

# RISING STARS



## A Visit to Old Dhaka

# Without Yesterday There can't be a Today

by Shahed Latif and Rabeth Khan

WALKING down the streets of old Dhaka reminded me how beautiful and historical this city actually is? We decided, my friend and I, to explore this part.

Dhaka's history started way back during the reign of *Badsha Shahjahan*. In this part of the metropolis there are so many beautiful historical places, majority of us, who live in that new part, are ignorant of it and I curse myself for being one of them.

All I knew until I came here was that, the roads of Old Dhaka are very narrow and the houses all cramped and mostly of old pattern. It is

irritated for being disturbed, but, then he has every right to ask me questions and inquire, as much as I am curious.

He informed me that this building was owned by a renowned businessman of that time named *Roboti Mohan Das* some sixty to seventy years back. *Mohan Das* left this place before the partition of India and

lost claim over it and the government owns it now. With this I turned to old Dhaka's other delights.

I heard a lot about the *Boro Katara*, *Choto Katara* mosque but never had the chance to visit it, but today I would visit it I said to myself and headed towards the mosque. On my way I saw many old buildings, they too may have a story of its own, who knows.

AFTER the insulting incident at the *Balda Garden*, *Shahed* and I, started for the ancient archaeological site of *Lalbagh Fort*.

On reaching, we could see the red bricked walls and the huge entrance. Our minds were bubbling with excite-

gateway and the defence walls, there are three buildings lying in a straight line in the center. From the left side, we first came a two storied building, which in those days constituted of an elegant audience hall and the *Hammam*, but now it turned into a museum. In-

were daggers, sheaths, arrows, spears, protective clothing of iron, armours, sword, shield and *guptis*. Among the firearms, there were flint locks, howitzers, percussion locks, pistols, cannon ball and lead bullets.

It was really amazing that those weapons at one time were ours. There was also a young handsome *Mughal* soldier attired in beautiful clothes. He wore a long red *punjabi* with a white *paijama*. A piece of a dark coloured ribbon around his waist as a sash and a green coloured turban on his head completed his outfit. Sorry to disappoint the female readers but true, that the *Mughal* soldier standing was no more than a hand made replica and not a real one.

fact by the caretaker of the *Fort*. The picture of a gate in the north of the *Fort*, which is no longer in operation, has inscription of a hundred taka note, on one side. There is also an underground tunnel which is still under research and is yet to be opened to the visitors as it is risky.

According to a rumour, it was

have time, take a dip into the large, cool fresh pond situated just beside the museum.

.....

This is my homeland, this is the place where I was born, this is the place which has given me shelter, and as a citizen of this country we should try to preserve all these historical things that reminds us of our roots and heritage.

Something from which our future generation could learn something of the past. Because without yesterday there cannot be a today and without today there cannot be any tomorrow, so for a better today and a wonder-



The famous Lalbagh Fort Star Photo

quite true, the roads are really narrow and the houses are very small but there's something that pulls you to it.

As I was walking down the lane I had a look at everything around me, suddenly as I was passing by a magnificent building, I love history and anything historical excites me, and any quest for knowledge. This ancient building beckoned me and I entered it. The pillars were decorated with beautiful mosaic/motives, the architect of those days sure had marvelous taste and now I know why people say that bygone days were better.

Well, in architecture I would certainly say yes, I am not saying that modern architecture is not creative but if

Pakistan, and during the riot he left this country — leaving this magnificent building behind I thought to myself.

For my quest I asked him "what is it used for now?" Now it has been taken by the government and used as a staff quarter for the fire-service employees for the last 15 years. He also said pointing to a tower that it was used for the training of the fire-service men but it laid useless now. *Mujibur Rahman* — this man lived there for 10 years now, as an employee.

