

The Nawabs of Awadh: Guardians of A Composite Culture

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Abstract

The Nawabs of Awadh played a significant role in shaping and preserving the composite cultural heritage of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century North India. Emerging as an influential political power after the decline of Mughal authority, the Nawabs established Awadh as a centre of cultural, artistic, architectural, literary, and intellectual activity. Their rule, particularly under prominent rulers such as Shuja-ud-Daula, Asaf-ud-Daula, and Wajid Ali Shah, encouraged interaction and synthesis between diverse Hindu and Muslim traditions. The cultural environment of Awadh was characterized by mutual participation in festivals, shared artistic traditions, evolving forms of music and dance, and the development of distinctive literary and culinary practices. The patronage extended to Urdu poetry, Kathak, Hindustani classical music, architecture, and crafts contributed to the emergence of a unique cultural identity often described as the Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb. Religious and cultural institutions frequently coexisted, reflecting traditions of tolerance, accommodation, and social interaction. This paper examines the role of the Nawabs in fostering this composite culture and explores how their policies of cultural patronage influenced social relations and artistic expression. It also considers the enduring legacy of Awadh's syncretic traditions in contemporary Indian society. The study argues that the Nawabs of Awadh were not merely regional rulers but important cultural patrons whose legacy demonstrates the historical possibilities of coexistence, cultural exchange, and shared heritage.

Keywords: Nawabs of Awadh, Composite Culture, Ganga-Jamuni Tehzeeb, Awadh, Cultural Heritage, Syncretism, Mughal Tradition, Urdu Literature, Art and Architecture, Wajid Ali Shah.

