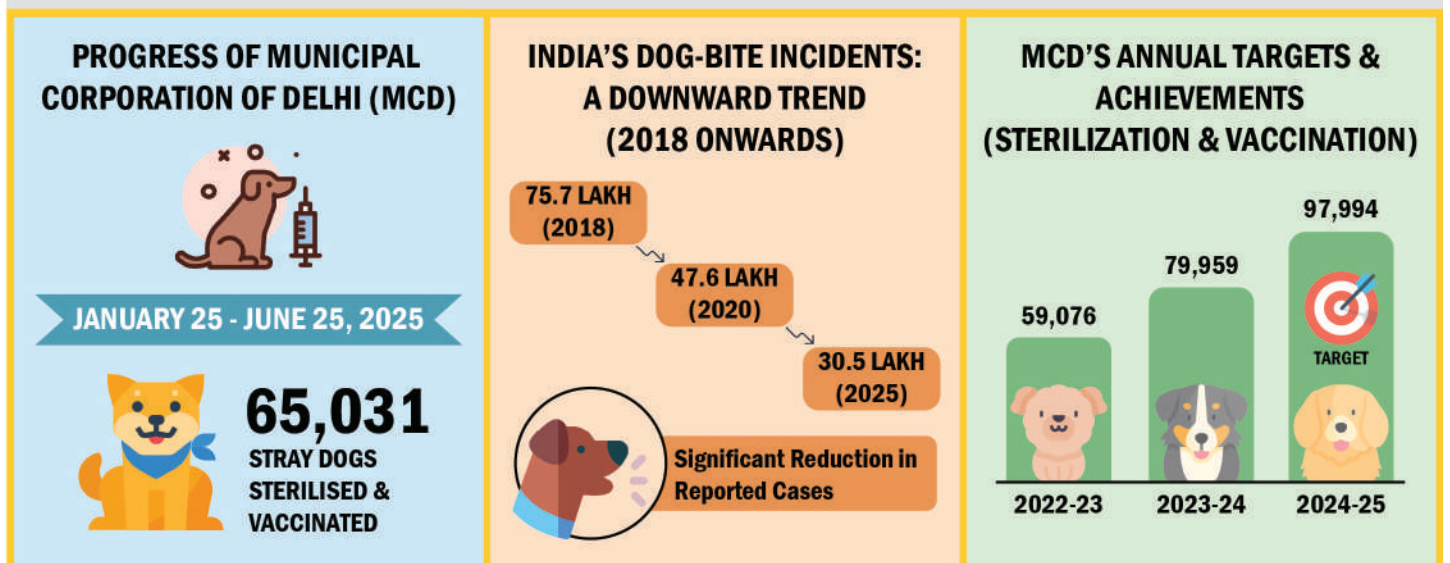
like “aggressive dogs,” fearing misuse by local authorities. Activists point out that aggression in dogs often stems from human behaviour — irregular feeding, neglect, or mistreatment.

India’s cultural relationship with animals adds yet another layer to the debate. Feeding stray animals — much like feeding cows or birds — is deeply rooted in Indian moral and religious traditions. For many, feeding a hungry dog is an act of compassion and spiritual merit; for others, it represents a public nuisance that attracts more dogs to residential areas.

Ultimately, Supreme Court’s intervention has shown that the issue of street dogs goes beyond questions of animal control. It reflects how Indians understand safety, empathy, and responsibility within shared spaces. The rulings have compelled the country to ask a difficult question: Can compassion and safety truly coexist on India’s streets?

While the answer remains uncertain, one outcome is undeniable — the conversation has shifted. Stray dogs are no longer seen merely as a menace, but as part of a larger reflection on how Indian cities can evolve to be safe, responsible, and compassionate for all living beings. ■

## MCD’s Stray Dog Management & India’s Dog-Bite Trends (2018-2025)



Sources: NDTV India, The Tribune

Infographic: MAHVISH SIDDIQUI

# Lucknow crowned as... India's **GASTRONOMIC** **JEWEL**

**SHRUTI KAPOOR**

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Lucknow is more than just a city - it is a unique feeling that comes from the city's culture, the smell of the spices, and the people who are nice and proud of their food. The award of the title 'Creative City of Gastronomy' to Lucknow, by UNESCO, was a recognition that was long overdue for a heritage that has nourished not only the body but also the emotions and the cultures of the people for the past several generations. The main reason for this recognition was not only the existence of famous dishes but also the way food traditions in the city are kept and rejuvenated with time, and the mastery that is involved.

When talking about the flavours of Lucknow, people first think of its kebabs. The Galouti Kebabs at the famous Tunday Kababi are prepared with a mixture of 160 spices and thus are a rare jewel in themselves. Every one of them has its own texture and tale, whether it is Kakori, Seekh, or Boti Kebabs. Fragile, aromatic, and multilayered Awadhi biryani is a perfect example of the culinary spirit in its most exquisite form. Cooking here is a matter of time and patience, which is in line with the sustainability that UNESCO promotes.

However, the popularity of Lucknow is not limited only to non-vegetarian dishes. Its vegetarian delicacies are as rich and tempting. Royal Café's classic basket chaat, Sharma Chai's evergreen Bun-Maska, the comforting Tehri, and Makhan Malai, the winter speciality, vegetarian

Lucknow has a fair share of characters. UNESCO emphasised the flavour diversity of the city by featuring the deliciousness coming from the modest street carts and the royal kitchens.

After the recognition by UNESCO, the street vendors, chefs, and restaurant owners feel more respected. The head of Tunday Kababi in Nakhas, Usman Sahib, recalls how visitors line up to take back a piece of Lucknow's history. For the local merchants, this acknowledgement is a kind of salute to their forefathers, who, through hardships and the changes of fads and trends, kept the recipes alive. As a result, they are now feeling appreciated.

One of the main reasons that led to the recognition of Lucknow by UNESCO is its capability to maintain the core of its tradition, while, at the same time, infusing it with innovations. The city is a perfect example of food sustainability as it uses locally grown products and follows the practice of mindful cooking, which the world is now beginning to acknowledge. Traditional cookware and methods are still very much a part of the kitchens, thus showing that it is possible for tradition and progress to co-exist.

Lucknow has turned into a global culinary destination. One can indulge in an elaborate Awadhi thali at Lebuva, or walk through the spice-filled alleys of Chowk while holding a plate of nihari or kulfi. Most tourists perceive Lucknow's food as an experience rather than a satiation. The recognition by UNESCO is not only an award to the food itself but also the hands that prepare it, the families that preserve traditional recipes, the street



Picture: VINAMRA GUPTA



Picture: SHRUTI KAPOOR



Picture: SHRUTI KAPOOR

vendors who add friendliness to every meal, and the culture of the city, which treats cooking as an art, not a chore. ■

Taste  
the  
Tehzeeb