I slowly began to walk towards the exit and saw a small shop were metal and other sort of things were being welded. There was an elderly man and I thought

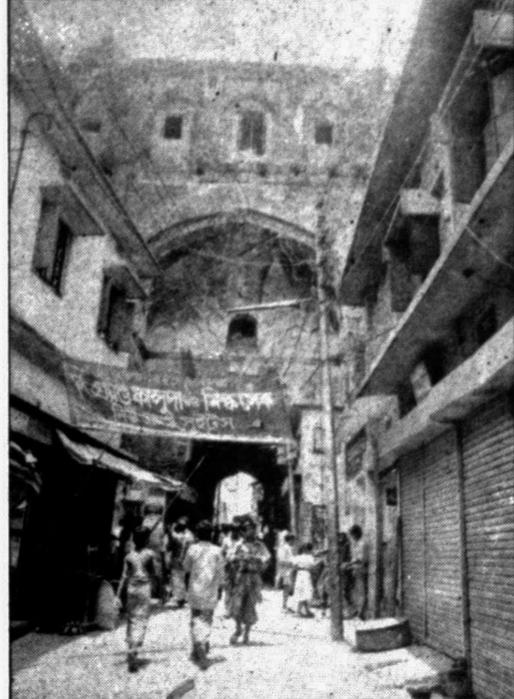
The roads are so narrow that a rickshaw and a person cannot walk side by side. After about twenty minutes I arrived there, it was just after the Eid holidays the people were still in a festive mood, on the walls I saw 'Eid-Mubarak' written and some colourful decoration on the electric wires also. When I arrived, the mosque was closed and there was one or two person — may be caretakers, they informed me that if I wanted to know anything about these historical mosques we should look for *Maulana Mohammad Nuruddin Fatee Puri*, *Moulana Shab* informed me that he has written a book, about all the historical mosques and madrasahs of greater Dhaka. He told me that the *Boro Katara* Mosque was during the regime of *Badsha Shahjahan* in 1644.

He said that a Subedar *Muhammad Suja* ordered architect *Abul Kasem Dewan* to build the mosque. But as this mosque was not liked by the Subedar he gave it back to its architect *Kasem*, who used it as a shelter and rehabilitation centre for the poor people. There are 21 blocks on the dome of the *Boro Katara* on which is written in Arabic the history of this magnificent mosque. When I asked him about the *Choto Katara* he informed that it was built by *Nawab Shaista Khan* in the year 1663 BC. I thanked him for his time and left for *Balda Garden*, an extraordinary botanical garden.

*Balda Garden* as soon as we think about this, beautiful trees and flowers, flash in our mind. You can see young couples, gossiping in a corner. In spite of all these beauties, there is one big problem, the attitude problem of the people there.

When I arrived I wanted to see this wonderful garden but was informed that the office was closed and there was no one inside, who could give information or allow me in. "Come some other day" he said.

I just wondered how can a public place like *Balda Garden* be without any official. May be they were enjoying their Eid holidays a bit to long perhaps, who knows. As *Balda Garden* is a nationally recognized place, the people in charge should be more decent, more helpful, rather than putting up a boring face in front of strangers. It is a shame.



The Boro Katara Star Photo

ment and anticipation. The first thing which really sparked us was the large area on which the *Lalbagh Fort* stood.

According to information, the

dently, the word "Hammam" means bathroom.

Then in the center, is the tomb of *Bibi Pari*, daughter of *Subedar Shaista Khan*.



The Choto Katara Star Photo

construction of this unfinished fortress was initiated by *Prince Azam*, son of the *Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb* in 1678 A D but eventually abandoned by the then *Mughal Subedar Shaista Khan*.

In addition to the imposing

and in the extreme right is a mosque of those days.

To enter the museum, a ticket of two taka has to be bought. In the ground floor, the rooms contain weapons of late *Mughal* period between the 18th and 19th century. The weapons on display

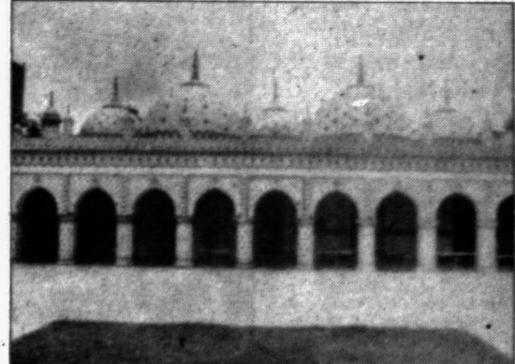
After finishing the ground floor, we went up the stairs leading to the first floor. The sides of the stairs had mosaic arts adding an icing to the atmosphere.

The first floor was decorated with coins of as early as 1526 A D and as late as 1788 A D. The coins were named after famous people of those times such as *Jalaluddin Md Akbar*, *Nuruddin Md Jahangir*, *Md Shah*, *Mohiuddin*, *Md Alamgir Aurangzeb*, *Md Faruque Sayer*, *Md Azam Shah Bahadur* and many others. There were also many Chinese jars made of porcelain, *Persian Celadon* plates, and other small vases. The collection of *Mughal* paintings were satisfactory. Famous paintings such as "A scene of dancing camels", "A scene of animals in forest", "Emperor *Aurangzeb* sitting on the throne" and other eye-soothing paintings.

Books of the *Mughal* period were also in display. A story book named "*Bahar Danis*" by *Enayetullah* and a poetry book named "*Duan-I-Hafiz*" by *Fakir Md Karim* were the most conspicuous. Documents, specimen of calligraphy of the *Mughal* period were also displayed. The first floor also had two balconies from where natural beauty of the surroundings is bound to be adored.

is educative as well as entertaining. Furthermore the maintenance of the whole area really impressed us as it will do to anyone.

Visit the *Lalbagh Fort* and imagine yourself as one of the *Mughal* families. If you



The magnificent Tara Mosque. Star Photo

said that a trained dog was let loose from the entrance of the tunnel by a research team, a few years back, but unfortunately it did not return. What became of the dog is still a mystery!?

We dared and also came to the opening with steep stairs leading down. We went down, but after advancing a few steps it was nothing but darkness. Thinking of what happened to the dog we decided to go back despite our interest to explore and quest for adventure.

It is refreshing that there are still many places to visit in Dhaka apart from the sights of people and automobiles. Anyone in his sparetime should visit *Lalbagh Fort*. It

ful tomorrow we must know about yesterday.

If we can preserve all these historical things we can attract a lot of foreign tourists and the image of our country to them would grow. The magnificent past of our should not be dug out and preserved for the future.

Life is very short and this short span it should be utilized and enjoyed to the brim. Once I read in a magazine in which *John F Kennedy*, the President of USA said, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country."

And I think that we should keep these words in mind and give whatever we can to our country instead of thinking what it gave us



Pari Bibi's Mazar inside the Fort Star Photo

we look back we would see that the people had an amazing sense of beauty in those times.

As I was standing there and looking at the mansion awestruck I felt a pat on my shoulder "may I help your brother", said a man. I felt

he would be useful to me. To quench my curiosity further I introduced myself and asked about the building. It was *Roboti Mohan Das's* house all right and he was the owner of a petrol pump. Unfortunately when he left during the riot he

## "House of the Shadow"

by Md Kabiruddin

bright flash, like lightning, and a sharp tremor that shook the place. Suddenly a blast blew out through the open windows of the house and I fell to the ground.

The noise came too, in a great turbulent, and the house

seemed to rock about me. Every window gaped blankly at me, without a pane of glass left. A trickle of blood was coming now from what was the beginning of a massive bruise on the base of my neck. Without any conscious purpose

I began to run. The sky was full of leaves torn from the trees by the explosion and still fluttering down. I ran on, stumbling and falling in the dark, away from the house. Away from the malevolence I knew was back there. All the time my eyes fo-

Nothing, I might as well have landed on Mars. The mist was rising and a heavy rain was beginning to fall. The rain drops scythed straight at my eyes. I could now see the vague outline of the station. (The strange thing was that when we first came here, me and *Shahed* were the only living things in that station.)

The station gates were barred and padlocked. I rattled the chains, banged, shouted, cursed. In response but the wolfish howling of the wind. I looked the other way and among the trees, shadows were forming. Next moment I had cause for real terror. One of the shadow took shape of a toad. Suddenly it began to laugh. That deep unholy chuckle, coming from a shadow, sent chills rippling down my spines. As I stood there my body gave a small spasmodic shudder. I had not a moment's doubt what it meant. Gone, the last escape to civilization.

While I am sitting here in my room and writing an abominable shadow is forming in the dark corner. Was I doomed to spend the rest of my life here, aching with loneliness, cut off from the world outside by dark ugly shadows. But I shall not remain alone with them. I may find a way-out from this dreadful place one day and then away for home!



THE indigestible facts of *Shahed's* (my brother) death shook me up so much that I decided to leave this place at once.

I felt like an alien without the right breathing apparatus and time was slowly running out. There was nothing I could do to save him. I saw him drowning with my own eyes. Not even a seal would possibly navigate in a tide like that. But I didn't know what he was doing there. I saw his bobbing head, a small cork tossed in a cauldron of foam. Before I could do anything the head vanished forever.

Next moment everything was silent. I blinked at the night, as to how it had calmed so suddenly. As far as I could tell, not a blade of grass stirred, not a leaf tossed. The sea was calm and the air was still. The water rippled blue over the sand leaving on either side a frothy scum, bubbles formed expanded and vanished, and all the ordinary waste came drifting with the tide, cans of beer, a piece of glass, feathers, dark seaweed, and a black shirt that belonged to *Shahed*.

That was the end of his life. It was not a suicide. He had been murdered by the evil force that exists in this house. Now for the absurd and mortifying truth. I am a prisoner of this 'House of the Shadows' I have allowed myself to be reduced to a nervous wreck simply through seeing shadows.

But what makes it? And why

does it always dance its devil dance around the house. Once I made a futile attempt to escape. It was midnight. I knew the shadows had left my room now. I didn't know why but that was for the first time they were out of my sight. There was an opportunity to escape. Which I might not have again. So I ran down the stairs as fast as my legs could carry me. The floor tiles were all loose, rattling against each other like broken crockery, and it wasn't easy to keep my feet.

Just as I was going to open the front door something caught my eyes. At the far end of the room from the door, where it was darkest a shadow was forming. It took the shape of a bat. I took another step forward. My feet had not reached the ground. When something hurtled at my head from above. I gave a cry of fear and ducked, but caught a swift sight of the bat as it streaked downward. I threw open the door and cleared the step with a jump, literally bursting from the house. Just then, on looking towards the forests on my right, I caught sight of a dark shadow flitting between the tree trunk.

At the moment, however, a dark cloud passed over the moon, and I saw no more of it. Just then, too, although all the other sounds of the forest had ceased, a species of home owl began to hoot with great persistency. After that things began to happen. There was a

## Life and Love

by Tasin Ahmed

Life is not just roaming around — Making phone calls and passing hours. Life is not just thinking of the past. It is not to wander in the memories.

Every life has a definite goal — It has a colour, a destination — It has a charm, it has pain and Love. A life blossoms in the touch of love. It is the fundamental of unity. Love towards mankind, towards creation. And love in yourself is the way of freedom.

Every life has a misfortune. — It has sorrow, it has misunderstandings. but still we hope for a long life — But why? cause it has joy and love. Love makes a life better, brighter and enjoyable.

Let us all spread love towards mankind. Let's promise — there will be no crime. There will be no murders, kidnapping and hijacking. There will be no pain, no sorrow, no loss. There will only and only be peace — Let's follow love — And make a new world.

### Just For You

"To somebody who shall misunderstand me forever. Thanks for that so-appropriate adjective you used to describe me at the end of our last phone conversation. Well, if that's what you think I am, why do you respect me, moreover, why do you keep on calling me? Expecting a response. A cynic person."

\*Rumi. Did you not received what I sent you. If you have no intention of joining us then please write a letter to the previous address revealing your problems. And if you haven't received then also write a letter, so that we can know whether you received or not. (WRITE WITHIN TWO WEEKS). From a member

